

One action that guarantees social media success

Yesterday, an acquaintance posted a picture of an elaborate, girly birthday cake she had made for her daughter's birthday. She had written "Happy 4th Birthday to my baby" as a caption. I commented saying "Beautiful cake! How old is she?" Someone, let's call her Jane, wrote back "ummmm Deborah. She's 4." I then looked at the post and realized that it indeed said the little girl had turned four. I was focused on the picture and my eyes just skipped the "4th" and read happy birthday to my baby." So I responded: "Sorry Jane. I was looking at the picture. Excuse my stupidity." To which Jane (someone I don't know and who doesn't know me): "I know. I just couldn't resist. It just struck me as so funny!"

Now I don't know Jane, but it was pretty obvious that she was trying to make fun of me, a stranger, in front of our mutual acquaintance and all of her friends. If she had stopped for just a couple of seconds and asked herself if the comment was necessary, she may have opted to skip it. People reading it would have realized I didn't read the caption correctly or they would have ignored it.

This is pretty mild stuff, I know. But people routinely post stuff quickly and with little thought to the consequence. For a "heavier" example, there's the Virginia politician who posted on his Facebook page that pregnant women are simply "hosts" for the baby. He did this to defend his viewpoint that abortion should be illegal. When people criticized him, he redacted the comment, but not before it made news as far away as England, as this article in the Daily Mail shows.

Social media allows people to engage in real-time conversation, but unlike in-person spoken conversation, social media posts are public, searchable and in many cases,

permanent.

In person, we can say something dumb or insensitive, and then move on. Perhaps we apologize or explain ourselves. The comments we make are not visible to anybody else outside our conversation (unless perhaps they are recorded, and you don't know it, in which case you may have bigger problems than just saying something stupid).

In social media, we have the illusion that we are having an intimate conversation with one person or a group, but in reality, we are making our thoughts completely public.

Before we post ANYTHING to social media, **we should stop** and ask ourselves: Is this really necessary? Does this comment have the capacity to offend? How will people perceive this comment?

Now, I am not advocating that you spend all day deciding whether to say something on social media nor am I saying you need to edit and approve every uttering. That would be counterproductive. You should simply take a moment and think about what you are saying.

On Monday, Brad Phillips wrote a post called "No Word Was Ever as Effective As A Rightly Timed Pause," on his Mr. Media Training blog. His argument is that a pause in conversation has two main effects. One is to give the person who is pausing a moment to pull his/her thoughts together instead of blurting out whatever comes to mind. The second is to give the listener the impression that the person is confident enough to pause, and thoughtful enough to give a well-reasoned response.

So next time to you are going to write a comment on Facebook, respond to someone on Twitter or even compose a blog post, PAUSE and think about what you are doing.

In the DC area and interested in improving your blogging skills? Attend the next How to Write Your Blog workshop on

April 1. Details and registration are available on Eventbrite.

It may not be face to face, but it is still personal

Social media allows for interactions across all sorts of barriers, whether they be time zones, geography or culture. With Facebook, you can keep up with what an old classmate is doing, even if she is living in the remotest corner of Siberia.

Although social media has made it possible to keep in touch with all sorts of people and even to create new relationships, it has also made those relationships more difficult.

It makes trolls come out to play!

It seems some people figure because it isn't a face-to-face interaction, they can ignore you or be rude to you. That is why trolls abound on Twitter. They find things they disagree with, and then attack, often being very nasty and rude. As if they weren't interacting with a person on the other end of the Twitter account.

It makes people forget their manners

Somebody sends you a congratulations on LinkedIn, comments on your nice new profile picture on Twitter or says happy birthday on Facebook and you forget to thank them. Maybe you "don't have time." Maybe you are just rude.

It makes people think actions have no consequences

Recently, Mark Schaefer from Schaefer Marketing Solutions wrote on his {grow} blog about how his blog posts have been ripped off, copied wholesale without attribution. I have heard of other bloggers like Schaefer, who've found their content attributed to other writers or on other websites without attribution. People and organizations who plagiarize stuff they find through social media or on blogs seem to think it's there for the taking, as if they can do what they want with absolutely no consequences.

