

# Missing opportunities

Are you truly making the best use of the many marketing opportunities out there? Probably not. This is understandable since there are so many things we can do and only a finite amount of time and staff to do it in. However, there are some opportunities that you SHOULD NOT be missing out on. These are:

- Responding to your emails
- Tracking your mentions on the Web and social media
- Responding to social media mentions
- Following up when necessary

Let me provide you with one example of a really big missed opportunity. A couple of weeks ago, I wanted to visit a coworking space in Baltimore. I sent an email to see if I could just drop by. It took someone there more than 24 hours to respond (the answer was yes, just come on by). With that in mind, I did just that. I was welcomed and given a spot to sit. I tweeted about it. No one responded, even a week later. No one asked me for my card or information. In fact, no one said much of anything. There was absolutely no follow up. Even though I believe the coworking space offers a great convenience and is a wonderful concept, I think this particular one won't survive. They are missing opportunities to engage with potential customers, and they are doing nothing to market themselves.

If we've learned anything about social media and the Internet, it is that people expect a response (most expect an immediate response). My website host is on Twitter, and if I tweet them, they certainly respond. Why? Because they realize that it is giving them an opportunity to engage with a customer and try to fix any problem that is happening.

When you don't respond to what is being asked of you or being

said about you, you are truly missing an opportunity. Social media makes it easy to find out when people are talking about you. Perhaps you can't monitor it all day, but do it once a day and make sure to engage.

If you want to make the most of easy opportunities, track and respond, and do so sooner rather than later. What are you doing to make sure you are responsive?



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## Tech vs. communication

Recently, I have been noticing jobs that require someone with technology skills (html, programming) to handle web development and social media. It is interesting that in some organizations social media efforts are housed under the IT umbrella. But should they be? I don't think so. That is like asking the kitchen installer to cook a meal. Just because you know the appliances and how to work them does not mean that you can use them to their best potential.

Last week, I attended a social media workshop (not worth my while, but that is a topic for another post). One of the presenters was a tech guy, and he came out and said that he didn't know marketing. He understood the power and importance of social media tools, but not how to use them for marketing purposes.

Then there is the whole web developer versus web designer issue. A web designer is concerned with the aesthetics of the website, and the web developer makes the site work. Some people claim to provide both services, but in my experience, a web developer's websites never look pretty. And a web designer

who does his/her own development probably can't do complex back-end stuff.

It boils down to what technology can and cannot do. Technology is a tool, a very specialized tool. And in the "internet age," keeping up with evolving technology is crucial. But technology alone cannot communicate, it cannot market. A superior tech website with no communications strategy or well written content will not do the job. Technology is not communication. Tech people are notorious for being hard to understand. They speak a specialized language and have skills that your average communications person just doesn't have.

The bottom line is that to have your IT department handle social media does not make good marketing sense. Social media is completely about communication. It is not about the technology that allows said communication. I don't have to understand how Twitter works to use it for marketing promotion. I need to understand how people communicate, what information they are seeking. This is not to say you shouldn't involve your IT department—they can probably help facilitate what you are trying to do. Just leave the communicating to the communicators.



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## Marketing one to one

Perhaps this post should be called Marketing 101, but it is about marketing one to one, person to person. It is perhaps the most basic of marketing techniques, yet the most dismissed.

Companies spend lots of time and money and effort coming up

with brilliant marketing/communications plans. They develop beautiful websites, and attention-grabbing ads. They do media outreach and get great publicity. And then the potential customer walks in the door, and the surly receptionist (or clerk or bank teller or any other frontline person) ruins the experience. He or she makes the customer feel unwelcome, unwanted, unserved. And guess what, the customer either walks away never to come back, or he/she becomes a NEGATIVE brand ambassador, sharing negative stories about your organization wherever he/she goes.

You see, many, if not all organizations, forget that marketing is really about getting people to buy your products or services or mission. It is about making it easy for them to realize how your product/service/mission fits in with their lifestyle and needs. **It is about people.**

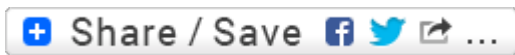
People want to be treated nicely and politely. It really is that simple. I would argue that part of your marketing plan should be to train your frontline employees to treat people nicely and politely. If your sales are down, perhaps you should try to figure out what is going on at the point of contact. We've discussed the four "Ps" here before: price, product, promotion, place. What is the place of contact with your customer? What is happening there?

