Out of Office: What Type of Employee is Best Suited for Remote Work?
Sara Jansen Perry, PhD, Cristina Rubino, PhD, and Emily M. Hunter, PhD

If You Want More than Just “Likes,” Attachment is Better than Attitude
Rebecca VanMeter-Brown, PhD, Holly A. Syrdal, PhD, Susan Powell Mantel, PhD, Douglas B. Grisaffe, PhD, and Erik T. Nesson, PhD

The Closer the Message, the Better
Yanli Jia, PhD, Yunhui Huang, PhD, Robert S. Wyer Jr., PhD, and Hao Shen, PhD

Watch Your Tone on Social Media
Renato Hübner Barcelos, PhD, Danilo C. Dantas, PhD, and Sylvain Sénécal, PhD

Intellectual Humility
Maria Arauz, MBA Candidate

INSIDER: Leaders Eat Last
Zack Snider, MBA Candidate

INSIDER: Rise and Grind
Jackson Price, MBA Candidate
Watch Your Tone on Social Media
Renato Hübner Barcelos, PhD, Danilo C. Dantas, PhD, and Sylvain Sénécal, PhD

The value of goods and services provided by an organization is, to a large extent, dependent on a consumer’s perception of the firm, and this perception is often determined by the way in which the company communicates with its customers. A company’s tone of voice used in communications is critical to the success of customer acquisition, particularly in online or virtual communications. In this article, we examine the differences between “human” and “corporate” tone of voice and the impacts these differing tones have on consumer perception.

Corporate or Human Voice?

When we listen to sales calls or view advertisements on social media, we see certain differences in the approaches businesses use to reach out to consumers. The tone of voice used in these communications is an important tactic that helps drive consumer demand for a product.

A corporate voice is a formal, structured tone that indicates a professional conversation and is primarily used to form a business relationship with the consumer. With this tone of voice, the company strictly delivers facts and does not focus on emotional appeal to influence customers.

A human voice is a more casual tone of voice that replicates the way in which we speak in more personal settings. Language is friendlier and may include common words or even emoticons. The goal of this tone of voice is to appeal to consumers’ emotions and build a bond rather than just converting a lead.

The difference between the two voices can be seen particularly in automated sales pitches and cold calls made to consumers. If the message used is generated by technology and has a corporate message, a corporate voice has been used. If the message is personalized, friendly and conversational, a human voice has been used. However, it is often difficult to decide the better voice to use and which voice will add the most value to the firm and appeal to the listener.
Which Voice, and When?

When deciding on the tone of voice to use in communication with consumers via social media, a primary factor to consider is the type of value—whether hedonic (emotional) or utilitarian (rational)—customers expect to receive from their purchase.

Next, after considering the type of value derived from a product or service, the tone of voice used in communication could be human and appeal to emotion, or it could be corporate and appeal to utilitarian motives. If the primary consumer value sought is driven by emotional appeal, then a human voice should be used to maximize impact. Alternatively, if the type of value is derived from the features of a product or service, then corporate voice would be more persuasive. Nevertheless, there are other factors that mitigate this relationship.

For example, other important factors to consider before deciding tone of voice for your communication are situational involvement and the level of risk involved in the purchase. In low risk cases, it is beneficial to use a human voice to influence demand, as consumers perceive the human voice as a personal connection to the brand. However, in high risk cases, a consumer attributes a more professional approach to a corporate voice and tends to trust the brand more. In high risk purchases, the customer looks for a formal approach to alleviate the stress of dealing with the risk, so a human voice may have a negative impact on the consumer’s purchase intent, as they may find the tone too casual to deal with a high-risk purchase.

From this analysis there are three scenarios that arise:

1) Low risk, low involvement, and primarily hedonic value: In this case, the human voice would maximize purchase intent.

2) Low risk, low involvement, and utilitarian value: In this case, a customer is often indifferent toward the tone, so the type of voice should be consistent with the brand’s overall positioning. However, this recommendation also applies if overall posts are negative concerning the brand.

3) High risk and either hedonic or utilitarian value: In this case, it is important to use a corporate voice to reassure customers of firm competence and reduce the risk associated with the purchase intent.

Real Estate Implications

In real estate transactions, we see varied levels of risk and value derived from purchases, and it is essential for agents to understand these factors that affect their respective clients. For example, a client buying an office space for their company franchise may see only facts-based value in the purchase and will likely be less influenced by a human tone of voice. A couple buying their first home will be more reactive to a human voice given the emotional value in the purchase, but a couple in a lower income group buying their first home may attribute a high level of risk with the
purchase and, thus, would be more influenced by a professional corporate voice. By carefully evaluating the risk and value factors of your clients, you will be better equipped to provide the proper tone of voice in your social media, advertising, or branding communications, thus driving up demand for your offerings.

It is important to note that this is an inexact science, and there are other factors like brand image and customer experiences that will influence the purchase. However, to a broad audience, analyzing the risk and value of the offering will effectively determine the consumers’ reaction to the communication.

**Recommended Reading**


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