

Give them a reason to care

My last post suggested you have a strong subject line in your email, especially when you are reaching out to potential clients. You have to give them a reason to care.

This advice extends to your Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook posts and your marketing in general. If you are trying to get people to do something (read your post, buy your product/service, donate), you **MUST** give those people a reason to care. You can't just say "look at me."

First, ask yourself what you want your potential client or customer to do. Then ask yourself, what would make the potential client/customer interested in doing what I ask?

So instead of saying: Donate \$\$ to Good Cause X say Donate \$\$ to Good Cause so we can help feed the starving in your city. Or be more creative: Hundreds are suffering from malnutrition—giving to Good Cause will help.

Are your emails getting read?

Email marketing is alive and well, in spite of all the doomsayers who say email is dead. Most people use email to communicate, and generally check their email multiple times a day.

We all get tons of emails—notifications, calendar events, special discounts, sales pitches and perhaps a few personal notes too. What makes you open (let alone read) an email. There are a few scenarios:

Known sender: We'll open something if we know who is sending it (your aunt Karen or Groupon, for example) Of course, spammers have exploited this to their advantage by fabricating the sent address.

Subject line: We'll open something if it sounds relevant or interesting, like "Special Event to Benefit (name of charity you care about) Next Week).

Ideally, your emails should have both to ENSURE the are opened. If you don't have one, you have to work on the other. Your mother can send you an email with the subject line "Hi," but if you are someone the recipient does not know your subject line MUST be descriptive.

I received an email this morning from someone I do not know, which had the subject line "meeting request." Why should I open that? I don't know the person sending it and the subject tells me nothing. If this person had been more descriptive and said "(Company name) requesting meeting to discuss (product/service/whatever)" wouldn't that have made it clear what the email was about?

Think about your readers...do they know you well enough to care about your emails? If not, give them a good reason!

UPDATE: Check out this infographic about email, which provides some good facts/figures including the fact that email continues to GROW.

Bad news for newspapers

How long until we don't have printed newspapers any more? Ten years? Five? Fewer? I am not sure but a look at some headlines on today's Mediabistro.com home page give us some clues:

LA Times to raise newsstand price (new cost will be 75 cents for daily)

Washington Post to shut all regional bureaus (except for Richmond and Annapolis, because of the local angle needs)

Oakland, CA loses its daily newspaper (joining several other cities in the same situation)

And most ominous of all:

Newspaper Ad Spending Down 7% in 2Q

The trend is clear: fewer people are buying newspapers, and fewer readers means less enticement for advertisers, which means less ad revenue. With less per-issue/subscription revenue and ad revenue, newspapers are increasing prices to subscribers/single-issue buyers or shutting down altogether. Some, like the New York Times, are embracing the online world and charging for access. I think this (unfortunately) is where all newspapers that want to remain viable will head. But then, what will they be called?

Let me know what you think. If you are heading out for a nice long weekend, enjoy! Happy Labor Day to all!

Getting your facts straight

If you need to do anything when preparing any type of communications (printed, online, even spoken), you need to get your facts straight.

Seems fairly obvious, but as usual, it escapes many.

Let me give you an example. Last week I received a check from a foreign bank, drawn from a U.S. dollar account. I have received these before (I do have clients in other countries). I went to Bank of America to deposit it. I was told that it would take up to four months to clear. FOUR months. (This was after lots of back and forth with a clueless teller and her remarkably unfriendly supervisor). I told them time and again that this was a US DOLLAR check—no exchange rate necessary. It didn't matter—they thought they had their facts straight, and did not leave me any option but to take the check elsewhere.

I went to my other bank. They were MUCH friendlier there, and seemed to understand what I was saying. They went ahead and deposited the check, warning that it would take up to six weeks to clear. And that I would be charged a fee. Because of the exchange rate. But, I said, this is a check drawn in US DOLLARS. There should be no exchange of any sort. Bottom line, the check cleared immediately. I have not yet been charged a fee. Seems like the bank teller and her supervisor at the second bank did not have their facts straight.

You have to know what you are talking about plain and simple. Sure you can make mistakes or have to ask someone if you don't know, but it is inexcusable to give customers/potential customers the wrong information.

Get your facts straight before you put anything out there!

Finding a vendor

How do you find a vendor? It is important to know this because it can inform marketing. Depending on what I am looking for, I used Google, LinkedIn, listing services, reviews or Twitter. I am sure you use other tools (and would appreciate your insights in the comments).