With the rise of Internet commerce, we are losing the sense of the importance of people—their feelings, their needs—when making a purchase. But in a bricks-and-mortar world it should definitely be front and center.

I am writing this post because of two positive (gasp, right?) interactions I had today on the phone. I was making a doctor's appointment at an office I have not been to, and the receptionist was helpful, informative and friendly. She made me feel confident that I will get professional service when I arrive there. The other was the reminder phone call from the hair salon where I have an appointment tomorrow. The

receptionist was polite (called me Ms. Brody) and friendly. I asked a question and he nicely answered me. It shows me that the salon VALUES its customers.

Are you showing your customers you value them? Are you treating them as people? Are you making sure that the one on one interactions with your organization are positive?



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## Beyond marketing

Although marketing communications can help brand your business, differentiate you from the crowd and even increase sales, it cannot make your business succeed. To succeed in business, you have to provide something useful or necessary—a product or service people want or need. And you have to provide that something consistently. You can have great advertising, but if your product is not available or is not of good quality, guess what? You are going to get nowhere fast.

Lots of people spend time on their marketing strategies. And they develop great websites and fabulous collateral materials. Some people spend lots of time coming up with fancy names and lovely logos. But what they fail at is defining AND providing their product/service.

This morning I read an article from the Philadelphia Business Journal about two local small businesses: a gas/service station and a dry cleaner. Both business owners work very hard and show up every day to run their businesses. People can count on them. Neither business does much in the way of marketing because they don't need to. If you need your car fixed, you go to one, and if you need some shirts cleaned, you

go to the other.

Yesterday, I came across this post over on Copyblogger. It is about how it doesn't matter whether you have a beautiful website if you don't have a message. I would go further—you have to know what you are doing, and to quote Nike, just do it.

Time and again I meet successful business people. You know why they are successful? Because they provide the goods. On the other hand, how many times have you seen a restaurant fail? Probably dozens of times. You know why restaurants fail? Because people didn't go there to eat. And why didn't they go? Probably because the food was bad or the service was bad.

Basically, it boils down to having the product or the service. Of course, if you want to increase your market presence and/or let people know you are there, you are going to have to engage in marketing. But marketing alone will not get you business.



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## Thoughts on the new Facebook

Mark Zuckerberg has done it again. He has made some serious threats to your privacy, if you are a Facebook user. Zuckerberg does not believe in privacy, he has said so in those very words, so it is not too surprising that he further damaged your privacy to enhance his bottom line.

There are tons of articles about the new issues with privacy that came out of the f8 conference. This one on GigaOm is a good one (and thank you to Downtown Women's Club for posting it on Facebook...the irony). Sadly, most Facebook users will

never know about these changes, which directly affect them.

I have been a steady Facebook user for more than two years. I had rarely logged out and usually checked in several times a day to see what everyone is up to. I also recently launched a Facebook Fan Page, which is now called a like page. But today, I logged out. I will log out every single time I visit Facebook and furthermore, I will limit my visits to Facebook. I am just not comfortable with what they are doing over there. And more pernicious, is that other sites I visit, like CNN and Washington Post now have my information and friends. Unless I logout of Facebook, CNN knows who my friends are and what they are doing online. Talk about Big Brother!

I also hate the new “like” feature on Facebook. A Fan page is not a “like” page. They are inherently different. Like Kim Woodbridge from Anti Social Development said to me about the change: “I like peas, but I am not a fan of peas.”

I am not sure that Facebook cares what people think. It is feeling high because it has 400 million users worldwide, and that gives the company a lot of power, not to mention marketing might. For now, if you care about your privacy, protect yourself. Do not let Facebook use you for its gain. So logout, opt out, or do what you have to do.

Feel free to share your thoughts in the comments. Are you a fan of the Facebook?