They thing is although social media interactions may be virtual, they involve real live human beings at both ends. Social media is not an excuse for engaging in behavior you could not get away with in person.

What do you think? Do we need to put the personal back in social media? Or is it societal?

Top blogging lessons from WordPress Camp Baltimore 2013

What did I do this past Saturday? I attended WordPress Camp Baltimore for the second time. I think that if you blog regularly and/or help people set up blogs, you should most definitely attend this volunteer-run event, available worldwide probably at a city near you. It is well worth the low cost of admission. If you want to find one near you, check out the WordPress camp site.



WordPress Camp
Baltimore 2013

I attended five sessions out of the total of 15. There were two tracks: one directed to the developers and one to users. Obviously, what I learned would be more useful to a user than a developer.

Social media must be integrated into both your actual blog and your blog's strategy

- Google + indexes faster, so consider setting up your Google + authorship description
- You need both inbound and outbound social media plugins
- Check out the Tweet Old Post plugin to be able to use your older blog posts
- Be careful with sending people to social networks—the last thing you want to do is lead someone away from your site.

SEO keeps changing but there are several things you can do to keep your site visible

- Use the WordPress SEO by Yoast plugin—highly recommended by tons of people
- Name all your images
- Do not ever write “click here.” Write a description.

- Organize your content well—Google likes organized websites—using headings, etc.
- Optimize your site so users like it
- Include rich content—pics, graphs, videos
- Watch your page speed (you may need to cache you website using plugins like WP Super Cache)
- Install and submit a site map using the Google XML Sitemap plugin

Producing your own podcast is not that hard

- What you need to produce a podcast is: a blog, hosting that provides enough bandwidth, artwork/branding materials and a podcast feed. You will also need a microphone and a way to edit your audio.
- Use editors like Audacity.
- Look into podcasting plugins like PodPress and PowerPress

Blogs and WordPress sites make content marketing easier

- Content marketing's purpose is to drive profitable (however you define it) customer action.
- Content marketing is about providing relevant, valuable (educational) and enjoyable material for your audience/user
- Remember that customers care about themselves not you
- Keyword research is key (you must know what keywords your customers would use to find your service/product)
- When you provide valuable content, the reader/user is bound by the need to reciprocate since humans have a deep seated need to return favors.
- Remember that information that is exclusive is more persuasive (this is only available for a limited time)
- Humans are more receptive to requests from people who appear to be authorities or experts.
- Read Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion by Robert

Cialdini

Thanks to the following presenters:

- AkilahThompkins-Robinson
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- Arsham and Josh from Webmechanix
- Douglas Bell
- Shane Powers

Does going for a run make you want to smile?

Yesterday, I took advantage of a gorgeous low-humidity, warm (not hot) day and went for a run along the C&O Canal in Potomac. There were several people along the trail, some walking, some biking and some running like me. Some people smiled, nodded or said hi as I passed. Some people ignored me completely (like the bikers who passed me without a warning or even a look back or the runner who pointedly looked straight ahead when passing in the other direction).



Smile! by Rob Kleine on Flickr

Some people are social, and some are not.

It's not just when you are out running on a gorgeous day. It's when you get in an elevator, walk along the street, go in a store, and so forth. Some people will always greet others, and some will pretend they are in their own little fiefdom. Some people are naturally social and some are not. Some people feel connection to those around them, and some do not.

Some of this has to do with factors other than sociability. Perhaps someone has just received bad news or is lost in thought about a pressing problem. Perhaps there is a language or culture barrier.

The same is true on social media. Some people are naturally good at social media and some are not. You can see it by how often they post, how often they like posts, how often they re-tweet, **how often they interact**. Of course, some people will defend their lack of engagement on social media by saying they

are “too busy” and they “don’t have time.”

