

Why you are failing to communicate on social media

A few weeks ago an acquaintance was coming to town from the West Coast. She posted on Facebook (along with about another five posts the same day) that she was free on a given afternoon and if people wanted to see her, to please message her. Now, I hadn't seen this person in a couple of years, and since I was free on the afternoon she mentioned, I would have liked to get together. But, I hadn't seen her post until it was too late. By the time I messaged her, she had already made other plans since she said that nobody responded to her post.

In my opinion, she failed to communicate effectively. There are several potential reasons why.

Why #1: Not understanding how social media works.

Chances are good that only a few people in your network will see what you post. First, social media is a continual flow of information from many sources. Nowhere is this more obvious than on Twitter, which shows you everything from everybody in real time. If you missed it, you missed it (unless someone re-tweeted it and it gained traction). And to make that more complicated, the different networks use algorithms to show you what the network thinks you want to see. On Facebook, the default algorithm is set to show "top posts," which are the posts that more people have "liked." LinkedIn has a similar algorithm, also showing what it deems are "top" posts.

Additionally, social media provides controls for people to "hide" or "mute" certain users. It's quite possible you've been hidden and thus your posts won't be seen at all.

In order to work around social media's constraints, you have to provide relevant content that gets liked and shared, and

therefore becomes “top” content.

Why# 2: Not using the right channel for your message and audience.

In this case, this woman was trying to communicate with a handful of her Facebook friends (the ones who live in this area). She may have had better luck by using a more targeted approach. For example, she could have used Facebook messenger to talk directly to those people. Or she could have (gasp) emailed or texted the people she wanted to see.

Different channels and media have different audiences. You probably wouldn't put an announcement that you are giving away your kittens on LinkedIn, but you might post on Facebook. LinkedIn is about business opportunities, and Facebook is more personal. You could also try sharing a picture on Instagram of those cute kitties looking for a home.

You have to choose the right channel to make sure your message reaches the right (more receptive) audience.

Why #3: Forgetting that social media is only one communications channel.

If you were trying to, say, promote a new product, chances are good you would use a mix of channels to reach different target audiences. You would also adjust your messaging accordingly. You might choose to use an email campaign. Or you could do media outreach. Or you could run some advertising, including Google Ads. Or you could try promotional give-aways. Or sponsorships. You get my drift.

For social media to work, it can't be your only communication channel. It has to be part of a larger communication plan. Social media is just that—a medium that has social aspects that help amplify your message. It is not a substitute for other media.

You want to get your message to the right people at the right time.

For any communication plan to be effective in this way, you have to use a mix of media depending on who you are trying to reach and when. You need to understand each medium, and what type of audience responds best to that channel. And you will need to adjust your messaging (e.g., length, complexity, benefits you highlight, etc.) for each medium.

Why I share political views on Twitter but not on LinkedIn

Lately, I have seen a couple of opinion pieces written by marketing people that state you should never, ever share your political opinion, at the risk of losing clients and alienating your network.

I don't agree. I think it depends on several factors and there is not a one-size-fits-all approach. You will need to consider at least two issues:

1. Are you an employee or are you representing yourself? Are you sharing a political opinion for a company or for yourself?
2. Where you are sharing your views?

Let's start with the where.

I don't think you should ever share political views on

LinkedIn, no matter if you are a company, individual or small business owner. But you should (in certain cases) on Twitter.

LinkedIn is a professional, business-oriented social network. Twitter is not.

People go to LinkedIn specifically to network and to research your professional background. They do not go to LinkedIn to find out about your views on Hillary Clinton.

Twitter is real-time conversation. LinkedIn is more static.

I know that you aren't supposed to talk about politics or religion in polite company. But Twitter is not polite company. It's a rapid-fire issue-of-the-minute national and international conversation. LinkedIn, on the other hand, is not that. It's a staid, share your credentials and network sort of place.

There are millions of tweets every hour. On LinkedIn, your network probably shares a few updates a day.

People go to Twitter to share their opinion and see what others think.

