

Pattern Speech for Introduction to Social Media, by Jane Genova, President of Genova Writing, Coaching and More, June 2010

Thank you for that kind introduction.

In 2005, I was where most of you are today. Like you, I sensed the power of the web and how it could help my business. But, I was an old print person. I needed to learn a whole new way of doing business. Yes, today's talk is about business, not communications per se.

I wanted to learn what I needed to learn hands-on.

So, every day for four months in 2005, I traveled from my office in New Haven, Connecticut to a courtroom in Providence, Rhode Island. There I blogged the lead paint trial. I did that blogging on my own dime. The Return on Investment or ROI has been extraordinary. Here is some of what I found out and what you will find out today:

- First of all, through trial and error and studying my web metrics, I discovered the right voice or tone to use online. That voice communicated “smart,” but not “too smart.” Smart was credible. Smart was a pull force. Too smart was alienating. Yes, I built a number of diverse communities through my blogging. They included security analysts, lawyers, corporate executives, and child advocates. They followed my coverage. They emailed me. They called me. They sent me

snail mail. You can see that blogging on <http://janegenova.com> under “legal.” And that’s how I started generating new business in a new way.

- Secondly, I got down cold the way search engines like Google and Yahoo “thought.” The term for that is “search engine optimization” or, for short, SEO. Knowing SEO gave my content the number one or number two rankings on coverage of the trial on search engines. The media pays attention to what’s on those search engines. Mainstream reporters contacted me for interviews. I wound up “owning” the share of mind on that trial. Check the web on lead paint litigation, public nuisance, Rhode Island, and, you bet, I’m there. And that was years ago.
- Third, I came to see the value of the soft sell. I dropped forever the hard sell. For example, instead of telling people what a great communicator I was, I showed them through my blogging and podcasts. What I showed them is how I could analyze the presentation strategies and tactics the lawyers were using. The web provides a stage on which we can showcase our skills. The web now is my primary new business development tool.

Today, you’ll learn what I did and what I’m still learning. And that’s:

- ❖ One, your voice or persona or presence online is the fastest, cheapest, and most compelling way to reach all the constituencies you need to reach. Those

constituencies might be your current customers, clients, prospects, shareholders, vendors around the world, employees, regulators, media, and the investment community. And once you get their attention, you leverage this forum to market, brand, advocate, activate, educate, cooperate, recruit, motivate, do course correction, and actually sell. The web operates via niche. Therefore, to reach some constituencies such as employees or vendors you would set up separate sites. They may or may not have a password for access. Yes, there are open sites and password-restricted sites. Some are free. Some have a paywall. You have to decide what mix of approaches work best for your constituencies. Giving password-only access to certain people can enhance the prestige of the site and make them feel “special.” Chrysler had done that with certain media. Your internal communications might operate on a password basis.

- ❖ Two, your digital sites are your company’s eyes and ears. You use them to find out whatever you need to know to succeed in your business. That’s because the web is a two-way medium. It’s interactive. The feedback you get you probably couldn’t purchase from a marketing or quality control organization.
- ❖ And, three, the web keeps mutating. That means you have to continue to change too in what you do, how you do it, and how you measure results.

Feeling overwhelmed, already? Join the club. We in business are not used to these digital tools, ever-changing web strategies and tactics, the transparency, and the noisy feedback from all corners of the globe.

I had started out my career handling communications for The Organization Man and The Professional Woman.

I had worked full-time worked for GM, IBM, Chevron, and Kraft.

CORPORATE. The corporate voice was that of a god. It was all-knowing. We used the term “statesmanlike” to describe that tone.

WEB. On the web, the corporate voice is human. It’s one human being trying to reach other human beings so that we can sort out together what we’re doing. You might think of Bill Clinton as our first social media leader. He put his humanity out there and felt our pain. The best introduction to this shift in organizational persona or voice is the 2000 book **THE CLUETRAIN MANIFESTO: THE END OF BUSINESS AS USUAL.**

I’ll share with you a quote from **THE CLUETRAIN MANIFESTO:**

“Markets are conversations. People in them communicate in language that is natural, open, honest, direct, funny, and often shocking. Whether explaining or

complaining, joking or serious, the human voice is unmistakably genuine. It can't be faked."

Ask yourself: When BP chief executive officer Tony Hayward spoke for the corporation, did he engage the world in a conversation? The answer, of course, is no.

In contrast, populist Sarah Palin is never not human. You may or may not like Palin. That's irrelevant. What counts is that Palin is achieving her goals of increasing her influence and making a ton of money. She's all out there on Facebook. It's said that her endorsement on Facebook of Carly Fiorina helped Fiorina win the GOP Senate primary race in California.

CORPORATE. The corporation was vertical. It talked top down. It operated on a tight chain of command. No one could talk out of turn. In fact, very few dared to talk. And if they did, they better have earned that right.

