

# An introduction to WORD OF MOUTH MARKETING

What it is and how to use it. A primer for software company CEOs and CMOs who need to drive sales with more credible marketing.

**The goal of this white paper is to help you understand the process well enough to know where to turn for help.** Awareness of word of mouth (WOM) is growing exponentially in the press and in the marketplace...and yet its application is often poorly understood. There are currently several versions in vogue. The major word of mouth trade associations ([www.womma.org](http://www.womma.org) and [www.vbma.net](http://www.vbma.net)) are still struggling to define the ground rules for its deployment. This document offers the author's views shaped over the past four years by many of the major resources impacting this powerful approach to new business. It provides solid case studies and shows how to get started. Many marketers refer to word of mouth as the world's greatest sales force. It could be!

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## **About the Illinois Technology Association**

THE ITA MISSION: The Illinois Information Technology Association exists to be a leading change agent that drives growth, development and retention of IT-focused businesses and talent in Illinois by providing networking, advocacy, resources and leadership. They serve members in Chicago-land and throughout the State and exist to help grow the number of successful businesses that create, deploy and utilize information technology as a core part of their organization. [www.illinoistech.org](http://www.illinoistech.org)

We represent the interests of our diverse membership at a local and national level, and work to connect member companies with each other and the resources they need to succeed. The ITA continues on a more than twenty year tradition of service to the technology community, and in 2005 was renamed from the Chicago Software Association (CSA). The CSA had a solid program and had been recognized as one of the most important technology organizations in the Midwest. ITA remains committed to continuing the good programs we began as the CSA.

## **About Keith Bates**

The MISSION of this Keith Bates effort is to offer the members of the Illinois Technology Association a resource where they can benefit from the past four years of Bates' research into Word of Mouth marketing. That research was preceded by 30 years as CEO/Creative Director of Keith Bates & Associates Inc., a high tech ad agency Bates founded in 1970 to serve exclusively the software industry. He also founded Walker-Bates, a high tech PR firm that he managed concurrently with the ad agency. Over those years his agency and PR firm supported the sales and marketing communications needs of more than 150 software/services vendors. [www.kbates.com](http://www.kbates.com)

What is the inspiration behind this seemingly altruistic effort? Bates was inspired by Peter Drucker, the great management writer and thought leader, who has a goal of learning something completely new, in depth, every decade. This decade's learning for Bates (which began in 2001) has been word of mouth marketing and its application to the software industry. Today the technology industry is being challenged to improve both marketing's efficiency and credibility while reducing costs. Word of mouth offers these solutions and Bates wants to share what he's learned in hopes of shortening someone else's learning curve.

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## Executive Overview

Awareness of word of mouth marketing (WOMM) is growing exponentially in the press and in the marketplace...and yet its application is often poorly understood. The goal of this article is to help you understand the process well enough to know where to turn for help, or how to launch your own program.

### WOMM Defined

For the purpose of this white paper I am dividing word of mouth into several categories although in reality, according to Dr. Paul Marsden, WOMM/Viral/Buzz are all same thing, namely network enhanced Word of Mouth. For those who want nuances: viral marketing leverages digital networks; buzz leverages media networks; and WOMM leverages social networks. Viral marketing can employ either an ideavirus or shockvirus approach, while social networking is typically managed as influencer relations. Keep in mind that pure word of mouth has no limits on distribution vehicles.

### Viral Marketing Explained

And from Justin Kirby, Managing Director of DMC Ltd., "In fact the most successful use of online viral marketing is not as a standalone tactic but as an integrated part of a brand's overall marketing strategy. One of the big mistakes brands make is thinking that an online viral campaign is an end in itself rather than recognizing that it's a means to an end. Viral marketing, like PR, is a process not an event. Its point is to create a buzz in order to help build brand and shift product, not just to create a buzz full stop. There is no point in 'going viral' without fulfilling a wider or longer-term strategic purpose.

