

Just because you are doing the hiring doesn't mean you don't have to market yourself

Have you ever been to a job interview where you are not encouraged to ask questions? Have you been offered a job where you don't ask about benefits, salary or vacation/sick day policy? I would bet that if you went to a job interview and you did not meet who you would be working for, and where, and if the interviewer did not tell you a bit about the hiring organization, you would be a bit hesitant about it being a good fit for you.

Some organizations seem to believe that if they are deigning to hire someone—be it an employee or a consultant or an agency or any type of service—they don't need to market themselves. Potential hires should just be excited that someone is offering to consider them or their services.

Companies that care about providing a good work environment are proud to let the world know about it. They even use it as a differentiator. You have probably seen organizations that tout that they were selected as a top employer for working moms, or most socially responsible organization and so forth.

There are many organizations out there, and if you are in marketing, you must differentiate yourself from everyone else. Even if you are “just hiring.”

Yesterday, I got the following email (identity is concealed):

Subject: What type of work do you do?

Body: Just starting the process to see if we want to bring in a firm as a consultant on several projects. What type of work does your firm do? Who/what are your clients?

[name]

Marketing Manager

[COMPANY NAME]

[phone/fax/email/address]

This marketing manager is not managing to market herself at all. What does her company do? What types of projects is she interested in? Why would I want to answer her? (Not to mention that you can find answers to all these questions right here on my website.)

Marketing is about making an impression. Even if you are doing the hiring does not mean you don't have to impress your potential hiree about what a good/special/professional company you are. Perhaps you are known for paying well, or paying on time, or being responsive, or having employees that have been there for decades. Whatever it is, it is what makes your organization special and different from other organizations.

Did you watch the Oscars?

Last night, I watched part of the Academy Awards (or Oscars to most everyone on the planet). I did not watch it all. And what I did watch, I didn't enjoy.

It seems quite ironic that the night meant to celebrating the best in film ENTERTAINMENT, is so un-entertaining. The jokes were not funny, the audio was off (some weird feedback on the microphones), the show was too long. Some speakers were cut off, and Billy Crystal, the host, seemed caught in some time

warp.

Perhaps it is because Hollywood is out of touch (seriously, how many people in this economy could even afford a designer gown?). Or perhaps it is because the Academy is completely not representative of the population (it is mostly male, mostly white, mostly old, as the LA Times reported).

With each passing year it seems that the red carpet pre-show, where the attendees show off what they are wearing, becomes what more people want to watch than the actual awards.

So, did YOU watch the Oscars? If so, what did you think?

The weekly communications #fail: rebranding gone wrong

Yesterday, as I was reading The Washington Post, I came across this item, regarding a makeover for a Silver Spring, MD bar.

The bar, formerly known as Piratz Tavern, was targeted by Spike TV to be redone. Apparently, the bar's sales had been slumping and the owners appealed to the "Bar Rescue" show. Piratz had a pirate theme—the waitstaff dressed up as pirates, there was rum, and "pirate-themed" food. The decor was pirate-casual (you know, skulls on the wall-like).

In comes the Bar Rescue staff and Piratz Tavern becomes, are you ready for this? Corporate Bar and Grill, serving gourmet burgers to executives not interested in being pretend pirates.

Corporate Bar and Grill? Seriously? Could they have chosen a more generic name? A more generic menu? I am not a betting person, but I would bet that this won't result in higher

earnings, except if they are charging much more for these executive burgers.

Perhaps what Piratz needed was not a complete rebranding to become a generic grill, but instead, an effective way to market a quirky spot that is a bit out of the way for foot traffic. If foot traffic was the issue before, it will still be an issue now, regardless of whether the food is better.

If you have something different, I think you should exploit it. Becoming just like everyone else is rarely a way to get ahead of the crowd. Becoming more generic is this week's communications #fail.

ATT's not so special offer—a marketing #fail

ATT sent me a “special customer offer.” The letter giving me notification of this “special offer” starts like this:

Dear Deborah Brody,

You've been such a great customer, you deserve something special from us.

*That's why I'm offering you a **FREE Android Smartphone** when you activate an additional line of service with a new two-year voice agreement with qualifying monthly data plan required per phone.*

To recap, ATT will show its appreciation for my business by giving me a “free” phone, which will require me to subscribe to more services and pay more per month and only if I activate

a second line.

Basically, they are offering me nothing.

The thing is, I don't need a second line of service.

I have gotten this same offer over and over and over again. Never once have I gotten an offer for a phone upgrade without ATT requiring a second line activation.

This offer is all about ATT and not at all about me. It is not even remotely tailored to the customer's needs.

ATT finishes its letter to me by saying:

Don't think twice about this one, Deborah. Call today [phone number] and get it all.

I don't have to think about this at all. I know it is not an offer for me.

ATT, your marketing is a big, fat #FAIL.

