Are we seeing more media crises?

This week featured two highly publicized and far-reaching media crises. One was the United Airlines situation, where a passenger was forcibly removed (and hurt in the process) from the plane, after he had been seated and had not agreed to "voluntarily" leave the aircraft. And the other involved White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer, who clumsily compared Syria's Bashar al-Assad to Adolf Hitler, and then showed great ignorance about just what Hitler did during World War II.

Twitter outrage

I saw both these situations unfold on social media (specifically, Twitter), and was able to add my observations to many others, both using hashtags and Twitter handles. Social media outrage appears to have caused both United and Sean Spicer to apologize profusely for their mistakes. In today's *Washington Post*, Kathleen Parker argues that in the United case, the Twitter outrage (or "mob" as she calls it) was able to bring the situation to light and make change happen.

It seems that we have more media crises these days than before—but like Parker argues, what has changed is the ability to get these situations in front of more people, more quickly, through social media. So, in fact, we may not be having more crises, but rather more exposure for and to these crises.

Changes…

It seems that United, and to some degree Sean Spicer, have still not adapted or recognized that the media landscape has changed dramatically. Anyone with internet access and a social media account can share their ideas, opinions, facts and more

damning, their video. Also, anyone with a smartphone has the ability to create video on the spot, and then share it immediately.

Ten years ago, if a passenger had been dragged off a plane, there would have been no record of it outside of the memories of the other passengers on the plane. Similarly, Sean Spicer's words would have received criticism later (if at all), not during his press briefing. Fewer people would've been exposed to these situations.

More "eyeballs" available

Today's media crises are happening not because spokespeople and companies are screwing up more, but because more people are seeing it happen. It would behoove any public relations/communications practitioner to internalize that most everything can be publicized very quickly, and may even have incontrovertible visual proof with it.

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 you 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 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.

Is lazy interaction better than no interaction?

This post is about a phenomenon that I've noticed on Twitter (just in case you aren't on Twitter, I'm letting you know now so you can stop reading).

First of all, here's a question: do you expect a thank you or other acknowledgement when you re-tweet something? I would like to know for sure (I would appreciate your thoughts, please do share them in the comments) but my gut tells me most people appreciate a thank you but don't expect it or need it.

And yet, there's been an explosion (or at least it seems so to me) in automated 'thanks for your interaction' tweets. You've probably seen the ones I mean:

> *My best RTs this week came from: @xxx @xxx #thankSAll Who were yours? sumall.com/thankyou*

> *or*

> *Thanks to my top interactors!*
> *@xxxx @xxxx*
> *#tweetjukebox*

I see why some people would think this is a good idea. Perhaps they were raised by parents who insisted that you must write a thank you note whenever you get a gift. Or perhaps, they think any interaction, even automated interaction, is better than no interaction.

It's similar to when you send a company an email outlining some concern or question you have and you then receive at

automated reply thanking you for your email but not addressing your issue. You could have said that the company's product is killing you and the reply would still say "thank you for your email."

Automated replies and automated tweets may be expedient but they are empty gestures. They have no content. They have no context. And they are basically useless in terms of creating the social media "engagement" everyone talks about.

If the only way you can think of interacting with others on Twitter is by automated thank yous, I respectfully suggest you get yourself off the platform immediately.

Similarly, if you absolutely, positively need to have an app send out canned tweets for you, you may not have the time or inclination to be on social media.

Here are some truths about social media engagement:

- its time-consuming
- there's effort involved
- personal beats automated every day

What do you think? Are you using these automated thank you generators? If so, what are you hoping to achieve? Are you achieving what you are hoping?

When you lose your internet

service…

I meant to post earlier in the week. However, Verizon "inadvertently" cut my FIOS line—so I had no TV or internet Wednesday into Thursday. Yes, this is a first world problem. Regardless, it had to be resolved, which involved the thing I despise the most in the world: calling Verizon customer service.

And it was just as bad as I feared. First you have to get through a phone tree (I can't stand talking to machines). And then I got disconnected. Then, when I called back, the phone tree was stuck on whether I had power at my location or not. Thanks Verizon, for thinking I am that stupid that I would think that without electricity I would have working TV/internet. On the third try, I went for the Spanish option, from which I was able to finally speak to an agent (whose command of Spanish was not the best as he was versed in Spanglish more than Spanish).

To make a long story short, after more than 24 hours without service and after several calls to support, my FIOS is back on a temporary line that will eventually have to be buried (meaning I am still not done with Verizon).

