

What you can learn about marketing from food trucks

You've heard of (or perhaps eaten from) the food trucks? While it may be a fad, it is a huge trend right now, spawning its very own Cooking Channel show: Eat Street. I admit, watching this show is a guilty pleasure for me. And, it seems, most of the really cool trucks are in places no where near me like Vancouver, Portland or San Francisco, making me really really want to visit!

Food trucks are popular because of three main reasons:

1. Mobility—bringing the food to you;
2. Accessibility: making cutting edge food cheaper/more accessible
3. Specialization: they concentrate on one thing such as fried food, cheese, lobster, sauce, ethnic, etc.

That last one is key—food trucks are specialists. You know what they offer right off the bat. Perhaps you love Philipino food? There is a truck for that in San Francisco! Grilled cheese your thing? Then head over to the grilled cheese truck in Los Angeles.

I was watching Eat Street the other day and daydreaming about a visit to the Pacific Northwest to have fish and chips or great soup or something, when the show focused on a truck that made pockets (some people would call them empanadas). They make savory and sweet pockets. Great. And then, the truck owner says he also makes burgers. What??? Why? What do burgers have to do with pockets?

Pockets and burgers are not related. One does not add anything to the other. In the competitive food truck business, you stand out by doing one thing really well. People will go to your truck because you have great lobster or mac and cheese or

tacos. Or because you have great Indian or Korean or Mexican.

Pick a specialty, get really good at it and don't dilute it. Don't be the pocket-burger truck.

The problem with leaf blowers

Have you ever been jarred awake by the sound of a leaf blower? Not too pleasant is it? Leaf blowers are definitely high on the noise index, but low on the productivity scale. After all, what does a leaf blower do? It blows leaves around—it doesn't gather them, or suck them up, it just moves them from place to place.

As I was watching a gardener use his leaf-blower several times over a four-hour span, making noise and not accomplishing ANYTHING, it occurred to me that the people paying for his services were really wasting their money. First, he kept doing the same thing, over and over, without actually creating any change. Second, he *seemed* to be busy and not to be accomplishing much. Third, he was taking the easy way out, yet at more expense. The harder and cheaper way would be to use a rake and gather the leaves to then dispose of. He was wasting resources (time, gas) and accomplishing little or nothing.

Since this is not a gardening blog, you know where I am headed with this. Are you using a leaf-blower for your marketing efforts? Are you making lots of noise but not actually getting things done? Are you moving paper around but not actually getting to closing? Are you doing the same thing over and over with minimal or no results?

Just like leaf blowers are annoying and pretty useless in gardens throughout the country, loud and untargeted marketing

efforts are pointless exercises that create noise and don't communicate. Next time you launch a marketing campaign or create a marketing piece, ask yourself, is this at all like a leaf-blower or is it a rake? After all, rakes are useful, cheap and get the job done with minimal noise.

Thoughts on reaching out, stumbling blocks and helplessness

Perhaps in honor of the name of this blog (Caffeinated ideas and views on marketing), I have lots of things percolating in my head this morning.

Reaching out

With social media fast becoming a substitute for print and electronic media, and with the idea that "inbound" marketing is best, we are seeing a drop-off in reaching out. For instance, there is a conference today in Washington that I only just found out about because someone in my Twitter stream is attending. This conference is intended for nonprofits. I am not sure what type of marketing was done for the conference, but I can assure you it was not a traditional advertising in many channels approach. I will place bets that the nonprofit I work with never heard about it...

I feel that what is happening here is that circles are getting smaller and tighter. If you depend on social media for your outreach, you will be reaching a self-reinforcing group of

folks. More and more, if I attend an event promoted on social media, I see the same folks I saw at the last event.

I am not shunning social media, but I do think that if marketers want to spread the word, they have to use many different channels to do so.

Stumbling blocks

Last week, I attended a talk by Guy Kawasaki, author of Enchantment. He mentioned that when you put stumbling blocks between you and your customer or supporter, you are not being enchanting. And yet, I have visited dozens of blogs this week, with interesting posts that I would like to share on my social networks, and guess what, they make it hard to do. For instance “Sexy Sharing” (I think that is what is called) adds a second step when you click on one the sharing buttons (It asks whether you want to allow a third party to connect to your account...and I don’t). That is not sexy, and it is a stumbling block. Similarly, some blogs do not have sharing or their sharing buttons don’t work, making me do the work (use my own Hootsuite sharing button or use a URL shortener to cut and paste). Or how many times are you asked to give information, create passwords, etc. just to get costs/estimates/speak to someone. Stumbling blocks turn people away, and hurt you in the end.

Helplessness

I belong to a listserv, the name and purpose of which I won’t share here. What irks me about this listserv is that many times people ask questions to the listserv that could be found out by doing some research (AKA typing a term into Google). To me, this is being helpless and dependent on others, and makes those people look bad (stupid). Perhaps these people are trying to reach out and start a conversation, but sometimes you just have to wonder if they understand the power of the Internet.