The weekly communications #fail

Every day I see something in the communications world that either irks me, peeves me or just plain amazes me, and not in a good way. There's so much that I am making it a weekly rant on the blog.

This week's communication fail has to do with sharing... social

sharing that is...and how hard it can be to do.

The communications failure for February 17th: Sharing done wrong.

Here's what I have encountered this week:

- **No sharing buttons whatsoever on a blog or major news site.** (In fact, I found no sharing buttons on a post about how to communicate effectively, I am not kidding.) This needs to stop. If you have a blog, you have to include the ability to share.
- **Sharing buttons that share the name of the blog but not the name of the post.** Why would I share something called say, Deb's blog and a URL and expect people to read it? If it said something like "Why sharing buttons are crucial" on Deb's blog, then yes.
- **Sharing buttons that share the name of the post but not of the author.** It's about giving credit where credit is due. There are so many sharing buttons out there, it's hard to find the right one.

If you are a blogger, do yourself a favor: check your sharing buttons right now.

First, have a message

In an op-ed piece in today's Washington Post, Eugene Robinson argues that Mitt Romney, erstwhile front-runner for the GOP

presidential nomination, lacks a message. Robinson writes:

Criticism of Mitt Romney for lacking a coherent message is grossly unfair. He has been forthright, consistent and even eloquent in pressing home his campaign's central theme: Mitt Romney desperately wants to be president.

He goes on to say, that in spite having many differences of opinion with the Obama administration, Romney hasn't articulated an overall message. Robinson expresses it like this:

My point is that even Romney's sharp disagreements with Obama's policies don't add up to a philosophy or a vision. They're more like what stuck after a bunch of random tough-sounding positions were thrown at the wall.

What are you fighting for?

It is not enough to be *against* something. You have to be *for* something. You have to stand for something that makes it clear who you are and what you will do. This is true for all politicians, nonprofits and even businesses.

Imagine if Coke were just the anti-Pepsi. That would not be enough. Instead, "Coke is it," Coke is the "real thing," Coke likes polar bears. You get my drift.

Having a positive (in that it not an "against" message) central unifying message cannot be underestimated. In fact, if the GOP loses in November it will be because the party has failed to articulate something other than they are against Obama.

Romney, and any other politician, would do well to take a step back and figure out what it is he wants to say, really. In his case, he needs to articulate better why his position (and the GOP's) is better for the economy, in positive terms. What

exactly does Romney think the problem is, and more importantly, what is the solution.

Did Komen know much about its supporters?

Given the tremendous amount of negative press, critical comments and social media outrage regarding Susan G. Komen for the Cure Foundation's decision to stop funding Planned Parenthood, we may be able to conclude that there is a rather large disconnect between the foundation's leadership/decision makers and its donor/support base. In fact, the decision has been received so poorly that it points to a top down decision-making approach that seems wholly ignorant of what supporters want.

It is an axiom of marketing (and of fund-raising) that you should understand and know your target audience. How can you market (or raise funds from) people you don't know? This is why marketers often use focus groups, surveys and other methods to determine just who makes up the customer/client/donor base.

I participated in the Komen Race for the Cure for two years. I am not sure if I ever got a survey from Komen. I did get tons of emails selling me Komen merchandise, which is why I unsubscribed and stopped supporting the organization.

Of course hindsight is always 20/20 but I believe that if Komen had done more to understand who supports the foundation and why, it may have avoided taking this decision and the huge firestorm of bad publicity that has followed. Perhaps every time someone gives a donation or signs up for a race, Komen (or any other nonprofit), could send out a quick survey. In Komen's specific case it could have been as simple as a question asking:

Which of our programs do you feel has the most value? (along with a checklist).

Perhaps if Komen had been aware that many people think Planned Parenthood provides good services, it would not have been so quick to pull funding and so ignorant about the potential outcry.

There are multiple lessons to be learned from the Komen debacle (PR and crisis communications matter, for one), none the least of is: **KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE** (customers, clients, donors, supporters)... and remember you work for them, and not the other way around.

Have you signed up to get my enewsletter? All you have to do is enter your name and email address on the upper right hand side of this page. Your name/email will not be shared.

When ego and attitude derail your marketing efforts

Personality matters in marketing, especially if you are marketing yourself. Personality affects the tone of your marketing efforts, and in the case of ego, what you highlight

and what you don't.

Since personality and ego are well, personal, we often don't discuss them as part of our communications strategy. But we should. Having a bad attitude or an insufferably big ego can and will derail marketing and communications efforts.

What do I mean? Perhaps by now you have heard of the fracas that has ensued from the Susan G. Komen for the Cure Foundation's decision to defund Planned Parenthood. I am not going to discuss the politics of it, but I will discuss the communications aspect of it. Komen did not handle communications well at all. Planned Parenthood actually took the news and made it into a fundraising point, while Komen was silent. Not even answering calls from the news media (they provided no comment to CBS Evening News for example). Komen has also been deleting negative comments from its Facebook page.

