

Authenticity matters (or, Why Bobby Jindal Won't Win but Chris Christie Might)

Bobby Jindal just announced (via Facebook) today that he is adding himself to the slew of GOP 2016 presidential hopefuls.

There are lots of reasons why Jindal does not have even a small chance of winning the nomination: Louisiana (the state where he is currently governor) is doing badly, he lacks charisma, and he has made a series of questionable/false/stupid comments recently (Muslim no-go zones, for example).

Currently polling at about one percent, Jindal faces tremendous challenges even getting in to the Fox News GOP candidates debate that will only allow the top ten contenders on stage. It's pretty clear that Jindal is jockeying for a vice presidential nod, but even that is out of reach for him. Why? **He has a huge authenticity problem.**

Jindal, who was named Piyush by his Indian parents, seems to have rejected his background. He converted to Catholicism and changed his name to Bobby. He has even said he doesn't consider himself Indian-American, but just American. The *Washington Post* explores the question about how Jindal views his past in this article published yesterday: From Piyush to Bobby: How Does Jindal Feel About his Family's Past.

This passage from the article (the bolding is mine) is very telling:

Suresh C. Gupta, a Potomac, Md., doctor, gave a fundraiser for Jindal's first gubernatorial bid. But he said Jindal has actively tried to disassociate himself from the Indian American community in recent years.

*“So what if he’s Republican? So what if he’s Christian? I don’t care about those things,” said Gupta, who is a Democrat. **“But you can’t forget about your heritage. You can’t forget about your roots.”***

*When Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi came to the United States last September, a host of politicians attended his rally at Madison Square Garden. Jindal did not. **When Jindal’s name was mentioned, he was booed by the crowd.***

It’s impossible to say what motivated Jindal to embrace being “American” while at the same time downplaying his roots. Perhaps he is embarrassed by his background or perhaps he thinks people can’t relate to an Indian-American. Whatever the reason, it’s clear that potential supporters are turned off by his disassociation with his background.

Although the United States is a melting pot, and most immigrants try to assimilate, many still have pride in their heritage. And there are many politicians who embrace hyphenation, from the first Italian-American mayor of New York City Fiorello LaGuardia to former Congressman David Wu (D-OR), the only Chinese-American serving in the House of Representatives from 1999 to 2011.

An even more negative view of Jindal is given in the *Politico Magazine* article by Alan Greenblatt: “The Stupid Party’s Candidate: Running to the Right is not Working for Bobby Jindal.”

Greenblatt argues that Jindal is pandering to the more conservative base of the Republican Party. He writes:

A governor who reshaped his state by overhauling the education and Medicaid systems now hardly talks substance at all. In fairness, he has released detailed plans on taxes and education, but he routinely spends his time on the stump

throwing red meat to the most conservative parts of his party.

He adds:

His pander approach hasn't worked for him. "He is smart, he is policy knowledgeable," says Henry Olsen, a conservative analyst at the Ethics & Public Policy Center, "but rather than build a public persona around his strengths, he has crafted a public persona around other people's strengths."

This adds up to an authenticity problem. Who is Bobby Jindal and why does he keep changing his stripes? People respond best to what is authentic and can generally spot a fake. Jindal seems to be working hard to be something he can never be. As long as he's trying to be something he isn't, he will continue to lag behind in the polls.

Authenticity matters, especially when you are trying to persuade.

What do you think? If you were Jindal's communications person, what would you advise?

Do political ads work?

This year, we have been bombarded with political ads on TV, especially in swing states. I can attest to this since my TV

DMA covers Northern Virginia, and Virginia is a swing state, so we have been seeing (too) many here in Maryland.

The spending is in the billions. Adweek reports: Political TV Ads Shatter Records. It's not over yet. According to Adweek, as of last week, 915,000 presidential ads have appeared. Add to that congressional and senate ads, and ballot question ads, and I would be surprised if you have seen even one commercial for Viagra!

