



Dear Publishing Professional,

We're finally enjoying a real winter in the D.C. area! I hope the cold months are a joy for you and not a source of the blahs.

Why “We have an integration” is meaningless

When considering a new technology, you have to find out how the new will fit with the old. You might be relieved to hear that the new technology has an integration with your other key technologies. Don't be.

“We have an integration” means almost nothing. You need to find out if it works and meets your needs. Check these things.

- When was it last updated?
- How many active users does it have?
- What additional services do you need to make this integration work? (E.g., does it require you to use some other technology or process?)
- Does it make assumptions about how use the other technology? (Yes, it does.)

Here are your first three steps.

1. Walk through all the settings and find out what they do and do not accommodate. Compare that with how you use the target technology.
2. Speak with the tech guys at the other technology and ask their opinion of the integration. Sometimes a simple export and import works better!
3. Speak with some customers who use it.

If you need help navigating all this, give me a call. I can help you work through it.

Is good enough good enough?

I enjoy exploring contradictions between wise sayings. A common example is “out of sight out of mind” vs. “absence makes the heart grow fonder.” Often the apparent contradiction is actually a matter of knowing when to apply the saying.

Here are two that are relevant to business.

- Done today is better than perfect tomorrow.
- If it's worth doing, it's worth doing well.

Both contain valuable insights, but you need to know which one to apply when.

“**Done today**” is more apt when speed matters. As a friend says, “if it's *really* worth doing, it's worth doing badly.” “Done today” also applies when iteration is expected (I can adjust as more data is available), when overthinking causes paralysis, or when the stakes are low.

“If it’s worth doing” applies when the stakes are high, you only have one shot at it, your reputation is on the line, the results are permanent, your values are at stake, or when “good enough” really isn’t good enough.

As an example of the “if it’s worth doing” side of this, **I spoke with Ian Edgar at the MACMA holiday party about how to make a podcast or a video successful.** Ian doesn’t accept the idea that you’re at the mercy of the algorithms, or that it’s impossible to predict what will be successful. He thinks that’s just laziness, and that if you do the work, you can create success.

Here are some of his pointers. (Ian very kindly checked this list for me!)

- Spend a lot of time thinking about the name of your show or video and the title of each episode. More time than you think.
- Have a distinct and immediately recognizable angle / perspective.
- Go deep. Resist the urge to simplify.
- Challenge assumptions. Ideas that run counter to your audience’s model of reality naturally garner attention.
- Have a clear format for delivering value that can be understood within moments.
- Be “unbelievably rigorous” about being interesting. The time you spend will pay off.
- Open the show with the most interesting thing. Don’t wait.
- There should be a revelatory moment of insight into the subject matter every 2-3 minutes.

That’s hard work, but in Ian’s experience, **following these principles makes the difference between success and mediocrity.**

Before you hit “send” next time, ask yourself whether good enough is really good enough.

Beware when schedules change

Do you remember a time when you locked your keys in your car? I used to do that when I was first driving. Then I developed the habit of always checking for my keys before I closed the car door. As you get older, your brain isn’t as sharp as it used to be, but you develop clever workarounds that make up for it!

Mistakes like locking your keys in your car often happen when you’re out of your routine – e.g., when you sit in the car for a few minutes to do something else before you get out. That disrupts your normal behavior patterns and makes you more likely to do something silly.

The same thing can happen with production routines. When the normal process or schedule gets disrupted, watch out!

Tip: When something breaks the ordinary pattern or workflow, double down on quality control. That’s when mistakes are most likely to surface.

Good, better, best, and Oreos

Sean Griffey made an interesting observation on LinkedIn about six new snacks Oreo intends to launch this year. “The purpose is mostly to take up valuable shelf space. Every inch they have on a grocery shelf is one less inch for their competitors and fewer opportunities for consumers to experiment with new brands.”

