

Is Twitter a High School for Adults?

There are followers and lists and getting many of each seems to be the focus for many people on Twitter. Some people make pleas for more followers and then there is "Follow Friday" in which people recommend to their followers other people to follow.

If this sounds a bit like a high school popularity contest, it is, for some people. Many people use Twitter to give and get information and ideas, but there is a subset of people who use Twitter to prove their hotness/coolness/hipness/in-the-knowness. These people go so far as to form cliques on Twitter, endlessly referencing their clique friends in every Tweet. They converse in public with each other and rarely engage with non-clique/inner circle people. Several of these people are "social media experts," which is ironic since they are not being very social (I must credit Daria Steigman of Steigman Communications with this idea).

I have theories as to why Twitter becomes like a high school for these people but I won't share them here. It is important to remember what social networks are for, and that is to make it easy to create connection. If all you are doing on Twitter is sending shout-outs to your five closest buddies or endlessly promoting yourself, you are not using Twitter to its full potential. I can't say that you are not using Twitter for what it is intended because I have no idea what its founder was thinking when he created the microblogging site.

Twitter is a great learning tool and it is a great sharing tool. It democratizes access and can really serve to mobilize people around causes. Eugene Robinson makes excellent observation in today's Washington Post, saying:

Twitter and other networking sites are unfiltered by editors or other gatekeepers. They rely on the wisdom of the crowd to sort out what is accurate and what is not. To someone (like me) who has spent his career as a gatekeeper, this was tremendously unsettling – at first. During the Iran protests, I saw how quickly Twitter users identified misinformation that was being posted by government propagandists. The self-policing capability of the medium is impressive.

The other big difference is that social networking offers not just information, but also the opportunity to take action. Twitter users were able to work together to mask the identities of the Iranian demonstrators who were using the site to tell the world what was happening. Last night, along with the news from Haiti came suggestions for how the Twitter community could most effectively help the relief effort.

Is this “news” the way we used to think of it? No. But it’s news people can use.

Read complete article [here](#).

To those popularity hounds on Twitter I say put high school behind you. If you have something worthwhile to say people will follow you no matter who your friends are or aren't.

Personal marketing goals for 2010

Although I am not a fan of New Year's resolutions, I think January is a great time to set goals for oneself. You have a whole year ahead of you to meet those goals. And goals are

tangible. You either meet them or not, whereas resolutions like “I want to be healthier” are vague.

Here are some personal marketing goals:

- Upload a headshot to LinkedIn
- Answer at least one question a month on LinkedIn
- Refine your LinkedIn headline
- Increase your LinkedIn contacts by 25% (minimum)
- Get business cards if you don't have them
- Update and polish your elevator speech and then practice it!
- Attend networking events at least twice a month
- Join a professional association
- Join a committee or volunteer group
- Start a blog if you don't have one (Posterous is easy!) or post regularly on your existing blog

What goals are you setting for yourself?

The unmaking of Jay Leno/UPDATED

You may remember that back last spring a big announcement was made that Leno would be in prime time, every day at 10:00 p.m, and Conan O'Brien would have the Tonight Show. The idea seemed to be that Leno is pretty popular, and a variety show is cheaper to produce than say a quality show like Law & Order, so why not have Leno take up this real estate which had so long been the province of the good TV dramas.

Well, the programming folks over at NBC are now discussing moving Jay Leno back to his original 11:35 p.m. spot, after

the news.

Anyone could have told NBC that this would fail. In fact a TV station in Boston was going to refuse to run Leno, because they thought it would hurt their lead for the late night news. It did. They were right. NBC strong-armed their stations into accepting the Leno show by saying they would be dropped if they did not go along.

What this shows, in my opinion, is the isolated world that TV programming folks live in. It shows hubris. It shows lack of research and a lack of common sense. I think most people questioned whether Leno could succeed at the earlier hour. Especially, up against what ABC and CBS offer at that hour. Leno is about about late night humor. He is not Barbara Walters, up to interviewing all sorts of folks.

In the end, the Leno Show was not bringing in the viewers that the 11:00 p.m. news needed (a very profitable franchise). NBC was probably bleeding viewers at the 10:00 pm and 11:35 pm hours too (Conan was no Jay). Bottom line, it was costing money to produce a lower costing show.

