

One thing that will make you stand out

Being personal. That's the one thing that will make you stand out.

We are living, increasingly, in an electronic world. People send email and texts instead of picking up the phone. People tweet out questions to strangers in the hopes of getting the wisdom of the crowd. But, as we talked about here, people want to connect personally, one to one. Although we *feel* more connected, we are more isolated from other people. It is now possible for you to know what your friend from elementary school had for breakfast (on Facebook) while not knowing who your neighbor is.

This morning, on CBS Sunday Morning, Steve Hartman investigated the handwritten thank you note. He has never been a fan, but his colleague Byron Pitts is. Pitts sends out thank you notes to the people he interviews, to others who have helped him. This makes Pitts stand out. Those people will remember the gesture.

I am not sure if it is generational, cultural or personality-driven, but some people just don't seem to get that people want to be treated like people. If someone is sick or has been sick, you ask about their health. If someone is facing a problem, you offer support. Yet many people don't do this even though it takes very little effort for a big reward. Some politicians have gotten far because they treat people like people. George Bush gained popularity in part because he was personal—asking people about their families, following up, sending thank you notes.

Don't underestimate the power of reaching out, of being personal. It could be a handwritten note, or it could be a

telephone call. Reach out to people, and you will stand out to them.

One move to guarantee social media success

If you do just one thing, I can almost guarantee you will improve your social media success:

Post a good (perhaps even professional) picture of yourself on your social media profiles.

First a caveat: I said a GOOD picture of yourself. Not some quirky, smirky mugshot a la Jared Lee Loughner (that is guaranteed to drive people away). I know that good is subjective, but aim for some of these adjectives: professional, pleasant, smiling, poised, polished, approachable.

The reason is simple: people do business (and connect) with people.

A few days ago, an acquaintance of mine who is notoriously shy and quiet, posted her company logo as her LinkedIn profile picture. What a bad move (and I told her so). After all, are people seeking to connect with her company (where she is an employee and not an owner) or with her?

For some people, putting up a picture seems like an invasion of privacy. For some, there is fear of being judged by looks or the worry that they don't look good enough. I have heard of women who want to lose weight before posting a picture. Unfortunately, these excuses don't fly. Social media is

social, and social means people. People are not icons or images or logos. They are themselves, and generally a photo captures this.

According to this blog post by Todd Taskey on Small Business Trends, a PROFESSIONAL photo will increase your chances of having business opportunities find you on LinkedIn. More reason to go out and get a professional portrait done. It truly is a worthwhile investment.

It's not what you say you do

It is what you do.

- Do you live up to your commitments?
- Do you deliver the goods?
- Are you reliable? Responsive? Responsible?
- Do you reply to people or just to tweets?

There are a lot of folks out there in the social media stratosphere developing massive followings, writing blogs, sending newsletters, even writing e-books, but **all they are doing is saying what they do. They don't actually do what they say they do. They seem to think talking makes up for acting.**

For instance, if you are in public relations, you need to create a strategy for your client. Tweeting all day is not a strategy—it is a tactic, and if it is not part of a larger, thought-out plan, it is good for nothing.

Although social networks are valuable, the people you know in real life may be more valuable because get this, you actually know them and they know you. If you are blowing off your in-

the-flesh connections so that you can develop lots of virtual friends, you will be left with lots of virtual reality and little real reality.

Use social media, but use it to do stuff, not to say you do stuff.

The above is a commentary by the author of this blog. It represents her views in every possible way.



Social cues

Although I think many people who march to the beat of their own drummer are interesting, some folks are just plain clueless. This past weekend I went on an organized hike. Most hikers were dressed in hiking clothes of one stripe or another, except for someone my friend dubbed “Disco Dan.” “Disco Dan” was attired in short shorts made of corduroy and of a peach hue, to match his multicolored button down shirt. Furthermore, “Disco Dan” was wearing non-hiking shoes. To say the least, “Disco Dan” stood out, and not in a good way.

Although “Disco Dan” was harmless and mildly amusing, it made me think about how people act in a societal context. Most people are adept enough to fit in. Some people, like Dan, either don’t get it or don’t care to get it, and still others are avant-garde, doing today what most of us won’t do for months or years.

How is this a marketing issue? First, responding to social

cues is important in personal marketing. If you are trying to get people to buy you, the product, you can't be out of touch with what is socially acceptable. For instance, if you are interviewing at a law firm and you show up in jeans and a t-shirt, you are saying with your clothing choice that you don't understand the law firm ethos, or that you are going to do what you are going to do, no matter what.

Secondly, observing and listening to understand what is socially acceptable and what is not, is essential when marketing. I would say that if you have trouble with social cues you are not going to be able to create great ad copy or be in public relations or in event planning. Say you are tasked with writing copy directed at senior citizens. You use the terms that GenY appreciates but that seniors don't understand. You are being tone-deaf to the needs of your audience. Or a more common occurrence, you go for the intentionally hip or what you think is really funny, but that your audience just doesn't get.

