

## The Cram Quarterly

*News and notes for educational communicators*

*Summer 2006*

### FEATURE

#### Real-world marketing lessons

Look around you, and you'll find everyday moments in life that can teach important lessons about human behavior—why we think, respond, and feel the way we do. Observing these life lessons can improve our marketing efforts.

***False Advertising?*** Officials instituted this slogan to replenish the city's self-confidence at a time when Baltimore was plagued with a number of urban problems, including one of the highest homicide rates in the nation.



*The lesson:* Unfortunately, no slogan is powerful enough to support an unrealistic claim. Hyperbole in marketing comes across as phony and invites ridicule rather than a nod of recognition. Our words have to be believable if we hope to connect with audience members and motivate them to act. In other words, don't just say it. Be it.

***Six of one ...*** A viewbook with a pocket on the inside back cover is like the ill-conceived El Camino—half car, half truck. It can't make up its mind whether it's a viewbook or a pocket folder, and it's not that good at being either.

*The lesson:* Thoroughly understand what information your audience needs and design materials to deliver it efficiently and easily. Forcing a publication to do “double duty” may save you money, but it can cost you functionality, reputation, prestige, and more.

***Go ahead, make me laugh*** Take a look at the following real newspaper ad. It demonstrates a marketing truism.

NORDIC TRACK—\$300 Hardly used. Call Chubby.

*The lesson:* Humor in advertising gets people’s attention. Laughter makes a message more memorable because it taps into an audience’s emotions. Warming someone’s heart is a good way to stay in the top of the mind as well.

–GCF staff

## FEATURE

### **The art of excellent photography**

Creating successful photographic images is an art. And, as with any kind of art, there can be varying degrees of sophistication, from the snapshot to the masterpiece. As communicators, we use images as well as words to convey messages to audiences. So how do we select the best image for the job?

Two rules apply: a successful photo has to look real, not staged, and it has to be technically accomplished. The technical elements are easier to judge. Is the image clear? Is the lighting okay? Is there a stray finger in the shot? When evaluating images for realism, however, you have to trust your instincts and pay attention to your gut reaction. Does the shot feel too posed, too sterile, or too clean? Do all the people look like models instead of everyday people? Do they look relaxed or rigid? How you answer these questions will determine whether you engage or repel your audience.

Clients often ask us whether they need a professional photographer to achieve the realism we’re talking about here. We offer the following guidelines to help answer that question.

### ***Help! When to call the professionals***

Professional images are especially important when you have complex messages to convey to your audience. Let’s say you’re creating a new admissions piece, and you want to communicate the concept, “active learning experience.” Do you use students in the classroom, a professor at the blackboard, or lab equipment to show audiences what

you mean? Will using motion blur help or hinder? A professional photographer will have the know-how to successfully interpret such a message and shoot an image that portrays it well.

Campus beauty shots may also require the skillful arrangement of a professional. After all, several factors determine the quality of the final image. What time of day should a building be shot? Should it be sunny or cloudy? From which direction should the image be taken? Should there be people in the shot, and if so, what should they be doing?

Keep in mind that not all professionals shoot professional caliber work. It helps to get recommendations from your peers. For example, [UCDA](#) provides a list of recommended photographers on their website. When interviewing, ask to see a photographer's published photos. Often, these will be more revealing than those carefully selected images in a portfolio.

### *Improving your amateur efforts*

How many times has this happened to you: you're sitting at your desk when the phone rings. "Quick, grab your digital camera, something's happening and we need photos!" Later, you find the results disappointing. Maybe the lighting is too dark/too light, facial expressions are weird, or the President has something in his teeth.

If your budget, deadline, or circumstance doesn't allow for a professional photographer, today's digital cameras have come a long way toward helping those of us without formal training capture decent photos. And, local camera stores often offer classes on digital photography.

You might also be able to rescue a poorly lit but one-of-a kind shot using photo enhancement software. [Lynda.com](#) has online video tutorials that show you step-by-step techniques for improving, correcting, and retouching images. You can choose between a monthly or an annual fee for the service.

Finally, there will be situations where you'll be receiving images from other people. Published standards will help you get the quality of shots you need. For example, when soliciting images for your institution's alumni magazine, let people know that print applications require no less than 300 dpi (dots per inch). For web applications, the standard is 72 dpi.

Whether you turn to a professional, shoot it yourself, or receive it in an email, a good photo can draw your readers in where words alone may fail. And isn't that what art (and communicating) is all about?

*–Domenica Genovese*

## FEATURE

### **Don't let webcams go by the wayside**

Each year at GCF we conduct our survey of 100 college websites, and we've noticed a decline in the availability of webcams on campus. Perhaps concerns about student privacy and the inability to control what's being broadcast have led to this decline. Nevertheless, we believe the benefits of providing web audiences with a 24/7 glimpse of campus life outweigh the concerns.

When the new Apple store opened on [Fifth Avenue in New York City](#), a camera captured customers standing in line to get into the store during its first [24 hours](#). This allowed Apple fans around the world to participate in the excitement of the opening from the comfort of their own computers. In the increasingly wide world of college admissions, prospective students can't always visit the colleges that interest them, but that doesn't mean that they don't want to experience what's going on there.

What if colleges promoted the fun of live feed? For example, a time-lapse feed could show freshmen moving bulging boxes of belongings out of cars and into dorm rooms. A foreign exchange student at one institution found a creative way to use her on-campus webcam. She told her family back home what time of day she would be in front of the camera so that they could go online and see her smiling and waving back to them.

