Tech vs. communication

Recently, I have been noticing jobs that require someone with technology skills (html, programming) to handle web development and social media. It is interesting that in some organizations social media efforts are housed under the IT umbrella. But should they be? I don't think so. That is like asking the kitchen installer to cook a meal. Just because you know the appliances and how to work them does not mean that you can use them to their best potential.

Last week, I attended a social media workshop (not worth my while, but that is a topic for another post). One of the presenters was a tech guy, and he came out and said that he didn't know marketing. He understood the power and importance of social media tools, but not how to use them for marketing purposes.

Then there is the whole web developer versus web designer issue. A web designer is concerned with the aesthetics of the website, and the web developer makes the site work. Some people claim to provide both services, but in my experience, a web developer's websites never look pretty. And a web designer who does his/her own development probably can't do complex back-end stuff.

It boils down to what technology can and cannot do. Technology is a tool, a very specialized tool. And in the "internet age," keeping up with evolving technology is crucial. But technology alone cannot communicate, it cannot market. A superior tech website with no communications strategy or well written content will not do the job. Technology is not communication. Tech people are notorious for being hard to understand. They speak a specialized language and have skills that your average communications person just doesn't have.

The bottom line is that to have your IT department handle

social media does not make good marketing sense. Social media is completely about communication. It is not about the technology that allows said communication. I don't have to understand how Twitter works to use it for marketing promotion. I need to understand how people communicate, what information they are seeking. This is not to say you shouldn't involve your IT department—they can probably help facilitate what you are trying to do. Just leave the communicating to the communicators.
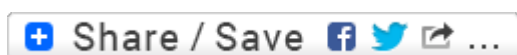
Marketing one to one

Perhaps this post should be called Marketing 101, but it is about marketing one to one, person to person. It is perhaps the most basic of marketing techniques, yet the most dismissed.

Companies spend lots of time and money and effort coming up with brilliant marketing/communications plans. They develop beautiful websites, and attention-grabbing ads. They do media outreach and get great publicity. And then the potential customer walks in the door, and the surly receptionist (or clerk or bank teller or any other frontline person) ruins the experience. He or she makes the customer feel unwelcome, unwanted, unserved. And guess what, the customer either walks away never to come back, or he/she becomes a NEGATIVE brand ambassador, sharing negative stories about your organization wherever he/she goes.

You see, many, if not all organizations, forget that marketing is really about getting people to buy your products or

services or mission. It is about making it easy for them to realize how your product/service/mission fits in with their lifestyle and needs. **It is about people.**

People want to be treated nicely and politely. It really is that simple. I would argue that part of your marketing plan should be to train your frontline employees to treat people nicely and politely. If your sales are down, perhaps you should try to figure out what is going on at the point of contact. We've discussed the four "Ps" here before: price, product, promotion, place. What is the place of contact with your customer? What is happening there?

With the rise of Internet commerce, we are losing the sense of the importance of people—their feelings, their needs—when making a purchase. But in a bricks-and-mortar world it should definitely be front and center.

I am writing this post because of two positive (gasp, right?) interactions I had today on the phone. I was making a doctor's appointment at an office I have not been to, and the receptionist was helpful, informative and friendly. She made me feel confident that I will get professional service when I arrive there. The other was the reminder phone call from the hair salon where I have an appointment tomorrow. The receptionist was polite (called me Ms. Brody) and friendly. I asked a question and he nicely answered me. It shows me that the salon VALUES its customers.

Are you showing your customers you value them? Are you treating them as people? Are you making sure that the one on one interactions with your organization are positive?

Beyond marketing

Although marketing communications can help brand your business, differentiate you from the crowd and even increase sales, it cannot make your business succeed. To succeed in business, you have to provide something useful or necessary—a product or service people want or need. And you have to provide that something consistently. You can have great advertising, but if your product is not available or is not of good quality, guess what? You are going to get nowhere fast.

Lots of people spend time on their marketing strategies. And they develop great websites and fabulous collateral materials. Some people spend lots of time coming up with fancy names and lovely logos. But what they fail at is defining AND providing their product/service.

This morning I read an article from the Philadelphia Business Journal about two local small businesses: a gas/service station and a dry cleaner. Both business owners work very hard and show up every day to run their businesses. People can count on them. Neither business does much in the way of marketing because they don't need to. If you need your car fixed, you go to one, and if you need some shirts cleaned, you go to the other.

Yesterday, I came across this post over on Copyblogger. It is about how it doesn't matter whether you have a beautiful website if you don't have a message. I would go further—you have to know what you are doing, and to quote Nike, just do it.

Time and again I meet successful business people. You know why they are successful? Because they provide the goods. On the other hand, how many times have you seen a restaurant fail? Probably dozens of times. You know why restaurants fail? Because people didn't go there to eat. And why didn't they go?

Probably because the food was bad or the service was bad.

Basically, it boils down to having the product or the service. Of course, if you want to increase your market presence and/or let people know you are there, you are going to have to engage in marketing. But marketing alone will not get you business.

