

# Expectations

We all have gone to see a movie that our best friend raved about only to find we thought it was just OK. Same happens with restaurants that receive glowing reviews. What happens is that our expectations have been set too high and naturally, we are disappointed with reality.

It's a like a present that is wrapped beautifully...what will be inside? Will it be better than its wrapping?

Buzz is about forming expectations and then exploiting them. Marketing people love buzz or WOM (word-of-mouth) because few things are as powerful as a recommendation from someone we know.

The down side of creating high expectations is having to deliver or even over-deliver on such expectations. We can have stuff go very wrong when things don't live up to expectations.

Lately, I have been paying attention to hotel websites and ratings. Usually, there is a picture of a perfect room. We don't see anything wrong. But what happens if we book this room, and show up at the hotel only to find that the bathroom is filthy, the carpets (which did not show up in the room picture) are grimy and the noise level is unbearable. What happens is that we are very unhappy. But what makes it worse is that we *expected* better.

Clearly there is a fine line to walk for marketing people. We have to create expectations and we have to be able to meet them in a reasonable way.

Tastes differ of course, so what I absolutely love, you may hate. Humans are more forgiving of taste not being met, but with service and other issues that are quantifiable we are not so forgiving. For instance, I went to a restaurant with a

friend. We both order the same thing, and I like it but she doesn't. Taste is at play (she prefers less spicy). However, we can both agree on the service (good), ambience (lovely), parking (difficult).

Marketing that succeeds creates high enough expectations to attract a customer without creating a situation that the customer may actually be upset. The latter happens a lot with sales. Stores run a sale, drawing customers expecting to get a great price on an item they really want. Expectations are not met and tempers are raised if the item is out of stock or is not as it appeared.

What do you do to create reasonable expectations? How do you navigate this line?

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## **Was 2009 a good year for marketing communications?**

As the last year in the first decade of 21st century, 2009 was certainly a year of flux. We saw lots of changes in media. Many magazines were shuttered, and some newspapers became online only. The Internet, in the Web 2.0 format was king. Twitter flourished, as did Facebook. Blogs continued to pop up everywhere. All the mainstream newscasts routinely place more information, video, interviews online. The divide between haves and have-nots is certainly growing.

Some trends that I personally disliked:

- The rise of personal branding to the level of ridiculous self-promotion.
- The failure of old guard public relations/advertising

practitioners to embrace new media

- The idea that new media/social networks are THE solution (they are not)
- Social media “experts” (having a Twitter account and a blog does not make anyone an expert)
- Endless self-promotion on multiple platforms of social media
- Linking every Tweet to Facebook and LinkedIn and everything in between
- Feeling the need to tweet everything, have hashtags for everything and “follow Friday”
- Rise in sexist images in advertising
- Decline in thoughtful public relations campaigns
- Decline in traditional media, especially print journalism
- Endless hype/hysteria about the supposed big story of the minute (Tiger Woods, Octomom, Balloon Boy, etc.)

But on the bright side

- Social media has presented great opportunities for small businesses
- The new PBS NewsHour
- Increased desire for measurement and return on investment
- Twitter, in spite of the above problems, has allowed for new relationships and allegiances, not to mention new parlance (tweetup, tweetsgiving, etc)
- Acceptance of blogs as legitimate journalistic outlets
- Citizen journalism and subsequent empowerment

What are your best/worst for the year?

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# The price is right!

It is too bad that marketing people often are not involved in the pricing process within a company. Because as you probably know, price is one of the four “Ps” (product, placement, price, promotion) involved in marketing. Often, especially if you are in a public relations/advertising agency, you had absolutely no input on price. None. And yet, you are being asked to promote a product/service that may not be priced correctly.

What is the correct price? The one the public will pay for that product or service.

For instance, say you see a great ad campaign for a product. You go look for it, but it is priced too high. You don't buy it. Of course, perhaps you are not the target audience. Perhaps the target is people with higher household incomes than you. That is possible.

However, I often see pricing that is more reflexive of a small committee of people who decide the price than of market research or a target audience strategy.

Prices can be too high and they can be too low. If something is too cheap, you may doubt its value.

In any case, if as a marketing communications person you can participate in talks about price, do so. If you can get market research to back up price decisions, do so. The right price can sell a product more readily than any campaign, press release or social media blitz.

Your thoughts?

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# Be consistent!

Check out my guest post: "The Golden Rule of Marketing: 4 Actions your Company Should Take" at the Green Buzz Agency blog.