I work from home, so having internet access is essential for me. Yes, I have a smartphone so I wasn't entirely disconnected from the world wide web, but try proofreading a brochure on your smartphone. Not so easy.

The only positive from this fiasco is that it sparked this blog post. Here's what I learned from losing my internet service:

1.**The measure of a company is how it responds to customer problems.** Verizon does not do well on this measure. Verizon, like most companies, is fine *as long as you don't have a problem.* Verizon makes it very hard for customers to talk to

customer service agents. It makes customers run around in circles: repeat information, navigate phone trees and so forth. I lost a whole day of service PLUS more than an hour getting someone to help PLUS using data on my phone PLUS having to go somewhere to be able to access the internet to do work PLUS waiting during a three-hour window. If I call to request a credit, I may be compensated for the service loss but not for my time and certainly not for the aggravation. I am sure Verizon is betting that I won't want to lose more time on this, and it may be right. As I said before, I despise calling Verizon's customer service.

2. **Monopolies like Verizon have no incentive to be customer-centric and they don't advertise or promote their customer service.** If you notice, all FIOS advertising is about what great speeds you will have or any other benefits of having WORKING service. There's no mention of the great customer service that accompanies this "super-fast" internet because there is none.

3. **Some companies provide better customer service via social media. Verizon does not.** Several years ago this was not true. You could get better, faster service from Twitter since @verizonsupport agents seemed to be more empowered than those on the 1-800 number. Now, if you complain on Twitter, Verizon reps will quickly want to move you over to direct message so that they can give you a link to report your problem. Agents on @verizonsupport seem to have little or no ability to actually help or intervene in your favor, unlike @deltaassist, which has the ability to rebook your flight, etc.

4. **The problem is with company policies not with employees.** It's been my experience that people want to help, but they are forced to follow company policies and procedures, which are not customer-friendly. The technician that came to my house was far more helpful and on the ball than the agents on the 1-800 line. He was empowered to do what he had to do to fix the problem, whereas the agents in the call center were forced

to call other departments and work within constraints.

5. **You must have a "plan b" or "plan c."** If something fails (you could lose power, or your car is in the shop or any other unexpected problem), you have to find a work around. In this case, my county libraries all offer wi-fi, and have desks with power outlets. That was the way to get some work done for me.

And lastly, on a personal note:

6. **I have to try to stop sweating the small stuff.** I get upset because I expect things to work and work well. And they often don't. Yesterday, I was reminded that our time on earth can be very short and you just don't know how life will turn out, so perhaps worrying about Verizon is a complete waste of time. I had my annual eye doctor appointment, and the usual optometrist was not there. I was shocked and very sorry to learn that she died suddenly after an aggressive illness. She was around my age. She was a very nice person and I always enjoyed chatting with her. The doctor told me she had been very healthy and health-conscious, but this illness came out of nowhere. She was gone in a matter of weeks. Rest in peace Teresa, you are missed.

Enjoy your Labor Day weekend! How did we get to the last weekend of "official" summer so fast? Sigh.

Do you have a Twitter

strategy?

I follow more than 1,300 accounts on Twitter. Some of them are purely news sources and some are people I know "in real life." Some are journalists and others "social media experts."

Sand sculpture by Rosaura Ochoa via Flckr

Since I spend a good amount of my day on Twitter, I see a lot of tweets. Many of those tweets are interesting or funny or offer good advice. However, some tweets make me wonder if the person/account has ever considered why he/she is on Twitter. I see constant check-ins and bitter complaints about spouses. I see random quotes and people earning points for some action (usually checking in). I see people obviously brown-nosing ("Store X is the best, super customer service). And just today I saw a tweet about someone's menstrual cycle (I wish I were kidding).

Get strategic.

Big brands probably have a written and codified Twitter strategy that is part of their larger content strategy. But if you are a freelancer, small business owner or just you, you may not have a "content strategy" much less a Twitter strategy? But should you?

If you want to get more out of Twitter, yes, you should

develop a simple but effective strategy.

Here's how to develop a Twitter strategy:

1. **Decide what you want to achieve on Twitter.** This is also the answer to "why am I here?" Perhaps you want to make business contacts or you want to learn more about a subject or you want to promote your writing. Whatever it is, write it down.
2. **Now, figure out your audience.** What kinds of people or accounts are likely to have the type of information you are interested in? Who on Twitter would be interested in your stuff? Can you describe a group or groups of people that would be your audience? For example, if you are a knitter and sell stuff on Etsy, your audience would be other knitters, people interested in crafts and so forth.
3. **What defines success for you on Twitter?** Do you want to have a large following? Do you want to be an influencer? Do you want to meet like-minded folks in person?

