3 Social Media/Web Marketing Mistakes to Avoid

Just this morning, I have seen all three of these mistakes, and by prominent websites/social media marketers.

Number 1: Not having links open in a new page/tab. Why is this a mistake? Because you are practically pushing people OFF your website and on to another.

Number 2: Poor social sharing tools (or worse, not having them). Poor social sharing tools are those that don't provide the title of the post, or the blog, or the author. The example I came across this morning gave me this when I clicked to share on Twitter: Currently reading [URL address]). How is this sharing helpful to anyone? You have to provide a reason for people to read your Tweet.

Number 3: Not checking @ mentions on Twitter. Someone is trying to communicate directly with you—is it wise to ignore him/her? Big companies with customer service problems would do well to check their @ mentions. This is easier done with a Twitter client like Hootsuite or Tweetdeck that automatically puts @ mentions in their own column.

Are these your top three mistakes? What would you add or subtract?

Weekly communications #fail: losing momentum

Momentum is a physics term, which means that speed or forward motion of an object is equal to mass times velocity. In everyday usage, momentum is the strength or speed gained by motion or a series of events (here is Merriam-Webster's definition).

Momentum is good for marketing—it helps you build up steam and propels you forward (gets you new business, more readers, bigger audience, etc). But if when things are starting to speed up, you apply the brakes, you (like your car) will quite literally slow down (lose momentum).

Losing momentum is a marketing killer.

How do you lose momentum? There are many "brakes." Here are few examples:

Not returning inquiry calls: If I call you for information, I am what they call a warm prospect. By not calling me back, you are losing me. By taking your sweet time to return said calls, you also lose momentum.

Not following up: In mid-December I attended the inaugural event for a new DC networking group. It sounded good and I provided my email, saying I would be happy to help organize an event. I haven't heard ONE word from them. They haven't held another event. They lost momentum.

Changing your terms suddenly (dashing expectations): Say you always get bread served at your favorite restaurant, and suddenly, the restaurant decides to cut costs and there goes the bread basket. It may have been what you enjoyed about the place, and now your expectations are dashed. You may not return.

Not blogging (or Tweeting or posting on Facebook) for months: You started your blog, and you had lots to say. And then you stopped posting. Any readership (or followers) you had, will dwindle. You lost momentum.

Whenever you do something that slows down your interaction with a prospective customer or client, you are losing momentum. That is a marketing/communications failure.

Have you experienced lost marketing momentum? Please give me your examples in the comments.

It's all about personality

One of my favorite lines from a movie is this one, from Pulp Fiction:

  "A pig's got personality. Personality goes a long way."

  -Jules Winnfield (played by Samuel L. Jackson)

It seems the folks at Spike TV"s Bar Rescue didn't think personality went a long way when they remade Silver Spring's Piratz Tavern into the very generic Corporate Bar and Grill. As I commented here on the blog, I didn't give the corporate makeover good chances of succeeding, and apparently neither did Piratz Tavern's owners. The Washington Post is reporting today that the bar's owners, Tracy and Juciano Rebelo are getting rid of the makeover and re-launching Piratz Tavern today.

The Washington Post article says this:

  The bigger problem, however, was the tavern's new identity,

designed to attract Silver Spring's corporate worker bees. The new place seemed to do just the opposite: It became a cruel joke among a number of locals.

After reading the article, I have concluded that the Bar Rescue team did have some genuine concerns about Piratz Tavern (to do with management style and food quality) but that their solution eliminated the only thing that made Piratz Tavern stand out—its personality. Remember, personality does go a long way.

To network or not to network, that is a question

Here it is, mid-March (Pi Day today because it is 3.14) and I haven't been to a single networking event this year. Not a one. I did got to a panel presentation yesterday, but that wasn't a networking event.

Now, I believe in networking and in networking events. It's important to meet people in person, and form relationships. It's good to get out. **So the question is not whether to network but where and how.**

Here are some factors in deciding:

Who is going. Is there a good chance that you will meet prospective clients, or good resources or just fun people? Is it going to be lots of people you already know? Will it give you a chance to reconnect? You should have a goal in mind when networking. If not, you are just attending an event.

Where and when is it. Is it convenient to attend this event? Will there be parking if I have to drive or is it near a Metro stop? How long will it take to get there? Is it at the crack of dawn or in the evening?

