

How do you view your target audience?

This is not the Spam that comes in a can

On the telephone

Have you received multiple calls on your landline and/or cell phone that are in the same area code and start with the same three digits as your phone number? Chances are high that you have. Spammers are hoping that you will think that this a local number and therefore will answer. However, when they keep using this technique over and over and over again, and when caller ID shows you names of people you don't know, you learn pretty quickly that this is a spam call and you don't answer.

On email

If you are a website owner, have you received emails telling you that you have problems on your website and that the emailer can fix these "fatal" errors so that your website can function? After the second or third one, chances are good you figured out that this is a scam and you deleted the email and/or added it to your junk list and/or reported it.

or

Have you gotten an email like this one I have already received twice (word for word) from "Tina Richardson:"

Hello Deborah,

I just came across the Mad Mimi piece, "Dyscalculia and MLD Newsletter." Nice job! As a heads up, your site is not WC3 accessible for people with physical disabilities related to dyscalculia. I get it: your website can't be accessibility compliant without sacrificing design, interactivity and

general user experience for visitors without disabilities (paying 50% more for designers and coders might help, but would still fall short).

The very red flag here is that there is no “Mad Mimi” piece that I wrote about dyscalculia.

These are real examples. I get these calls and emails, several times a day. Apparently, the idea here is that I am going to believe that the call is from someone I know, or that my website has a ton of problems, or even that I wrote something that I didn't. In short, all these “marketing” pieces depend on my naivete or stupidity or lack of common sense. They are designed so that a trusting or uninformed person falls for them.

What differentiates spam marketing from real marketing

How you view your target audience determines what kind of marketer you are. If you view your audience as naive, easily swayed or just plain stupid, chances are you are a spammer/scammer. If, on the other hand, you view your audience as knowledge-seeking and perhaps even sophisticated, chances you are a real marketer (and therefore probably more successful).

Real marketing seeks to give potential customers fact-based information on which to base a buying decision. Spam/scam marketing often uses fear-mongering or the assumption that the target does not have enough information.

If you want to be taken seriously, do not view your target audience as stupid, gullible, uniformed, unsophisticated. Instead, view your target as smart and then your marketing will also be smart and successful.

You do know you can segment your mailing list, right?

Today, I got an email about a six-week communications leadership seminar. It sounds interesting, except it takes place in Chicago and I live near Washington, D.C. The target audience for this seminar is business professionals who live in the greater Chicago area yet this email was probably sent to the whole list.

Email marketing is great because it is relatively inexpensive, and because it is highly customizable. Say you are a retailer with stores across the country. You could send emails to your customers in specific locations announcing the opening of a new store or a change in hours, or perhaps a change in location.

In other words, with email marketing you can send targeted email messages that are relevant to their recipients at a relatively low cost.

Yet the email I received about the Chicago seminar is not relevant. It is just clutter in my inbox. Why did I get this email? I'd venture to say it is because the list owner did not either a) segment the list, or b) gather enough information from the recipients to allow for segmentation, or c) both.

Most email marketing programs allow for list segmentation. If you are marketing to a diverse audience, you will have to gather some relevant information to be able to segment your list or to be able to personalize it. If you don't gather information that will allow segmentation and/or you have an email provider that doesn't allow for segmentation, you need to make some changes ASAP. That is, unless you are trying to

get your email deleted or generate a few unsubscribes.

4-step plan to achieve marketing success in 2018

We are only four days into the new year, and there is plenty of time ahead to re-calibrate or re-focus your marketing efforts to achieve maximum success in 2018. You can also use this time and planning to create a completely new marketing strategy. To help you make the most of this opportunity, I am offering you four steps to get you on the right track.

Step 1: REVIEW

Look back at your marketing efforts in 2017. What did you do? Social media marketing? Content marketing? List all your marketing activities, such as newsletters, blog posts, video, social media promotions, advertising, etc. Be sure to include specifics, such as what vendors and technology you used (e.g., Constant Contact or MailChimp, Hootsuite or Tweetdeck, etc.) You may also want to incorporate how much these activities cost you, for example, how much you spent on subscription-based services, video production, content production, and so forth.

