

## HOW ARE YOU COMMUNICATING?

by [Steve Brown](#)

For centuries bankers have written in prose. That is, they strung together words and ideas in a sequentially logical order in order to convey an idea. This writing style was mandated by the medium, namely, paper. Paper forced us to write in sequential order.

However, somewhere around 1990 the internet gave rise to the hyperlink. By using the hyperlink, online readers can now digest material in non-sequential order.

Fast forward to 2010 and communication has substantially changed. Effectively conveying an idea now requires skills your English teacher never dreamed of. Whether you are putting a post on Facebook or posting a video on YouTube using a Smartphone application, the use of higher order programming languages and broadband has changed communication.

Take your narrative on the front page of your website. Good content conveys the brand of your bank, a profitable financial solution and a value proposition. Great content does all that AND gets picked up as a top ranked page by Google. Your readers are no longer just humans, but search engine algorithms. The goal is no longer to convey a single idea, but to do it in a way that floats to the surface of the ever-shifting zeitgeist.

For example, you could send a shareholder letter out for 3Q results or you could post a video about 3Q that also talks about your local economy and the current foreclosure topic. One will get read by 30 people, the other maybe by 400+. The rise of YouTube has elevated the 1 to 3 minute video as central to communication. Click on CNN's website and find that almost half their stories at times are punctuated by video.

This is one reason banks need to be experimenting with social media such as Facebook. If you are blocking your employees from accessing social media or if or not allowing customers to post comments to your page, you are limiting your bank's communication evolution. Instead of fighting the internet, embrace it. Aside from the potential marketing and knowledge synthesis benefit, Facebook is an ideal way to learn how to communicate in this new decade. A well worded topic and post of 140 characters will not only attract comments and feedback, but will have those that posted coming back frequently as they get noticed that someone commented on their comment. By communicating in Facebook, bankers can get almost instant feedback in what interests their community. Ten "Likes" and 3 "Shares" is a hit, while an ignored post may not be worth repeating. An important Military-inspired weblink or video from another site may help your bank's image more than just telling your customers that you are going to be closed for Veterans Day.

Changing your writing style to accommodate metatext (text with hyperlinks to other text, presentations, etc.) is also a new writing skill. Add the name of your local city and state to your bank's blog or social media post and your communication gets picked up by Google filters and your municipality's page, giving your bank even more exposure. In addition to utilizing different forms of media, writing today means leveraging contextual clues that help determine where else your thoughts get read be it a search engine or another website. Another area where communication is evolving is the greater use of charts, graphs, interactive dashboards and graphical clues. Your latest

numbers may be important, but it is unlikely they will get read even by the board. Create a bar chart with shaded target areas and thresholds and your readers will quickly understand where you want your loan loss allowance to total loans to go and if you are in compliance with policy. Pictures are worth much more than a thousand words.

Finally, tone and personality are once again becoming central to the new style of communication. A bank's identity needs to come through in its writing, something that is difficult to accomplish if you are still running everything through a committee. Readers expect blandness from the government, so community banks are in an ideal position to become a leading voice in the community.

For 2011, challenge yourself to try out different forms of media and different communication styles - make mistakes, get feedback, be conspicuous and strive to be entertaining. Think in terms of the dimensions of the internet and don't forget to leave space to allow your customers to talk. Above all else - be authentic and your voice will be heard more clearly than before.

## **BANK NEWS**

### **M&A**

The parent company of Cheviot Savings Bank (\$342mm, OH) has entered a deal to purchase the parent of Franklin Savings & Loan (\$280mm, OH) for approx. \$24.4mm. Cheviot will receive 7 branches and \$229mm in deposits.

### **JP Morgan Chase**

3Q net Income rose 34% to \$4.42B from \$3.59B in 3Q09 as loan loss provisions contracted. However, revenue dropped \$2.8B to \$23.8B.

### **Productivity**

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