

What do your customers want?

Can you complete this line:

The main thing my customers/clients want from me is ...

You should, of course, be able to answer this. If you are a toy manufacturer, for example, your line could be “the main thing my customers want from me is safety...parents won’t buy unsafe toys for their kids.”

Once you can answer this question, you can proceed with marketing.

This week, Netflix made an announcement that it would spin off its DVD business under a new name (Qwikster). This came at the heels of a subscriber loss due in part to the 60% increase in prices announced earlier. Not only that, but Netflix’ stock price has fallen.

Apparently, Netflix failed to ask itself what its customers wanted. Ignoring their loyal fan base (as this great article in the Harvard Business Review blog discusses) is probably why there has been such an uproar.

What do Netflix customers want? Do they want more streaming video or do they want to keep getting DVDs in the mail? Do they want an easy, inexpensive way to get movies fast?

Netflix’ CEO wants to be in the streaming business, not in the DVD business. But perhaps that is not what his customers want. Perhaps his customers do not like the name Qwikster. Perhaps he didn’t ASK his customers first. Sure, companies have to make decisions based on financials etc, but part of the input should include some market research, some customer feedback. Netflix did not ask, and now they know—customers want convenience and price stability from Netflix.

What do your customers want? How will you find out?

Give them a reason to care

My last post suggested you have a strong subject line in your email, especially when you are reaching out to potential clients. You have to give them a reason to care.

This advice extends to your Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook posts and your marketing in general. If you are trying to get people to do something (read your post, buy your product/service, donate), you **MUST** give those people a reason to care. You can't just say "look at me."

First, ask yourself what you want your potential client or customer to do. Then ask yourself, what would make the potential client/customer interested in doing what I ask?

So instead of saying: Donate \$\$ to Good Cause X say Donate \$\$ to Good Cause so we can help feed the starving in your city. Or be more creative: Hundreds are suffering from malnutrition—giving to Good Cause will help.

Are your emails getting read?

Email marketing is alive and well, in spite of all the doomsayers who say email is dead. Most people use email to communicate, and generally check their email multiple times a day.

We all get tons of emails—notifications, calendar events,

special discounts, sales pitches and perhaps a few personal notes too. What makes you open (let alone read) an email. There are a few scenarios:

Known sender: We'll open something if we know who is sending it (your aunt Karen or Groupon, for example) Of course, spammers have exploited this to their advantage by fabricating the sent address.

Subject line: We'll open something if it sounds relevant or interesting, like "Special Event to Benefit (name of charity you care about) Next Week).

Ideally, your emails should have both to ENSURE the are opened. If you don't have one, you have to work on the other. Your mother can send you an email with the subject line "Hi," but if you are someone the recipient does not know your subject line MUST be descriptive.

I received an email this morning from someone I do not know, which had the subject line "meeting request." Why should I open that? I don't know the person sending it and the subject tells me nothing. If this person had been more descriptive and said "(Company name) requesting meeting to discuss (product/service/whatever)" wouldn't that have made it clear what the email was about?

Think about your readers...do they know you well enough to care about your emails? If not, give them a good reason!

UPDATE: Check out this infographic about email, which provides some good facts/figures including the fact that email continues to GROW.

One question to improve your Twitter stream

Do you have the kind of Twitter followers you want? Are you getting the information you want and need from your Twitter stream? If the answer is no, I have one question for you to consider before you post your next Tweet:

Who cares about what I am about to post?

Do your friends care? Your mother? Your potential clients? Your colleagues?

Not everything you want to say has to be said on social media. If you want to vent about your new dishwasher, why not call a neighbor? If you want to make brunch plans—why not text your friends?

Bad news for newspapers

How long until we don't have printed newspapers any more? Ten years? Five? Fewer? I am not sure but a look at some headlines on today's Mediabistro.com home page give us some clues:

LA Times to raise newsstand price (new cost will be 75 cents for daily)

Washington Post to shut all regional bureaus (except for Richmond and Annapolis, because of the local angle needs)

Oakland, CA loses its daily newspaper (joining several other cities in the same situation)

And most ominous of all:

Newspaper Ad Spending Down 7% in 2Q

The trend is clear: fewer people are buying newspapers, and fewer readers means less enticement for advertisers, which means less ad revenue. With less per-issue/subscription revenue and ad revenue, newspapers are increasing prices to subscribers/single-issue buyers or shutting down altogether. Some, like the New York Times, are embracing the online world and charging for access. I think this (unfortunately) is where all newspapers that want to remain viable will head. But then, what will they be called?

Let me know what you think. If you are heading out for a nice long weekend, enjoy! Happy Labor Day to all!

Some people won't change

If you are in the marketing business, a pretty big chunk of your time is probably spent convincing people about something. If you are in sales, you are probably convincing them to try your product. If you are in advertising, you are doing the same on a larger scale. On the other side—the internal side—you are also trying to convince. You may be trying to persuade your client to embark on a public relations campaign or back a new creative direction.

Sometimes this works, and sometimes it doesn't. Some people

resist change but can change if they see a good reason. Some people just resist change and no amount of reasoning is going to work.

I have a client that refuses—flat out—to consider social media. The higher-ups at the company will not budget for it. They see no value to brand and image building. Their only criteria is bottom line. And in marketing communications we know that there can't be a direct correlation between your communications efforts and the bottom line. If you are trying to create an image, the costs could be higher up front and the payoff later. To think that you will spend \$100 in advertising to bring in \$100 in business is wrong. It could happen, and in fact you could spend \$100 and bring in several times more in business. But it may not happen immediately.