### Metcalfe's law, the power behind viral marketing

Metcalfe's law tells us that the value of a network

increases with the square of the number of people using it. So when you have 10 users in the world, that's 25 times better than when there were two. And at 100 users your network is 1000 times better than at 10. With 100 user hubs your network has a reach of 10,000 people. 100 hubs seems to be the magic number.

Twenty five years after Regis McKenna published a brochure touting the value of word of mouth the term viral marketing was created by the VC firm Draper Fisher Jurvetson. It was used to describe the phenomenon of Hotmail, which grew with the rapidity of a cold virus, from 0 to 12 million subscribers in eighteen months. Viral marketing was pronounced marketing buzzword of the year for 1998.

And then not much happened until 2001 when the July 30 issue of BusinessWeek carried Buzz Marketing as their cover story. That's also the year when four major books came into being expanding on the concept of word of mouth marketing. Those four books are identified with stars on the Authors/Practitioners page.

### Benefits of employing WOMM

Perhaps the first issue to resolve, because of the nature of the audience for this white paper, is whether WOM lends itself better to consumer marketing or business to business. The answer is "both" equally well. In the B2B world it is particularly well suited to the pharmaceutical and technology industries because of the need for one on one conversation about technical aspects.

From the customers point of view word of mouth emanates from a trusted source, is credible, friendly, and tuned to the listener's personal interests. It also overcomes the four most feared words in advertising, "I don't believe you".

## Stories and Case Studies

From Stanley Arnold's Tale of a Blue Horse to the incredible stories of Hotmail, Post-it Notes and a dozen others you'll find inspiring success stories. Netscape, Napster, Trivial Pursuit, and BullGuard software security all offer exciting examples of WOM.

### Choose the approach that best fits your needs.

There are three, and they range from Ideaviruses to Shockviruses to Influentials.

Ideaviruses are predicated on spreading the word based on a superior product. Shockviruses are predicated on spreading the word based on superior advertising. And Influentials are predicated on spreading the word based on either evangelists, or the mavens and connectors that populate network hubs who are persuaded to spread the word based on either the user's enthusiasm for the product or corporate sponsored relationships.

A point of clarification contributed by Justin Kirby, "What's the difference between Viral Advertising and Viral Marketing? Well any viral advertising campaign is doing viral marketing but what is specific about viral advertising is the use of creative agents rather than the amplification and acceleration of product recommendations". And referencing a recent Marketing Sherpa report, "The reason you focus on the creative agents is because the product normally doesn't have a uniqueness that can be leveraged to amplify and accelerate word of mouth. So you make the creative agent/communications *sticky* because the product *isn't* necessarily."

### Costs Overview

You will encounter two sets of costs if you pursue a WOM program. First will be an ongoing monthly fee to design and manage the process. These monthly fees can range from \$5,000 to \$20,000 and will probably be based on a one year commitment. Second will be your out of pocket costs for production services which need

to be estimated before a commitment is made ... but this cannot be accomplished until the planning is done.

### Challenges to implementation

Both WOM and viral marketing can be a tough sell to management because they reflect a major change in the typical approach to marketing communications. However they solve some big sales and marketing problems ... like qualified leads, shorter selling cycles, and often an overall reduction in the cost of sales.

### Deliverables from your WOM marcom group

Marketing's deliverables include development of a virusworthy product or story, databases of power influencers, messaging and assistance with accelerated contagion or seeding.

### Launching a WOM program

I mentioned earlier that WOM is not a standalone tactic, but rather a component in your overall marketing strategy. So before putting all your eggs in the WOM basket be sure you develop a comprehensive Communications Support Plan.

### Understanding network hubs

Network hubs are individuals who communicate with more people about a certain product than the average person does. Researchers have traditionally referred to them as "opinion leaders." In industry they're called "influencers," "lead users," or sometimes "power users." They are the 10% who influence the 90%.

### To wrap this up read seven pages of random comments from practitioners, pioneering WOM authors, and my friends from both WOMMA and VBMA.

Where to turn then? Help can be found via word of mouth consultants, ad agencies, and PR firms.



