What does your Twitter stream communicate

Lots of communications people —journalists, PR folks, ad people—are on Twitter. I am too, and I follow many communications types. You can get a lot of good information, and interesting facts from your Twitter stream. But you can also learn a lot about the people you follow.

What you tweet about: Obviously, what you tweet about shows what you are interested in, and what you are more knowledgeable about. If you are in health care, you may tweet about the latest health research. If you are constantly tweeting about personal stuff, you are communicating that your business is not as important to you as your personal life. If you never tweet about personal stuff, you are saying that you view Twitter as only business.

When you tweet: Do you tweet during the day? Chances are that you incorporate Twitter into your work life. Do you only tweet on the weekend? Timing shows how much you understand how Twitter works. Although we have the ability to look a people's stream history, Twitter tends to be about immediacy. If you are tweeting in the middle of the night, you are saying you don't care whether people see your tweets, you just want to share.

How much you re-tweet: If you re-tweet stuff, it shows you are really reading what the people you follow share, and also, that you find it useful. You also are saying you are willing to share credit. If you never re-tweet, well, maybe you haven't found anything worth sharing.

Your Twitter stream really communicates a lot to those who follow you. Twitter is about building your network, and it is about sharing. I would argue that Twitter is also about

branding. If you haven't locked your tweets, anyone can see what you are putting out there, and can form an opinion about who you are and what you do.

What does your Twitter stream say about you?

Wiki promotion and self-promotion

Promotion is one of the four "Ps" of marketing (the others being price, product, place). You can't market effectively without promotion, and in fact, marketing communications is all about promotion. MarComm people don't deal with price, product or place, other that to give input.

So, to sell a product, a service or an idea, you will promote. Promotion could go many ways, from traditional advertising, to blogging, to a public relations campaign. That's all fine and good. However, with the rise of social media as a prime promotion vehicle, we run into some problems. In social media, we rely on user-generated content, whether through blog entries or sharing thoughts and ideas via social networks. We now have the term "citizen journalist."

Enter Wikipedia. Wikipedia is an online, USER-GENERATED encyclopedia. Anyone can contribute to Wikipedia. There is very little if any editorial control over content. Products, people, historical events, music and any number of other topics are covered over at Wikipedia. Wikipedia entries tend to come up pretty high in Google searches too. It seems obvious that someone looking to promote something or someone

would add a Wikipedia entry. Right?

From a marketing perspective alone, of course you would add Wikipedia as a target for your social media/SEO/SEM efforts. It makes complete sense. However, as a consumer you have to be wary. If anyone can post anything on Wikipedia, then how accurate is that information? Can you rely on in? Should you rely on it? Are people questioning what they find on Wikipedia and if so, how is that affecting Wikipedia entries?

I don't have the answers to this.

You have all heard of personal branding right? And personal branding has everything to do with promotion, and more specifically, self-promotion. You see people on Twitter promoting links to their blogs, to their parties, to their businesses. This is OK (although I have a problem with people who endlessly self-promote but that is another blog post). And to link it back to Wikipedia, individuals are now creating Wikipedia entries about themselves. Again, it makes sense on a macro-scale.

Still, perhaps I am being "old school" but a self-provided entry on Wikipedia is meaningless. A third party endorsement, like an article in a newspaper, has much more weight. Presumably, the third party (perhaps a journalist) did some fact-checking. If I can put down whatever I want in Wikipedia, what is stopping me from inflating reality or straight-out making stuff up? And worse, people think of Wikipedia as a real source for information, not unlike an Encyclopedia Britannica.

The bottom line is this: maybe using Wikipedia to promote yourself or your product is a good strategic, social-media-savvy move, but is it ethical?

What do you think?

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.

Thoughts on the new Facebook

Mark Zuckerberg has done it again. He has made some serious threats to your privacy, if you are a Facebook user. Zuckerberg does not believe in privacy, he has said so in those very words, so it is not too surprising that he further damaged your privacy to enhance his bottom line.

