

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.

Are you hitting the mark?

Are your efforts paying off? Is your marketing achieving results?

How do you know? Obviously, the first sign is that you are generating numbers: sales, impressions.

But how do you know what people think about you, your product, your service and your marketing efforts? This is a harder question to answer. If people don't attend your event, it could be for a myriad of reasons (don't have time, costs too much not interested). Same thing with your product or service. How do you know why people aren't buying?

It comes down to requesting feedback, and to listening to what your audience has to say.

First, you should ALWAYS request feedback from attendees to your event and people who buy your product. Make it easy for people to provide comments on your website. Have an email address specifically for feedback.

Second, listen to what exactly is being said about you in the comments you receive. Also, cast a wider net: check out SocialMention (or other social media monitoring tools) to see what is being said about you or your brand.

Last week, I tweeted to a local marketing networking group that they were sending me too many email messages. In fact, it got to a point that I would just delete rather than read. The organizational response to me via Twitter was to tell me they would be happy to remove me from the list. I told them to take my comment seriously. I was giving them FEEDBACK. They didn't want to listen.

You will not know if you are hitting the mark with your marketing efforts if you don't make an effort to gather feedback. You may get some people to buy your product or attend your event, but you may be missing a host of others.



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]

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.**



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?



Who is your rep?

Your representative could affect your reputation. And yet, how many times have you seen big firms and/or top tier colleges represented at a job fair or college fair by a young, inexperienced person? When you go to trade shows, who is sitting at the booths? Top brass? Fat chance—most likely, exhibitors at a trade show are represented by someone from the marketing department.

Have you ever gone to a networking event and met someone from a company who does not have any idea of what the company message is?

The other day, I was at a fair here in Bethesda. A very young girl handed me a flyer for a political candidate. The flyer tells me the candidate “has the experience to work for us,” and yet her representative was probably not even out of college. The rep did not back up the message.

I got a phone call the other day from a marketing company. I had been seeing their name pop up on my caller ID for weeks, calling at all hours and on the weekend. When I finally answered it turns out they were representing a charity. I thought it was a telemarketer and I told the young man at the other end of the call to remove from his list. He launched into the rigamarole about charities are exempt blah blah. And then I said I was irritated that they kept calling me never leaving a message. He then started to tell me how the charity is busy helping people in need (so my concerns are not quite as legitimate). I hung up. He was not a worthwhile representative for the charity.

Who is sitting at your front desk/reception area? Who is out a chamber events representing your company? Do you know? What have you taught your representatives about your key messages? Can they give an elevator speech for your company?

Remember, your representative is you.



It's not what you say you do

It is what you do.

- Do you live up to your commitments?
- Do you deliver the goods?
- Are you reliable? Responsive? Responsible?
- Do you reply to people or just to tweets?

There are a lot of folks out there in the social media stratosphere developing massive followings, writing blogs, sending newsletters, even writing e-books, but **all they are**

doing is saying what they do. They don't actually do what they say they do. They seem to think talking makes up for acting.

For instance, if you are in public relations, you need to create a strategy for your client. Tweeting all day is not a strategy—it is a tactic, and if it is not part of a larger, thought-out plan, it is good for nothing.

Although social networks are valuable, the people you know in real life may be more valuable because get this, you actually know them and they know you. If you are blowing off your in-the-flesh connections so that you can develop lots of virtual friends, you will be left with lots of virtual reality and little real reality.

Use social media, but use it to do stuff, not to say you do stuff.

The above is a commentary by the author of this blog. It represents her views in every possible way.



Is social media all that?

There's a lot of hand wringing about whether the "C-suite" (fancy jargon term for the higher ups in a corporation) is on social media. Does it matter? Does the CEO have to be on social media for it to be worthwhile? The answer is no. For social media to matter it has to be the conduit to your audience or your supporters.

