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2010: The Year of Saying, "I Got It"

BY FC EXPERT BLOGGER LYNETTE CHIANG Thu Jan 7, 2010

This blog is written by a member of our expert blogging community and expresses that expert's views alone.

UPDATE! [Read the response by a Named Party to this post](#)

I'm not talking about "getting it" as in "I get that you're just not into me" or "Stay away from me - I got it."

I mean, simply acknowledging that you got someone's email, letter, message, enquiry, job application or order for fluffy slippers.

I'm noticing a disturbing trend in business non-interactions: the non-response being offered up as a response.

Whether it's a job application, a follow-up, an eBay or Craigslist purchase, people are sincerely and faithfully not responding.

The [Cingular "dropped call" campaign](#) dramatized the perils of non-response due to technology failure, with people jumping to wrong conclusions, off buildings and down people's throats - and the fallout can be as damaging as the Cingular ads illustrate.

First, your non-response causes the non-recipient to switch from thinking warmly about your product, your company, and yourself, to bleakly. If they manage to pin your name or face to an email address will tell 10,000 others on the internet. Continue to non-respond, and they will plot and scheme to hire a Unabomber to erase you and your lousy widget from the planet. Just like road rage causes some to roll down a window and pull a gun? I assert that non-responding taps the same neural pathways.

I recently applied for a gig which sounded like it suited me down to the ground. Let me share with you the job description:

About the Client Relationship Manager:

Our clients aren't interested in data; they aren't interested in crunching numbers - they're interested in getting answers to critical business questions. Our relationship managers ... excel at listening to our clients, understanding their questions ...

About You:

- * You are friendly, motivated, and smart
- * You find business endlessly fascinating
- * You like talking to people
- * You are comfortable crunching numbers and drawing conclusions based on the crunched numbers
- * You like technology but are happy to let really smart MIT computer scientists build it
- * You have a bachelor's degree
- * You might have a few years of relationship management experience
- * You might know something about global trade

** You're cheesy enough to care about making people happy and making the world a better place*

It's a refreshing job description, isn't it? I prepared a response, sent it off, then waited for an "I got it". The ad prohibited phone calls. I followed up a couple of times just to make sure it landed. Nothing. Carrier pigeon, anyone?

The ad wanted someone "cheesy enough to care about making people happy and making the world a better place". Acknowledging a person - even by auto-responder - would certainly make the world a better place. A [Customer Evangelist](#) - a 24/7 Client Relationship Manager - "gets" this.

A good customer spoke to me for the first time in 3 years. For some reason, I never responded to a string of his emails. He admits to spending those 3 years stewing over it and sticking pins in a small, Oriental-looking rag doll. His emails must have gone into a black hole because I try, how I try, to answer every email, even if just to auto-respond, "I got it."

I recently bought a laptop protector from a company called iPearl Inc for \$29.95. It arrived damaged. The company told me to send it back for a refund. I sent it and [posted pictures of it](#). No response. Several months and emails later, no sign of my PayPal refund, and they're still blithely selling the things ([I finally received customer satisfaction](#) as a result of this blog post, thank you iPearl Inc).

So, I started thinking murderously. Trawling the internet for ways to trace the owner, so I can hire a pyromanic with a flame thrower to torch their warehouse and blow up pallet after pallet of Made-in-China iPearl laptop covers sky high. I feel embarrassed for the entire Chinese race, of which I'm a card carrying member. Even if they simply wrote "Sorry the cover arrived damaged, and we blame it on you", it would be more definitive than a Non Response.

Once, when the first contractor to sew my [Traffic Cone Bag](#) went e-AWOL, I eventually cross-haired her Las Vegas picket fence on Google Earth and sent someone from my 25,000 strong customer community to her door to save her the problematic trip to the post office. A simple "Got it, can't do it, luv" would have stopped me from stalking her and the \$500 I eventually lost on trusting her.

