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Create Belly Laughs

Ellen C. Wells



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I just spent a ridiculous amount of time doing research for this month's column. But I love you guys and you deserve my best, so when work calls I'm more than happy to dig deep and put the hours in.

What was I doing? Reading amusing online Amazon-style reviews.

Now, I'm usually a serious person. I read non-fiction, watch Nature on PBS and listen to the BBC World Service. I value science, appreciate art and live for fiery discussions. If I lived in France I'd wear a beret and sit in a cafe sipping absinthe or cappuccino, depending on the time of day, of course. A beret! That's how serious I can be.

But.

There's not much that is better in the way of humor than a Wes Anderson movie. "Best In Show?" Genius. The band of brothers who made the Monty

Python movies, too, are no comedic slouches. And if you want bottom-of-the-barrel humor (or rather, toilet humor), I just can't stop cheeky guffaws from escaping whenever I watch Benny Hill. Or even Melissa McCarthy, for that matter.

Humor levels the playing field. It's the great equalizer. We all get a joke; even if the joke is crass/offensive/rude, everyone gets the punchline. Even humor that is without language—like street mimes or wordless paintings and cartoons—is universally understood. There's something about it that strips us naked and makes us more human, and makes us more willing to understand the human in one another.

The faux Amazon or Yelp review does what great humor is meant to do: create deep belly laughs using common objects and common experiences. For example, here's one faux Amazon review of the movie, "The Wolf of Wall Street," which the reviewer gave a one-star rating: "There were no wolves in this movie." HA! Or the review of a horse head mask: "It is day 87 and the horses have accepted me as one of their own. I have grown to understand and respect their gentle ways."

I've recently found the amusing Amazon-esque reviews of animals, pets and plants on Twitter using the #rateaspecies hashtag. Written by zookeepers, scientists and nature lovers, these mostly one-liners use humor to bring attention to the oddities and even endangerment of certain living things. For instance, Camellia Quinn gives the banana slug zero out of five stars: "DOES NOT TASTE LIKE BANANA," she exclaims. Ben Goldfarb gave two stars and a "not intended for indoor use" warning to the fur saw: "Good: Effectively removed backyard cottonwoods. Teeth

self-sharpening. Runs on bark! Bad: Chewed through dining room table, used legs to build a dam in the bathtub.” And this one from Zoos Victoria: “INSTRUCTION MANUAL MISSING. So confused about how to put it together. Has anyone else had trouble, too? It kind of looks like a duck but also a beaver. And it lays eggs but is a mammal? Waiting for version 2 to come out before buying.” I’d say that’s a pretty accurate description of a platypus if you had no knowledge of its existence.

Out of the 100 or so #rateaspecies posts I saw, less than a handful were plants, and none were ornamentals. The closest I came to seeing a garden plant was an unidentified fast-growing vine. Why not plants? We should make the #rateaplant hashtag, which as of March had only one tag on Twitter, something just as fun and engaging as the tweets about dogs and dinos and egg-laying mammals. Let’s give it a try with this example: “Was hoping this Mortgage Buster would clear up my loans but no doing. Giving it three of five stars, though, because it makes a tasty sandwich. #rateaplant.” Or how about this one: “In fact, money does NOT come out of this tree. #rateaplant.”

Flood social media with #rateaplant this spring, especially your Facebook page. Make yourself belly laugh. Your business is serious, yes. But that doesn’t mean you can’t have a chuckle while you’re at it. **GP**