Let me know what you think!

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## Social media has changed PR

This is not or should not be a newsflash, but social media has changed public relations. Yet many people are resisting.

Yesterday, I was fortunate to have attended a presentation on social media strategy given by Sally Falkow, and hosted by the PRSA-NCC, here in Washington DC. Ms. Falkow presented a case for social media (newspapers in decline, people looking for new sources of information) and gave some advice on how to use social media to achieve public relations/marketing goals. You can access this valuable presentation here:

[slideshare id=2655269&doc=prsadcsocialmedia-091205063755-phpapp02]

Although her presentation gave me lots of new perspectives and ideas, what fascinated me the most was the audience reaction. Specifically three or four people, who are decidedly old school, immediately started questioning Ms. Falkow. One person in particular, who claimed she had been a White House reporter, was quite acid about new media, saying "no one has time to watch video news releases" and "blogs are not credible." Obviously, this woman is not keen on social media, and thinks it just is not up to snuff, certainly not

comparable to old media.

These questioners actually were quite disruptive, but mostly, they were a sad reminder that some people will fight change. This is why so many organizations are having a difficult time communicating these days. Sure, I know that getting a clip in a major newspaper or coverage from a major broadcaster felt good and was the result of good media relations. But that is not where the majority of the audience is these days. Newspapers are dying, major news broadcasts are losing ground, and more importantly, legions of people have embraced social media. Although you could ignore this situation, you would be doing it at your own peril.

If you practice PR, or advertising, or marketing, you **MUST** consider social media. It is not optional any more. It is not just a way to get young people or techies. It is where a large majority of people are getting their news and information. Railing against it, questioning its legitimacy and refusing to change your ways will only result in your public relations efforts going to waste. You will be left out in the cold.

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## **Why should I hire YOU?**

What do I need to know in order to make a decision about hiring you? That is what your ABOUT section on your blog or website must answer. On the rare occasion that someone is going to make a decision about contracting services or buying products from you, that person will want to know your credentials.

Here are a few questions that you should answer:

- How long have you been in business?

- What is your experience?
- Do you have any special credentials?
- What makes you special?
- Who are you?
- Where or with whom have you worked?

Recently, I was “shopping” for a doctor. The insurance website listing is not helpful other than to give me the distance the doctor is located from my house and where he or she went to school. So I checked to see if some of the practices had websites. I found one that was very simple yet answered questions I had: does the practice do its own lab work? What kind of healthcare do they practice? What are the doctors’ backgrounds? It all sounded good to me and now I have an appointment. I will let you know.

On the other hand, I came across a new marketing company’s website. Their “About us” says this:

*We are uniquely qualified “marketing experts” as our seasoned management team has a combined 50 years of success in executing revenue generating strategies across numerous industries. We’ve been the leaders of Sales, Marketing, Business Development and Product Marketing teams. We have made cold calls, designed and launched products, catapulted public relation campaigns, pontificated press releases, and of course, successfully executed hundreds of marketing campaigns for small, medium, and large businesses.*

*Our team not only creates the programs, they are on the front lines executing and analyzing them. However, our success isn’t measured in our experience and ROI alone. We are customers too and know the importance of rapport-building and customer service. We treat each customer as honor, and mind our customer’s marketing campaigns as they were for our own company.*

Why not tell me who you are, with whom you have worked, and

where you are located, for starters? Hell, I am a “seasoned marketing expert” myself, right? (Not to mention the excessive capitalization.)

What other things do you look for when you are looking to hire/contract/buy services? Comments please!

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## It's not you, it's me

Have you ever wondered why some ads work and some don't? Some ads don't work because they are missing crucial information or they are too convoluted or weird. Some ads just don't stimulate interest or excitement. And some ads miss their target completely by being placed in the wrong medium.

Yes, sometimes, it is the marketing effort that is to blame. Sometimes the creativity wasn't there or the strategy was not the best.

But (of course there is a but), sometimes it is what you are selling, your offer, that is to blame. In other words, your marketing is fine but your offer is not.

Many times I get dozens of emails advertising an event. The event is posted everywhere. All the correct information is there. Perhaps there is a great headline. But the date conflicts with something else. But the price is too high. But you just bought something similar. **The offer is off.**

Sometimes, what you are offering is not what the customer wants.

For instance, a local marketing association is having an event



about LinkedIn. Another organization in town had a similar event just a few weeks ago. Furthermore, the event costs \$60. It is too much for me. There was nothing wrong with the marketing for the event except the offer didn't entice me (in this case it was the cost).