What do you think?

UPDATE:

Steven Pearlstein, columnist for the Washington Post hits the nail on the head regarding what NBC did in business terms. Read his column here.

Expectations

We all have gone to see a movie that our best friend raved about only to find we thought it was just OK. Same happens

with restaurants that receive glowing reviews. What happens is that our expectations have been set too high and naturally, we are disappointed with reality.

It's a like a present that is wrapped beautifully...what will be inside? Will it be better than its wrapping?

Buzz is about forming expectations and then exploiting them. Marketing people love buzz or WOM (word-of-mouth) because few things are as powerful as a recommendation from someone we know.

The down side of creating high expectations is having to deliver or even over-deliver on such expectations. We can have stuff go very wrong when things don't live up to expectations.

Lately, I have been paying attention to hotel websites and ratings. Usually, there is a picture of a perfect room. We don't see anything wrong. But what happens if we book this room, and show up at the hotel only to find that the bathroom is filthy, the carpets (which did not show up in the room picture) are grimy and the noise level is unbearable. What happens is that we are very unhappy. But what makes it worse is that we *expected* better.

Clearly there is a fine line to walk for marketing people. We have to create expectations and we have to be able to meet them in a reasonable way.

Tastes differ of course, so what I absolutely love, you may hate. Humans are more forgiving of taste not being met, but with service and other issues that are quantifiable we are not so forgiving. For instance, I went to a restaurant with a friend. We both order the same thing, and I like it but she doesn't. Taste is at play (she prefers less spicy). However, we can both agree on the service (good), ambience (lovely), parking (difficult).

Marketing that succeeds creates high enough expectations to attract a customer without creating a situation that the customer may actually be upset. The latter happens a lot with sales. Stores run a sale, drawing customers expecting to get a great price on an item they really want. Expectations are not met and tempers are raised if the item is out of stock or is not as it appeared.

What do you do to create reasonable expectations? How do you navigate this line?

Was 2009 a good year for marketing communications?

As the last year in the first decade of 21st century, 2009 was certainly a year of flux. We saw lots of changes in media. Many magazines were shuttered, and some newspapers became online only. The Internet, in the Web 2.0 format was king. Twitter flourished, as did Facebook. Blogs continued to pop up everywhere. All the mainstream newscasts routinely place more information, video, interviews online. The divide between haves and have-nots is certainly growing.

Some trends that I personally disliked:

- The rise of personal branding to the level of ridiculous self-promotion.
- The failure of old guard public relations/advertising practitioners to embrace new media
- The idea that new media/social networks are THE solution (they are not)
- Social media “experts” (having a Twitter account and a blog does not make anyone an expert)

- Endless self-promotion on multiple platforms of social media
- Linking every Tweet to Facebook and LinkedIn and everything in between
- Feeling the need to tweet everything, have hashtags for everything and “follow Friday”
- Rise in sexist images in advertising
- Decline in thoughtful public relations campaigns
- Decline in traditional media, especially print journalism
- Endless hype/hysteria about the supposed big story of the minute (Tiger Woods, Octomom, Balloon Boy, etc.)

But on the bright side

- Social media has presented great opportunities for small businesses
- The new PBS NewsHour
- Increased desire for measurement and return on investment
- Twitter, in spite of the above problems, has allowed for new relationships and allegiances, not to mention new parlance (tweetup, tweetsgiving, etc)
- Acceptance of blogs as legitimate journalistic outlets
- Citizen journalism and subsequent empowerment

What are your best/worst for the year?

Taking things for granted

When you are surrounded by something, you assume everyone else is as well. You are taking for granted that everyone has the same experience. But, this is simply not so. And taking things for granted results in bad communication, for sure.

How many times have you tried to talk to a real tech-y person? Chances are you ended up nodding your head because it was easier than asking what each word meant or gadget or program did. This happens whenever you try to communicate with someone who is immersed in a world, and does not realize you aren't.

On Saturday, I was at a talk about research on the Internet. Some terms came up like "delicious" or "brand reputation," which did not strike a chord amongst the attendees. You have to know who your audience is and adjust your explanations accordingly. If you are tweeting on Twitter, you don't have to explain what a tweet up is. If you are in a room where people feel very cutting edge because they finally put up a picture of their dog on Facebook, you will have to explain, and it will not be as obvious as you think.

