

Marketers who assume targets are stupid

There are marketers out there who believe that their target audience is made up of stupid people. People who will buy anything, believe anything and do anything.

These marketers are the bottom-feeder telemarketers who tend to use robo-calls or use auto-dialers to call frequently at different times on different days. They play the CALLER ID system by using non-specific identifiers such as “Card Services” or “Holiday Rebate.” (I got a call today that had the CALLER ID as “Important Call”– yes, really.) They ignore the Do Not Call List and refuse to take you off their rolls.

These marketers use direct mail with no targeting or culling of lists. They send offers that are too good to be true. They ask for sensitive information just to enter you in a drawing for a fantastic prize you have zero chance of winning.

These marketers think that by running the same TV ad or print ad over and over and over and over again you will finally be convinced to cough up three convenient payments of \$19.99 plus shipping and handling.

These marketers think that by using an actor dressed as a doctor in an advertisement they are proving their miracle pill has been tested and approved by a reliable source.

These marketers think that sending spam email that says “Secure Notification” on the subject line will make you open an email from a bank with which you have no business.

These marketers think people are stupid and will buy anything that sounds great or will be scared by a letter that says this is your final notice (even though you haven’t gotten any notice before or even do business with that company).

Preying on people's stupidity or gullibility or fear is not ethical. It is not good marketing. And marketers who engage in these practices give all marketers a bad name.

As easy as 1, 2, 3 (or not)

Last week, I read a guest post on a popular PR blog that counseled people to spend 10 minutes a year on their LinkedIn profile and to schedule one or two tweets a day "to maintain a presence on Twitter."

Can you do social media in a few minutes a year? Sure you *can*. But, the question is not whether you can, it is whether you *should*. And if you think you can achieve good outcomes by doing it the easy way, you are in for a big surprise.



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Marketing in general, and social media marketing in particular, are not easy tasks. In fact, to achieve results,

you have to spend lots of time and effort (and sometimes money too). Anybody who tells you you can do it a couple of minutes a day is lying to you (or maybe just misleading you). **Just having or maintaining a presence is simply not enough.**

Your goal may be to just have a presence. But why would that be your goal? If you are marketing (yourself, a product, a cause, an idea), you probably have goal that involves movement (more followers, more buyers, more supporters). Just being is not going to move your goal very far forward.

Take Twitter. If you schedule your tweets and then do nothing else, what exactly are you achieving? Not engagement, that's for sure. Twitter is a responsive platform. People comment and respond in real time. If you don't participate in real time, and respond quickly, I am not sure you should be on Twitter at all. Beside the fact that one or two tweets a day will likely get missed, especially if there is something else going on (and breaking news breaks on Twitter).

Take LinkedIn. If you refresh your profile one time per year, and then don't do anything else, you aren't going to appear on the timeline. People will forget about you.

Perhaps what the guess blogger I referenced above was trying to say is that you have to have a minimum presence if you are going to participate in social media channels. However, you can't and shouldn't be satisfied with the minimum. You need to MAXIMIZE your presence if you are trying to achieve goals. And perhaps you don't need to be on every social media channel. Perhaps you choose one or two where you can make an effort.

Social media marketing may be easy to understand, but it is not easy to achieve. It takes a lot of time, and a lot of effort. That's a fact.

What are your thoughts? Do you think social media marketing can be accomplished easily? Do you think a minimum works? I would love your thoughts in the comments.

How do your customers feel?

It seems that many businesses, especially the big ones, spend much more money on memorable advertising campaigns and very little on customer service. No matter how great a business is, there will always be customer service to be done (changing addresses, paying bills, correcting billing errors, etc.). Yet, many businesses ignore the basics.

A couple of examples:

Netflix. Netflix does not seem to care much about how its customers feel. The company does not respond to Twitter mentions. It doesn't seem to be concerned about negative postings. How do I know? Well, I have had Salmon Fishing in the Yemen at the top of my Netflix queue for about six weeks or more. At first, there was a "long wait." Now, it's a "short wait." Bottom line is that I have watched several other movies while still waiting for Salmon Fishing. And I have tweeted Netflix. And I have wanted to email them—there is no easy way to do that.

ATT. I have been with ATT for years now. I recently upgraded to a smartphone and was told that I was eligible for the upgrade (which apparently means in ATT language they will CHARGE you for this upgrade). I called to see if they would take this charge off—and my argument was 1) I was not advised of such a charge and 2) I was told I was eligible for an upgrade. The customer service agent said he would give me a "courtesy one-time waiver" of this fee, but proceeded to lecture me that this fee was something all carriers do and that ATT would charge me it with every subsequent upgrade. He was combative and rude, and when I pointed this out to him, he hung up on me. I called back and spoke to supervisor and she

told me the same thing about the charge (a bit less rudely). I repeatedly told her that I have been an ATT customer for years, I pay my bills on time, and ATT had given me no special offers. Bottom line in my experience: ATT does not care.

