

Doesn't everybody?

Some people think that books, magazines and newspapers are dead. Borders, the bookstore chain recently in bankruptcy, is closing down all its stores. If you walk into a Barnes and Noble, the display for the Nook (their e-reader), has taken over the entrance. All around it *seems* that *everybody* is using tablets and e-readers to read books and magazine and that *nobody* is reading the printed on paper stuff anymore. But, that would be wrong.

Did you know that only 12% of U.S. adults own an e-reader (like a Kindle, Nook, etc.)? Or that 35% of U.S. adults own a smart phone (Iphone, Blackberry, etc.)? Given how the media reports things, and if you are surrounded by folks who are early adopters, then you could be excused for thinking the number was much much higher—like 99%.

The truth is that not everybody is on the smart phone/e-reader/all-computer-all-the-time bandwagon. The numbers above mean that nearly two thirds of adults in the US do NOT use a smart phone, and nearly 90% do not have an e-reader. This indicates to me that many many people out there are still consuming media in more “traditional” ways—like in a printed format. Or perhaps are relying on television and radio.

It is a wrong (and dangerous) assumption to think that “everybody is doing it.” They are not. Unless it is breathing, not ever human being out there is doing (or thinking) the same thing as you are.

Last week, I attended a presentation purportedly about YouTube. In effect, it was about stuff you could do if you wanted to get together a video to promote your company (it was not a very in-depth or insightful presentation). One thing that the presenter asked was whether people in the room knew what QR codes are. I turned to a colleague sitting beside me

and asked “who doesn’t?” It turns out that most in the room (all communicators I may add) had no idea. Because I know what a QR code is (a quick response code that has become ubiquitous on print ads everywhere, and which when scanned takes you to a website), and I see them everywhere, I assumed everyone else did too. Clearly, I was wrong.

You can’t assume that everybody knows something. In communications, making assumptions can be detrimental to making your message clear.

And yet, people using the above-mentioned QR codes in their ads are assuming that people know what they are! And also, they are assuming that people have a smart phone that they will use to scan the QR code. But if we go with the fact that 35% of people have a smart phone, and from my unscientific survey, even fewer know what a QR code is, then you are probably reaching somewhere south of 30% of people by using those codes. Think about that.

Getting more readers and getting unfollowed

Check out my guest blog post at the Downtown Women’s Club blog: 5 ways to get more readers to your blog. Hint: it has to do with being consistent and getting the word out. Special thanks to Diane Danielson for giving me the opportunity!

On social media and blogs, we are all trying to get more

readers and more followers. If we are in business or marketing, we are also trying to convert some followers/readers/likers into customers. Right?

Lately, I have been cleaning up Twitter, LinkedIn and Facebook. Basically, I have been reducing the numbers of people that I follow or am connected to. Let me tell you why.

It's personal

On Facebook, which I consider a personal network, I have been "unfriending" anyone that I don't know very well, or only know through business encounters. I tend to share my personal views and activities and really, would rather have fewer "friends" on Facebook than thousands of people with insight into my personal life.

It's business

On LinkedIn, I have removed a few connections because I just don't know enough about them. LinkedIn is a business network, and when you connect with someone, you have access to his/her connections. I want to be more careful with this network and not give away my hard-earned connections to people who are just trying to expand their own networks with little regard for what I do.

It's common sense

I have been unfollowing lots of people on Twitter lately. Why? Because there is only so much time in the day, and there are so many tweets that I want to make sure to follow folks who are offering stuff that is relevant and/or interesting. I am on Twitter to share and to learn, but I don't need to learn about what you did at the gym or whether your cat is at the vet. On Twitter, I definitely stopped following anybody who:

- Self promotes endlessly
- Uses crass expressions/language ALWAYS

- Doesn't ever share anything valuable (as defined by me)
- Seems to be in a quest to get the most tweets per day ever
- Who never ever interacts with me or re-tweets or even acknowledges my re-tweets (unless the person in question is a journalist/politician/world leader)

So yes, we are all trying to get more followers and to do that, you need to be aware of what gets you unfollowed.

Your thoughts?

More ways to make people dislike your company

It is the marketing kiss of death when people actively start disliking your company. People like to do business with people (and companies) they like. Except where there is monopoly-like with the power company or the phone or cable company—then people are forced to do business with companies they do not like very much.