And then there was the fancy hamper company that didn't send a timely acknowledgement of a gift. I felt I had to verify the contents with the birthday girl, in case they'd swapped out the fancy soap Dial Deodorant and the Marcona almonds for Planter's Peanuts and ... you get the idea.

Failing to say, "I got it" erodes the cornerstone of an enduring relationship: trust. "Without trust, we cannot start," an artist in Indonesia once told me, as he asked for half the money up front.

Non-responding damages trust between friends and family too.

"I send cards with money to nieces and nephews, and silence is now the norm," laments a friend. "You don't know if they actually got the money. Or got abducted." Technology has so reduced the attention span of youth that they neglect to text "thx, got."

So how to respond and stay sane?

Let thoughtful auto-responders do your dirty work:

1. Job applications submitted by email - set up an auto responder to state that the application landed. This indicates to the sender they got your email address right. "We received your application with thanks. You'll be hearing from us if we have more questions for you." It's that simple. See the example from Six Apart below.
2. If the candidate is clearly not suitable for the job, super decent companies will auto-respond something like: "Thank you for your recent application. Your skills don't quite fit our requirements at this time ..."
3. If you trawl through hundreds of emails each day, shoot back "I got it, stand by." That's pretty easy to cut and paste. Or, paste: "I got it. I'm flat out like a lizard drinking, so if I haven't gotten back to you in a week, or if it utterly can't wait, poke me again. Please."

People will understand - we're all busy.

4. For nieces and nephews who are sent money - just call and say thank you, or it might be your last windfall ever.

5. Check your junk email box. Often.

"I read you", "Roger", "over and out" and other forms of [voice procedure](#) - and were invented for a reason.

Voice procedure communications are intended to maximize clarity of spoken communication and reduce misunderstanding -

Wikipedia.

The need for clarity didn't end when we stopped talking and started emailing.

You spend millions building up trust in your brand. You can destroy it in minutes for the sake of three words. "I got it." It's the "I love you" and "Just do it" of the new decade.

The origin of the non-response conundrum?

She: "Do you think she's more attractive than me?"

He: (no response)

+++

UPDATE: An example of a good 'auto response' from [Six Apart](#)

01/08/2010 22:03:24 Thank you for your interest in Six Apart Ltd. We received your resume and look forward to reviewing it. If your background and experience are a good match for the position, we will be in touch shortly. In the event you are not contacted, please be assured that we will keep your resume on file so that you may be considered for future opportunities. Again, we appreciate your interest in Six Apart Ltd. and we wish you all the best with your job search. Six Apart Recruiting

The recruiters at Six Apart may do nothing more with your resume than use it as a virtual beer coaster, but it leaves you with a better feeling about the company, its products and staff than silence.

Customer Evangelist the [Galfromdownunder](#) has vowed to interface more and more with human beings, even if it costs more. It leads to better emails

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Rick Langlois 02/03/2010 09:05 AM

I plan to send a link to this article to everyone in my office. I can't do it today or I'll be fined. I work for a University and today is the first of four furlough days I must take. We have been soundly warned against doing ANY "company" work on our furlough day. The trouble is, for many of us, work can be life and life can be work.



Michael Kelly 01/17/2010 12:17 AM

You makes several good points Lynette. One point seems to be that with evolving communication technology, our 100,000 year old habit of looking into each others eyes, observing its reaction to each word we say, gauging interest, tempo, receptivity, etc., has now been replaced with 'emailing_sending_sound.mp3' followed by silence We've put our trust into a new and somewhat reliable system, though often unreliably managed. Face to face we have an immediate gauge of how well our message comes across. As we move along the analog to digital spectrum, that reassurance deteriorates as we go. At least with the post , we had some reassurance of either hand delivery, uniformity of mail receptacles and laws against tampering with them. There was some trust into the system. But now we place our trust and time and money often into a system each of us can customize with wacky rules, with constant system changes and upgrades and Blackberry sync with gmail app and a 3rd party outlook integrator things which woops, wipes your emails and changes your contacts back to 3 year old information, or in your case, we send our emails to corporations without standard protocols or traditions of what courtesy looks like. All this can be frustrating, because not being heard is to lack power, and lacking power and feeling taken advantage of indeed can enrage us when we are at our wits end. Great post on fast company,

cheers,
~Michael Kelly



Katherine Krohn 01/14/2010 04:27 PM

Lynette, I enjoyed your essay regarding the issue of people in this "busy world" failing to acknowledge our emails, phone messages, birthday gifts, or even blog postings. It does seem that scattered thoughts, fragmented thoughts, are all the rage.