Netflix and ATT appear to be utterly unconcerned with how their customers feel about them. I am just one more customer.

In contrast, I flew **Delta** last month and was amazed by the airline's interest in my customer experience. After the first flight I was sent a survey to measure what I thought of the boarding process, etc. The return flight was badly delayed due to weather in Washington. Delta sent an apology for the delay (even though it was truly not at fault) and asked how the gate agent and flight attendants acted during the delay.

Customer service and experience should be an integral part of an organization's overall marketing strategy. If your organization does not know anything about how your customers feel, and does not respond to customer issues, you are well on your way to losing those customers.

Marketing should be both about ATTRACTING customers and RETAINING them.

Thoughts?

Checking out the customer experience

My last blog post was about how you have to "be open for business" if you are trying to market a destination. In other

words, marketers have to be aware of what the potential/actual customer experience looks and feels like.

Last night, I attended a happy hour at a newish bar in Penn Quarter in Washington, DC. My friend and I each got a \$5 beer and sat down. The place was crowded, not packed, and the din was tremendous. We could barely hear each other. Why? Well, the room was apparently designed to bounce all noise back. There were none of the usual noise absorbers like acoustic tile on the ceiling or carpet or drapes. Instead the floor was pure concrete, the ceiling had no insulation and the walls were also concrete.

It was so unpleasant that we left after one beer. I wonder how many other people also left after a short while. If this bar checked out its customer experience they could take corrective steps to cut down some of the noise. Otherwise, I predict that within six months the place will close because no one is going to want to hang out there.

Regardless of what field you are in, marketing is not simply pushing out a message and hoping it will stick. Marketers need to understand their customers and their experience with their product or service.

Savvy marketers will check out the customer experience. Whether you do it by surveys, secret shoppers, going on location, listening to customer input on social channels—there are many ways to understand what your customers like and dislike. If you ignore the customer experience, your marketing will ultimately fail.

How do you check out the customer experience? Have you had a marketing campaign fail (or succeed) because of customer feedback?

Is your destination open for business?

If you work in destination or travel marketing, there are plenty of people that envy your job. What could be more fun than having travel as your business? After all, travel marketers get to research and report on the places that make a destination stand out. I am sure that involves a lot of fun activities like dining out and attending cultural events.

Some destinations are easier to market than others. Perhaps New York City or Washington, DC are more enticing to travelers than Des Moines or Kenosha (no offense to either of those cities).

Whatever destination you are marketing, however, you should make sure it is open for business. This means having places for people to stay and eat, and actually being open.

Yesterday, I went to Hagerstown, Maryland. My destination was not the city of Hagerstown, but rather the Premium Outlets located there. Once I was done shopping, I decided to check out "Historic Downtown Hagerstown." I figured I would stop by the visitor center to get some information about what made Hagerstown historic and then perhaps get a refreshment of some sort.

I drove into Hagerstown, and I noticed that there were few if any people on the street. Everything seemed closed. I went into the visitor center at 3:45 pm, which was lucky since it closes at 4 pm on Sundays. The only person there was the clerk. I asked if anything was open and he told me that most restaurants and other businesses in downtown Hagerstown are closed on Sundays AND on Mondays. I picked up a few brochures

and left. Needless to say, I was not going to be able to get any snacks so I just headed to the highway and back home.

Hagerstown's Convention and Visitor's Bureau's website does not mention that downtown Hagerstown is closed on Sundays. Also, their tagline seems to be "Let's make some Maryland memories 75 miles away from Baltimore." I am not sure why anyone would think that's a good way to market a destination (hey, its more than an hour's drive from a big city!).

Most people who take day trips do so on the weekends- Saturdays AND Sundays. If a town/city is dead on Sundays, there is no reason to visit. If you want to market your city or town as a destination (historic or otherwise), you must be open for business.

Would you make a separate trip to visit a place if you found it was not open on the day you visit? Let me know your thoughts.

Should you do all your marketing on social media?

Social media has lots of pluses when it comes to marketing. Among them are:

- Low cost (especially compared to the cost of advertising on television)
- Word-of-mouth value for trust and amplification
- Speed and ease in execution

Social media is a VALUABLE part of a marketing communications

plan, but, it should not be the only part. If you put ALL your effort/dollars into social media, there is little doubt that you will be failing to reach all of your target audience.

Let me tell you about two companies that make their business solely on online traffic, but are advertising in other media: Constant Contact and Reputation.com

In case you have never received an enewsletter, you should know that Constant Contact is an established email marketing business. Many organizations and businesses use Constant Contact to send out email campaigns. Constant Contact advertises its services on the radio. Yes. On the radio.