There are tons of articles about the new issues with privacy that came out of the f8 conference. This one on GigaOm is a good one (and thank you to Downtown Women's Club for posting it on Facebook…the irony). Sadly, most Facebook users will never know about these changes, which directly affect them.

I have been a steady Facebook user for more than two years. I had rarely logged out and usually checked in several times a day to see what everyone is up to. I also recently launched a Facebook Fan Page, which is now called a like page. But today, I logged out. I will log out every single time I visit

Facebook and furthermore, I will limit my visits to Facebook. I am just not comfortable with what they are doing over there. And more pernicious, is that other sites I visit, like CNN and Washington Post now have my information and friends. Unless I logout of Facebook, CNN knows who my friends are and what they are doing online. Talk about Big Brother!

I also hate the new "like" feature on Facebook. A Fan page is not a "like" page. They are inherently different. Like Kim Woodbridge from Anti Social Development said to me about the change: "I like peas, but I am not a fan of peas."

I am not sure that Facebook cares what people think. It is feeling high because it has 400 million users worldwide, and that gives the company a lot of power, not to mention marketing might. For now, if you care about your privacy, protect yourself. Do not let Facebook use you for its gain. So logout, opt out, or do what you have to do.

Feel free to share your thoughts in the comments. Are you a fan of the Facebook?

Share / Save ...

Hello there social butterfly!

Are you a social (media) butterfly?

Social media and social networks are not new anymore. In fact, there is talk of a Web 3.0. Social media is mainstream. After all, you have the White House and most television anchors tweeting and lots of businesses have Facebook pages. I bet your grandmother is on Facebook and your grandpa is blogging. Social media has served to connect lots of people, across

demographics and geography.

With the rise of social media, and its usefulness in "friend" raising, being social is becoming a bigger asset. How social are you?

Take the following quiz to gauge your sociability:

1. Do you read blogs regularly?
2. Do you use a reader? (extra points if you can define RSS)
3. Do you ever comment on other people's blogs?
4. Do you have a blog? If so, do you blog regularly, or was your last post last summer?
5. Do you have a Twitter account? Do you actually tweet?
6. Do you know what Foursquare is?
7. Do you use a service to post your blog content to your Twitter stream? If so, have you customized the settings?
8. Do you respond to @ tweets and DMs?
9. Have you met anyone from your social media world in real life?
10. Have you ever been to a Tweet-up?

If you answered yes to all 10 questions, you are a certified social media butterfly.

If you answered yes to at least five questions, you are earning your social media wings.

If you answered yes to less than three questions, you are a social media wallflower.

Is Twitter a High School for Adults?

There are followers and lists and getting many of each seems to be the focus for many people on Twitter. Some people make pleas for more followers and then there is "Follow Friday" in which people recommend to their followers other people to follow.

If this sounds a bit like a high school popularity contest, it is, for some people. Many people use Twitter to give and get information and ideas, but there is a subset of people who use Twitter to prove their hotness/coolness/hipness/in-the-knowness. These people go so far as to form cliques on Twitter, endlessly referencing their clique friends in every Tweet. They converse in public with each other and rarely engage with non-clique/inner circle people. Several of these people are "social media experts," which is ironic since they are not being very social (I must credit Daria Steigman of Steigman Communications with this idea).

I have theories as to why Twitter becomes like a high school for these people but I won't share them here. It is important to remember what social networks are for, and that is to make it easy to create connection. If all you are doing on Twitter is sending shout-outs to your five closest buddies or endlessly promoting yourself, you are not using Twitter to its full potential. I can't say that you are not using Twitter for what it is intended because I have no idea what its founder was thinking when he created the microblogging site.

Twitter is a great learning tool and it is a great sharing tool. It democratizes access and can really serve to mobilize people around causes. Eugene Robinson makes excellent observation in today's Washington Post, saying:

Twitter and other networking sites are unfiltered by editors or other gatekeepers. They rely on the wisdom of the crowd to sort out what is accurate and what is not. To someone (like me) who has spent his career as a gatekeeper, this was tremendously unsettling — at first. During the Iran protests, I saw how quickly Twitter users identified misinformation that was being posted by government propagandists. The self-policing capability of the medium is impressive.