For example, yesterday I was searching for a freelance editor. I used Google, and found (remarkably) few individuals had websites, whether I searched for “DC freelance editor” or “Maryland freelance editor.” I did find a couple, and one of them, had a very nice website and clearly defined rates. I searched for her on LinkedIn, and discovered that her background was very technical—no editorial. Made me think twice about her skill set. Another one had very strong writing credentials, but absolutely no social media (and she explained she is not into it). It made me question whether she gets it. I also Tweeted it out, and got a response from a colleague (good word of mouth). But, no freelance editors even picked up on it. Obviously, not using Twitter search to find business.

Tool: Google

Marketing lesson: Websites are important. Google profiles are helpful. If you are in an industry that is reviewed, having positive reviews is important since Google finds results from Yelp and others.

Tool: LinkedIn

Marketing lesson: If you aren't on LinkedIn, you are at a disadvantage. The quality of your profile (both for individuals and companies) is important. For individuals, testimonials, number of connections and your background do matter. Don't make stuff up, but bone up what is there.

Tool: Twitter (or other social media sites)

Marketing lesson: How you present yourself, and even if you are on social media, says a lot. What does your Twitter profile, stream, followers say about your business or you?

Tool: Printed materials (brochures, business cards, etc.)

Marketing lesson: How your marketing materials look (are they printed on quality stock, are they black/white or color, do they look professionally designed), can give an immediate impression. How your marketing materials read—what information you provide—can seal the deal.

Tool: Using the telephone

Marketing lesson: Are you reachable? How do you/your company answer the phone? Do you even answer the phone? Some people will want to talk to someone in real time.

Tool: Word of mouth

Marketing lesson: Each and every customer who has a positive interaction with you can be an ambassador, and each and every customer who has a negative impression can be a detractor. Watch your customer interactions. Improve your customer service.

The bottom line is that if you are marketing yourself/your company, you have to understand how people find you, and how they decide whether to contact you or not.

Your thoughts? What makes you decide on a vendor? How do you find a vendor?

Do you have an internal communications program?

Many companies devote almost all of their communications/marketing resources to EXTERNAL communications, that is, the customer facing communications like ads, press releases, and so forth. It seems like far fewer companies take the time to invest in INTERNAL communications.

Internal communications are the information exchanges you have with your internal audiences: your staff, board of directors, volunteers and any other group internally affiliated with your organization. Many companies communicate company news to employees via internal email or a staff meeting. There is nothing wrong with that, but perhaps you could do more.

An internal communications program should be:

Timely. Your staff should never find out about a company decision from outside sources.

Complete. Provide all the necessary details—more than you would provide the media.

Regular. Even if you have no major announcements, you should communicate with your internal audiences on a regular basis.

What kind of information should you share? Here are some ideas:

- Staff changes and promotions—including dismissals

- Company earnings and market reports
- Competitive information
- Any external communications: press releases, ads, blog posts
- News reports on your organization
- News reports on your field
- Calendar events
- Policies—including any changes

When your internal audiences know less about your organization than the general public you risk a downgrade in morale. Having a good internal communications program will keep your internal audiences informed.

If you do have an internal communications program, what is your preferred form of communication? If not, why not?

A tagline that works

Taglines can help or hamper your marketing efforts. They must be clear and relevant. A few nights ago, I was watching TV and saw the following commercial for Red Lobster:

[youtube
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ySl03vqdKNQ&w=560&h=349>]

The last line is: “I see food differently.” The tagline for this campaign is **Sea Food Differently**. I think this is tagline writing at its best: clever, play on words, and RELEVANT. They are saying that Red Lobster does seafood differently (presumably better) than other restaurants.

Perfect.

Compare that to Salonpas. Salonpas, which has a completely weird name that makes me think of a hair salon, is a pain relief patch. They are running this spot on TV right now:

[youtube
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eX4WVN4YN0Q&w=560&h=349>]

The tagline is: "Nothing's been proven to beat the relief."

What does that mean? It is saying that nothing is proven to provide relief—which, I am pretty sure, is not the message they intended.

Some taglines make you scratch your head, some don't make you think at all, and some, the ones that work, make you think.

Just because its on the computer doesn't mean you can't act human

Be warned: this is a rant.

Lately, I have been getting followed and unfollowed on Twitter by a guy who has a networking group here in DC. He happens to have many Twitter handles (and a surprising number of followers). He has used at least five different handles to follow me, and then, I take it because I haven't followed back, he unfollows me. Is this a good way to get me to follow him? NO!!!

Say this interaction was taking place on the phone instead of

on Twitter. It would go like this: He would call from his cell phone, and hang up once I answered. Then he would call from his office line, and hang up again. And so forth. This would be very annoying, and bordering on perverted behavior (if there were any heavy breathing involved).

