

# Gender and Message

I am sure you have heard by now that Charlie Gibson is stepping down from the anchor position at ABC World News and that Diane Sawyer will be taking his place come January. It was probably Charlie's time to go, he looked tired and somewhat out of touch. I am not a huge Diane Sawyer fan, although I think she will do well in the slot. However, is Diane going to be judged solely by her accomplishments? No. Absolutely not. She will be judged by her gender. It has already started. All the talk about how "historic" it is that now there will be two female evening news anchors, blah blah blah. I have news for all (mostly male) pundits and TV critics out there: It is 2009. There are women everywhere. This is not news. Katie Couric is in third place not because she is a woman, but because she has a bad delivery for news, in my opinion. Diane has much more gravitas. But it will be inevitable that they will be compared on things like appearance and clothing.

UPDATE: Carole Simpson opines that Diane Sawyer being promoted to network news is too little, too late. Simpson thinks that network news is in tremendous decline, and that with women at the helm, they may end up being blamed. Interesting take. Here's the link to her piece on CNN.

Gender is old news. For Generation Y especially (not that they watch the evening news) the idea of judging someone based on something innate like gender, race or sexual orientation is anathema. So here's a plea to all the old fogies that are stirring up flames about how amazing it is that there will be two female anchors—drop it! Concentrate on real news. Judge all anchors on their ability to deliver the news, on their editorial choices and not on the shape of their genitals.

It was Marshall McLuhan who said the medium is the message. Well, the message is the message. Here's a piece from CNN on

how Obama is losing the health care fight because of social media. No, Obama is losing the health care fight because his MESSAGE is not resonating. It is not the medium, it is the message.

Thoughts?

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## Why a thank you is good marketing



Thank you for reading this post, and thank you for reading my blog. I probably haven't thanked you before, so I apologize, because this post is about how thank you is really a marketing

tool.

We've all heard of customer appreciation. Often, it is a deal available to new customers. Sometimes it is a gift with purchase. In many cases, the customer has to do something additional to get appreciated—sign up for a new service or buy more.

What about customers that just use a service, like a gym, cable, phone and have been using it for years. Do they ever get thanked? No, they often don't. Why? Because companies take the bulk of their customer base for granted. They imagine that if they are providing the service, and there is no problem, the customer will remain loyal. But in fact, customers are not always loyal. They will switch for lower prices, or better service. They may also switch because a company does not seem to appreciate they have a choice in service providers. This is why more banks and customer service agents start any conversation with you by saying things like "thank you for banking with us."

The bottom line is that saying thank you is about expressing appreciation. And most everyone likes to be appreciated. And yet, thank yous are sometimes hard to come by.

In your personal marketing or personal branding, saying thank you may be even more important. Think about it: What are you saying when you don't say thank you? You are communicating that you are uninterested, unappreciated, or that you take the gesture for granted. It makes you seem rude and self-involved. Some people will claim they are too busy to respond. Are you too busy to make sure that you are perceived properly?

Remember, no one is forced to be your customer unless you are a monopoly. And no one is required to help you out unless he or she wants to. It is simple to say thank you. Saying thank you boosts the perception that you care, that you are aware

that what the customer or friend has given you has some value.

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# **New business: marketing essentials**

If you are a new business, or a small business, or any business at all, there are a couple essentials for your marketing. I am assuming you already have a business name and have done all the necessary paperwork to get yourself set up.

The number one item you need is a website. Buy your own domain. If you can't afford a fully designed website you can use templates through vendors such as Network Solutions or Go Daddy. If you are more technologically inclined, you can use WordPress, but host it at your domain name. Your website, at minimum, should answer these questions: who are you, what do you do, why should anyone hire you or purchase your product, how to reach you. If you are a restaurant or deal with the public, include your hours and directions to your location. Remember, this is a minimum. If you are a restaurant, you could also include menus. Service businesses could include case studies, client lists, testimonials.

The number two item you need is business cards. You can get them for cheap or you can have them professionally designed. Whatever you do your business cards should have your name, primary phone, website URL and email address (preferably at your domain).