Reputation.com works on making sure that you preserve a good reputation online. It is useful for people/organizations that have received negative reviews or are associated with with negative news/information. Reputation.com advertises in print (I saw a print ad this morning in the Washington Post). It also advertises on television.

If these two companies—which do business online—have to take their advertising off line, that should tell you that you cannot rely on social media (or online media) alone. You have to mix it up. You have to reach potential customers where they are, and they may not be on social or online.

Do you do all your marketing on social media? If so, tell me why. If not, also tell me why.

Marketing lessons from an A+ plumber

As a homeowner, I have dealt with dozens of contractors to perform repairs and inspections, and all the other things one needs to get done in a house. One stands out—my plumber Mark. Not only is he a good plumber, he's a nice guy. I think we can learn a whole lot about marketing from him.

Choose your target market carefully: Mark has decided exactly where he is most comfortable working, geographically and culturally. He knows also what he is NOT looking for.

Advertise to the target market only: Mark does not have a sign on his truck, and he does not run ads in the mass media. He wants to continue working with his target market and not with just anyone.

Distinguish yourself from the competition: In Mark's case, he is green (although not certified) and he prides himself on punctuality. These are two things he highlights in his marketing materials.

Love what you do and be good at it: Mark loves plumbing and has since he was a child. He also knows what he is doing.

Be professional and responsive: Mark responds to inquiries quickly. He asks for pictures of the repair that needs to get done so he can properly assess and estimate the job.

Be pleasant and respectful: People like to do business with people they like. Mark always shakes hands with you when he comes to your house, and he immediately dons booties to prevent tracking dirt into your house. (something most contractors don't even think about). Mark also leaves his work area spotless. No messes to clean up.

In the end, Mark wins at marketing because he has figured out how to market to a niche audience, to provide exemplary service that generates return business and referrals and he doesn't waste his marketing dollar reaching out to people outside his market.

Who is your audience?

Perhaps the most basic question you have to ask yourself before creating any marketing/communications materials is:

Who is my target audience?

The more you know who they are, where they are and what they need, the better your materials will be.

And yet. A couple of days ago, I was driving down Massachusetts Avenue in Northwest D.C. and saw a sign outside of a church that made me wonder.

The sign said:

English Classes Available. Please Call [telephone number] to Enroll.

Now, if you need to learn English, can you read English? Nope. Is the audience for this sign people who know people who need to learn English? Perhaps. I would think this sign would be more effective if it were written in the language of the people you are trying to target, don't you think?

Special is special unless it isn't

I recently flew to Fort Lauderdale and back on US Airways. On both flights, the flight attendants had a “special” offer for us, a “specially selected flight.” The offer— only available until April 30 (or the whole month of April, whichever way you look at it) was to sign up for a credit card, and get bonus miles. The rest was so complicated that the flight attendant was struggling to explain what it was and how it worked (something to the effect that if you spent x dollars then you could buy a free companion ticket to anywhere except where it is not available).



Photo by Dr. Keats from Flickr

This was not a special offer. It was a run of the mill sign up today for our credit card so that we credit you 5000 miles

for the trip. This is not different from any of the airline credit cards or even the points credit cards out there.

This was not unique to our flight. The flight attendants made the same pitch twice. And the guy next to me had heard it on another flight.

Moral of the story: Don't say something is special if it is not. Most people are savvy enough to know when something is really special and when it is not. Also, don't repeat your special offer by saying it is only available to a select few when you've already offered it to many many others.

4 Passover Lessons for Marketing and Communications

Passover is almost over for those of us who celebrate it. The eight-day-long Jewish holiday celebrates liberation from slavery in Egypt. For most people, the main observance of the holiday is abstaining from eating bread and other leavened products (because the Israelites fleeing Egypt did not have enough time to allow their bread to rise), and substituting matza instead.

Can Passover inform any marketing communications decisions? I think it can. Here are four Passover lessons for you marcomm efforts:

One: Freedom rules!

Passover is a festival that celebrates the liberation of the Israelites from Egyptian slavery. In marketing and

communications, we also celebrate freedom. We don't want to be tied to one platform, one way of thinking, solutions that no longer work. Celebrate and use your freedom!

Two: Change is good

During passover, we eat matza for eight days, and don't eat bread, pasta, etc. It is a change for most people, a pause, a reset. It challenges your routine, forces your creativity. When you do things differently for a short time, you may discover what works and what doesn't.

Three: Dress it up a bit

In my opinion, matza is infinitely better when spread with cream cheese or jelly (or both). Plain is just OK. In other words, some bells and whistles help. For example, having a well designed, attractive website can give your business an edge over a dull, plain website.

Four: Friends and family are key

Passover is a holiday that is better when celebrated with friends and family. In marketing and communications, your "friends and family" are your customers and your promoters. In social media they are your followers and "likers." Your friends and family are the cornerstone of your outreach efforts.

Do you see any other lessons in Passover?