

Name changes

Electrasol is now called finish. Brinks Home Security is now Broadview. My question is why? Why would two established brands change names? And in this case, the new names are a whole lot more generic than the originals. Electrasol has a lot more stand-alone recognition than finish. Finish, after all, is a verb. It is not a name. Same with Brinks. Every one knows Brinks—why would you become Broadview? That is one of those meaningless marketing names that doesn't really separate you from the crowd. It's as if Hertz changed its name to Roadview. Makes it less memorable.

Brand or company name changes should be few and far between. It is confusing and dilutes your brand/name recognition. Obviously, sometimes a personnel change makes it necessary, as in the band Crosby, Still, Nash and Young, which added/lost Young. But when you have a time-honored name, such as Electrasol (or Cascade, its largest competitor) you make it harder for the consumer who has been using your brand for years to find you if you change your name. And, I don't think in this case "finish" is going to attract any younger/new consumers.

Perhaps you want to be "cooler" or more in step with the times. We know AT&T stands for Atlantic Telephone and Telegraph, but clearly, they had to lose the Atlantic and the telegraph parts if they wanted to be known as a national telephone company. So they used their initials. Same with KFC. They have not changed their name from Kentucky Fried Chicken but they wanted to be known for more than fried food, so they use their initials instead.

Ownership changes bring about name changes as in the case of New England Telephone, which later became Nynex and now is Verizon.

In sum, some name changes are necessary and some are just gimmicky and maybe even plain stupid. In my eyes, finish and Broadview fall in this category.

What do you think?

More thoughts on personal marketing

Last week, I was working at a conference. I was hired to write reports about several workshops. Two other women were hired in the same role. One of these women was warm and friendly. She wanted to chat and have lunch. She swapped business cards. The other was very reserved. She did not seem interested in having lunch, chatting, or even the conference itself. The friendly woman has her own business. She says it's going well. The second woman had recently been laid off. She was searching for work and was using the conference as an additional source of income. She had business cards from her previous employer, which obviously was not the correct contact information.

Here are a few lessons on personal marketing this second woman could learn:

- Friendliness can create connection. Connection can lead to other opportunities. Also people will want to help if they can, but not if they don't like you.
- Business cards are important. If you have been laid off, use an online service like Vista Print to get cards printed cheaply or free. Print pertinent contact information on the card.
- Look beyond the current opportunity and be future oriented.

It is hard to gauge how you are presenting yourself. However, why not try and see how people are responding to you. Are they smiling, interested in what you have to say? Or are you sending signals that you are not interested? You never know where the next opportunity could come from, or what you can learn from other people. Closing yourself off is not a good path to expand your opportunities.

Ignore your core audience at your peril

Evening news broadcasts skew older on audience demographics, which is why you will often see medications for cholesterol, ED, and other diseases that affect older people advertised there. Of all three network evening news, I would venture to say that ABC World News with Charles Gibson skews the oldest, simply because Charlie is the oldest anchor. Lately, all evening newscasts have been tending to soft news, with a smattering of hard news. NBC Nightly News has a segment called Making a Difference and ABC does the New Normal. If you want hard news, you'd turn to BBC or the Internet. If you want in-depth news, you'd probably tune into the News Hour with Jim Lehrer on PBS.

Last week, there were at least four celebrity deaths. Per usual, all were covered by all networks. On Friday night, ABC World News covered the Michael Jackson death for the entire broadcast, except for about one minute devoted to other news. The other networks did much the same, except for PBS. In my opinion, this is more reflective of the news editors interests than of the news viewers interests, and it will result in more audience loss for ABC, etc. Don't believe me. Read viewers

responses to the ABC news decision to devote its broadcast to Jackson's death here.

