

Information that bears repeating

I have blogged about this before but I don't think it can be stressed enough: do your materials provide enough information to your prospects? Lately, I have come across several websites, notably, government websites, that simply do not provide enough information or make it difficult to find said information. Here are some examples:

US Capitol tours: no information regarding using public transportation to get there or a map pointing out the nearest Metro stops. Very little information about anything else. How long is the tour? What is permitted and not permitted? Not to mention how unfriendly this site is. If a government bureaucrat didn't personally design and write this, one of his/her scared minions did.

US Naval Academy tours: When do the tours start? Where is there parking? How about using public transportation to get to the academy? How long are the tours?

Glen Echo Park: Typical of most National Park Service websites, minimal information. The home page has a link for direction at the very bottom of the page. The About Us has another link to directions. What about hours? Not listed at all, except for the cafe.

This list is simply from my personal experience in the past three weeks. How many more websites are out there that just don't give enough information?

If you have a website, you would do well to look at it from an outsider's perspective. Here are is a small list of items to consider:

- Is your contact information easily accessible?

- If I have never before heard of your business or organization, will I understand what you do?
 - Have you listed your services and explained them?
 - If you are open to the public, are your hours, admissions fees, directions to your facility, parking and transportation and other information the public needs to know clearly and prominently posted?
 - If you are a restaurant, have you posted a sample menu?
 - If I don't understand what you have written, is there an alternative way to contact you?
 - Is your information up to date?
 - Is your layout (including fonts, etc) easy to read and navigate? Things to consider are busyness (too much information or graphics), font size, background, colors and optimization for different web browsers.
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Guest post on Habla Blog

Hi all, please read an article I wrote about translation on Habla Blog. Thanks!

Products that promote

Promotional products or advertising specialties have been around for quite a long time. Wikipedia claims that there were commemorative buttons for George Washington back in 1789. The Promotional Products Association International (PPAI), the trade association for the industry, was founded more than 100 years ago in 1904.

Promotional products should be part of any marketing campaign. According to research by the PPAI, promotional products help create a positive brand image. As for hard numbers, according to a PPAI research study, 52% of business travelers who received a promotional product did business with the advertiser. *That is more than half.* That same study found that three quarters of respondents recall the advertiser name on a product that they received. And last year, the industry set a new record by selling \$19.4 billion in promotional products. This sales volume indicates that promotional products outperform other marketing communications such as sponsorships, cable TV, and outdoor advertising.

According to Sean McColl, vice president at PromoCorp, Inc., an Alexandria, VA based promotional products company, “having something tangible in hand is increasingly a way to be noticed.” Sean points out that we are being bombarded with electronic communication—everything from radio ads to text messages—so the coffee mug emblazoned with a company logo sitting on your desk stands out. It isn’t going anywhere, and chances are, you may be using it on a daily basis. It can certainly help with brand awareness and recognition.

In order to be effective, a “promotional product should be the right product for the right target market. Something that the user will hold on to,” says Sean. For instance, a recent college graduate is interested in different products than a CEO. Sean counsels his clients to be creative and to use a tiered approach for products. For instance, at a trade show, you should have an inexpensive piece such as a pen or customized candy for general consumption. If you talk to a prospect for a while longer and you think the prospect may be interested in further discussion, you could hand him or her a slightly more expensive item, say in the \$5 range. And finally, if you speak to a decision-maker with whom you want to have a more in-depth conversation, you may give him or her a \$20-\$25 specialty. This approach makes sense. It gives

customers several ways to remember you and it gives you as an advertiser, a way to reward potential business.

Sean says that promotional products are an integral part of a marketing campaign and can be used in many ways. They can be used as a thank you gift, or a follow up to a trade show, they can be a leave-behind or an introduction. A very popular product right now is known as the “sticky drive.” This is a flash drive pre-loaded with information or a link to a website. The drive also has plenty of space to store your files, and a logo on the outside. More and more, companies are getting creative with the look of the flash drives. There is one shaped like a ballpoint pen, that is indeed a working pen, with an LED light, and a pointer. What a great idea in today’s multi-task oriented world.

Since there are thousands of items to choose from, you should consider how you will use the product and how you will get it to your prospects. The old stand-bys—stress balls, mugs, pens and apparel—may still be the most effective. But as shipping prices go up, you may want to consider flat items that can be mailed via the regular mail. Because of shipping cost considerations, Sean says a popular item for Christmas this year is a customized CD, featuring the name of your company and offering a selection of music.

All in all, my favorite promotional products are pens. As Sean says, they are inoffensive, useful and inexpensive. I bet you have company pens on your desk right now—I do.

Which promotional product do you prefer?

- Pens
- Mugs
- USB/Flash Drives
- Mouse Pads
- T-Shirts
- Candy
- Music CDs



This post is based on a live interview with Sean McColl of PromoCorp, Inc. PromoCorp Inc. can be reached at 1-888-385-2162.