A friend of mine tells me how she answered the telephone the other day with a "hello," after which her sixteen-year-old daughter retorted, "Mom--NO ONE says hello anymore." So it is now hopelessly old-fashioned to bother with extraneous words in our communications, including the once-popular favorites, "hello," "goodbye," or, like you mentioned, "got it"?

I recently read in More magazine that if you want to "act old," leave a phone message. (Please also note that a "message" is an out-dated term—it is a voice mail, says said source.) Apparently voice mail is too time-consuming for all concerned. In other words, people can see on their caller ID that you've called, so you needn't bother leaving a message; because even if you did, no one would listen to it anyway. (BUT, I argue, when "old-fashioned" types like me see that someone has called and hasn't left a voice mail message, we assume that the call wasn't urgent or that the caller plans to call back later...so we might not call her or him back.)

We have more information in front of our eyeballs than ever before, but still something is missing. Wouldn't it be nice if we all cleaned the useless clutter from our minds on a daily basis (like through meditation or whatever it takes), in order to have the capacity to focus on more of the important stuff?

Just a few thoughts...my contribution to the deepening well of information-overload! I truly enjoyed your blog. Thanks for writing it.

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Katherine Krohn
Author/Freelance Writer
<http://www.katherinekrohn.com>



Kent Stephan Jensen 01/13/2010 02:00 PM

Brilliant article Lynette.

15 years ago I had a boss who didn't greet me back when I said "Goodmorning", "Hello" or simply nodded my head at him in the morning. After about a year of non returned greetings I felt seriously offended. So I cornered him and told him how utterly humiliating his behaviour was. His response "Hey, there are more than a hundred workers here. Greeting everyone back would take way too much of my time". I responded "I don't care if you don't greet the others - but you have to greet me. Your behaviour humiliates me".

Since that day he always greeted me. A few times I tried not to respond. But naturally, I couldn't help smiling a little.

Let's hope your article can help wake up at least a great amount of auto resonances.

Greetings,
Kent
<http://workworkwork.tumblr.com>



Hugh Larkin 01/11/2010 11:58 PM

Lynette:
You're right, we all need to say in some fashion, "I got it." Businesses are the worst at responding, as in your resume example. In my personal case, during the recession of the early 80's when I got laid off from my first full-time professional job, I sent out over 2500 resumes, but was surprised to get over 1800 responses that all politely said 'sorry, but no work' in one form or another. And in '97 when I got laid off from another firm, I sent out about 100 resumes and got only a couple of responses. Shows what a lack of care is now pervasive in the business community in general. Resumes, e-mail inquiries, or product return, it makes no difference - there is usually a lack of acknowledgment to the sender. And what I hate the most is that businesses want us to respond to them ASAP when they try to communicate; and if we don't, we get penalized. We could also rant on about automated telephone answering systems.

Friend to friend connections are usually the easiest to allow a no or late response. But then again, we also shouldn't 'ignore' friends. The issue here is that we, as a society, are now conversing in short sentences, too often with abbreviated words/terminology. And we send/pass on too much junk as a means of staying in touch. While technology allows us to be more connected, we just don't know how to communicate clearly.

my deflating \$0.02 worth,

Hugh



Merl Ledford 01/10/2010 11:55 PM

Failure to respond to clients in a punctual manner is the Number One reason lawyers get sued. So for people in my business, same-day response to client phone calls/emails is critical.

