

Who should handle your newsletter?

If you have an organizational newsletter, who handles it? In my experience, it probably is one of the following:

- Administrative assistant
- Intern
- Volunteer/Development assistant or coordinator (for nonprofits)

And yet, an newsletter should be part of your communications and marketing efforts. At the very least, your communications/marketing people should take a look at the newsletter and check for the following:

- Consistency of message
- Use of logo and tagline
- How it fits into the overall messaging/communications campaign
- Timing (is it coming out too close to other communications?)

Of course, someone needs to be the final editor and proofreader. In the past couple of weeks, I have received an newsletter that has had date mistakes (saying an event is on Wednesday instead of Tuesday, with Tuesday's date) or with location mistakes or even speaker name mistakes.

The best way to handle an newsletter is to have an editorial calendar—created by your communications department—which can adjust for any special events or needs that arise each month. Your admin or intern can write the content, but it must be checked before sending out. Every single time.

An newsletter is a valuable communications tool, which when done right, can help your organization. When done wrong, it

can reflect badly on your organization and make people unsubscribe.

How do you handle your enewsletter? Do you have any good tips? Please share them in the comments.

How not to sell

Here we are—it's Black Friday, and plenty of businesses want your business. Between extended (way extended) hours and special deals, people are being lured in to buy. Most of these people have a very specific need in mind (a Christmas gift for their child or a flat screen TV for the family room) and are going in with focus.

Which leads me to an experience I had on Tuesday (the day I went to the mall, because, frankly, there is nothing I need so much that I will fight people and crowds today). It was a classic case of how not to sell.

I went in to a shoe store—with the intent of shopping for SHOES. I selected a couple of pairs and asked the clerk for my size. She said "We are having a sale on our handbags—20% off." I nodded. Then, she brought the shoes out. I slipped them on, and found that they were a bit loose in the heel. She hadn't been paying too much attention to me, and finally asked me how they fit. I said they were loose. She offered to measure my foot...I declined (I already know my shoe size). Then I selected another pair. She brought them out, and she told me the store has a great deal on socks...get a hole in them and get them replaced for life. I nodded once again. I left the store with no shoes, socks or handbags.

The salesperson was trying to sell everything except what I

wanted. Most likely, “corporate” told its people to upsell and gives a bonus/commission for every non-shoe item sold. But, in this case, this particular salesperson lost sight of what her job is in essence—to sell shoes. In order to do so, she would have had to focus on what I wanted. She could have asked if I was looking for a casual or dressy shoe or whether I needed a wider width, or offered an alternative suggestion when I told her the shoes she brought did not fit. **Instead, she ignored my needs and focused on her script (mention sale on purses, mention lifetime warranty on socks). How not to sell, plain and simple.**

To sell, you have to focus on what your customer wants. That is also plain and simple.

4 tips to make e-invitations successful

Everybody’s inbox is full of holiday and event invitations during this time of the year. Between fundraisers and holiday parties, you have enough email to last you until January. If you are the person sending those invitations out, are you having success?

Success starts with having the person open your email, but is sealed when the person makes a decision to attend.

Sometimes, there is too much volume and you could have the perfect invitation and few people will see it. That’s something to consider during the November-December holiday season. However, you can’t avoid it if you are keen to have a holiday party or a year-end fundraiser.

Based on the invites I have been getting, here are my four top tips for making them successful:

1. Have an informative subject line (Join Joe's Christmas Party on December 22)
2. Provide the **all the requisite information**: date, time, location/directions, cost, attire, and any other relevant information. Do not put any of this stuff elsewhere.
3. Double (and triple) check the dates, spelling, and the accuracy of the information.
4. Include at least one reason as to why this event is a must-attend (biggest fundraiser of the year, more than 200 potential clients, the best food and drink, etc.)

These may seem like good common sense, but I can't tell you how many emails I get that:

- Have the right day, but the wrong date
- Don't include location
- Don't include cost (and make you click through to registration to find out)
- Give no reason why would want to attend

Yes, this is basic, but minding the basics is the first thing you should do. Once you have covered the basic, the extra credit to make invitations successful is good design. An attractively designed invitation will welcome people, and make them want to be a part of the event.

What do you do to make your invitations stand out from the crowd?

Why The Outlet Shoppes at Gettysburg needs help

A few days ago I received a four-fold brochure in the mail that had this tease on the address panel:

*Governor O'Malley doesn't want you to know about this....SHOP
TAX FREE*

My first impression was this was a political mailing. It wasn't, because on the back panel it says:

Shop Tax Free Every Day

The Outlet Shoppes at Gettysburg (website, address, phone)

Midnight Madness – Thanksgiving Night! Save All Night

On the inside panels was a listing of participating stores with their different special offers.

