

Whatever do you mean?

Have you seen signs/logos/headlines that make you stop, and not because you are intrigued, but rather because you are confused? If you have, you know what I mean.

I just say a delivery truck with the following sign:

Sanford Foods

Poultry Distributor

Pork Beef Supplies

The “Poultry Distributor” part was highlighted. So I thought to myself, what is it? Poultry or pork? Yes, I know they distribute all of it, but why highlight poultry? My point is that there is too much contradictory information in a few words. It is not clear. They could have said: Sanford Foods: Distributors of Fine Poultry and Meats. And that would have been fine.

My advice is to have one overarching message in your logo or slogan. Too much is confusing.

Thoughts? Or better yet, examples?

A bit of advice

HGTV (one of my favorite channels) has a show called Real Estate Intervention. It features a truth-telling real estate agent Mike Aubrey who brings a dose of reality to homeowners who are having a hard time selling their house. While we could discuss the fact that HGTV has had to adjust to the

reality of a hard housing market (as this blog discusses) what I want to talk about is giving advice.

As a marketing consultant, I am required to give advice. I deal with questions like should you do a brochure, update your website or what your tag line should be. You would think that clients, who are paying for my opinion, would listen to it, but often, this is not the case. Many times, people want an outsider to bolster their ideas. For instance, if you think your website is fine as is, you want me to agree. If I don't agree, you dismiss me.

In the Real Estate Intervention show, people seem reluctant to listen to Mike because they often do not like what he has to say. His advice (usually, lower your asking price) is not what they want to hear. In spite of the fact that Mike shows comparable houses that sold for much less, the homeowners seem to believe that their houses are better and that people would pay much more money for it (even though they have not been able to sell their house at the asking price). The show really illustrates how hard it is to give advice.

Advice is tricky because people have preconceived notions. Most people think that they know as much or more than you know and if your advice does not match up to their ideas, then you must be wrong. Even when all evidence points to the contrary. We've seen lots of businesses pushing back against social media, for instance. Business owners don't believe it can help. Even though it does. But because it is not their reality they push back.

What can you do if you are in the business of giving advice? Well, the best is to be like Mike Aubrey. Make your case in the most concrete way possible. Facts and figures are very helpful. Never say "because I think so." That won't cut it. In the end, advice will only be received well by someone who is receptive. Accept this.

Elements of a successful event

Do you attend many networking events? I have gone to my fair share. Some are better than others. Here's what I think makes a good event:

1) **A topic.** I appreciate that happy hour events draw people interested in getting a drink after work, but they don't inform or give you anything to talk about. Having a topic and a speaker gives events an edge.

2) **Allocating time to networking.** Many times there is a speaker and/or a meal and no time to meet and mingle. Specifically allocated meet and mingle time is very important.

3) **Easy access.** If you are asking people to drive to your event, make sure there is plenty of parking (preferably free). If you want people to take public transport, then be close to the bus/subway stop.

4) **The right price.** Too expensive can be a real turnoff to people. The price should reflect the value, but it should also be within the range of other similar events. This morning I saw an event about social media that was comparable to other events I have been to/seen advertised, but was priced twice as much. Would I go? No.

5) **Organizational ambassadors.** Some people are shy. If you are hosting an event, have members of your organization or group be hosts: greet people, tell them about your group and introduce them to others.

6) **Choosing day and time carefully.** Your event can be

derailed by competing events. If possible, try to avoid conflicts.

Update: How could I forget this one?

7) **Food and drink.** There is nothing worse than going to an event that offers nothing. I once went to a wine and cheese that had neither wine nor cheese. Instead, we got leftover SoyJoy bars from another event and water. I kid you not.

What would you add?

Slogans have impact

We know of course that a good slogan or tagline is key in helping to make a business stand out. Slogans should be short and sweet and descriptive. Many slogans lack this last one: descriptive. They may be short and sweet, and maybe even clever, but they don't say anything.

I came across this wonderful blog entry in Budget Travel's blog about travel slogans. The post talks about some memorable slogans such as "Virginia is For Lovers" and other not so memorable ones. The author talks about many of the Central American tourism slogans that just don't seem to translate. El Salvador uses "Impressive!" and Guatemala uses "The Soul of the Earth."

In any case, let this be an example about why you should choose your slogan carefully. Although brevity is good, description is better. What do you do? What makes you special? (The answer to this is never that you are unique...as I have said before few things are unique).

