



## Finding Your Digital Voice

by Emily Reeves / 5.2013

### Overview

Your brand has a personality, a message tone and voice. How you convey that online is just as important as how you convey that in your television, radio and print advertising. But online communications are more personal and involve two-way engagements. And each digital channel has different needs. This digital whitepaper covers how to approach and plan for your digital voice in all of these channels.

### What is a brand voice?

A brand with a strong personality, or voice, stands out more to customers and makes a bigger impact on their choosing the brand when it comes time to make a purchase decision. While many brands have figured out how to establish and deliver a consistent brand voice in “traditional” channels, brands are flailing in the digital sphere. What is appropriate? What is the difference between wit and snark? How should you respond to people who are out to complain about everything? Does your brand have to be funny to stand out online?

Your Brand Voice Is The  
**HEART & SOUL**  
Of Your Communications

More than specific words and phrases, your brand voice is the tone in which you speak to and connect with your audience. Many things contribute to the “voice” of your brand: a store atmosphere, logos and colors, experiences with employees, and every single interaction online.

Is your brand:  
**authoritative?**  
**informative?**  
**witty?**  
**fun?**

Your voice can be authoritative, informative, fun or just plain witty, but regardless, it must be authentic. Your audience will be able to tell if it's not genuine. And, as studies have shown throughout the years, consumers buy products from brands that they connect to on an emotional level — and stay away from brands that they don't.

### *Finding Your Digital Voice*

Create a grid with the following columns:

- Traditional channel brand voice for your brand
- Digital channel personalities and users for the actual channels
- Your target audience tone, words, images used on digital channels

Start by outlining who your brand is in the “traditional” world (these can be your rows under the “traditional channel brand voice for your brand” column in your grid):

- What are the goals and objectives you have set out to achieve with your communications?
- What is the single most important message you try to communicate to customers? (Come up with one thing, not a series of things in one sentence!)
- If your brand was a person, how would you describe it/him/her? Think physically and personality. Is he tall? Does he play sports? Is he busy with his family? Or is he single and active with his friends on the weekend? Is he rough and gruff? Or is he stylish and into technology? Is he personable? Or more introverted? Is he the life of the party or is he hanging out in the kitchen with the chef learning new cooking techniques? Create a character that represents your brand.
- Who is your target audience? If you are a luxury fashion label and your brand has been around for 20 years. Should your social voice reflect your 20 year old life? Perhaps. If you're selling to 20 year olds. But if your prices are high and 40 year old women love your clothing, you should be talking to them. If your company creates technology solutions, your social messaging should cater to IT professionals and CIOs. Your brand should have a voice that talks to consumers in a language they understand. If there is a disconnect (even if you have high engagement), you may not be communicating with your most valuable audience.

Next, you will want to cross your personality and target audience with the personality and users of digital channels in order to figure out where you should be communicating. Below are just a few examples of digital channels, their users and what they are doing on those channels (these can be your rows under the “digital channel personalities and users for the actual channels” column in your grid). Think about your brand in the context of these channels and ask yourself if it makes sense for your brand to be there.

- Pinterest is heavily used by women in their 30's with young families. The most frequently pinned content includes food/recipes, fashion and crafts.
- Google+ skews towards males in their 20's who are single and early adopters of technology.
- Instagram has a growing teenage audience, though everyone who uses Instagram is looking for interesting images.

Once you decide what channels make sense for your brand, listen and watch the channels and the users that fall within your target audience. What is the tone that they use in their posts and shares? What words are trending? What is it about the images that get shared more than others that make them shareable? (These categories can be your rows under the “your target audience tone, words, images used on digital channels” column in your grid)

- What words are they using to describe their experiences?
- What brands do they reference and how do they describe those brands?
- What do they celebrate in life? What do they complain about in life?
- What are in the images that they share?

With your grid completed, step back and start circling the things that you find are common in all three columns. You will quickly and easily see where your brand can fit in and what you can talk about that makes sense for your brand, your target audience and specific channels.

<b>Your Traditional Channel Brand Voice</b>	<b>Digital Channel Personalities &amp; Users</b>	<b>Your Target Audience Tone Use</b>
Goals & objectives	Pinterest: female, 30-years old, young family, recipes, crafts, fashion	Words used to describe experiences
Single most important message to communicate	Google+: male, 20-years old, single, tech-oriented	Brands referenced and how described
Describe your brand as a person	Instagram: teenagers, image-focused	Life celebrations and life complaints
Your target audience	Other channels	Image content

### *Define Your Digital Voice*

Now you need to put some definition to the voice that your brand will use online so that everyone who works within your company can be consistent in how the brand is talking with your customers and potential customers. And these categories need to be defined for **each** digital channel.

#### **Channel Objective**

What do you want to accomplish through communications on this particular digital channel? This should be something that is measurable.

#### **Channel Audience**

Who are the people that use this particular channel and how do their interests align with your brand?

