

# What sways you?

Today, on Thanksgiving Day, many people are sitting around plotting how to tackle “black Friday.” What stores should they visit? Whose gifts should they get? How early should they get there? And so forth.

Many of these folks are swayed by the promise of getting AMAZING! deals. Low low prices! Doorbusters! But are the deals worth the hassle? Hard to say.

The truth is that we can be swayed by many things. For instance, the reports about the TSA’s new invasive procedures. It was widely reported on TV, yet it seems that few if any people participated in Opt-Out day. At least that is what is being reported today. The Washington Post has yet another editorial supporting the TSA, and a front page article saying that very few people protested the TSA. Does that sway you?

A new movie opened yesterday starring Jake Gyllenhaal and Anne Hathaway called Love & Other Drugs. The Washington Post gave it one and a half stars. Roger Ebert gave it three. Which review sways you? When you are deciding whether to spend \$10 plus, which reviewer will make you go to a movie or not?

My point is that we are swayed by opinions, news reporting, public relations and advertising but we are not always aware of what is making feel one way or another. These forces are powerful—they surround us and provide us information.

Oh and the force that seems to sway the most people is what their peers are doing. If everybody is going around using Foursquare, then we are too. And on this week of Thanksgiving there has been the often disingenuous need to express gratitude publicly. On Twitter, there’s a hashtag for that.

I am not against gratitude or expressing thanks. But if I do it, it is not because I am swayed because 400 people in my

Twitter stream are expressing all the blather they are thankful for.

What sways you this Thanksgiving and holiday season? Why do you do what you do?

Happy Thanksgiving to all, and thank you for reading.

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## Inform your customers first

Perhaps you heard yesterday that Netflix is adding a streaming-only option and increasing its rates. It was reported on various different blogs, websites and of course, Twitter. Here's a sampling (and notice the date/time):

L.A. Times

ABC News

Consumerist

I am a Netflix customer, and guess what, **I heard about it from Netflix directly last night, through a company email that arrived at 6:38 p.m.** Of course, by then I already knew that I was going to be paying more.

Companies should tell their own customers about changes to ANYTHING (pricing, service, hours, etc.) before they release the information publicly. Customers should not find out that their service provider or bank or whatever will be changing its ways from third parties. It does not make good business sense. It alienates customers.

When communicating news, you must have a hierarchy:

First, communicate changes to your internal organization.

Second, communicate to your users/customers.

Third, communicate to the public at large using media relations, advertising or other mass channels.



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## Sometimes, it isn't about marketing

By now, you have probably heard about George W. Bush's new book/memoir *Decision Points*. Bush went on a media blitz to promote the book and appeared on the Today Show and Oprah, among other venues. Many have said *Decision Points* is about trying to recast how the Bush II presidency is viewed. It certainly is a chance for Bush to explain why he did what he did. But the question is—will the book change the public's perception of Bush?

I heard a pundit (I can't remember who or on what show) say that if you liked Bush before, you will like him now, but if you didn't like Bush then, you will certainly not like him more after reading the book. Perhaps only if you had no opinion or were undecided would you change your perception of Bush after reading this book.

Why? Because sometimes it isn't about marketing. Products or services are good or not good, useful or not useful, and no

amount of marketing changes that. If you are a Bush hater, no matter how many positive books are written about him and how many accolades he receives, you are not going to change your mind.

Same thing happens with housing. I know a Realtor who is trying to sell a house. The house itself is very roomy, with a great layout and other nice features—except it is very close to a major highway. The Realtor is marketing the house in all the usual ways—open houses, brochures, well worded descriptions, etc. But unless you don't mind having a view of traffic, you are not going to buy the house. It is not about the marketing. It is about the product.

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## **Go check-in somewhere else**

If you are on Twitter or Facebook, you will have seen many of your “friends” tell you that they are at Starbucks or at the airport. Some of them are “mayors” and some have “badges.” It's all about the Foursquare check-in. Many nonprofit marketing consultants, and more for-profit marketing consultants, are advising that organizations/companies should get on Foursquare (or other location-based services). The idea is to have people in the vicinity know you are there—offer those people special deals or more information just for checking-in.

But. There is a problem: only four percent of adults online “check-in” or use geo-location services, according to research from Pew.

To me, the rush to embrace check-ins and geo-location has more

to do with the fact that marketers have lots of friends using Foursquare, and less to do with reality. To suggest to nonprofits that they must be on location-based services is based on what exactly? It is based on the desire to be cutting-edge, to suggest something “ahead of the curve.” What it is not is practical. Nonprofits have many many other communications and marketing challenges to fix, other than having people check-in.