...to add wings to your marketing, spurs to your sales

# Everything you ever wanted to know about WOM

## WORD OF MOUTH DEFINED

Regis McKenna's explains the difference between word of mouth and all other forms of communications with the following. "It is an experienced process, rather than an observed one. The message is tuned to the individual listener. The credibility of the speaker carries over to the message immediately. Experts can be used in this medium without the negative effect of commercializing his or her position and message. Efficiency... while taking time to disseminate the message is delivered directly to those who must use the information and act on it. Feedback is instantaneous."

To quote Emanuel Rosen's *The Anatomy of Buzz*, "To create buzz and use it effectively, you should have a realistic view of the phenomenon, not glorify it. For example, some word-of-mouth enthusiasts argue that if you get good buzz, you don't need to do any marketing. This can be a major mistake. Distribution, advertising, promotions and other traditional marketing activities can translate the goodwill surrounding your product into sales. Good buzz is the best thing you could wish for, but it's just one component of your marketing mix."

## VIRAL MARKETING EXPLAINED

Conceived in 1996. Born in 2001. It's the management of an "ideavirus", or a "shockvirus" through word of mouth online. It's word of mouth on steroids.

It's marketing's response to the educated consumer and the Internet. As the ability (speed) of customers to communicate with customers grows stronger, the credibility of marketers communicating with customers grows weaker. If charging people for exposure to your virus is going to slow down its spread give it away! Apple cut the price of WebObjects from \$50,000 to

\$699 recognizing that unless *a lot of people* used their software no one would use it!

WHY GO VIRAL? WHY CHOOSE WORD OF MOUTH? BECAUSE TRADITIONAL ADVERTISING IS COSTLY AND SERIOUSLY LACKING IN CREDIBILITY! And because viral marketing has become the latest stealth strategy for "qualified" lead generation.

What's this viral marketing thing all about? Viral marketing (VM) is defined as *managing* digitally-augmented word of mouth, or buzz. "Digitally-augmented" simply means using the Internet to deploy your VM program and email is the primary tool of choice. Word of mouth has been around since the beginning of time but the spreading, without electronic support, is typically both tedious and slow from a marketing standpoint. The Internet has changed all that. To quote Seth Godin from his *Unleashing the Ideavirus*, "Stop marketing at people. Turn your ideas into epidemics by helping your customers do the marketing for you!"

## BENEFITS TO MARKETERS AND BUYERS

The simplest reason for choosing word of mouth marketing over traditional advertising is that it can be FASTER, CHEAPER, BETTER! But no guarantees! A recent study by advertising giant Euro RSCG Worldwide states that for generating excitement about products, word of mouth is 10 times more effective than TV or print ads. If you can achieve focus on your product's virus-worthiness viral marketing will deliver 10X the market impact at 1/10<sup>th</sup> the cost. VM turns your ideas into epidemics by helping your customers do the marketing for you. It also overcomes the four most feared words in advertising, "I don't believe you".

Why the viral marketing approach to word of mouth? In a nutshell it's the speed and low cost distribution enabled by the Internet. And because traditional advertising is costly, not terribly productive anymore, and lacking in credibility word of mouth marketing is becoming the best way to launch a brand. Today the speed of information diffusion enable by the Internet is weakening the ability of *marketers* to communicate with customers and strengthening the ability of *customers* to communicate with customers.

From the customers point of view word of mouth emanates from a trusted source, is credible, friendly, tuned to the listener's personal interests, very efficient, and offers instant feedback. In other words, dialogue, rather than monologue.

#### **WORD OF MOUTH STORIES AND CASE STUDIES**

From Stanley Arnold's *Tale of the Blue Horse*, 1968 comes the story of United Airlines and how they used word of mouth to inspire executive secretaries to choose United over competitors when charged by their bosses to book a flight. At that time United's public image seemed to lack something. Arnold's suggestion: send a freshly cut, long-stemmed rose every Monday of every week for a year to the executive secretaries of the top 1000 CEOs (fifty-two thousand roses). Plus a bud vase with the first mailing. The result: doors closed previously to United salesmen were suddenly open. Within six months dramatic increases in ticketing occurred.

