

BEST PRACTICES

July 5, 2005

How To Build A Word-Of-Mouth Marketing Campaign

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

By embracing word of mouth (WOM), marketers can motivate consumer communication and discussion about their brand and generate buzz. Despite a jumble of confusing terms and concepts, planning a WOM campaign comes down to some basic marketing concepts: the audience, the message, the vehicle, and the metrics. Finding the right combination will give a WOM marketing campaign the greatest chance to spread faster than a hot stock tip at a cocktail party.

WOM IS ABOUT CREATING BUZZ

Word-of-mouth (WOM) marketing is hot, as new digital channels like email and SMS accelerate peer-to-peer exchange and consumers turn their backs on traditional advertising. But swarms of new terms and concepts confuse marketers — even Emanuel Rosen, author of “The Anatomy of Buzz: How to Create Word-of-Mouth Marketing” admits to being confused about it.¹ The result? Missed opportunities and lost budgets due to miscommunication between marketers and their agencies.

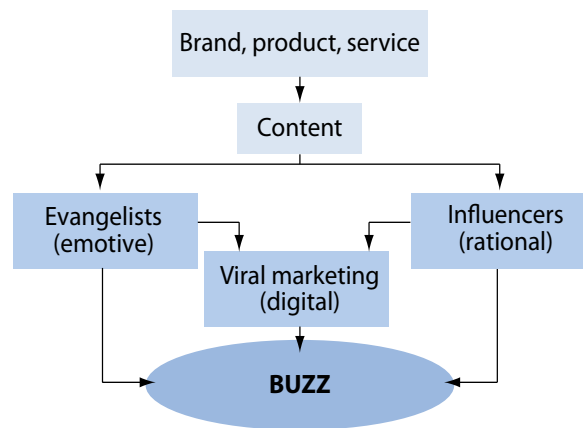
What Marketers Need To Know About WOM

WOM marketing is the overall term for:

An honest targeted conversation based on something valuable that creates buzz.²

The buzz itself is the objective of WOM marketing — to have as many consumers talk about a brand or a product to as many friends and acquaintances as possible. Marketers can create buzz by choosing the right (see Figure 1):

- **Targets: evangelists or influencers.** Evangelists are consumers who voluntarily convert others to a brand or product. These people can be employees, vendors, consumers — anyone who comes across the brand or the product and develops an emotive connection with it.³ Apple, for instance, has many evangelists, who keep trying to convert Windows users to their niche Macs. Marketers can also target influencers — consumers who have influence on others because they’re recognized experts on a subject or known for passing on great ideas.⁴ Influencers use rational arguments while spreading the word, as opposed to evangelists, who are emotive.
- **Channels: viral or traditional.** Traditionally, word of mouth happened at bars and corporate water coolers. In viral WOM campaigns, consumers pass on messages using new channels like the Net, mobile phones, and MP3 players.⁵ These devices fuel much faster distribution — the Trojan Games viral marketing campaign got 6 million people visiting its Web site in the six months after its launch.

Figure 1 Word-Of-Mouth Marketing Is Simple

Source: Forrester Research, Inc.

- **Content: anything consumers want to share.** Messages that spread well in WOM marketing have two key characteristics: 1) They meet the emotive or rational goals of the evangelist or influencer; and 2) consumers can pass them on easily, such as the four downloadable movies that financial services firm Cetelem offered online and through mobile phones.⁶

A SUCCESSFUL WOM CAMPAIGN STARTS WITH FOUR CLASSIC CHOICES

With WOM, consumers become an extension of the marketing department by helping spread the word and create buzz. While some of the tactics are different, marketers who wish to “recruit” consumers need to address the same four planning questions as in any marketing effort.