In my opinion, the check-in is really great for retail and restaurants/bars, especially if you are promoting a special or a sale or trying to build interest. But, just realize that there is an element of unfairness to those patrons who don't have smart phones, or don't do check-ins (apparently 96% of the population).

Perhaps people are not so eager to share their locations. It does seem big-brother to me. And this is what the article Tag-Along Marketing in the New York Times talks about.

Will check-ins take off in the future? It's questionable. And you should not base marketing advice on something that is still in the works.

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## **You may be overlooking something**

If you blog, for yourself or for your organization, do you know what your blog looks like to the outside world? How are your readers seeing you? Are they subscribing in a reader, via email or just visiting your blog? Are those visitors sharing your blog? If so, how are they doing it?

(Caffeinated tip of a few days ago was to make sure your blog is shareable.)

Many bloggers out there, including those that blog for large organizations, are NOT checking to see how their blog looks. I can tell you because there are several I follow in my Google Reader. Here are several fixable mistakes these bloggers are making:

- Duplicating entries
- Having no title appear for the blog or having a generic title like “Most Recent Entries.”
- No sharing button
- Sharing button that does not fill in information when you share so the post only has a link and no title.
- Only sharing the first line of the post
- Not allowing sharing from the reader
- Not having a visible RSS feed or email subscription tab on your blog

Happily, all these are fixable. Start by following your own blog via RSS feed in a reader and via email subscription. Use your sharing button to see how (and if) it works. You may be overlooking something that will turn off one of your readers. You should probably view the blog on someone else’s computer too.

You may be overlooking something. Protect your brand and your blog!

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## Can you keep your promise?

When you are trying to market your services or your product, you will naturally try to make the product or service look

appealing. That's fine, as long as you are not overselling or over-promising. If you oversell or promise something you can't deliver, you will run into problems.

Let me give you an example, drawn from my experience this week with the US Postal Service.

My mother sent me an express package on Monday. It was guaranteed to be delivered by noon on Tuesday. It wasn't. I called the 1-800 to track it and find out where it was. After some problems with the automated attendant (that is a whole other issue), I got through to a representative. She had no idea where my package was or when I would get it. At one point, she put me on hold. During this interlude, I found out that:

*For delivery you can rely on, choose the United States Postal Service.*

Is that supposed to be a joke? My "express" package arrived more than 24 hours after it was "guaranteed" to arrive. And as I learned from the customer service agent, the guarantee is really about your money. They don't actually guarantee the arrival of the express packages at their destination, but rather, if your package doesn't arrive when they say it will, they will give you your money back.

I guess that when you absolutely, positively need it there by a certain time, don't use the USPS, use Fedex (or UPS). For those of you who don't remember the Fedex ad, here it is

[[youtube id=3lyxkSIIn9A&fs=1&hl=en\\_US&rel=0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?id=3lyxkSIIn9A&fs=1&hl=en_US&rel=0)]

The quickest thing you can do ruin your reputation is to promise that you will do something that you can't or won't do. And reputation is important in marketing. What do you think my impression is of the USPS?

So, when you are prepping your marketing materials (and

especially your tag line), be careful about what you say. Daily Blog Tips has a great post on 10 Tips to Improve Your Sales Copy Today. Note that their number two tip is: **Don't Make a Promise You Can't Keep.**



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## An easy marketing tip

Do you want to easily market yourself? I have a great tip: make your content (blog, website, social media stuff) shareable. I don't mean that you should simply create stuff people want to share—which is a given—but make it easy to share. By this I mean have a social media sharing button/widget on your blog or website (such as the one at the end of this post). If you don't know how to get one, here are a few to try:

- Add to any (which is what I have here)
- "Tweet this" button from Twitter
- Add this

You can find other individual service sharing buttons at this Wiki:

- <http://www.sharingbuttons.org/Buttons>

WordPress.com recently started its own sharing widget.

Find one that works with your blog/website and deploy it. By **allowing your content to be easily shared, you will increase your reach.** The word to note is EASILY. There are ways I can share your content without your help...but if you make it easy



for me, then I will most likely do it. And that is why you create great content, right?

*Important clarification for WordPress users : If you have a WordPress.org blog (self-hosted), you may be able to find these buttons as plug-ins. WordPress.com users CANNOT use plug-ins, but can add these manually to each post or find the WordPress.com sharing button.*



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## Blog Action Day

Today is Blog Action Day (and I would link to the website but it is down) and the topic is water. I found out about it from Daria Steigman's post "Water is Life" and also from a post on Conversation Agent: "Ten Facts About Water."