If you have money or a good friend who is a graphic designer, get a logo and letterhead package done.

Once you are set up, you may consider developing a tagline or

a slogan for your business. Use it on everything.

These are the essentials. There are plenty of other marketing communications collateral materials you could develop for yourself, including brochures, ads, press releases, white papers and so forth. You also have to think about your social media strategy: Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn for starters.

Start with the essentials. Work from there.

If you want help figuring out what marketing materials you need, contact me.

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## Interest and Julie & Julia

Last night I saw the movie Julie & Julia, about Julia Child and Julie Powell. Julie Powell wrote a book about her experience blogging about cooking her way through Child's Mastering the Art of French Cooking. I liked the movie and would recommend it, especially if you enjoy food and want to feel inspired.

But this is not a movie review blog, it is about marketing communications. And here's the thing: the movie has stimulated the sales of Julia Child's books, biographies and of course, of Julie Powell's Julie & Julia. In fact, there is a renaissance in interest in all things Julia Child. This is probably due to Meryl Streep's excellent personification of Julia on screen and a compelling storyline about following your dreams and believing in yourself.

The marketing lesson to draw from the success of Julie and Julia is that interest stimulates action. It goes back to the AIDA principle we have discussed before: attention, interest,

desire and action. If you make something interesting, you will stimulate action on the part of your intended target audience. The movie made all things Julia and Julie interesting. The audience was loving the food, and now, naturally, wants to partake in it. The audience was inspired to learn more about Julia (and Julie for that matter).

Movies are great marketing vehicles because they reach mass, captive audiences. This is why we see so much product placement in the movies, and why there is advertising at the movie theater. A good movie is by nature, interesting. If it has to do with a historical figure, we want to learn more. If it showcases music (like Walk the Line did for Johnny Cash), you want to go out and listen to the music again.

The other lesson is to put things in front of the right audience. In Julie & Julia's case, the thing is both cooking and following dreams, for a female audience. Last night, I would say that 90% of the audience was female, and I would venture to say that most were under 45.

In any case, Julie & Julia reached its intended audience and is proving that people always want to know more if they are stimulated to do so.

Did you see the movie? What did you think?

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**Can you succeed in  
communications without new**

# media?

It's hard to remember what communications was like back even a decade ago. When I started in advertising, we faxed insertion orders and delivered artwork. When I started in PR, we faxed press releases and mailed photos. Now, we all just use the Internet. In the past two or three years, we've evolved past email and launched into new media: blogs, Twitter, social networks, and so forth. "Old" media is dying a bit more every day. Newspapers are disappearing or slimming down. News broadcasts are relying on Twitter and Facebook for user interaction. We've become a nation of citizen journalists, wielding our cameraphones and uploading our viewpoints. I read somewhere that a large liquor advertiser will be spending 90% of its ad budget on new media. On the other hand, a study showed that 60% of Americans use print media to make shopping decisions.

In any case, there is a new paradigm in how people acquire information. Fewer people are turning to traditional media and more people are turning to new media. That is the reality and your communications efforts must reflect that.

A few days ago, I was having a conversation with a graphic designer. He's pretty old school, to such an extent, that although he has worked in web design, he had never heard of WordPress. I spoke with a technical writer who knows nothing about blogs, and dismissed them as useless. Do you think these people are ready for the present, not to mention the future? In my opinion, they will be left behind.

I believe that if you are in communications, you must learn about new media. You may not use it, but you need to know about it. People are making lots of money training other people on how to use blogs and Twitter for communications efforts. In fact, for a mere \$395 you can go to an all-day Twitter conference. Why would people spend this type of

money?Because we are looking to know what the next big thing will be. In the early 90s, glossy magazines were the big thing. In the early 00s, dot-com/websites were the rage. Now we are in the blogosphere.

In a sense, communications is way more challenging now than ever. We have a very segmented audience and extremely targeted media. I am not sure we have much left in the way of mass media. Communications practitioners have to become adept at many forms of media.