Tweeting and not failing (a top ten list)

I love Twitter. I love reading articles others share, seeing what people are up to, and generally the no-boundaries community that exists on the micro-blogging site. I follow and am followed by people in other states, countries, continents. In a sense, Twitter connects the world!

But there is a downside to Twitter: the people who don't use Twitter wisely. These people can ruin the experience, until you block them. These people are the reason for my top-ten list of Twitter pet peeves:

1. **Following and unfollowing and following again.** This tactic is meant to getting followers but if I didn't follow you the first time, or the second, chances are I AM NOT INTERESTED.
2. **Excessive self-promotion.** Tweets that always start with I or include the word me. Being on Twitter exclusively to promote self and not offering any value.
3. **Lurking.** People who follow you and never engage or retweet. They are just watching you. Why?
4. **Not giving credit**. If I tweeted something that you think

is so worthwhile that you re-tweeted it, just credit me, please?

5. **Follow Friday.** I hate this. It makes Twitter into a popularity contest, and makes you ripe for spamming. Thanks for the shout-out but don't add me to your list.

6. **Being super selective.** You have thousands of followers, yet you start your mornings saying hi to five of your favorite friends. I remind you: Twitter is not high school and all of us can see you didn't single us out. If you want to say hi to just a few people, might I recommend DM or (gasp) EMAIL?

7. **Spammers.** People who send you @messages that have nothing to do with anything except what they are trying to get you to buy. There is a special place in hell for you.

8. **Incomplete profiles.** If you don't have a bio, or a website, or preferably both, on what should I base my decision to follow you? Your inability to fill out your profile? This also goes for not posting a picture.

9. **Cursing.** I curse all the time in real life, but I don't want to read obscenities on my Twitter stream. It generally is not necessary to put that out to the world.

10. **Never acknowledging retweets or @messages.** Sure I understand that reporters or celebrities with tens of thousands of followers can't possibly respond to all these messages, but if you have under 500 followers, most likely you can spend a couple minutes each day responding. Remember you are on Twitter to create community!!!

Of course, these are MY pet Twitter peeves. You may not agree. Which is why you can feel free to leave your top Twitter peeves on the comments! (Or hey, write your own blog!)

Identity crisis

Who are you? Why are you here?

Lots of people ask themselves these questions, especially around milestone birthdays and during the "mid-life crisis." For individuals, there is no one right answer. Some people spend their whole lives seeking for the answers and some people just go for "one day at a time" philosophy.

But what do you do if your business has an identity crisis? First, determine if your business does have an identity crisis. Here are some signs:

- You offer many types of services or products that can't easily be grouped together
- Your company name and tagline do not readily communicate what you do/everything you do
- You have several different logos/different taglines
- You don't have clear-cut branding (no signature color, font, tagline, key messages)
- If someone asks you what you do, it takes several sentences to explain (you just can summarize it in one phrase)

If you answered yes to even one of these descriptors, you probably are suffering from an identity crisis. You brand is not strong and your business mission is not clear.

Having a business identity crisis can result in your business going under. Just down the street from where I live was a "wellness center." It was a retail outlet that sold vitamins and baby clothes made from organic cotton. They offered massages and facials. They held yoga and qi gong classes. They probably would have described themselves as a lifestyle

store, which is generic. They weren't known for any of these offerings. And they closed. To me, this was a classic example of an identity crisis. Too many products and service offerings. No clear differentiation. And a vague description that can mean different things to different people.

In a crowded marketplace, differentiation can make the difference (I am so punny). You won't be able to differentiate if you have an identity crisis.

Does your business suffer from an identity crisis? Time to ask yourself some hard, existential questions.

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Consistency

Ralph Waldo Emerson is often quoted as saying that consistency is the hobgoblin of small minds. The quote actually says that it is a *foolish* consistency.

In communications, consistency is a necessity. Case in point, using your logo. If you use your logo only some times, you are not building your brand identity. On the other hand, if you use your logo all the time, then you are consistently working on reinforcing your brand.

If you blog, you should blog consistently. If you abandon your blog for months, your readers will abandon you. If you run a networking group, you should have meetings on a consistent basis. If not, then your group may think you are no longer in business.

I just read this blog post about obvious tips to save you time

on Unclutterer.com. In communications there may be one obvious tip to communicate more effectively: be consistent!

Your thoughts?

Qualities of a PR Pro

PLEASE READ UPDATES AT THE END OF POST

In the last couple of weeks, I have come across a few blogs where the authors are complaining about inappropriate public relations overtures or of getting mass and untargeted pitches. I have come across a great deal of grammatically incorrect, spelling challenged and generally poorly written PR material.

I also have met several PR people who don't really follow the news or ever read a newspaper (including online). A few months ago I witnessed a gathering of PR professionals who expressed fear of social media, and resistance to change.

Today I came across this excellent and cautionary article, Almost Everyone Gets PR Wrong by Nick Morgan in Forbes, about public relations and public perception, and how PR folk just don't seem to know how to shape the narrative. Morgan writes the following:

Executives everywhere take note: Beware the power of the narrative. Stop keeping score, and instead look at your organization from the outside. What is your basic job, as far as the world is concerned? And what is the story that has developed over the years? That's where your PR efforts should

be focused. That narrative has to be simple, consistent and all about your functional role in the world. You've only got one story. Make it a good one.

