

Wishing is not a marketing tactic

Several weeks ago, I started getting a weekly newspaper in the mail. It was supposed to be a four-week free subscription to thank me for some volunteering I had done. The enclosed note said that they hoped I would consider subscribing.

I would consider subscribing, but I haven't been given the chance. I keep getting this newspaper, even though it has been more than eight weeks (twice what was originally offered) and never once has a subscription card come along with it. I guess they are wishing I call them and say "please charge me for the paper you are already sending me for free!"

Wishing is not a good marketing tactic.



Gran blows out her candles on her 80th birthday cake by Ben Sutherland on Flickr

Instead, ask for what you want or give potential customers a pathway to becoming paying customers. In this case, the newspaper could send me a card saying that they hope I have enjoyed my free trial subscription, and if I would like to continue getting this newspaper, then please send a check in

the enclosed envelope or call some phone number with my credit card information.

We see this with many other situations. Another common example is failing to ask for referrals. Does your hair or beauty salon ever ask you specifically to refer people? They probably wish you did, but they don't make it easy or worth your while. Say they said to you when you were checking out: We hope you like your new hair do. Perhaps you know someone else who wants a new haircut. If you do, we have a referral program. Just tell your friend to call us the number on this card, and we will give you a discount on your next service.

Sometimes you have to ask very specifically for what you want. A few days ago, I read that the tweets that get the most traction are the ones that have an ask in them: please retweet, please help, please donate, etc. You can't wish for things to happen...you have to make them happen!

Thoughts?

3 guaranteed ways to lose business fast

Sometimes you see stuff that makes you shake your head (or slap your forehead) and wonder how some people manage to stay afloat.



THE G.A.H. PERM FOREHEAD SLAP by happy
via on Flickr

Based on personal experiences in the past week alone, here are three guaranteed ways to lose business fast:

1. If you have a website, make sure it is lacking relevant information.

Sure, every business should have a website, but not any website will do. Websites should be useful if you want them to support your business.

I was looking for a restaurant in which to grab some lunch. I found several and checked out their websites. One place had a website that did not have the following: hours of operation, location, menu. Guess what? I did not have lunch there.

2. Make it very difficult to do business with you (and easier to do it with competitors)

How many hoops do you want your potential customers to jump through? Five? Ten? Perhaps you are putting a few too many obstacles for your customers to climb through to get to you. These obstacles can be things like too many forms to fill, rules, not providing services your competitors provide, and so forth.

I wanted to get some catering for my workshop last week. I usually order coffee and pastries from a national chain, but that place was not nearby the location last week. I thought I would patronize a local place, so I checked it out. First, it took ONE week to get an answer back. Then, I was told that coffee could be provided, but the coffee urn would have a \$100 deposit (meanwhile, almost all coffee chains have a portable cardboard coffee box that they don't have to charge a deposit for). Oh, and they do not provide plates for the pastries. Guess what? I found another place to get some coffee and pastries.

3. Ignore your social media responses and/or your emails. Take your time responding if you do get around to it.

The thing about social media and in some cases email too is that it is a quick response forum. This is not the pony express or even the USPS. I don't send a missive on social media expecting a response next week. I expect it today, or even sooner.

I wanted to refer someone some business, but did not have complete contact information. I tweeted and got no response. Even now, more than a week later, I have yet to receive any type of acknowledgement. I can't send business to someone who either doesn't care to respond or doesn't understand how social media works. And then there is the case of the coffee shop I mentioned above. One week to answer an email about doing business with you? That is unacceptable. If you can't answer emails or tweets, then I think you don't have the time or the interest to do business with me.

Have you seen these classic business mistakes?

Is it a PR problem or is it a business problem?

Yesterday, I read Gini Dietrich's take on the state of the PR industry, *The PR Industry Does Need Better PR*, on her firm's blog, *Spin Sucks*. Basically, Gini points out that what people think they know about PR is wrong or misleading. It's her conclusion that what the PR industry needs is better PR.

I think what the PR industry needs is better business skills.