Yesterday, Netflix became a very disliked company. In an email to subscribers (which again hit AFTER the press release hit the blogosphere), Netflix raised its prices for the second time in less than one year. The company, which was offering people a plan that allowed one DVD at a time (unlimited in a month) and unlimited streaming for \$9.99 (raised from \$8.99 last December), is now offering this combination for \$15.99 OR you can get the DVD option only for \$7.99 or the streaming option only for \$7.99. You can read it Netflix own words

here:

<http://blog.netflix.com/2011/07/netflix-introduces-new-plans-and.html>

Needless to say, a price hike of this magnitude was not greeted with open arms by Netflix subscribers. Just check out the more than 6,000 comments on the blog (link above), or these stories from USA Today and the New York Post.

On Twitter, many people are expressing their dislike for this price hike and threatening to cancel their subscription altogether.

Netflix is pretty disliked right now. But what really is driving the discontent?

1. **Raising rates without offering more.** In effect, most people are complaining because Netflix' streaming option does not offer the equivalent value of the DVD option (i.e. you can't get everything on streaming that you can get on DVD).
2. **Thinking your customers will grin and bear it.** Yes, it probably will help to raise revenue...if you keep your current base! The result here is that customers will find other options better suited to the value they perceive the service should be worth.
3. **Underestimating the power of social media.** With Twitter and Facebook one person's discontent spreads like wildfire.
4. **Underestimating your customer's intelligence.** The email from Netflix about the price hike says this:

We are separating unlimited DVDs by mail and unlimited streaming into two separate plans to better reflect the costs of each. Now our members have a choice: a streaming only plan, a DVD only plan, or both.

This presumes customers want a choice or that they don't like the choice they have or that if you put it as a choice then people will accept it.

Companies that treat their customers like revenue sources and not like people who actually do have a choice in which companies they do business with, risk losing business. Netflix will probably survive this episode, but not without a lot of bad blood and bad publicity.

How to become the most hated company

Yesterday, I talked about how you can make sure people dislike you. It's not hard—all you have to do is be self-centered and creepy. Well, how about making your company one of the most hated companies in America? That is a new level of dislike, and Pepco has reached it.

The article about this “honor” in WTOP (Berzerk customers make Pepco ‘most hated’ in U.S.) tells us that the power company has had a drop in customer satisfaction since last year, due in part to:

frequent and wide-ranging outages made worse by belated customer service response... Pepco has had reliability problems in the past, but not as serious as the last year when its customers faced 70% more power outages than households in other metropolitan areas, along with outages lasting twice as long on average.

What is most interesting to me is how Pepco responded to this

“accolade” reported in the website Business Insider. Here is what the article said

Pepco initially issued a statement questioning the validity of the Business Insider rankings, which it said could have been to drive up their readership.

It later retracted this statement, released another written statement in response to the survey. Pepco spokespeople declined to answer specific questions.

“While we certainly believe that this label is over the top, we have heard our customers loud and clear and are working hard to upgrade our system,” the second statement said.

Pepco’s communication department certainly does not get it. You don’t get rid of something by attacking the source (unless it was some muck-raking tabloid). The lesson here is that Pepco is in denial about how it is perceived by its customers. As a company, it believes that if it says that it is fixing things, people should just accept it.

To become the most hated company you have to provide bad service, first and foremost. But you compound this by:

- Thinking your customers are stupid or ignorant (read about Pepco’s misguided ad campaign for instance)
- Denying that serious problems exist
- Not doing enough to address those problems, or just giving lip-service to fixing said issues.
- If criticized, pointing fingers at the source of criticism rather than dealing with the substance.

I tweeted out the WTOP article yesterday, and @pepcoconnect tweeted back: Working to get it right (with a link to this: <http://pepcoconnect.wordpress.com/2011/07/11/working-to-get-it-right/>) And if that is true, why on Friday night, did I lose power for one and half hours, for no apparent reason?

The problem with leaf blowers

Have you ever been jarred awake by the sound of a leaf blower? Not too pleasant is it? Leaf blowers are definitely high on the noise index, but low on the productivity scale. After all, what does a leaf blower do? It blows leaves around—it doesn't gather them, or suck them up, it just moves them from place to place.

As I was watching a gardener use his leaf-blower several times over a four-hour span, making noise and not accomplishing ANYTHING, it occurred to me that the people paying for his services were really wasting their money. First, he kept doing the same thing, over and over, without actually creating any change. Second, he *seemed* to be busy and not to be accomplishing much. Third, he was taking the easy way out, yet at more expense. The harder and cheaper way would be to use a rake and gather the leaves to then dispose of. He was wasting resources (time, gas) and accomplishing little or nothing.