Before General Foods could sell (new products) they first had to announce this new line of products to their salesmen—the men who would sit down with the buying committees of the retails stores and try to persuade them that a demand for (their new products) would be sweeping the nation (via word of mouth). Young & Rubicam, their ad agency, was therefore asked to develop an imaginative idea that would help General Foods introduce (the new products) to its sales force with flair and confidence. Y&R turned to Stanley who

dreamed up the idea of a blue horse consistent with General Foods promise that the new product line would definitely be "a horse of a different color."

On meeting day the blue horse had been tethered to a tree about forty feet from the bar. After the first round of drinks the salesmen of General Foods could not believe their eyes. "These drinks are so damn good," one of the regional sales managers said to me, "I believe I see a blue horse out there." All the others said the same thing, but none could believe what their eyes told them.

Finally the meeting began as General Foods announced to its salesmen that their company was going to give them the most exciting line of products in their company's glorious history. General Foods finally revealed it was going into gourmet foods. Everyone quickly had a second drink. The applause was perfunctory. Some of the applause even sounded like hissing.

"This is new territory for General Foods," the speaker went on. You might even say that compared to what you've been selling until now, this is a horse of a different color."

At that point they responded. They had seen a blue horse out there. Now they knew what it was all about. The meeting finally picked up momentum, and to the extent that experienced food salesmen can summon up enthusiasm for gourmet foods, these salesmen were close to a level of exuberance. The introduction of the gourmet line was dispatched beyond anyone's expectations.

In Search of Excellence by Tom Peters and Robert Waterman. In 1980 Peters and his coauthor Bob Waterman, (McKinsey consultants) put together a 125-page summary of what later became the classic management book *In Search of Excellence*. They gave it to just a few executives they knew, but very quickly these individuals started discussing with others what they had read. Tom Peters attributes part of the success of his first book to an extensive seeding campaign.

**VIRAL MARKETING STRATEGY:** Successful seeding is an active process. It goes well beyond the Field of Dreams cliché "If you build it, they will come." Rather than waiting passively for people to come to you, you go out and plant seeds all around the forest. Here are a few guidelines:

**VIRAL MARKETING TACTICS:** As word about the coming book started to spread, demand soared, and the authors decided to seed the market with 15,000 copies of this preliminary report. Their publisher was worried that Peters and Waterman were giving too many. Edward Burlingame, who commissioned the book for Harper & Row, said that the company expected to sell around 60,000 copies in the first year, meaning that the 15,000 copies represented 25 percent of that amount. But Peters believes that these copies were important in generating word of mouth and sales. "Within days of the book's launching, supportive reviews appeared, and the network of 15,000 (plus at least an equal number of photocopied knockoffs) hurried to buy the real thing, often in bulk for their subordinates," Peter recalls in *Thriving on Chaos*.

**RESULTS:** *In Search of Excellence* sold 1.5 million copies in hardcover alone.

The game of Trivial Pursuit sold 20 million copies in 1984 but word about the product didn't spread by contagion alone. Buzz was accelerated by a seeding campaign. Samples were sent to celebrities mentioned in the game. The helped start trivia parties which in turn were encourage by more than 100 radio stations asking trivia questions. They also sent teaser mailings to toy buyers just before a major industry toy fair. Emanuel Rosen calls this type of acceleration leapfrogging.

In 1993 people didn't really understand online services. AOL had formed alliances with major media but the masses weren't responding. Comprehension and credibility were low. So Jan Brandt mailed 250 million CDs to seed the market. The program cost \$300 for a new user worth only \$124. It worked. After reaching

their tipping point costs dropped to less than \$100 per new user.

### **THEN THE INTERNET ARRIVED**

The Hotmail story started in 1995 with two young men from Silicon Valley, each working for a different company, but needing to collaborate on a common project without using their company's email. Suddenly they had a bright idea...a free email service that could be accessed through the web. With only \$300,000 in VC seed money they launched the company. A word of mouth program launched both electronically and face-to-face started to spread the word. It was good old word of mouth marketing at Internet speed. Within two months they had 100,000 users, and by eighteen months they had 12 million subscribers. The term viral marketing evolved from this success story. Microsoft bought Hotmail for \$400 million and as of 2001 was signing up a hundred thousand people a day.

