

Can two or three words guarantee business success?

The two or three words that may well guarantee business success are any of these options:

Happy holidays, Merry Christmas, Happy New Year, Happy Hanukkah, Happy Kwanzaa, Happy Thanksgiving, Season's Greetings, Best wishes.

not to mention the two most effective words in business:

THANK YOU

Two to three words that work to show other people (customers, clients, vendors, business associates) that we are thinking of them. That we value the relationship. That we do not take them or their business for granted.

This year, I received a season's greetings card from my eye doctor! That was a first for me...I think most doctors take one's business for granted.

Think about whom you received greetings from, and from whom you did not. Any surprises? Also, if you ordered gifts or other merchandise online, did you receive a thank you for your order? If you didn't, would you buy from that retailer again?

If I feel my business is not valued, why would I continue to do business with that vendor/merchant/consultant/individual?

Perhaps sending a greeting or saying thank you is not enough to GUARANTEE success, but it will help prove you think they are important to you. Making sure your customers and clients feel valued will help make it easier to continue to do business with them.

What say you?

Marcomm takeaways from the Iowa Caucus

Last night, FINALLY, the results of the Iowa Caucus gave us a more real sense of where people are headed in the GOP race. You can read about the results in this Karen Tumulty story for the Washington Post.

As you have probably heard *ad nauseum* the results may or may not indicate who the eventual GOP nominee will be. That said, I think we can draw the following three marketing communications lessons from the caucus:

1. **Advertising works.** Furthermore, negative advertising is VERY powerful. Mitt Romney spent the most and won the caucus (OK, Romney's Super PAC spent the most...but that is another discussion).

2. **It's the message AND the messenger.** The message is important, but perhaps not as important as the messenger. People vote for people they like, explaining why Santorum did so well. Santorum comes across as a sincere, committed and caring person. And he rocks a sweater vest (and sweater vests are what granddads and jolly uncles wear, right?). Gingrich, who came in at a distant fourth, comes across as pedantic and angry. Even his post-caucus speech was angry (I didn't watch it, but read commentary like this analysis from Mr. Media Training).

3. **Be present.** Jon Huntsman made the decision to skip Iowa, and the numbers show it. He came in with 0.6% of the vote. People like to see something they want to buy, not just hear about it. Lots of pundits describe the Iowa caucus as true retail politics, where politicians meet and greet (in person)

their potential supporters. You have to be the bricks and mortar in the case, and not just the virtual.

What did you think? Any marketing lessons you took away?

Communications wishes for 2012

My main wish for 2012 is that it ends up being a better year than 2011 (although that is not a very high bar). In terms of marketing communications, I offer you my top ten lists of what I wish to see more and less of.

What I wish to see more of:

1. People/companies who know the difference between strategy and tactics and that you can't substitute one for the other.
2. Easy-to-navigate websites that include REAL contact information and a comprehensive ABOUT page
3. Clever taglines that actually communicate a message (like Red Lobster's "Sea Food Differently")
4. Nonprofits that understand that marketing communications are an important part of their operations
5. People who use effect and affect correctly (AKA better copyediting)
6. Plain English
7. Thinking of social media as a tool (like advertising) and not as a substitute for marketing communications as a whole.
8. Companies and organizations that understand that the quality of their customer service will directly impact their marketing efforts.

9. Personalized LinkedIn invitations
10. Connecting IRL (in real life) with social media friends and followers

What I wish to see less of:

1. The search for the ROI of social media/Klout scores
2. Sexist language (using terms like man hours) and sexist advertising (yes, I am looking at you Budweiser and GoDaddy)
3. Grammatical mistakes and typos (perennial wish of mine)
4. Check-ins
5. The words utilize, monetize, incentivize; and clichéd/meaningless terms including low hanging fruit, sweet spot, pivot point.
6. Sending out too many newsletters
7. LinkedIn profiles without a headshot
8. Blatant self promotion and re-tweeting of one's own tweets/mentions
9. Overpriced and overhyped social media conferences
10. Life lessons and how to live advice from marketing/social media bloggers

What do you wish for in 2012?