Since this is not a gardening blog, you know where I am headed with this. Are you using a leaf-blower for your marketing efforts? Are you making lots of noise but not actually getting things done? Are you moving paper around but not actually getting to closing? Are you doing the same thing over and over with minimal or no results?

Just like leaf blowers are annoying and pretty useless in gardens throughout the country, loud and untargeted marketing efforts are pointless exercises that create noise and don't communicate. Next time you launch a marketing campaign or create a marketing piece, ask yourself, is this at all like a leaf-blower or is it a rake? After all, rakes are useful, cheap and get the job done with minimal noise.

Putting back the social in social media

It's been discussed to pieces but social media is just a channel for communicating with other people. It is not the be-all-end-all. Yes, it can be used for marketing (just like that ad you just saw on your way to work this morning) or to incite political action (as in Egypt) or to let people know when the next event is.

Recently, I was at a women's business networking event and we were told to discuss resources we recommend for new businesses, and our own goals and achievements. When I talked about blogs (I write blog content for clients, among other things), many of the women started saying things like "I am not on Twitter/Facebook, and I just don't get it." My response was this: well, you better learn because people are using these channels to communicate much the way you use the telephone or we used to use the fax or the telex even longer ago.

Social media has become the communication channel of choice for many people. Will people still use the phone? Yes. Will some use the fax? Maybe. Telex, no. In a few years, we will be communicating some other way (not on Twitter or Facebook). We will use what other people are using.

Communicating on social media is just a phone conversation on steroids.

It is about people speaking to other people. Yet, there are

many people out there scheduling their tweets, and broadcasting irrelevant news and/or sales pitches. There are people who never attempt to learn anything about the PERSON at the other end of the avatar. People who are too busy looking at their screens to interact with other people at an event. (As an aside, a few weeks ago I was at an event regarding social media, and one of the organizers never introduced herself to anyone and barely looked up from her laptop. And she is supposed to be a social media whiz. Apparently, she knows how to use the tools of social media but not how to be social in real life with actual people.)

Last week, I made a point of having coffee with someone I regularly chat with on Twitter: Diane Danielson (founder of the Downtown Women's Club). I had traveled up to Boston for my college reunion, and asked Diane if she would like to meet up. It was nice to be able to talk face-to-face, and make a more tangible connection.

In my opinion, the real goal of social media or any other communication channel is to connect, whether it be to converse or to exchange information or to perhaps to sell (products, ideas, services).

So, try to put the social back into social media by realizing you are using it as a way to communicate with other people.

Write well or fail

On Monday, I came across a letter to the editor in the Washington Post that made me nod my head vigorously. The author, David Klinger was writing about the Scripps Spelling Bee coverage, and I think you should read his letter:

I have written for a federal agency throughout a 34-year career. I had to pass a spelling test before graduating from the University of North Carolina's journalism school. Yet I turn to the dictionary half a dozen times a day to check a word or reconfirm a spelling. That's the nature of good, careful writing.

Memorization of words like "thanatophidia" (which isn't even in my Webster's) or "bondieuserie" for the Scripps spelling bee is about as relevant to me – or to today's generation of texters and youthful online denizens – as a buggy whip.

Scripps included, we desperately need to acquaint the next generation with a few, basic English grammar skills that seem to have disappeared amid society's collective cyber-mania: complete sentences, subject-verb agreement, correct punctuation and that all-important axiom that "an apostrophe does not a plural make."

David Klinger, Martinsburg, W.Va.

Basic grammar skills are disappearing left and right. I see the use of apostrophes to make plurals ALL the time. People just don't get it. However, to those in the know, using grammar poorly makes you look dumb. There is no other way to describe it. In marketing and PR, which are communications-based disciplines, writing well is key. It is key because if your grammar, spelling or sentence structure don't add up, you are probably not getting your thoughts through clearly.

Over on the Journalistics blog, Jessica Love writes "The Write Stuff: Still the #1 PR Skill." Yes, it should be, but no, many PR practitioners don't have it. We can blame many things from a failing school system to an overreliance on short form messaging, but the responsibility to straighten out your writing skills lies with you.

Write well, or fail to communicate.

Thoughts on reaching out,

stumbling blocks and helplessness

Perhaps in honor of the name of this blog (Caffeinated ideas and views on marketing), I have lots of things percolating in my head this morning.

