

Some thoughts on the ROI/ROE of social media

Increasingly, I am seeing articles out there about measuring the Return on Investment (ROI)/Return on Engagement (ROE) in social media. This morning, I read an article that went so far as to show you how to calculate the dollar figures of investment and the projected value of any customers you may get from your blog.

The thing is this: what are you using social media to accomplish? Without knowing the answer to that, there is no measurement available. If you are indeed using your blog simply to generate sales, it is easy to calculate if you are getting a decent ROI.

However (you knew this was coming), using social media can help you/your business accomplish many goals, such as:

- Thought leadership
- Image/branding
- Name recognition
- Networking (as in actually meeting other people)

These are not so easily measured in numbers and certainly not in dollars, and yet they all have value.

My conclusion is that you should not waste your time trying to measure your ROI/ROE but instead ask yourself if your social media use is generating value for you. If you are spending hours and hours a day on social networks and haven't made one solitary connection, it is clear that there is no value for you. If you have made connections, improved your image, heightened your name recognition, perhaps that is the value you seek.

What are your thoughts? What makes you use social media for

business purposes?

Just because its on the computer doesn't mean you can't act human

Be warned: this is a rant.

Lately, I have been getting followed and unfollowed on Twitter by a guy who has a networking group here in DC. He happens to have many Twitter handles (and a surprising number of followers). He has used at least five different handles to follow me, and then, I take it because I haven't followed back, he unfollows me. Is this a good way to get me to follow him? NO!!!

Say this interaction was taking place on the phone instead of on Twitter. It would go like this: He would call from his cell phone, and hang up once I answered. Then he would call from his office line, and hang up again. And so forth. This would be very annoying, and bordering on perverted behavior (if there were any heavy breathing involved).

If he actually wanted to talk to me, he might call and say "Hello, I really think you have some great ideas to share, and I would like to talk to you some more." But apparently, he is either unaware of how to behave like a human, or is just interested in numbers.

There is no great mystery to getting Twitter followers: it is simply about behaving courteously and human. That is, showing interest, re-tweeting content to show support and giving

credit, and INTERACTING.

Why do so many people forget they are dealing with other people on the Internet? You would not walk into a store and yell obscenities, for instance. And yet people do this on Twitter as a matter of course.

A computer is just a tool. It need humans to run it.

Beware the social media echo chamber

Sarah Palin may be forgiven for thinking that many people in the U.S. agree with her viewpoints—after all, she gets confirmation all the time from her Facebook fans. Last week, Politico reported that Palin posted a criticism of President Obama on her Facebook page. If you check out the entry, you will note that there are dozens of supporting comments and more than 19,000 people liked her words.

You could also be excused for thinking that Sarah Palin has lots of support. But you would be wrong. What she has is support among her supporters—that is, she is preaching to the choir. She is not going to get push back from people on Facebook, because after all, they (presumably) have indicated that they “like” her. Sure, there are probably several people in there who “liked” her to follow her moves, but overall, these are her fans, her base, her **echo chamber**.

Politicians—and marketers—need to be careful that they aren't

getting to overenthusiastic about the echoes they are hearing. **Your supporters will mostly always like you and agree with you. But if you are always listening to those who like you, you will be unaware of why those other people out there don't.**

Social media, especially the concept of Facebook pages, is the very definition of an echo chamber. You are sharing content with those who are already predisposed to liking what you say and do. Same thing happens with your Twitter stream—you have chosen to follow and be followed by certain people. If someone in your Twitter stream annoys you or doesn't agree with you, you can block him/her.

I am not saying that brands should not have Facebook pages, or that you should not select your Twitter stream. What I am saying is that you have to be aware that you may be speaking in an echo chamber—hearing back what you want to hear.

What do you think? Do you find yourself in an echo chamber?

Getting more readers and getting unfollowed

Check out my guest blog post at the Downtown Women's Club blog: 5 ways to get more readers to your blog. Hint: it has to do with being consistent and getting the word out. Special thanks to Diane Danielson for giving me the opportunity!

On social media and blogs, we are all trying to get more readers and more followers. If we are in business or

marketing, we are also trying to convert some followers/readers/likers into customers. Right?

Lately, I have been cleaning up Twitter, LinkedIn and Facebook. Basically, I have been reducing the numbers of people that I follow or am connected to. Let me tell you why.

It's personal

On Facebook, which I consider a personal network, I have been "unfriending" anyone that I don't know very well, or only know through business encounters. I tend to share my personal views and activities and really, would rather have fewer "friends" on Facebook than thousands of people with insight into my personal life.

It's business

On LinkedIn, I have removed a few connections because I just don't know enough about them. LinkedIn is a business network, and when you connect with someone, you have access to his/her connections. I want to be more careful with this network and not give away my hard-earned connections to people who are just trying to expand their own networks with little regard for what I do.