During the presidential debates it was pretty easy to see who doesn't live in the United States and who uses automated tweets. Those were the folks who didn't weigh in on the Clinton-Trump stand-off and/or tweeted about non-political matters.

But it matters who you are, too.

On social media, not everyone is treated the same.

If you are tweeting as yourself and you are not claiming a company or organization in your Twitter profile, then you should say what you want.

If you are tweeting in name of the organization, then you

need to be very careful what you say.

If you are representing a consumer-oriented organization (like a restaurant or manufacturer), then you should be probably keep quiet. People do not generally follow a product or brand to see what political views it has.

If you work for an organization that works in a political or advocacy space, then you must make your views known. People follow political/advocacy accounts precisely because of a specific viewpoint.

If you are like me, an individual who owns her own business, then you should make a decision that best fits you. I choose to share my political views on Twitter, not on LinkedIn. Be aware that not all your current or potential clients will share your views, and may choose not to do business with you because of those views. On the other hand, some people will share your viewpoint and will choose to interact with you precisely because of that view.

We are human

In the end, we must remember that on social media, we are not automatons, we are human beings. Sometimes we respond viscerally and in the moment. For example, when people found out about the horrible massacre at Newtown, they shared their horror and some also shared their views on guns.

Human beings have ideas, likes, dislikes and of course, political opinions. While political opinions can incite strong responses, your likes and dislikes can generate controversy too.

You win some, and you lose some

Ultimately, you will need to accept that sharing your opinions (political and otherwise) may create a backlash, or it could result in support. Your opinions can lose you followers, but

they may also gain you a following.

What do you think? Do you share your political views? What is the main reason you do or do not? Let me know in the comments.

P.S. If you care about my political views, follow me on Twitter at @DBMC.

What makes a successful LinkedIn long-form post

Last year, LinkedIn opened up its publishing platform to all. Since then, we've seen an explosion in these long-form posts. Everyone is trying it, and why not, after all, LinkedIn is the professional social network and we want to expand and influence our business network in order to get more business or land our next job.

The idea, according to the LinkedIn help blog, is to share your expertise. It says:

Your long-form posts should share your professional expertise. Write about challenges you've faced, opportunities you've seized, or important trends in your industry.

And yet, many times people are pushing their products/services/ebooks/webinars on us. Instead of providing information or resources, these people are merely trying to

sell us something.

Tell, don't sell

I don't know about you, but I don't like being sold to. If I am shopping for something, I want a salesperson to help me figure out what I should be looking for. I don't want a salesperson to push something.

It's about trust

On LinkedIn, your network is probably composed of people you have worked with or gone to school with, or perhaps met volunteering or through a networking event. Your network is not a bunch of random strangers (or at least, it shouldn't be). You've earned your network's trust. This is why when somebody spams us on LinkedIn we get pretty upset. And this is why we should get upset when somebody writes a LinkedIn long-form post that is designed solely to sell something.

To stop breaking your network's trust and get their attention instead, write LinkedIn posts that are worthwhile.

What makes a top-performing post?

A read of the top performing posts on LinkedIn shows they share the following characteristics:

- They answer questions (for example a current top post is titled "What makes a leader")
- They give tips
- They have fun headlines
- They have a strong point of view, sometimes controversial
- Having notoriety or celebrity helps (The top post when I looked yesterday was by author Daniel Goleman)

Make your posts work for you

Based on this, here are six tips to make your LinkedIn posts stand out and work for you:

1. Write about a subject you know well. If you are an expert on UX, then write about that instead of the five life lessons you learned from the seminar you attended last week.
2. Share your knowledge/expertise. Don't charge for it by making people pay for your webinar or your ebook.
3. It's not academic writing—make it conversational.
4. Don't rant. There are plenty of other places you can vent—perhaps at your local pub to your friends.
5. Write clearly. Avoid spelling and grammar mistakes by asking someone to edit/proof it.
6. Spend time working on your headline. Think of it as your book cover. If it is appealing, people will read through (and maybe even buy it).

What is your experience with LinkedIn long-form posts? Have you written one? If yes, how did it perform? If no, what has stopped you?