WEB. The web or social media is horizontal. It's open. Any one can jump in.

When the Microsoft brand was in crisis because of global lawsuits, it gave one of its employees Robert Scoble the right to be the voice of Microsoft. Scoble had a blog. In it he said what he thought and how he wanted to put it. If he saw a competitor's product better than Microsoft's he told his readers to go out there and buy it. You

might want to read Scoble's book **NAKED CONVERSATIONS**. Microsoft's brand bounced back.

CORPORATE. Another difference was that corporate communications was totally "long form." By "long form," I mean it was wordy. It didn't respect its audiences enough to be concise and to the point. Both internal and external communications went on and on like a speech by Fidel Castro. They didn't give that a second thought.

WEB. On the web, there is a continual migration to "short form." Less is more. Better to say it in the 140 characters on Twitter than the 300 words of a blog post. Better to capture in a few images for YouTube than a 230-page print book. Better to have clients download your 33-page free eBook than your 75-page comprehensive study.

This march to short form is permeating all communications. In the rather conservative field of law, law firms, judges and juries are demanding speakers and writers to be concise. They want lawyers to give one good example as evidence, not four weak ones. The message even in that old-line profession is: Hey, buddy, don't waste my time with too much.

CORPORATE. The last key difference between organizations Before the Web and After the Web is the amount of risk tolerated.

Some businesses still attempt total control over what they say. As if that's possible. We all know now that more a company tries to control the less reach it has with all its constituencies. Think that memo which went out internally at GM and which every blogger and every mainstream journalist picked up and covered. That memo told employees they couldn't use the term "Chevy" any more. The car was now referred to as "Chevrolet."

Duh? Well, something happened inside Fortress GM. The next day THE WALL STREET JOURNAL reported that GM indicated that memo had been misunderstood. The term "Chevy" could be used.

WEB. On the web your voice is only credible if it you are willing not give up control. You must be totally vulnerable. Totally transparent. You take the risk of revealing yourself. You have to. Anything other than a human voice is a joke. The human voice comes through in your tweets, podcasts, video trailers, videos, blog posts, and on your Facebook wall. Your voice also comes through in your press releases with their links that you route through PR Web.

The best guide to the HOW of all this is the book THE DIGITAL HANDSHAKE. The author is Paul Chaney. Chaney was my social media coach in 2004.

If you still aren't all that comfortable with creating your online presence, that's to be expected. After all, you might think of being out there on the web as learning to speak a second language. Yeah, call it SMSL. Social media as a second language.

How we engage in a digital conversation requires that we become fluent in the new language of commerce.

We no longer speak the old corporatese. That old tone, word choice, length – Over. Done. Stick a fork in it.

The new language of commerce has some fundamentals we got to get down. They include:

The basics of SEO or Search Engine Optimization. That's also called organic search. It's free, as opposed to paid search, such as paying for every prospect who clicks on your site.

It's through SEO that you stand out on the web. There are many voices on the Internet competing for attention. There is so much content which the search engines can pick up. How do you boost the odds that you will be one that is noticed and taken seriously? Answer: SEO.

You can stop taking furious notes. After this seminar, you can order as a reference guide THE TRUTH ABOUT SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION. The author is Rebecca Lieb. Lieb knows her stuff. Right from the get-go, she says:

“Search engine optimization is the art and science of getting digital content to appear prominently in organic search engine results. ... It’s about being front-and-center when a searcher raises his proverbial hand and says: ‘Hey! Over here! I’ve got a question a need an answer. Who’s available to help?’”

You want to be the one who’s there. You do this by:

- ✓ Thinking like those doing the actual searches. If the searchers are looking for a lender, what’s in their mind is “borrowing money,” not “lending institution” or “bank.” That brings up the importance of the right keywords. Those words are what you use in your content to bring the search engines to fit your copy in the right categories on the web. The web is a big place. You can find out the keywords which work from talking with your audiences, analyzing your competitor’s word choice, and experimenting.

- ✓ You also think like an entertainer. The web is show biz, not buttoned-down office. That means your keywords will refer to what is grabbing people’s attention that day. It could be an aspect of the John Edwards’s scandal. It could be the latest poll numbers on Barack Obama. It could be the new jobs

figures. You will leverage these kinds of grabbers or connectors in all your communications, ranging from your tweets to your press releases.

- ✓ You must front-load those grabbers. That means they must be in your subject heading, your first few words in the post, and in the first paragraph. The web is an impatient media. If you're not there right there, you're not there.

- ✓ You must know the specific “grammatical” rules for each kind of site. For web sites, you need to understand home pages, landing pages, meta tags, and links among the pages. For blogs you need to understand that words trump graphics. The crawlers and spiders on search engines favor words. Blogs are made up of words. That's why people continue to blog even though it is a mature medium. Blogs are ideal for SEO.

