

Two different offers from one service provider

I was away for a few days and had to wade through a pile of mail on my return. Among the “important” mail that I received, were two envelopes from the Automobile Association of America (AAA). One was a co-op with USAirways (with which I have frequent flyer miles) and the other was a garden-variety membership solicitation.

I used to be an AAA member but had let my membership lapse years ago when I discovered my car insurance company provides roadside assistance as part of my fee. What I like about AAA is that you can usually get good deals on hotels, so I read the I started reading the USAirways/AAA offer first.

The USAir/AAA offer included “free enrollment” (\$15 initiation fee was waived), free second membership, free extra month and 750 miles. To find the total cost for the year, I had to read through it twice. It was hidden in the billing certificate. **The total cost would be \$65.50.**

The offer from just AAA is the following: Free enrollment, free second membership, a savings of \$25 on membership and a savings of \$5 on automatic renewals. Again, it was hard to find the **total cost of \$40.50.**

Basically, I would save money just having a regular AAA membership. Why would USAirways agree to send out an offer that when compared to the regular offer is more expensive? Remember, miles do not cost the airline anything and you can’t get anywhere with 750 miles. Why would you, the consumer, pay \$25 for 750 miles? Remember, the actual service is being provided by AAA. The toll-free number for both offers is the general AAA number.

And, why make the total cost so hard to find? As I wrote about

a few days ago, it is a bad idea to hide crucial information. Consumers need to make decisions with the facts in front of them.

I am not sure where to point the blame here: at AAA for not de-duping their mailing lists? at USAir for agreeing to have an offer sent out that is more than AAA's own offer, with similar timing? at AAA for thinking customers don't care about details?

My bottom line: if you are going to have different offers, make sure that one is not cannibalizing the other.

Your thoughts?

Mirror, mirror?

On the news today: The Royal Wedding. Obama Releases Birth Certificate. The Royal Wedding. Katie Couric Leaving CBS. The Royal Wedding. Trump Shows How Egomaniacal he is. The Royal Wedding.

Does the news media reflect the public's interests, or does the public reflect the newsmedia? Is it a two-way conversation, or is it a two-way mirror, where we see what they are doing, but they don't see what we are doing?

I am not sure, but I do think that what we see around us reflects a much larger problem—one where voyeurism and scandal dominate. And I don't like it.



Check your links

I know you need to add one more thing to your to-do list like you need to wake up Friday at 4 a.m. to watch the royal wedding, but do consider doing this with every blog post, website page, tweet, etc that you put out there:

CHECK THE LINKS!

Does your website have any broken links (or pages that don't appear correctly)? Does the sharing software on your blog work? All of it? When you post a link to a story on Twitter, are you sure the link is working?

Many of us do not check these very often.

Case in point: a blogger I follow has faulty sharing buttons on her blog. I read a good post by her, which I wanted to share on Twitter. I clicked on the link and all I got was a blank Twitter page—no title and no link. No good. I created a Bit.Ly short link and posted it anyway but she would have no way of knowing that the item had been shared unless her blog records ping-backs. I reported this to her, and I hope she is able to correct it.

Prevent this from happening by occasionally checking these links. Just sayin'.



WOTD: Vacuous

Over on Twitter, lots of people tweet out their word of the day. Today's word for me is: vacuous.

Merriam-Webster gives the following definition:

1 : emptied of or lacking content

2: marked by lack of ideas or intelligence : stupid, inane <a vacuous mind> <a vacuous movie>

3: devoid of serious occupation : idle

I am thinking of this word because I have been seeing so many vacuous blog posts lately. Vacuous because they lack intelligence. For instance, I read a post today about improving your Facebook page. One of the tips was to fill out all the information required. If that is not vacuous, I am not sure what is.

I can certainly use vacuous in a sentence when it comes to social media. There are many vacuous tweets out there. Your social media profile makes you look vacuous. And so forth.

You should not assume that your reader knows everything, but you also should not assume your reader knows nothing. The latter promotes vacuous comments and posts.

Hiding crucial information

Say you walk into a store. You are browsing through racks of pants, and see a pair you like. You look for the size, and you can't find it. You look for the price, but there is no price tag. Now, you have to consider taking this to a sales

associate to have her/him look up the size and price, and find one that has both these bits of information. The problem is that this information is crucial to you making a purchase.

And then there is the bother factor. Have you ever taken an item to the cash register without a price tag? You will have to wait while a (usually slow) runner goes to find what the price is for your item. And the line will be held up. Etc. Pain. Right?

Withholding price information is going to make sales slow and customers unhappy. Yet, online, this happens all the time. There is a conference and you are trying to find out how much it costs. You have to click on the registration button. You get an invitation to an event, and cost is never listed until you decide to register.

Why do organizations insist on hiding crucial information? Do they think by not revealing the price of the seminar/event/workshop you are going to be more enticed to sign up?

I believe that organizations need to be transparent and upfront regarding costs. If your gala costs \$125 per person, tell me. If the workshop is free, tell me that too.

It is never a good idea to force your potential customers/clients/donors/supporters to ask for a price check.

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1 big lesson from 3 Cups of Tea Controversy

No doubt by now you have heard about the controversy surrounding Greg Mortenson and his book Three Cups of Tea, as well as the Central Asia Institute (CAI). CBS' 60 Minutes did an expose on Mortenson, and the report alleges Mortenson fabricated some part of his story and that the CAI has been mismanaging funds.

The story has been widely reported in the media. Jon Krakauer, who was interviewed in the 60 Minutes story, has issued his own expose.