The other big difference is that social networking offers not just information, but also the opportunity to take action. Twitter users were able to work together to mask the identities of the Iranian demonstrators who were using the site to tell the world what was happening. Last night, along with the news from Haiti came suggestions for how the Twitter community could most effectively help the relief effort.

Is this "news" the way we used to think of it? No. But it's news people can use.

Read complete article here.

To those popularity hounds on Twitter I say put high school behind you. If you have something worthwhile to say people will follow you no matter who your friends are or aren't.

Social media has changed PR

This is not or should not be a newsflash, but social media has changed public relations. Yet many people are resisting.

Yesterday, I was fortunate to have attended a presentation on social media strategy given by Sally Falkow, and hosted by the PRSA-NCC, here in Washington DC. Ms. Falkow presented a case

for social media (newspapers in decline, people looking for new sources of information) and gave some advice on how to use social media to achieve public relations/marketing goals. You can access this valuable presentation here:

[slideshare id=2655269&doc=prsadcsocialmedia-091205063755-phpapp02]

Although her presentation gave me lots of new perspectives and ideas, what fascinated me the most was the audience reaction. Specifically three or four people, who are decidedly old school, immediately started questioning Ms. Falkow. One person in particular, who claimed she had been a White House reporter, was quite acid about new media, saying "no one has time to watch video news releases" and "blogs are not credible." Obviously, this woman is not keen on social media, and thinks it just is not up to snuff, certainly not comparable to old media.

These questioners actually were quite disruptive, but mostly, they were a sad reminder that some people will fight change. This is why so many organizations are having a difficult time communicating these days. Sure, I know that getting a clip in a major newspaper or coverage from a major broadcaster felt good and was the result of good media relations. But that is not where the majority of the audience is these days. Newspapers are dying, major news broadcasts are losing ground, and more importantly, legions of people have embraced social media. Although you could ignore this situation, you would be doing it at your own peril.

If you practice PR, or advertising, or marketing, you MUST consider social media. It is not optional any more. It is not just a way to get young people or techies. It is where a large majority of people are getting their news and information. Railing against it, questioning its legitimacy and refusing to change your ways will only result in your public relations efforts going to waste. You will be left out in the cold.

Your minimum social media presence

If you are in marketing communications — advertising, public relations, direct marketing, design or anything else involving promotion, you should be conversant in social media. You should know what it is and you should be using some social media tools yourself. How will you be able to recommend "new media" to clients if you are not on any social networks yourself?

I am not covering any new ground here, I know. However, I am continually shocked when I meet people who are in the marketing biz and who are completely out of the loop in terms of social media. Or, what I think is worse, is people in marketing who have dipped their tippy toes into social media only to have Twitter accounts they never use, or incomplete LinkedIn profiles with 10 connections or a blog that was last updated in 2007. Do you know these people? Are you one of these people? Don't be!

OK. If you buy in to the paragraphs above let's proceed.

LinkedIn—your professional social networking site

- Set up your profile, and include a photograph of yourself. You can most likely use the same photograph on other networks as well. Make sure you have a robust description of what you do now, and an informative headline. If you have older profiles, get rid of them. Make it easy for people who know you to find you.
- If you own your company, set up a profile for your company. Include your company logo and website.
- Link your blog to your profile.

- Grow your network! When you meet people you'd like to do business with, see if you can add them to your network.
- Answer questions. LinkedIn has an "answers" section…see if you can contribute to it.

Blog already!

- If you have a website, that is fine. But keep in mind that websites are static and don't invite interaction. If you can add a blog to your website you will keep it fresher.

Twitter

- Set up a twitter account. If it is personal, use your name. If it is business, use your business name. Getting long and complex doesn't pay off. Remember, your name is part of any re-tweeting, so don't take away precious characters from the 140 you are given.
- Your Twitter profile should have either a photograph of you or your company logo. Do not use the Twitter bird. Be sure to write up a bio and include your website or blog URL.
- Follow people. Make lists (the newest Twitter feature)
- Tweet! Have something to say.

