Strategic
Communications

Success Through Strategy

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Some Common Missteps and Misconceptions About Digital Communication You Need to Understand

Back in 2008, when I launched Strategic Communications, LLC, I found myself in the position of not being as busy as I was used to being. It takes a while to build business, of course, but while I was doing that, I found myself also faced with the loss of work from some of the editorial clients I had worked with for some time. As the recession hit, these publishers were struggling in what was then a very stagnant content environment. Publications I had worked with for years were either going out of business entirely or cutting back on circulation schedules.

It was a challenging environment, to say the least. But, as that old saying goes, "When life hands you a lemon, make lemonade." One of the big benefits that I was fortunate to leverage back then was the ability to spend time dabbling in the relatively new space of social media. I was one of the first among my peer group (baby boomer business people) to get engaged with LinkedIn and Twitter.

Over the years, I've embraced digital marketing wholeheartedly. My early background in direct mail marketing made me an avid fan of analyzing response and measuring anything that could be measured. Digital marketing is like direct mail marketing on steroids! It's highly addictive and highly engaging, at least in my opinion.

I've learned a lot over the years as I've experimented with my own accounts and as I've had the pleasure of working with a number of clients to manage their online presence. And I continue to learn something new, it seems, just about every day. Recently I was thinking about some misconceptions, or misunderstandings, about the digital world that hold some back from being as effective as they might be in the online environment. To me, much of this makes natural sense; to others it may not. For example:

They're just not that into you. You may labor over every post you create, carefully considering how you can make it resonate with your audience and potentially go viral, but the truth of online interactions is that your audience isn't quite as attuned to your messages as you might believe. To them, you're often nothing more than a fleeting blip in their day — *if they even notice you at all*.

What it means: Don't be hesitant to resend similar, or even the same, messages out to your audience at different times of the day or on different days of the week. Rather than irritate them, you'll simply increase the odds that they'll see what you have to say.

Many members of your audience may not even be online. Human nature being what it is, if we're engaged in some activity, or interested in something, we have a tendency to believe others share our interests. Sometimes they do, but sometimes they don't. There are still groups that are not actively engaged online, particularly in the business-to-business (B2B) space where we do most of our work. And, even if they are online, they may not be engaged in certain social media channels.

What it means: It's important to not make assumptions, especially when it comes to online engagement. [I've found Pew Research Center's data](#) about the demographics of social media users to be both fascinating and instructive. Consider this: Of those who are on the internet, only 31 percent are on Pinterest, 28 percent on Instagram, 25 percent on LinkedIn and 23 percent on Twitter (72 percent are on Facebook). It's good information to know!

That said, you need to look beyond the raw numbers. Numbers are important, and I rely on them quite heavily in my work. But you need to *think* about what the numbers might be telling you in strategic ways.

What it means: Pew's research suggests that 72 percent of the internet audience is on Facebook, but that doesn't mean these people necessarily represent *your* audience or that they're likely to be amenable to your messages as they're interacting with their social circles through this channel. Conversely, just because only 23 percent are on Twitter doesn't mean this small segment of the large internet population (or some even smaller segment of it) might not represent your ideal audience. You really need to think about not only *how many* people are engaged in social channels, but also *how they're using* these channels, to determine whether your messaging can gain traction.

Your fiercest competitors can be your best allies. Our clients take different approaches to dealing with and engaging, or not engaging, with their competitors. We, of course, respect their positions. We've noticed though — and we've read about this in other forums — that there's some benefit to "keeping your competitors close."

What it means: Obviously, engaging with competitors online by following or friending them can help you keep tabs on what they're up to. But, even beyond that, sharing competitors' posts and commentary can be a good thing to do. Why? Because it conveys confidence and humility to your audience, along with a strong message that you're more concerned with providing them with high-quality content — regardless of where it comes from — than with continually talking about how great you are. That can get old, quickly.

Your organic traffic may not really be organic. When evaluating your web traffic analytics, chances are you're looking at the differences between organic traffic (traffic generated from search engine searches), direct traffic (traffic generated by people entering your URL into their browser) and referral traffic (traffic generated through links from others' sites). You need to look beyond the high-level numbers, though, to ensure you're evaluating these channels correctly.

What it means: When we conduct our analyses at the end of every month, we eliminate from the organic traffic numbers any search terms that represent a search for ourselves, or our clients. Why? Because with organic search what we're attempting to measure is the number of people who found us based on a general search — not those who already knew about us. If you do this with your own analytics, you may be startled to find how much of what you thought was organic traffic really isn't.

You need to pay attention to what's happening when people come to your website. For most digital marketers, all of your communication efforts are being used to drive traffic to your website. But just getting them there is the first step. Once they're on your site, you need to drive them to do something and evaluate to what extent they're doing — or not doing — it.

What it means: If people are coming to your site and leaving very quickly (measured through bounce rate), that is generally a concern. You need to figure out why and take steps to better engage this traffic *and* drive the traffic to some desired outcome. Fortunately, web analytics can give you a lot of great insights into exactly how you might make some simple adjustments to impact desired outcomes.

One key takeaway is this: these truths are really nothing new. Think about the online concept of the abandoned shopping cart. In a traditional retail environment — let's say a grocery store — customers sometimes fill up their carts and then abandon those carts without checking out. Why they do that should be a concern. In a retail environment it may relate to long lines at the checkout counter, slow checkout personnel, or suddenly realizing that they left their checkbook or credit card at home. It's hard to tell. In

the online environment, the same thing can happen. Shoppers get to the point of checkout and decide *not* to make the purchase. They abandon their shopping cart. It's the same concept as abandoned online shopping carts, but we have a different means of analyzing the reasons behind these decisions and taking steps to improve outcomes.

Solid marketing communication practices have always suggested that we take steps to fully understand our audiences, where they are, how they interact (or are likely to interact) with our messages and what's important to them. Sometimes, though, when something bright, shiny and new emerges (like social media and digital marketing), we have a tendency to overlook the foundational wisdom that still applies to the work we do. These are just a few of the missteps, or misunderstandings, that we see holding marketers back online.

[What would you add to the list?](#)

About Us

[Strategic Communications, LLC,](#) works with B2B clients to help them achieve their goals through effective content marketing and management with both internal and external audiences. We are adept at evaluating and analyzing communication efforts and working with clients to plan, create and publish high-quality, unique content through both online and offline media to achieve desired results. Our background in [business journalism](#), marketing and online communications makes us well-positioned to serve the needs of 21st century marketers.