Have you been to a PR networking event lately? If you have, you've probably noticed a lot of young people, mostly women. These young people often have inflated titles—including account manager, account director and even vice president—after being in the industry for three years or so. Many of these PR “pros” studied PR in college. Some may have even had an internship or two.

You may also have met a lot of former journalists who have decided they will have more job stability in public relations, while using their writing skills and knowledge of what is newsworthy.

What few of these PR people have is a solid understanding of business. Few, if any, have gone to business school. Few, if any, understand basic marketing ideas like push-pull. Fewer still understand finance, balance sheets or even how to read and interpret data.

Lots of people are busy trying to figure out how to get the word out about an event, or how to have a great social media campaign, but what they are failing to see is the big picture—how public relations helps a company to achieve its business objectives.

A big part of the disconnect that currently exists between

public relations agencies and the business side of the industries served has to do with the separation between communications functions and marketing and sales roles. Even though public relations is part of marketing communications, public relations does not usually have a stake in marketing and sales processes and outcomes. Businesses may hire public relations agencies to help with image, but even then, the point usually is to increase the bottom line (i.e. sales in for profit organizations, influence or donors at nonprofit organizations).

In his article 3 reasons to find a new PR/social media agency, Scott Signore states quite succinctly the following as his third reason:

Finally, despite the evolution in the category and the number of significant changes the PR business has endured over the years, it's still about executing a communications program that helps drive business. So, look for another PR and social media agency partner if your current group is not directly supporting your business objectives.

What Scott is saying is that if PR agencies are not helping companies achieve **business objectives**, they should be fired. Fundamentally, they are not doing their job.

And yet, as I said before, too many PR professionals simply do not understand business. All public relations pros should be reading business books or articles or watching business-focused programs. Those who want to be high-level agency executives should consider going to business school.

What do you think? Is it a PR problem? Or is it a lack of business know-how?

What message are you sending?

OK, so you don't like to blog. You hate tweeting. You refuse to put up a picture on your LinkedIn profile. And yet you have all those social media platforms. Perhaps you should get rid of them.

Here's the thing. If you don't use them—for whatever reason—don't have them. Having an old blog, and old profile or an unused Twitter makes it seem like you are no longer around or worse, that you just don't care.

Last night, I attended a panel presentation where one of the presenters said that potential employers and/or new business connections are checking out your social media profiles prior to meeting with you. Having an outdated social media presence sends a message, and it is not a good one. (As an aside, and kind of weird, I checked the social media presence for some of these panelists and I found a blog that hasn't been updated since 2009 and someone with four LinkedIn profiles with about one connection each. Hmm. That is not a great message is it?)

This is the message I am getting from you:

You say you know how to do social media but you haven't tweeted in two months and you only have 50 followers? I don't believe you.

You are a writer and you say you can help others blog but your website doesn't have a blog? You don't know how to position yourself and what a blog is really for.

You are a communications executive and all you have is a personal Facebook page? You don't get the power of social media to educate and expand your network.

You are sending a message by having an outdated or unused profile and it may not be one that you want to communicate. An outdated or unused profile could mean that you are not comfortable on social media, that you don't have much to say, that you don't pay attention to social media or even that you experiment but don't follow through. None of it is positive.

Don't miss out! Sign up for the next How to blog workshop, taking place on May 17. Details and registration here.

The two actions that will make your communications more effective

There are two actions that will improve your communications efforts. These are:

- **Listening** (really listening, not just nodding your head)
- **Saying what you mean**

It sounds absurdly simple, but chances are that you are not doing one or both well.

Listening is crucial.

Yesterday, I went to a large home improvement store (I won't name names). I was on the search for an edger/trimmer for my pocket-sized lawn. I have never bought this item and I have no idea what I need. I flagged down an associate and I explained that I have a small lawn, and that the grass is hard to cut near the fence, and that I did not want to spend too much money. So this associate points me to the high end trimmers, starting at \$100. And then he says to me: "well, you said you

wanted to cut your shrubs.” Huh? I said NOTHING about shrubs since I don’t have shrubs. Clearly, this associate was not listening. He was also not very qualified to talk about edgers, but that is a different story.

