

The question of the day: Is Twitter Worth It?

It's on the minds of people everywhere: should I Tweet on Twitter? Some people think it is silly. Some people think it is stupid. Some people think it is a waste of time. I even saw a letter to the editor in the Washington Post where some guy was saying that he was above hearing all about how people enjoyed breakfast or whatever (he must be down to brass tacks guys, because God knows, in real life everybody talks about extremely important stuff all the time). Well folks, in order to answer this question, I have decided to let you see what other people out in the blogosphere think about it:

Janet Fouts from Social Media Enabler, says it is worth it. (I found this post through Social Media Today, worth a look through if you are interested in this topic)

Neil Patel from QuickSprout sees pros and cons.

Copyblogger says you can grow your business with Twitter and that you can improve your writing with it.

Work it Mom is in favor of Twitter

And finally, Chris Winfield uses Twitter to find out if it is a time waster or not.

And me? I think you can't beat the ROI. Twitter is free, and if I learn something it is totally worth it, and if I am wasting my time, it is also worth it.

Thoughts from the peanut gallery?



Everything can be bought

A few months ago, I wrote about airline advertising. You have probably all seen the ads on traytables and on the backs of tickets. This is fine as long as it keeps the beverages free and keeps the airlines flying. But today I am writing about airport advertising. Airports have always had plenty of places to advertise, from the bag carousels to the luggage carts. But now, I have seen the most unusual type of airport advertising yet: advertising on the outside of the gate connector.

Yesterday I was at Miami International Airport, not my favorite airport but that would be the subject for a whole other blog, and as our airplane pulled up to the gate, I noticed that all the gate connectors were sporting HSBC Bank advertising.

I have never seen this type of advertising before, and I wonder two things, how much it costs and how much impact it can have. Sure, lots of passengers are potentially trapped audiences for this type of advertising, but why would a bank choose this type of advertising? More sense would be for a fast food restaurant (one with a branch inside the airport) or a soft drink or something that you would buy soon, but a bank? Are you going to go open an account because you see that it is advertised quite literally on the airport structure itself?

In any case, this shows that advertising can be placed almost everywhere. Creativity or business greed?

When the tag line doesn't add up

There is a commercial that annoys me because its tag line is just plain stupid. OK, there are probably several commercials like that, but I just saw the one for Smucker's this morning. You know Smucker's –it makes jam and jelly. It is widely available. It may even be good (if you happen to like a little High Fructose Corn Syrup in your jam). But Smucker's assumes that you and everyone else on the planet thinks Smucker's is good. They can be forgiven for that, after all, they are in the business of promoting their product. What I can't fathom is why they think their name conveys the goodness of their product. Smucker's? It looks remarkably like a word in Yiddish that is not exactly complimentary. And yet, the company's marketers tell us: With a name like Smucker's, it has to be good. I am left thinking, really? Why? What is it about the NAME Smucker that makes it good? Is Smucker will known for all the good things he did? Am I missing something? If the tag simply said: With Smucker's, it has to be good, then I would buy it. But the name is meaningless to me and other than we know that Smucker's makes jams, we don't know from the name alone that they are good.

Do you have a tag line that makes you wonder or even cringe? Let me know in the comments!



Are we losing radio too?

Advertising dollars

It doesn't make it into the news too often, but radio is hurting from the same causes as the newspaper industry is: advertising losses. In radio's case, it has a lot to do with Ipad and MP3 players. But it has a lot to do with the recession too.

Format change! That's the solution!

I was just reading this *Washington Post* article about a classic rock station here in Washington that is (AGAIN) changing formats to adult/pop contemporary. The station's owners seem to think this will attract a younger, female audience. It might, if it weren't for the fact that nearly every other radio station in the market plays Pop and AC. It seems inane/insane to switch formats in this economy. The article says that they station had good numbers, yet it was not enough.

You can't (and shouldn't) please everybody

It seems to me this has something to do with what brought Wall Street down: GREED. The idea that you have to have the most, and by a large margin, to be the absolute leader. It does not serve the listener, and it certainly will not accomplish it in the end. People become fiercely loyal to a radio station and its DJs. Whenever there is a format change there will be upheaval and resentment. And frankly, in this market, this particular change causes a homogenization that is truly unbearable.

