

What can Shakespeare teach us
about social marketing?
Gold, Silver and Lead Marketing





**William Shakespeare:
Social Marketing Guru?**

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Most of us read in school Shakespeare's masterpiece, *The Merchant of Venice*, in which three suitors for the hand of the "fair Portia" must choose one from among three caskets – one made of gold, one of silver and a third made of lead.

Each casket contains a cryptic inscription. Portia's beautiful image is secreted in one of the caskets, but each of the three suitors takes a different approach to selecting the "right" casket required to make Portia his wife.

Of course, Shakespeare uses the casket images as allegories to how we think (clever playwright that he was).

The gold casket's inscription reads: Who chooseth me shall gain what many men desire. Sounds like a good deal. So the first suitor, the Prince of Morocco, chooses the gold casket, thinking that he'll receive what many men desire – Portia and a lot of gold in casket form.

The inscription on the silver casket reads: Who chooseth me shall get as much as he deserves. Still sounds like a good deal. So the second suitor, the Prince of Arragon, takes a more logical, analytical approach. He considers his own worth and figures, hey, I'm going to win the hand of Portia because **"I'm going to get what I'm worth."**

The final coffin, the one made of lead, is inscribed: Who chooseth me must give and risk all that he has. Okay, not such a good deal,

right? But the third suitor, a character named Bassanio, takes his time examining the three caskets and their inscriptions.

By this point, the lovely Portia has fallen in love with Bassanio and, so, wants him to select the right casket. Bassanio takes the most analytical approach to making his choice in this classic tale of romance.

He rejects the gold casket as a symbol of "outward shows," aka it's too ostentatious. He rejects the silver casket, calling it **"a common drudge/Tween man and man."**

So, Bassanio opts for the least attractive casket, the one made of lead, looking beyond appearances alone, and risking all that he has. Fortunately, Portia's love, Bassanio, is able to see beyond the superficial, beyond the obvious, and sure enough, the lead casket is the one that contains the image of Portia. Thus, Bassanio, the most insightful of the three suitors, wins the contest for the hand of Portia, much to the relief of Portia and the audience.

So, what we can learn from this analogy from the Bard of Avon? Especially in this day of the W3, RSS, SEO, conversion ratios and web site metrics.

Well, one very important lesson we can learn is to look beyond appearances. We can also learn to use social media sites more effectively – and Shakespeare never even heard of LinkedIn or Facebook. Definitely a man ahead of his time.

The Princes of Morocco

Remember, he chose the gold coffin. After all, it was gold. But, as Shakespeare teaches us, the prince exploited the opportunity to win the hand of the fair maiden.

The same is true of social media sites like Plurk, Brightkite, Twitter and other short messaging services, or SMSs. The Princes of Morocco exploit social media for their own benefit, constantly hyping their service or product offerings.

These marketers spam Facebook with ads for their products or hype their services. They, like Shakespeare's Prince of Morocco, use social media for their own gain, launching spam blasts and recruiting paid followers to increase their on-line presence, while ignoring the intrinsic value of conversational marketing.

These Princes of Morocco take a narrow view of social media, much like Shakespeare's hapless suitor: Social media isn't about you, your products or business. It's about seeing beyond the surface (gold) and tapping into these resources by providing useful information and exchange of ideas to build a following.

In these cases, The Princes of Morocco don't look under the surface. In the realm of social media and networking sites, it's simple: "all that glitters is not gold." Listen up, all you Princes of Morocco.

The Princes of Arragon

In Shakespeare's masterpiece, the Prince of Arragon, reading the inscription on the silver casket, figures he'll get all that's coming to him, which is a lot – at least in his mind. Well, again, that's not what social media marketing and networking are about.

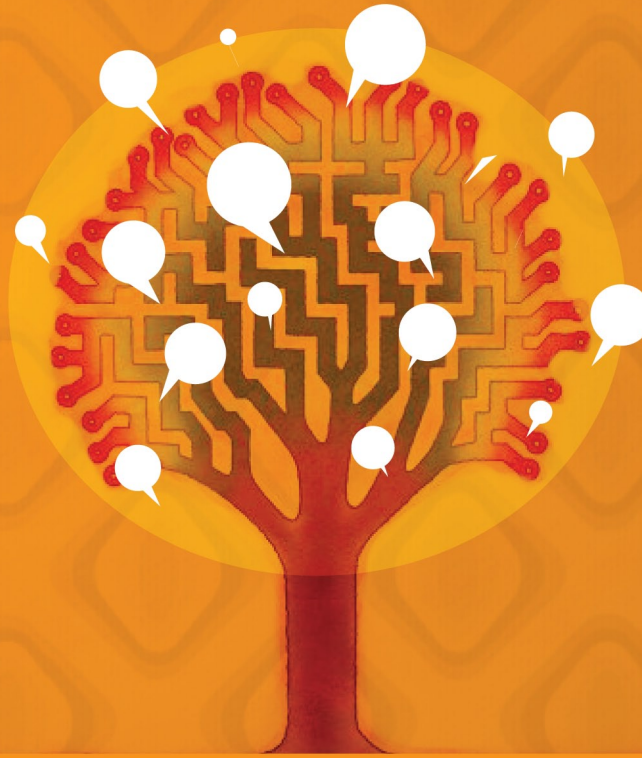
These "Princes" feel that they're tech-savvy and sharp marketers, employing the resources of others for their own benefit. Post to Facebook and you use that resource for your gain.