Facebook

- In my book, Facebook is personal. However, you can and should set up a fan page for your business. It is a no-cost way of promoting your business.

To succeed in social media, you must invest some time, be consistent and be persistent.

To recap, get on one or more social networks already!!!!

Blogs, comments and marketing

OK, not quite as sexy as Sex, Lies and Videotape…

Lately, I have been reading/hearing a lot about comments on blogs. Most people seem to favor comments. One of the ways we know that people are responding or finding what we write interesting and worthwhile is when we get comments. It is also a way to know what our audience is thinking. Others are not so keen on allowing comments because there might be some negative or disparaging statements, and opening up you/your organization to what the public thinks.

Clearly, some organizations are more likely to want to know how the audience thinks and some are not so inclined. **I would counsel those who want to remain hermetic not to have a blog. A blog, almost by definition, is a forum (it can be internal, but nevertheless it is about exchange of ideas).**

Those who are OK with audience interaction should probably have guidelines to govern the comments. In fact, you don't HAVE to publish each and every comment if you don't want. Right here on Caffeinated we've received some fairly self-serving comments along with some out of left field observations that we have decided to let live in the netherworld.

Courtland Milloy, a columnist at the *Washington Post*, has a piece in today's paper about nasty/ignorant/vicious comments. He wants readers to tone down the invective. I agree with him—I have followed some comment streams on opinion pieces and people give wind to the most disagreeable thoughts. And Milloy argues that even though these commenters are counted as visitors to the site, some advertisers may not want to be

associated with them. Is this true? I am not sure that advertisers/marketers look at comments other than as a numbers game. We all know that there are some kooky people out there who are bored/irritated/deranged and take it out on comments boards. **What we endorse as marketers is the content on the site, not the comments.**

As marcomm folks, what we need to worry about is our policy for comments. I don't think you should discourage comments, but you should make clear that not everything is fair play and that not every utterance will see the light of the blogosphere. You may want to set this out in a terms and conditions somewhere on your blog.

David Griner, in his blog, The Social Path, has had a series of articles on comments. It is worthwhile to read this one, about whether you are LEGALLY liable for comments made on your blog. As I point out above, this type of concern should be part of the policies that govern your site, and something you must consider if you do have a blog.

Your thoughts? Comment, but please no racist, slanderous, sexist remarks!

Words are Key

Keywords. They are the mantra of the Search Engine Optimization (SEO) people. Some websites are written in a weird, keyword heavy format to make them seem like candy for the search engines. Websites also have metatags and alt-text and other areas for keywords. Search engines read text, which

is why content is king on the Internet. Search engines do not read images, unless they are labeled or tagged.

Some companies set up blogs just to increase their likelihood of being found. And SEO people think you should have keywords there too.

If you ever doubted that keywords are important, then do a little experiment on Twitter. Use a keyword like marketing, writing, or golf (if that is your thing) and see how many people start following you. Yesterday, I re-tweeted a story about the Christian Science Monitor getting rid of its religion reporter (fairly ironic, and that is why I shared it). Guess what, no less than three people of a heavy Christian persuasion started following me. Even though none of my posts and my bio say anything about Christianity. These people were simply keyword surfing and leeched on to the word Christian in Christian Science Monitor.

So, how do you create a list of keywords? Easy. Start with your industry and work from there. Say you are a civil engineer. You would have the following: engineering, civil engineering, building, and so on. The important thing is to think of variations and related words. If you are in advertising, you would naturally choose marketing, and perhaps sales. You may also want to include location (city, state, country) and specialties. You may want to use the names of your principals. **Just ask yourself: what would people ask if they needed to find me or someone that does what I do?**

Final thought: a popular word on this blog has been Twitter. In fact, I am sure if I tagged this article with the word Twitter, I will get plenty of search engine hits.