Unfortunately, as more people lose the ability to interact directly with other people due to the over reliance on electronic gadgets like smart phones and gps, the less they are able to pick up on social cues. It is common to see people with headphones on walking around in their own personal bubble, and when they are looking for something, instead of asking a live person nearby they go to Twitter or Facebook and ask there.

The bottom line is that we live together in a society, where some things are more acceptable than others. When you want to be like Disco Dan and wear what you want because you want to, you are only communicating to the world that you don't care or that you don't get it. Either way, it creates a degree of alienation.

What are your thoughts? Have you noticed an increase in people who don't react to social cues?

What does your Twitter stream communicate

Lots of communications people –journalists, PR folks, ad people—are on Twitter. I am too, and I follow many communications types. You can get a lot of good information, and interesting facts from your Twitter stream. But you can also learn a lot about the people you follow.

What you tweet about: Obviously, what you tweet about shows what you are interested in, and what you are more knowledgeable about. If you are in health care, you may tweet about the latest health research. If you are constantly tweeting about personal stuff, you are communicating that your business is not as important to you as your personal life. If you never tweet about personal stuff, you are saying that you view Twitter as only business.

When you tweet: Do you tweet during the day? Chances are that you incorporate Twitter into your work life. Do you only tweet on the weekend? Timing shows how much you understand how Twitter works. Although we have the ability to look at a person's stream history, Twitter tends to be about immediacy. If you are tweeting in the middle of the night, you are saying you don't care whether people see your tweets, you just want to share.

How much you re-tweet: If you re-tweet stuff, it shows you are really reading what the people you follow share, and also, that you find it useful. You also are saying you are willing

to share credit. If you never re-tweet, well, maybe you haven't found anything worth sharing.

Your Twitter stream really communicates a lot to those who follow you. Twitter is about building your network, and it is about sharing. I would argue that Twitter is also about branding. If you haven't locked your tweets, anyone can see what you are putting out there, and can form an opinion about who you are and what you do.

What does your Twitter stream say about you?



Some non-connected thoughts

This is not a post about marketing communications per se, but it does have to do with communications. This is also not in any particular order.

Heads in the sand

I wrote a few days ago about my stay in a Rochester hotel that did not live up to its advertising. Like I said then, there was nothing WRONG with the hotel, but it wasn't particularly right. Since I made my reservation online, I got the following email from the hotel:

Thank you for staying with us at the XXX. We sincerely hope you enjoyed your visit with us and that we were able to exceed your expectations. We look forward to serving you again when your travel plans bring you back to the XXX area.

They "hope" they exceeded my expectations. Well, they barely

met my expectations but are they interested in knowing what my expectations and experiences were? No. I responded to them that if they cared about my expectations they would ask for feedback, and guess what, I have gotten no reply to that.

If you want to stick your head in the sand about your product or service, you are doing so at your own peril. If you are wondering why sales are down or employee morale is low, perhaps you need to FIND OUT instead.

How you present yourself (or, there are other people in the room)

I was at a couple professional development events yesterday. In both cases, there was at least one audience member who, during the Q&A, seemed to forget that there were other people in the audience. In the first case, the questioner went on and on about her business and finally got in a question (if asking a question that applies only to you is asking a question). In the second case, the questioner shared a very personal, and in my opinion, inappropriate, story as a set up to her comment (no real question). Both these people clearly see the world as subordinate to their own personal needs and desires.

This last thought leads me to:

Self promotion, arrogance and the cult of celebrity

Although the rise of social media and citizen journalism is, in general, a good thing, there has also been a rise in the amount of people who think they are superior to all the rest of us, and now, because they can harness great followings and share their every thought with the masses, have become ubiquitous and often, quite obnoxious. I wrote recently about people who actually create Wikipedia entries for themselves (talk about arrogant), and yesterday, my friend and colleague, Daria Steigman told me about the hoopla surrounding a “famous” PR person and a comment on a blog. Read the whole thing here and draw your own conclusions.

However, let me add my conclusion, I think Kami Huyse is generally right that people have become arrogant, but what she doesn't realize is that she herself is being arrogant by claiming "I don't have time to Google you." Why is her time more important? Now let me be clear—people who think that "Google me" is a response to other people who ask how to contact you or more about you are clearly arrogant. BUT, if I truly want to know more, chances are I WILL Google you.

In the end, it is up to each of us to give attention to the people we respect. If we don't respect someone or we think they are arrogant, then let's NOT follow them or read their blogs or buy their books or attend their parties or whatever. Self-promoting and arrogant people will eventually lose their followings IF enough people realize that just because other people think someone is great does not mean that he or she really is great (after all, lots of people liked Stalin ...).



Following up

We go to networking events. We chat. We shake hands. We exchange business cards. And then we follow up. Or at least that is what we are "supposed" to do.

Here's my take: you follow up with whom you want to stay in touch with or want to do business with. Can you follow up just to be polite? Yes, of course. Nothing wrong with it. But if your time is limited, then be selective.

Now, if you are following up, there is a wrong way, a better way and the best way.

The wrong way is like this follow up email I received:

Hi Deborah:

It was good to hear about what you do for companies. I hope to see you soon.