Then there are those like someone I know named Jon, who blocked off his Facebook wall to avoid unwanted communication and has even asked me to “untag” him from a conversation because he did not care to hear what other people had to say about something he had been involved in. Or the people like Jon, who avoid commenting on posts because they don’t want to be dragged into a conversation. My question to Jon and others like him is: why are you on Facebook? Why are you on social media at all?

Here’s the thing: If you don’t want two-way communication (or even multi-lateral communication), DO NOT get on social media. It is not all about you. It is about the other people too.

People who like to control what others say or with whom they connect, are not naturally good at social media. We see the corporate CEOs who have been forced to open Twitter accounts by their communications advisers and who then do not tweet or respond to tweets.

Getting on social media is about being social. It is about being responsive. It is about interacting. It’s about (the hated, overused term) engagement. You can’t automate your social media interactions. You need to be present, social and say hi.

Smile! You are on social media.

Top 3 most annoying LinkedIn behaviors

I just got an email from LinkedIn telling me Tom and Sue (not their real names) have endorsed me. The thing is the endorsement from Sue is worth something. She's someone I respect and whom I have known for several years now. Her endorsement is real while Tom's is not. I have never known Tom in a professional capacity or worked with him. I know him from school and he is endorsing me for things that are not even on my profile. This leads me to my top three most annoying LinkedIn behaviors.

#3: Fake endorsements

I am really not sure why people do this. Do they want a fake endorsement in return? Is it fun to play with LinkedIn? What is it?



16/50 -grr!! by THEMACGIRL on Flickr

#2: Posting too much and about non-business topics

Yes, I guess this could be two behaviors, but in my experience they go hand-in-hand. People who post too much are also

posting about extraneous stuff. Remember that you want to showcase what you do, and unless you are a veterinarian, that stuff about how kittens need extra blankets in the winter is great for Facebook but has no place on LinkedIn.

#1: Sending generic LinkedIn invitations (perennial “winner”)

Stop doing this. I don't understand why people you don't know in person, who feel they would like to connect with you , can't seem to scare up a couple of lines to provide some context, some reason, or some personality.

What annoys you on LinkedIn? Yes, you can vent right here!

How companies #fail at using Twitter

Twitter is second only to Facebook in brand marketing (85% to Facebook's 91%, according to Social Media Examiner's 2013 Social Media Marketing Report). It's safe to say that Twitter is part of most organizational social media strategies. Yet, many companies do not seem to understand how to use Twitter or how to use it to connect with their customers.



FAIL stamp by Hans Gewirtz on Flickr.
Read more here:
<http://hans.gewirtz.com/2011/03/07/fail-stamp.html>

How do companies #fail at Twitter?

1. They fail to update their profile

Have you ever gone to a Twitter profile and found a link to a blog that has not been updated since 2009? Or how about a company that does not list its current website? It takes minutes to update a Twitter profile. There is no excuse. And don't even get me started on those companies (and individuals) who are using the default Twitter egg as their profile pic...

2. They fail to seize opportunities

As on most Sundays, yesterday I watched CBS Sunday Morning (some of the best morning TV out there). There were lots of great stories, including one about a Brooklyn pickle manufacturer. It was a nice story, and gave the company great publicity. CBS tweeted out a link to the video and mentioned the company's Twitter handle. I went to check it. The company never promoted its appearance on CBS and the only mention of it was the re-tweet of CBS's video link after the

fact. That is a missed opportunity.

3. They fail to use Twitter beyond self-promotion

Too many companies think that Twitter is a one-way megaphone where they can trumpet their awards and recognitions or think of it as an easy way to push out news releases and personnel announcements. While there is room for this type of promotion, if a company's stream is devoted solely to itself, it is not "engaging" with its audience.

4. They fail to understand how people expect companies to use Twitter

Related to the above, companies who use Twitter as a self-promotional news stream, don't understand people expect to be able to interact with them. Twitter is a social media network, and the word social is there first for a reason. Social has up-ended the way that companies must communicate with their audiences. Instead of one-way communication, social media has given companies a way of having two-way communications with their customers.