Staying Smart

Have you seen the TV commercials for Holiday Inn? There are a couple campaigns—one is about the hot breakfast bar “scene” at the Inn and the other tells you how if you stay at a Holiday Inn you can just about perform brain surgery the next day. It’s all part of Holiday Inn’s branding strategy under the tag line “stay smart.” If you read the literature in the room, they have “smart” labeling in place. So, shampoo is just called “wash,” and soap is “cleanse” and conditioner is “tame.” This is in case you couldn’t figure out that shampoo is used to wash your hair, etc. I think it is a way to have a house brand instead of paying the royalties and/or higher cost for a name brand product like the ones found in other hotels.

I think “stay smart” is a smart tagline. Unfortunately, this is a case of marketing not being in touch with reality. For the past three nights I have stayed at a Holiday Inn Express in Rochester, NY. I didn’t sleep through one single night. Why? Because hotels are not built to be soundproof. That is not SMART. Why are people generally staying at a hotel? Because they need a place to SLEEP. Sure, some people use hotels as party suites or as places for a quick romp, but I would venture that most travelers are using the hotel as a base and a place to spend the night. The phenomenon of noise

in hotels is not unique to Holiday Inn, but very few hotels are claiming that staying with them will make you act smarter. Very few people act smarter or otherwise with just a few hours of sleep. If Holiday Inn wants to be truly smart they will investigate how to make their rooms more friendly to sleep.

It's a Giant logo

Here in the Washington DC area, there are two major supermarket chains, Giant and Safeway. There are other smaller chains like Harris Teeter, and national chains such as Trader Joe's and Whole Foods. When I first moved to the area, I went to Giant. I was shocked and appalled—compared to the Publix in Florida, the prices were higher and the produce inferior. I pretty much abandoned Giant in favor of shopping in several other places. There doesn't seem to be one place that has it all. Trader Joe's has good prices but does not carry certain things and does not have good produce. Whole Foods has good produce at extremely high prices. And so forth.

Lately, Giant has been suffering from lost market share and has begun redesigning its stores, lowering its prices (supposedly) and now, redesigning its logo. The Washington Post reports that its old logo has been in use since 1963. It was certainly time for an update. The supermarket has also been advertising itself as the place for a bargain. The new commercials play on the economic climate. One of them says to the viewer that if he or she has been thinking of buying a cow to have cheaper milk, then he or she should just come to Giant, where milk costs XX a gallon.

Time will tell if the new look and logo will bring more customers in. And whether the store really has better prices.

In a sense, supermarkets are in a hypercompetitive environment and apparently, customers are now looking for an “experience.” Safeway also redesigned its stores to have wood floors and more upscale look. Overall, I think consumers are looking to save a buck and find what they need in one place. Giant and Safeway can look prettier and more inviting, but if the food bill is still expensive, then they will continue to lose market share. For one, I want to check out the “new” Giant. But whether I shop there, remains to be seen.

P.S. This more “positive” shopping experience, with brighter colors etc., has been played up by Bloom Supermarkets. I blogged a while back about their weird commercials and their “happy” shopping experience.

Packaging buzz words



Johnson's Nourishing
Renewal Lotion

This is Johnson's Nourishing Renewal Lotion, which purports to restore youthful baby softness to one's skin.



Johnson's Green Tea Moisturizer

And here's the exact same lotion, except the label and name have been changed. Now the lotion only claims to give you "healthy, beautiful looking skin."

If you often shop for the same products you may find that products change their names or attributes, but if you look closely at the ingredients, the products are still the same. In this case, Johnson's has added the word "green tea," even though nowhere in the ingredients is green tea listed. In fact the label goes on to say that the lotion "contains natural antioxidants found in green tea. The previous label said that the lotion contains "vitamins A & E, shea butter & essential oils." The old label more accurately describes the product in my opinion, but because green tea has become such a big a buzz phrase in marketing, the powers that be decided to tinker with the label. This strategy can be positive if you are trying to attract new customers who may be drawn to the perceived value of green tea. However, the strategy can backfire, because existing customers looking for their regular lotion will have to figure out if this is still the same. They, like I, will realize that it is the same, but has changed its name and NOTHING else.

Products go through name changes all the time. Packaging is

also changed periodically, to entice new shoppers. At some point, purely cosmetic changes (no pun intended) don't add any value to the consumer. In this case, I am not getting any green tea benefits, just the same natural antioxidants found in green tea.

Do you have any examples of packaging that has changed but the product remains the same?

Yeah, it's personal

I have written before that marketing communications goes beyond nice brochures, great ads and a fabulous website. There is an element of marketing that is more personal—it is how each and every customer, or potential customer, views your company or organization. With the rise of social media and the ability of posters such as myself to critique anything and everything, this has become even more important.

Last week I had my hair cut at a salon in DC. I went there because a friend recommended it. Check. However, I got there, and waited for my appointment. This in spite of the fact that they charge YOU if you are late for your appointment. The hairdresser never apologized. She was neither good nor bad, but she did tell me, weirdly enough, that she had been written up "on one of those sites on the Internet" and she hated the Internet for this reason. My answer is that if more than one person is saying the same thing, there is a problem. I checked on the salon and indeed lots of people had mixed reviews of the place, some worse and some better. However, many of the complaints had to do with attitude. Things like the receptionist was rude or was not very accomodating. Now listen to me—these things MATTER. More today than ever.

