

Can you keep your promise?

When you are trying to market your services or your product, you will naturally try to make the product or service look appealing. That's fine, as long as you are not overselling or over-promising. If you oversell or promise something you can't deliver, you will run into problems.

Let me give you an example, drawn from my experience this week with the US Postal Service.

My mother sent me an express package on Monday. It was guaranteed to be delivered by noon on Tuesday. It wasn't. I called the 1-800 to track it and find out where it was. After some problems with the automated attendant (that is a whole other issue), I got through to a representative. She had no idea where my package was or when I would get it. At one point, she put me on hold. During this interlude, I found out that:

For delivery you can rely on, choose the United States Postal Service.

Is that supposed to be a joke? My "express" package arrived more than 24 hours after it was "guaranteed" to arrive. And as I learned from the customer service agent, the guarantee is really about your money. They don't actually guarantee the arrival of the express packages at their destination, but rather, if your package doesn't arrive when they say it will, they will give you your money back.

I guess that when you absolutely, positively need it there by a certain time, don't use the USPS, use Fedex (or UPS). For those of you who don't remember the Fedex ad, here it is

[youtube id=31yxkSIIn9A&fs=1&hl=en_US&rel=0]

The quickest thing you can do ruin your reputation is to

promise that you will do something that you can't or won't do. And reputation is important in marketing. What do you think my impression is of the USPS?

So, when you are prepping your marketing materials (and especially your tag line), be careful about what you say. Daily Blog Tips has a great post on 10 Tips to Improve Your Sales Copy Today. Note that their number two tip is: **Don't Make a Promise You Can't Keep.**



An easy marketing tip

Do you want to easily market yourself? I have a great tip: make your content (blog, website, social media stuff) shareable. I don't mean that you should simply create stuff people want to share—which is a given—but make it easy to share. By this I mean have a social media sharing button/widget on your blog or website (such as the one at the end of this post). If you don't know how to get one, here are a few to try:

- Add to any (which is what I have here)
- "Tweet this" button from Twitter
- Add this

You can find other individual service sharing buttons at this Wiki:

- <http://www.sharingbuttons.org/Buttons>

WordPress.com recently started its own sharing widget.

Find one that works with your blog/website and deploy it. By **allowing your content to be easily shared, you will increase your reach**. The word to note is EASILY. There are ways I can share your content without your help...but if you make it easy for me, then I will most likely do it. And that is why you create great content, right?

Important clarification for WordPress users : If you have a WordPress.org blog (self-hosted), you may be able to find these buttons as plug-ins. WordPress.com users CANNOT use plug-ins, but can add these manually to each post or find the WordPress.com sharing button.



Blog Action Day

Today is Blog Action Day (and I would link to the website but it is down) and the topic is water. I found out about it from Daria Steigman's post "Water is Life" and also from a post on Conversation Agent: "Ten Facts About Water."

The idea is to get bloggers to post on a common topic to get the word out. Just yesterday, I wrote about the death of mass communications and in a sense, Blog Action Day is a way to use social media in our extremely segmented world to inform people and get them to act around a common cause.

When I visited Australia in 2008, there was a lot of talk on the media about bottled water. Tap water in Australia is drinkable and yet people were spending money (and at about \$3 per 1/2 liter, a lot of money) for bottled water. The problem with bottled water of course is waste. The bottle is not always recycled. Australia is mostly desert, and in the

summer, it can get very very dry. Australians tend to be active—always running, walking, swimming, surfing. Since it is necessary to keep hydrated, having access to water is a necessity and bottled water can be very convenient. How do you change people's habits?

Another water habit that I encountered in Australia was a campaign to reduce showering time. In my hotel in Melbourne was a card and a timer inviting me to keep my shower to four minutes. I always wondered why this wasn't done in the US too. Australia was certainly in a drought state. The United States is not there yet, but could be. Again, how do you change people's habits? How do you get people to think about the length of their showers and how this impacts the environment?

Do you think Blog Action Day can help make a difference? What would a mass information campaign look like in our social media age?



Mass comms

Back when I was in grad school, I studied mass communications. The theory was that advertising, public relations and journalism all reached mass audiences. Back then, there was no Twitter, no one blogged or even had a website. Cable existed but lots of people still watched the broadcast channels. People still read the newspaper. Magazines were everywhere. Mass media was alive and well.

