

Is social media making us more passive-aggressive?

If you are on Twitter, chances are you've seen tweets like this:

Hey smelly guy on the Metro, invest in some deodorant!

This girl at the gym is hogging the machines.

People are tapping away their snide commentary on their smartphones, knowing full well that the person they are discussing will never see these commentaries or know he or she was being discussed at all.

People seem to be avoiding a confrontation. Or maybe they are avoiding an uncomfortable conversation. People seem to be expressing anger and distaste quite passively—by sharing it on Twitter—without actually solving the situation.

Perhaps this avoidant behavior is related to technology. Over the weekend, the Washington Post ran an article regarding entitled “It’s over. Didn’t You Get My Text?” (weirdly, the digital article is titled differently: “The Art of the Digital Breakup”). More and more, people are hiding behind their gadgets and avoiding talking to each other, especially about difficult things. In the article, Lisa Bonos writes:

And it’s not unheard of for Facebook users to get news about their romances when the other person changes his or her status...

Bonos says that digital rejections seem easier because there is no interruption or arguments. But, it could be painful for the “dumpee” since there was no chance to interact, to ask questions.

I see it all the time (and have been guilty of myself): using email or social media to say something that we couldn't say to someone face to face.

It's affecting conversations for sure. But more distressing to me is that it seems to be affecting empathy and connection with other people. We figure that if we "like" something on Facebook, then we've connected with someone. But have we? Not really. I have seen many people who say they would rather text than talk. Some people even prefer posting things on social media to communicate with lots of people at once instead of bothering to talk to friends individually.

In the end, social media may not be MAKING us more passive-aggressive or socially awkward, perhaps it only exacerbates what was already there. And for me, social media has been the springboard to more meaningful personal connection. Sadly though, there are far too many people hiding behind their gadgets, making snide comments rather than confronting or connecting with other people.

What do you think? Have you seen the rise in passive-aggressive behavior? Does it affect you?

Putting back the social in social media

It's been discussed to pieces but social media is just a channel for communicating with other people. It is not the be-all-end-all. Yes, it can be used for marketing (just like that ad you just saw on your way to work this morning) or to incite political action (as in Egypt) or to let people know when the next event is.

Recently, I was at a women's business networking event and we were told to discuss resources we recommend for new businesses, and our own goals and achievements. When I talked about blogs (I write blog content for clients, among other things), many of the women started saying things like "I am not on Twitter/Facebook, and I just don't get it." My response was this: well, you better learn because people are using these channels to communicate much the way you use the telephone or we used to use the fax or the telex even longer ago.

Social media has become the communication channel of choice for many people. Will people still use the phone? Yes. Will some use the fax? Maybe. Telex, no. In a few years, we will be communicating some other way (not on Twitter or Facebook). We will use what other people are using.

Communicating on social media is just a phone conversation on steroids.

It is about people speaking to other people. Yet, there are many people out there scheduling their tweets, and broadcasting irrelevant news and/or sales pitches. There are people who never attempt to learn anything about the PERSON at the other end of the avatar. People who are too busy looking at their screens to interact with other people at an event. (As an aside, a few weeks ago I was at an event regarding social media, and one of the organizers never introduced herself to anyone and barely looked up from her laptop. And she is supposed to be a social media whiz. Apparently, she knows how to use the tools of social media but not how to be social in real life with actual people.)

Last week, I made a point of having coffee with someone I regularly chat with on Twitter: Diane Danielson (founder of the Downtown Women's Club). I had traveled up to Boston for my college reunion, and asked Diane if she would like to meet up. It was nice to be able to talk face-to-face, and make a more

tangible connection.

In my opinion, the real goal of social media or any other communication channel is to connect, whether it be to converse or to exchange information or to perhaps to sell (products, ideas, services).

So, try to put the social back into social media by realizing you are using it as a way to communicate with other people.

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!

Web and social media irritants

There are things that I see happening on social media and on the web that are irritating. They happen way too often. Here are my top peeves (and least of this week).