Napster, a way of networking people's hard drives so that they can share music, spread so fast in only a few months that it threatened the entire recording industry and appeared on the cover of *Newsweek*!

The story of Post-It notes is so good it ought to be apocryphal but it's actually true. Nobody was buying the. 3M was going to cancel the whole program. Then the brand manager of the product persuaded the secretary of the chairman of 3M to send a case of Post-Its to the secretaries of the chairmen of the other 499 Fortune 500 Companies. Suddenly, the most powerful sneezers in the most powerful companies in the country were sending around memos, all containing comments scrawled on Post-Its. It took just a few months after that for it to become yet another successful business communication device. A classic ideavirus.

From a recent Wall St. Journal article, "Airlines in bankruptcy usually don't have the luxury of grinding through precious dollars with fancy image campaigns to reassure nervous travelers. United spent some \$30





















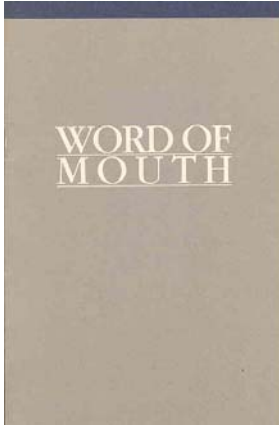












# Regis McKenna, Word of Mouth

## HOW TO START A WORD-OF-MOUTH CAMPAIGN

**The Message.** Word of mouth is not appropriate for all communication. The message itself has to be developed and analyzed. Word of mouth is most effective when one wants to build credibility and establish lasting ties or when commitment is most critical. It is effective when the message must carry intangibles such as commitment, credibility appeal, adaptability and support.

**Segmentation.** You must break down the network into manageable pieces and identify major influences within each segment. This task must be done by knowledgeable, experienced people. Unlike other promotional tools, word of mouth requires someone who "knows" the influencing factors.

**Analyze the segment.** Ask the question, "How does information pass within each segment and how are the segments linked?" Then ask, "Who are the most influential people within each segment?"

**Pick the targets.** Make a list of the 20 or 30 major influences and assign the most credible members of the organization to deliver the message.

## The difference between word of mouth and *all* other forms of communication include:

- It is an experienced process, rather than an observed one. The message in word of mouth is embodied in a living, breathing, emotional person.
- The message is tuned to the individual listener. It is changed, simplified, altered, embellished and verified for each person.
- The credibility of the speaker carries over to the message immediately.
- Experts can be used in this medium without the negative effect of commercializing his or her position and message.
- Efficiency; While word of mouth takes time to disseminate, the message is delivered directly to those who must use the information and act on it.
- Feedback is instantaneous: agreement, disagreement, understanding, not understanding.

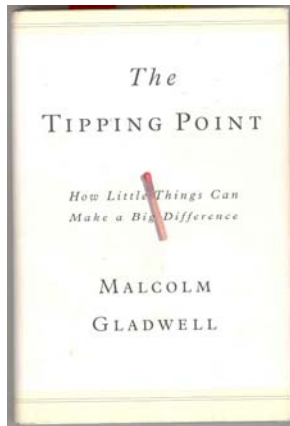
## THE 90-10 RULE

By now one might be saying, "Okay, by talking to everyone in the world we can better communicate our message. That's not practical or possible!" Right! But the 90-10 rule states that 90 percent of the world is influenced by the other 10 percent.

There are probably no more than 20 or 30 people in any one industry who have a *major* impact on trends, standards, opinion and a company's image or character.

Certainly we know this is true in the media and financial community. While there may be dozens of magazines and mountains of analysis covering an industry, only several have real influence and impact.

This is true within companies as well. A relatively few people hold the key to power in any organization. This is not to say that these key influences are easy to reach. A memo may reach them easier, but credible word-of-mouth approach will be far more influential and effective.