That's that basics about SEO. But as Lieb points out, it's not just a science. SEO is also an art. An art is a craft. You'll get better and better at crafting your SEO the more you experiment, study the traffic patterns, and take risks. SEO is not just a bundle of tactics. It also involves plenty of intuitive feel for the process. You develop that sixth sense by being out there, trying and failing. That's why it's wise to start out low profile on your sites. You will make many mistakes. It usually takes a while to get ready for prime time.

The next part of the new language is deciding which digital tool you will use when and where. These are not mutually exclusive. You can simultaneously communicate

differently on Facebook, LinkedIn, blogs, podcasts, YouTube, and twitter. Each can and will reinforce each other. But you have to know the right voice for each.

In American English, there are many ways of speaking. There's the more formal kind of communication you use when applying for a job. This is the tone and word choice you would probably use on social network LinkedIn. There is the communication of intimacy we use with our significant others. This is probably the tone and word choice you would use on Facebook. There is the everyday way of speaking you use when riding the elevator in your residential complex. This is likely the tone and word choice you will use on your blogs. There is the exploratory way of speaking when you're fishing for information from a colleague. This is the tone and word choice you might use when approaching other sites and joining in their conversation.

You are wondering, aren't you: I can probably do well on a podcast but no way am I a Facebook person. You are exactly where you should be in this process. You have discerned that your voice and your goals and objectives will not be a good fit for every kind of tool on the Internet. There are some tools which you may never use.

That's where trying things out comes in. This is a hands-on craft. You don't hire a marketing firm to do that trying out for you. Instead you stick your own necks out. You fail, you succeed, you fail. And all the while you're getting to be master players on the Internet.

Through a disaster, I made the most progress on the learning curve about tone. The website for writers MediaBistro.com asked me to facilitate a discussion on a bulletin board. That was 2006. I adopted a top-down tone. I was there to teach them – or so I assumed. They had other thoughts. After all, they were digital natives, not a digital immigrant like myself. Well, through over 100 negative comments they taught me. I never did that again. All my conversations on the web are horizontal.

If you're not making mistakes on the Internet, you're not on it enough, you're not trying out enough, and you're not making a proper investment of your heart and mind. One more thing. Let me hammer this: Digital communications is niche based. If your blog on customer service starts bleeding into manufacturing topic, then stop that. Start another site on manufacturing. Direct your readers there through a link on your blog.

That brings us to the third part of this new language you will be learning. That is how links extend the reach of your voice. Links are those `Http://` addresses on the web. Those addresses refer to sites per se and specific content on those sites. Links go out from your sites and come in from other sites. They are sometimes called link bait or love links.

They pack a wallop on the web because they do at least three things:

One is that they call the attention of search engines to you. That's because search engines operate on the theory of the wisdom of crowds or the belief that what most

people value must have value. Links from other sites to your site tell search engines that other people see your site as having value.

The second thing they do is create connections between your site and other sites. On your site, you put a link to another site. Maybe it's an article from THE WALL STREET JOURNAL you want to make available to your readers. Maybe it is a comment you want to take issue with. Maybe it's a new community supporting a politician. Maybe it's to the PDF of the written copy of the ruling of the U.S. Supreme Court on mandatory arbitration.

Those outward links show your constituencies that you are up on what is going on, that you are making available to them what they won't have to hunt for themselves, and that you care about the subject and them enough to invest plenty of work.

Outward links are also a way of making friends and enemies. The web operates on strong opinions. If you don't have your share of enemies you're not a player. And, remember, controversy sells. Outward links also signal through their keywords that search engines should also be interested in what you're saying.

The next thing outward links can do is call attention to a new site you start. That site should have links to all your other sites. That speeds up the process of search engines finding out that there's a new part to you and also helps constituencies know you're there.

There is no rule of thumb about what kinds of links or how many you should have. You will get a feel for this. Your objectives in linking are:

- To attract links from other sites. This lets search engines and others on the web know you're there and that you matter. Again, this operates on the wisdom of crowds principle.
- To provide one-stop shopping on a subject for your constituencies. You not only provide the facts and your opinion on the coverage of the U.S. Supreme Court decision on Miranda rights. You provide links to other major coverage. You also provide access to the copy of the ruling itself. You might also give other links to where other information and commentary can be found. This can lead you to own the territory on the subject.
- To make allies and enemies on the web. Your link, its tone and content indicate your support or criticism of other content. Being willing to make strong statements and even being controversial is part of the game. Gawker, Politico, and HuffingtonPost all resonate on the web and in the hearts and minds of diverse constituencies because they have a strong voice and aim to generate controversy.

The advantage of starting on your social media strategy and tactics now is that you join the conversation. You are putting your organization out there in a fresh way, a way that constituencies have come to trust. They don't trust the traditional ways.