If you don’t listen, you are not going to “get” the story, whatever it may be.

The other side of the communications equation is **saying what you mean**. Lots of people (and organizations) say what they think the other person (or their target audience) wants to hear. Saying what you mean is not burying things in fine print or in if-thens. **Be clear! And please, be sincere.** People can tell when you are not saying what you mean. And then they don’t trust you.

Mattress stores don’t say what they mean

A great example of communications that don’t say what they mean is mattress store advertisements. Having just gone through mattress shopping, I can tell you, just ignore the ads. They are designed to entice you into the store. Once you are in the store, you find out the real deal. Generally in the world of mattress sales, the enticement is free something or the other (free box spring, free delivery, free set-up, free TV, etc.). The reality is that the pricing is structured so that you can’t compare it to other stores, and there are caveats. If you get a mattress priced over \$X, then you get free delivery. If you want to price match, we have to make sure it is the same mattress (and since mattresses are made specifically for each store, there is no exact same name). If you want us to remove your old bed, then we charge you a fee. If you want the ten-year warranty, then you have to buy our overpriced mattress cover. And on and on.

No clarity. No saying what they mean. Making people distrust what you are saying. That is not communications!

It is about effective communications. Effective means that

something is successful in achieving the intended result. If you are intending to sell mattresses or edgers or any product, service or opinion, you should both listen and say what you mean.

How to write your blog workshop

What are you doing on May 17? Why not sign up for my How to write your blog workshop? You will learn how to make your blog more effective, how to come up with blog post ideas and lots of other good stuff. Details and registration [here](#).

Are you being coy?

Someone I know posted this update on Facebook:

“A real game of yuck this week.”

Who knows what she meant. I am sure you have seen similar coy or opaque statements that just beg followers to ask for more information. And that is what the poster wants...you to ask for details. This may or may not be a good tactic to get attention on Facebook. It certainly is a bad tactic to use if you are trying to get attention in your email marketing, your blog posts, and other marketing content.

Say you have an email newsletter you send to your clients. You write:

Spring is a lovely time of year. Good things happen in the spring, it is a time of renewal. Tulips are blooming and spring sales are everywhere.

Unless you want to get people upset at your opaqueness, there is little use for being coy in marketing communication. Instead, you should know what you want and ask for it. Instead of rhapsodizing about spring in your newsletter, why not figure out what action you want your target audience to take (this is your **call to action**, in marketing terms). Don't make your audience guess. Tell them, clearly and precisely. Here are a few examples:

- Spring means renewal! Time to renew your subscription to our newsletter
- Spring classes are starting. Here is how to enroll in our next class.
- Spring sales are on! Check out the reduced prices on our newest product

These are all **specific actions** you want your audience to take.

Are you being coy in your communications? Why not start being direct and asking for what you want?!

How to blog workshop on May 17

Sign up today to get your early registration discount to my next How to Blog workshop taking place on May 17. For more details and to register visit howtowriteyourblog4.eventbrite.com .

What you can learn from John

McCain

Do you watch Meet the Press? If so, you have probably noticed that Senator John McCain has been a frequent guest. He's also been on the other Sunday shows like Face the Nation. According to The Washington Monthly, as of 2009, McCain had been on Meet the Press 54 times. Since then, I would say he has been on many more times, making that number 60 or larger.

Other people appear quite frequently too. In fact, based on Sunday show appearances, you would be excused for thinking there are only about 10 senators in the U.S. Senate. Other frequent guests are Senators Lindsey Graham, Chuck Schumer and Dick Durbin. (As an aside, it seems that male senators appear more frequently than female senators...). Back in the 90s, when I first started watching Meet the Press with Tim Russert, the go-to senator was the Senator Orrin Hatch. In fact, I stopped watching MTP because it seemed like Sen. Hatch was always on!

Is John McCain a more important senator than the other 99? No. What he may be is more media savvy. And he is a proven commodity. The Sunday shows know they can count on McCain for making strong pronouncements or taking controversial views.



Sen. John McCain (photo by Medill DC on

Flickr)

There's a few PR lessons you can learn from John McCain.