# Malcolm Gladwell, The Tipping Point

In this brilliant and groundbreaking book, *New Yorker* writer Malcolm Gladwell looks at why major changes in our society so often happen suddenly and unexpectedly. Ideas, behavior, messages, and products, he argues, often spread like outbreaks of infectious disease. Just as a single sick person can start an epidemic of the flu, so too can a few fare-beaters and graffiti artists fuel a subway crime wave, or a satisfied customer fill the empty tables of a new restaurant. These are *social* epidemics, and the moment when they take off, when they reach their critical mass, is the Tipping Point.

Gladwell introduces us to the particular personality types who are natural pollinators of new ideas and trends, the people who create the phenomenon of word of mouth. He analyzes fashion trends, smoking, children's television, direct mail, and the early days of the American Revolution for clues about making ideas infectious, and visits a religious commune, a successful high-tech company, and one of the world's greatest salesmen to show how to start and sustain social epidemics.

## What You'll Learn In The Tipping Point:

Directions for reaching a Tipping Point. You'll learn how the three rules of the Tipping Point -- the Law of the Few, the Stickiness Factor, and the Power of Context -- offer a way of making sense of epidemics.

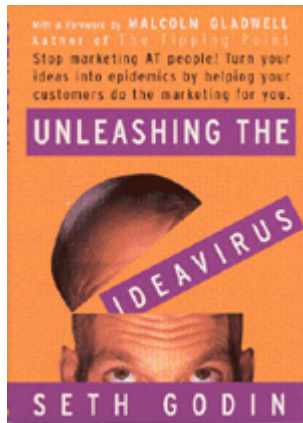
How to choose the people who will spread the epidemic. Spreading the word depends on people who are either experts or possessed with a rare set of social gifts. You'll learn how to identify mavens, connectors, and salesmen (persuaders).

The importance of memorable product exposure. The Presentation is everything. If your product is not inherently exciting you must position your message so that it is, and has the ability to move people.

Understanding the power of context. You'll learn to become sensitive to the circumstances and conditions of times and places, those specific and relatively small elements in the environment can serve as Tipping Points. The paradox of the epidemic (viral marketing) is that in order to create one contagious movement; you often have to create many small movements first.

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1. The Three Rules of Epidemics.
2. The Law of the Few: Connectors, Mavens, and Salesmen
3. The Stickiness Factor: Sesame Street, Blue's Clues, and the Educational Virus
4. The Power of Context (Part One): Bernie Goetz and the Rise and Fall of New York City Crime
5. The Power of Context (Part Two): The Magic Number One Hundred and Fifty
6. Case Study: Rumors, Sneakers, and the Power of Translation
7. Case Study: Suicide, Smoking, and the Search for the Unsticky Cigarette
8. Conclusion: Focus, Test, and Believe



### What You'll Learn In Unleashing The Ideavirus

**Why ideas matter.** In this section you'll learn about the holy grail for people who deal in ideas, how to create an environment where consumers market to each other, the key steps to building a virus, 6 reasons why ideaviruses are so important, 5 things ideaviruses have in common, and 7 ways an ideavirus can help you.

**How to unleash an ideavirus.** Learn why you must focus on "sneezers" those people best qualified to start an epidemic, why unleashing and ideavirus is more than simple word of mouth, and thirteen question ideavirus marketers must have answered.

**Understanding the ideavirus formula.** How to tweak the formula and make it work plus a look at the eight underlying variables that impact success.

# Seth Godin, Unleashing the Ideavirus

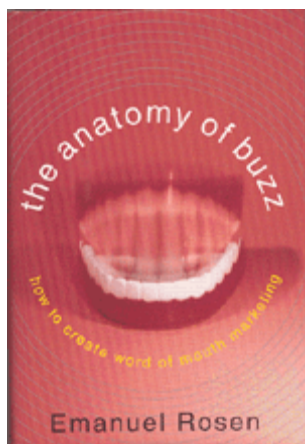
### If you don't have time to read the whole book, here's what it says:

Marketing by interrupting people isn't cost-effective anymore. You can't afford to seek out people and send them unwanted marketing messages, in large groups, and hope that some will send you money. Instead, the future belongs to marketers who establish a foundation and process where interested people can market to each other. Ignite consumer networks and then get out of the way and let them talk.