I sent a link to Lynette's well-written article to all my lawyer clients with a quick reminder that same-day response is a Must, especially when the news is bad. We all hate to make those "bad news" phone calls while the "good news" calls are the first to get returned. For good risk management standpoint, my attorney clients have to order their calls the other way around.



B Carlton 01/10/2010 12:13 AM

Talk about "non-response". I forgot my password to this web site so I could add a comment. They never sent me my password!!! Is it a snow-day today? Anyway, I tried a few more passwords tonight and finally stumbled in here.

At some point, I think we will get over-whelmed at the amount of electrons coming our direction. I think many companies are already over-whelmed.

This week I went online to see if my insurance company had posted my payment from last month and to determine what I owed. It was still not posted. I call customer service and find out they only post payments once a month. Until then, it still shows I owe money. Seems archaic that they can't be more current with customer history. On the other hand, maybe smart. Customers will see a balance owing and will pay again creating duplicate payments. Certainly helps cash flow.

It doesn't give me a warm-fuzzy though that they know what they're doing when it comes to an internet presence.



Walter Jacques 01/09/2010 02:54 PM

Lynette, congratulations on being the first customer-oriented person I've known to even address this issue. There's not a bigger grinder to me than non-acknowledgment of an issue (like your laptop cover) brought to the attention of a company. Identification of a customer service problem is information that a good company can't even buy, and when you GIVE it to them and they don't appreciate it, don't get me started! Same could be said of personal relationships, of course. That "We're too big to have to care" or "We're the only game in town" attitude has diverted my business elsewhere more than once. I hope this entry is well-read by people who make (intelligent) decisions. -Walter



Lynette Chiang 01/09/2010 02:06 AM

Chuck, my stance on this is not so much about the recipient taking responsibility - that's a completely different post on non-attachment, lowering expectations et al. Mine is a simple warning to companies that they non-respond at their peril.

Now for an experiment: I invite all gentleman to go home and when their partner asks them a question, don't respond. And report the results here. Of course women can do this experiment too, but I have a hunch the results will on average be slightly less colorful ...



Chuck Craytor 01/09/2010 12:41 AM

Lynette, I think a lot of people are a bit overwhelmed with huge amounts of email, Facebook and daily life. In addition, when it comes to personal email or email to professional contacts, we have to take into account differing thinking styles and personality profiles. For example, my good friend Mike R (whom you know) only responds to my emails if it is necessary to fulfill a specific request. And when he does respond (which is rare) it is generally two or three words at the most. It used to bother me. It doesn't anymore, however. I have learned to accept him for his style. He's one of the most giving people I know and yet he rarely responds to emails. I've learned that his style is to be very productive, efficient, and brief in communications. I get much better results with a phone call, by the way.

I know the feeling when we don't get a response and wonder if perhaps we have offended the person or something else. But more and more, I just move on. I really have no idea what's happening in the other person's life. I practice two of the Four Agreements often: "don't take it personally" and "never make assumptions."

I hope this is helpful in some way.

Chuck



Robert Harrison 01/08/2010 05:22 PM

First let me say about your article, "I got it."

As for:

"First, your non-response leaves ample room for people to switch from thinking warmly to bleakly about your product, your company, and even you personally, if they manage to pin your name or face to an email address. They will then tell 10,000 others on the internet. Stay silent, and it could lead to consumer plotting and scheming to hire a hitman to erase you and your lousy widget from the planet. You've seen how road rage can lead to someone leaping from a car and pulling a gun? A non-response traverses those same neural pathways ..."

I rather suspect that they don't traverse exactly the same pathways, though I suspect they run parallel for at least some distance.

Speaking from my own experience I'd have to say that failure to respond does not generate in me the same amount of rage that bad driving does. When I fail to get a response from an email my first thought generally isn't "die you stupid f&*"#*#, die!"

Generally my first thought is that it's been misplaced, lost in a server meltdown, or whatever else can go wrong online. If my second email is not responded to, then I begin to doubt the intentions of the company.