Make your own list

It is inevitable that at the end of the year blogs, newscasts, newspapers and everybody else creates lists for their

readers/viewers: best posts of the year, what's in and what's out, resolutions for 2012, trends, and so on. While some of these are interesting and even though-provoking, I challenge you to make your own list.

To make your own list, you will have to sit and reflect a bit. Here are some guiding questions:

- What worked the best for you in terms of marketing communications? (What got the most response, donors, etc.)
- What worked the least for you? (Where did you spend time/money with little or no return?)
- Did you create any partnerships? What worked best/least?
- Did you sponsor anything/anybody? What worked?
- Did you read any business/marketing books? Which provided the best/most actionable advice?
- What ads/commercials were memorable to you? Why?
- What peeved you the most?
- What did your competition do this year that you admired? That you thought was not so good?
- What people/organizations brought you the most value? (Perhaps your graphic designer or your printer...)

- What one marketing communications task that you accomplished this year was the most worthwhile (something like creating a brochure, redesigning a website, launching a blog, etc.)

In the *Escape from Cubicle Nation* blog, Pam Slim urges you to ask yourself four questions:

1. What did I learn?
2. What am I grateful for?
3. What will I stop doing?
4. What will I start doing?

Although Ms. Slim is looking at personal growth, I think these questions are valid to determine what your marcomm efforts

will be in the new year. Looking through your lists will help you move forward in 2012. The last two questions are especially key. If you found that something you have been doing provides no return on investment, STOP doing it. Start doing something different!

Please share your responses or any questions that you ask yourself at year's end.

Marketing lessons from the gym

Today, as most days, I was working out at the gym and observing those around me (the gym can get very boring). There were some people working up quite a sweat, and there were those that were barely working. Some were older, some were younger. In short, there were all types. But three stood out to me:

The multi-tasker: Today, the multi-tasker was a woman using one of the ellipticals while responding to email and/or texts on her smart phone. She was so engaged with her phone that her legs were barely moving. Was she there to exercise or was she there to deal with work?

- **The lesson:** If you are distracted from your goal, you won't get there. In marketing, you could be trying to do too many things at once and not succeeding in any of them.

The repeater: The repeater is the person who does the exact same exercise, at the same level of intensity, on the same machine. Always. In this case, I have seen this woman "run" at

a very slow pace on the exact same machine, at the same time every single day. And guess what—her body is not changing (she is not even breaking a sweat).

- **The lesson:** If you do the same thing over and over without change you won't be effective or see any change. For instance, some companies have always used a full page ad in the Sunday newspaper. And they have been doing that for years. It may produce some results but it will not expand your reach.

The guy wearing jeans at the gym: Have you seen these guys? They come in to the gym in their jeans (usually with belts too) and sometimes, with street shoes instead of sneakers. How are you going to run in jeans?

- **The lesson:** You have to dress appropriately for the occasion/venue. In marketing terms: you have to know what marketing vehicle is the right one for what you are trying to accomplish. If you are trying to target seniors, perhaps a spot on the evening news is the best way to go.

Have you seen these people at your gym?

Is threatening your customers ever a good idea?

Today, in my inbox, I had an email from an online bookseller with this subject line:

“Last day for FREE shipping in time for Christmas.”

I also had an email from an online drugstore, with this

subject line:

“NOW OR NEVER: get \$5 dollars off your order and free shipping.”

Although both emails have virtually the same message, the former is URGENT, the latter is THREATENING.

Threatening is telling me that unless I do something there will be consequences (in the drugstore's case, no more free shipping or something). Urgent is telling me that I should act now because time is running out.

It is more effective to **show your customers why they should act now** instead of telling them that if they fail to act, they will suffer consequences. Don't you agree?

Blurred lines between advertising and editorial

If you have ever worked with large newspapers, you know there is a strong editorial stance against pay for play, meaning that no matter how much advertising a company provides the newspaper, the journalists/editors will not let that influence their reporting. This line is much more blurred in smaller, local newspapers, where sometimes, a good editorial piece will follow advertising or vice versa.

It is important to keep the line of separation between advertising and editorial so that readers can trust the newspaper is not being bought. Imagine that if in a political campaign a certain candidate bought a lot more advertising

than the other, and then the editors endorsed said candidate. Wouldn't that be questionable?