One of my top ten peeves of all time, and which I have discussed before, is the **impersonal invitation to connect on LinkedIn**. In the past few weeks, I have received at least four or five invitations from people I don't know and who haven't made the slightest attempt to personalize the LinkedIn generated note "I'd like to add you to my professional network." I got one this morning, and I fired back a note telling the person in question that we hadn't ever met, and that a tip for her would be too personalize the note. She wrote back this really clueless note:

Please accept my sincere apologies. I must have mistaken you for someone else. I thought I had met you at a XXXX function. I never send blind invitations.

I am currently writing for a couple of online magazines and am building local pr connections.

So sorry to be an annoyance.

Why is this clueless? Because, a) she did send a blind invitation. She could have written something like, "We met at

a XXX event last week, and I would like to connect with you here.” And b) she is telling me she is using LinkedIn to build connections, which I interpret as using this forum to send out countless queries and newsletters , etc. So, she is not seeking to build a connection with ME, she is seeking to build her network to profit her work.

Other irritants are:

Blog posts that are not shareable on social media. And ironically, this post, from the All things WOM, from the Word of Mouth Association, IS NOT SHAREABLE. Has no share buttons. Really. How stupid is this.

Web redesigns that are not useful to the reader. The Washington Post redesigned their website and recently re-launched it. As far as I can tell, readers were not consulted. In a note to readers, sent THREE days after the re-launch the Post says:

The Washington Post is now even more essential and more in tune with the way you interact with news.

- *Follow stories as they develop and share your ideas as they evolve*
- *Watch events unfold with new video programs*
- *Know what's getting the most buzz and what's really happening in D.C.*
- *Get straight to your favorite coverage with destination hubs for Politics, Local, Sports and Opinions*

I guess what they mean by “more essential” is less stuff to read. Now I have to dig through the site to get to local news. And where are the blogs? Oh, and by screwing around with the site, lots of the Post’s blog RSS feeds were messed up. Nice going.

Using swear words on Twitter. I have written about this

before, and I will again in light of this article in the New York Times. I swear all the time, just not on Twitter. Because Twitter is a broadcast medium that is also archived. What you say here is on the record for ALL to see. It shows a lack of thought to use your words carelessly.

Promoting yourself endlessly or worse, showing off on Twitter.

There is one particular person, whom I just unfollowed today, who felt it necessary to be a braggart at every turn. It was things like this: “aren’t you jealous of my fabulous view?” with an attached picture. Why do I want to read this? Why do I care? Again, Twitter is a broadcast medium. What you say can be seen by 1000s of people.

Sending too many (or useless) email marketing messages. The AMA-DC was sending me four emails A WEEK. I told them it was too much. They unsubscribed me for criticizing them. And here is Entrepreneur’s take on why people stop following you. Read it and see that too many emails or too many posts irritate people. (And get this, I keep getting Comcast’s marketing missives, even though they CANCELLED my account.)

Any of these get your goat too?

Go check-in somewhere else

If you are on Twitter or Facebook, you will have seen many of your “friends” tell you that they are at Starbucks or at the airport. Some of them are “mayors” and some have “badges.” It’s all about the Foursquare check-in. Many nonprofit marketing consultants, and more for-profit marketing consultants, are advising that organizations/companies should get on Foursquare (or other location-based services). The idea is to have people in the vicinity know you are there—offer those people special deals or more information just for checking-in.

But. There is a problem: only four percent of adults online “check-in” or use geo-location services, according to research from Pew.

To me, the rush to embrace check-ins and geo-location has more to do with the fact that marketers have lots of friends using Foursquare, and less to do with reality. To suggest to nonprofits that they must be on location-based services is based on what exactly? It is based on the desire to be cutting-edge, to suggest something “ahead of the curve.” What it is not is practical. Nonprofits have many many other communications and marketing challenges to fix, other than having people check-in.

In my opinion, the check-in is really great for retail and restaurants/bars, especially if you are promoting a special or a sale or trying to build interest. But, just realize that there is an element of unfairness to those patrons who don’t have smart phones, or don’t do check-ins (apparently 96% of the population).

Perhaps people are not so eager to share their locations. It does seem big-brother to me. And this is what the article Tag-Along Marketing in the New York Times talks about.