5. They fail to understand that Twitter is real-time

Perhaps waiting 24 hours to return a phone call or an email is standard business practice, but it won't fly on Twitter. When somebody is asking something on Twitter (or other social media networks), they are expecting a real-time answer, much the same as if they were having an in-person conversation. Answering a Twitter @ query hours or days later is ineffective and completely inappropriate to the medium.

6. They fail to understand "social shame"

Companies who disregard/ignore/fail to check @ messages on Twitter are unaware of the concept of social shame. Like it or not, individuals turn to Twitter when they have a problem, figuring companies want to preserve their reputations and will

respond or try to fix the problem. Many companies don't seem to understand the amplification involved in social media. If I complain about a company, my followers may see it but people who use Twitter's search function will also see it.

What other company failures on Twitter have you seen? Please add your thoughts in the comments.

UPDATE July 9, 2013

Failure can include auto-tweeting replies. Seems that Bank of America has been doing that, quite inappropriately, according to this story on Consumerist.

It's only new once

You can't call yesterday's news new. In fact, you probably can't call it news either. And yet, it has become a habit for some marketers, most notably those on Twitter, to use the word "new" or even worse, the word "breaking" to set apart their content. Now, if something is truly new or breaking, then that's fine, but keep in mind that calling something new or breaking is a one-time-only proposition.



News shop by Cyberslayer via Flickr

Once you have called something new or breaking, you can't do it again. Why? Here are three reasons:

1. It is **false advertising**: it is no longer new.
2. It **undermines your credibility**: you are trying to get me to believe something that is not so.

3. It's a **cheap tactic**: is this the only way you can get attention for your product, service or idea?

If I see a Twitter stream replete with the words new or breaking, it better be from a wire service, newspaper or news broadcast. A post that you wrote two weeks ago is not new. An idea that you tweeted out last week certainly is not breaking.

Remember it's only new once, everything else can be classified as gently used or old or even outdated!

Social media amplifies everything

Social media takes a magnifying lens to everything. It makes everything appear bigger and closer (kind of like your side view mirrors).



Fun with magnifying glasses by
matlock on Flickr

You've probably heard that social media serves to amplify your message. You tell your friends on Facebook, and they then share it with their friends, and so on. I have come to realize that social media amplifies more than your message. It amplifies mistakes, personality traits and business smarts (or lack thereof).

Mistakes

You used to be able to slip up and it would be forgotten. Not any more. Now, someone will catch your mistake, and put it on Twitter or YouTube. And then people will share that. And before you know it, everyone knows of your mistake. Perhaps forgiven, but not forgotten.

Personality traits

Are you an angry person? You will appear even angrier when

trying to contain your ire to 140 characters. Your nastiness will be contained and then disseminated. Are you rude? Not only will the person appalled at your belching at the dinner table know about it, but everyone else will too. Self-centered? It will be evident in endless self-promotional posts. On the other hand, if you are a connector or naturally gregarious, it will be evident because you will have 1000s of followers.

Business know-how

Do you answer your customer queries? If you don't do it regularly and quickly, it will be even more apparent on social media channels. People will complain. And since you aren't used to replying quickly, the problem will grow.

Not sure what social media is for and ignoring it? You can be sure others will not be. You will either look like a fool or lose customers.

For example, today I was looking at service providers "website." All it was a poorly formed WordPress site. There was no contact information. None. No listing of services. No reason why I should hire. In short, it was a disaster. I found a Twitter handle, and tweeted. No response. Better to not be on the web at all!

Remember that social media gives people the ability to share the good and the bad about you. Small can become big. And that can be a good thing, or it can be a disaster. Your choice!

Don't miss out! Sign up for the next How to blog workshop, taking place on May 17. Details and registration here.

