

Orchard House Communications

A quarterly newsletter  Fall 2005

This newsletter of communications ideas and strategies is free to marketing and corporate communications professionals. Hard copy is on 100 per cent post-consumer recycled paper.

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Preventing Communications Catastrophes

By Gloria Hildebrandt

Poor communications can lead to problems great and small. While everyone in the field knows this, we still see too many instances of it. Recently, the world saw trouble at a national level, with the Bush administration's response to the Katrina disaster. At a personal level, I have recently seen trouble within a professional group I belong to.

Much has and will be written about the U.S. government's slow, almost-reluctant action right after Katrina caused devastating floods. Accusations of racism and political manoeuvring flew around while thousands suffered. Was it indifference to poor black people? Was it because local politicians are Democrats?

There was obviously a problem with communications. Conspiracy theories aside, while news programs broadcast hours of horrifying images, not one soup kitchen, tent city, hospital shelter seemed to be set up. No officials rescued flooded survivors. It seemed that no action was being taken. The world was amazed.

It seems that only after public opinion began to be heard, and private, individual efforts were made, that the government awoke to the problem.

What was needed, of course, was an immediate, widespread plan of action, with frequent reports from the administration about what was being done, and specific ways that people could help. Effective communications could have eased concern. Instead, what might have been only a poor communications response was interpreted as the most sinister callousness.

Close to home, I have recently experienced a more common problem – a

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Heard on the radio: John Roberts [Republican appointment to the U.S. Supreme Court] was asked for his position on Roe vs. Wade. He replied "I don't care how they get out of New Orleans."

communications breakdown that has resulted in disenchantment and a lack of confidence in a professional group. Ironically, this group is made of communication specialists, proving that the problem can occur anywhere.

The board of directors of this group recently announced initiatives that took many members by complete surprise: a strict deadline for membership renewal, with a \$25 late penalty; a higher fee for new members, and the phase-out of an award-winning newsletter. Finally, the first meeting was announced with the mysterious focus of "See what we have in store for the organization this

year, and what volunteer opportunities there are."

Several members reacted negatively. Some announced they would not renew. Some wanted to know the new direction of the organization before deciding whether to renew. The editor of the newsletter confided that she had not been informed about any change to the publication. In short: a chaotic mess.

The situation was saved somewhat by the president personally calling concerned members and discussing issues with them. An email message followed with the agenda of the first meeting, so that people would have a better idea of what would happen. Clearly, early, thorough communications of all planned **➔ Click to continue**

When a Designer Works With a Copywriter

When a graphic designer and a writer have a creative project to work on, there are two possible approaches, according to Branimir Zlamalik of gb.com unlimited. The designer can develop a graphic structure into which the copywriter must fit the message, or the writer comes up with an idea and the designer must build upon it and support the message through visual means.

When the designer creates a concept, the challenge for the writer is to develop copy that will meet the client's needs while working within the confines of the design. The text should support and enhance the visual treatment.

When the process is reversed, and the writer comes up with an expression of an idea, the designer can increase the impact by adding visual layers of meaning that can create in-

terest and excitement.

The best results can be achieved the way that Branimir and Gloria Hildebrandt work together – not in isolation, but in creative harmony, with give and take, in which the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. In the past, one of them has had an idea, then the other has responded by adding elements, which in turn have inspired the other again to refine or

elaborate on the concept further.

Branimir and Gloria have found that the greatest creativity and client satisfaction arises from consulting, critiquing, responding to and building upon each other's work in progress. Through this process, results have been achieved that were not thought of initially. Small, individual sparks of creativity can combine to cause a significant flame.

► Communications Catastrophes

changes would have prevented hard feelings and saved time.

Whether external or internal, communications have a huge role to play in maintaining efficiency, morale and productivity. Make sure that your organization benefits from a regular communications strategy before you need it. Instead of being used to attempt to patch up trouble, it can actually prevent difficulties from arising in the first place.

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Branimir Zlamalik

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The Banishment of Exceeding Expectations

By Gloria Hildebrandt

It is time to retire the saying “exceeding customer expectations.” I have seen it so often, in so many situations, that I question the organizations that use it. Have they no imagination, no pride in distinguishing themselves from everyone else who uses it? The words clang out cliché and insincerity.

They remind me of garage sales that are held in the same location every weekend. Of stores that aim to mislead with “Going Out for Business” signs. They are making false claims, hiding something. Trying to misdirect the public.

Surely, when you announce that you exceed customers’ expectations, you have immediately raised their expectations to unreachable heights. Disappointment is inevitable.

I remember when I was young, and small shops surprised with their service or extras. When a baker’s dozen was 13, with an extra brownie or tart added to the cardboard box tied with string. When the deli owner tossed a handful of wrapped candies into the shopping bag. When an expensive pair of hiking boots was bought and a free tin of protective grease was included. These gestures were unannounced but earned my gratitude and loyalty. I felt valued and appreciated.

When I work on a project for you,

I don’t think I can consistently exceed your expectations. I have a higher opinion of you than that. I think you have high expectations of getting work from me that succeeds in achieving its goals. My job is to understand your objectives and then meet them dead on target. If you raise the bar next time, I’ll aim higher for the new goal.

As a customer, I have always been happy with the saying “Satisfaction guaranteed.” When my expectations are met, I’m content. Make the whole experience pleasant, and I’ll be loyal. That’s my aim in working with you. I want to reach your high expectations and lofty goals. If, on the way, I provide more than you had hoped for, we’re all pleased. But I won’t insult your intelligence or set myself an unrealistic target by announcing ahead of time that I’ll exceed your expectations.

If that happens, let it be a pleasant surprise for both of us.

Gloria New Editor for Caledon Living

Gloria is pleased to have been invited to become editor of *Caledon Living*. This is a visually stunning, full-colour home and lifestyles magazine about



the various communities in Caledon. Published quarterly, it features rural and urban, lifestyle, heritage and resource articles and photographs. Residents of Caledon receive it for free, but people outside of the area can get it at Chapters or Indigo bookstores, or by subscription.

Send a cheque for \$10.70 to:
SDB Creative Group Inc.,
P.O. Box 340, Bolton, ON L7E 5T3

Caledon Living was created and is published by Simon Burn, principal of a marketing communications company based in Caledon. See his site at www.sdbcreative.com.

“The magazine started as a marketing experiment for local businesses to effectively reach their target audience in a high-quality medium not available to them at the time,” says Simon. “This resulted in a publication that quickly became so popular that now we are in the publishing business!” For more about *Caledon Living*, go to www.caledonliving.com.

Autumn 2005 Events

DesignFest '05: Oct. 8 Graphic designers, web developers, illustrators, flash devotees, managers, directors, students, educators, product evangelists and industry experts will participate in seminars, workshops, and get hands-on training and advice from some of the most engaging speakers in the Digital Design and New Media field. For more info: www.designfest.ca/index.cfm

Halton-Peel Communications Association Mini Trade Show/Portfolio Night: Oct. 20 A dozen highly talented independent, professional communication specialists display their work and give out samples of their expertise. **Oakville Central Library, 120 Navy St.,** 7 to 9 p.m. Parking behind library, on Water St.

Toronto Small Press Book Fair: Oct. 29 This is a twice-yearly celebration of bookmakers, writers and small publishers. All sorts of scarce, book-like creations will be on display and available to buy. At **Trinity-St. Paul's Centre, 427 Bloor St. W.,** from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. See www.torontosmallpressbookfair.org.