Will check-ins take off in the future? It's questionable. And you should not base marketing advice on something that is still in the works.

Don't go knocking traditional media

Last week I wrote that social media is not all that. Even if I do believe in the importance of social media, I don't think everyone HAS to be on it. And now, Pew Research has found that 1 out of 5 Americans do NOT use the Internet. This means if you are still aiming for high coverage you cannot rely on Internet ads/social media marketing alone. Traditional media (I know, it sounds old-fashioned) is still viable when attempting to reach those Americans who won't or can't access the Web.



Wiki promotion and self-promotion

Promotion is one of the four "Ps" of marketing (the others being price, product, place). You can't market effectively without promotion, and in fact, marketing communications is all about promotion. MarComm people don't deal with price, product or place, other than to give input.

So, to sell a product, a service or an idea, you will promote. Promotion could go many ways, from traditional advertising, to blogging, to a public relations campaign. That's all fine and good. However, with the rise of social media as a prime promotion vehicle, we run into some problems. In social media, we rely on user-generated content, whether through blog entries or sharing thoughts and ideas via social networks. We now have the term "citizen journalist."

Enter Wikipedia. Wikipedia is an online, USER-GENERATED encyclopedia. Anyone can contribute to Wikipedia. There is very little if any editorial control over content. Products, people, historical events, music and any number of other topics are covered over at Wikipedia. Wikipedia entries tend to come up pretty high in Google searches too. It seems obvious that someone looking to promote something or someone would add a Wikipedia entry. Right?

From a marketing perspective alone, of course you would add Wikipedia as a target for your social media/SEO/SEM efforts. It makes complete sense. However, as a consumer you have to be wary. If anyone can post anything on Wikipedia, then how accurate is that information? Can you rely on it? Should you rely on it? Are people questioning what they find on Wikipedia and if so, how is that affecting Wikipedia entries?

I don't have the answers to this.

You have all heard of personal branding right? And personal branding has everything to do with promotion, and more specifically, self-promotion. You see people on Twitter promoting links to their blogs, to their parties, to their businesses. This is OK (although I have a problem with people who endlessly self-promote but that is another blog post). And to link it back to Wikipedia, individuals are now creating Wikipedia entries about themselves. Again, it makes sense on a macro-scale.

Still, perhaps I am being “old school” but a self-provided entry on Wikipedia is meaningless. A third party endorsement, like an article in a newspaper, has much more weight. Presumably, the third party (perhaps a journalist) did some fact-checking. If I can put down whatever I want in Wikipedia, what is stopping me from inflating reality or straight-out making stuff up? And worse, people think of Wikipedia as a real source for information, not unlike an Encyclopedia Britannica.

The bottom line is this: maybe using Wikipedia to promote yourself or your product is a good strategic, social-media-savvy move, but is it ethical?

What do you think?



Advice you shouldn't ignore!

Last week was Digital Capital Week here in Washington, DC. The event consisted of workshops, meet-ups, parties and other events. It was well attended and well tweeted. As is now the custom, event attendees tweet out the little nuggets of shareable information followed by a hashtag, thus sharing with their following and publicizing the event.

Here are some that I saw:

“Be authentic.”

“Search your name on YouTube to see if there is any videos of you that you’ve forgotten.”

“Engage with your followers.”

“Blogging is hard work.”

My reaction to these on my Twitter stream: Really? Is that so? I have never heard that before.

On my Google Reader this morning, I came across this piece from HubSpot: “Responding to a Social Media Crisis: #Intuit Outage Takeaways.” Here are its four rules for dealing with such a crisis:

*1. **Practice what you preach.** If you tout the importance of transparency, then make sure that you can be transparent during a crisis, too. For example, at HubSpot, we use trust.hubspot.com to show our portals and report on downtimes.*

*2. **Respond fast, respond often.** You’re only hurting yourself if you wait too long before releasing information, and when you finally do speak up there isn’t a lot of substance to what you’re saying. Give frequent updates, even if the update is just “no new information”.*