What about segmentation and target audiences?

When all radio stations play the same music, you can assume they all have the same audience, right? So, if you are trying

to reach older people, where are you supposed to advertise in Washington? My point is that a variety of formats allows media buyers to reach different target audiences. Not everybody is seeking for women, 18 plus. Some may want adults, 40 plus or another segment. In a sense, format changes affect the entire market.

Losing sight of what you are

It seems to me that when you aim for the mass, you actually end up losing what makes you special. This particular radio station has gone through several format changes and I predict will either change again or go off the air. In the era of the Ipod/MP3 player and declining revenue, the solution is to offer something that can NOT be found elsewhere. That is how you find an audience, and more importantly, how you build a LOYAL following.



The opinion ad

Newspapers are in a downward spiral

Every day there is more bad news for the newspaper industry. The *New York Times* will eliminate its City section, Chicago Sun-Times is filing Chapter 11, *Washington Post* is offering its fourth buyout in 6 years, and on and on. Even CBS Sunday Morning covered the coming “death” of newspapers.

Paid opinions

One area that is fairly unique to newspapers is the paid opinion ad. Usually a full page, this ad will carry the unadulterated opinion of an organization, group, industry or

even individual. The target is public opinion and/or lawmakers. We've seen "it's our fault" ads and "you're wrong and here's why" ads. In fact, this is a time honored way of getting opinions across without the filter of an editor or a reporter.

Where will they go?

Sure there is advertising on the Internet, between pop ups and banners, we're often inundated with advertising messages. However, we can pretty much ignore these ads. Only if we are in the market for say, acai diet supplement, do we click to find out more. Opinion ads use the full page newspaper format because they need the space to communicate a complicated message. It's not about a sale or product attributes. I can't see how these type of ads will subsist in an Internet-only market.



Marketing is personal

How do you respond when someone asks you for a favor?

Ideally, when someone asks you for a favor (some information, a quote, some advice) you respond nicely. Sometimes you may not be able or willing to grant the favor, and in this case, you still should be nice. Why? because people do business with people they like. And being not nice makes people not like you.

Sample negative conversation

Me: Hi, I am looking for a web designer for my client, and I am wondering if I could get a quote from you.

Graphic designer (sounding grouchy): (Big sigh) well, I don't know. What kind of website?

Me: Mostly static, about 10 pages or so, and with some room to make changes, like on the staffing page.

GD (mumbling and sounding pissed): Hmm, well, we work with CMS, and it's hard to just give you a quote, but you know websites start around \$20,000.

Me: Well, it sounds like we aren't a good fit for each other. Thanks.

GD (sounds relieved to not have to deal with me): OK.

This graphic designer, whom I had found listed through the AIGA (contact me if you want her name), was downright nasty. I have made many of these calls, and for the most part, the designers I have spoken to have been helpful. They ask questions, and they say they will get back to me with an estimate. Even if the estimate is not in my ballpark, I now have a graphic designer contact. You never know what can come up.

What would have made this conversation go better.

If she had said something like: "Thanks for your call. I am happy to do an estimate for you, but you should know our website designs start at \$20,000. Is that within your budget?"

Marketing is personal because it is people who make decisions, and personal biases affect decisions. Like I said before, we'd rather do business with people we like (or at least respect). Sometimes it is not your credentials, or your abilities, or your writing skill or your design skill, it is your likeability. Being polite and being nice can go a long way to getting you business, and conversely, being rude and being nasty can almost assure you of losing business.



On doing things piecemeal

Are you a small business with a tight marketing budget?

If you are, you probably have fallen prey to the idea that you should do (marketing) things as you can afford them. You know, an ad here, a brochure there. Budget-wise, this may make sense. After all, you can't afford a large campaign, or an ad agency. Branding-wise, not so much. It's tough to build up an image on unconnected pieces of the puzzle. The missing link is the connection, or the reason, behind each piece.

Think strategically

In business, there is strategy and there are tactics. Often companies fall into tactics without thinking about the strategy. Many people can't tell the difference. Here's a quick example: sending a press release is a tactic, achieving positive publicity is a strategy. Ideally, tactics should follow your strategy.

