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Getting 'er done



Avoid marketing quagmires by answering questions early.

by Rich Porayko

You know what's easy? Busy work. It always amazes me how many people live in the muck and are "slammed" everyday but yet don't actually get much done.

It's one thing to have a dozen projects on the go. It's a totally different thing to get all those projects wrapped up accurately and on time. Marketing guru Seth Godin calls it "shipping". The brochure "shipped" for the product launch. The email blast "shipped" in time for the tradeshow. The new campaign rollout "shipped" the first week of the New Year. Certainly there are logistics involved, however it has everything to do with getting 'er done.

If you want to make a difference, it's not about the volume of projects on the go at any given time, it's about knocking them off the list. Clock-watching doggers are a major pet peeve of mine. Sadly, they fool most of the people, most of the time and often have long and successful careers. I'll admit, in a previous life, before I became independent, I was spring loaded at work, especially Fridays. Nowadays, my work/life balance is not as balanced.

Good, bad or indifferent, nearly all of the customers I've worked with throughout my career use a committee of one sort or another to steer their marketing program. The members of these committees have included owners, engineers, the sales team and even finance. I get it. The more eyes, the better. A broader group offers different perspectives and opinions. It is the nature of the marketing beast. Where this falls off the rails is when Steve from ops disengages himself from the project until the 11th hour and then decides it's time for him to raise a deal-breaking flag. This has happened with nearly every single marketing project in B2B history.

I hate Steve. Either you're on the bus or you're off the bus, Steve. Catching a typo or error at the last minute is one thing but coming in at the last minute with a game changer is BS. Even if you are the owner of the company, if the project goes back to the drawing board late in the game either your marketing resources are ineffective or your vision and expectations simply were not clear at the project kick off. You didn't have a project kick off? There's the first reason why your project

slipped. Outlining goals and expectations at the beginning of a project works wonders, most of the time. Godin calls it thrashing early. Get all of the thrashing around done at the front end and use the back end to work on polishing and fine-tuning. If the project goes back to the drawing board on the back end, I would argue that it's the project sponsor's fault for not clearly outlining expectations, not marketing's.

Some managers just aren't wired for thrashing early. Marketing people are used to being asked to work on projects with little more than a short phone call or email – in other words, with no plan. On one hand, I personally take it as a compliment because I have a reputation of being able to make chicken salad out of chicken shit. On the other hand, my vision and the vision of others may not be the same. Instead of five or 10 revisions, it is can be 30 or more revisions not resembling anything like the original concept. This is a sign of the project sponsor not having vision. I would call it scope creep, however you need to have scope in order to have scope creep.

As a marketing person, if you want to take your career to the next level, do your best to have kickoff meetings and gather expectations at the beginning. Determine your message, content and deadlines at the beginning of the project. Straightforward communication can work wonderfully but when there are revisions, be enthusiastic. Redo it and be grateful for the experience and employment. There are only two other choices: re-doing it and being negative (the surest way to getting canned) or quitting.

As the manager tasking the marketing person, as long as you are paying your bills on time, you have every right to ask for as many revisions as you wish. But be aware (and this is important) that for each project that slips, it means that other projects are not getting done and next thing you know there are a dozen unfinished projects on the go. What is not fair is to drag on a project for months while adding more projects and deadlines onto the people working on the one(s) that still aren't complete. It doesn't work that way. It destroys efficiency and you risk desensitizing the team with the sheer volume of revisions.