Step 2: BENCHMARK

How do you know how far you've come if you don't know where you started? Benchmarking at specific intervals or times of the year is a great way to measure your progress (or lack thereof). To do this, create a simple table in Excel or in Word. The first column will list the indicators you want to track. Input the numbers for the indicators you are tracking

under a second column headed with the date you collected the information. Add another column for the next date you will revisit these numbers. You could do this on a quarterly, semi-annual, or annual basis, depending on your business plan.

To figure out what to benchmark, think about the different components of your marketing plan you reviewed in the first step: content marketing, digital/social media marketing, print, etc. What are some key performance indicators (KPIs) within those components?

Some possible indicators are:

- Revenue
- Social media likes/followers (broken down by channel)
- Newsletter subscribers/open rates
- Website conversion rate
- Number of visitors to the website
- Number of customers/clients served

Step 3: ANALYZE AND ASSESS

Looking back at your efforts in 2017, where did you spend the most time and effort? What worked the best? What worked the least? Where was the biggest return on investment (ROI)? What vendors were worth it? Did you have trouble using certain technology? Is there a better way to do what you have been doing? In terms of social media/digital strategy, what tactics earned the most attention/engagement?

Your aim here is to recognize patterns, successes, and failures.

Step 4: CREATE YOUR 2018 ROADMAP

Now that you know what you did and whether it worked or not, you can decide what to continue and what to eliminate. Perhaps you want to add more budget/time to your email marketing. Perhaps you want to scale back your efforts on social media

channels. Looking at your benchmarks, what numbers do you want to change? How will you get there? Perhaps you want to increase your website conversion rate. What activities will achieve the results you want? Are there areas you want to explore? Perhaps you've heard that voice search will be big in 2018 (it will). What do you need to do to make your SEO responsive to these new challenges?

I'd love to hear what you are planning for 2018 and where you will be spending your marketing dollars. Please share in the comments or email me. I may include your responses in a future blog post.

Happy New Year and good luck with your 2018 planning!

What's a comma worth?

I got this postcard last week from a real estate agent who is selling a townhouse near me:

Just Listed. And Inviting You In.

██████████ Court, Rockville, MD
\$51,900,000



Open House Sunday, December 17th 1 - 4

Call me at 301-██████████ for details.

Beautiful Garage Townhouse!

Invite us in. We'll bring results.®

Weicher
Realtor

Seems this lovely townhouse costs more than \$51 million.

Yes, it is an error, but that's what happens when you don't bother to proofread your work. Numbers are especially tricky, and in this case, comma placement (and lack of periods) makes a several *million* dollar mistake.

Would you trust a real estate agent who doesn't bother to check details on a listing before she prints hundreds of postcards and mails them out? Would you want someone like this reviewing your contract for a home? Putting in an offer in your name?

Don't lose millions and your credibility. Take a few minutes to proofread your work. And if you can't, hire someone who can.

Happy holidays to our Caffeinated Ideas readers! We'll be back

with more great content in 2018.

If advertising is better, why bother with PR?

Last night, at a happy hour for the Washington, D.C. chapter of the ASBPE, I got a chance to meet the managing editor of the *Washington Business Journal*, Vandana Sinha. I asked her about the change I discussed here last week, where the *Business Journal* is now charging for personnel announcements in their “People on the Move” section.

Sinha told me that companies are actually very happy about the change, because they can now be assured that their announcements will be printed. Companies feel they’ve gained control over the process.

Paid vs. earned

That reaction points to the advantage of advertising over public relations, and it’s the difference between paid and earned media. If you pay for ad space, you get it. You can place whatever ad or information you choose (within certain limits).

When you rely on media relations efforts to obtain coverage for your organization, you are not assured of success. It will depend on whether what you are trying to get out there is deemed “newsworthy” by the editors/journalists at the media outlet you are targeting. If you get coverage, you’ve “earned”

it.