Which brings me to something I couldn't quite believe that I saw today in the Washington Post. Thomas Heath wrote his Value Added column praising Total Wine, the Potomac, MD based mega liquor store. Heath writes that one of the ways Total Wine has grown is because of how one of the company's founders studied law, so that he could use the knowledge to help change laws regarding liquor in states into which the company was trying to expand. On the opposite page to the column was a junior page ad for—you guessed it—Total Wine. Seriously. (People who read the paper electronically would never see this...but that is another discussion.)

What is going on here? Heath or his editor tells the Total Wine people he is writing a positive piece about Total Wine, and Total Wine says, in that case we want to advertise, and can you place the ad right next to the column please? And the Post says sure-not a problem? Clearly, there was communication if not straight on hand shaking across advertising and editorial on this one, blurring the lines at the Washington Post. How do we know that Heath was not encouraged to write a positive column on the promise of Total Wine advertising? We don't.

What do you think? Did the Post act appropriately? Would it have mattered if the ad was placed anywhere else in the paper?

Being more effective

If you are the type to make New Year's resolutions, make one to be more effective in your marketing communications efforts. Being effective—that is, actually successful in producing your intended result—should be the goal of all marketing communications.

How can you be more effective? There are several ways to make sure your communications meet their mark, but it probably starts with the basics:

- Do you know and understand your **TARGET AUDIENCE**?
- Do you know what your **KEY MESSAGE** is? Are you expressing it clearly and unambiguously?
- Are you properly **TIMING** your communications efforts?
- Do you know your **USP** (unique selling proposition)?
- Are you aware of who your **COMPETITION** and what they are doing?
- Have you gotten **FEEDBACK** from outside sources on your creative? Is it conveying the attributes you are trying to convey?
- Are you following a **STRATEGY** or are you just engaging in **TACTICS**?

What are your suggestions for being more effective? Please share in the comments.

Let's get together soon! (she

said)

You know this person right? The person who says “let’s get together soon” but never does anything to make it happen? Or worse, the person who says you should get together and when you follow up, s(he) actually rebuffs you/comes up with an excuse/doesn’t respond at all.

In marketing communications this person is the equivalent of the false brand promise or the product that does not perform as advertised(truth in advertising).

It is something to watch out for. If you are marketer—are you blithely promising to get together and then promptly forgetting your promise? That is, are you telling prospects that your product/service is the most effective way to XXXX, but falling somewhat short?

You know what happens when you fail your brand promise? You lose customers, and you most likely won’t be able to get them back.

Recently, I attended a business event that was billed as a goal-setting workshop. It wasn’t. Not even close. Guess what? I am not going back to that group. Same thing happened a few months ago when I attended a local communications group event on the strategic use of video...except there was no mention of strategy whatsoever.

When you fail to do what you promise to do—whether in your marketing efforts or your personal outreach—you lose business (current or potential).

Instead of saying “let’s get together soon” say “how about we meet up for coffee on Monday at 2 pm.”

One week without Facebook

It's been a week since I logged into my personal Facebook account. One week in which I haven't "liked" anything or found out what my "friends" are busy doing in their lives. And guess what? It's been OK.

I decided to avoid Facebook this week because frankly, I am sick of the site. Between the false feeling of connection to the inspirational quotes, location check-ins and general braggadocio, I am not sure which irritates me the most. And it is definitely not the point to be annoyed when you are on a website.

This week I have been on Twitter and LinkedIn. On these social networks I generally learn more than I ever do on Facebook. Twitter provides me with up-to-the-minute news, links to information I may have not seen and a way to chat with people in real-time. LinkedIn lets me see what people are doing professionally.

This leads me to social media marketing. If you are relying on just one social network like Facebook to do all your marketing communications, you may be putting all the proverbial eggs in one basket. You should diversify. Yes, Facebook has a HUGE audience. But it is a POTENTIAL audience, not a measured, constant audience. People do not yet HAVE to go to Facebook every day. They may choose to, but they don't need to go there to check mail or get their news.

I would still counsel you to use Facebook as part of your marketing mix. **Because it is opt-in for people, you are communicating with those who are receptive to your message.** That is truly valuable. Just don't share inspirational quotes

or you will lose me!

Your thoughts? How do you feel about Facebook?