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HOSTED BY DEBBIE ALBERT

Episode 115: Communicating in the Digital Age: Know Your Audience - The Benefits of a Communications

Audit (Part 1 of 3)

Guest: Paul Koulogeorge

This is Prove It. A podcast for impatient business owners, overwhelmed marketers, and PR practitioners with no time for podcasts. In just 10 minutes they answer 3 questions and offer proof of what's working in marketing communications today. Here's Debbie Albert, President of Albert Communications.

Debbie Albert: This episode of “Prove It” is the first in a three-part series doing a deep dive or, as deep as you can go in 10 minutes, into communicating in the digital age. The first episode is titled “Know your Audience: The Benefits of a Communications Audit,” and we're going to get into that shortly. The second will be about communicating with Millennials or Gen X or whatever were to at the time. And the third is going to be about using social media in a communications plan.

My guest for all three episodes, is Paul Koulogeorge, the vice president of marketing, advertising and public relations for the Goddard Schools.

Paul has a pedigree worth sharing. His undergraduate degrees from Wash. U. in St. Louis, he has an MBA from Northwestern's Kellogg School of Management, and he's worked in marketing positions for Kraft Foods, Coca-Cola, EB Games, DFC and now Goddard Schools. The guy is no slouch. And on top of these impressive credentials, he's a friend and a colleague, so Paul, welcome to Prove it!

Paul Koulogeorge: Thank you Debbie, glad to be here.

Debbie: As you know, we're going to go through three questions and then I'm going to ask you to prove your point. So, are you ready to get started?



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Paul: I am ready; looking forward to it.

Debbie: Okay, so for number one, I say, **if rule number one in marketing remains understanding your audience, what ways do you go about doing that?**

Paul: Yeah, so, you know, we regularly do surveying where we talk to all of our different, important consensus groups. So that includes our employees, that includes the franchisees because we're a franchise-based system, and that includes the parents who have children in our schools. And by regularly communicating with them, we want to understand what they like, what are their pain points, and most importantly, you know, what do they want us to stop, start, and continue.

Debbie: Right. And since we're talking about that in the digital age, **what are some of the ways that you go about doing that?** And this is my question 1b.

Paul: Well, you know, it's a little bit of a mixture of using old fashioned and new age technology. So, we've tried to mix it up because you want to reach every possible generation that might be interacting with your product or brand.

For example, for internal employees, we do regular meetings where we gather people together in small groups, and we say, "Hey what's working for you and then ask what's not working for you, and tell us what you like and don't like."

Then we do electronic surveys using Survey Monkey or whatever brand you want to use where you're going to ask them questions. In addition to that, we've started breaking out into, you know, texting, social media, new technology in order to get feedback from employees.



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Debbie: Right. We should never underestimate the value of human interaction even though it is the digital age.

Paul: Well, and I think you get different answers based on different technology. If you're doing one-on-one focus group with a person, you know, they'll suddenly see how empathetic you are, what you want to know, they'll read off your queues. And you might get very different information if you really dig deep. By doing a Survey Monkey type survey, you don't have that possibility to do that but it might be a great way to do pair trade-offs and other type of quantitative questioning where people can rate things or prioritize things, which is harder sometimes to do in a one-on-one meeting.

And then when you talk about using social media to interact with people, that gives you a great opportunity to use videos, use photos, use multimedia. So, each one has its place, and you might get very different answers.

Debbie: Right. That's a good point. And so my second official question is, **how do you manage getting all of this when you have a diverse audience, not just in terms of race and gender and age, but you at Goddard, have a very diverse audience in terms of geography, job title, people with access to computers, you know, you have a wide range of people that you want to get to know. How do you make sure you solicit input from all of those people?**

Paul: Yeah, it's really important. So, a few things. One is, no matter which type of surveying we are doing it whether it's a focus group, in person, or a Survey Monkey type of survey or something on social media, we always make sure that we've represented, each of the different functional groups, so like marketing, HR, or IT - that we've looked at both field employees, and home office employees, that we've got a mixture of tenure with the company so really long tenure people, really new people in and, you know, if we know that there are some people that have issues with something, make sure you are including those people's issues because you want to make sure you hear from them. So, it's really kind of checking all the boxes, and then of course varying the communication type research you do. So, it's something that's new media and



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some of it's still old-fashioned, face-to-face. If the more you can vary the groups and the tools, the better you're going to be inclusive of getting every opinion out there.

Debbie: And I think we should stop calling it old-fashioned. I think we, should...

Paul: Traditional, traditional.

Debbie: Traditional or human interaction. I mean, I think people tend to dismiss it these days, when as you said earlier, you can really dig deeper in people, if you have one-on-one qualitative interviews with people you might be able to get a lot more out of the them than you're ever going to get from a Survey Monkey.

Paul: Yeah, that's very fair. It's something we deal with running a marketing department as I do. There's always a bias that anything new, you know, Google ads or Facebook sharing, but that's better than old fashion, that's just the word, you know, then, you know, for the traditional type vehicles and it's really not the case, it's just that people always have now a bias towards new versus traditional.