If we are at a point, due to limited resources and dwindling subscriptions, where reporters and editors are stretched to the point that they no longer can entertain pitches and read press releases, what is the future of media relations? Furthermore, if media outlets are searching for more ways to bring in revenue, by seeking various sponsorships and now charging for announcements (and in effect making something that was previously earned into paid), where does that leave a media relations practitioner?

Clearly, if you pay for your media (advertising), you are guaranteed not only coverage, but coverage that you like. What is the incentive for organizations to hire anybody to do media relations?

Media relations is a tactic

For many years, public relations practice seems to have been more focused on media relations than on strategy and image management. It was easier to do publicity than it was to counsel clients on other ways to improve their public standing.

In my opinion, the practice of media relations has to evolve (or even disappear), if it hasn't already. No longer can agencies simply churn out press releases, pitch editors, and earn media for their clients. That is become increasingly unproductive and difficult to achieve. Additionally, the way people consume news has changed dramatically. There are few true mass media outlets left, and many more targeted, specialty channels.

The media landscape has changed

Because of the new media landscape, public relations, where the practice is about managing perceptions of an organization, has to re-focus its efforts away from media relations. It's

important to recognize that media relations is just *a tactic* to help PR achieve its objectives.

Many PR agencies are already turning away from media relations. Today's PR agencies are doing much more social media, marketing, crisis communications and other practices in order to help organization manage their public presence.

Bring back integrated marketing communications!

PR is not advertising, but both are essential components of any communications plan. Perhaps the future will bring us **communications agencies**, where PR and advertising are integrated. Yes, I know this is not a new concept, but it's one that needs to be revisited now that times have changed.

What are your thoughts on media relations practices? Is it something that is still worthwhile? Should PR evolve? Please share your comments.

Publications' need for revenue threatens public relations efforts

Personnel announcements used to be one of the most reliable and easy forms of publicity for a company. In the years I worked at PR firms, we always sent out these type of announcements, usually including a headshot. Eventually, most of them would end up in the business section of the local newspaper, or within specialty newspapers or magazines.



It's disheartening because it has further blurred the line between advertising and editorial content, and opens the possibility up that companies will be willing to "pay to play." If there is money to be made from charging for what was previously known as earned media, then there is no incentive for publications to cover any press release or announcement unless it is major (e.g., new iPhone).

The pressures on print journalism have been covered before. We know that people are not buying or subscribing as much to print, and we know that publications are asking fewer reporters to produce more content, more often, and with fewer resources. Most publications have a digital presence, and many struggle with instituting a pay wall for readers to access their content.

It may seem trivial for a publication to charge for personnel announcements, but it points to a much larger problem and also to serious consequences for editorial integrity. It's not only happening in print. Broadcast also seems to require more revenue than what it is getting from traditional advertising. More people are getting news from websites and social media sites, and fewer are watching the evening news. Over the past several weeks, I've noticed a trend in which national restaurants are getting local news to cover food and drink specials, not only on air, but on social media channels.

For a specific example, just last Friday, I noticed that WJLA

(the ABC affiliate in Washington, D.C., owned by Sinclair Broadcasting) re-tweeted one of its local reporters, Kevin Lewis, discussing a special on a drink offered at Applebees, the national restaurant chain. Lewis included a link to the “news” about this special on the WJLA website, which then linked to a press release directly on Applebees website. At no point did the words “sponsored” or “paid advertising” show on the tweets or on the press release. If the WJLA news team thinks that sharing drink specials from a restaurant is actual news, they are not familiar with real journalism.

In this era where journalism is being called “fake news” whenever it digs up inconvenient information for a politician, it is not a good look to get money to run publicity, without even acknowledging that it is paid.

Decisions with unintended consequences

This is a post about unintended and negative consequences, based on two separate experiences yesterday.

Last minute deal—get in at no cost!

Last night, I attended an event on trends in digital marketing. I signed up for it a couple of days ago, and paid \$11.84. Yesterday, about two hours before the event was due to start, there was an email from the organizer to a listserv I am on saying that she didn’t have enough attendees, so if

anyone wanted to attend *for free*, they could.