- **Who do I target?** Most consumers chose with their gut, not their brain. Therefore, evangelists have a strong effect. Symbiotic brands will have such evangelists and need to focus WOM campaigns on them.⁷ Firms that have few evangelists or that sell complex products like PCs need to concentrate on influencers who can endorse choices. When making the target choice, marketers need to realize that evangelists and influencers already exist and have an effect — WOM marketing is about using their impact positively. How can marketers find them? By listening to consumers and welcoming positive and negative comments that they communicate directly to the firm or indirectly via Emotive Network tools like blogs and forums.⁸
- **How do I get the word out?** More than 60% of online Europeans are engaged in online activities, and 20% of them have looked at product reviews from other Net consumers.⁹ The speed and ease with which these consumers can pass on content should convince every marketer that they need viral elements in their WOM strategy. Consumers downloaded a video from LiveVault, starring John Cleese, more than 300,000 times, increasing the traffic on its Web site by ten and generating thousands of sales leads.¹⁰

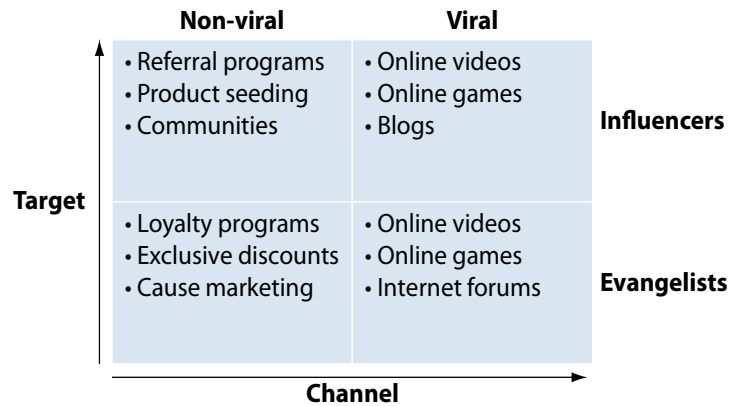
- **What's the message?** Marketers should think about the reaction they want to get from the recipient. They have an enormous toolbox for viral campaigns — including online videos, online games, Internet forums, blogs, and podcasting as well as more traditional methods like referral programs or product seeding (see Figure 2). With I Love Bees — an alternate-reality-gaming campaign — Microsoft mobilized more than 10,000 fans to take part in a real-world game based around the Halo 2 video game and united 600,000 fans online by creating curiosity and interest. More than 2 million players accessed ilovebees.com, helping generate sales of \$125 million on Halo 2's first day out on the market.¹¹
- **How do I measure the effect?** Buzz may sound like a fuzzy concept, but it's traceable. Vendors like BuzzMetrics, Intelliseek, and Viral Tracker look at key metrics like spread, analyze the tone of what's being said, identify the key “connectors,” and determine how the campaign is affecting the company's image.¹² The Word-Of-Mouth Marketing Association will launch an effort to bring more standardization and discipline to WOM metrics at a conference in Chicago on July 13, 2005.

BEST PRACTICES SHOW THE POWER OF WOM MARKETING

Many firms have created buzz by making the right target, channel, and content choices. These companies got outstanding results in terms of awareness, participation, and traffic online:

- **Virgin Mobile.** With the collaboration of DrillTEAM, the mobile firm created an “influencer team” of 300 customers to create buzz around its brand, new products, and key messages. In addition, it seeded viral movies on the Net through the Web site best-hands.net, which attracted more than 4 million customers.¹³
- **Audi.** For the launch of its new A3 premium compact, Audi introduced “The Art of the Heist” — staging the theft of the new car and asking consumers to help them find the thief, using a mix of traditional and new media channels like live participation and blogs. In just one day, more than 200,000 people got involved in the search. This generated enormous online buzz, with fans creating seven Web sites in the first few days after the launch.
- **ebookers.com.** In cooperation with ad agency Halpern Cowan, ebookers decided to seed an online game via its newsletter to 500,000 customers. The game, which users can forward to friends, involves helping Holly pack items into her suitcase; by guessing four words, the player can enter a competition to win flights to four destinations. ebookers wanted to increase brand awareness and grow its database — which it did, generating 45,000 addresses in just four months.