By thinking about these issues, you will start being more focused or purposeful in your tweeting.

Now, get tactical

Tactics are what puts your strategy in motion.

1. **Engage.** See someone asking a question? Respond! Find somebody's tweet useful/inspiring/interesting? Retweet!
2. **Become a content curator.** Find sources (Twitter accounts, blogs, websites) and follow them. Collect and share the most relevant information for your audience (see above).
3. **Join/follow selected Twitter chats.** There are so many on a variety of topics, and folks that participate in those are folks that are interested in the same stuff as you are.
4. **Use lists**. Twitter gives you the ability to put accounts

into lists, and then, when you use a Twitter client such as Hootsuite, you can put those lists into their own column. This way if you have a list of "Fiendish knitters" you can make sure to see what those crafters are up to.

What am I trying to accomplish?

Of course you will have the occasional "not on message" tweet. You are a person with a life and you want to share your interests or things that happen to you. But if this is all you tweet, you have a problem, and you are probably not seeing any results from Twitter.

So, perhaps before you tweet anything, you should ask yourself : What am I trying to accomplish by sharing this?

Let me know: do you have a Twitter strategy? Can you share it?

Are you lacking social media manners or best practices?

When I first started using Twitter in 2008, I had no idea what an "RT" was or how to check "@" messages. I didn't know Tweetdeck from Hootsuite. So I asked a couple millennial friends of mine, and over lunch, they explained how Twitter worked and how to use it.

Since then, I believe I have become fairly adept at using Twitter and use it quite heavily as a place to learn, share and interact with people. I've also used Twitter to promote my blog posts and workshops, and by extension, my business.

One of the most gratifying aspects of Twitter is how many

personal relationships I have developed. Some people whom I met through Twitter have become friends IRL ("in real life") and some have become trusted online colleagues.

Developing best practices for social media use

In order to make life on Twitter more manageable, I follow certain "best practices." Up to now, they've been in my head, but here's a more formal list:

- Use a client such as Hootsuite to make managing @ replies, streams easier
- Group people in lists to include as a stream to follow (this way, I know what my friends/colleagues are up to)
- Respond to @ replies ASAP
- Thank people for sharing tweets, posts, etc.
- Avoid obscenities/expletives and unfollow those who favor this type of communication
- Follow selectively (and don't follow back automatically)
- Don't engage with trolls, and block whenever possible
- Block followers who are obviously spammers or bots or who are only following to get me to follow back
- Be conscious of what I am sharing
- Take personal conversations offline or DM if appropriate
- Avoid unproductive complaining
- Don't tweet everything on my mind or share mundane stuff
- Be personal without providing too much personal information
- Don't use tools that do your tweeting for you

To me, it's about common sense and having manners

They say good manners exist so that your behavior make others comfortable. That's why it is not good manners to use expletives (because some people may be offended and thus uncomfortable). That's why we say please and thank you (because we want to acknowledge that we are not owed anything, and that we appreciate kind gestures). That's why we don't

chew with our mouth open (no comment needed right?).

And yet, some people just don't get that in order to be on social media, and get along with others, you need to mind your manners and your behavior. Perhaps they don't really understand how Twitter works and that whatever you post on Twitter is visible to the public. Perhaps they think you won't notice if they ignore your messages. Perhaps they feel entitled. Or perhaps they are always rude in person too.

Perhaps the best practice is to not take it personally

Who knows why people behave the way they do. Truth is you just don't know. It could be they are going through a hard time or just got busy with other things. Some people like to offend and want to argue (trolls are everywhere on social media). Context and tone are hard to convey on social media, and on Twitter, you only have 140 characters to express yourself.

Do you have best practices for Twitter? Do you behave differently on different social networks?

Summer challenge # 7: Be direct and get it fixed

A few years ago, I had a client who thought I had a special skill: mind reading. Unfortunately for both of us, I am not actually able to read minds. I can sense moods (anger, disapproval) but I can't actually know what a person is thinking unless that person decides to tell me. In the case of

this client, I did not do what she was thinking I should do, and therefore, the relationship went south.

Years later, reflecting on this client relations episode, I concluded that that particular client was passive-aggressive. She had high expectations, which she did not clearly articulate, and then was extremely disappointed when her staff and contracted personnel failed to meet those standards.

Unfortunately, passive-aggressive behavior has become standard for many. Instead of confronting a problem, they hope the other party will sense their disapproval. If you've dealt with passive-aggressive people you know they will often pretend everything is OK but do things like procrastinate or give the wrong information in an effort to subvert your efforts. Or they will give you the silent treatment. (You may want to read: How to Spot and Deal with Passive-Aggressive People .)