I admit, the above are some random thoughts. Your take on them is appreciated...that is why we have comments!

Engagement is just the beginning

Johna Burke, of BurellesLuce addressed WWPR last week (recap by Joan Coyle [here](#)). She talked about social media measurement and provided lots of useful information about web tools and marketing strategies.

One thing, more than anything else Johna said, struck me as crucial: she talked about engagement and marriage. Engagement, Johna said, is just the beginning. It's when everything is all promise and excitement (isn't that ring all shiny?) Marriage (which most times follows the engagement) takes a lot of hard work and commitment.

In social media, people talk about engagement all the time. You have to "engage" with your followers. What does this really mean? Why are you engaging? The answer is simple—to build a lasting relationship (the "marriage"). If you are engaging just to engage and not to follow through, then you are just breaking promises. If you get caught up in getting Twitter followers but don't provide any substance or reason to "stay together" then you are looking at social media (and any marketing) as being all about the excitement of it rather than the substance (which should be your marketing goals and strategy).

Engagement is just the beginning. It is your starting point to a marketing/communications strategy that seeks to accomplish a goal (e.g. establish thought leadership, increase sales,

etc.).

Are you getting engaged all the time or are you working on your marriage?



Brilliant and not so brilliant

Free tacos, just for me!

This is brilliant, and it is part of California Tortilla's clever (and as they would say, spunky) online direct marketing campaign. Let me explain: CalTort has a loyalty card (the "Burrito Elito" card), which allows you to accumulate points toward free food. To use it, you have to register it online. Every week, CalTort sends out a special of the week or some such to its database (which I am sure is sizeable). And every once in a while they send out a private note to card holders, such as the one I got today, which says, under the subject line "We Miss You. And We Can Prove It":

*Where the heck have you been? To show you how much we miss you, we got you a little something—but we can't give it to you unless you come in. So here's the scoop: we've just put a **FREE TACO** on your Burrito Elito card. All you have to do is visit any Cal Tort, with your card, within 2 weeks of this email to get it. After 2 weeks it goes away—so hurry!*

We're holding our breath until you get here. 1, 2, 3...

Why is this brilliant? Because it has a personality (slightly

irreverent), it is personalized and gives me a REASON to go to CalTort. It also shows that a bit of creativity and some work can earn you customers and loyalty. Kudos to CalTort for knowing how to use direct email effectively.

This is boring. Gen Y thinks this way.

On blog posts, in newspaper articles, on TV and in ads everywhere there are sweeping generalizations and assumptions that undermine your message. You (the blogger or copywriter) assume that if you find something boring, that everyone else finds it boring. You are a member of a generation, therefore you can speak for the entire cohort. No and no.

It is not very brilliant to assume that the world sees things EXACTLY like you do, like there is a universal key and you hold it. For instance, not everyone found the humor in Pineapple Express funny (I didn't), so if you start a movie ad with the line "As funny as Pineapple Express," you will automatically lose people.

Be mindful of what you are assuming and saying. Generalizations and stereotypes that are cast too wide will turn away more people than will be brought in.

You must be able to answer this question

In my new favorite movie, **POM Wonderful Presents: The Greatest Movie Ever Sold**, filmmaker Morgan Spurlock goes into a meeting to pitch his movie to Ban Deodorant. Apparently, Ban is not a top-tier deodorant, and the company is pretty interested in alternative ways of expanding their presence,

thus the meeting with Spurlock.

During the pitch, Morgan Spurlock asks the Ban people to describe their product. There is a long moment of silence that follows, and then the marketing people put their thinking caps on. The audience laughed at this interval because of how ridiculous the scene was—and yet, I bet it plays out every day with businesses of every size, everywhere.

You must be able to answer this question: **what is your product/service and what makes it different from any other product/service in the category.**

If you can't describe your product/service and its attributes, you are in deep trouble. If you don't do any other marketing, you must work on that description and pound it in to your marketing and salespeople's heads. Can you imagine a Coca Cola salesperson being asked to describe his/her product and not being able to do so? All he/she has to say is "Coke is it! " (Just kidding, but they would probably say something to the effect that Coke is one of the world's top selling soft drinks, and it is a carbonated, sugar loaded "delight.")



“Faction:” learn what this is

Perhaps if you studied politics, like I did, you think faction is a party or group that is usually causing some trouble. However, if you watch Morgan Spurlock's *The Greatest Movie Ever Sold*, you will learn that a “faction” is a combination of the words fact and fiction. Meaning that it is neither fact nor fiction. Perhaps it is a fictionalized fact, or fact-based fiction. Sounds like many of the memoirs that are making the

rounds these days.