So, to answer my own question, no, you cannot succeed in communications without new media.

What do you think?

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## **Being upfront is good policy**

As you have no doubt read somewhere else, the governor of North Carolina, Mark Sanford, had disappeared for a few days and no one seemed to know where he was. His staff first said they didn't know, and then they said he was hiking the Appalachian Trail. Well, it turns out the good governor was a lot farther away...he was in Argentina. And when he arrived back in the United States he expressed surprise about the amount of coverage.

First, let's start with the public relations aspect of this. Sanford screwed up, and not by going out of town, but by being secretive about it. He could have easily said he was taking a few vacation days and that would have been the end of the story. Instead, he chose secrecy and his staff chose disinformation or misinformation. These decisions reflect poorly on the governor's and his staff's judgements. Clearly,



these poor folks don't understand how the media works. News is instantaneous and has a wide net. Everyone reported his "disappearance" and they also reported the explanation and now they are reporting (and commenting) on what really happened. Not being able to understand the consequences of your actions is the definition of lack of judgement.

When you are in a political position you are also in a public position. It is probably hard to adjust to losing your privacy but that is the what happens when you get elected to office. President Obama has made comments to this effect, about how he is living in a bubble and so forth. Nonetheless, it is best to acknowledge and deal with the situation. Not understanding that the public is now invested in an elected official's moves is not understanding how politics works.

In any case, this case shows that a being upfront is good policy and good politics. Not talking or being secretive always carries a negative connotation. People imagine the worse and in today's hyperfast communications environment, negative comments can transverse the globe in seconds.

You can read great insight on this situation in Politico.com and on The Fix blog in the Washington Post.

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## Random thoughts

### Radio Commercials

Does it seem to you that every time you are listening to the radio, and a commercial break comes on, you get commercials on all other stations as well? Does it also seem to you that commercial breaks/DJ gab fests on radio go on for way too long?

It's great that there is still so much advertising on radio, but I think that by making the commercial breaks so long radio stations risk losing their listeners. If I am listening to station, and a long commercial break comes on, I switch stations until I find one that is playing music. If these breaks were shorter, there would be less risk of alienation, IMO.

### Different name, same location

Why is it that store owners think that by changing the name of a store they will get tons of new business? I was just walking home and saw that a day spa/salon just changed their name (and to something a lot more utilitarian). I thought, well, the problem was not the name of the salon, it is the location! Hard to get to, off the beaten path, etc. I don't know if the salon was sold to another owner, but in any case, when I see too many names on the same store front I tend to think problems.

### As if we thought Iran was democratic

I am not sure why Iran bothered to hold elections. Why pretend they are a democracy? Let me point out that the actual leader of Iran is not the president but the Ayatollah, the so-called Supreme Leader. Anytime you have someone ruling a country who is not elected and calls himself the Supreme Leader you are not dealing with a democracy. The problem is that the west wanted to believe that elections=democracy. They do not. It is not good marketing for Iran to hold elections and then repress the protests when it appears the election is a sham. Talk about a public relations fiasco!

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# Are you hosting an event?

When you host an event, you want people to attend, right? If you don't think so, just ignore this post.

So, how do you get people to attend your event? It may seem self evident, but many organizations do not follow these promotional tips:

**0) Before you start, be sure to have all the following info for inclusion: title and purpose of event, date of event, hours of event, exact location and directions to event, cost, contact information, whether you need to RSVP or not (and who the RSVP contact is). You would be surprised at how many invitations miss some of this critical data.**

1) Invite people. Be sure to send out an invitation to all members, interested parties, people who have attended your events in the past, etc.

2) Post the event on your website or blog or both. Ask a third party to check and see if you have included all necessary information.

3) Send a calendar item listing to your local newspaper, event aggregator, tv station.

4) Include in your newsletter. If it is an annual event, add to your signature line on email and include on all communications, internal and external.

5) Remind people. There are many events competing for people's attendance, so be sure to send reminders. This is where social media like Twitter could be useful.