Say for instance you are the CEO of a kid's cereal

manufacturer. You advertise your highly sweetened concoction on children's shows on Saturday morning. Do you also have to watch those shows, or even those TV channels? No! Of course not. Presumably, your marketing department did some research and found that a certain percentage of your target audience watches shows and therefore if you advertise your cereal there, those kids will be begging their parental units to buy it for them.

Social media is not for everyone. But that does not mean it is not effective in reaching some people. It is more effective for certain applications and among certain demographics. This is why social media is part of the arsenal in your marketing mix.

Let me emphasize again: social media is part of the marketing mix. There is more to marketing communications than social media, and if your chief executive is not tweeting or blogging or Facebooking, that is OK.



Customer communications is part of marcom

Marketing communications is a large, unwieldy term. It covers a bunch of stuff, from public relations to advertising, to printed materials and trade show displays. Really, marketing communications is any communications that helps to market your product/service/organization. This why you should consider customer communications also part of your marcom effort.

Let me illustrate how a failure to communicate with customers

can have a marketing impact:

I ordered a book from one of the Amazon sellers (the individuals or businesses that sell books for cheaper than Amazon does). I have done this many times before, in fact, just the week previous I had received both a book and a DVD I ordered this way. I received confirmation on July 6 that the order was received and on July 7 I got an email telling me that my order had shipped, and I could expect it any time between July 14 and 28.

My experience told me that usually it takes about a week to get your stuff, and I diligently checked with my front desk to see if my package had arrived. By July 21, two weeks after the seller said my stuff was shipped, there was no sign of the book. I started to suspect that a) they sent ground mail through China or b) that they had never sent it at all. On July 24 I contacted the seller through their website. By Tuesday I had received no answer, so I contacted them through Amazon. The response was this:

Thank you for your inquiry. We appreciate your patronage and interest in our merchandise. Our records indicate that this order was shipped via USPS Bound Printed Matter, which usually arrives within 4-14 business days. This method is not traceable, and we cannot provide a definite date for delivery. We apologize that there was confusion regarding the delivery times you could expect. The listing for each item includes a statement "usually ships in 1-2 business days". Although it does state that the item will be shipped in two business days, delivery may take 4-14 business days. We have noticed that the expectation created by these messages can create confusion and we are working diligently to correct this situation. Please feel free to contact us if you have any additional questions.

Sincerely,
Customer Service

Superbookdeals

AB

Notice how they tell me that Amazon is creating false expectations, and that they don't offer to do ANYTHING for me.

By July 28, officially the last day I could receive the package before filing a claim, I still had not received anything and wrote them again. This is their response.

Thank you for your inquiry. We appreciate your patronage and interest in our merchandise. Our records indicate that this order was shipped via USPS Bound Printed Matter, which usually arrives within 4-14 business days. This method is not traceable, and we cannot provide a definite date for delivery. We apologize that there was confusion regarding the delivery times you could expect. The listing for each item includes a statement "usually ships in 1-2 business days". Although it does state that the item will be shipped in two business days, delivery may take 4-14 business days. We have noticed that the expectation created by these messages can create confusion and we are working diligently to correct this situation. Please feel free to contact us if you have any additional questions.

Sincerely,

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AB

Look familiar? Same response as before. No attempt to resolve the situation, and no information whatsoever.

I got the book on July 29. The order, according to the invoice inside the package, had been processed on July 19 and had not shipped until July 21. The seller sent the package two weeks later than they claimed to Amazon. Basically, they lied. How likely am I to shop with these people ever again? Not very. In fact, I gave them the lowest rating and

complained to Amazon about it.

Better customer communications would have nipped this problem in the bud. Say the seller wrote me and said we're sorry, we made a mistake with your order, and we were unable to ship when we promised. Wouldn't I have been more understanding? Of course I would. Instead, they sent me a canned response, taking absolutely no responsibility for the situation and actually blaming Amazon instead. Additionally, there is no good way to reach the seller directly nor a name of a person.

Customer communications are your one-on-one way to promote your company/service/organization. If you can't market one-to-one you should not be marketing on a larger scale.