In today's Washington Post, Ned Martel writes in the article "Could the campaign ads benefit from Mad Men touch" that the ads are not even that good. He says:

To advertising executives, this onslaught of attack ads looks like a giant waste of money. It certainly runs counter to every risk-conscious maxim the industry has honed since the days of "Mad Men."

Negative ads have been a staple of political campaigns forever. You want to discredit your opponent, that is understood. Unfortunately, this year especially (or so it seems...memories are short), we are seeing that not only are these ads negative, they are also factually challenged. Glenn Kessler, "The Fact Checker" writer at the Washington Post, today rated one of Mitt Romney's ads regarding Obama's so-called Apology Tour four Pinnochios (which means that this particular ad includes falsehoods).

We are seeing a lot of back and forth: Romney says one thing, and Obama answers it. And to add legitimacy, we are seeing the use of news footage. An Obama ad recently used footage from a 60 Minutes interview of Mitt Romney.

But does any of it make any difference in trying to reach the mythical undecided voter? I am not sure. I think it must have some impact but does it change minds? Do people watch the ads or do they tune them out? I don't know. What are your

thoughts?

Marcomm takeaways from the Iowa Caucus

Last night, FINALLY, the results of the Iowa Caucus gave us a more real sense of where people are headed in the GOP race. You can read about the results in this Karen Tumulty story for the Washington Post.

As you have probably heard *ad nauseum* the results may or may not indicate who the eventual GOP nominee will be. That said, I think we can draw the following three marketing communications lessons from the caucus:

1. **Advertising works.** Furthermore, negative advertising is VERY powerful. Mitt Romney spent the most and won the caucus (OK, Romney's Super PAC spent the most...but that is another discussion).

2. **It's the message AND the messenger.** The message is important, but perhaps not as important as the messenger. People vote for people they like, explaining why Santorum did so well. Santorum comes across as a sincere, committed and caring person. And he rocks a sweater vest (and sweater vests are what granddads and jolly uncles wear, right?). Gingrich, who came in at a distant fourth, comes across as pedantic and angry. Even his post-caucus speech was angry (I didn't watch it, but read commentary like this analysis from Mr. Media Training).

3. **Be present.** Jon Huntsman made the decision to skip Iowa, and the numbers show it. He came in with 0.6% of the vote.

People like to see something they want to buy, not just hear about it. Lots of pundits describe the Iowa caucus as true retail politics, where politicians meet and greet (in person) their potential supporters. You have to be the bricks and mortar in the case, and not just the virtual.

What did you think? Any marketing lessons you took away?

Grover: You don't know marketing

Last night, I watched Steve Kroft on 60 Minutes attempt to get Grover Norquist to be thoughtful about his no taxes pledge. In case you don't know, Norquist, the founder of the misleadingly named "Americans for Tax Reform" is the reason the GOP will not vote for any tax increase regardless of anything.

I could say a lot about Norquist's smarmy demeanor, lack of ethics and sad attempts at humor, but I want to concentrate on one particular aspect of the interview. Norquist said that what American for Tax Reform is trying to accomplish is **to brand the Republican Party as the party of no taxes**. Here is the exchange, taken from CBS News/60 Minutes website:

Norquist claims he got the idea to brand the Republican Party as the party that would never raise your taxes, when he was just 12 years old and volunteering for the Nixon campaign. He says it came to him one day while he was riding home on the school bus.

Norquist: If the parties would brand themselves the way Coke and Pepsi and other products do so that you knew what you were buying, it had quality control. I vote for the

Republican. He or she will not raise my taxes. I'll buy one. I'll take that one home.

Kroft: So this is about marketing?

Norquist: Yes. It's a part of that. Yeah, very much so.

But Norquist says the success of any product requires relentless monitoring and diligent quality control to protect the brand, whether it's Coca Cola or the Republican Party.