Now, there is a report that the Montana Attorney General will investigate the CAI.

Bottom line: Mortenson is facing serious challenges to his credibility.

One big lesson for everyone: serious investigative journalism is still a force to be reckoned with.

One big lesson for Mortenson: answer requests for interviews. 60 Minutes tried to interview him and he declined. Not answering makes it look like you are trying to hide something. Never a good idea.

What do you think?



My marketing must-haves

As a very small business, Deborah Brody Marketing Communications does not have a large marketing budget (seems a bit ironic). For instance, I have never printed a brochure, but I do have a website. Here are the list of things I do have, some of which are free, for marketing purposes:

- **Website** (soon to be upgraded...stay tuned): This is the must-have of all must-haves, for the obvious reasons that you need to know that I exist, and without a website, I may as well not be here.
- **Blog** (you are here on WordPress.com ...soon to be integrated to one site): Keeps you informed on what I am thinking.
- **Business cards**: printed, in color and double-sided. Well worth the investment. Latest ones were ordered from Greenerprinter.com and are made of 100% recycled paper.
- **Twitter**: Have met many people via Twitter not to mention the amount of information and ideas that I have picked up.
- **LinkedIn**: A profile on LinkedIn is like an online resume with feelers.
- **Google alerts**: I track several topics, and my own name. An invaluable source of current information only topped by
- **Google reader** (with a long list of great blogs and feeds): You need to be current in the marketing field...and probably any field. A good way to stay on top of stuff is to have your Google Reader feeding you the latest from the industry's top blogs, etc.

What I have that is not a must-have: a Facebook page for my business. This is in spite of evidence that says Facebook is a good place to be for businesses and brands.

What are your must-haves? Let me know in the comments please!

What we can learn from the budget “negotiations”

Last week, our elected officials took the whole country to the brink. Whether you think it was ideology, intransigence, real economic crisis or plain circus, we all got a painfully clear view of what kind of government we have, and it was not a pretty picture.

But not all is bad. We can derive some lessons from this latest governmental crisis that can be applied to marketing:

- At some point, spin does not compensate for the reality on the ground so stop spinning already!
- Repeating the same phrase over and over becomes meaningless (e.g. “we are fighting for the American people,” “we do not want to shut down the government.”)
- Innuendo and doublespeak are not substitutes for clear communication.
- Say what you want unequivocally. You want cuts to Planned Parenthood—say that. Don’t make it a “rider” so that you can sneak it in under the radar.
- Don’t underestimate your audience...they can see through your antics.
- Be prepared for people to question you, your motives and your goals.
- There is a difference between justifying your actions and explaining your actions.

Politicians, like PR or advertising professionals, are in the business of persuasion. And like PR or ad people, they are beholden to special interests (or as we call them “clients”).

What did you learn about marketing from our government’s game

of chicken?



Reputation matters

Several days ago, a blogger on a well-respected site that I frequently read stated that the gender gap on wages was a myth. He said that if women don't earn as much as men it is because they don't work as much (really, he said this). He used all sorts of manipulated information that failed to address the underlying issues, such as women are usually also responsible for child care. I suspect that he was trying to be contentious to receive more traffic. I called out the post on Twitter, and the author attacked me personally saying I was acting like a victim. I am not making any of this up.

A couple days after the Gender Gap is a Myth post, a woman posted a strong rebuttal on the website, which pointed out some inconsistencies and omissions by the male blogger. In my mind, it made the male blogger look even worse. For me, the end result has been that I will not read anything the male blogger writes anymore because a) I have lost any respect for his assertions and b) I think that he writes to get a rise out of his audience rather than to inform. His reputation is ruined for me, and there is very little he can do to change it (if he even cares).

The bottom line here is that what you publish online (on Twitter, Facebook, blogs, etc), how you respond to comments and how you interact with others who disagree with you all influence your reputation. You can create a reputation for

being fair, or for being smart, or on the other hand, you could create a reputation for being a raconteur or a complete ass. Your reputation matters. And it will influence what people think of you, what they say about you and whether they continue to read your stuff/subscribe to your blog and so forth.

Reputation can indeed affect your bottom line.

What is your reputation? What do you think people think about you based on what you put out there? Do you think it matters? And if you don't think it matters, why?



Don't Waste Your Marketing Dollars

Unless you are Verizon, a company that seemingly has no cap on the amount of marketing dollars it can spend promoting FIOS, you have a budget. Use your budget wisely. Sounds simple yet how many companies don't get this?

You may be wasting your marketing dollars (and creating bad blood along the way) if:

- You are sending newsletters without permission or too many times a week or without a clear, easy opt-out
- You are sending non-targeted direct mail
- You are using robo-calls to mass dial anyone in an area code (this is not only stupid, it is illegal)
- You are using threatening language
- You are sending multiple pieces and none of them have

the same offer

- You are sending marketing pieces that contain typos, grammatical and/or spelling mistakes
- You are sending marketing pieces that look home-made (and not in the enticing, chocolate chip cookie kind of way)
- You are mistaking the fact that someone once gave you a business card for the opportunity to blanket him/her with marketing messages
- You are using your social media platforms to sell, sell, sell...never bothering to interact/engage
- Your marketing does not match reality (you say you offer 24/7 support but what that means is that you can hold for assistance for 24 hours or more)

Marketing that works is strategic and thoughtful. Sending out hundreds of letters to people who have no need for your service (like sending coupons for garage door openers to people who live in apartment buildings) is a waste. Use your dollars wisely.

