

So What? Who Cares? The Essential Questions for Marketers

Every communicator's worst fear is a flop. To help avoid flopping, one of the best things I ever created for myself – and anyone willing to adopt this process – is the "So what? Who cares?" filter. This is the question we marketers, creative directors, writers, and publicists should ask every time our clients bring us a new communications project.

What might be newsworthy to you might mean nothing to your audience and community. On the one hand, content needs to be generated, and it can be tempting to fill a feed with anything and everything just to see what sticks. And sure, we are all about celebrating, giving a social media shoutout, or extending a good old "at-a-boy" when there is something to share. But too many times we have seen folks spiral down an expensive rabbit hole and spend unnecessary budget dollars and time on subject matter that, frankly, just doesn't matter.

For your PR team, pitching subject matter that has no depth or stickiness will most likely provide you with no interest, which then puts your PR people in an awkward position, making them appear incompetent – which isn't the case at all. The same goes for pressing your creative team and writers to prepare a social media post that ends up going to just a handful of followers because the firm has not strategically and purposefully created a social media presence. Flops all around.

Just because you feel you have something to say doesn't mean you have anyone to listen. Why the crickets? Has there been consistent effort to provide valuable content to the people you want to connect with? Is the subject matter appropriate for that audience, or are the posts better shared and celebrated with your mom? The goal of connecting with the audience should guide the content strategy, and valuable content brings in the audience. That, in a nutshell, is "So what? Who cares?"

Grow an Audience by Producing Valuable Content

First, you have to consider your audience – that's the "who" you want to care. Anyone in the driver's seat of the firm's content generation operation should have a strategy aiming toward amassing a following that will find value in the information you generate. Law firms build their entire businesses on advice, so there should be no shortage of fodder for content. There should also be plenty of people who will care about what you put out.

Then, each post needs to pass the "So what?" question. When it comes to sharing and creating content for the masses, be sure it has a purpose and shows value. That could mean highlighting expertise, showing good will, connecting with others, or providing tips, new information or perspectives that the reader will find interesting and unique, and maybe even share.



Terry M. Isner
Owner/CEO
Branding & Business
Development
302.519.8895
tisner@jaffepr.com

The "So what? Who cares?" filter has other uses besides telling you whether or not to pursue a project. The filter may help you decide which direction you should take the content. For example, asking yourself "So what? Who cares?" may show you that the information would be valuable to a specific industry, and would work best in the firm's newsletter. Or perhaps colleagues and peers would find it most valuable, so LinkedIn would be the best place for it.

Ideas That Fail the "So What?" Test

Here are several content ideas that almost always fail the filter.

- We're moving to a new office! So what?
- We're launching a new website! Who cares?
- Happy third anniversary, Alan the associate! Okay, Alan's mom will like this one.
- We are updating our brand identity! Not sure many people will care.
- This partner wants to be on the Late Show, or other such vanity projects. I'm sure someone will care once it happens.

No need to toss all of these ideas out the window, though. Almost all of them can become interesting, valuable content with a little more thought and finesse. Moving to a new office? Build goodwill in the community by running a social media campaign with some of your attorneys talking about what they love about the new place. Updating the brand identity? Describe your values, or tell the story about your mission statement. And one of the best ways to feed an ego while providing valuable content is having attorneys showcase their authority and thought leadership by articles for a firm blog.

Even if a message isn't impactful outside of the firm, you may find ways to combine it with other information to boost its value. For example, a new website that is designed to provide a unique and personal experience tailored to each visitor might pique some interest. Or you can highlight a new resource page that will be helpful to clients.

An anniversary doesn't just celebrate a length of time, but could be a reason to tell stories about your people or highlight their successes. By digging a little deeper, you might get a lot of people in your target audience to care.

The UV BG Filter

There's almost always a way to turn non-newsworthy topics into sticky pieces of content that might support uniqueness, value, branding, and growth – UV BG. Which, by the way, is another filter I use with my clients to help them develop and curate their communications.

In other words, ask yourself these questions:

- How does this information help build my or the firm's reputation?
- Does it present me as an expert and provide my audience with value?
- Does the information validate that your client has aligned with the right legal team?
- Does the addition of a new attorney at the firm strengthen its roster or culture?

Think about what you are promoting and ask, "Will anyone care?" If not, ask how to make the subject matter valuable, and to whom? These two simple questions will help guide your communications team and ensure that every piece of content is worth something.

Want some more input on business development, marketing, and big-picture questions about firm culture? Reach out to me, Terry M. Isner, at tmisner@jaffepr.com.