

USPS: Marketing Disconnect

Have you seen the latest USPS ad campaign? It says that you can send anything that fits in a box, anywhere in the country for a flat fee. Fabulous USP. Great deal. Easy.

But, and here is the rub, you have to deal with the post office unless your handy dandy mail carrier comes by to pick up your packages. Folks who don't work in offices or who work out of home actually have to make the trek down to the post office. And guess what, at the post office you are going to have to wait. And wait. And wait some more.

I was at the post office today. There were at least 10 people in line. And only two clerks were working. The supervisor was not working. And one of the clerks was trying to get people to use the automated machine, with her help, which sort of defeats the purpose of AUTOMATION. At one point, only one clerk was helping customers. All I needed was one international stamp, for which I wanted to pay cash. I was frustrated but realized this is the perfect example of marketing disconnect.

What is marketing disconnect? It is when the marketing does not match the product. Let's say you see a gorgeous ad for a luscious chocolate shake. You go buy it, and the product you get is far from luscious, in fact, it tastes more like talcum powder than chocolate. That is marketing disconnect. What happens is that you will never buy that product again. And heck, you may stop trusting advertising altogether.

Same here. Why would you want to continue dealing with the post office if you don't have to? Which, is probably why more and more people are paying bills on line. The USPS is hurting. In fact, they are thinking of closing branches (which of course means that you will have longer waits because more people have fewer places to go). I felt bad for them until

today. The USPS is often a model of inefficiency, when it comes to customer service. I think the back end people and the letter carriers do a tremendous job.

For marketing to continue working, operations and products need to be in line with the offering. In this case, if the post office wants to boost the sales of the flat fee packages it must also do something about the customer service experience in its offices.

Ignore your core audience at your peril

Evening news broadcasts skew older on audience demographics, which is why you will often see medications for cholesterol, ED, and other diseases that affect older people advertised there. Of all three network evening news, I would venture to say that ABC World News with Charles Gibson skews the oldest, simply because Charlie is the oldest anchor. Lately, all evening newscasts have been tending to soft news, with a smattering of hard news. NBC Nightly News has a segment called Making a Difference and ABC does the New Normal. If you want hard news, you'd turn to BBC or the Internet. If you want in-depth news, you'd probably tune into the News Hour with Jim Lehrer on PBS.

Last week, there were at least four celebrity deaths. Per usual, all were covered by all networks. On Friday night, ABC World News covered the Michael Jackson death for the entire broadcast, except for about one minute devoted to other news. The other networks did much the same, except for PBS. In my opinion, this is more reflective of the news editors interests

than of the news viewers interests, and it will result in more audience loss for ABC, etc. Don't believe me. Read viewers responses to the ABC news decision to devote its broadcast to Jackson's death here.

World News for sure lost me as a viewer. I watch the evening news broadcasts for the news, as quaint as that may seem. I understand some coverage of the premature death of a pop star, but I don't understand the 24-7 coverage that has been going on, in spite of some pretty major international and domestic news. From now on, I will watch the News Hour. Less hype, more news (maybe too much news, but that is another story). I will be curious to see Nielsen ratings for this week. It seems to me that people interested in the Jackson story do not watch ABC World News. They watch Access Hollywood or Inside Edition.

I have written of this before, and I will continue to defend this position. You communicate to your core/target audience first. Perhaps ABC was seeking a younger demographic, or trying to appeal to people who normally don't watch Charlie Gibson. However, what they did was ignore their core audience and even alienate said core audience. The core audience, the audience who watches Charlie every evening because they admire his editorial choices, was disgusted as is apparent in the comments made to ABC. And, the "new" audience is not sticking around for Person of the Week next week, unless said person is Michael Jackson.

En newsletters

How many of you use newsletters? I bet a fair amount do, and a larger amount receive many newsletters each day.

Certainly newsletters are more environmentally-friendly than

printed newsletters, and are more timely, since there is no lag time getting to a printer. And for sure, enewsletters are cost-effective, costing nothing to a few centers per newsletter. But, and this is a big but, are enewsletters effective in achieving their objective?

An enewsletter intends to inform or to promote or both. There are internal and external enewsletters too. Some serve as employee communications, others as corporate communications.

What I am wondering is with the overwhelming amount of information (email, Twitter, Facebook, RSS feeds, blogs, news aggregators) that we are exposed to each day, are enewsletters serving their purpose? Or have they become one more piece of nuisance in our inboxes? I am not sure, but I sure would like to hear your opinions. Vote in the poll or send me thoughts in the comments.

[polldaddy poll=1714351]



Thoughts about a rebranding

You've probably heard of the Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure, right? Well it doesn't exist anymore. It changed its name to the Susan G. Komen GLOBAL Race for the Cure. This is the second year I participated and I think the rebranding is bogus and confusing. From a marketing perspective I understand why they would do it. After all, now they are able to call it the "first ever" global Race. But that is BS. It is not the first Race and anyone who has ever participated knows that.