Cost. Some events are free and those you can decide on based on the two factors above, but some events are costly. For example, I got an event invitation for something that is $49. And it is a breakfast presentation. To me, that is a lot of $$. Will the cost cover anything other than networking—a presentation or a meal? There's one group I know that gives a percentage of the cost to charity, so there is a feel-good/do-good aspect to paying.

Plenty of notice/time to RSVP. Sometimes you don't have enough notice (as I am writing this I got an invitation for something tomorrow night—sorry, I already committed to something else). Sometimes you have to RSVP far in advance.

What are your reasons to attend or not attend an event? I would love to hear what makes it or breaks it for you in the comments.

Why you must have a marketing timeline

This past Saturday, I received a 6″x11″ size postcard, in color (read: higher printing costs) advertising an event taking place on Sunday. Yes, you read that right. I got the expensive postcard one day before an event, and this was for a nonprofit group. You know what this postcard was? **A total waste of money.** I had already heard about the event via social media and enewsletter. I had already decided not to attend.

Photo: Time by Thomas Hawk, via Flickr.

Why have a marketing timeline

What this organization probably failed to do was a build an accurate marketing timeline. Without a timeline, you will print and mail stuff too late (or too early), send enewsletters too often or not frequently enough, send a press release too far from the event, etc. Marketing takes planning. Planning is essential if you want to get the most for your marketing dollars. In the case above, the postcard was a complete waste of marketing dollars. Very few, if any people, decide to attend an all-day event (which has a registration fee that is higher at the door) the day before.

How to build a marketing timeline

You probably will want to either sketch this out on a calendar or use a spreadsheet program to map this out.

1. Start with the end (your target date) and work backward.

2. Create a row for each communications vehicle, such as press release, enewsletter, email blast, brochure, etc.

3. Decide how many days prior to the target date you want each communications vehicle to reach your audience.

4. Consider preparation time for each communications vehicle. For example, for printed materials, you have to consider printing times, shipping to you, delivery times (are you using first class mail or bulk) and approval process. Set target dates for each preparation step.

5. Fill out your timeline.

Remember to give yourself time to plan your marketing timeline!

Your thoughts?

Weekly communications #fail: no response

We are all inundated with messaging from every which way. We get voice mail and texts, email, direct messages, tweets, and even snail mail. Sometimes we just don't have time to respond to everything and everyone, but that choice is a communications failure.

This week, I told you all about the incident with my website. The woman who was the root cause of this issue has yet to respond to any of the tweets or emails I sent her. Not a single word (and the words I would most like to hear are "I am sorry"). No acknowledgment that she messed up and that her screw up affected my business (and not to mention, cost me money). By not responding, she has made matters worse because now she has increased my anger level and shown me that she just doesn't care.

Of course, sometimes people respond because they feel compelled to. Their parents jammed manners into them, and thus, they resent having to answer each and every message. They can become passive-aggressive and they issue responses that don't actually respond but put it off by telling you they tell you they'll get back to you when they are a bit less busy or when Jupiter is in line with Neptune. In a sense, this is not communication but aggression.

Sometimes we don't respond because we don't have an answer. This is still non-communication.

Whether you have a legitimate reason or not, when you fail to respond to someone who is talking directly to you, you are failing to communicate.

Why cold calling doesn't work

It's 9:30 a.m. and I am trying to concentrate on a project when my phone rings. It is a representative from my credit card company. She is selling some additional service like travel insurance or some such. She is speaking in a monotone, and barely letting me get in a word edgewise. I speak over her and tell her to remove me from the marketing list. She goes away but only after she has interrupted my work and made me lose five minutes listening to her spiel.

I'd bet you have had the exact same thing happen to you. Everyone has. Unsolicited telemarketing calls are the bane of my existence, and worse yet if they are recorded calls (robo-calls). And we get pounded with them—I get at least two or three a day. Luckily, most of us have caller ID and don't pick up calls from numbers we don't recognize or that are places we don't do business with.

One time, I got a call from a real estate agent who went on and on about "listings in my area" and when I asked her what area that was, she referred to a place I hadn't even heard of. I told her that she was calling the wrong person, and she had the nerve to be huffy at me.

Cold calls just don't work. Why?

- Because you are quite literally interrupting someone or catching him/her at a time that is inconvenient.
- Because with caller ID, people can choose to ignore your call.
- Because these calls are not invited or welcome.
- Because they are blindly selling something based on broad factors like ZIP codes or business codes.

- Because there are too many variables that must align to make a sale: person answers call, person is receptive to talking, person is interested in the offer.