It's common sense

I have been unfollowing lots of people on Twitter lately. Why? Because there is only so much time in the day, and there are so many tweets that I want to make sure to follow folks who are offering stuff that is relevant and/or interesting. I am on Twitter to share and to learn, but I don't need to learn about what you did at the gym or whether your cat is at the vet. On Twitter, I definitely stopped following anybody who:

- Self promotes endlessly
- Uses crass expressions/language ALWAYS
- Doesn't ever share anything valuable (as defined by me)

- Seems to be in a quest to get the most tweets per day ever
- Who never ever interacts with me or re-tweets or even acknowledges my re-tweets (unless the person in question is a journalist/politician/world leader)

So yes, we are all trying to get more followers and to do that, you need to be aware of what gets you unfollowed.

Your thoughts?

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!

Engagement is just the beginning

Johna Burke, of BurrellesLuce addressed WWPR last week (recap by Joan Coyle here). She talked about social media measurement and provided lots of useful information about web tools and marketing strategies.

One thing, more than anything else Johna said, struck me as crucial: she talked about engagement and marriage. Engagement, Johna said, is just the beginning. It's when everything is all promise and excitement (isn't that ring all shiny?) Marriage (which most times follows the engagement) takes a lot of hard work and commitment.

In social media, people talk about engagement all the time. You have to "engage" with your followers. What does this really mean? Why are you engaging? The answer is simple—to build a lasting relationship (the "marriage"). If you are engaging just to engage and not to follow through, then you are just breaking promises. If you get caught up in getting Twitter followers but don't provide any substance or reason to "stay together" then you are looking at social media (and any marketing) as being all about the excitement of it rather than the substance (which should be your marketing goals and strategy).

Engagement is just the beginning. It is your starting point to a marketing/communications strategy that seeks to accomplish a goal (e.g. establish thought leadership, increase sales, etc.).

Are you getting engaged all the time or are you working on your marriage?



Check your links

I know you need to add one more thing to your to-do list like you need to wake up Friday at 4 a.m. to watch the royal wedding, but do consider doing this with every blog post, website page, tweet, etc that you put out there:

CHECK THE LINKS!

Does your website have any broken links (or pages that don't appear correctly)? Does the sharing software on your blog work? All of it? When you post a link to a story on Twitter, are you sure the link is working?

Many of us do not check these very often.

Case in point: a blogger I follow has faulty sharing buttons on her blog. I read a good post by her, which I wanted to share on Twitter. I clicked on the link and all I got was a blank Twitter page—no title and no link. No good. I created a Bit.Ly short link and posted it anyway but she would have no way of knowing that the item had been shared unless her blog records ping-backs. I reported this to her, and I hope she is able to correct it.

Prevent this from happening by occasionally checking these links. Just sayin'.



Is social media the right venue for you?

Sometimes it seems like everywhere you turn someone is telling you to be on Twitter, Facebook and so forth. Lots of companies are now advertising that you should follow them.

Let me say there is a huge benefit to being on social media. Some companies will find most if not all of their target audience on social networks. But, and there always is that but, if you are not prepared to be on social media, don't be on it. It can hurt more than help.

Let me give you an example of how being on social media when you are not ready can actually cause more damage than any benefit. Last week, I bought a mattress from Sleepy's, "the mattress professionals." The mattress was supposed to be delivered on Tuesday, between 3 pm and 7 pm (and, no, this is not the cable company although Sleepy's gives them a run for their money). By 6 pm, it was obvious the delivery was going to be delayed. I tweeted to @sleepys several times. No answer. Mattress finally got delivered at nearly 9 pm. I did not receive a tweet back from Sleepy's until nearly 5 pm the next day, asking me to email my concern. The next day, they tweeted to email my concern (which I already had done.). By Friday, I had an email from them asking me to test the email address!!!! And, someone from customer service finally called me Friday afternoon.

Although there are many things wrong with Sleepy's (and if you are interested in my opinion of this company just drop me a line), **it adds insult to injury for them to be on social media and not to respond to social media.**

Social media for companies, whether it be for customer service or for image, requires a sizeable time investment. It

requires monitoring for mentions. It requires responsiveness.

Is social media the right venue for you? Here's a checklist to determine the answer:

- **I have the time and/or the staff to manage social media.**
- **I have the understanding of how social media works.**
- **I will respond to customer complaints on social media like I do on traditional outlets.**
- **I will monitor for mentions consistently/constantly.**

If you can't commit to this checklist, social media may not be the right venue for you.

If your company does not have the staff/time to deal with social media, do yourself a favor, and do not get it to the game. You will make matters worse. By saying you have social media outlets, you are encouraging your customers to contact you there. If you are not there, then your customers will become even more frustrated. Frustration can lead to anger and upset. And because of the power of amplification, the problem will get transmitted to more and more people.

Your thoughts?

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.