Sincerely,

(name of person)

The thing is, I never spoke to this guy directly. He got my card somehow. And it is vague. And impersonal. And gives me no reason to follow up with him.

Better is the following:

It was nice meeting you yesterday. Attached please find a brochure about our company. Please feel free to email this out to other business owners. We are happy to pay a 10% referral fee (minimum of \$1,000) when you refer a business owner to us.

Look forward to seeing you at the next event.

I did meet this person, who is giving me more information about her business. However, there is no personal note. She doesn't seem to say anything about me.

Best is something like this:

Hi Deborah,

You had great ideas and suggestions. Thanks for sharing the information.

I'll contact you in two weeks. As I mentioned, I am working on a XXX program for XXX. I'll share with you the structure that I am developing.

Best regards,

A little about me and a little about her. A firm follow up time frame, and something particular to discuss.

What do you look for in a follow up call/email? What are your best practices?



Personal marketing goals for 2010

Although I am not a fan of New Year's resolutions, I think January is a great time to set goals for oneself. You have a whole year ahead of you to meet those goals. And goals are tangible. You either meet them or not, whereas resolutions like "I want to be healthier" are vague.

Here are some personal marketing goals:

- Upload a headshot to LinkedIn
- Answer at least one question a month on LinkedIn
- Refine your LinkedIn headline
- Increase your LinkedIn contacts by 25% (minimum)
- Get business cards if you don't have them
- Update and polish your elevator speech and then practice it!
- Attend networking events at least twice a month
- Join a professional association
- Join a committee or volunteer group
- Start a blog if you don't have one (Posterous is easy!) or post regularly on your existing blog

What goals are you setting for yourself?

How are you perceived?

"Quick, acute, and intuitive cognition." That is how Merriam-

Webster defines perception. It is a quick assessment of what is before us. It is how we form impressions and judgments.

Have you ever considered how you are perceived by a potential client? Potential friend? Man/woman on the street? Obviously, we may not care how a complete stranger perceives us, but in business we should definitely be concerned with the image we are giving potential customers, clients or partners (a partner can be anyone who we do business with—from someone we network with, to someone who refers business to us or an acquaintance we run into occasionally).

There are many angles from which you are perceived:

- Personal appearance and demeanor
- How you sound
- Online presence, which includes your websites, what is written about you, your blog, and your social media presence
- Articles about you
- Articles you've written
- Your marketing materials (brochures, postcards, reports, etc)
- Your behavior and actions
- Your associations

If people have a positive perception of you it will help get business. A negative perception on the other hand will impede your success.

How to assess

Start with a simple Google search on yourself to see what comes up. Negative, positive or neutral?

Turn a critical eye on your website and/or blog. Would a visitor to your site know what you do and why you are qualified to do what you do? What would he/she think of your services?

How are people responding to you on social media? How many followers do you have? More importantly, who is following you? Quality is important here. How about on Linked In—do people accept your requests for connection? Are you giving them enough for them to want to connect with you?

When you go to an event, do you feel confident? Do you ever feel unprepared or frazzled? If so, what aspects of your appearance and demeanor need work?

It is hard to self-assess from all these angles so it may be best to ask a trusted friend or colleague to give you some feedback. A marketing consultant (such as me!) can help assess your marketing materials.

Have you assessed how you are perceived? Please let me know how you did it and what helped.

Proving once again Mother was right

Mom was right about minding your manners. Although behaving appropriately and properly seems to be lost these days, it is still the best way to behave, especially if you care about your personal brand and personal marketing.

This evening I was at an event about social media. Lots of people were tweeting and in this context that is acceptable behavior. However, lots of people, especially a very obnoxious man behind me, were chit-chatting during the panel presentation. This is not acceptable. It shows lack of respect for the speakers, the audience, and very poor manners. Of

course, this is no way compares to the congressman shouting “you lie” to the president or the obnoxious rants of a self-absorbed, self-important rap/pop star (I am omitting the names because you know who I am talking about and I am sick of giving them any more publicity).

Manners and considerate behavior are in free fall in our society and we should be concerned from a personal branding and marketing perspective, among others. Why? Because someone who has bad manners shows him/herself to be very self-absorbed, even narcissistic. And do you want to do business with someone like that? In the end, we always want to do business with people we like and maybe even respect. Let me tell you, if I ever see the man whom I mentioned was seated behind me, I will not want to meet him. And why should I? He has shown me through his behavior that he lacks common courtesy.

The takeaway is this: mind your manners to show the world your best self, and in the process you will help improve your personal brand perception.

On Monday, Kami Huyse discussed this very issue on her blog, Communication Overtones. She came to a different conclusion. She thinks the overemphasis on personal branding has allowed character to fall by the wayside. I think society and culture have more to do with that. I was thinking about it this evening and really, I don’t think you can fault personal branding at all. In fact, as I said before, if you care about your personal brand, you should aim to be civil, be polite. It is better to be known for your ideas, your experiences than for your crassness and lack of manners. Right?

What are your thoughts on this subject?