Do you notice any missing information? How about driving directions, or even an indication how far it is from main roads/cities in Maryland? How about hours?

This brochure assumes that saving on taxes would be enough incentive for me to go the website or call to get the information that is missing. That is expecting too much. I did go to the website just to see how this mall does with this piece of marketing communication. The website does list hours and has a rather unhelpful map under the directions. And also a Facebook link (which is not listed in the brochure).

I think that if you are going to spend money on printing, it better be worth the money. In this case, the Outlet Shoppes at Gettysburg got carried away with an idea—lets tell people in Maryland that we don't charge taxes—and went from there. The

company neglected to include BASIC information that anybody choosing to shop out of state would need: how do I get there, how long is it going to take and when are you open?

I would bet anything that this brochure was done in house. If it wasn't done in house, it was done by a local agency that knows exactly how to get to the Outlet Shoppes at Gettysburg, because there is no other mall like it nearby. In Maryland, there are several outlet shopping malls in state, and others in Northern Virginia.

To me, this is a clear example of why you need to get an independent or outside opinion on your marketing materials. You will overlook something and a third party may be able to point it out to you, like I am doing here.

Thoughts?

Should you be handling your own communications?

When businesses are very small they tend to not be able to afford outside help. Sometimes, the business in question works in the communications space (writing, editing, advertising, etc.) and thinks it can handle it.

Chances are good that you should NOT be handling your own communications, unless you can answer the following three

questions:

1) Do you know what you offer, and can you say it in one sentence? Recently, I was at a business meeting and someone was attempting to describe her business. She gave us many sentences but still it did not make sense. Someone had to ask her to clarify, and she still wasn't able to do it.

2) What are the top three benefits of working with you? Unless you have been asking your customers all along, chances are good that you may not be sure what your customers really appreciate about your business.

3) Are you able to speak(and write) in plain English? Many firms, especially those in the technology sector, speak in jargonese. Most people, including your customers, do not understand jargon, or convoluted sentences. Being clear and making yourself understood is not so simple!

Hiring outside help can be invaluable in helping you to refine your message, clarify your thoughts and communicate them concisely.

Is Facebook becoming a nightmare for small business?

I logged on to my Facebook page to find the following message:

Changes to How You Share Content on Your Page

We want you to connect with your fans in the most effective ways possible. That's why as of September 30th you'll no

longer be able to automatically import posts from your website to your page notes. The best way to get people to interact with your content is to give them insight into the links you share on your Wall by adding personal comments and responding to feedback from fans.

We're focused on creating even better tools for pages – look for announcements soon.

Somehow, I am not sure that making it harder for me to share my blog posts on Facebook will also make it more effective for me to connect with my “fans. ” Why is Facebook telling me what is better? The answer is simple: Facebook wants me to spend money. Advertise the page to get more fans, and more clients.

Over on Mashable, there is an article “What Facebook’s Changes Mean for Marketers.” Basically, the new Facebook changes will force marketers (businesses) to create a more interactive approach to the getting fans. It will require more work and more dedication.

For small businesses, which are working on getting paying customers and using social media to amplify their reach, putting more work into ONE platform is nonsensical. Yes, Facebook has A LOT of users, but not all those users are your customers. If a business finds that its best base is coming from Facebook, then yes, it will be worth investing the extra time.

I am not convinced that Facebook generates sales. It does helps create brand awareness and build image, which adds value. Small businesses will have to decide how much more time they want to devote to Facebook, since it looks like it will require more time, more work and more strategy.

Your thoughts?

What do your customers want?

Can you complete this line:

The main thing my customers/clients want from me is

You should, of course, be able to answer this. If you are a toy manufacturer, for example, your line could be “the main thing my customers want from me is safety...parents won’t buy unsafe toys for their kids.”

Once you can answer this question, you can proceed with marketing.

This week, Netflix made an announcement that it would spin off its DVD business under a new name (Qwikster). This came at the heels of a subscriber loss due in part to the 60% increase in prices announced earlier. Not only that, but Netflix’ stock price has fallen.

Apparently, Netflix failed to ask itself what its customers wanted. Ignoring their loyal fan base (as this great article in the Harvard Business Review blog discusses) is probably why there has been such an uproar.

What do Netflix customers want? Do they want more streaming video or do they want to keep getting DVDs in the mail? Do they want an easy, inexpensive way to get movies fast?

