

What you will read below is an actual discussion from members of a LinkedIn group discussing the spammers that get into groups trying to sell their wares through a dishonest approach in social media groups. I believe that this conversation represents what most people, that put time into groups, think. I believe this is an excellent lesson for everyone; people trying to get help from community and people trying to offer help from community. There is nothing dishonest about earning a living and selling products and services; just dishonest approaches. –Ed Rigsbee

LinkedIn Group: [Social Media for Nonprofit Organizations](#)

Discussion posted by [Jon Hardie](#):

This group feels like a cupcake tasting contest - so many great cupcakes & so little time. I try find really great questions - not faux plugs for a work product - & support it . What do you think? [Fernando Maneca](#) • Thanks for posting this question. This has been on my mind for quite some time now.

I've been cleaning house for the past few weeks. I left two other groups because too many people were high-jacking conversations onto their own blogs. I was spending far too much time trying to keep track of conversations that dove-tailed onto multiple blogs ... manually ... UGH!

I know I could have subscribed to those RSS feeds to help keep track of everything, but it just got too complicated, time consuming and cluttering my Google Reader, so I chose to unsubscribe, unsubscribe, unsubscribe ... and un-follow conversations that become cyclical.

What are you doing?

[Jon Hardie](#) • Fernando - Absolutely. I think that there are a few issues at play here ... lets just look at one of them - first we understand the behavior - then we look at the remedy.

1. Bait and Switch (creating a fake discussion question - to promote your stuff)

A person wants to put: their take, their podcast, their slide share, their "free" printed book (which turns out to be a pdf of the abstract), their video, their blog ... "their stuff" out there. Fair enough - no harm no foul.

The problem arises when folks fabricate a rhetorical question, and pose it as a legit discussion question (which coincidentally /nudge/nudge/ is addressed by their stuff) ... and then /surprise/surprise/ (just click on the tiny URL) and they have supplied their stuff as the /amazing/ perfect answer to their rhetorical question. Discussion? What discussion?

As I scroll down the discussion topics, this bait and switch hijacking (as you aptly called it) feels like a social media redlight district (choose your gender). What's advertised in the window (a great discussion/conversation) isn't what you get when you go inside (a free ginsu knife, or a chopper shredder dicer slicer, tonite only, for only \$9.99 sales person)

It's not being straight, it's manipulative. And if that is what they think social media is all about - no wonder social media gets a bad name ... and they don't get any customers. Would they be telling their clients that that was the way to build trust and loyalty ... not likely!

I think that SM is about building and sustaining conversational relationships across networks, with responsive listening, authenticity, transparency, passion, while delivering real value with every transaction. It's not about manipulation, coercion, bait & switch or smoke and mirrors. It's about being real.

If all of these buy me, read me, listen to me, hear me, see me, folks took some time to listen to the real questions, ongoing conversations, then joined in the conversations, actually contributed to the conversations - (called delivering real value) - and obliquely mentioned a blog article, a podcast as an additional resource - everyone wins.

In the process of delivering value you build awareness, understanding, and identity, shared trust and loyalty and real followers ... and folks who are interested in your stuff, read your stuff, talk about your stuff to their friends ... and their friends trust what you say, and they tell their friends to read your stuff ... an viral it goes.

Fernando, our shared frustration with bait and switch hijacking, I think is driven by being taken in, used, manipulated and taken advantage of ... which is no way to run a marketing campaign or to tell clients how to run theirs.

So what do I do ... like porcupines being amorous ... I listen very very carefully. Is this a real deal, real question, great topic - no hooks no bait ... and I support it, and respond. and acknowledge others, and value, and participate. Most of these discussions have dozens of great contributions.

An aside, I was in early text only newsgroups of several dozen folks linking the UK and the US in the early 80's at 300-1200 baud. Egalitarian, open, supportive responsive, authentic ... and wonderfully. zero tolerance for BS.

That's where "flaming" really got it's name. When members of the group took up words together, and banished the offenders to some remote planet, to form their own group to bait and switch each other. Like two continuous loop telemarketing recordings blaring out of speakers on opposing sides of the kitchen table - trying to sell each other the same thing over and over again and over again ... and no one is listening.

That make any sense ... ring any bells (except at Pavlov's front door)

but I digress...we can explore some of the other issues as this discussion emerges

Thanks Fernando, for nailing the experience right on the money.

[Fernando Maneca](#) • Jon ... I wonder how and when or if people use the "flag as inappropriate" links that are sprinkled throughout the site. Perhaps if we as a community were more diligent at identifying and filtering out hucksters and hijackers, this space would become less attractive to that kind of sales tactic.

Having said that, I understand the attraction to that tactic (in theory). If I want to get a message out there, I want to centralize it as much as possible so that delivering it requires the least amount of effort and time. Sure, I would want to drive as much traffic to my space as possible. The issue here is that this space is meant to be a place where we share knowledge and help each other ... and improve our community as a whole.

However, at best, this tactic demonstrates a lack of understanding of how social media/networks function. But truly, it demonstrates a level of selfishness that ultimately threatens the very fabric of social media/networking.