Some people won't change. If what you are offering/advising does not fit with their worldview, they won't even consider it. In this case, just give up. Don't spend energy and ideas trying to convince someone who doesn't want to be convinced.

Getting your facts straight

If you need to do anything when preparing any type of communications (printed, online, even spoken), you need to get your facts straight.

Seems fairly obvious, but as usual, it escapes many.

Let me give you an example. Last week I received a check from a foreign bank, drawn from a U.S. dollar account. I have received these before (I do have clients in other countries). I went to Bank of America to deposit it. I was told that it would take up to four months to clear. FOUR months. (This was

after lots of back and forth with a clueless teller and her remarkably unfriendly supervisor). I told them time and again that this was a US DOLLAR check—no exchange rate necessary. It didn't matter—they thought they had their facts straight, and did not leave me any option but to take the check elsewhere.

I went to my other bank. They were MUCH friendlier there, and seemed to understand what I was saying. They went ahead and deposited the check, warning that it would take up to six weeks to clear. And that I would be charged a fee. Because of the exchange rate. But, I said, this is a check drawn in US DOLLARS. There should be no exchange of any sort. Bottom line, the check cleared immediately. I have not yet been charged a fee. Seems like the bank teller and her supervisor at the second bank did not have their facts straight.

You have to know what you are talking about plain and simple. Sure you can make mistakes or have to ask someone if you don't know, but it is inexcusable to give customers/potential customers the wrong information.

Get your facts straight before you put anything out there!

Blog is moving...please update your RSS feeds

After three years and eight months blogging at WordPress.com, Caffeinated Views is moving! I am now going to host the blog right on my website at www.deborahbrody.com. The change-over is happening this weekend.

I am very excited to finally be able to integrate this blog

into my website, although it does mean some growing pains, since those of you who subscribe will have to change your feeds. The blog will also lose its title and look a bit different. However, I will keep providing the same type of insights into marketing communications, and much appreciate your readership.

The new feed will be found here as of next week. Please update your readers.

<http://deborahbrody.com/blog/feed/rss/>

I would love your feedback on the new website/blog.

And many thanks for sticking with me!

Finding a vendor

How do you find a vendor? It is important to know this because it can inform marketing. Depending on what I am looking for, I used Google, LinkedIn, listing services, reviews or Twitter. I am sure you use other tools (and would appreciate your insights in the comments).

For example, yesterday I was searching for a freelance editor. I used Google, and found (remarkably) few individuals had websites, whether I searched for “DC freelance editor” or “Maryland freelance editor.” I did find a couple, and one of them, had a very nice website and clearly defined rates. I searched for her on LinkedIn, and discovered that her background was very technical—no editorial. Made me think twice about her skill set. Another one had very strong writing credentials, but absolutely no social media (and she explained she is not into it). It made me question whether she gets it.

I also Tweeted it out, and got a response from a colleague (good word of mouth). But, no freelance editors even picked up on it. Obviously, not using Twitter search to find business.

Tool: Google

Marketing lesson: Websites are important. Google profiles are helpful. If you are in an industry that is reviewed, having positive reviews is important since Google finds results from Yelp and others.

Tool: LinkedIn

Marketing lesson: If you aren't on LinkedIn, you are at a disadvantage. The quality of your profile (both for individuals and companies) is important. For individuals, testimonials, number of connections and your background do matter. Don't make stuff up, but bone up what is there.

Tool: Twitter (or other social media sites)

Marketing lesson: How you present yourself, and even if you are on social media, says a lot. What does your Twitter profile, stream, followers say about your business or you?

Tool: Printed materials (brochures, business cards, etc.)

Marketing lesson: How your marketing materials look (are they printed on quality stock, are they black/white or color, do they look professionally designed), can give an immediate impression. How your marketing materials read—what information you provide—can seal the deal.

Tool: Using the telephone

Marketing lesson: Are you reachable? How do you/your company answer the phone? Do you even answer the phone? Some people will want to talk to someone in real time.

Tool: Word of mouth

Marketing lesson: Each and every customer who has a positive interaction with you can be an ambassador, and each and every customer who has a negative impression can be a detractor. Watch your customer interactions. Improve your customer service.

The bottom line is that if you are marketing yourself/your company, you have to understand how people find you, and how they decide whether to contact you or not.

Your thoughts? What makes you decide on a vendor? How do you find a vendor?

Do you have an internal communications program?

Many companies devote almost all of their communications/marketing resources to EXTERNAL communications, that is, the customer facing communications like ads, press releases, and so forth. It seems like far fewer companies take the time to invest in INTERNAL communications.

Internal communications are the information exchanges you have with your internal audiences: your staff, board of directors, volunteers and any other group internally affiliated with your organization. Many companies communicate company news to employees via internal email or a staff meeting. There is nothing wrong with that, but perhaps you could do more.

An internal communications program should be:

Timely. Your staff should never find out about a company decision from outside sources.

Complete. Provide all the necessary details—more than you would provide the media.

Regular. Even if you have no major announcements, you should communicate with your internal audiences on a regular basis.

What kind of information should you share? Here are some ideas:

- Staff changes and promotions—including dismissals
- Company earnings and market reports
- Competitive information
- Any external communications: press releases, ads, blog posts
- News reports on your organization
- News reports on your field
- Calendar events
- Policies—including any changes

When your internal audiences know less about your organization than the general public you risk a downgrade in morale. Having a good internal communications program will keep your internal audiences informed.

If you do have an internal communications program, what is your preferred form of communication? If not, why not?