The difference is that in the case of road rage my response is immediate and quite visceral. I want to pedal up to your drivers window and drag you kicking and screaming through it. With non-responders I've already had some time to ponder it and because the offense isn't immediately apparent, as is being cut off, it doesn't trigger so much adrenaline.

Now that doesn't mean I won't ultimately plot the downfall of whatever little kingdom the recipient of my wrath commands, but the timing and intensity are very different.

In addition, from experience, I do know how to go up the food chain with non-responders. Back in the 80's when personal computers were just showing up I had the unfortunate pleasure of having a recently factory serviced model go bad within days of it's return. I wrote, and this was in the days of actual paper mail, to the address of the service manager. I did not get a response. I then wrote the president of the company. Within a week his administrative assistant called me, shipped me a new computer, and a label to ship the old one back.

I know what to do if you don't respond to me.

I'm only just learning what to do you if you irritate me on the road. My most recent experience involved a city bus.

I was biking home in the early afternoon when a city bus motored up behind me. The next stop was two very short blocks away. He sped up, came around me, then immediately pulled in front of me and slowed to stop. I had to slow down or I would have been pushed between the bus and the gutter.

I should note that in our fair city this is not the norm for city bus drivers. In fact they generally go out of their way to insure we don't end up as a stain on their undercarriage.

I surprised myself by not swearing; out loud at least.

I did swing into the now open left lane and pass the now stopped bus. At the next red light, which I arrived at well before the bus (proving there was no need to pass me), I whipped out my camera and took a picture of the bus with license plate and id number.

I then rode home and wrote the bus company an email via their complaint form. For the record I received a reply within 24 hours.

I have not always behaved as well. Of course with the bus I had an organization to whom I could address my complaint. With an average commuter it would generally be impossible, at least for me, to locate a higher authority so easily.

And perhaps that is another key difference. With non-responders we do have a way of dealing with our feelings of frustration and anger. We can go "higher up the food chain," all the way to highest court, public opinion. With road rage, there is generally no further solution save something a bit more physical. In my case with the bus there was an option. Hence my brain activated those pathways.

I guess on the whole, and after far too much verbiage, I have to say no; they don't.

Aloha! Bob



Mark Newsome 01/08/2010 12:21 AM

Lynette,

I get it! :-)

It's becoming an "impersonal" society these days. You phone customer "support", for example, only to get an automated system (seemingly) designed to frustrate you so that you simply go away. (I'll do that and I "won't be back.")

I'm impressed with Comcast, however. They're starting to "get it". I found that the head of their customer service department, Frank, has a twitter account and he's there to help. Recently, I sent him a message and within minutes he remotely reset my cable box, fixing the problem.

--Mark



Tom McDermott 01/07/2010 10:45 PM

Awesome synopsis. Thanks, TMCD in CO



Frederick Iannotti 01/07/2010 05:36 PM

Yes, indeed — there is a trend toward not responding.

I think it's the result of several things interweaving.

For one, people are too busy. For another, a lot of them are depressed, as we are in a depression.

Another reason is that people were more responsive in the days when it was harder to reach out to people, and thus people you reached out to generally were people you knew, and they knew you were making an effort in reaching out. Today it is easy to reach out and thus people receive far too many communications from people who act like they know you, but really don't.

As a media pitcher I've found that people are becoming a lot more resistant to outreach, especially via email. You have to call them all on the phone, and even then only one in 10 answers their phone. One in 100 responds to a voicemail. It is frustrating, but I think they do this because they are overwhelmed and wouldn't be able to get much work done if they spent their time reading and responding to 200 to 300 emails a day, which is what a good reporter gets from PR people.

So I agree, but I also understand.

One more thing to add to the mix is that because it is so easy to reach out to people, people tend to do so reflexively, lazily, without much forethought. Therefore, what is being communicated tends to be shallower. Thinking takes work, and writing a letter requires thinking. Writing an email or a text message requires only a stream of consciousness.

Nonresponsiveness is a wall that people are erecting to preserve some sense of personal space and privacy. It's a reaction to being too available and too accessible.