The best type of marketing is targeted. Cold calling by its nature is not targeted. Even if you a home insurance sales person cold calling ten people who just bought a home, you aren't really targeting because you don't know whether those people already have home insurance.

The best type of marketing is customized. With cold calling, due to volume and your lack of knowledge about the target, you will likely follow a script, which, by its nature is not customized.

The best type of marketing is inbound marketing. Cold calling is outbound marketing at its very worst. It's sending out messages to people who don't necessarily want or need these messages and hoping that through some margin of return, you will get enough business to justify the expense.

Ah yes, I know. You got the biggest client you have through cold calling. I think you were lucky. You called someone at a convenient time, with a message to which he or she was receptive. And you were able to get him or her to actually pick up the phone. Or that person did not have caller ID. Or that person was in a very good mood that day.

Why not put effort into other things that do work and that don't leave your prospects cold?

P.S. Plus of course, fewer and fewer people are using landline telephones these days, and cell phones are not listed.

Trust

Trust: the movie

On Sunday night I watched the movie Trust (starring Clive Owen and Catherine Keener), which is about how a teenage girl gets scammed by a pervert online. I won't give away all the plot details, but suffice it to say that it is a powerful and sad commentary on the underbelly of the online world, the power of the Internet; teenage angst and desire for acceptance; and parental disconnection.

Weirdly, this movie set the stage for an incident that happened yesterday that has made me think hard about the nature of trust and the online world.

Photo by Libby Levi for OpenSource.com via Flickr

Trust online

The nature of online interactions makes it hard to know who you are dealing with. As in the movie Trust, a person can provide a fake name, or picture or any other details. Unless we know otherwise, we are forced to trust the person is who

she or he says she/he is. This is why some of us limit who we are friends with on Facebook or connect with on LinkedIn. Twitter is a bit trickier.

Trust can be gained and lost

This blog and website was built by a virtual assistant/small business web developer whom I found online. I found her through Twitter when I was looking for some VA assistance. Since she had Web and WordPress skills, she fixed a couple of issues on my old website, and then built this website. Along the way, I referred a couple of people to her. **But.** She was a bit hard to get a hold of. She would disappear for days on end and not respond to emails or calls. Getting the project done was painful and slow. However, I was pleased with the end result.

This person also sold me web hosting on HostGator, as she was a reseller. I paid her upfront for a year of hosting. She assured me that I could deal with HostGator directly if I had any issues. Except when I did have an issue, it turned out she wasn't telling the truth. Yesterday, I found I had no email access and my website was down with a page that said "account suspended." I called HostGator immediately, and to make a long story short, I was told that the account holder—the virtual assistant—had not paid her account and that in order to make changes to the account *she* would have to contact HostGator. Well, I told you she was hard to get a hold of. I called both numbers I had for her (one was disconnected and the other one went to a voice mail that was not accepting messages). I sent email, and I tweeted her repeatedly. She was not to be found.

In the end, I was forced set up and pay for a new hosting account, and because I had a password, was able to get HostGator to transfer the files. It was stressful. HostGator has all sorts of rules about reseller accounts about which I had no clue. I was told that my website/email could be down for as long as 48 hours. In the end, it was only a couple of

hours.

I learned a lesson the hard way. You can't and shouldn't trust anybody you don't know personally (and even then) completely. In this case, I should have retained control of my web hosting.

To quote Ronald Reagan, "trust but verify"

There is only so much you can do…some people will try to scam you even if you check out references etc. But before you put money on the table, you must do your due diligence and try to verify a person's credentials. Also, check in with your gut. Your gut always seems to know.

Trust and marketing

<u>As a marketer, part of your job is to make sure potential customers and clients can and do trust you. Without trust, there can be no business relationship.</u> This is why we include actual addresses, names and phone numbers in our collateral material (including and especially websites). This is why we have customer/client testimonials and provide references. And this is why third party sites like Yelp and Angie's List are doing so well.

Trust is integral to marketing a business. Without it, you are toast.

Once trust is broken, you are done. I will never do business with the VA business again. And neither will anyone I know. Because of social media, my voice is amplified. She must not truly understand this because 24 hours later, I still haven't heard a word. Radio silence in an online world.

What is going on with the social in social media?

Twitter trolls and raconteurs

If you follow me on Twitter you know that I often share articles and insights regarding communications, marketing, PR and social media. You will also see a lot of political commentary. I know that having a political point of view can be a turn-off to some potential clients, but I have chosen to use my social media to share what is important to me.