#### **Personality**

Think of your brand like a character, and a character who always wants something. Customers won't listen to you talk about a vacuum cleaner for more than a minute unless you start talking to them about what that vacuum "wants," and the obstacles it needs to overcome to fill that want. You know your brand's message better than anyone; therefore, you need to design your messaging to communicate that message. For what does your brand stand for? With what kinds of lifestyles and people can it be aligned? Consider what your target demographic likes besides your product or service

and explore how you can integrate these things into messaging. Be true to your message, but be artful in your communication.

### **General Tone**

Because you want your brand voice to be genuine and natural, it will likely be inspired by your *own* voice. Is it funny? Laugh-out-loud funny or wink-and-a nod funny? Is it authoritative? Scholarly authoritative, or like an older brother explaining something really cool to his younger brother authoritative?

### **Content & Language**

Content marketing is all about telling a story. Be specific about the story that your brand is telling and the content that will support that story. Keep in mind that consumers don't want you to tell them that your product is amazing, they want you to show them. They want specifics, examples, and stories.

In the online world your words, videos and images are the only things you have at your disposal to establish a connection between your brand and your customer. There are no face-to-face interactions with employees to ensure that your brand comes across as human and caring. So as you build your online content, whether it's for your website, social media pages, blogs, or any other channels, consider how the communication of your message is coming across. Be real, transparent and specific in all communication so that your brand really speaks to your customers.

Although your brand may be the expert in its field, coming off sounding like you're smarter than your customers could turn people off pretty quickly. Establishing appropriate brand language will give you a foundation for the types of words, phrases and jargon to be used in social media communications. Want to sound very exclusive? Use insider language and acronyms. Want to sound hip? Stay up-to-date on the latest slang. But be careful – if you make a misstep in slang it'll look like you're trying too hard.

### **Customer Service/Responsive Tone**

How will you respond to service issues? Your customers are going to use digital channels to reach out with service issues. You can not avoid it. And their comments are going to public for all to see. You need to have a plan for dealing with and responding to these issues that aligns with your brand voice and quickly takes care of the issues. Err on the side of caution in this arena. It's easy for people to take things out of context, blow things out of proportion, or to have a viral disaster when it comes to the digital channels. Avoid these by always responding to customer inquiries, insults and instigations with respect. Sometimes a comment may call for a bit of wit, but respond as though you would expect an employee to respond face-to-face. This will generally keep you on the right side of the line of appropriateness.

<b>Channel Objective</b>	<b>Channel Audience</b>	<b>Personality</b>
<b>General Tone</b>	<b>Content &amp; Language</b>	<b>Responsive Tone</b>

## *A Few Things To Watch Out For*

### **Delegating Resources**

Selecting an intern to manage your brand's Facebook page up is not the way to begin a digital strategy. Even if you are somewhat ignorant to how the digital platforms work, you are fully capable of creating a messaging strategy that speaks to your audience. Start with the long-winded version, exploring who your customer is and what you want to communicate to them. Then you can rely on someone else to put it into soundbites, videos and photos fit for the various social networks.

### **Clarity**

With transparent and consistent communications established, it's important to strive for clarity in how you deliver your brand's voice to your customers. Don't make your customers guess at what you are trying to say by using overly flowery or superfluous writing that only serves to muffle your brand's voice. Strive for clarity of meaning first so that your customers don't get confused, become frustrated and then abandon your page. Less is truly more when it comes to your brand's online communications.

### **Consistency**

In order to maintain the human connection you've built with your customers offline, it's important for them to have a similar experience with your brand online. When the brand experience differs from offline to online, you risk confusing your customers by not delivering what they've come to expect. And inconsistent experiences can break the trust you've worked so hard to establish. Review all online brand touch points for consistency with the brand voice you've already established offline and make sure your brand's online elements speak with the same tone and personality as those that are offline.

### *Interested in learning more?*

Contact Emily Reeves at [ereeves@stoneward.com](mailto:ereeves@stoneward.com) for help planning your brand's digital engagements.

### *About Stone Ward*

Stone Ward is a full-service ad agency. Established in 1984 by Larry Stone and Millie Ward, today the agency employs 52, with capitalized billings exceeding \$40 million. The agency's offices are in Chicago and Little Rock.

### *About Emily Reeves, Director of Digital Innovation & Insight Planning*

As the agency's digital champion, Emily Reeves proves that Stone Ward has the offerings, expertise and alliances to bring sound, measurable digital innovation to our clients' marketing efforts. A seasoned communications strategist with a passion for all things digital, Emily has distinguished herself as an avid blogger, social media speaker, industry observer and moderator. In her role as digital thought leader for Stone Ward, Emily collaborates with our team of agency leaders in creative, brand management, public relations, media, digital technology and video production to create relevant ways to tell our clients' stories in the digital space and to provide meaningful measurement and analytics as a tool for calculating our efforts. Emily's focus on measurement extends to her duties as the agency's research leader, where she works

with Stone Ward clients to develop and execute research plans that inform integrated client marketing efforts.

*Sources:*

[4 Ways To Find Your Brand's Voice](#)

[Does Your Brand Have Digital Laryngitis](#)

[Finding Your Brand Voice](#)

[7 Things Content Marketers Can Learn From Fiction Writers](#)

[Tips For Finding Your Brand's Social Voice](#)