Do you have examples of slogans that you just love? Or that

you just hate? Please share!

How are you perceived?

“Quick, acute, and intuitive cognition.” That is how Merriam-Webster defines perception. It is a quick assessment of what is before us. It is how we form impressions and judgments.

Have you ever considered how you are perceived by a potential client? Potential friend? Man/woman on the street? Obviously, we may not care how a complete stranger perceives us, but in business we should definitely be concerned with the image we are giving potential customers, clients or partners (a partner can be anyone who we do business with—from someone we network with, to someone who refers business to us or an acquaintance we run into occasionally).

There are many angles from which you are perceived:

- Personal appearance and demeanor
- How you sound
- Online presence, which includes your websites, what is written about you, your blog, and your social media presence
- Articles about you
- Articles you've written
- Your marketing materials (brochures, postcards, reports, etc)
- Your behavior and actions
- Your associations

If people have a positive perception of you it will help get business. A negative perception on the other hand will impede your success.

How to assess

Start with a simple Google search on yourself to see what comes up. Negative, positive or neutral?

Turn a critical eye on your website and/or blog. Would a visitor to your site know what you do and why you are qualified to do what you do? What would he/she think of your services?

How are people responding to you on social media? How many followers do you have? More importantly, who is following you? Quality is important here. How about on Linked In—do people accept your requests for connection? Are you giving them enough for them to want to connect with you?

When you go to an event, do you feel confident? Do you ever feel unprepared or frazzled? If so, what aspects of your appearance and demeanor need work?

It is hard to self-assess from all these angles so it may be best to ask a trusted friend or colleague to give you some feedback. A marketing consultant (such as me!) can help assess your marketing materials.

Have you assessed how you are perceived? Please let me know how you did it and what helped.

Culture in communications

I just finished reading Malcolm Gladwell's very insightful *Outliers*. I recommend it if you want to think about success as being a meeting of opportunity, chance and ability. And, my

friend and colleague Daria Steigman just posted a question about culture in social media on her blog, Independent Thinking.

Daria wants to know if culture affects communication. Outliers can answer this question. Without a doubt, the answer is yes. In Outliers, Gladwell talks about the Avianca plane crash a few years ago on Long Island, NY. The plane crashed because it had run out of fuel after circling for hours due to bad weather in the area. Gladwell thinks that if the culture of the first officer flying the plane had allowed him to be less deferential toward the JFK control tower, he would have been able to make an emergency landing at Kennedy. Instead, he was not forceful in telling the tower that the plane was dangerously low on fuel. I highly recommend you read the book to fully understand this concept.

Suffice it to say that different cultures expect different communications from different people. Some cultures are more hierarchical and others less so. Some are more cooperative. Some are more focused on results. Whatever the differences are, any communications messages must reflect these nuances.

In Spanish, for instance, there is a difference between the more familiar “tu” and the more formal “usted.” In certain Spanish-speaking countries, everyone uses tu and it is considered old-fashioned to use usted. In other countries, if you don’t know someone, you automatically use usted. Clearly, an ad written in one of the pronouns that doesn’t take into consideration the norm of the country may insult or offend or not reach its intended audience.

Culture matters in communications. A good communicator always knows his or her target audience, and one of the most important qualifiers to that target is culture.

Business cards

Dos and Don'ts

Do have a business card, even if you don't yet have a business off the ground. There is nothing worse than people who go to networking events and don't have business cards. Go get plain cards with your name, phone and email at the very least. When you are more set up then spend more money.

Do use both sides of the card. The other side can hold more information about your services. It is extra real estate space, use it.

Don't make your cards super unusual. Cards that are odd sizes, vertical instead of horizontal or folded are hard to put away easily. Most people either put them in a Rolldex of some sort or scan them. If your card is too small or too big for these applications it will get lost. I particularly hate vertical cards and folded cards.

Do use a professional design. When possible, hire a graphic designer to do your entire letterhead package. It looks nicer.

Don't go too cheap. Unless you are brand spanking new, don't go for the cheapest black ink on white crappy paper cards from your inkjet if you can all avoid it. It looks, well, cheap.

Don't use other people's cards. If you work for yourself do not under any circumstances just fill out your name on someone else's card. Looks bad.

Do make sure you have the correct information. By this I mean, your card should have your name, company name, phone number, email address, at a minimum. You can add street address, fax,

cell phone number, Twitter handle, and other info.