The name Arragon was chosen for its resemblance to "arrogant" and these marketers think they have it all figured out. Their insight? Social media is not a mass market numbers game as the Princes of Morocco would believe, but an influence game. They suppose if they can influence the influencers, they win over their networks as well, so linkage on social sites is the number one objective. These posers believe that by tweeting, posting, pinging, burning feeds and using all the tools available to social marketers, they'll get their sales pitch out to millions.

The trouble is, there are so many of these social marketers that their messages get lost in the tech-babble of the social web. All you have to do is watch your Twitter connections. Everybody is selling something, but no one is buying. Ah, but then there are the Bassanios of social marketing on line.

On social sites, the Bassanios provide good, useful information, something to make the lives of followers better. Their actions are driven by passion for open dialogue and exchange, a commitment to real engagement.





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Look beyond the obvious to discover
the substance of social media as part
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Bassanios

Remember, Bassanio chose the lead casket – the one that contained Portia's image and, so, beat out his two other competitors. Why?

He looked deeply – beyond the obvious. It wasn't about gold or silver or lead. It was about interpreting the casket inscriptions and applying them to his decision. And, as we now know, Bassanio made the right choice. He used analysis, logic and a deeper view of the options in front of him.

Bassanios, in the world of social marketing, are, by nature, pragmatic. They listen. They employ logic. They are pure of heart. They see truth and value to produce the most positive outcomes, whether it's winning the hand of a fair maiden or driving site traffic.

On social sites, the Bassanios provide good, useful information – something worth reading – something to make the lives of followers better. Their actions are driven by passion for open dialogue and exchange, a commitment to real engagement.

They deliver information transparency, not information designed to generate leads or drive traffic to their sites. These pragmatists recognize that they'll build a following through social marketing by helping their readers. Stop the hype.

These off-site marketers engage their demographic with good information, based on helping others. They recognize that social media isn't gold or silver – it's practical when used properly.

Jump Ahead 400 Years and Let's Get Freudian

Freud, Carl Jung and other early psychotherapists relied heavily on symbolism to develop their theories of what motivates humans to action. The three caskets that appear in *The Merchant of Venice* also provided a great deal of insight for Freud.

Freud carries on the fascination with the story by building a detailed analysis of the three coffins and arrives at some very interesting conclusions about (1) how we decide (2) consideration of the consequences of our decisions and (3) using logic to see past the obvious to arrive at good outcomes.

Choosing based on appearances, like the Prince of Morocco, or choosing based on faulty logic and self-centric interests like the Prince of Arragon, didn't win the hand of the fair maiden.

Instead, Freud examined the three casket analogy and arrived at conclusions that you can apply to your own social media marketing campaign.