Netflix’ CEO wants to be in the streaming business, not in the DVD business. But perhaps that is not what his customers want. Perhaps his customers do not like the name Qwikster. Perhaps he didn’t ASK his customers first. Sure, companies have to make decisions based on financials etc, but part of the input should include some market research, some customer

feedback. Netflix did not ask, and now they know—customers want convenience and price stability from Netflix.

What do your customers want? How will you find out?

Give them a reason to care

My last post suggested you have a strong subject line in your email, especially when you are reaching out to potential clients. You have to give them a reason to care.

This advice extends to your Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook posts and your marketing in general. If you are trying to get people to do something (read your post, buy your product/service, donate), you **MUST** give those people a reason to care. You can't just say "look at me."

First, ask yourself what you want your potential client or customer to do. Then ask yourself, what would make the potential client/customer interested in doing what I ask?

So instead of saying: Donate \$\$ to Good Cause X say Donate \$\$ to Good Cause so we can help feed the starving in your city. Or be more creative: Hundreds are suffering from malnutrition—giving to Good Cause will help.

Are your emails getting read?

Email marketing is alive and well, in spite of all the doomsayers who say email is dead. Most people use email to communicate, and generally check their email multiple times a day.

We all get tons of emails—notifications, calendar events, special discounts, sales pitches and perhaps a few personal notes too. What makes you open (let alone read) an email. There are a few scenarios:

Known sender: We'll open something if we know who is sending it (your aunt Karen or Groupon, for example) Of course, spammers have exploited this to their advantage by fabricating the sent address.

Subject line: We'll open something if it sounds relevant or interesting, like "Special Event to Benefit (name of charity you care about) Next Week).

Ideally, your emails should have both to ENSURE the are opened. If you don't have one, you have to work on the other. Your mother can send you an email with the subject line "Hi," but if you are someone the recipient does not know your subject line MUST be descriptive.

I received an email this morning from someone I do not know, which had the subject line "meeting request." Why should I open that? I don't know the person sending it and the subject tells me nothing. If this person had been more descriptive and said "(Company name) requesting meeting to discuss (product/service/whatever)" wouldn't that have made it clear what the email was about?

Think about your readers...do they know you well enough to care about your emails? If not, give them a good reason!

UPDATE: Check out this infographic about email, which provides some good facts/figures including the fact that email continues to GROW.

Finding a vendor

How do you find a vendor? It is important to know this because it can inform marketing. Depending on what I am looking for, I used Google, LinkedIn, listing services, reviews or Twitter. I am sure you use other tools (and would appreciate your insights in the comments).

For example, yesterday I was searching for a freelance editor. I used Google, and found (remarkably) few individuals had websites, whether I searched for “DC freelance editor” or “Maryland freelance editor.” I did find a couple, and one of them, had a very nice website and clearly defined rates. I searched for her on LinkedIn, and discovered that her background was very technical—no editorial. Made me think twice about her skill set. Another one had very strong writing credentials, but absolutely no social media (and she explained she is not into it). It made me question whether she gets it. I also Tweeted it out, and got a response from a colleague (good word of mouth). But, no freelance editors even picked up on it. Obviously, not using Twitter search to find business.

Tool: Google

Marketing lesson: Websites are important. Google profiles are helpful. If you are in an industry that is reviewed, having positive reviews is important since Google finds results from

Yelp and others.

Tool: LinkedIn

Marketing lesson: If you aren't on LinkedIn, you are at a disadvantage. The quality of your profile (both for individuals and companies) is important. For individuals, testimonials, number of connections and your background do matter. Don't make stuff up, but bone up what is there.

Tool: Twitter (or other social media sites)

Marketing lesson: How you present yourself, and even if you are on social media, says a lot. What does your Twitter profile, stream, followers say about your business or you?

Tool: Printed materials (brochures, business cards, etc.)

Marketing lesson: How your marketing materials look (are they printed on quality stock, are they black/white or color, do they look professionally designed), can give an immediate impression. How your marketing materials read—what information you provide—can seal the deal.

Tool: Using the telephone

Marketing lesson: Are you reachable? How do you/your company answer the phone? Do you even answer the phone? Some people will want to talk to someone in real time.

Tool: Word of mouth

Marketing lesson: Each and every customer who has a positive interaction with you can be an ambassador, and each and every customer who has a negative impression can be a detractor. Watch your customer interactions. Improve your customer service.

The bottom line is that if you are marketing yourself/your

company, you have to understand how people find you, and how they decide whether to contact you or not.

Your thoughts? What makes you decide on a vendor? How do you find a vendor?