A rule for good communication is not to take things for granted. Explain what you mean using common terms. Avoid jargon. Jargon is the ultimate insider language, and it takes for granted that you understand it. Remember, just because it is obvious to you does not mean it is obvious to everyone else.

Lack of communication may cost you a sale

Prescriptives: One Customer's Quest for Makeup

Today, I went to the mall in search of a replacement for my dwindling bottle of Prescriptives foundation, which I love. First I went to Nordstrom, where I originally found it. The Prescriptives counter was very small, and a salesperson from a different counter "helped" me. She was not very familiar with

the brand and she said they were out of what I needed. Next stop, Bloomingdales. I looked everywhere and no Prescriptives counter. I asked someone who answered me with a look as if I had just asked for Cover Girl, that Prescriptives does not have a counter at Bloomingdale's. I walked out.

Next stop was Macy's. A young sales guy informs me that Prescriptives is being discontinued. This is news to me. I ask whether I can purchase the foundation online. He tells me no, but that he can custom blend some foundation from me at exactly double the price. I asked if I could find a similar foundation with the parent company, Estee Lauder. He says probably, and walks me over to the Estee Lauder counter, where he explains what I need to a saleswoman who then proceeds to ignore me. No joke. I walk out.

Finally, I get to Lord & Taylor. I find their Prescriptives counter and the salesperson tells me they are sold out of that particular foundation. She shows me a couple of others, which I don't like. She assures me I can find something similar at Estee Lauder. We go over there, and the Estee Lauder looks up in her sales book and yes, she finds the "equivalent" to my foundation in the Estee Lauder lineup. OK. She is a good salesperson. She is nice and helpful and I buy the Estee Lauder offering.

I get home. I check on the Internet and guess what? I can buy my exact foundation online. I do it.

What is the moral of this makeup quest? A company must communicate with its associates and the public just a wee bit better.

- First, I did not know Prescriptives was being phased out. It is probably buried in some news somewhere but a large ad would have made that clear to me.
- Second, the counter people did not know enough to say the following: Prescriptives is being phased out. You

can still purchase our existence here or check online until X date. One of these sales people even had the wrong information. Not helpful.

- Third, the physical displays/counters at the stores did not have any of the above information.

Prescriptives is part of Estee Lauder. It is in EL's best interest to make sure that Prescriptives customers migrate to one of their brands, and be happy about it. In order to do this, the company needs to communicate better. Period. End of story.

Have you ever had to deal with a brand that was being discontinued? What did you do?

Editor & Publisher to shut down

What does it say about the publishing industry when the venerable, 108-year-old trade journal covering the industry is folding? [Read the story here.](#)

It seems inevitable that we will see continued downturn in the magazine market. More and more, people are turning to digital media for all their news and information. And why not? It is there, at your fingertips. It is continually updated and often, you don't have to pay for it.

Magazines are starting to seem as quaint as LPs (vinyl records for those who don't remember).

The price is right!

It is too bad that marketing people often are not involved in the pricing process within a company. Because as you probably know, price is one of the four “Ps” (product, placement, price, promotion) involved in marketing. Often, especially if you are in a public relations/advertising agency, you had absolutely no input on price. None. And yet, you are being asked to promote a product/service that may not be priced correctly.

What is the correct price? The one the public will pay for that product or service.

For instance, say you see a great ad campaign for a product. You go look for it, but it is priced too high. You don't buy it. Of course, perhaps you are not the target audience. Perhaps the target is people with higher household incomes than you. That is possible.

However, I often see pricing that is more reflexive of a small committee of people who decide the price than of market research or a target audience strategy.

Prices can be too high and they can be too low. If something is too cheap, you may doubt its value.

In any case, if as a marketing communications person you can participate in talks about price, do so. If you can get market research to back up price decisions, do so. The right price can sell a product more readily than any campaign, press release or social media blitz.

Your thoughts?

Be consistent!

Check out my guest post: “The Golden Rule of Marketing: 4 Actions your Company Should Take” at the Green Buzz Agency blog.

Let me know what you think!