1) Be the go-to person on your areas of expertise (McCain's areas are mostly immigration, foreign policy and defense). Some may say this is being a "thought leader."

2) Make yourself available and say yes to invitations. (My guess is that MTP knows that it can get McCain pretty much any time.) If you turn down an interview, the producer will simply go on to the next person on the list.

3) Have clearly defined, strong messages and/or positions. (MTP knows what it will get when it books McCain.)

4) Once you are in, you are in. (McCain does not have to prove anything or do much to get invited on the shows.)

What do you take away from McCain's frequent appearance?

Check out my guest post at Fletcher Prince's blog

Honored to be featured on the Fletcher Prince blog, discussing business cards as a budget marketing tactic.

Have you looked at your business card lately?

Social media intelligence is an essential skill

You have probably heard of Emotional Intelligence (EI), which is defined as the ability to perceive, evaluate and control emotions. EI is the ability to figure out how to respond appropriately to a situation. There are people that rank low on the EI scale—they lack empathy or social skills. They may laugh inappropriately or not seem saddened by a tragic moment. And there are those who have high EI and are very adept at navigating human interactions.

Yesterday's attack on the Boston Marathon got me thinking about a variation of EI—what I am terming **social media intelligence**. The news was just awful, and coming out in dribs and drabs. On Twitter, there was a ton of (mis)information. There was one bomb, then there were three. Was it domestic terrorism or did this have the hallmarks of Al Qaeda? Wild speculation abounded.

The people who have social media intelligence were the ones had reasonable responses and tweets. Some asked people to check their sources before tweeting and some asked others to refrain from posting exceedingly graphic images.

Those with **low social media intelligence are the people that appear unaware how their communications affect their followers** and who were busy re-tweeting thoughtlessly, spreading rumors and even engaging in fear-mongering.

Another variation of low social media intelligence was being unaware that a big news event was happening and tweeting/posting about mundane, unrelated stuff. Unfortunately some of these are communications folks who have automated posts to send out press releases and other announcements. There is little that is as jarring as reading about an

upcoming event (join us for a spectacular fun-filled evening!) when simultaneously finding out that the nation's oldest marathon has been targeted by terror. Some people (those with higher social media intelligence) called out this behavior.

Whether EI is learned or you are born with it is an open question. Social media intelligence on the other hand, can most certainly be learned. In fact, in today's social media fueled information age, having this type of intelligence is an essential skill. Here are a few guidelines:

- Be aware of what is going on and act accordingly. Don't post without checking your feeds.
- Don't assume that everything you see on social media is true and deserving of re-posting. Double-check facts and sources.
- Every social media network is different—post accordingly. Perhaps your personal trials and tribulations are best left to Facebook and taken off LinkedIn.
- Remember that people can see your posts both in real-time and in the future.
- Discussions on social media are not all about you. Remember the social in social media.

What would you add? What makes someone have social media intelligence? What are examples of lacking or having social media intelligence?

Is your message reaching the right person?

This past week, I got four or five calls/messages from a guy at a car dealership saying he had the information I requested. Trouble is, I didn't request the information. The guy most likely had the wrong phone number. His message was not reaching the right person.

If you want to communicate a message, you have to make sure that you are reaching your target audience, whether it is a one-to-one interaction or a specific demographic group.

What can we learn from the dealership guy?

First, get the details and information that you need. In this case, the dealership guy had the wrong phone number. If you want to communicate with any audience, it is important that you know where they are and how to reach them.

Second, if you aren't getting a response, check why. This guy left me four messages. The fact that I wasn't getting back to him did not seem to trigger the realization that he was calling the wrong person. For marketing communications, you may want to check the reach of the channel you are using, or whether the message is appropriate to your target audience.

Third, pay attention! If the dealership guy had bothered to pay attention to my voice mail message he might have realized he was calling the wrong person. Many marketers are, like him, going through the motions. If the playbook says, contact someone three times or run an ad for a month, that is what these inattentive marketers are doing, regardless of effectiveness.

Are you sure your message is getting through to your intended target audience?