That reminded me of the "good, better, best" option on a landing page. The point of the three-option offer is to move people from the good offer to the better offer. You'll find that people who quote you on replacement windows will do the same thing. The point of this kind of offer is not necessarily to sell the "best" (highest priced) option, but to get people to move from good to better. In such a case, the "best" option can pay for itself – even if it's not profitable on its own – if it moves enough people from good to better.

Here are a few things to keep in mind when crafting such an offer.

- The "best" option can serve as an anchor, which makes the "better" option seem like a bargain.
- Providing a contrast allows people to compare value with price.
- Make sure the step from "good" to "better" is more significant in value than it is in price.
- Avoid choice paralysis. If you make the decision too hard, people will abandon the purchase altogether.

Reality, AI, and parlor tricks

I get a creepy feeling when I see an image of a beautiful woman, have an immediate reaction to the image, then realize it's not a person at all. It was created by AI.

That's very disconcerting, but there's an important thing to consider about this. That AI-generated image isn't real, but *neither is any other image*. A two-dimensional, still portrait of a person is not a person. It's a flat representation of a person. It doesn't smell like a person. It doesn't react like a person. It's only an image.

By spending so much time in the phony computer world, we've learned to twist our concept of reality. We've flattened out the world to make it fit on our computers, then we start to think that this flat version is the world that matters.

Years ago, I read about a version of the Turing test where people would interact with a chatbot. If they couldn't tell the chatbot from a real person, that system had passed the Turing test. In my mind that only goes to show the limited utility of the Turing test.

To do this test we have to reduce human communication to text on a screen, then we play some parlor tricks with computer programming and say "see, the computer is just as good as a human."

No, it's not. It's completely unlike a human. The way an AI chatbot chooses an appropriate response has almost nothing in kind with how you would do it. It uses clever tricks to spit out text that mimics a trimmed down, flat representation of human interaction.

A lot of the concern over AI is a direct result of the fact that we've limited multi-faceted human interaction to what we can squeeze through a computer screen. AI is very useful in that limited world, but let's not live in flatland. Go outside and talk to somebody.

Less vs. fewer

I've seen this too often, so I have to say something. It's "fewer people" not "less people." It's fewer sugar cubes, less sugar. Fewer cars, less pollution. Fewer eggs, less protein.

Got it? When it's something you count, use "fewer." When it's something you measure, use "less." There are exceptions to that rule, but "less people" is always wrong.

Quick takes

If work from home is so great, why do sponsors always prefer the in-person events?

Don't underestimate the negative effect on your customers of rules and bureaucracy.

There's an important difference between an inclination to action and being reckless. You need both personalities / tendencies in your organization. In the right places.

Don't allow "being a team player" to be an excuse for cowardice. You're not a good team player if you don't bring up your concerns.

- Support the decision once it's made, but make sure the decision was made with all the cards on the table.
- If you're in management, create an environment where people have the freedom to voice another point of view – even (especially) those you don't like.
- Mentor (or even discipline) employees who fail to bring up their objections but then gossip or complain later.

How many producers do you need for your podcast? NPR's "Up First" has an astonishing number. Is this overkill, or an emphasis on quality?

"What gets measured gets done." Are your reports aligned with your priorities?

How the "Elon is a Nazi" meme applies to you

Our country lives in two different worlds that increasingly can't understand or speak to one another. I don't like it, but that's the reality. So ... what do you do?

Specialization can be a good thing. Some organizations have found success by targeting one of these worlds. Think Black Rifle Coffee on the right or Patagonia on the left.

Others have tried to stay in the middle. Think Coca-Cola.

If you already have a small market, the middle is almost certainly the right place to be, which means that **you need employees who represent both points of view and are unafraid and empowered to express them.**

Sincerely,



Greg Krehbiel



P.S. – **I'm looking for new clients.** If you need help in your business, or if you know someone else who does, please give me a call. There's little in the publishing world that I haven't done, and I learn new things very quickly!