World News for sure lost me as a viewer. I watch the evening news broadcasts for the news, as quaint as that may seem. I understand some coverage of the premature death of a pop star, but I don't understand the 24-7 coverage that has been going on, in spite of some pretty major international and domestic news. From now on, I will watch the News Hour. Less hype, more news (maybe too much news, but that is another story). I will be curious to see Nielsen ratings for this week. It seems to me that people interested in the Jackson story do not watch ABC World News. They watch Access Hollywood or Inside Edition.

I have written of this before, and I will continue to defend this position. You communicate to your core/target audience first. Perhaps ABC was seeking a younger demographic, or trying to appeal to people who normally don't watch Charlie Gibson. However, what they did was ignore their core audience and even alienate said core audience. The core audience, the audience who watches Charlie every evening because they admire his editorial choices, was disgusted as is apparent in the comments made to ABC. And, the "new" audience is not sticking around for Person of the Week next week, unless said person is Michael Jackson.

Being upfront is good policy

As you have no doubt read somewhere else, the governor of North Carolina, Mark Sanford, had disappeared for a few days and no one seemed to know where he was. His staff first said they didn't know, and then they said he was hiking the Appalachian Trail. Well, it turns out the good governor was a

lot farther away...he was in Argentina. And when he arrived back in the United States he expressed surprise about the amount of coverage.

First, let's start with the public relations aspect of this. Sanford screwed up, and not by going out of town, but by being secretive about it. He could have easily said he was taking a few vacation days and that would have been the end of the story. Instead, he chose secrecy and his staff chose disinformation or misinformation. These decisions reflect poorly on the governor's and his staff's judgements. Clearly, these poor folks don't understand how the media works. News is instantaneous and has a wide net. Everyone reported his "disappearance" and they also reported the explanation and now they are reporting (and commenting) on what really happened. Not being able to understand the consequences of your actions is the definition of lack of judgement.

When you are in a political position you are also in a public position. It is probably hard to adjust to losing your privacy but that is the what happens when you get elected to office. President Obama has made comments to this effect, about how he is living in a bubble and so forth. Nonetheless, it is best to acknowledge and deal with the situation. Not understanding that the public is now invested in an elected official's moves is not understanding how politics works.

In any case, this case shows that a being upfront is good policy and good politics. Not talking or being secretive always carries a negative connotation. People imagine the worse and in today's hyperfast communications environment, negative comments can transverse the globe in seconds.

You can read great insight on this situation in Politico.com and on The Fix blog in the Washington Post.

Random thoughts

Radio Commercials

Does it seem to you that every time you are listening to the radio, and a commercial break comes on, you get commercials on all other stations as well? Does it also seem to you that commercial breaks/DJ gab fests on radio go on for way too long?

It's great that there is still so much advertising on radio, but I think that by making the commercial breaks so long radio stations risk losing their listeners. If I am listening to station, and a long commercial break comes on, I switch stations until I find one that is playing music. If these breaks were shorter, there would be less risk of alienation, IMO.

Different name, same location

Why is it that store owners think that by changing the name of a store they will get tons of new business? I was just walking home and saw that a day spa/salon just changed their name (and to something a lot more utilitarian). I thought, well, the problem was not the name of the salon, it is the location! Hard to get to, off the beaten path, etc. I don't know if the salon was sold to another owner, but in any case, when I see too many names on the same store front I tend to think problems.

As if we thought Iran was democratic

I am not sure why Iran bothered to hold elections. Why pretend they are a democracy? Let me point out that the actual leader of Iran is not the president but the Ayatollah, the so-called

Supreme Leader. Anytime you have someone ruling a country who is not elected and calls himself the Supreme Leader you are not dealing with a democracy. The problem is that the west wanted to believe that elections=democracy. They do not. It is not good marketing for Iran to hold elections and then repress the protests when it appears the election is a sham. Talk about a public relations fiasco!

Enewsletters

How many of you use enewsletters? I bet a fair amount do, and a larger amount receive many enewsletters each day.

Certainly enewsletters are more environmentally-friendly than printed newsletters, and are more timely, since there is no lag time getting to a printer. And for sure, enewsletters are cost-effective, costing nothing to a few cents per newsletter. But, and this is a big but, are enewsletters effective in achieving their objective?