Figure 2 The Word-Of-Mouth Marketing Toolbox



Source: Forrester Research, Inc.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Source: Emanuel Rosen, “Five Common Misconceptions About Buzz Marketing,” MarketingProfs, May 17, 2005; visit <http://www.marketingprofs.com/print.asp?source=/5/rosen1.asp> for more information.
- ² Marketers are embracing word-of-mouth marketing as the antidote to traditional advertising’s waning effectiveness, and as a way to build momentum for a product or service. To be successful, marketers should forsake one-way campaigns for two-way dialogues, yield control of the message in favor of the role of participant in the conversation, and abandon carefully crafted positioning statements for more personal language. See the May 3, 2005, Trends “What’s The Buzz On Word-Of-Mouth Marketing?”
- ³ Consumer loyalty is declining; conventional loyalty strategies fail because they are one-sided and ignore critical loyalty drivers. To turn the tide, brands need to shift to symbiotic loyalty, building consumer trust through emotive connections, actively cultivating endorsements, and minimizing costs by knowing when, what, and where to invest in loyalty — and when to end unprofitable relationships. See the November 3, 2004, Forrester Big Idea “Symbiotic Loyalty.”
- ⁴ Firms need to use viral marketing to get commercial messages to mass audiences. For success, marketers should focus on winning over Online Influencers — and letting them do the evangelizing instead. See the May 6, 2003, Report “The Tipping Point Online.”
- ⁵ Podcasting, the latest addition to on-demand media, has attracted the attention of both tech-savvy young early adopters and innovative brands seeking to create some buzz while the phenomenon is still new. As both consumers and organizations begin to create podcasts, the market will segment based on content. Successful brands will provide engaging content of relevance and value along with a simplified user experience. See the July XX, 2005, Trends “Podcasting For Marketers.”

- ⁶ Cetelem is the first financial services company to launch a viral campaign online and through mobile phones. Four movies can be downloaded and forwarded from the Web site created at this occasion. The concept is based on an anti-hero who's extremely stingy and doesn't want to spend money to enjoy his life. This campaign is part of an overall strategy to maximize Cetelem's presence on the Web and get new clients. Visit www.relationclient.net/index.php?action=article&id_article=138015 for further information.
- ⁷ Consumer goods firms and retailers collect enormous amounts of data on consumers, but are not able to use it to drive symbiotic loyalty. To become effective, firms should divide consumer data into three levels — collective, individual, and emotive. Each level requires a different data collection method, with an increased individual consumer engagement. Marketers can only reach the highest CRM level — emotive — after mastering the preceding two levels. See the March 30, 2005, Trends “Identifying The Emotive Consumer.”
- ⁸ While consumer firms try to attract users to brand sites, consumers prefer to connect in Emotive Networks. Brands and media must accept and learn from these — or lose emotional touch with their audiences. See the September 24, 2002, Report “Emotive Networks Connect Consumers.”
- ⁹ Emotive Network activities — online activities that involve users connecting with others in mutual interest or support — now involve more than 60% of online Europeans. These Emotive Network users are an attractive group for marketers and retailers: They are the online users with most experience, are very active online, and are willing to spend on the Net. To reach them, advertisers must research how their behavior influences their product purchasing decisions and weave these influences into their marketing to ensure consumers feel empowered and informed throughout the purchase and consumption process. See the June 24, 2004, Trends “Marketers: Wake Up To Emotive Network Users.”
- ¹⁰ LiveVault used banner ads, email blasts, two print ads, and several emails to friends and family to drive traffic to the micro site containing the video. Visit www.livevault.com for more information.
- ¹¹ This information came from case studies presented at AD:TECH 2005. Visit http://avantgame.com/McGonigal_42%20Entertainment_ADTECH_April%202005.pdf for more information.
- ¹² Three technology trends — media fragmentation, addressability, and interactivity — are converging on the world of marketing and advertising. In a new era of Left Brain Marketing, analytical strategies grounded in deep audience knowledge will rise to predominance. Creative will remain essential but will play a smaller, more sophisticated role. The looming transformation of TV into an addressable medium marks the inflection point in the shift. See the April 6, 2004, Forrester Big Idea “Left Brain Marketing.”
- ¹³ Virgin Mobile provides insight into its viral marketing activities: Visit <http://dmc.co.uk/index.php?bz03Mg> for more information on this campaign.