The idea is to get bloggers to post on a common topic to get the word out. Just yesterday, I wrote about the death of mass communications and in a sense, Blog Action Day is a way to use social media in our extremely segmented world to inform people and get them to act around a common cause.

When I visited Australia in 2008, there was a lot of talk on the media about bottled water. Tap water in Australia is drinkable and yet people were spending money (and at about \$3 per 1/2 liter, a lot of money) for bottled water. The problem with bottled water of course is waste. The bottle is not always recycled. Australia is mostly desert, and in the summer, it can get very very dry. Australians tend to be active—always running, walking, swimming, surfing. Since it is necessary to keep hydrated, having access to water is a necessity and bottled water can be very convenient. How do you

change people's habits?

Another water habit that I encountered in Australia was a campaign to reduce showering time. In my hotel in Melbourne was a card and a timer inviting me to keep my shower to four minutes. I always wondered why this wasn't done in the US too. Australia was certainly in a drought state. The United States is not there yet, but could be. Again, how do you change people's habits? How do you get people to think about the length of their showers and how this impacts the environment?

Do you think Blog Action Day can help make a difference? What would a mass information campaign look like in our social media age?



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## Mass comms

Back when I was in grad school, I studied mass communications. The theory was that advertising, public relations and journalism all reached mass audiences. Back then, there was no Twitter, no one blogged or even had a website. Cable existed but lots of people still watched the broadcast channels. People still read the newspaper. Magazines were everywhere. Mass media was alive and well.

Today, mass media are dying. Witness the declining numbers for the broadcast channels. An article in Fortune Magazine about Oprah said that one of the reasons she is going to her own cable channel is because her audience on regular TV is declining. We have all seen magazines disappear and newspapers shrink (and become more irrelevant).

The question is how do we communicate messages to the masses when the masses are getting more and more segmented? People are demanding personalization. No one seems to listen to the radio anymore, they listen to their own playlists on their MP3 player. In social media, we follow those we want to follow.

There are messages that must get to the masses. For instance, last year we had the H1N1 “pandemic.” Health information had to be sent out to the largest number of people.

What got me thinking about this is that we have had an increasing number of pedestrians being struck and killed by cars here in the DC area. Clearly, more people are driving either drunk or distractedly, and are speeding on top of it. In the past week alone, we have seen more than half a dozen people KILLED not to mention others who are injured. How do we combat this? How can we get the word out if there is no mass medium that is effective?

In the age of Twitter, where would a PSA make real impact?



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## You must know tech

Amy Webb, principal of Webbmedia Group, spoke yesterday to a Washington Women in Public Relations (WWPR) Executive communicators brown bag lunch. She is very knowledgeable and highly enthusiastic about technology and has made a business consulting on the various trends and applications of the new tech stuff.

Some of us are a bit recalcitrant about tech stuff. There are so many changes that it is hard to keep up. Most of all, tech is changing the way things are done and change is hard.

However, we must learn about tech and how it is affecting the marketing/communications space. Just this week, long time Washington Post writer Howard Kurtz announced he is leaving the Post to go to the online-only Daily Beast. Print is giving way to online more and more.

Amy Webb talked about being in the space where the consumers are—even if you aren't on there—places like Facebook, Foursquare, Tivo and mobile apps. She sees the world of media (traditional media, the web, mobile, e-readers, tablet pcs) as all connected by social media. Social media is part and parcel of all forms of media, not a separate entity.

Webb divides the social media world into:

- Geo social (Foursquare)
- Corporate social (Yelp)
- Social commerce (Groupon)
- Social content (YouTube)
- Mobile social (Loopt)
- Pure play (Facebook)
- Social curation (Digg, Delicious)

Other key take-aways from Webb:

- Keep your taglines and messaging simple for sharing
- Curation is huge right now simply because there is too much information out there to make sense of.
- Personalization is becoming more important. Journalists don't want mass press releases or multimedia releases but rather personalized content.
- Whatever you have done on line can be found by anyone with a bit of research knowledge
- Before launching a brand—make sure the name you want is

not being used on social media.

- Tablet PCs are really big, witness the huge sales for the iPad, and there are many more on the horizon

My conclusion is that you must know tech. As Amy Webb suggested, read Mashable and/or Techcrunch every day to keep up with technology.

How is tech affecting your marketing life?