An enewsletter intends to inform or to promote or both. There are internal and external enewsletters too. Some serve as employee communications, others as corporate communications.

What I am wondering is with the overwhelming amount of information (email, Twitter, Facebook, RSS feeds, blogs, news aggregators) that we are exposed to each day, are enewsletters serving their purpose? Or have they become one more piece of nuisance in our inboxes? I am not sure, but I sure would like to hear your opinions. Vote in the poll or send me thoughts in the comments.

[poll daddy poll=1714351]



The answer to your marketing needs

I recently read that to get leads for your business, white papers are the answer. (For those that don't know, white papers are backgrounders, in-depth write ups about a subject area.) For one second I thought, yeah! that is the answer and I was about to put it on my to-do list. But wait, I thought, there is never ONE answer to marketing. That is the magic bullet thinking that gets lots of people in trouble.

Marketing should be about using a mix of strategies and tactics that can promote your service or product to its target audience. For instance, say you are marketing denture paste. You could advertise in the AARP magazine (if the budget allows) or in a local seniors newspaper. You could sponsor an event targeting those 65+. You could do many things, but you wouldn't necessarily advertise in Blender Magazine or choose a skateboarding teen as your spokesperson. You have to go where your target audience goes.

So, my advice to you is that if someone tells you that to market your business, all you need to do is this one thing, walk away. Walk away fast. There is never a one-size solution nor any kind of magic bullet. Marketing is about creating awareness and that can take time and many forms.

I had a client once who was looking for the magic bullet. So, he hired me to re-do some copy, and he hired a PR guy to get some publicity, and he redesigned his website. He thought that each thing he did would bring a huge influx in business. And

none of it did. Sure he got a better website, and good publicity, but because nothing was strategic and everything was a quick response to I need to get more business, it didn't work. And he kept wasting money wanting to find the one thing that would work instead of working on many different tactics that would give his brand cohesiveness. I could never make that client happy because one piece of copy or one press release is not going to turn you into a million dollar business.

A couple of nights ago, I was watching CNBC and they had a show entitled The Oprah Effect. As you no doubt know, anything that is seen on Oprah, almost automatically becomes a bestseller. You may think then that Oprah is a magic bullet. Well, yes and no. It does get you tremendous exposure, but in order to get on Oprah, you have to have a good product, good marketing and a good story. Those are part of the marketing mix. You also have to be ready to play in the big leagues. What if you can't deliver? Then your business is going down the tubes.

In sum, stop looking for one solution and look at the whole picture. What do you need to do to give yourself a marketing boost?



Thoughts about a rebranding

You've probably heard of the Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure, right? Well it doesn't exist anymore. It changed its name to the Susan G. Komen GLOBAL Race for the Cure. This is the second year I participated and I think the rebranding is bogus and confusing. From a marketing perspective I understand why

they would do it. After all, now they are able to call it the “first ever” global Race. But that is BS. It is not the first Race and anyone who has ever participated knows that.

What this rebranding accomplish? Not much that I can tell. In fact, this year the Race here in the Washington DC area had fewer participants (45,000 vs. 50,000 last year) and raised less money. Last year, Cynthia Nixon and Condoleeza Rice addressed the participants, and participated in the Race. Also, Mayor Adrian Fenty raced. This year, the only “celebrities” were Jill Biden and her husband.

In any case, I think that any established cause or organization needs to carefully evaluate what it aims to get from a rebranding. Is it worth the cost? Is it worth the confusion?

Ultimately, I felt that the “Global” Race for the Cure was very disorganized compared to last year. I did not feel appreciated for raising money or participating and I don’t think I will participate next year. And I did not get that it was global in nature (other than the very long and ridiculous speech by some “royal” from Bosnia). In fact the whole point of Komen is to raise funds for the LOCAL community.

[polldaddy poll=1689540]



Are you hosting an event?