Reaching out

With social media fast becoming a substitute for print and electronic media, and with the idea that “inbound” marketing is best, we are seeing a drop-off in reaching out. For instance, there is a conference today in Washington that I only just found out about because someone in my Twitter stream is attending. This conference is intended for nonprofits. I am not sure what type of marketing was done for the conference, but I can assure you it was not a traditional advertising in many channels approach. I will place bets that the nonprofit I work with never heard about it...

I feel that what is happening here is that circles are getting smaller and tighter. If you depend on social media for your outreach, you will be reaching a self-reinforcing group of folks. More and more, if I attend an event promoted on social media, I see the same folks I saw at the last event.

I am not shunning social media, but I do think that if marketers want to spread the word, they have to use many different channels to do so.

Stumbling blocks

Last week, I attended a talk by Guy Kawasaki, author of Enchantment. He mentioned that when you put stumbling blocks between you and your customer or supporter, you are not being enchanting. And yet, I have visited dozens of blogs this week, with interesting posts that I would like to share on my social

networks, and guess what, they make it hard to do. For instance “Sexy Sharing” (I think that is what is called) adds a second step when you click on one the sharing buttons (It asks whether you want to allow a third party to connect to your account...and I don’t). That is not sexy, and it is a stumbling block. Similarly, some blogs do not have sharing or their sharing buttons don’t work, making me do the work (use my own Hootsuite sharing button or use a URL shortener to cut and paste). Or how many times are you asked to give information, create passwords, etc. just to get costs/estimates/speak to someone. Stumbling blocks turn people away, and hurt you in the end.

Helplessness

I belong to a listserv, the name and purpose of which I won’t share here. What irks me about this listserv is that many times people ask questions to the listserv that could be found out by doing some research (AKA typing a term into Google). To me, this is being helpless and dependent on others, and makes those people look bad (stupid). Perhaps these people are trying to reach out and start a conversation, but sometimes you just have to wonder if they understand the power of the Internet.

I admit, the above are some random thoughts. Your take on them is appreciated...that is why we have comments!

Engagement is just the beginning

Johna Burke, of BurellesLuce addressed WWPR last week (recap by Joan Coyle here). She talked about social media measurement

and provided lots of useful information about web tools and marketing strategies.

One thing, more than anything else Johna said, struck me as crucial: she talked about engagement and marriage. Engagement, Johna said, is just the beginning. It's when everything is all promise and excitement (isn't that ring all shiny?) Marriage (which most times follows the engagement) takes a lot of hard work and commitment.

In social media, people talk about engagement all the time. You have to "engage" with your followers. What does this really mean? Why are you engaging? The answer is simple—to build a lasting relationship (the "marriage"). If you are engaging just to engage and not to follow through, then you are just breaking promises. If you get caught up in getting Twitter followers but don't provide any substance or reason to "stay together" then you are looking at social media (and any marketing) as being all about the excitement of it rather than the substance (which should be your marketing goals and strategy).

Engagement is just the beginning. It is your starting point to a marketing/communications strategy that seeks to accomplish a goal (e.g. establish thought leadership, increase sales, etc.).

Are you getting engaged all the time or are you working on your marriage?



Repetition and frequency

In advertising, most media buyers are trying to find the holy grail of how much repetition/frequency you need to get your target audience to hear/understand and act on your message. The other aspect is reach. Are you reaching the target audience through the channels you have chosen?

It occurs to me that some companies, namely the ones that have the MOST customer service issues (telecom companies, power companies and airlines) and some degree of monopoly, are the same ones that advertise the most aggressively. In any given hour, you will see many spots for Comcast/Xfinity or for Verizon FIOS. I wrote here last year about the intense amount of direct mail FIOS sent me. These companies are hammering away repeating their message with a scary frequency.

Why? Because they have to. Nothing else is going to speak as loudly as lots of loud advertisements. Certainly not the customer experience or their “stellar” customer service.

A few months ago I had a appliance repair person come to the house. He was great: fixed what needed to be fixed, and charged a fair price. He does NO advertising. His business, which is doing well, is strictly word of mouth.

Can you imagine Comcast or Verizon having no advertising? On the other hand, you have few options when it comes to Internet, cable and phone providers. You will have to persuaded over and over and over.

I am suspicious about any company that feels the need to advertise ALL the time. It seems to me that high repetition and frequency, which are expensive to maintain, are the only way they will retain any top-of-mind share.

What do you think?