I felt like a sucker. Why had I bothered to pay anything at all for an event that wasn't garnering enough attention to the point that the organizer was begging people to come by offering free admission?

And the real question is, why would I ever pay this organizer for any event when it may be more advantageous to wait until the last minute?

The unintended consequence of this poor decision is to effectively make people decide to not sign up in advance, to not pay at all, because there's a likelihood that if too few people sign up in advance, the organizer will be desperate enough for warm bodies and offer free admission to all.

Ask and ask and ask again—until they don't want to be asked again

Unless you were not online, or checking email, you know yesterday was Giving Tuesday. Giving Tuesday was developed (supposedly) as an "antidote" to Cyber Monday/Black Friday. In theory, Giving Tuesday is a chance to support charities instead of, or in addition to, shopping like mad for the holidays.

A lot of hoopla has developed around this "holiday." Case in point: Every organization that I have ever supported sent me emails the week before, the day before and the day of, to beg me to give them money on Giving Tuesday. Some organizations sent multiple emails on Tuesday in addition to multiple emails on the days before. My inbox was flooded with requests, and then so were my social media feeds.

Some organizations were getting matching funds on Giving Tuesday, so giving on this day automatically meant more money in the coffers. But the level of pushiness these organizations reached around Giving Tuesday in order to get these extra

funds may have had the unintended consequence of reducing the number of people opting in to newsletters. I unsubscribed to at least two, and was seriously considering unsubscribing from all of them.

The intensity of the effort made it seem as if this was your one chance to give, as if you couldn't give any time of the year, and *as if giving at any other time was just not as good*. The other unintended consequence of this extreme focus on Giving Tuesday, I believe, is to reduce year-round giving.

Organizations make lots of decisions to fulfill short-term goals (get lots of donors on Tuesday), but which neglect to take into consideration long-term goals (develop good relationships and donor opportunities year-round). In other words, before you make a snap decision that only affects one event/day, think about what your overall goals are, and whether this decision furthers those goals or not.

To gift or not to gift...a marketing question

As has happened every November for the six years I've lived in my current home, I received this on my doorstep:



It is given by a local real estate agent who also sends a magnetic calendar in the mail and places quarterly sales updates on my doorknob. He includes a card with his contact information along with the jar of apple butter.

Here's the problem: I don't really eat apple butter. I am not opposed to it, but it is not something I eat regularly. I have three unused jars from the past few years, and I don't really know what to do with them. It's a shame to throw them out, but it's not something I feel counts as food to be taken to the food pantry. In other words, it has become clutter and something that puts the burden on me. For me, this is not a welcome gift.

I am not sure why this real estate agent keeps doing this. Perhaps he has found there is a return on investment, or he wants to be known as the apple butter guy. I am not sure, but in my opinion, his is an example of how not to do corporate gift giving.

Gift giving can be a good marketing tactic, as long as there is some thought and strategy behind it.

Many large companies regularly give customers a gift that costs them very little but is very effective in getting people to the door: a free visit, a \$25 coupon toward your purchase,

discount cards, VIP seating, and so on. Others send Christmas gifts to ongoing customers. Some take hold monthly birthday lunches for clients. These companies and organizations have budgeted a certain/set amount toward corporate gifts, and have instituted these as regular marketing effort.

In order to have a *successful* gift giving campaign. you should think about the following two things:

1. What are you trying to accomplish?

Perhaps you are thanking customers for their business during the year, or perhaps you want to entice new customers. Either way, if you don't know why you are giving, there is absolutely no point to doing it.

2. Who are you giving to?

This is crucial information. If you are giving to a client you've known for years versus giving to a potential customer, you will be spending different amounts of time and effort. For a long-term client, you probably will need to find a personalized gift, and for a potential customer, you want to encourage them to check you out.

But not just any gift will do.