Similarly, in everyday interactions with businesses, businesses should really take care with details. Here are a couple of examples from my experiences. I went on a long trip back in February, and used a travel agent because of the complexity of the trip. She was not very good and since I wasn't spending the type of money she is used to dealing with, she barely gave me the time of day. Additionally, she gave bad advice! I wrote a letter to the travel agency owner. And guess what—I never heard from her. Not one word of acknowledgment or apology. So PORTFOLIO TRAVEL on Wisconsin Avenue in Washington, DC, you will never see my business again, and certainly I will never recommend you.

Last week, someone asked me for a proposal. I sent it to her by COB, the same day. She claimed she would get back to me by the end of last week. She did not. I followed up on Monday and she did not even have the courtesy to respond to my email. Why would I ever want to work with someone like that?

So in summary, every personal interaction with a member of the public has the potential to get you good or bad publicity. Every. Single. Interaction. When people are upset these days, they make their voices heard through a very public forum, the Internet. There are dozens of sites like Yelp.com devoted to rating businesses and products. Some health care insurers are now allowing you to rate your doctor too. No one is immune. There is an expression, "mind your ps and qs." Or "cross your ts and dot your is." Whatever it takes, remember that every time you interact with the public you are representing your company. You are a marketing ambassador. Act like it.

Political Ads Analyzed

I found this in-depth article, analyzing the presidential candidate's tv ads on Salon.com and wanted to share with you. Kathleen Hall Jamieson is a well known expert in the area of political advertising, something I was very interested in when I was in graduate school. In fact, I looked up many of her articles to do my Master's project, which was a marketing campaign for a third-party candidate. But enough about that.

This campaign is going to play out across two electronic arenas—television and Internet. I have said before that I think McCain's ads are not going to help him, as long as he continues a personal attack against Obama. I know McCain has to discredit Obama, and especially, he has to strike at the issue of experience. The truth is that Obama does not have much national experience, and McCain does. However, the generation of voters that will make the difference in this election, in my opinion, is GenY. And they certainly don't care about experience per se. I think they are idealistic and don't tend to think that the older you get, the better you are.

On the Internet, Obama has shown prowess in collecting money. He has a well thought out social media and Internet marketing campaign. This will help with GenY voters. Recently, it was reported that McCain is not very astute on the computer. This is such a strike against him. So of course, McCain's main tactic will be to portray Obama as inexperienced. They will also try to make him out to be "foreign." This was reported yesterday in the media...it was one of the tactics offered to the Clinton campaign, and which was wisely ignored. McCain certainly can lay claim to the patriotic mark—after all, he fought in Vietnam and was a POW. The question remains, is it sufficient to win over hearts and minds?

Web 2.0 Squared

If you have ever doubted that blogs are important then take a look at Pete Snyder. Snyder, at 35, is a multi-millionaire today because he understands the importance of blogs and created New Media Strategies, a firm devoted to checking up on what blogs are saying about its clients. “Trolling” if you will. I have written about this phenomenon before, but had no idea a single person made so much money checking up on online mentions and reputations. Read the entire Washington Post story [here](#).

More and more, we will hear about Web 2.0. In fact, I am not sure that traditional public relations moves such as sending press releases will continue to work at all. Many people no longer read newspapers, unless they are online. Newspapers are consolidating and there are fewer reporters to target. Small community newspapers may still pay attention to press releases, but overall, people are using the Internet more often to obtain and disseminate news.

Recently, I attended a meeting with other writers. Some of them were woefully uneducated about the powers of social media. Indeed, if there is a Networking 2.0 it is social media. I know people who have hundreds of connections on LinkedIn and/or Facebook. These networks are the new Rolodexes. People who refuse to join will simply be tapped out of the new currency. It’s like people who refused to have cell phones. It also always surprises me to find businesses without a website. What is that about? It seems today that aside from Mom and Pop neighborhood shops (drycleaners, card stores) everyone has to have a website. How else to find out more about someone?

All in all, the Web is the place. How many people have flocked to the iPhone because they want access to the Web wherever they are?

The All-American Beer is Not

As no doubt you have read or heard, Anheuser-Busch, parent of Budweiser beer, has been bought by an Belgian-based company, InBev. The news spawned lots of hand wringing about what this would do to the “all-American” beer and could red-blooded Americans drink a product owned by (pause) Belgians. Well the answer can be seen in the newest Budweiser/image commercial, which is airing during the Olympics. The new commercial is about all things American, you know, Nascar and the Statue of Liberty. I may have seen a slice of apple pie somewhere in there. Clearly this ad is designed to celebrate America and to make sure to make the connection between Budweiser and America (and Americana). It makes sense. If anything, Budweiser has always had very good commercials (how else to explain the appeal of this most watered down of beers). This one deals with the issue at hand—the company is no longer American-owned. But the beer is still the “Great American Beer.” In one word, the commercial is patriotic. It’s meant to build on people’s patriotism while watching the greatest of international sporting events, the Olympics, but in reality, it is meant to address head-on, any concern Bud consumers may have about the new ownership, or even to obfuscate the change.