Yesterday, I tweeted about how the GOP is working to deny access to contraceptives. Promptly, a pro-Mitt Romney supporter (don't know name or gender or location) tweeted back that contraception is not health care. I pointed out to him or her that getting pregnant can lead to health complications for certain people so contraception certainly can be health care. He or she said there are many "natural" ways to prevent conception. It kept going until the troll was silenced with something he or she had no answer for…why insurance should cover Viagra.

After this exchange, I was left wondering once again why people on Twitter seek out those who they disagree with and start sparring with them. I don't. I am not there to fight with those that don't see the world like I do…and I certainly don't seek battles out. If I disagree with someone I follow/follows me, that's a different story. I didn't go out looking for a fight.

Social media can connect you to people all over. In my mind, I would rather find those people I connect with rather than those I disagree with. I would rather find friends than

enemies.

Photo from Loriane DiSabato via Flickr.

Facebook "friends"

Facebook friends are people you have met at some time in your life, and with whom you share a Facebook "connection." Sadly, it is not a real connection but rather an artificial one. There are those friends who never use the site at all. Are you connected if you never hear from one another? And then there are those that share every minute detail of every day. They aren't connecting—they are spamming everyone they have met with everything on their minds. And then there are those who only feel comfortable connecting over Facebook. These people are incapable of picking up the phone or sending a non-Facebook email. Instead, they "connect" with you by liking your post or wishing you a happy birthday on your wall.

On his blog, the 8 pm Warrior, Aaron Briebert said in the post "Warning: Social Media is Killing Real Communication (and Relationships)" that social media is a form of deferred communication, and one that is

tearing apart traditional relationships. Especially among young people. As we get overwhelmed by deferred communication, stuff is missed. Divisions are formed.

Mashable recently published this post: "Is Social Media Actually Making Us Less Connected?", in which Professor Sherry Turkle from MIT says that technology is impacting the quality of our relationships.

One major issue, she [Turkle] said, is that when we text, email or post to a social networking site, we're able to project ourselves as we want to be seen. "We get to edit, we get to delete, and that means we get to retouch."

Inversely, Turkle notes that a face-to-face conversation "takes place in real time and you can't control what you're going to say."

Further, with our phones at our constant disposal, Turkle says we're only paying attention to the things we want to pay attention to. And that leaves us increasingly disconnected from our friends, family and co-workers as we simply turn to our devices when a conversation no longer interests us.

Social media is not helping anybody develop social skills, in fact, it seems to be killing social skills. If we have a disagreement with someone, instead of having a difficult conversation, we are unfollowing or unfriending. If we don't care for someone, we just hide their posts or block them. And there are those who expect that you will learn about major life events (engagements, break-ups, promotions, babies) from their Facebook status.

The fact is real relationships take effort. Facebooking and Tweeting can be done in a few minutes a day. It's quite easy to post a happy birthday message on someone's wall. But to call the person, send him or her a card, or see him or her in

person takes time and effort.

Do you think social media is really social?

Weekly communications #fail: homonyms, and how you say it matters

Homonyms: words that sound and/or are spelled the same but have different things

As I was reading the Washington Post this morning, on the front page was an article about a rapist recently sentenced to three life terms. In the article, the reporter said that the rapist "**reined** terror on Montgomery three decades ago…" Of course, the correct word in this context is **reigned**. Reined (restrained) and reigned (exercised power over) sound the same—they are homonyms—but have completely unrelated meanings. Yesterday, I was reading a blog post with a headline that said "too much to **bare**." The author really meant to say "too much to **bear**."

Granted, these mistakes are easy to make because the words are not spelled incorrectly (so spell check would not help) and they sound the same to your ear (so reading aloud would not catch it). Sadly, misusing homonyms is a common mistake. Here's a list of the most common: http://wsuonline.weber.edu/wrh/words.htm

These types of mistakes are precisely why we need editors.

How you say it matters

Using the correct words is important. But how you say what you are saying also matters. If you are asking me to do something for you, being pleasant and appreciative makes me want to help you. If on the other hand you write me asking me for something you need (like an email I received a few weeks ago) that says that this thing is needed right away, and you don't say please, thank you or that you would appreciate my help, then, I am not inclined to help you.

Being polite and considerate of whoever is receiving your business communication will result in better compliance. That's a fact. Being rude, inconsiderate or demanding, on the other hand, will result in resistance.