



Compost Bin ([DIY](#), 2016)

Composting and Communicating

Tami Herndon

[LinkedIn](#) 10/17/16

Early this morning, I collected fallen leaves and grass clippings to put into my new compost bin. The bin arrived by mail yesterday with three simple instructions: add 25% brown matter, add 75% green matter, and rotate bin to mix. The contrasting dull and vibrant hues of organic waste in the bin made me think about how readers approach digital communications. (What??) Individuals often think that written text is dull, preferring vibrant visuals instead. But like composting, communicating requires a right mix to produce successful results.

How did I suddenly link composting and communicating after a quick glance into my compost bin? I didn't spike my green tea this morning (my tea bag went into the compost bin) or add mind-expanding mushrooms to my omelet (my egg shells and mushroom stalks also went into the bin). Instead, I blame these random thoughts on my intensely-focused efforts aimed at finishing a master's degree in professional writing in just a few weeks. Lately, my mind in overdrive translates everything, including my garbage, into writing and communicating.

Visuals v. Written Text

Visuals add richness to digital communications. Photographs, videos, displays, and illustrations help readers focus on the message and expand their understanding. Too many visuals, though, distract readers and result in communications that just stink. Likewise, if I overload my compost bin with too much green matter, a stinky situation will develop. Green matter contributes nitrogen to the carbon-nitrogen ratio in a compost bin, a friend explained to me. Adding too much nitrogen transforms this

sustainable practice into an odorous mess remedied only by adding more brown matter.

Written text, a mainstay in communications dating back to [cuneiform](#) in 3500 BCE Mesopotamia, maintains a fickle following these days. Individuals still rely on written text to explain, direct, and inform, but they only want to read it in small, concise bites. I agree that too much text elicits snores from readers just as too much brown matter will put my compost bin to sleep. However, I disagree with trends that completely replace text with visuals because I feel that both are needed to create effective communications.

Effective Communications and Perfect Compost

Communications and compost have one important attribute in common and that is balance. Effective communications balance engaging written text with dynamic visuals to convey specific messages. In the same way, compost is created when one-part brown matter is balanced with three-parts green matter and mixed. Perfect compost forms from a static 25%-75% ratio, but effective communication must vary the amounts of text and visuals according to the purpose of a message. Messages that require more text benefit from well-placed visuals that act as rest stops for readers. Similarly, visual-heavy messages use text to map out paths for readers, adding context and meaning.

Effective communication and perfect compost develop when a right mix is used. While composting is new for me, creating effective communications is my specialty.

Communication-seeking clients benefit from my ability to intuitively combine words and visuals to achieve the right mix. I balance concise text with engaging images to attract audiences and convey messages. In similar fashion, my flower beds and garden will flourish from the right mix in my compost bin. The carbon-dense brown matter balanced with nitrogen-rich green matter will transform my garbage into nourishing plant food.

Aim for Balance

Until this morning, I had never connected composting with communicating. After all, the two topics don't usually appear in the same conversation or train of thought. Yet, once I started pondering the simile, I discovered a common attribute. Both communicating and composting require two main ingredients in just the right mix. This right mix involves ratios with composting and purpose with communicating. When composting, I pay attention to browns and greens, and when communicating, I focus on words and visuals. In either case, I aim for balance to produce the best results.