If he actually wanted to talk to me, he might call and say "Hello, I really think you have some great ideas to share, and I would like to talk to you some more." But apparently, he is either unaware of how to behave like a human, or is just interested in numbers.

There is no great mystery to getting Twitter followers: it is simply about behaving courteously and human. That is, showing interest, re-tweeting content to show support and giving credit, and INTERACTING.

Why do so many people forget they are dealing with other people on the Internet? You would not walk into a store and yell obscenities, for instance. And yet people do this on Twitter as a matter of course.

A computer is just a tool. It need humans to run it.

Are you ready for prime time?

Here's something to think about: you can start marketing too early. Sometimes, you aren't ready for prime time, as they say.

Last week, I attended a networking event. There, I met two

self-employed event planners. They were both very pleasant and seemed knowledgeable about the ins and outs of event planning. Both gave me their business cards. As I always do when I get back from this type of event, I went to their websites. At least, I tried to go to their websites. Neither website was up—one was “under construction” and the other was a placeholder from the domain registrar. Although both ladies had nice (professionally designed and printed) cards, they skipped a step. You should always have your website up before you hand out cards with the URL—even if it is a one page describing your business and providing contact info.

Later on in the evening, I met two women who are planning to open a yoga studio. They did not have cards, and they told me their website was under construction. For the life of me, I can't remember the name of the studio. One of the yogis told me they are considering doing a Groupon...the week they open. I told her that that I would not advise that since she wouldn't even have worked out any kinks.

Here is an article from USA Today about Groupon (Is Groupon a great idea for entrepreneurs?) Among the cons of using Groupon is that if you are not ready for the onslaught of business, you will end up turning away customers. Say the yogis get 40 people signed up, but the studio only holds 30, or their computer system has a bug and can't register new customers? Then those potential customers are going to be disappointed and chances are, won't be coming back (there are plenty of other yoga studios in the area).

The bottom line is that before you start any type of marketing, whether it be in-person networking or a traditional advertising/media campaign, you need to be ready for business. This means having your website up and running and all your business tools in order (e.g. invoicing, computer systems, ordering, etc.) People have limited time and resources and they will often not give you a second chance. Or they will forget about you. Or they will think you are an amateur.

Not only should you be ready for prime time before you start marketing, you should be ready for business.

Bad habits or perception busters?

This morning on Yahoo.com there was an article about habits that can hold you back, which got me thinking about the things people do, perhaps unconsciously, perhaps subconsciously, that affect how they are perceived by others and that hold them back career-wise. Some of these habits are particular pet peeves of mine, which certainly have changed the way I perceive someone.

Not answering direct emails: It makes it seem as though you don't care enough about the sender to answer. If you work at an agency or for yourself, it is an absolute disaster not to answer client's emails. If you are a client, and you don't answer your email, you are making it very hard for the agency/representative to do its job on your behalf.

Not saying thank you: I have written about this before, but when someone does something for you just say thanks! A few months ago, I took out a couple hours of my day to meet with some people who were looking for advice. I did my best to listen and give suggestions. To this day, I have not received a solitary note of thanks. It makes me think that neither my time nor my input were in anyway valuable to them.

Not doing what you promised: If you say you are going to get something by the end of the day, or that you will take on a project and then not do it, you are failing to keep your promises. This makes you seem unreliable, and uncaring. Last

year, while working on a group project, one of the group members offered to complete a good chunk of the project. She never did. And she didn't provide a reason, an excuse or even any further words about it. I would never work with her again. And I made sure that other people knew she dropped the ball.

Being habitually late: The article on Yahoo ([link above](#)) says this is a surefire sign of something going on...you resent having your time held hostage to someone else's schedule. To me, it shows a deep disrespect and makes me perceive you as unreliable. Enough said.

Never following up: This is a mistake that happens frequently. In the past few weeks, I have been getting estimates to get a fence built. So far, I have received four estimates. Guess how many follow up calls I have had to see if I am interested in moving ahead? None. Not one call. And you wonder why people don't get business...they don't even try to get it.

Not remembering/always forgetting: This is a catch-all, but it covers things such as always forgetting you have met someone before, forgetting to do something, not remembering names, not remembering crucial details, etc. If you have a bad memory, get an aid of some sort like a calendar or a smart phone.

The thing is some of these may just be annoyances and people will overlook them. But do some of them enough and it will affect how you are perceived. The flip side is that these are easy to fix and if you are aware that you are doing them you can change your ways. Have you recently lost a client? Did any of these play a part? Have you been overlooked for a job or a promotion? Are any of these habits yours?