**Why Ideas Matter.** The holy grail for anyone who traffics in ideas is this: to unleash an ideavirus. An idea that just sits there is worthless. But an idea that moves and grows and infects everyone it touches ...that's an ideavirus. An ideavirus is a big idea that runs amok across the target audience. Word of mouth is not new it's just different now. Ideaviruses give us increasing returns, word of mouth dies out, but ideaviruses get bigger. And finally, ideaviruses are the currency of the future. While ideaviruses aren't new, they're important because we're obsessed with the new, and an ideavirus is always about the new.

### The key steps for Internet companies looking to build a virus are:

- Create a newsworthy online experience that's either totally new or makes the user's life much better. Or makes an offline experience better/faster/cheaper so that switching is worth the hassle.
- Have the idea behind your online experience go viral, bringing you a large chunk of the group you're targeting without having to spend a fortune advertising the new service.
- Fill the vacuum in the marketplace with your version of the idea, so that competitors now have a very difficult time of un-teaching your virus and starting their own.
- Achieve "lock in" by creating larger and larger costs to switching from your service to someone else's.
- Get permission from users to maintain an ongoing dialogue so you can turn the original attention into a beneficial experience for users and an ongoing profit stream for you.
- Continue creating noteworthy online experiences to further spread new viruses, starting with your core audience of raving fans.



# Emanuel Rosen, The Anatomy of Buzz

Emanuel Rosen, with nine years experience as Marketing VP for a Silicon Valley software company, here illuminates the reality of how "buzz" can be launched and managed so as to more rapidly reach a critical mass (the tipping point) of adopters for one's innovation.

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6. How Buzz Spreads

### Part Two. Success In The Networks

7. Contagious Products
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### Part Three. Stimulating Buzz

9. Working with Network Hubs
10. Active Seeding
11. The Elements of a Good Story
12. Viral Marketing
13. Does Madison Avenue Still Matter?
14. Buzz in Distribution Channels
15. Putting It Together
16. Buzz Workshop

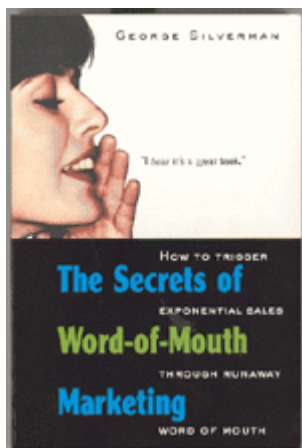
## What You'll Learn In The Anatomy of Buzz

**How buzz spreads.** You'll learn that buzz is all the word of mouth about a brand, which it spreads through invisible networks of very special people, that we talk because we're programmed to talk, and that nothing happens without the establishment of network hubs. You'll also learn the structure of these networks and about the energy and credibility required to make it work.

**How to assure success.** You'll learn that some products evoke and emotional response, some advertise themselves, some leave traces, others become more useful as people use them, products that are compatible, that "do the rest", and the power of gossip. And you'll learn that there's still a need for traditional advertising, promotion and PR to accelerate the whole process but that the timing of this stuff is critical. It's called Leapfrogging, and it builds momentum.

**How to stimulate the spread of buzz.** You'll learn how to identify and nurture network hubs, the importance and techniques of "seeding", the importance of having a good story. You'll learn to think of viral marketing as a buzz accelerator and that very few products can rely on buzz alone. But ads can hurt as well as help. Plus skills at channel deployment. And lastly examples of people who did it and how, followed by a Buzz Workshop chapter that Seth Godin says "by itself is worth the entire price of the book!"

**Does Madison Avenue still matter?** Yes! The truth is that very few products can rely on buzz alone. Six rules about ads and buzz: keep it simple, tell us what's new, don't make claims you can't support, ask your customers to articulate what's special about your product or service, start measuring buzz, and listen to the buzz. Can advertising kill buzz? Yes, if it's shoved down their throats, or perceived to be dishonest.