Social media intelligence is an essential skill

You have probably heard of Emotional Intelligence (EI), which is defined as the ability to perceive, evaluate and control emotions. EI is the ability to figure out how to respond appropriately to a situation. There are people that rank low on the EI scale—they lack empathy or social skills. They may laugh inappropriately or not seem saddened by a tragic moment. And there are those who have high EI and are very adept at navigating human interactions.

Yesterday's attack on the Boston Marathon got me thinking about a variation of EI—what I am terming **social media intelligence**. The news was just awful, and coming out in dribs and drabs. On Twitter, there was a ton of (mis)information. There was one bomb, then there were three. Was it domestic terrorism or did this have the hallmarks of Al Qaeda? Wild speculation abounded.

The people who have social media intelligence were the ones had reasonable responses and tweets. Some asked people to check their sources before tweeting and some asked others to refrain from posting exceedingly graphic images.

Those with **low social media intelligence are the people that appear unaware how their communications affect their followers** and who were busy re-tweeting thoughtlessly, spreading rumors and even engaging in fear-mongering.

Another variation of low social media intelligence was being unaware that a big news event was happening and tweeting/posting about mundane, unrelated stuff. Unfortunately some of these are communications folks who have automated

posts to send out press releases and other announcements. There is little that is as jarring as reading about an upcoming event (join us for a spectacular fun-filled evening!) when simultaneously finding out that the nation's oldest marathon has been targeted by terror. Some people (those with higher social media intelligence) called out this behavior.

Whether EI is learned or you are born with it is an open question. Social media intelligence on the other hand, can most certainly be learned. In fact, in today's social media fueled information age, having this type of intelligence is an essential skill. Here are a few guidelines:

- Be aware of what is going on and act accordingly. Don't post without checking your feeds.
- Don't assume that everything you see on social media is true and deserving of re-posting. Double-check facts and sources.
- Every social media network is different—post accordingly. Perhaps your personal trials and tribulations are best left to Facebook and taken off LinkedIn.
- Remember that people can see your posts both in real-time and in the future.
- Discussions on social media are not all about you. Remember the social in social media.

What would you add? What makes someone have social media intelligence? What are examples of lacking or having social media intelligence?

Getting “scroogled”

I am sure you have probably seen Microsoft’s ad campaign against Google, where the company claims you are getting “scroogled” by Google. It is clever, and has some basis in reality. If you haven’t, one of the ads is for Outlook.com, which is being presented as an alternative to Gmail. The ad implies that Google is reading your “private” email to be able to target advertising to you.

I am not sure Microsoft is the correct alternative to Google, but I think they are on to something with the term “scroogled.” Google, which is ubiquitous, is desperately trying to get more people on its (useless in my opinion) Google Plus platform. To force you to join, they are now killing the extremely useful Google Reader.

I have been using Google Reader for years, and often advise attendees to my blogging workshops that they should set up a reader. I also think readers are the only way to keep up with blogs, since you may follow dozens (if not hundreds). Readers give you one place to see what is new. If you only follow one or two blogs, then getting email updates works.

Alternatives to Google Reader: Get one ASAP!

In any case, Google Reader will be gone as of July 1. Luckily, there are some alternatives out there. Here are some reviews and compilations for you to check out:

CNET: 5 Worthy Alternatives

Silicon Angle: 6 Alternatives to the Dying Google Reader

Lifehacker: Google Reader is Shutting Down; Here Are the Best Alternatives

Don’t get “scroogled!”

The lesson I draw from this is that any free service is free to let you down in the end. Many individuals and organizations put all their eggs in the proverbial free basket, and will suffer the consequences when organizations like Google and Facebook change the rules of the road whenever they like. My advice is to make sure you own your own website or blog (don't depend on Blogger or WordPress.com), have your own email (which you can usually get when you have your own domain and web hosting) and have alternatives to the free behemoths, which after all have their own agenda to push and ultimately, don't care about your needs and wants.

What are your thoughts? Do you feel that Google is treating you fairly?