Sadly, this turns me off from the Amazon seller program. It tells me that Amazon is not vetting its sellers enough and that you don't know what you are going to get.

Bottom line is if you want to keep your customers happy, do a good job communicating with them.



How what you don't say or do can hurt you

Sometimes it's what you don't do or say that hurts you.

This is what I am talking about:

- When you don't say thank you
- When you don't acknowledge a phone call or an email
- When you don't respond

- When you don't say "I'm sorry" when you are in the wrong
- When you don't do what you say you are going to do

These omissions hurt you both personally and professionally. On a personal level, we know these types of non-actions lead to misunderstandings and hurts. They often ruin relationships. On a professional level, they are just as damaging, if not more, since there is a monetary aspect involved.

Let's take a few professional examples. Say you are a charity, and you received a donation (the amount really doesn't matter). You don't acknowledge or thank the donor. What are the chances the donor will **want** to give to you again?

Say you are a consultant, and you promised your client you would have the report by end of the week. The client is waiting on this report to make a big decision. You don't deliver. What happens? You've let down the client, and you have seriously undermined your credibility.

You you get an inquiry about your product or service. You don't respond (excuses don't matter!). You have just lost potential business.

Perhaps you are overworked and overwhelmed. Perhaps the message got lost. Perhaps you just didn't think about it. In the end, no matter what the reason or excuse is, the result is the same. Not saying or doing or not being civil and polite creates a perception about you, about what you value, about how you interact with others.

Perhaps you just don't care how you are perceived. However, if you don't care about perceptions, then you shouldn't be in marketing communications.

MarCom is about creating positive perceptions for the product/service/organization/cause we are promoting. Being civil, being responsive, showing you care are part and parcel of creating positive perceptions.

What do you think? Have you lost business because you didn't say or do what you should have said or done?



Things that make me crazy

We all have pet peeves and things that make us go bonkers. Right? Unfortunately, we can't always tell what will make other people feel like they are listening to nails scratching a blackboard, and sometimes our communications misfire because of it.

I wish I could say these are universal peeves and that you should avoid them at all costs (you *should* avoid them with me), instead I am asking you to think of what makes you crazy and what you would like to see avoided. Please be sure to share in the comments.

- Using words that you don't understand or saying something complicated when simple would do (like *utile*—why can't you say *useful*?)
- Having really obvious grammatical mistakes (example: using *I* instead of *me* or having problems with subject-verb agreement)

(Please read this entry over at [OpenForum: 5 Common Word Usage Mistakes that Make You Sound Stupid](#))

- **Capitalizing Everything Instead of Bolding:** more and more people are doing this in white papers and other texts. **Capitals are for proper names and the beginning of sentences only.**

- Threatening: If you don't do it this now... For instance, I got an email from the IPRA (a division of the PRSA-NCC) about an event, and then I got another email, and another. Then, I got one that said "final notice." Like if it was an overdue bill and I hadn't paid it. And then I get an email telling me it's my "last chance." Here's a newsflash IPRA: threatening me is not going to make me more interested in seeing Mike McCurry, who sold out his boss for the chance to sell his book. Nope.
- Saying or claiming things that are obviously not true: I am planning to write a post about this specifically, but what I am referring to are ads or brochures that seem to ignore reality. Like those Cox Communications commercials that claim the company has great customer service, when plenty of people can attest to the opposite. Or American Airlines claiming to be empathetic, telling me they know why I fly.
- Insulting my intelligence: enough said.
- Excessive self-promotion: I see this a lot on Twitter and Facebook. When you feel the need to tell me how great you are all the time, I immediately think you are insecure. I used to follow someone who was very proud of her WeightWatchers progress. And that is fine, but she needed all her followers to pat her on the back too. There is a moving line somewhere between excessive self-promotion (and neediness) and genuine pride and promotion of accomplishments. Figure out where it lies.

What's on your list?

