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Re-Cap from Social Fresh: Keynote: It's Not Social Media - It's Simply Life with Peter Shankman



One of the sessions I was most excited about at Social Fresh Portland was the keynote speech by [Peter Shankman](#) of HARO - "It's Not Social Media - It's Simply Life." Shankman's speech had a lot of great takeaways, and focused on the four rules he follows in business and in his life: 1) Transparency 2) Relevance 3) Brevity 4) Top of Mind. He started by saying that the smart ones are all saying the same thing - social media isn't going away; it's entering the lexicon.

Shankman learned some valuable lessons at the start of his career, which he shared with the audience. In 1995, when AOL was "the internet," Shankman was working with them and helped to found the AOL newsroom by asking "is there a better way to solve this problem?" He said that they would go into work every day and try something new - if it worked, they did it again. If it didn't work, they didn't do it again - a lesson that's applicable now in social media. Shankman commented that learning to constantly ask - "is there a better way to solve this?" - has served him well. He said that one of the best things you can ever do is to find a better solution to a problem, because if the solutions that everyone already had already worked, it

wouldn't be a problem anymore.

These lessons have obviously served Shankman well, because in two years, he has created a social media company that's actually profitable, with 110,000-115,000 members and \$1.2 million in ad revenue. He made the interesting point although people always tell you to make a back-up plan in case you fail, they never tell you to make a plan for when you succeed. Would you be prepared?

Shankman then got into his four rules - number 1 is "Transparency." He said that your audience, clients, and buyers are the ones that really control your company and all you can do is react to what they want, citing Amazon's move from being a bookseller to selling a variety of products. Information wants to be free, to get out, so we no longer have true control over it, or as Shankman said "Social media is a laxative. You can no longer hold in what you want to keep inside." He added "Tweet that," for the legion of tweeters in the room. Because information is so available, it's necessary to be transparent, which he joked "is the new black...or opaque." Someone will always find out about an issue, so you need to get in front of it before someone else does.

Shankman's second rule is "Relevancy" - how do you become relevant to an audience who gets their information a million different ways? Ask them how they want their information. He used himself as an example, saying that if you call his phone, his voicemail will pick up and tell you to text him. If you send people information the way that they want to receive it, you empower them to be "finders." A "finder" is a person you trust, who you *want* to receive email from. Those people get access and approval to be in people's inboxes immediately. People love to be finders - they're social media's version of the "cool kid," because they get access. Shankman illustrated his point by showing a video for [Pedigree dog food](#) - the people who "find" this will think it's cool, and will send it along, therefore, doing Pedigree's public relations for them. If you give your audience permission to forward your items because they're relevant and cool, they'll similarly end up doing your public relations.

Shankman touched on Twitter to illustrate his third rule, "Brevity", saying that 140-characters did not originate with Tweets, but with text messaging. He observed that 9/11 and American Idol were the two things that got Americans to understand text messaging. Because Twitter was borne from text messaging, Shankman doesn't see it as being that useful - he said that adoption of Twitter is not happening with kids and older people. He added that T3-colored glasses affect the way that we see technology and until Twitter makes money, they are Pets.com waiting to happen. He encouraged the audience to embrace the concept of short messaging, not the Twitter brand.

Although not his fourth rule, Shankman had another valuable lesson to teach the audience - "Learn to write." He said that we're asked for our attention roughly 16,000 times a day - so how do you reach people? **Learn to write.** 95% of all communication for a call to action comes through the written word, which shows why it's essential to learn to write well. Shankman gave a great example for why this is important - a few months ago, he received a resume from a soon-to-be college graduate. She was incredibly well-qualified, and he was hoping to work with her. Until he got to the end of her cover letter, where she wrote "I'm really looking forward to working 4 u." Her lack of understanding that in a professional context, it's not appropriate to abbreviate the words "for you" was the reason that Shankman didn't hire her (he did send her a letter to explain). Emphasizing the importance of good writing to the audience, he said "Stop hurting America. Learn to write!"

Shankman's fourth rule is "Be top of mind," because that's how you generate business. He pointed out that every day, we talk to only roughly 1% of our network, so when you consider that your audience is only paying attention to the top 1% of their network, it's essential to figure out how to get there. Shankman commented that Facebook doesn't understand relevance yet, in terms of networks, but they're moving towards it. We haven't even touched the tip of the iceberg of social media. Shankman observed that in the next 24 months, he believes that everyone will be part of a single network, mentioning [pokens](#) (basically a social business card) as a tool for



this. In the future, how relevant someone is going to be to you is how relevant they are to you in your network. The more touchpoints you have, the more relevant you will be to each other and the more connected you will be online. He added that the fewer interactions you have with the guy who plays Farmville all day long, the less he will show up in your Facebook stream - unless, of course, you've already learned how to hide him.

When we move towards one network and listen to what's being said, our customer service will be generated by people who trust us. Social media is a broadcast channel for the people who receive and then spread your message. For the first time, information is flowing from inside the network out. Newspapers are failing because people are more likely to trust the people in their network rather than a publication they don't know. An audience question finished up the session - someone asked where we should be "living" in social media while there are still so many networks out there. Shankman recommended that we find out where our audiences are and go there.