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# The dark side of social media

## Editorial

Social media has definitely changed the Internet, marketing, news gathering. Many people feel more in touch with long lost friends because of social networks. In short, there is lots to praise and like about social media. But, because it is social, and mostly free, social media has increased the reach of hate groups, racists and other people who previously relied on getting their message out only to a small circle of similar miscreants.

Take for example a group on Facebook that is dedicated to “praying” for President Obama’s death. I won’t link to it here but this hateful group has already amassed almost one million followers (or likers in the new Facebook parlance). As you know, social media works as an amplifier. So if someone sees one of their friends likes organic yogurt, then he or she can also like said product. Same thing happens with these hate groups. And then it becomes a numbers game. Sadly, many people join these groups because they think its “funny” or as a joke. But what they are doing is lending weight, via numbers, to a hateful cause.

Remember the Holocaust Museum shooter? Well he had several rantings on the Web. And the guy who killed a bunch of women at a gym in Pittsburgh, and then killed himself? He had an entire blog devoted to his hatred of women. Social media is easy to access and has little or no cost. Anyone can set up a blog or a website, a Facebook page or a Twitter stream.

There is a lot of hate and plenty of malcontents out there. It’s unfortunate that social media, which generally serves to build community and share interesting ideas, can also be used to share the hate and spread the ignorance. I am not sure what, if anything, we can do about this.

# Tweeting and not failing (a top ten list)

I love Twitter. I love reading articles others share, seeing what people are up to, and generally the no-boundaries community that exists on the micro-blogging site. I follow and am followed by people in other states, countries, continents. In a sense, Twitter connects the world!

But there is a downside to Twitter: the people who don't use Twitter wisely. These people can ruin the experience, until you block them. These people are the reason for my top-ten list of Twitter pet peeves:

1. **Following and unfollowing and following again.** This tactic is meant to getting followers but if I didn't follow you the first time, or the second, chances are I AM NOT INTERESTED.
2. **Excessive self-promotion.** Tweets that always start with I or include the word me. Being on Twitter exclusively to promote self and not offering any value.
3. **Lurking.** People who follow you and never engage or retweet. They are just watching you. Why?
4. **Not giving credit.** If I tweeted something that you think is so worthwhile that you re-tweeted it, just credit me, please?
5. **Follow Friday.** I hate this. It makes Twitter into a popularity contest, and makes you ripe for spamming. Thanks for the shout-out but don't add me to your list.
6. **Being super selective.** You have thousands of followers,

yet you start your mornings saying hi to five of your favorite friends. I remind you: Twitter is not high school and all of us can see you didn't single us out. If you want to say hi to just a few people, might I recommend DM or (gasp) EMAIL?

7. **Spammers.** People who send you @messages that have nothing to do with anything except what they are trying to get you to buy. There is a special place in hell for you.
8. **Incomplete profiles.** If you don't have a bio, or a website, or preferably both, on what should I base my decision to follow you? Your inability to fill out your profile? This also goes for not posting a picture.
9. **Cursing.** I curse all the time in real life, but I don't want to read obscenities on my Twitter stream. It generally is not necessary to put that out to the world.
10. **Never acknowledging retweets or @messages.** Sure I understand that reporters or celebrities with tens of thousands of followers can't possibly respond to all these messages, but if you have under 500 followers, most likely you can spend a couple minutes each day responding. Remember you are on Twitter to create community!!!

Of course, these are MY pet Twitter peeves. You may not agree. Which is why you can feel free to leave your top Twitter peeves on the comments! (Or hey, write your own blog!)



# Identity crisis

## Who are you? Why are you here?

Lots of people ask themselves these questions, especially around milestone birthdays and during the “mid-life crisis.” For individuals, there is no one right answer. Some people spend their whole lives seeking for the answers and some people just go for “one day at a time” philosophy.

But what do you do if your business has an identity crisis? First, determine if your business does have an identity crisis. Here are some signs:

- You offer many types of services or products that can't easily be grouped together
- Your company name and tagline do not readily communicate what you do/everything you do
- You have several different logos/different taglines
- You don't have clear-cut branding (no signature color, font, tagline, key messages)
- If someone asks you what you do, it takes several sentences to explain (you just can summarize it in one phrase)

If you answered yes to even one of these descriptors, you probably are suffering from an identity crisis. Your brand is not strong and your business mission is not clear.