Again, thanks for starting this conversation. I hope more people join in as I think that together we can make this an even better place to "hang-out" and meet other people who have chosen to do what we do for the nonprofit world.

Thanks!

[Jon Hardie](#) • Fernando, I am less inclined to suggest or adopt punitive and reactionary approaches, such as inappropriate flagging. I think folks genuinely are trying to build traffic to their work product. So they join groups and create faux discussion questions to get click through's. The problem lies with intent.

Why am I here, and what do I want for outcomes? Is social media about megaphones or relationships? There are two subsets of folks in this group - (1) organizations that want to implement SM, or have adopted social media and want to learn how build SM capacity, and learn from each others experience, and from SM professionals.(2) and Consultants who want to help

organizations adopt SM, and SM best practices, share their insight, knowledge and experience, and who also want to build their own capacity by learning from clients and each other.

We learn best in positive supportive environments where it's OK to screw-up and learn ... and where there are no dumb questions. While we have different learning styles and map things cognitively very differently ... we can dramatically reduce the learning curve of having to individually re-create the wheel each time - from scratch - in a group setting - where we can benefit from others perspective, and insight driven by their unique experiences.

To do that we have to adopt a "what I learned in kindergarten - best practice". We have to get past the me me me me I I I stage, to the sharing stage - where everybody has a piece of the solution or the puzzle, everybody supports and listens to everybody else, everybody's contribution is valuable and appreciated, and everybody has their turn.

Fernando, what I hear you saying (and agree with), is how do we make this a place - this group, and these discussions places where we feel comfortable "hanging out" with folks we can be real, authentic, passionate, thoughtful, humorous with, learn from, support acknowledge - and ultimately, offer real value to one another from time to time ... as among friends.

And that takes at least two thing to happen. Owning your own fertilizer. And, checking our egos at the door , and instead investing in a shared community and in emerging and wonderful relationships ... rather than running rampant with our vuvuzela's and megaphones, hyping our own stuff, and wondering why everyone has their hands over their ears ... and no one is listening.

I think we have to model that to each other and invite civil, playful, thoughtful engagement and responsive listening, with one another - just as we would advise our client to do implementing SM with their stakeholders, staff, volunteers, board, donors and collaborative partners.

One set of SM behaviors builds isolation and frustration, the other set builds robust relationships, networks and followers ... just have to walk the talk

How does that approach sound? How do folks navigate the over-abundance of folks stuck in the loop self promotion - rather than joining the real conversations and contributing, mano a mano. [Fernando Maneca](#) • Absolutely ... just this morning, a friend and I were talking about the feeling we have that at any time were going to reveal ourselves as frauds ... and that we need to get over this feeling. We all have something to offer each other and the community at large, and we need to respect this in ourselves and in others as we share.

It is hard for me to accept this type of "sharing" from people who seem more interested in selling me something. But yes, not everyone's style is the same. So perhaps clicking the "Flag as inappropriate" should be reserved for abusive behavior. Yes, you're right.

Unfortunately, my time is limited. I have a full-time job and two very young children, which leaves me two hours for personal time each night. That's time with my wife, time for diversion, to read, to catch-up with family, friends and peers on social media, etc.

Following a dovetailed conversation just eats up too much of my time, so I have to unfollow that conversation. Which is too bad. Sometimes there's some great stuff, but...

OK I'm going in circles. Perhaps its time to just sit on the sofa and veg-out with my wife who's watching Project Runway. Mmmm and I think there's some Ben & Jerry's in the fridge.

Thanks for the conversation. I truly appreciate your understanding and willingness to dig deep to uncover the hidden stuff.

[Trudy Soucoup, M.A.O.L.](#) • I have throughly enjoyed your conversation. Thank you both, Jon & Fernando, for sharing your thoughts. I rarely have the time in my full-time life to join in

conversations - but erudite conversations like these always make me glad I decided to drop in. I have pretty much stopped reading the notices I get for exactly the reasons you stated - often a colossal waste of time.

I hope to read more on how those of us who are truly interested in dialogue can counter these 'sellers' in order to make this a more interesting place for us all.

[Laura Pence](#) • I have recently flagged a "discussion" as inappropriate and sent an e-mail explaining why I thought so to the moderator of that group. The "discussion" topic was actually an invitation to a free webinar, which is more of an event than a topic for discussion, but there are plenty of events of various kinds posted in this area of this particular group and many of them are quite useful. So far, so good.

The advertised free informational webinar purported to be 90 minutes of teaching on a subject that I am highly interested in, so I decided to register and check it out. I have recently attended similar webinars and a couple of them have been simply fantastic, while others were useful, but also very sales oriented. This particular webinar was a farce; there were approximately 3-4 slides with 1000 ft view content for the first 10 minutes and the rest was straight up product promotion and sales pitch. The service being sold sounded fantastic, but I have no interest whatsoever in buying anything from a company that literally tricks people into attending an infomercial by calling it something else. I would say that it was a complete waste of time, but I did learn that "I have a bad feeling about this" and that is something, anyway.