What this rebranding accomplish? Not much that I can tell. In fact, this year the Race here in the Washington DC area had

fewer participants (45,000 vs. 50,000 last year) and raised less money. Last year, Cynthia Nixon and Condoleezza Rice addressed the participants, and participated in the Race. Also, Mayor Adrian Fenty raced. This year, the only “celebrities” were Jill Biden and her husband.

In any case, I think that any established cause or organization needs to carefully evaluate what it aims to get from a rebranding. Is it worth the cost? Is it worth the confusion?

Ultimately, I felt that the “Global” Race for the Cure was very disorganized compared to last year. I did not feel appreciated for raising money or participating and I don’t think I will participate next year. And I did not get that it was global in nature (other than the very long and ridiculous speech by some “royal” from Bosnia). In fact the whole point of Komen is to raise funds for the LOCAL community.

[polldaddy poll=1689540]



It's all about appearance

We judge people by their appearance

Have you heard about the latest YouTube sensation? Apparently, on the show “Britain’s Got Talent,” a woman who is not a) young; b) thin or c) beautiful wowed the judges, because, get this, she can sing. The show is about talent, and yet the woman was pre-judged on her appearance.

While I think that judging talent by appearance is not wise, it remains part of how the world operates. We do judge the

book by its cover. What does this mean for your marketing?

Evaluate what people are seeing about you: website, brochure, business cards, etc. Will people think you have less talent because your website is outdated or your cards have typos?

Are you projecting what you want people to think? I have written before about this, but if you have a dated look (a website designed in the 90s) are people going to think you are “with it?” If you are a graphic designer and you have no samples on your website, what does that say?

Appearance is easy to fix. Talent/quality is a lot harder.

It's the media

Is it just me?

Or is it the 24 news cycle, but it seems that more and more the media is reporting on the media. Witness the Jon Stewart-CNBC debacle. It was reported on in every other media outlet. Today, on a *Washington Post* blog, instead of doing any original reporting or commentating, the writer posted video of President Obama's interview with 60 Minutes. As well as there was a large piece in the Style section about Steve Kroft, who conducted the aforementioned interview.

Has the media itself become more newsworthy? Doubtful.

What's making you sweet?

Is it HFCS?

In the past few months, the Corn Refiners Association has been running some ads featuring the much-maligned high fructose corn syrup (HFCS). In case you haven't heard, many doctors and researchers blame HFCS for the obesity epidemic because HFCS is found in millions of food items and seems to be metabolized differently in the body. Recently some research found that the way HFCS is manufactured causes the release of mercury. Bottom line, corn refiners had to act. After all, their product is beginning to be perceived as bad for you.

The commercial

I am sure you've seen the commercials. A couple is sitting on blanket in a park (oh so idyllic) and she offers him a ice pop made with HFCS. When he recoils, she counters telling him it is made from corn and it's fine in moderation.

You can see the commercials and read the "facts" about HFCS at the Corn Refiners Association website.

The backlash or the return of sugar

It turns out that sugar is not about to roll over and play dead. It is making a comeback. In fact, many products are using it as a selling point, as pointed out in this New York Times article. Of course, some products are just advertising that they are not made with HFCS (like the Thomas English Muffins' package that blares no high fructose corn syrup).

[poll daddy poll=1474842]



Frames of reference

Sometimes, when you are writing or speaking to a group you try to frame things by using examples or metaphors. Nothing wrong with that. Except when your audience doesn't get it. The other day I was listening to a professor speak and he referred to the Iran-Contra affair. Nothing wrong with the example but it did not work as a frame of reference for the students, many of them born well after the time. Or perhaps you use cliched expressions like "you sound like a broken record." Guess what—kids probably have never ever seen a record. In fact, I am starting to think they will rarely see a CD. Lots of our jokes and references are generational—and we need to consider this as we try to communicate with the younger set.

Do you have good examples of generational frames of reference? Please post in the comments.

In print or online

A couple of weeks ago, The Washington Post decided to merge its online personality (washingtonpost.com) with its print personality by using the print Washington Post brand online. The company had decided a while back to separate its online content from the print content although it was mostly the same. Now, it is definitely trying to make it all one.

I think that in the next few months we are going to see changes in print and online newspapers as subscriptions go down and costs go up, as advertisers continue to dial down

their presences. Eventually, newspapers will have to deal with the fact that they are giving away all of their content for free online. It begs the question of why someone should subscribe to the print edition. Of course, some people do not have online access or simply prefer to read printed matter. But those people are probably a distinct minority. Overall, most people that follow news are online and comfortable reading news online. The other question for newspapers is how can they make money from their online ventures? There is online advertising, but what kind of metrics are they giving their advertisers? With print, you have geographic based demographic information. But online, anyone can read the content on a site. What will this do to local advertisers?

[polldaddy poll=1395553]

Super Ad Twitter

I don't really care much about the Super Bowl this year, although I will probably be rooting for the Arizona Cardinals. However, I do care about the most expensive ads on TV. So, I will be Twittering on Super Bowl Sunday. Follow me at twitter.com/dbmc

On Monday, I will post a round up.

Have a happy weekend!