A Winthrop & Weinstine blog dedicated to bridging the gap between legal & marketing types.

Having An "Authentic Presence" Online

Posted on March 17, 2011 by Laura Gutierrez

The buying and selling of goods and services is NOT what it used to be. The market is more competitive; big corporations and businesses are no longer on top despite (perhaps in spite of) their size. And consumers...well, we now have platforms that have the potential to reach millions to get out our message—good or bad, justified or not.

You are familiar with authenticity, I know. It's not a new subject. Perhaps marketers speak too much about it, and you're immune. It happens. But it's *so* important, especially when you're venturing into social media.

In my last post, I discussed why monitoring your brand is important. But even before you can begin to monitor, you must have an authentic online presence. Why? Because without it, your audience may not be listening.

There's been a lot of talk in the marketing community about authenticity. What does that mean exactly? Sure, you know the definition, but how does it translate to social media? It's time for businesses—brands—to be honest, personable, transparent and willing to concede a little (and that means admitting mistakes).

Don't have multiple identities.

A post from LexBlog founder & owner Kevin O'Keefe gives great reasons why *not* to have multiple identities on social platforms:

Many have one [account] for their personal affairs, and one for business. Some use pseudonyms to claim some expertise or flawed SEO advantage ala @accidentatty on Twitter. Lawyers in larger law firms often hide behind a practice group Twitter identity rather than use their own name.

I, too, have noticed this trend. And it's not just contained in the legal industry. Audiences do not want to identify with a brand—an ambiguous figurehead or a vague term. I must qualify: this does not mean you can't go out and have a company profile or Twitter account, there is a use for that. Just make sure your audience knows what it is—an aggregate—and redirect that audience to the actual human beings—lawyers, marketers, sales reps, presidents…whomever is willing to use these social platforms on behalf of the business.

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Having two or more accounts can be problematic—you can't remember to whom you told what story. (You know what I'm saying.) And it can lead to mistakes, like tweets from the Red Cross or Chrysler (note the difference in how they handled it). It's hard enough balancing life and work, business and personal…why separate the two? You are you, no matter what, right? If not, then maybe rethink what you're doing on social platforms. More often than not, something will slip out or your audience will see right through it. And if a mistake is made, do something about it. Own up and move on.

Use your name.

My friend & fellow legal marketer Heather Morse writes on The Legal Watercooler blog about using your name on social media platforms (she uses Twitter as an example).

If we've never met in person, and we were to bump into each other at, say, the Legal Marketing Association's annual conference next month, how would you best be able to identify me? By "LGL_MKTR" – a descriptive term of what I do?

Or, by my name?

I'm going with [my] name.

While I understand why businesses use descriptive, SEO-type terms as Twitter handle names, it's harder for the audience to feel connected. Whom are they "talking" to? People can't connect with an entity.

But what if my name is already taken, you ask. That's my problem. Laura Gutierrez? It's a common name. Options? You could add a number or two to the end. If it's too long, use a nickname. There are ways around it— just make it *you*, your brand. Make it *authentic* (there's that word again). You're more than just a business that sells [fill in blank].

Why take this advice?

A post from Mashable on top digital marketing trends (Ashley Brown, @ashbrown) sheds some light on why businesses should concern themselves with their social authenticity:

If this year's SXSWi conference is any indication, the foremost digital marketing trends of 2011 will be central to one theme: user presence.

Too often, businesses over-engineer their marketing efforts in an attempt to capture the attention of their audiences' minds and wallets. But audiences are smart, and they're immune to these efforts.

(Read the rest of Ashley's post for the top 5 trends.)

"User presence" = communities. A community, essentially, is made up of individuals with a common interest—perhaps your brand. Tight-knit communities have *communication* and collaborative thinking. They share. *Trust*. And that starts with engagement and authenticity.

If you're not convinced, you could always try to manage multiple accounts with different "personalities" and see how confusing it can be for you and your consumers. I wouldn't recommend it.

What other ways can you make your social platform authentic? How do you showcase transparency? I'd be interested to learn how you're creating your authentic presence online.

[h/t to Susanne Egli of Talon Performance Group for the term "authentic presence." She may not own the rights to it, but I originally heard the term from her.]

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