Debbie: Right. **So, in the digital universe, what is the most important thing to understand about reaching your intended audiences?** And you have plenty of audiences.

Paul: Yeah, yeah, we do. And, you know, in my particular position that I have, we're marketing to millennial moms, so these are women 25 to 45, but, you know, the people that own our 500 different franchises around the country tend to be people who are baby boomers. They are in their 50-60s, we even have owners, they're going to their 70s, and so we're often bridging that gap of how do you get people of one generation to communicate with another generation. It's a very different third generation.



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So, it's making sure that everyone first of all, has an appreciation of the different generations. Then we spend a lot of time actually educating our employees and our franchisees about, you know, these are the characteristics of a millennial, these are characteristics of generations, and you to have an appreciation of that and understand that they look at the world a little differently, that's not bad, it's not better either, but you need to understand that.

Debbie: Right. And they want to be communicated with in different ways.

Paul: It's true because our franchisees, if they're recruiting let's say a teacher, their first reaction is great, let me pick up the phone and call that candidate. Well, the typical teaching candidate is right out of college. They're 21-22-23 [years old], they don't want to pick up the phone, they want a text message, or they want, you know, instant, you know, a Facebook Instant Message, and that's not the comfort level of the generation that's trying to communicate with them. So, it's kind of, it's just using that same analogy to them the other way. Saying, what if this person applying sent you a text and they would be like, well, you know, I wouldn't want to be talked to that way. Okay, but now, that's how they do want to be talked with.

So, it's kind of appreciating what the other generation is, you know, looking for, and making sure that you're not, you know, stuck in your generation. Make sure they're open to both generations.

I think that I always tell people is mix it up. If you're trying to reach people, don't always do one for, don't always email, you know, don't always text, don't always phone, don't always social media, mix it up and vary the communication and pulse it or drip it a different way in a different week, less safe to try to reach an audience over several months' sales sample.

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Debbie: Right. Keep that thought because in the second part of this three-part series, we're going to talk about the millennials. We're getting down that path, but I want to stop now and get to the "Prove It" part.



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Paul, give us an example of how Goddard did its homework to understand its audience so that you could communicate them in ways they prefer, and how you continue to do that now?

Paul: So yeah, 100%. What we did at Goddard school was, every year we do an all-employee meeting and at that all-employee meeting, we have an open forum for a group in the small groups of eight to 10 people and we ask them during the meeting to let us know, what's happening at Goddard, what are they like, what are they dislike, what do they want to see change.

And a year and a half ago, when we did that, one of the things that came up across multiple of the small groups was communication, that people felt communication was not evenly dispersed among the company, some departments knew more than other departments, and they felt that that was unfair. So that led us to hire you, Debbie, and conduct an audit of our communication and we did this by looking at both quantitative and qualitative ways.

So we had you go out and meet one-on-one with a variety of employees at all levels of the company in all functional groups in the company, both field based and home office based and ask them a series of questions about, you know how do they feel, how communications worked at gate if they could do one thing better, what would they do, what do they think about the frequency of communication, what do they think about the honesty of our communications, do they believe that what they provide feedback is actually hurt some questions like that.

Then we also did a quantitative survey of every single employee in the company and we got over 90% response which was great, and we had them go vehicle by vehicle both formal communication vehicles like let's say a monthly newsletter and informal vehicles like departmental meetings, or if two departments get together for a project meeting, and we ask them, you know, one of these things works the best, what works the worst, which you want to see more of, which you want to see less of. And had some open-ended questions of, in a perfect world, how would you design the perfect formal communications at Goddard.

Debbie: And I think we can agree that the one-on-one interviews, we-we did the qualitative



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first, and we-we found a lot of trends through the qualitative and then when we did the survey on top of it, it just verified and validated all of the findings we had and the one-on-one gave us more in depth, but the, you know, we had the survey results from 90% of the company, it was really quite extraordinary.

Paul: And, you know even better than the result of the results was the credibility it gave us within the organization because people saw, we heard what their frustration was, we then did this research and then we of course share back the results.

Debbie: Right.

Paul: And based on that, we made a number of significant changes. We hired a full-time communications manager, they started a corporate counsel of communications that meets monthly, and they drafted, for the first time in our company's history, a formal corporate communication guideline that every department has to follow.

Debbie: Yes, I agree with you. I think that to do a survey, you absolutely positively have to share the results and show that you took action on them. It makes all the difference in the world.

Paul: And-and I think that, you know, I'll be totally honest. We were probably as a member of senior management, we were in our ivory tower saying, "Oh, you know, I know everything's happening in the company, so communications must be good." But I didn't put myself in the shoes of a field employee living in California who just doesn't feel like they know everything.

Debbie: Right.

Paul: And so, if I really listening to all types of audience and people from different tenure, we



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heard about how things were different when it was a much smaller company, and it really set a goal for us for we want to achieve for our future bigger company.

Debbie: Yep, it was a tremendous success, it really was. So, with that, I'm going to wrap up this episode. I want to thank you Paul for your insights as always and as to our listeners to stay tuned for more episodes of “Prove It” to gain more clarity in what's happening in marketing communications today.

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