

How to make your communications more effective

Merriam-Webster defines effective as “producing a decided, decisive or desired effect.” Effective communication, therefore, leads its target audience to a planned or desired outcome. Conversely, ineffective communications do not produce the desired effect, they don’t hit the target.

How do you make sure your communications efforts hit the target?



Not with signs that point the wrong way

This morning I attended a business networking event at a local hotel. I haven’t attended any events in this location before, and I have only been in the hotel’s lobby once before. I walked in, and asked at the check-in desk where the event was

being held. I was told to go around the corner to the elevators and down to G2. When I turned around, *behind* me, was a sign for the event. The sign was facing the check-in desk, not the main entrance, so it would not be seen at all by someone entering the hotel.

This sign was ineffective because it did not address the needs of people entering the lobby from the main entrance. Had the event organizers considered that some people would be entering the hotel through the main entrance, they would have known where to place the sign.

Not with a mismatched presentation and audience

Last week, I attended an event entitled "Communication and Marketing Strategies that Will Grow Your Business." It was held under the auspices of a networking group, in a business accelerator space. Most of the audience members were very small businesses, freelancers or solopreneurs (companies of one). The presenters were from a large, multinational communications firm that services large clients. They decided to give a presentation on how to develop a marketing plan (a four-step process according to them).

It was clear that the presentation was completely mismatched to the audience when the presenters got to the part about generating different tactics. Among the tactics they advised was holding a press conference. In my career in public relations, I saw my clients hold press conferences very rarely. The fact is that press conferences need to be about big news to get any kind of coverage, especially in this age where media attention is so fractured. A small accounting firm owner or a career coach, two people who were in the audience that day, would never hold a press conference.

This presentation was not as advertised, that is, to share marketing strategies to grow your small business. It was geared toward large enterprises rather than the small

businesses that were in the audience. The presenters either did not know who they were addressing or were not thinking if the information they were sharing was appropriate to the needs of the audience. In short, the presentation was ineffective.

Effective communication only happens when you consider the audience

Effective communicators consider the needs of the target audience. Without considering what those recipients need to know, or how they need to know it, the communications will fail, or miss its target.

Bottom line:

You will hit the target more often if you consider what your audience needs.

The two actions that will make your communications more effective

There are two actions that will improve your communications efforts. These are:

- **Listening** (really listening, not just nodding your head)
- **Saying what you mean**

It sounds absurdly simple, but chances are that you are not doing one or both well.

Listening is crucial.

Yesterday, I went to a large home improvement store (I won't name names). I was on the search for an edger/trimmer for my pocket-sized lawn. I have never bought this item and I have no idea what I need. I flagged down an associate and I explained that I have a small lawn, and that the grass is hard to cut near the fence, and that I did not want to spend too much money. So this associate points me to the high end trimmers, starting at \$100. And then he says to me: "well, you said you wanted to cut your shrubs." Huh? I said NOTHING about shrubs since I don't have shrubs. Clearly, this associate was not listening. He was also not very qualified to talk about edgers, but that is a different story.

If you don't listen, you are not going to "get" the story, whatever it may be.

The other side of the communications equation is **saying what you mean**. Lots of people (and organizations) say what they think the other person (or their target audience) wants to hear. Saying what you mean is not burying things in fine print or in if-thens. **Be clear! And please, be sincere.** People can tell when you are not saying what you mean. And then they don't trust you.

Mattress stores don't say what they mean

A great example of communications that don't say what they mean is mattress store advertisements. Having just gone through mattress shopping, I can tell you, just ignore the ads. They are designed to entice you into the store. Once you are in the store, you find out the real deal. Generally in the world of mattress sales, the enticement is free something or the other (free box spring, free delivery, free set-up, free TV, etc.). The reality is that the pricing is structured so

that you can't compare it to other stores, and there are caveats. If you get a mattress priced over \$X, then you get free delivery. If you want to price match, we have to make sure it is the same mattress (and since mattresses are made specifically for each store, there is no exact same name). If you want us to remove your old bed, then we charge you a fee. If you want the ten-year warranty, then you have to buy our overpriced mattress cover. And on and on.

No clarity. No saying what they mean. Making people distrust what you are saying. That is not communications!

It is about effective communications. Effective means that something is successful in achieving the intended result. If you are intending to sell mattresses or edgers or any product, service or opinion, you should both listen and say what you mean.

How to write your blog workshop

What are you doing on May 17? Why not sign up for my How to write your blog workshop? You will learn how to make your blog more effective, how to come up with blog post ideas and lots of other good stuff. Details and registration [here](#).