NEWSLETTER - Messaging

Messages are the foundation for critical content including value propositions, launches/announcements, speeches/storytelling, etc. But successful messaging is challenging - "Burning the message into their skulls is a rare art. In order to do that, the message must be memorable, clear, vivid, and have an element of emotion" (Venture Capitalist Michael Moritz). There is market coverage of many types of messages - corporate/brand messages, product messages, marketing messages, event messages, campaign messages, etc. Over my career, I have had the opportunity to lead and be on countless teams focused on messaging. Future newsletters will cover lessons learned specifically with value proposition and speech development.

Messaging - **What Has Worked**

3 Points: People who have worked with me can attest to my constant question - what are the top 3 points ? To me it is about focus. What are the top 3 messages you want to convey and have people remember? For example, in a speech it helps the audience to summarize the 3 messages at the beginning as this creates the framework to follow throughout the presentation.

- Challenge: It is not always that simple to boil all our messages into 3 points. I still suggest having 3 of the most important points "at the ready". Then Messaging Guides or Messaging Hierarchies can be leveraged to logically go deeper and for everyone to be on the same page.

Continuous Testing: Some of the most challenging but also most rewarding experiences in my career have been testing initial message ideas with industry analysts or customers (i.e. Customer Advisory Board). I admit sometimes it was pretty eye opening feedback. Testing is critically needed to make sure we are not "looking at our own bellybutton" but rather creating messages that resonate with our audience. The other important benefit is that we gain advocates having incorporated others' feedback.

- Challenge: It is not sufficient to test messages once. Our markets and customer requirements are changing so fast that we need an ongoing process of testing and refining.

Timeliness: Key messages are important because they are relevant to an activity at that moment in time. Key messages help quickly summarize a situation and enable alignment. I remember one meeting with several partner company executives where a lot was discussed during the day, but it was the moment at the end when a quick summary of key messages created clarity and alignment.

- Challenge: It is very difficult to create key messages "on the fly". Most of the time it takes time to think, link to other strategies, and summarize.

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Messaging - **What Has Not Worked**

"Me Too": With many companies in the same markets using common sources of market research, it is easy to fall into the trap of sounding like everyone else. The test is to take off your company logo and see if your messages could as easily be your competitors'. The other challenge is when your messages are too generic and not specific enough to a target audience to have them engage. It's also a good idea to stay away from overused jargon.

- ● Recommendation: Differentiation is difficult. Take your messages and find fact based proof points to support why your's is unique.

More is Less: How many times have you been sitting in an audience and a presenter has a Powerpoint of "key messages" that are in 8 point font with about 20 key messages on a page?

- ● Recommendation: It has been an invaluable approach to start with defining key messages to create a presentation and resist collecting various slides to create a powerpoint deck.   Once we have our key messages we can start figuring out how to tell the visual story. Then turn messages into images. You know the saying; a picture is worth a thousand words.

Inconsistency: Whether you are an individual, a team, or a company, one of the most destructive things to successful messaging is when different, or worse opposing, messages are sent to your audience. Although we really can't control the message (especially in the era of social media), we can help guide our message. And sometimes we forget that internal messages and external messages should compliment each other (even if different teams are "responsible" for internal and external messages).

- ● Recommendation: Messaging Guides and Hierarchies are one way to help but also valuable are team reviews or training.. Different spokespeople or subject matter experts can help hone messages based on their experiences and knowledge but it is important to have a core set that are refined, not a message du jour.

Let me know of your messaging experiences that could benefit others so I can include them in an upcoming newsletter (marshall@reedstrategies.com).

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APPENDIX

Note: Analysis and key message summaries included in 1Q2017 RS Market Research Insights report.

Future of Work (4Q2016 report): Sample Market Coverage in March
- (Newswise) Accenture Exec Shares the Three Trends Enabling the Digital Workforce of the Future (Video)
http://www.newswise.com/articles/accenture-exec-shares-the-three-trends-enabling-the-digital-workforce-of-the-future
- (CNBC) 58% of high-performance employees say they need more quiet work spaces (Video)
http://www.cnbc.com/2017/03/15/58-of-high-performance-employees-say-they-need-more-quiet-work-spaces.html
- (HBR) Augmented Reality Is Already Improving Worker Performance
https://hbr.org/2017/03/augmented-reality-is-already-improving-worker-performance?utm_medium=email&utm_source=newsletter_weekly&utm_campaign=insider&referral=03405
- (LinkedIn) Job-Stealing Robots? Millennials See Hope, Fear in Automation
https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/job-stealing-robots-millennials-see-hope-fear-cathy-engelbert?trk=eml-email_feed_ecosystem_digest_01-hero-0-null&midToken=AQGXlpF_HRf2Fg&fromEmail=fromEmail&ut=3aPKlT2DTs6TI1
- (Customer Think) The future is arriving now. Are you ready?
https://customerthink.com/the-future-is-arriving-now-are-you-ready-interview-with-anthony-abbatiello-of-deloitte/

Customer Service Experience (1Q2017 report): Sample Market Coverage in March
- (Forbes) Mind The Gap: Where User Experiences Go To Die
https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesagencycouncil/2017/03/06/mind-the-gap-where-user-experiences-go-to-die/#68906a0d27de
- (Diginomica) The future of customer service – conversational, intelligent, personalized
http://diginomica.com/2017/03/23/future-customer-service-conversational-intelligent-personalized/
- (Mckinsey) Putting customer experience at the heart of next-generation operating models
http://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/digital-mckinsey/our-insights/putting-customer-experience-at-the-heart-of-next-generation-operating-models?cid=reinventing-eml-alt-mip-mck-oth-1703
- (Huffington Post) AI-Powered Customer Service Needs The Human Touch
http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/ai-powered-customer-service-needs-the-human-touch_us_58b88046e4b0ffd61787bd3d
- (Customer Think) Top 10 Customer Service Trends for 2017
http://customerthink.com/top-10-customer-service-trends-for-2017/

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