The problem with this scenario is that Norquist seems to think that branding is achieved by threat. Basically, if a GOP candidate does not sign the no-taxes pledge, Norquist will fund his demise. The deal is that pols will sign the pledge and then get money for their campaigns. If they refuse to sign the pledge, American for Tax Reform will do everything it can to discredit them and will fund any opposing pol who does sign the pledge. Furthermore, if the pol votes for a tax increase after having signed the pledge (no matter how long ago), Norquist will work to make sure the pol loses his/her seat.

Norquist is *not* a marketer—he is a politician who is using power and money to influence (and some would say corrupt) the political process. To really “market” the GOP, Norquist would have to do some research. He would have to listen to the average citizen/consumer. He would have to explore what the GOP brand means to people inside and outside the GOP.

Finally, Norquist is not really trying to REFORM taxes or make them more equitable or fair. He is working to reduce the size of government, as this article in Politico points out.

Why not make the GOP the party of “we don't want to be a part of government.” Many of us could support that.

Your thoughts?

Personality and style communicate

All the advertising in the world is not going to make a frog into a prince. People respond to things personally—especially to things (like politics) that affect them directly.

In Washington DC, incumbent mayor Adrian Fenty lost the democratic primary to his opponent council member Vince Grey. Why? Partially because people preferred Grey, but in larger part, because people did not like Fenty's arrogance and leadership style. You can read an article in the Washington Post that further delves into this [here](#).

Would you vote for someone you don't like? Probably not, even if he or she had the nicer ads, the flashier website. My advice to political strategists is people respond to people they like more than to ads they like.

Propaganda

Last night, I was fortunate to visit a magnificent exhibition at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, entitled State of Deception: The Power of Nazi Propaganda.

As the curator explained, propaganda is inherently linked with advertising and public relations. In the beginning of modern advertising and PR, propaganda people were running the show. Edward Bernays, the “father of modern PR” was a propagandist. But propaganda is not inherently negative. Propaganda is simply the propagation of an idea, using various means.

Unfortunately, as with Hitler and the Nazis, propaganda has been used to propagate evil and incite violence and murder. It is a testament to the power of propaganda that the Holocaust was as widespread and supported as it was.

The Nazis understood the power of mass media, and they understood the power of symbolism and word choice. They understood that you had to dehumanize your enemy. They used words that had emotional appeal to the Germans of the day, like “freedom.”

The Nazis made radios cheaper and widely available, and then proceeded to use radio as a way to send out their propaganda within music shows. It became illegal in Nazi Germany to listen to foreign radio broadcasts, punishable by long imprisonment. So the way propaganda worked within Nazi Germany was to use all media possible and by the suppression of all opposing viewpoints.

In any case, the lesson to learn is that words are powerful. We that work in the promotion business, be it advertising, PR or marketing have the power to persuade and that is not something to be taken lightly.

Gender and Message

I am sure you have heard by now that Charlie Gibson is stepping down from the anchor position at ABC World News and that Diane Sawyer will be taking his place come January. It was probably Charlie's time to go, he looked tired and somewhat out of touch. I am not a huge Diane Sawyer fan, although I think she will do well in the slot. However, is Diane going to be judged solely by her accomplishments? No. Absolutely not. She will be judged by her gender. It has already started. All the talk about how "historic" it is that now there will be two female evening news anchors, blah blah blah. I have news for all (mostly male) pundits and TV critics out there: It is 2009. There are women everywhere. This is not news. Katie Couric is in third place not because she is a woman, but because she has a bad delivery for news, in my opinion. Diane has much more gravitas. But it will be inevitable that they will be compared on things like appearance and clothing.

UPDATE: Carole Simpson opines that Diane Sawyer being promoted to network news is too little, too late. Simpson thinks that network news is in tremendous decline, and that with women at the helm, they may end up being blamed. Interesting take. Here's the link to her piece on CNN.

Gender is old news. For Generation Y especially (not that they watch the evening news) the idea of judging someone based on something innate like gender, race or sexual orientation is anathema. So here's a plea to all the old fogies that are stirring up flames about how amazing it is that there will be two female anchors—drop it! Concentrate on real news. Judge all anchors on their ability to deliver the news, on their editorial choices and not on the shape of their genitals.