Having a business identity crisis can result in your business going under. Just down the street from where I live was a “wellness center.” It was a retail outlet that sold vitamins and baby clothes made from organic cotton. They offered massages and facials. They held yoga and qi gong classes. They probably would have described themselves as a lifestyle store, which is generic. They weren't known for any of these offerings. And they closed. To me, this was a classic example of an identity crisis. Too many products and service

offerings. No clear differentiation. And a vague description that can mean different things to different people.

In a crowded marketplace, differentiation can make the difference (I am so punny). You won't be able to differentiate if you have an identity crisis.

Does your business suffer from an identity crisis? Time to ask yourself some hard, existential questions.



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## Looking for the magic bullet...

Are you looking for the magic bullet? The one solution to your marketing problems? Well, I can't help you. That's right—I can't help you find the magic bullet because there is no magic bullet!

A while back I had a client who was trying to re-grow his dwindling business. So he launched a social responsibility program. And when that failed to work as planned, he tried a new product and used postcards to sell it. And then that didn't work, so he tried doing do-good projects and used press releases to promote them. And then that didn't quite work either. You know why? Because all of these are tactics and there was no overall strategy or vision. One tactic, whatever it may be, will not result in sustained and increased sales.

When I was in grad school, we learned all about a new concept at the time: Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC). The concept was that your marketing efforts should integrate various tools, such as advertising, public relations, sponsorships, other one umbrella. I have always believed in

this view.

Today, people seem to believe that the magic bullet is social media. Build a Facebook Fan Page and you will get clients! Be on Twitter and you will get clients! Write a blog and you will get clients! No, no, no!!! You certainly should consider social media, but one or all of these tools will not guarantee marketing success, especially if you are pursuing each of them haphazardly without an overarching strategy.

There really is no magic bullet. Marketing communications is about strategy and also about trial and error. Some things will work better than others. Something close to a magic bullet may be measurement. If you measure success, you will find out what works best for you. If you don't measure, how will you know your impact?

Have you been looking for a magic bullet? What have you found?



## What was he thinking?

You've probably heard about the flap involving Bob McDonnell, Virginia's new Republican governor. McDonnell issued a proclamation calling April Confederate History Month in his state. But he had omitted a key belief of the Confederacy—its support of slavery. Naturally, there was outrage from civil rights leaders, African-Americans and the media. And guess what, McDonnell had to amend his statement to include language about slavery.

Now, I think McDonnell was speaking his mind the first time. I also think Virginia has a large racist population who would be

happy to be Confederate once again. And clearly, I think the whole Confederate declaration is a ridiculous, shameful attempt to pander to the more right-wing, racist elements in Virginia. But, from a public relations perspective, I want to know what was McDonnell thinking? Indeed, was he thinking?

McDonnell either is unaware that large segments of the population consider slavery an outrage or he has really bad advisors or simply is ignorant of how the media works. Anybody could have told him that many people would be offended by this offensive proclamation. And furthermore, that the media would pick it up and tear it apart. Sure, he reacted within a day and issued a "fix" and an apology, but why on earth was the governor not aware of the furor his decision would cause?

On the one hand, I think that McDonnell probably does not realize that being associated with confederacy equals racism because he does not see that as racist. He buys the whole Confederate argument that the Civil War was a fight about states' rights. On the other hand, I also think McDonnell does not understand public perception or perhaps he lacks in the public relations advice department.

Whether on purpose, or unwittingly, McDonnell has contributed further to the perception that he is a good ol' boy, happy to maintain Virginia's commitment to Confederate ideals where African-Americans are second class citizens, if citizens at all. McDonnell did not even consider that African-Americans live in his state and that they may not share his rosy view of the importance of celebrating Confederate history.

So, what was he thinking? He was not thinking nor was he receiving any type of credible public relations advice when he issued the proclamation. Obviously, once the criticism started, his PR folks woke up or showed up to the office.

The moral of this story is that perception matters, and that

if you do or say something offensive, and you are in public office, you will have to face the music.

UPDATE: Washington Post columnist Robert McCartney makes very good points in his column today.