Don't sacrifice legibility for information. If you have to use a ridiculously small point size to fit in too much information on the card, forget about it. The point of the card is to let people find you EASILY, without the help of a magnifying glass.

I have said it before and I will say it again, if you are in business of any kind, you need a business card. It is an easy way to provide other people your information. Before you go to your next networking event, take a look at what you are giving out. Does it help or hinder you?

You only have one chance to make a first impression

Yesterday, I attended a networking/information lunch put on by a group to which I had never been before. The topic was business strategies. This was the fall kick-off event and I thought it was a good time to think about strategy as I move forward with my business and so forth. Well, the speaker was more interested in telling us about how he doesn't take clients under \$20,000. He made the point that we should think about doing strategy and not tactics. No word about how to develop strategies for your business. He also took a bunch of self-centered questions from the audience. In a word, the event was disappointing. Not to mention expensive and not very satisfying.

The group put out a survey and I gladly responded that the event did not meet my expectations and why. The organizer wrote me and said that "he had no control over the speaker"

even though he agreed with me about content. He asked me to give the group another chance.

Here are my thoughts.

1) Organizers do have some control over the speaker. It is not total of course, but the organizer could have reminded the speaker of the topic, and OUTLINED EXPECTATIONS FROM THE SPEECH, QUESTIONS AND TOPIC TO BE COVERED.

2) It is not enough to ask me to try again. It was money out of my pocket, and perhaps he could have offered a discount for next time or something such.

3) The organizer needs to be aware that you only get one chance to make a first impression. If you don't make a good first impression, YOU MUST make a better second impression or else all is lost. My second impression is that the organizer doesn't get it. He did not take full responsibility. Etc.

Oh, and when I arrived at the event, there was no name tag for me, even though I pre-registered. Nothing irritates me more at these types of events than having a handwritten Hello, I am... tag. Awful. My handwriting is not that clear and I think it looks unprofessional.

Ironically, this group is a public relations related group. What is the saying about doctors healing themselves?

Profanities

Now, I am not claiming that I don't use profanities. I do, probably too much, in private conversations or when I am in the car behind some incompetent driver. However, I never use profanity in a public forum such as Twitter or Facebook.

Profanities can get you in trouble. People have varying degrees of comfort toward the use of profanities. The point is you have to watch out for what you put out there. People will judge you. And some people get in trouble. A state senator in California was forced to resign because of some salacious comments he made, which were recorded and replayed. A few weeks ago, a local religious-sponsored organization here in DC used unnecessary expletives in its Twitter stream. I cringed when I read that. It is public, and it's on the record.

There is a self-important blog expert here in DC who has an Internet radio show. I tuned in only to hear him use an expletive every other word, apparently because he could. It made him sound dumb, and my respect for him is now non-existent.

In general, marketing communications should never contain profanities. Unless you are communicating with a target audience that enjoys using expletives every other word, you will offend someone, somewhere. Not to mention that using expletives can make you seem rude and coarse. In an age where manners are dwindling, it is important to be mindful of our PUBLIC language, especially language that may be etched in cyberspace, just waiting for someone to find it.

The value of a title

We've all heard of MDs, MBAs, and PhDs. We usually deal with a CPA once a year. I don't have to tell you what these stand for. You know. You are familiar with them, and therefore you understand their value. What about MPS? Do you know what that is? I don't. The point is that titles are important, but only

if you know what they mean.

Would you go to a doctor that didn't have a MD after his or her name? Probably not. MD stands for medical doctor. You may need to go to a PsyD, which is a doctor of psychology. You may want your lawyer to be a JD and he or she probably uses the abbreviation to Esquire in his/her cards.

There are some titles that are obscure, like the MPS. Does it mean anything at first glance? Probably only to those who have it. MP, on the other hand, stands for Member of Parliament in the United Kingdom, which may be a pretty important title. Some organizations, such as the IABC (International Association of Business Communicators) and the PRSA (Public Relations Society of America) issue certificates like the ABC and APR respectively. The problem is that no one outside of a small circle knows what it means. In fact, you can be a business communicator or a public relations practitioner WITHOUT being accredited. On the other hand, you cannot practice medicine legally without your proper degree.

My point is that we all like titles. In fact, some cultures love titles. However, if you are going to use them as a marketing point, you better be sure that people know what the title is and what it stands for. I got an invitation to an event where the speaker is the aforementioned "MPS." Am I supposed to be impressed? I don't even know what it stands for!

Anybody have a title they have seen and don't know what it is?