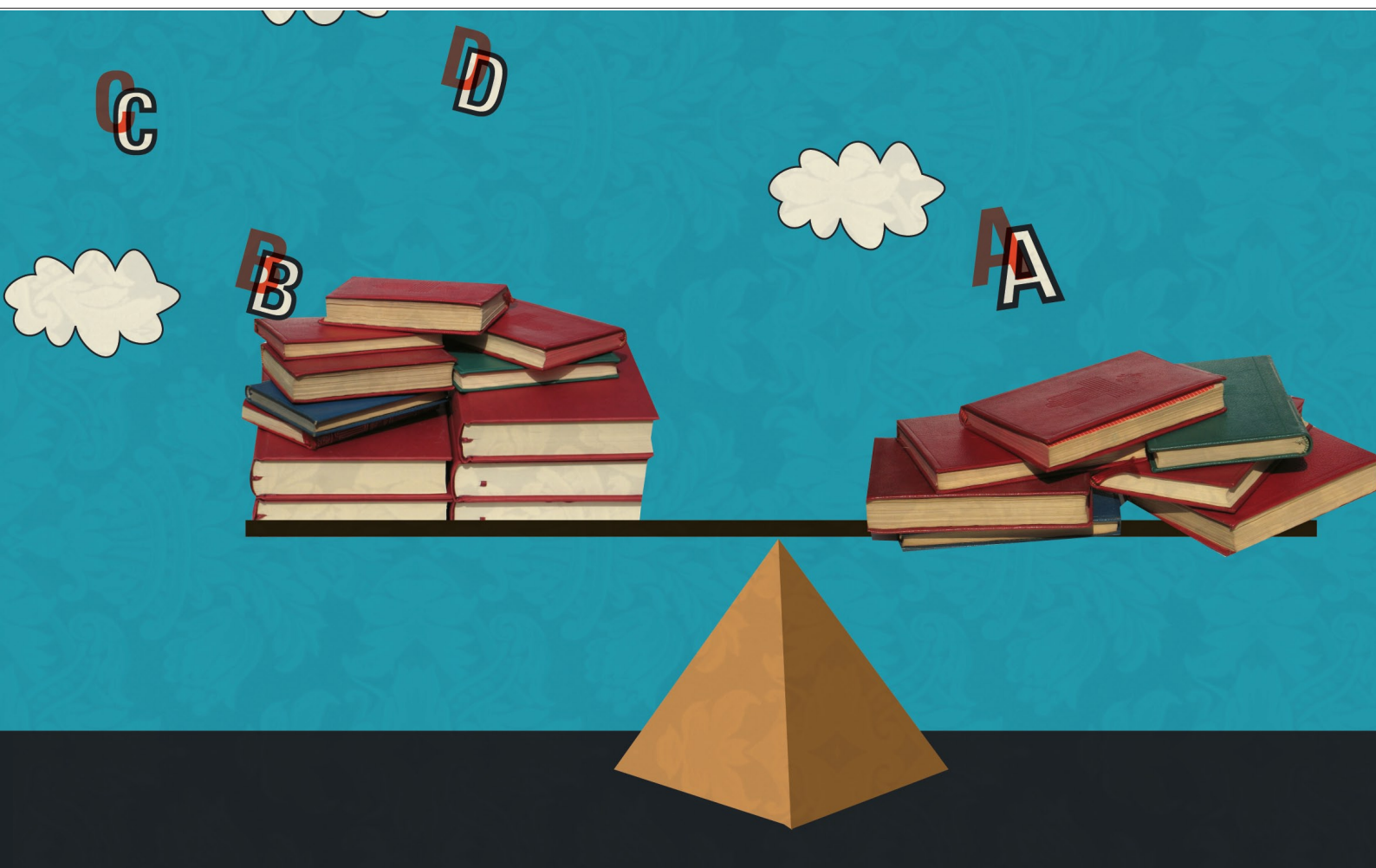
First, always choose the lead casket. Look beyond the obvious to discover the substance of social media as part of marketing a web site.

Look for the true value, employ impeccable logic in making your choice and provide your following with substance, not glitter. Be passionate and transparent and seek out conversation and debate.

Second, choose wisely. Indeed, the Prince of Arragon employed a bit of logic in choosing the silver coffin that promised him what he was worth. Well, your pings and posts to social sites aren't worth anything according to Freud, unless they provide value, i.e., aren't self-serving.

Finally, choosing the least superficial course (the lead casket) also lead to Bassanio's success, something Freud is quick to point out. The one who saw intrinsic value won the hand of Portia, or in the case of social media, "Bassanios" win followers and build business by using social marketing to benefit others.

So what are you when it comes to LinkedIn, Facebook, Naymez and other social sites? Are you're a Prince of Morocco who only sees the surface value of what's available? Are you a Prince of Arragon who thinks he's got social media (and a silver casket) locked up tight.



Or are you a Bassanio, who sees the underlying value of a lead casket or a social site like Brightkite? You are if you provide good information instead of constantly hyping your product.

Freud uses Shakespeare's allegory as an example of the consequences to our decisions and points out that those who are able to see substance beyond form, the way Bassanio did, win in the end.

So, learn from the Bard and from the father of psychotherapy. Choose the lead coffin. Choose substance over form in your social marketing. Put the needs of others before your own and keep the objectives of your readers always at the fore front.

It worked for Shakespeare's Bassanio, it worked for Sigmund Freud and it'll work for you.

Choose the lead coffin when it comes to your approach to social media – always.

Look for the true value, employ impeccable logic in making your choice and provide your following with substance, not glitter. Be passionate and transparent and seek out conversation and debate.

Shakespeare never heard of the W3, but there are lessons to be learned in his writings, and in Freud's further elaborations, on how we make choices and cope with the consequences of those decisions.

So, what category do you fall into when it comes to social marketing? If you recognize the base value, the underlying substance of the lead coffin, you'll win the hand of Portia and maybe even win great influence.

Go ahead and risk it. Shakespeare would be so proud of you.



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