Today, mass media are dying. Witness the declining numbers for the broadcast channels. An article in Fortune Magazine about Oprah said that one of the reasons she is going to her own

cable channel is because her audience on regular TV is declining. We have all seen magazines disappear and newspapers shrink (and become more irrelevant).

The question is how do we communicate messages to the masses when the masses are getting more and more segmented? People are demanding personalization. No one seems to listen to the radio anymore, they listen to their own playlists on their MP3 player. In social media, we follow those we want to follow.

There are messages that must get to the masses. For instance, last year we had the H1N1 “pandemic.” Health information had to be sent out to the largest number of people.

What got me thinking about this is that we have had an increasing number of pedestrians being struck and killed by cars here in the DC area. Clearly, more people are driving either drunk or distractedly, and are speeding on top of it. In the past week alone, we have seen more than half a dozen people KILLED not to mention others who are injured. How do we combat this? How can we get the word out if there is no mass medium that is effective?

In the age of Twitter, where would a PSA make real impact?



You must know tech

Amy Webb, principal of Webbmedia Group, spoke yesterday to a Washington Women in Public Relations (WWPR) Executive communicators brown bag lunch. She is very knowledgeable and

highly enthusiastic about technology and has made a business consulting on the various trends and applications of the new tech stuff.

Some of us are a bit recalcitrant about tech stuff. There are so many changes that it is hard to keep up. Most of all, tech is changing the way things are done and change is hard.

However, we must learn about tech and how it is affecting the marketing/communications space. Just this week, long time Washington Post writer Howard Kurtz announced he is leaving the Post to go to the online-only Daily Beast. Print is giving way to online more and more.

Amy Webb talked about being in the space where the consumers are—even if you aren't on there—places like Facebook, Foursquare, Tivo and mobile apps. She sees the world of media (traditional media, the web, mobile, e-readers, tablet pcs) as all connected by social media. Social media is part and parcel of all forms of media, not a separate entity.

Webb divides the social media world into:

- Geo social (Foursquare)
- Corporate social (Yelp)
- Social commerce (Groupon)
- Social content (YouTube)
- Mobile social (Loopt)
- Pure play (Facebook)
- Social curation (Digg, Delicious)

Other key take-aways from Webb:

- Keep your taglines and messaging simple for sharing
- Curation is huge right now simply because there is too much information out there to make sense of.
- Personalization is becoming more important. Journalists don't want mass press releases or multimedia releases

but rather personalized content.

- Whatever you have done on line can be found by anyone with a bit of research knowledge
- Before launching a brand—make sure the name you want is not being used on social media.
- Tablet PCs are really big, witness the huge sales for the iPad, and there are many more on the horizon

My conclusion is that you must know tech. As Amy Webb suggested, read Mashable and/or Techcrunch every day to keep up with technology.

How is tech affecting your marketing life?



Who is your rep?

Your representative could affect your reputation. And yet, how many times have you seen big firms and/or top tier colleges represented at a job fair or college fair by a young, inexperienced person? When you go to trade shows, who is sitting at the booths? Top brass? Fat chance—most likely, exhibitors at a trade show are represented by someone from the marketing department.

Have you ever gone to a networking event and met someone from a company who does not have any idea of what the company message is?

The other day, I was at a fair here in Bethesda. A very young girl handed me a flyer for a political candidate. The flyer tells me the candidate “has the experience to work for us,” and yet her representative was probably not even out of

college. The rep did not back up the message.

I got a phone call the other day from a marketing company. I had been seeing their name pop up on my caller ID for weeks, calling at all hours and on the weekend. When I finally answered it turns out they were representing a charity. I thought it was a telemarketer and I told the young man at the other end of the call to remove from his list. He launched into the rigamarole about charities are exempt blah blah. And then I said I was irritated that they kept calling me never leaving a message. He then started to tell me how the charity is busy helping people in need (so my concerns are not quite as legitimate). I hung up. He was not a worthwhile representative for the charity.

Who is sitting at your front desk/reception area? Who is out a chamber events representing your company? Do you know? What have you taught your representatives about your key messages? Can they give an elevator speech for your company?