The Greatest Movie Ever Sold is a faction, and it is a must-watch movie if you are even remotely interested in marketing. Spurlock, who is previously known for his documentary Super Size Me, has blown open the world of product placement and movie funding.

This movie is funny and it is pure genius. To see Spurlock go pitch this movie, about product placement and movie funding, to people in marketing is just about as humorous as any parody can be. But what is truly genius, is that it is real. This is how things get done in the world of marketing. Celebrity endorsements are real. Advertisers are looking for new ways to reach more audiences. And everything is for sale.

I can't do this movie justice here. There was too much stuff that struck a chord, from creating a pitch, to finding the brand personality, to how to market a movie.

Here's a the official trailer:

[youtube id=T4Ng2P3zxzM&w=560&h=349]



Two different offers from one service provider

I was away for a few days and had to wade through a pile of mail on my return. Among the "important" mail that I received, were two envelopes from the Automobile Association of America (AAA). One was a co-op with USAirways (with which I have

frequent flyer miles) and the other was a garden-variety membership solicitation.

I used to be an AAA member but had let my membership lapse years ago when I discovered my car insurance company provides roadside assistance as part of my fee. What I like about AAA is that you can usually get good deals on hotels, so I read the I started reading the USAirways/AAA offer first.

The USAir/AAA offer included “free enrollment” (\$15 initiation fee was waived), free second membership, free extra month and 750 miles. To find the total cost for the year, I had to read through it twice. It was hidden in the billing certificate. **The total cost would be \$65.50.**

The offer from just AAA is the following: Free enrollment, free second membership, a savings of \$25 on membership and a savings of \$5 on automatic renewals. Again, it was hard to find the **total cost of \$40.50.**

Basically, I would save money just having a regular AAA membership. Why would USAirways agree to send out an offer that when compared to the regular offer is more expensive? Remember, miles do not cost the airline anything and you can't get anywhere with 750 miles. Why would you, the consumer, pay \$25 for 750 miles? Remember, the actual service is being provided by AAA. The toll-free number for both offers is the general AAA number.

And, why make the total cost so hard to find? As I wrote about a few days ago, it is a bad idea to hide crucial information. Consumers need to make decisions with the facts in front of them.

I am not sure where to point the blame here: at AAA for not de-duping their mailing lists? at USAir for agreeing to have an offer sent out that is more than AAA's own offer, with similar timing? at AAA for thinking customers don't care about details?

My bottom line: if you are going to have different offers, make sure that one is not cannibalizing the other.

Your thoughts?

My marketing must-haves

As a very small business, Deborah Brody Marketing Communications does not have a large marketing budget (seems a bit ironic). For instance, I have never printed a brochure, but I do have a website. Here are the list of things I do have, some of which are free, for marketing purposes:

- **Website** (soon to be upgraded...stay tuned): This is the must-have of all must-haves, for the obvious reasons that you need to know that I exist, and without a website, I may as well not be here.
- **Blog** (you are here on WordPress.com ...soon to be integrated to one site): Keeps you informed on what I am thinking.
- **Business cards**: printed, in color and double-sided. Well worth the investment. Latest ones were ordered from Greenerprinter.com and are made of 100% recycled paper.
- **Twitter**: Have met many people via Twitter not to mention the amount of information and ideas that I have picked up.
- **LinkedIn**: A profile on LinkedIn is like an online resume with feelers.
- **Google alerts**: I track several topics, and my own name. An invaluable source of current information only topped by
- **Google reader** (with a long list of great blogs and feeds): You need to be current in the marketing

field...and probably any field. A good way to stay on top of stuff is to have your Google Reader feeding you the latest from the industry's top blogs, etc.

What I have that is not a must-have: a Facebook page for my business. This is in spite of evidence that says Facebook is a good place to be for businesses and brands.

What are your must-haves? Let me know in the comments please!

What we can learn from the budget “negotiations”

Last week, our elected officials took the whole country to the brink. Whether you think it was ideology, intransigence, real economic crisis or plain circus, we all got a painfully clear view of what kind of government we have, and it was not a pretty picture.

But not all is bad. We can derive some lessons from this latest governmental crisis that can be applied to marketing:

- At some point, spin does not compensate for the reality on the ground so stop spinning already!
- Repeating the same phrase over and over becomes meaningless (e.g. “we are fighting for the American people,” “we do not want to shut down the government.”)
- Innuendo and doublespeak are not substitutes for clear communication.
- Say what you want unequivocally. You want cuts to Planned Parenthood—say that. Don’t make it a “rider” so that you can sneak it in under the radar.
- Don’t underestimate your audience...they can see through

your antics.

- Be prepared for people to question you, your motives and your goals.
- There is a difference between justifying your actions and explaining your actions.

Politicians, like PR or advertising professionals, are in the business of persuasion. And like PR or ad people, they are beholden to special interests (or as we call them “clients”).

What did you learn about marketing from our government’s game of chicken?

