

# WORD OF MOUTH MARKETING SOMETHING OLD, SOMETHING NEW

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There is no stronger reinforcement of your company's reputation, products and services than a satisfied customer who tells others how great you are.

Word of mouth has been around for decades, but there are new methods and tactics to leverage word of mouth referrals. Technology now makes it possible to identify with unprecedented precision the enthusiastic consumers of a given product and encourage them to tell their friends about it.

## **"Word-of-mouth is about getting real people to talk about your product,"**

according to Dave Balter, author of "Grapevine: The New Art of Word-of-Mouth Marketing."

That's always been a key objective of public relations. Instead of going to TV producers or newspaper reporters, new technologies also allow you to go right to the consumer, who—in person, over the phone, on blogs or by e-mail talks to other consumers.

**Consider the case** of the owners of a liquor store who identified and worked with four customers who accounted for about 25 percent of store's sales, either through direct purchases or through recommendations they made to other customers.

The store owners enlisted these four people as part of its team, regularly asking them what they liked and didn't like about the store. Based on the feedback, the owners changed the stock, shifted store hours, redesigned the layout and improved staff training. Those four original customers became even more passionate about the store. Without conventional advertising,

marketing or even holding wine tastings, sales increased by 25 percent.

The key to word of mouth is to identify these customer advocates, harness their natural tendencies and sustain them in their efforts.

**Here are some initial questions** to ask to gain a better understanding of how to stimulate word-of-mouth endorsement of your company's products or services:

- Who exactly are my best customers?
- How old are they, where do they live and what do they do?
- What kind of media do they use and view as credible?
- How do they communicate?
- Where do they spend their free time?
- What beliefs do they have?
- What causes do they support?
- What values do they hold?

Answers to these questions will help you communicate in the context of your best customers and motivate them to spread the word about your products or services.

**The challenge with word of mouth** is to maintain its integrity and authenticity. Word-of-mouth is most effective when it's least contrived and least self-conscious. People can spot a fake. When it's real, people will always know it.

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