This way can accomplish more with fewer resources. That can give you an extraordinary ROI. Instead of spending millions in ad campaign, you could invest peanuts in providing the tools for consumers to download and then co-create a new version of your services. You could run a contest for the 12 best names for your new service or a repositioned service. All that in itself provides cool publicity. Yeah, create a PR Web release on it.

How to start? Go to typepad or wordpress and start a blog. Then try a podcast from it. Make an amateurish video of the chief executive officer mowing his or her lawn. This gives constituencies a peek at the human side. So, yeah, load it on YouTube. Set up a twitter account. Go to Facebook and decorate your Wall. Make a profile on LinkedIn. Redo your website.

Know what?

You will like doing this. It's real. It pulls the creativity out of you. And you will learn to learn. All you have to do is check the metrics. You will get it very fast what's working and what's not.

If you don't do this now, your competitors are. You will be conspicuous because of your absence. That will be so obvious that your constituencies will wonder if you're too set in your corporate ways to even try. They will start asking themselves: Are you attempting

to hide something by not being out there? And they will probably wonder what's wrong with your leadership which doesn't demand that you are out there.

If you are smart and I know you're smart, you are going to pick up several of these tools.

Now, let's briefly look at three case studies.

At one time, the WASHINGTON POST owned political news, analysis, and commentary. But, like much of traditional journalism, WaPo turned inward. It became more concerned about who was doing what inside than covering what was going on outside.

What an opening for a competitor. Two men left WaPo. They were John Harris and Jim VanderHei. In 2007, they started what we now know as the website Politico.com. The folks they hired to cover the 2008 election were hungry, in-touch with the people, and fast.

They didn't miss a trick. If Hillary Clinton had a stilted message on her website or emailing, they noticed it, they posted on it, and they sent links out on it. This speeded up metabolism gave them about 11 million unique visitors a month during that campaign. Eventually those who came to Politico to pick up those odd bits and pieces posted in real time, stayed. Those with tips went to Politico reporters. They wanted Politico to break their story.

You know the rest: Politico ate WaPo's lunch. It took over its influence. It is making standard political coverage seem not smart enough, not well connected enough, not fast enough. Can WaPo even stay in existence? I'm not betting on that.

Here's a second case study. It was conducted by Vivaldi Partners. And it confirmed that the web is a game of influence through niches. The web is not a game of numbers, like mass media.

Vivaldi looked at the social media efforts of Dunkin' Donuts and Starbucks. Vivaldi found that Starbucks had 80 percent more Facebook and Twitter followers than did Dunkin' Donuts. Know what? That didn't matter. What did matter is how strongly those followers felt about the brand. Those who followed Dunkin' were 35 percent more likely to recommend the brand than the followers of Starbucks.

Vivaldi also found that the tone of the content mattered. Dunkin' adopted a fun tone. One time it ran a contest for customers to send in photos of themselves drinking iced coffee in winter. One-hundred-and-forty sent in submissions. That led to 3.9 million product plugs through posts and updates.

Here is a third case study. On my blog Over-50, I am sponsoring a Fifty-Over-50 contest. It's like those Forty-Under-40 contests which feature young people heading on up. Mine features older professionals accomplishing great things, coming back after a stumble, or doing better after a career disaster than before. To be selected, candidates must audition,

American Idol-like. So far, this series has increased traffic 64 percent, brought in 54 percent additional coaching business, and led to several speaking engagements.

What now for you? Get online. That's where business is now being conducted.

Key in your company's name and the names of competitors. Which have the higher rankings and the most listings on search engines?

Try different keywords associated with your business to check how often the name of your company comes up. Check who's saying what about your company, your industry, and what your customers want.

Decide how you are going to use the social media tools you learned about today to boost your company's reach on the web, to position it as having the edge over the competition, to bring its accomplishments and developments to that attention of the right constituencies.

Then start.

Speedread some of the books I recommended.

Take a look at your website. Does it set you apart. Set up some blogs. You can do podcasts from them. Do some tweets. Decorate your wall on Facebook. Make a

compelling profile for yourself on Linked. Invite your friends and enemies to follow you on LinkedIn. Go around making short videos that can be downloaded on YouTube. The more amateurish the better. Call in a vendor to find out prices for three-minute video trailers for some of your services. Those video trailers are hot. Put them on your website, your blogs, your Facebook wall, and show them on LinkedIn as part of a case study. Sure, issue some PR Web press releases on some of things you're discovering on the web. Make use those releases follow the guidelines for SEO.

Don't feel you're ready for primetime? You may not be. So start out lower profile. Quickly you will find your strengths. Play to them in digital communications.

One more thing. If you're over-50 and have a good story to tell, you can audition for my Fifty-Over-50 series. You can reach me at Mgenova981@aol.com.

Thank you for paying attention. And now this goes interactive. It's time for you questions and comments ...