After the webinar I decided to do a bit of checking into the person who recommended the event. I had seen the same post or similar ones several times in several groups of which I am a member and I was curious. It turns out that it was posted by a "person" with 0 connections who is out of state and works for a company I have never heard of, but isn't the company selling the service. The position listed has absolutely no relation to any of the groups this fictional person has joined. The previous posts were by other people of the same background; I guess they can't keep posting their spam under the same names for very long because once you take a look at their profile it is glaringly obvious.

My point is that in this case I wanted to bring the moderators attention to the faker who is spamming the group and alert them that any future posts offering the same webinar are not legitimate events, but spam promoting commercials. I would hate for other busy professionals in the group to waste 90 minutes out of their day watching this tripe when there are legitimate businesses out there offering actual help and resources that are a much better use of time.

I was very frustrated with the misrepresentation of the content the webinar offered. I do not approve of dishonest methods and I don't understand how companies think that this is a good way to do business. Do people actually purchase things from people or companies that behave in such a manner? Would you?

[Mary Catherine Dabrowski](#) • Ditto, Amen and Alleluia! I "listen" to discussions more than participate in them--primarily because of time, or rather, lack of time. But I thoroughly enjoyed this discussion, Fernando and Jon, and had to say so.

I still have the expectation that those who post in this group and other LinkedIn groups are not spamming me. I get disappointed every now and then with bait-and-switch like Laura, with offers of a free ebook only to find out it is basically a table of contents and you need to purchase the rest of the book. But, for the most part, I have found good info here and some great free webinars that actually did explain/teach what they proposed to do.

Groups like this are the only way I can afford to learn about social media right now. So thanks to all of you who "get" it and share freely and sincerely.

[Jon Hardie](#) • Thank you both Trudy & Laura. Your posts dovetail perfectly.

"What do we all want for outcomes from this group", and, "How do we define success." The answers to these 2 questions are very different - based on your intentions going it.

Group 1 selling stuff that is product centered.

I visualize small groups of people at an event, in animated conversations. Along comes someone who barges in, interrupts, and loudly starts talking about themselves, their stuff, their product or service ... and folks are rolling their eyes, and slowly backing away, excusing themselves. This person is delivering a spray and pray, push marketing monologue with a 2% conversion rate. They seem to have no sense of community, of netiquette, of starting by listening, and joining in conversations ... and actually contributing value and building trust loyalty and ... duh (followers who would be delighted to see their stuff - if it wasn't bait and switch and it offered real value).

Sadly, they want to "use" the discussion group to sell their stuff". When, in fact, there are subgroups set up by Heather (our moderator), that are specifically designated for this work product marketing of: webinars, podcasts, videos, slide share - and folks should use them for that purpose.

Group 2. Learning from each other and sharing stuff - customer centered

Trudy, I think there are hundreds of thoughtful folks in this group with much insight to offer. I think we are all hungry for a real "community of practice" with an ongoing group conversation/discussions on lots of great topics - which is I believe is the intention of this group and certainly of this discussion.

Trudy, your comment about "no time speaks volumes ,on one hand, to net disposable time available to build personal capacity, and on the other hand speaks to the huge amount time (opportunity cost) consumed sorting out the goldmines from the landmines, and pushing the delete button; or sadly even worse, actually being taken in by hucksters i.e. Laura's sad experience of being scammed -

Suggestion Laura - one thing to do is name names and put it out there.

Laura, the net is really no different from "real life" is it? We make choices. We have self selected this SM for nonprofits group - IN HOPES of limiting the noise, and learning stuff, discovering and valuing the contributions and insight of others and offering value in those conversations ... not in spite of them.

Trudy and Laura, after spending hours one week slogging through the hype - I created a boilerplate comment that I cut and paste in the most egregious faux discussions.

"Thanks for the post - but it's a bit off topic. This is a discussion group not a classified section. (you can go to X for posting webinars, blogs, podcasts, videos ets) This is a social media group, we are investing in building professional relationships. What we really need, is your insight, ideas, suggestions and active responsive listening and direct participation in our conversations.

Idea: If you have real value to deliver to the discussion - folks will then seek out your stuff on your profile your signature, they may even suggest how you might deliver the message more effectively. Thanks for listening, and hope to see the real you in the discussion soon"

How do others engage this issue sensitively - without making it a time sink.

[Jon Hardie](#) • Thanks a bunch Mary Catherine ...Exactly!

As reflected in your own time management experience, 70% of social media group members (LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter etc) are listeners; and genuinely and appropriately feel they are a part of the ongoing conversation - OR they wouldn't be there! They continue listening ... ONLY as you can personally attest - if they receive/perceive real value in the transaction.

The very recent HP study on twitter describes - hands down - that popularity (the number of twitter followers) has little to do with "influence" in SM audiences - and everything to do with the

quality and value of the engagement in relationships.

If the bait and switchers were to "get it" ... they would be investing in responsive listening and relationship building, and joining in the conversation, being authentic, transparent, passionate, real and ... appropriately deliver value to the discussion members when they actually participate.

So, Mary Catherine ... Listening really is the heart of social media. We need to recognize that in our SM conversations, that we are always writing for and delivering value to this much larger audience - many of times larger - like the part of the iceberg that lies below surface of the ocean. Even the Captain of the Titanic didn't get it.