All this made me think about what makes a good public relations person (no matter if he/she specializes in media relations, crisis communications or strategic communication). Following a list of qualities a PR pro should have, in my opinion:

- Ability to use the language correctly (grammar, spelling, word usage), both written and spoken
- Common sense: being able to see what is important and what won't make a difference
- Interest in the news and the news business
- People skills and emotional intelligence (e.g. being able to pick up cues)
- Understanding what public relations attempts to accomplish (getting the big picture)
- Ability to network (meeting people and being able to connect with them is a learned and important skill)
- Eager to learn new skills and communication trends
- Seeing the possibilities and being creative ("thinking outside the box")

UPDATE: As per the two comments below:

- **Listening skills (not as easy as it sounds!)**

In short, a PR pro should be a great communicator and should be able to understand how communications works to shape perception.

UPDATE: Just read this great post about the 14 attributes for new PR practitioners. Matches up quite nicely.

What makes a PR pro in your opinion?

Share / Save

Appearance matters

If you work in any aspect of marketing, you know that appearance matters. We look at various marketing materials and we judge whether they look professional, or home-made, cutting-edge or stuck in time. We advise our clients to re-do logos, update brochures, set up Facebook pages. Our goal is to make sure that their appearance is up to par with the expectations in the marketplace.

Recently, I wrote a post saying that you CAN judge a book by its cover. After all, designers spend a lot of time designing that cover to entice you to read it. Perhaps the book won't be up to your literary standards, but as a marketing piece you know the book accomplished its mission (getting you to buy it if not to read it).

In personal marketing, appearance matters even more. Again, I have written about this before, but I want to revisit it. If you are in the market for a job, say, then you are ALWAYS job hunting. If you are going to a networking meeting, you must look professional. If you look sloppy or like you just rolled out of bed then you will be perceived as someone who doesn't care.

Last Friday, I was indulging a guilty pleasure and watching What Not to Wear on TLC. The episode was about a 38-year old professor of non-verbal communication who dressed frumpily. She actually looked at least 20 years older than her age. Stacy and Clinton (the show's hosts, in case you haven't seen it) kept telling her that she was communicating to her students that she just didn't care about her appearance, and thus did not care about herself. She had a hard time understanding that what she wore, how she wore it, indeed her

appearance, was undermining her message that we send out all sorts of nonverbal cues. It was fascinating to watch because here is a case of someone who understands that everything you put out there (clothing, etc.) is communication. In the end, she came around and by the end of the show she looked much closer to her age than when she started. She also looked far more professional and modern.

It is hard to judge how we appear. We see ourselves day after day and we lose perspective. Same can be said for our marketing materials. This is why we often need to get a third-party opinion. And we need to listen carefully to that third-party. Perhaps they are saying something we don't want to hear. For your graphics and marketing pieces, an expert can do wonders. Sometimes an update makes the difference. For personal appearance, start with trusted friends or associates, and if you are very serious, hire an image consultant.

We are judged by our appearance. And our appearance contributes to how people perceive us. Take control of your appearance. Make sure people perceive you the way you want to be perceived.

Why we blog

Many of us have blogs to help our business, express our opinions or other reasons. I'd like to have a more scientific approach. If you have a blog, please complete the following

survey (it will take about 1 minute):

Click Here to take survey

Thanks! I will post results here.

Proving once again Mother was right

Mom was right about minding your manners. Although behaving appropriately and properly seems to be lost these days, it is still the best way to behave, especially if you care about your personal brand and personal marketing.

This evening I was at an event about social media. Lots of people were tweeting and in this context that is acceptable behavior. However, lots of people, especially a very obnoxious man behind me, were chit-chatting during the panel presentation. This is not acceptable. It shows lack of respect for the speakers, the audience, and very poor manners. Of course, this is no way compares to the congressman shouting "you lie" to the president or the obnoxious rants of a self-absorbed, self-important rap/pop star (I am omitting the names because you know who I am talking about and I am sick of giving them any more publicity).

Manners and considerate behavior are in free fall in our society and we should be concerned from a personal branding and marketing perspective, among others. Why? Because someone who has bad manners shows him/herself to be very self-absorbed, even narcissistic. And do you want to do business with someone like that? In the end, we always want to do business with people we like and maybe even respect. Let me

tell you, if I ever see the man whom I mentioned was seated behind me, I will not want to meet him. And why should I? He has shown me through his behavior that he lacks common courtesy.

The takeaway is this: mind your manners to show the world your best self, and in the process you will help improve your personal brand perception.
On Monday, Kami Huyse discussed this very issue on her blog, Communication Overtones. She came to a different conclusion. She thinks the overemphasis on personal branding has allowed character to fall by the wayside. I think society and culture have more to do with that. I was thinking about it this evening and really, I don't think you can fault personal branding at all. In fact, as I said before, if you care about your personal brand, you should aim to be civil, be polite. It is better to be known for your ideas, your experiences than for your crassness and lack of manners. Right?

What are your thoughts on this subject?