It was Marshall McLuhan who said the medium is the message. Well, the message is the message. Here's a piece from CNN on

how Obama is losing the health care fight because of social media. No, Obama is losing the health care fight because his MESSAGE is not resonating. It is not the medium, it is the message.

Thoughts?

Political communication is a two-way street

Well, it finally is here. Election Day. Never before in my lifetime have I seen such a long election cycle, and yet so much interest. We have seen positive ads and negative ads. We've seen staying on message and going off message. We saw how the current economic situation shifted the message. But the bottom line is that each candidate used **MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS** to reach his/her **TARGET AUDIENCE**. Yes indeed. An election is a real live, measured test of the success of your marketing communications. If you got your message across and people bought, you win. Simple. And the voters get their say today. For the past year, we've heard from the candidates. Today, they hear from us. What we bought and what we didn't buy. In fact, I dare say that political communication is the pinnacle of this field...it uses all methods of communication from simple lawn signs, to expensive TV ads to social media. It needs strategy and it has to appeal to the largest majority. I am jealous of anybody in an American politics class this semester. What a way to see and understand the process.

So, did you vote today?

Is it time for a change?

There is a pizza joint across the street from my building. It's one of those take-out/delivery places that also serve subs and other greasy food. A couple of weeks ago, there was a sign posted that it was under new managements. And then, the renovations followed. They added floor to ceiling windows, painted the place yellow and added a new sign, using the same name as before but with new fonts and color scheme. So all in all, they have spiffed up the old hole-in-the-wall that needed it. I suspect that there is no new management but rather the realization that when things get tough, the tough get going (excuse the cliché). The pizza place realized it had to make changes, in this case, aesthetic improvements, to attract new customers or lure back former customers. (It remains to be seen how the pizza will taste, and that will be another story)

The same holds true for any business identity. Have you been using the same logo for the past 20 years? When was the last time you examined your branding effort? Is it time for a change? Does your tagline still communicate what you do? Does your marketing identity synch with your business personality?

In short, if things aren't going well now due to the economic situation, it is a perfect time to take stock of how you are marketing yourself, and decide if you need to make changes. The same old does not always work.

This also brings me to one of the most successful political campaigns in modern times: Barack Obama's. What is his campaign slogan? Change we can believe in. Change is big right now and Obama knows that the public wants a change from the Bush years. As opposed to McCain's slogan of Country First, I think that Obama's slogan speaks directly to what

people are looking for and communicates it effectively.

We'll know (hopefully) on Wednesday morning if Obama's slogan won more hearts and minds than McCain's. But regardless of who wins this election, we are in for a few months (at least) of tough economic times. It's time to change, right?

The Virtues of Staying On Message

As a marketing communications case, Barack Obama's campaign is the clear winner. The campaign has chosen a message (the economy is really bad because of the Republican's mismanagement of it and Obama can do better) and stuck with it. People are concerned about this message and are responding well to it. The McCain campaign on the other hand has not found its core message. We know that McCain is concerned about mortgages, taxes, and...Obama's association with Bill Ayers. Although all of these are legitimate issues to focus on, the campaign has not crystallized into one overarching message that can be delivered time and again.

McCain may have the ideas and the experience, but his "marketing" is getting muddled. And that may cost him the election. Obama, on the other hand, early on grasped the importance of the Internet in attracting younger voters, has stayed on message and has a flexible ad budget that has allowed him to put money in the states he considers more important. McCain's most recent ad strategy, in spite of the overwhelming economic news, was to place ads talking about Obama's relationship with Ayers. It has backfired, no doubt. At a campaign stop on Friday, McCain had to spend time

assuring the crowd that they shouldn't be scared of Obama, that he is decent (subtext—he is not a terrorist).

The bottom line for any campaign, political or otherwise, is to choose a message that resounds with the target audience and stick to it.