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MARKETING MATTERS

Listening with digital ears

Paying attention to what consumers are saying has always been an important task for those in marketing. With the proliferation of blogs and social network sites, listening to conversations in cyberspace adds another dimension of information for those wanting to keep up with trends or consumer preferences.

While you may have neither the time nor the interest to set up a Facebook site, there are a number of tools you can use to listen to what others are saying about your company or your specialty.

• **Twitter** is a micro blog that allows you to let others know about something you've discovered or follow those who talk about topics of interest to you.



twitter

You can sign up for an account at www.twitter.com.

com. Twitter users make posts (called "tweets") that are only 142 characters in length. Marketers use Twitter not only to follow trends but also to pull people to a website. Twitter has a search capability that will allow you to find out if others are "tweeting" about your company or product.

- **Google Alerts** will let you know if your name, company or any other phrase of interest comes up on the internet. Subscribe by going to the Google "More" page and clicking on Alerts.
- **Search.twitter.com** allows you to do specific searches and add geographical details if you want to know what people in your area are talking about online.
- **Boardtracker.com** follows the most popular bulletin boards and can return topics and conversations that do not show up anywhere else. Some industries such as engineering and computing still have a heavy bulletin board use, and are worth monitoring.

Effective use of voice mail

Most people don't realize that voice mail was originally developed to take the place of the secretary.

A generation ago every manager had a secretary to handle calls. Technology has eliminated that need and transformed the secretary's job into a broader role of administrative assistant. Meanwhile, business people have thought little about how to use voice mail appropriately.

The purpose of voice mail is to move the conversation forward according to podcaster Mark Horstman. You would never send an email that reads "Got your email; email me." Voice mail operates on the same principle.

Never leave a voice mail saying "Got your message; call me." That message implies that you do not want to talk with the other person except when it suits your schedule. Furthermore, you are creating an obligation for the recipient without an appropriate understanding.

Leave voice messages that include information such as asking questions or making recommendations. "If everyone used this guidance, phone tag would not be such a problem and we would all make voice mail more effective," Horstman said.

Other voice mail rules:

- Make sure your tone is pleasant.
- Exclude everything that is not professional. If your voice mail were played over a loud-speaker, the only expression people should have is a small smile.
- Keep voice mails short. One minute is good. Never exceed three minutes.



MANAGEMENT ISSUES

Management during tough times requires courage

In her new book, *Management Courage: Having the Heart of a Lion*, Margaret Morford lays out six principles to guide managers through tough workplace

situations. The six principles she cites are quite simple though not always easy to follow:

- Be painfully honest.
- Never treat people identically. Your employees are individuals who have different needs and motivations.
- Don't use individuals or policies as a crutch.
- Ask for and give real feedback.
- Take the blame.
- Leave soul-sucking situations.

Most managers will agree with Morford's point that it takes great courage to manage against the norm and deal with the tough issues of employee

development. She also offers and poses some hard questions for managers to test their own level of courage. How do you rate as a manager with these test questions?

- Are there employees with whom I have not been completely honest?
- If I believe someone is not promotable, have I told him or her?
- Is there anyone I manage who should be coached about a behavior problem?
- Have I failed to recognize someone publicly because I thought it would offend another individual?
- Have I failed to do something special for one of the better performers because I didn't want to be accused of favoritism?
- When was the last time I admitted publicly that I made a mistake?

Such questions are guaranteed to make wise managers reflect on their own weaknesses.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Nuts & bolts
- Working smarter

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NUTS AND BOLTS

Chinese drywall giving Florida builders headaches

During the construction boom, there was a shortage of drywall manufactured in the U.S. and so some suppliers turned to China to get more of the building material that was in such demand. Now residents in some of the structures where the drywall was installed have complained about smells, breathing problems and other aches and pains.



The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission is investigating complaints that have come from hundreds of homeowners in Florida. Class action lawsuits have also been filed in California, Louisiana and Alabama.

Prior to 2006, nearly all drywall was manufactured in the U.S. but after demand outstripped supply, imports of the Chinese drywall grew dramatically. Some estimate that it was used in more than 60,000 homes in a dozen states including the post-Katrina reconstruction in Louisiana.

Plaintiffs allege that the problematic drywall material came from at least one gypsum mine in China where the material has a high sulfur content.

Those complaining about the Chinese-drywalled houses say their is a rotten-egg smell in the houses

and occupants reportedly suffer from nosebleeds and other ailments. There is also evidence of increased copper corrosion that could be caused by high levels of airborne sulfur or other moldy toxins.

Construction losses big part of jobless spike

The dismal job-loss report for March – 663,000 jobs disappeared pushing the nation’s unemployment rate to 8.5 percent – was even worse for the construction industry. The industry shed 161,000 jobs in March raising the unemployment rate for construction workers to 22.3 percent.

Recession halts rise of skyscraper

The planned 150-story Chicago Spire – expected to be the tallest tower in the Western Hemisphere – is supposed to be finished by 2012. But as is the case with many astronomical projects, the building has come to a screeching halt because of the credit crisis.

What was supposed to be a glamorous addition to the area is now looking less than desirable. Globally work has been halted on 11 percent of the 1324 skyscraper projects including 29 of 301 projects underway in the U.S.

Change in attitudes

A byproduct of our troubled times may be the fact that people are not whining so much. Those who still have jobs are appreciative and workers are accepting pay cuts or furloughs to protect jobs elsewhere in their companies. Even though people’s homes have lost significant value, those who are up on their mortgages are grateful that they are not facing foreclosure. Those whose portfolios have plummeted are glad that at least they did not invest with Bernie Madoff.

Job satisfaction is up according to a December 2008 survey by Yahoo! In that survey, 38% of respondents were “very satisfied” with their jobs compared to 28% feeling the same way in December 2007.



With all the gloom and doom around, people seem to understand that whining does not work as a strategy. Some say the bad economy has served as a wake-up call that has forced people to re-evaluate their lives.

Showing gratitude can have positive effects that range from reducing stress to improving overall health. Furthermore, it’s better for your job security. Surveys show that nonunionized companies will axe complainers first when layoffs are necessary.

Working Smarter

Getting things done

There are as many ways to defy procrastination as there are procrastinators out there.

If you are one of those people who put off tasks while you are waiting for the right time or the right mood, you’re a procrastinator. Procrastination has a number of causes:

- Perfectionism
- Fear of failure or success
- Lack of clear goals



Underestimating the difficulty or time required to complete tasks.

While getting things done is as much art as it is science, it never hurts to review the steps that will help you work smarter and stop procrastinating.

- Look ahead. Prioritize work that needs to be done and in what order. Don’t fall into the trap of concentrating on the easy tasks. While you may get a lot done this way, the vital but more difficult tasks will get pushed aside.
- Make a list. By listing all the things you need to do and then organizing them by urgency, you gain some control over your schedule. Categorize the activities in terms of urgency. You have must do’s, should do’s and can do’s. Must do’s are those tasks that need to be accomplished right away to avoid consequences.
- Reward yourself. You’ll get more done if you are looking forward to something. Rewards don’t have to be expensive or time consuming but they should be able to create anticipation and motivate you.
- Get started. Once you dive into a task and work on it for 10 minutes, you’re likely to keep going.

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