6) Create an event page on Facebook or other social media sites.

7) To be really efficient, you may want to use an electronic

event management database to help you to keep track of attendees, send out invites and take RSVPs. Two that come to mind are Cvent and EventBrite.

A note about timing: You want to give people enough time to plan to attend, but not too much time so that they may forget about the event. Perhaps you can invite three to four weeks in advance, and remind people two weeks and one week before the event.

Again, the most important thing about publicizing an event is to provide all the information somebody would need to attend the event. Don't take this for granted. I can't tell you how many events I have seen listed that lack basic info such as DATE!

If I have overlooked anything, please remind me in the comments!



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## Writing for your audience

According to Netflix, the British/BBC series Gavin and Stacey garners four and a half stars. This is why I added it to my queue. But I watched the first season (all on one DVD) and I rated the thing two stars. (Quick plot explanation: Gavin, who lives in Essex, and Stacey, who lives in Wales, meet over the phone and decide to meet in person after six months. They fall in love. Meanwhile, they each have a best friend: Smithy for Gavin and Nessa for Stacey, who also get involved.)

I have no doubt that many people find Gavin and Stacey hilarious. In fact, some of the acting is very good, and some of the situations are painfully relevant. However, it is clear

that the intended audience is British. For instance, the whole Wales is another country joke. In the United States, we would be hard pressed to find Wales on the map of the UK, and for the British, Wales is quite literally another country (just like Scotland). There is rivalry between them, and there is some kind of joke on how the Londoners can't understand what the Welsh are saying. OK, I get it, but I don't really get it in the way a British person would.

And then, there is the culture of a place. Apparently, smoking is still a normal thing to do in Britain. There is smoking indoors and out, by everyone. In the U.S., we have steered away from showing this much smoking, and I don't think I have seen much on TV. In Britain, the culture is OK with smoking. To me, it is jarring (and adds nothing to the plot).

In short, I didn't find Gavin and Stacey quite as amusing as if I had been British. That is because the series is written by the British for the British. Yes, some things are universal (weird in-laws, weird friends, not wanting to reveal secrets), which is why we can watch programs from different countries and get it. Humor though, is harder to convey.

The bottom line is that you write for your audience. To do this, you must understand who your audience is and what makes them tick. We define audiences in all sorts of ways: demographically, geographically and so on. Case in point: you would not write an ad directed to a 65 plus demographic using teen slang. It just wouldn't make sense.

Understand your audience and tailor your word choice and message to their needs and sensibilities.

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# Words are Key

Keywords. They are the mantra of the Search Engine Optimization (SEO) people. Some websites are written in a weird, keyword heavy format to make them seem like candy for the search engines. Websites also have metatags and alt-text and other areas for keywords. Search engines read text, which is why content is king on the Internet. Search engines do not read images, unless they are labeled or tagged.

Some companies set up blogs just to increase their likelihood of being found. And SEO people think you should have keywords there too.

If you ever doubted that keywords are important, then do a little experiment on Twitter. Use a keyword like marketing, writing, or golf (if that is your thing) and see how many people start following you. Yesterday, I re-tweeted a story about the Christian Science Monitor getting rid of its religion reporter (fairly ironic, and that is why I shared it). Guess what, no less than three people of a heavy Christian persuasion started following me. Even though none of my posts and my bio say anything about Christianity. These people were simply keyword surfing and leeching on to the word Christian in Christian Science Monitor.

So, how do you create a list of keywords? Easy. Start with your industry and work from there. Say you are a civil engineer. You would have the following: engineering, civil engineering, building, and so on. The important thing is to think of variations and related words. If you are in advertising, you would naturally choose marketing, and perhaps sales. You may also want to include location (city, state, country) and specialties. You may want to use the names of

your principals. **Just ask yourself: what would people ask if they needed to find me or someone that does what I do?**

Final thought: a popular word on this blog has been Twitter. In fact, I am sure if I tagged this article with the word Twitter, I will get plenty of search engine hits.