Once you've decided what you are trying to do and to whom you are giving, you can choose the gifts that make the most sense. Some attributes that you may want to consider are these:

- Memorable
- Useful
- Linked to your brand identity
- Stand out from the crowd

Remember: what makes a a good gift is something the recipient appreciates or wants.

What are your thoughts on gifts as a marketing tactic? Have

you received or given a particularly good or bad gift? Please let me know.

Be very scared (of poor word choice)

You know what is (a bit) scary? When you say or write something that you don't mean. You don't intend to do it, but you do it anyway.

Why would you do something spooky like that?

First, it's because you use words that you don't understand, or you misuse words. This is more common in spoken than in written communications, since we don't have the luxury of having a dictionary available when we talk. This type of scary mistake seems to happen a lot in television/cable news.

Here are two examples:

A political analyst/journalist who said **nonetheless** (which Webster's defines as "in spite of that") when she really meant **never mind** (which means much less or let alone).

Someone who said "from the **outset** (which means beginning or start, and can be used alone, without a modifier, such as, *from the outset*) **of...**" when he/she should have said the **onset of** (which also means beginning or commencement, and is usually used in conjunction a phrase, such as in the *onset of winter*).

It's easy to mess these up. They are very similar in meaning, and similar sounding, but yet are different words with slightly different usages and meanings.

Second, it's when you use words that are spelled similarly to what you meant to say, but are not the right word. This happens mostly in written communications, and it mostly happens because you rely on spellcheck, and you don't proofread.

Here are a couple I have seen recently:

A sentence that used **neatly** instead of **nearly**.

And even more weird, a sentence that used the word **bong** instead of **bond**.

Don't be ghoulish—use your words carefully—and go ahead, have a happy Halloween!

I've started collecting these, and I intend to publish them once a month. I invite you to share any you find by sending me an email at info@deborahbrody.com.

Closed, or just changing names?

Today, on my way to the Metro, I walked past where a Mediterranean cafe has been located for the past five years. It was closed, and in the window was a sign saying that “Amai Japanese Crepe” was coming soon.

By the way, anybody know what the hell a Japanese crepe is?

When I got back to my office, I checked on the web to see if I could figure out what happened. I first went to the cafe's website. It's still there. Same address. No update on the situation. Then I went to Yelp, and I noticed it said the place was "temporarily" closed but a five-star review had just been posted yesterday. Hmm. Stranger and stranger. I went back to the cafe's website, and clicked on their Twitter feed. Last post there was from 2015. Not useful at all. Then I went to the Facebook page. I clicked on "posts," and found one from September 22, which says this:

Thank you everyone for your loyalty and support these past 5 years. We opened in February 2012 and strived to bring a little taste of Israel and classic Italian espresso to our customers. Now, it's time to look to the future. XXX will be closed as of September 22 for renovations. We will be closed for two weeks to improve and update the cafe. We look forward to showing the improved us when we reopen.

Errors above appeared in the original post. I just x'ed out the name of the restaurant. There was also a picture of the sign about the Japanese crepes. That's it. No more information. But now we know the restaurant is changing name and changing focus. What we don't know is when this will happen, or what the hell a Japanese crepe is supposed to be.

To me, this is a classic and stupid communications failure. Why a failure? Here are the mistakes I see:

1. Failure to use their website to provide updated information.
2. Failure to provide complete information on the actual site (something like: XX cafe is transforming. We aim to re-open on [date]).
3. Failure to use social media appropriately. The Twitter feed should be deleted, and they could provide updates about the

renovation, some information about what they will become. Not to mention that Facebook post was from a month ago, where they claim they would re-open in two weeks.

4. Failure to consider what customers need to know. Maybe this is the biggest problem. Nowhere do you really know what is going on.

It's hard to say what will happen here. People who came to this place looking for Israeli food are not necessarily going to feel good about a Japanese crepe (whatever that may be). Passersby will think that the old place is gone, and will not necessarily think the new place is associated with the old.

As with any change, clear and precise communication is necessary. It seems that to this restaurant, communication with customers is an afterthought.