Making sure everyone knows about the camera addresses privacy concerns as well. If people don't want to be on camera, then they'll know what areas to avoid. Posting a sign near the camera will clear up any confusion about where exactly it's located.

As with photos, audiences want to see what is real and true about your institution. A live feed from an on-campus camera does just that. It's real life in real time, and you can't get more genuine than that.

*—Brenda Foster*

## NOTEWORTHY

### **Admissions applications: Don't throw out the paper just yet**

You've probably noticed that fewer and fewer colleges are requiring admissions applicants to submit hard copy applications, offering online forms instead. But many of our clients have told us that most students who actually matriculate used a paper application.

We have a few theories that attempt to explain this trend. Maybe students feel that they will stand out by submitting a paper application, or perhaps print is more believable, more serious. Maybe students reserve the application fee (which is often waived with online applications) for the colleges they are most serious about attending. Whatever the truth, it seems prudent that institutions continue to offer paper applications to prospective students.

Feel free to [contact us](#) about the application process and your experience with paper versus electronic forms. We're interested in hearing your thoughts about why matriculating students seem to prefer paper applications.

—*Brenda Foster*

### **A step-by-step approach to proofreading**

Some people are endowed with an uncanny sense of grammar. For the rest of us, here are proofreading tips and tricks that will help you make the most of your efforts.

1. Start out with a general set of rules. Is the publication going to follow the MLA guidelines or *The Chicago Manual of Style*? If your institution has a style or graphic standards manual, you'll want to have that nearby. Know how phone numbers and addresses are to be formatted, and what titles (i.e. building names, abbreviations) are acceptable.
2. Read the entire document word by word. This is where the bulk of the work happens. There's no way around it—if you want to really give a document the hairy eyeball, you have to *look* at every single word. Sometimes sounding a sentence out in your mind or even reading it aloud helps isolate errors.
3. When in doubt, check it out. Look for questionable grammar, spelling, punctuation, hyphenation, etc. If anything looks suspicious, refer to the general set of rules you set up in step 1, or consult print or online references.

4. Once you have completed your initial reading, go back through the text and check formatting for consistency and alignment. Now that you have a general understanding of the subject matter, you'll be better able to look critically at headings, subheadings, photo captions, and the like.
5. Rotate the document through your department to have more than one set of eyes doing the proofreading.

If accurate proofreading sounds time consuming, that's because it is. But having an error-free document is worth the time.

*–GCF Staff*

### **Auto vacation response email overload**

Imagine returning from vacation to find your email in-box filled with hundreds of extraneous and repetitive messages on top of all the important emails you received while you were gone. This happened to me recently when I instructed my email program to send an automatic response letting people know I was out of the office.

In my case, I ordered stamps just before leaving for vacation. The postal service sent me an email message confirming my order, and my email program dutifully sent a message back saying that I was on vacation. The post office's server then began a ping-pong game of sorts with the GCF server, which resulted in a volley of messages that bounced back and forth between them every ten minutes.

This influx of messages clogged my email system and computer, making it very difficult to get my mail when I returned. Hours were wasted sifting through the mess to find my important messages.

Be aware that if you receive a lot of junk email, you and your computer could be susceptible to this problem. Most servers are tuned to prevent this sort of thing, but you might want to give your automated response a trial run before you leave, just in case. And be sure to check your mail program settings.

*–Katie Pugh*

## FUTURE TRENDS POTTING

### **Nintendo's Brain Age**

I always told my kids that playing video games would rot their brains. Now, [research](#) is showing that challenging your mind with certain activities, including puzzle games, can actually strengthen your brain and keep it in shape.

Nintendo is capitalizing on this news with a package of, well, mind games for its latest portable games console. “Brain Age: Train Your Brain in Minutes a Day!” puts gamers’ thinking skills to the test with brainteasers and puzzles (including Sudoku). “Brain Age” targets an audience outside of Nintendo’s traditional fan base. Known as casual gamers, this group includes people you wouldn’t typically see planted in front of the television with a joystick in hand: women, parents, business people, and even seniors. Since the console is portable, players need not chain themselves to any large appliances. The games can go anywhere—the doctor’s office, the PTA meeting, the airport, you name it. Who would’ve thought that waiting in all those lines can make you a genius!

—Theresa Williams

## JOIN US

### **... in Baltimore**

Brenda Foster and Katie Pugh will be speaking at the third annual eduWeb Conference. Check our [website](#) for details.

#### **[eduWeb Conference](#)**

July 30-August 2, 2006 Baltimore, MD

### **... in New Orleans**

Brenda Foster will teach the Advanced Marketing Session on Wednesday, October 8. The session, “100 College Websites. Countless Insights,” will teach participants how to take advantage of the latest technologies and how to identify website features that will serve the needs of their audiences.

#### **[AMA Symposium for the Marketing of Higher Education](#)**

November 5-8, 2006 New Orleans, Louisiana

## **F E E D B A C K**

Do you have comments, questions, or story ideas that you'd like us to cover in an upcoming issue of *The Cram Quarterly*?

If so, send an email to [brenda@gcfonline.com](mailto:brenda@gcfonline.com) or give Brenda a call at 410-467-4672.

## **S U B S C R I B E**

If you would like to be added to our newsletter mailing list please click [here](#).