*3. **Apologize for the right thing.** Make sure you aren’t alienating your customers further with your apology. They may be more upset if they feel like you are not addressing how the error impacted their livelihood.*

*4) **Make amends.** Try to find a way you can make it up to your customers. They are the backbone of your business, so it’s in your best interest to keep them happy.*

Read more:
<http://blog.hubspot.com/blog/tabid/6307/bid/6101/Responding-to-a-Social-Media-Crisis-Intuit-Outage-Takeaways.aspx#ixzz0raltVJsJ>

All these pieces of advice are fine. They aren’t saying anything new, but we are supposed to think that social media somehow needs these rules. Being authentic and credible? Yes, you should be IN ALL ASPECTS of life. Engage with your

audiences? Yes, of course you should. And the Hubspot advice to deal with a “social media” crisis? That is just plain crisis communication 101.

Social media may be new media, but the communications “rules” and advice that apply to older media apply here too. Perhaps because so many people are coming into media/communications because of social media, that so-called experts can recycle this advice and call it social media expertise.

My conclusion is that people are very eager to learn, but they are being snookered by the “social media experts” who seem to recycle advice and bring very little value to the conversation. So my advice, and this you should definitely not ignore, is to question any advice social media experts give.

P.S. If you need someone to tell you that being authentic and credible is important, then I really don’t want to do business with you.



Tech vs. communication

Recently, I have been noticing jobs that require someone with technology skills (html, programming) to handle web development and social media. It is interesting that in some organizations social media efforts are housed under the IT umbrella. But should they be? I don’t think so. That is like asking the kitchen installer to cook a meal. Just because you know the appliances and how to work them does not mean that you can use them to their best potential.

Last week, I attended a social media workshop (not worth my while, but that is a topic for another post). One of the presenters was a tech guy, and he came out and said that he didn’t know marketing. He understood the power and importance of social media tools, but not how to use them for marketing purposes.

Then there is the whole web developer versus web designer issue. A web designer is concerned with the aesthetics of the website, and the web developer makes the site work. Some people claim to provide both services, but in my experience, a web developer's websites never look pretty. And a web designer who does his/her own development probably can't do complex back-end stuff.

It boils down to what technology can and cannot do. Technology is a tool, a very specialized tool. And in the "internet age," keeping up with evolving technology is crucial. But technology alone cannot communicate, it cannot market. A superior tech website with no communications strategy or well written content will not do the job. Technology is not communication. Tech people are notorious for being hard to understand. They speak a specialized language and have skills that your average communications person just doesn't have.

The bottom line is that to have your IT department handle social media does not make good marketing sense. Social media is completely about communication. It is not about the technology that allows said communication. I don't have to understand how Twitter works to use it for marketing promotion. I need to understand how people communicate, what information they are seeking. This is not to say you shouldn't involve your IT department—they can probably help facilitate what you are trying to do. Just leave the communicating to the communicators.



Hello there social butterfly!

Are you a social (media) butterfly?

Social media and social networks are not new anymore. In fact, there is talk of a Web 3.0. Social media is mainstream. After all, you have the White House and most television anchors tweeting and lots of businesses have Facebook pages. I bet your grandmother is on Facebook and your grandpa is blogging. Social media has served to connect lots of people, across demographics and geography.

With the rise of social media, and its usefulness in “friend” raising, being social is becoming a bigger asset. How social are you?

Take the following quiz to gauge your sociability:

1. Do you read blogs regularly?
2. Do you use a reader? (extra points if you can define RSS)
3. Do you ever comment on other people’s blogs?
4. Do you have a blog? If so, do you blog regularly, or was your last post last summer?
5. Do you have a Twitter account? Do you actually tweet?
6. Do you know what Foursquare is?
7. Do you use a service to post your blog content to your Twitter stream? If so, have you customized the settings?
8. Do you respond to @ tweets and DMs?
9. Have you met anyone from your social media world in real life?
10. Have you ever been to a Tweet-up?

If you answered yes to all 10 questions, you are a certified social media butterfly.

If you answered yes to at least five questions, you are earning your social media wings.

If you answered yes to less than three questions, you are a social media wallflower.