Remember, your representative is you.



It's not what you say you do

It is what you do.

- Do you live up to your commitments?
- Do you deliver the goods?
- Are you reliable? Responsive? Responsible?
- Do you reply to people or just to tweets?

There are a lot of folks out there in the social media

stratosphere developing massive followings, writing blogs, sending enewsletters, even writing e-books, but **all they are doing is saying what they do. They don't actually do what they say they do. They seem to think talking makes up for acting.**

For instance, if you are in public relations, you need to create a strategy for your client. Tweeting all day is not a strategy—it is a tactic, and if it is not part of a larger, thought-out plan, it is good for nothing.

Although social networks are valuable, the people you know in real life may be more valuable because get this, you actually know them and they know you. If you are blowing off your in-the-flesh connections so that you can develop lots of virtual friends, you will be left with lots of virtual reality and little real reality.

Use social media, but use it to do stuff, not to say you do stuff.

The above is a commentary by the author of this blog. It represents her views in every possible way.



Don't buy your own PR

In the age of self-publishing and social media, it's easy to put out information about your brand or yourself out there. It's easy to gain "followers." The lack of filters makes it easy to connect directly with people. But that doesn't mean that what you are saying is true. Keep that in mind. Just

because you put in on your blog and somebody shared it on Twitter DOES NOT MAKE IT FACTUAL OR TRUE OR EVEN RIGHT. It just means that someone liked what you have to say.

In fact, just yesterday the disheveled leader of Iran, Mahmoud Ahmanidejad, claimed to the United Nations General Assembly that the U.S. was behind the 9-11 attacks and that most of the world believes that. To a rational person, this is hogwash, and yet there are nutcases out there who agree with this maniac. **Let me emphasize again: having followers does not make you right or true.**

Many people and companies are falling prey to the lure of large numbers. They believe that because they have large numbers of followers, they are “all that.” They may be, but they should question it. Just today, I read a blog post by a book author, talking about herself and her concentration. It was purported to be about happiness, but it really was all about her. Another popular blog shared this morning what the blog author does as a morning routine, as if this is what we all need to do. What is happening is that because it was easy to get ideas out there, and to get positive publicity for such ideas, these people believe that everyone cares and everyone agrees with them. But that is just not accurate.

I am not saying that you should not self-publicize or promote yourself or your brand. **I am just saying you should not fall prey to the numbers game. Just because you have supporters does not mean everyone supports you** (go over to the Washington Post and read what happened to Mayor Adrian Fenty if you want a real-life example of buying your own PR at the expense of a reality check).

If I can paraphrase a famous line: publicity corrupts, absolute publicity corrupts absolutely.

(And for some comic relief, read Christopher Elliott’s interview with Delta’s head of customer service, who thinks

Delta has the best customer service. Clearly, she hasn't flown Delta.)

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Don't go knocking traditional media

Last week I wrote that social media is not all that. Even if I do believe in the importance of social media, I don't think everyone HAS to be on it. And now, Pew Research has found that 1 out of 5 Americans do NOT use the Internet. This means if you are still aiming for high coverage you cannot rely on Internet ads/social media marketing alone. Traditional media (I know, it sounds old-fashioned) is still viable when attempting to reach those Americans who won't or can't access the Web.

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Is social media all that?

There's a lot of hand wringing about whether the "C-suite" (fancy jargon term for the higher ups in a corporation) is on social media. Does it matter? Does the CEO have to be on social media for it to be worthwhile? The answer is no. For social media to matter it has to be the conduit to your audience or your supporters.

Say for instance you are the CEO of a kid's cereal manufacturer. You advertise your highly sweetened concoction on children's shows on Saturday morning. Do you also have to watch those shows, or even those TV channels? No! Of course not. Presumably, your marketing department did some research and found that a certain percentage of your target audience watches shows and therefore if you advertise your cereal there, those kids will be begging their parental units to buy it for them.

Social media is not for everyone. But that does not mean it is not effective in reaching some people. It is more effective for certain applications and among certain demographics. This is why social media is part of the arsenal in your marketing mix.

Let me emphasize again: social media is part of the marketing mix. There is more to marketing communications than social media, and if your chief executive is not tweeting or blogging or Facebooking, that is OK.