If you are failing to bring in people to your event or buyers to your store, examine your offer. Is the offer fair? Is the offer special? Do people like the offer? Don't blame your marketing until you make sure you have a good offer.

Sometimes you have to think, it's not you, it's me.

Do you have examples of an ad with a bad offer? Please share!!!

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## **Plainly speaking, it is better**

What is better is to speak and write plainly, a lesson that is being forced on the U.S. Government according to the Federal Diary column by Joe Davidson in the Washington Post. To make that happen (I could have written: In order to facilitate the transition), there will be a symposium on plain language this afternoon at the National Press Club, held by the Center for Plain Language.

There is no doubt that the government (and many in the legal community) loves to make things complicated. The more obtuse, the better. The more wordy the better. Passive voice? They love it. Big words when smaller words would do, check.

But, more disturbing in my opinion (since I already expect government/legal communications to be convoluted), is that marketing folk are jumping on the complicated bandwagon. This blog post, from the Branding Strategy Insider, claims that “Complex Language Weakens Brands.” As the post says:

*A serious impediment to communications is this constant upgrading of the language. No aspect of life is left untouched by the upgrade police. Not only does a term have to be politically correct, it has to be as long and as complicated as possible.*

A great example from the post is that UPS went from being in the parcel delivery business to being a logistics company. How many people on the street instinctively understand what logistics is???? Not many, my friends. The only people who understand logistics are in logistics.

In any case, if you want to be clear, speak and write plainly. Using big words when small ones would do does NOT make you look more intelligent (if anything, it makes you look less so). From the Center for Plain Language website:

*A communication is in plain language if the people who are the audience for that communication can quickly and easily*

- *find what they need*
- *understand what they find*
- *act appropriately on that understanding*

I think the bullet points above are the point of ANY communications.

And you thought plain vanilla was the boring choice.

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# Whatever do you mean?

Have you seen signs/logos/headlines that make you stop, and not because you are intrigued, but rather because you are confused? If you have, you know what I mean.

I just say a delivery truck with the following sign:

*Sanford Foods*

*Poultry Distributor*

*Pork Beef Supplies*

The “Poultry Distributor” part was highlighted. So I thought to myself, what is it? Poultry or pork? Yes, I know they distribute all of it, but why highlight poultry? My point is that there is too much contradictory information in a few words. It is not clear. They could have said: Sanford Foods: Distributors of Fine Poultry and Meats. And that would have been fine.

My advice is to have one overarching message in your logo or slogan. Too much is confusing.

Thoughts? Or better yet, examples?

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## Don't try the same trick over and over

Here's a tip: if something does not work the first 50 times, don't do it again. Seriously. Stop. Re-evalauate. Don't waste your efforts.

Sure, practice makes perfect, if you are headed to Carnegie Hall. With marketing, practice (repetition) can lead to annoyance and disconnect.

Last November, I started collecting all the marketing mail that relates to FIOS, Verizon's fiber-optic service. To date, I have received nearly five pounds of direct mail and many robo-calls (although I finally got them to stop the robo-calls). Here's the clincher though: I have not signed up for FIOS. Verizon keeps sending me the same marketing pieces, over and over and over and over. Most egregious is the one that is marked: **Important Information About Your Verizon Service**. Really, how many times do you think I am going to fall for this? Once, maybe twice, but not dozens.

I am not sure what Verizon's strategy is here, but in my case, they are wasting tons of money and not to mention, killing many trees (yeah, I know you want me to switch to paperless billing, but I bet if you just cut out excessive direct mail you would save a ton).

My other example is from a online listing service I used to pay for. It changed, without informing me, and suddenly, I was getting no inquiries or even visits to my website from it. I stopped paying for the premium service. I tried to inform them why. No feedback form or even email address was available. And the guy who runs the service sends me emails at least twice a week asking me to sign up again. The same exact email, twice a week. I am not exaggerating. Again, why would you continue to do something again and again if you are getting no results from it? Do you think I missed the email the first 25 times?

In any case, marketing communications is about strategy and tactics. You use certain tactics to implement your overall strategy. The thing is, you have many tactics at your disposal and you should fine tune your tactics so that you are achieving the result you want. If a tactic does not seem to

work, shelve it. Put it away.

Your adaptability will help set you apart. Trust me on this.  
Don't waste your resources with tired tactics that don't work.