It seems as though Komen did not anticipate or prepare for the backlash of this decision, and therefore has allowed its critics to transform the message (Komen is playing politics with women's lives). Why? In my opinion, Komen is a victim of big ego. Komen seems to believe that because it is such a large, and up to now, well respected, organization, that its donors will support whatever it does. But Komen miscalculated. Komen allowed ego to get in the way of having a smart communications strategy that would explain its decision, defend it and keep supporters happy.

It is important to remember that companies and organizations are run by individuals, who have attitudes and personalities that influence how they act.

On an individual level, attitude is even more important when marketing. Last week, I attended an alumni event for my graduate school institution. As I was sitting and eating my appetizers, I saw a guy whom I recognized as an alum of my

undergraduate institution.

Me: "Didn't you go to [name of school]?"

Him: "Yes."

Me: "I thought I recognized you."

Him: [no comment]

Then I noticed that the other woman at the table had graduated from law school the same year as this guy (both had name tags with the name of the school and grad year). I pointed it out to both of them. She immediately tried to figure out if there was any connection. He didn't. As we continued this increasingly painful exchange, I asked him what law firm he works for. It turns out he is looking for a job in government and is doing tax preparation in the meantime.

If he had a better attitude, perhaps I would try to see if I know of any resources for him. But instead this man has a tremendously bad attitude, left a bad impression and apparently does not understand what networking is and what it can do for you.

Your attitude matters because it determines how people react to you. If you have ever worked at a large organization with people at its helm that have big egos and/or bad attitudes, you know this impacts how the organization communicates and markets itself. It could be that the CEO/President is a narcissist and thinks that all press releases should quote him/her. It could be that the VP of Communications shuts down any creative idea if it differs from his/her own. And so forth.

Next time you have a marketing/communications failure, check to see if attitude, personality or ego had anything to do with it.

Have you signed up for the DBMC newsletter yet? First edition

of the year is coming out next week. Sign up box is on the upper right hand side of this page.

Show and tell

Show *and* tell. Sure you can just show, or you can just tell, but believe me, doing both will be more effective. I promise.

What makes me even write about this? Well, it turns out I am in the market for some dining room furniture, and have been looking through Craigslist to see if I can find anything appropriate and within budget. In any case, I have come across a great many postings that say something like this:

Like new dining room set with 6 chairs, extension leaf. Contemporary style.

But there is no picture. No picture for me to see if I like the style or the color or anything. You have to have a picture if you want to sell a dining room set...or anything else that people buy based on looks!

Tell, and show.

Showing alone doesn't do the trick either. Some people (and many of these are marketers who paid lots and lots of money for a fine looking website/brochure/advertisement) think fancy graphics and beautiful design will compensate for a lack of content.

No. No. No.

A potential client was telling me she was looking for "sexy"

copy to relaunch her website. I asked her if she could point to websites in her field that she deemed to be “sexy.” She sent me to a much more attractive website than hers. But guess what, the content was just as deadly dull and meaningless as hers. It just looked better (ok, much better).

Show, and tell.

Pretty but empty does not sell your product or service. People need information—both visual and intellectual—to make a buying decision.

How do you find vendors (or employees)?

Inbound marketing vs. outbound marketing—which is better?

Clearly, if you are a business looking for customers, inbound marketing, where people come to you, is better. If potential customers find you, without you having to go out to find them, means something is attracting them to your offering.

Outbound marketing is where you are spending time and money to find prospective customers who are not otherwise attracted to your offering. It is harder and more costly.

Lately, I have seen a variation of inbound marketing, which is the attempt by businesses to find vendors (not customers) by asking people to apply for the job. Similarly, some employers find employees by advertising a position and accepting resumes for it, which often results in receiving an overwhelming amount of resumes where a high percentage of the applicants are not suited for the job. This is why some employers hire

headhunters, who search for someone fulfilling the exact qualifications the employer is looking for.

Today I came across this posting:

I am launching a small site for my new business and I am in need of a copywriter to polish the content on the site.

It is a small project about 5 pages tops.

If you're interested please send me a description of your experience, contact information, and your hourly rate.

No resumes please. Convince me.

When I saw this, I was intrigued at first and considered "applying." Then, on second thought, I asked myself why this person would put up a posting like this. First of all, she describes it as a small project. This is probably code for low-budget. And then, that last sentence: Convince me. She is looking for someone to blow her away. It doesn't look like a promising situation because it seems this person is looking for someone to write amazing copy at a cut rate price, which may be good for her but not very good for me.

Is this how you find vendors? I don't. I have found vendors by using several ways:

- Asking trusted sources
- Searching for vendors who do what I need (for example, doing a Google search of flooring sales in Rockville)
- Using ratings websites like Angie's List

In this way, I am in control of the vendors I contact. And for the vendors, it is inbound marketing, which is more efficient.

What do you say? If you are a vendor, do you (should you) respond to these queries? If you are looking for a vendor, is this the best way to go?