In social media, we see a lot of passive-aggressive behavior. On Twitter, we see it in "sub-tweeting," in which a tweet refers to a specific individual without identifying him/her. We see it in random complaints, designed solely to shame the company but not actually get the problem fixed. You know the type: "My phone service sucks thanks to @companyIhate … I should switch." Or there is the re-tweeting and hashtagging of someone's tweet, in order to embarrass or mock that person (I recently had this done to me and it resulted in getting a couple very ugly tweets from random strangers).

Recently, I saw some truly remarkable passive-aggressive behavior on Twitter from someone busy live-tweeting her condo board's meeting. She tweeted her displeasure at everything discussed. Never mind the condo board is not on Twitter and that nobody would even know to look for the hashtag this Twitter user made up. I read her litany of tweets with complete astonishment. She was present in the room—why not speak up and address these issues with the people she was so angry with instead of showing (and recording for posterity)

her mocking displeasure?

My summer challenge to you is to drop the passive-aggressive behavior and be direct. If there is an actual issue, get it fixed. Yes, it may mean confronting someone directly. In some cases, it may mean going offline and using the telephone to call the dreaded customer service to deal with a problem. In the end, the problem will be aired out if not resolved completely.

Before you go to Twitter to air your problems, why not follow excellent advice from Paula Kiger on Spin Sucks: Four Questions to Ask Before You Complain on Twitter .

If you are upset or angry at someone's actions, why not discuss it directly? Here are 5 Tips for Communicating Assertively Without Being Passive-Aggressive.

What do you think? Have you been victimized by passive-aggressive behavior? Or do you engage in passive-aggressive behavior yourself? The truth is we have all been on the giving *and* the receiving end of passive-aggressive behavior. Let's try to stop the cycle.

Take some Twitter advice from Biz Stone

Biz Stone is one of the co-founders of Twitter. He's now CEO of a new company called Jelly. The *Washington Post* ran an interview with him in yesterday's edition, for its On Leadership series. You should read the entire interview but here is Biz's best Twitter tip:

Just be authentic. That's the only way to go. Over and over and over it comes back to that. People try all kinds of different things, and when they just present themselves as human, that's when people connect with them.

Exactly. This is why robo-tweeting, as I discussed a few weeks back, doesn't work. This is why humble-bragging and endless self-promotion turn potential followers off. It's rude and it's not how you would interact in person.

When you act as you do "in real life" you develop real relationships and therefore get the "engagement" that you should be aiming for. You talk with people not at people. You help others out. You act graciously. It's called being human, and if you are a likeable human, you may actually get people wanting to follow you on Twitter.

Do you understand why people follow you on Twitter?

Last Friday, as I was checking my @mentions on Twitter, I found the following tweet:

This tweet came from a mobile app developer and it seems to be trying to shame me into a follow. (BTW, according to its website: *"Tweepdash helps you to distinguish mutual followers and people who are not sharing the love. It's very tedious and mind-numbingly boring to sort out your Twitter list. Tweepdash gives a quick overview of your total Twitter community."*)

Why haven't I followed this particular Twitter user, or as Tweepdash claims, why am I not "sharing the love?"

Well, for one, I have zero interest in or love for the user's product and even less in the user's Twitter stream. Also, this user has never, ever interacted with me on Twitter other than to follow me (meaning that he/she/it? has not ever re-tweeted anything, or asked me a question, or anything). So, in Tweepdash language, this user has not shown any love for me. Lastly, I don't automatically follow anybody back.

My "following rules" are these:

- Follow people and organizations with whom/which I have a personal connection.
- Follow those with good content in areas that I am interested in (read my profile on Twitter if you want to see what some of those are).
- Follow journalists who cover subjects I am interested in.
- Follow those who have interacted with me on Twitter (other than simply following me) and with whom I have built a "relationship."

Why do people follow specific Twitter users? Because they are getting something out of it; whether it be information, furthering a connection or sharing an interest.

Following people just to get them to follow you is not a good Twitter strategy. It shows that you don't understand why people use Twitter. It shows that you think all you have to do is show up to the party. But hey, if you've ever been to a large party, you know just showing up and not talking to other people or being uninterested and/or uninteresting will lead to you being all alone.

The bottom line is if you are trying to build a Twitter following, start by understanding why people would follow you on Twitter.

What are your thoughts? Do you automatically follow back? Would you block users you don't care for? And finally, what would you do with the tweet I got?