

Seven communication mistakes that hurt your business

Communication is critical to your business success, not an optional extra. The rule 'if you build it, they will come' simply does not apply. You can build a great product or service, but if people don't understand it or care about it, you might as well pack up and go home.

I've worked with giant corporates to one-man bands, and every single one of them finds it a challenge to clearly communicate what's special about them. As if that wasn't hard enough, there are some basic communication mistakes that I see time and again. Are these 7 deadly communication sins showing up in your business?

1. IT'S NOT ABOUT YOU

You need to get under the customer's skin, walk in their shoes and eat their breakfast. OK, maybe not the last one... but you do need to know and understand your customer deeply. What do they need to get done? How are you meeting that need? Don't make it all about you.

2. LITTLE MISTAKES, BIG IMPACT

I see it all the time... spelling mistakes, typos, dodgy layouts and the worst of all - 'lorem ipsum' holding content on live websites. I can't stress it enough - this is doing your brand serious damage. Nobody will take you seriously if there are mistakes in any of your customer-facing materials. Just... Don't.

3. STRUCTURE IS KING

And you thought it was content, didn't you? Structure is so important - it helps the reader follow what you're saying, and encourages them to read on. Every good story has a beginning, middle and end. Press releases and news articles put all the vital information at the top and then go into more detail as they go on. Features have a 'hook' that draws you in. Ignore structure at your peril!

4. TELLING, INSTEAD OF SHOWING

Don't tell your readers you are the expert, or the market leader. Anyone can say that stuff. You have to show that it's true. What would an expert in your industry do? What would the market leader do? Maybe it's cutting-edge research, maybe it's winning awards, maybe it's giving inspiring speeches... it's definitely not a list of empty statements on a website.

5. FORGETTING TO SUPPORT YOUR TEAM

Business leaders often expect that their teams will be able to communicate the company's vision, ethos and difference, just as well as they can themselves. Not so. You need to provide your team with tools to give them confidence in front of the customer. This could be practical tools like brochures or templates; or regular team training to ensure everyone 'gets' it.

6. NEGLECTING YOUR VISUAL STORY

A picture speaks a thousand words, or so they say. You can have the best copy in the world, but if your pictures are cheesy stock images of business people shaking hands, your words will lack authenticity. Invest in a decent headshot and think hard about the right images for your brochures and website - don't make this an afterthought.

7. BEING AFRAID TO GET EMOTIONAL

Yes, you heard me right! In business, we're taught that facts and figures trump emotion and feelings. But the truth is that people make decisions based as much on gut feel and intuition, as they do on facts and figures. Give people something to believe in, make a rallying call, be passionate. Above all, don't be afraid to appeal to hearts as well as minds.

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telling your best story

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