When you host an event, you want people to attend, right? If you don’t think so, just ignore this post.

So, how do you get people to attend your event? It may seem

self evident, but many organizations do not follow these promotional tips:

0) Before you start, be sure to have all the following info for inclusion: title and purpose of event, date of event, hours of event, exact location and directions to event, cost, contact information, whether you need to RSVP or not (and who the RSVP contact is). You would be surprised at how many invitations miss some of this critical data.

1) Invite people. Be sure to send out an invitation to all members, interested parties, people who have attended your events in the past, etc.

2) Post the event on your website or blog or both. Ask a third party to check and see if you have included all necessary information.

3) Send a calendar item listing to your local newspaper, event aggregator, tv station.

4) Include in your newsletter. If it is an annual event, add to your signature line on email and include on all communications, internal and external.

5) Remind people. There are many events competing for people's attendance, so be sure to send reminders. This is where social media like Twitter could be useful.

6) Create an event page on Facebook or other social media sites.

7) To be really efficient, you may want to use an electronic event management database to help you to keep track of attendees, send out invites and take RSVPs. Two that come to mind are Cvent and EventBrite.

A note about timing: You want to give people enough time to plan to attend, but not too much time so that they may forget about the event. Perhaps you can invite three to four weeks in

advance, and remind people two weeks and one week before the event.

Again, the most important thing about publicizing an event is to provide all the information somebody would need to attend the event. Don't take this for granted. I can't tell you how many events I have seen listed that lack basic info such as DATE!

If I have overlooked anything, please remind me in the comments!



How Newspapers Are Killing Themselves

We can dub it newspaper suicide when newspapers do things that are guaranteed to reduce subscription rates, and I don't mean by endorsing an unpopular candidate or showing bias on their pages. It is by cannibalizing their own print readers.

Let me give you a case in point about my local newspaper, the fabled Washington Post. Last Friday, I am checking the weather and blogs on the Washington Post website, and lo and behold, I see columnist Mark Fisher's LAST column. I read it to learn that he is leaving the Post, why, etc. Fast forward to Sunday. I settle in with my ever-thinner newspaper, and guess what, I see Mark Fisher's last column in PRINT. Now let me rephrase this in monetary terms. I read Mark Fisher's column on Friday online for FREE, and I read the same column in print for a price. (P.S. you can read lots of Sunday print columns online, on Friday).

Then, if this is not enough to get me thinking that I am a sucker for paying to have the newspaper delivered to me when all I have to do is turn on my computer to read the same stuff online, that I see that TV Week has now become an opt-in to the paper, meaning I have to actually call the Post to tell them that I want to continue receiving this handy-dandy TV guide. Let me repeat this again: I have to tell them to deliver it.

A couple of months ago, the Post folded its printed Book World supplement, making it online only. And in fact, if you want a listing of paperback bestsellers in the DC area, you have to go online, because the printed edition just lists the hardcover bestseller list.

And here's another piece of the suicide pact that the Post seems to have: they are now touting a special online only investigation on the front page of the printed paper. So, it seems, they want me, a reader of the print version, to go online. If I haven't been online before, then I will realize that the entire newspaper plus much more is available for free.

In effect, the newspaper is driving me to go online. Special investigations, columns available before their print date, up to date event reviews, blog posts, discussions...why would I want to pay to get a newspaper delivered? I am asking that every day, and I bet a bunch of people are too. The thing is the paper is still making money from subscriptions and print advertising, right? So why are they not giving subscribers more not less????

In my opinion, this is a conscious attempt to drive people to the online version so that they can stop issuing a print version. Then, they will save printing and delivery costs, and finally, start charging for the online version once the printed version disappears. You will only pay for something if there is no alternative, right? The Post has been doing

this piecemeal, but we are seeing the effects in a much reduced printed version, a heftier online version and a mandate for all reporters to blog, Tweet, and have a Facebook page. Obviously, the future is online.

What do you think?