You must know what you want to accomplish so that you can figure the steps to make it happen.

Often, small business owners are overwhelmed with trying to do everything: managing staff, invoicing, doing the books, buying inventory, negotiating. Marketing may be a distant thought, something to do when there is down time. This is unfortunate because marketing will bring business in. Neglecting your marketing will result in a business downturn, for sure.

Develop a basic marketing plan

The easiest thing to do is to devote some time to thinking about what you want to accomplish. Perhaps you want more

female customers, or larger organizations. Write these goals down. Figure out who your current customers are. Figure out how much budget you can afford to devote to marketing. See what you already have and what you need.

Here are some elements of a marketing plan:

- Current situation/Situation analysis
- Goals
- Target audience
- Budget
- Tactics for reaching target audience (and this is where your ads, brochures, press releases fit in)

Remember, doing marketing piecemeal will only result in getting small chunks of your target audience.



It's the media

Is it just me?

Or is it the 24 news cycle, but it seems that more and more the media is reporting on the media. Witness the Jon Stewart-CNBC debacle. It was reported on in every other media outlet. Today, on a *Washington Post* blog, instead of doing any original reporting or commentating, the writer posted video of President Obama's interview with 60 Minutes. As well as there was a large piece in the Style section about Steve Kroft, who conducted the aforementioned interview.

Has the media itself become more newsworthy? Doubtful.

What's making you sweet?

Is it HFCS?

In the past few months, the Corn Refiners Association has been running some ads featuring the much-maligned high fructose corn syrup (HFCS). In case you haven't heard, many doctors and researchers blame HFCS for the obesity epidemic because HFCS is found in millions of food items and seems to be metabolized differently in the body. Recently some research found that the way HFCS is manufactured causes the release of mercury. Bottom line, corn refiners had to act. After all, their product is beginning to be perceived as bad for you.

The commercial

I am sure you've seen the commercials. A couple is sitting on blanket in a park (oh so idyllic) and she offers him a ice pop made with HFCS. When he recoils, she counters telling him it is made from corn and it's fine in moderation.

You can see the commercials and read the "facts" about HFCS at the Corn Refiners Association website.

The backlash or the return of sugar

It turns out that sugar is not about to roll over and play dead. It is making a comeback. In fact, many products are using it as a selling point, as pointed out in this New York Times article. Of course, some products are just advertising that they are not made with HFCS (like the Thomas English Muffins' package that blares no high fructose corn syrup).

[poll daddy poll=1474842]



Again with public perception

In today's *Washington Post*, Steven Pearlstein writes about Wall Street executives (more specifically AIG executives) who are so blind to public perception that they keep stumbling and looking worse. In case you have been avoiding the news, AIG gave some of its top executives millions of dollars in bonuses, while on the receiving end of government/taxpayer money. Nobody but AIG is happy about this. Currently and mostly due to the economic crisis, there is a tremendous amount of populist rage and ill will toward Wall Street and "fat cats" such as Bernie Madoff, who seem to be living the high life while many people are down in the dumps.

Yesterday I wrote about the Facebook redesign and many others have been writing/complaining across the blogosphere and in real life.

What do AIG and Facebook have in common? Not understanding how they are perceived and that perception matters. Both companies have proceeded with business as usual without so much a look in the rear view mirror. Perception is currency, in the most real, dollar sense, which is why the practice of public relations exists. Companies hire PR agencies to help them manage and in most cases improve the public perception of them.

Sometimes, as in the case of Facebook, there seems to be a complete disregard for how core audiences will react to news and changes. There are simple ways to prevent this: testing in the form of focus groups or surveys or even simple conversations with current users. It's about getting outside the bubble. Come to think of it, don't bubbles always burst? Soap bubbles, housing bubbles, tech bubbles to name a few.

In the case of AIG, it has much to do with Wall Street culture, in which greed is good (as the movie Wall Street pointed out) and money is king. The more money, the better. After all, Wall Street is not some nonprofit organization with some altruistic purpose in mind. The whole raison d'être for it is to make money. So it stands to reason that the only thing AIG execs understand is money. Something soft and unmeasurable like public anger is a small price to pay. Except when it isn't. I think the fat cat era may be nearing its end (at least until the next bubble forms).