# George Silverman, The Secrets of Word of Mouth Marketing

## Twenty-Eight Secrets of Word-of-Mouth Marketing

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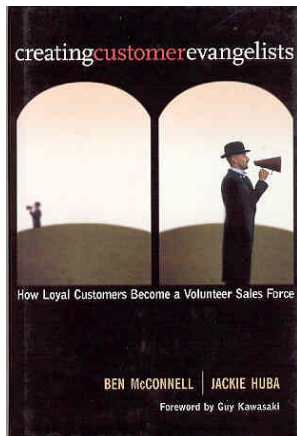
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- #1. Selling is mostly an illusion.
- #2. By influencing word of mouth directly, sales can routinely be increased three to ten times or more!
- #3. Single most effective method for speeding up decisions is word of mouth.
- #4. Word of mouth is as easy to structure and use as traditional advertising.
- #5. Word of mouth is literally thousands of times as powerful as advertising.
- #6. Word of mouth is paradoxically the most powerful and most neglected force in marketing.
- #7. It is almost impossible for your product to succeed unless it has massive positive word of mouth.
- #8. Word of mouth either explodes at an exponential rate or it fizzles.
- #9. There are over a dozen reasons why word of mouth is so powerful. All of these reasons, once understood, can be turned to your advantage.
- #10. The overriding characteristic that gives word of mouth its power: word of
- #11. There are many different types of word of mouth, all potentially controllable.
- #12. Different types of decision makers need different types of word of mouth at each stage of the decision cycle.
- #13. As important as content is, the sequence and source are just as important.
- #14. There are basically two levels of word of mouth, expert and peer, and their relative power varies at different stages of the decision cycle.
- #15. In word of mouth marketing, confirmation and verification are more important than information.
- #16. In word of mouth marketing, you are navigating spheres of influence.
- #17. Experts are more approachable than ordinary people, but only through total honesty.
- #18. Credibility is more important in an expert than fame.
- #19. There are many reliable mechanisms for delivering word of mouth.
- #20. Word of mouth must be approached systematically, as a campaign.
- #21. The word of mouth among your sales force can be more important than the word of mouth among your customers.
- #22. There is a specific way to research the naturally occurring word of mouth so that you can identify exactly what your customers are actually saying.
- #23. There is a way to experiment with ways to influence the natural word of mouth and verify that it is in fact persuasive.
- #24. There are many ways of producing and delivering "canned" word of mouth that are almost as powerful as live, spontaneous word of mouth.
- #25. Paradoxically, in word of mouth, unlike in conventional marketing, negatives can be more reassuring than positives about the product.
- #26. "Word-of-mouth advertising is a contradiction in terms.
- #27. In word of mouth marketing, any perceived attempt to influence the content will totally invalidate the communication.
- #28. The usual rules of advertising and salesmanship are often counterproductive in word of mouth marketing.



# Jackie Huba/Ben McConnell, Creating Customer Evangelists

**You are an evangelist.** You tell others what movie to see, which computer to purchase, what restaurant to visit, which dentist you prefer, which cell phone to buy, which books to read, which clubs to join. Your recommendations are sincere. Passionate, perhaps. Perhaps you didn't realize that you are an evangelist—a bringer of glad tidings—but your sphere of influence, made up of friends, family, colleagues, and professional communities, realizes it.

## HOW TO SPOT EVANGELISTS AND WHAT TO DO WITH THEM

People talk about you. They talk about your company, your products and services, and your personality. Many say nice things, and some are absolutely gushy with their praise. Would you like to know who they are? How do you find your evangelists? Short of spy cams and hidden microphones, it's not difficult to find your evangelists. Here are a few ideas.

**Scan the Web using your favorite search engine and discover where you are mentioned online and by whom.** Make note of everyone who compliments your products and services and everyone who criticizes them. For the people who love you, send them a hand-written thank-you note. Invite them in to a special club with other evangelists where they get inside information about products and services. Make them feel extra special. For those who take issue with your products or services, find a way to contact them via e-mail or ask if it's OK to talk on the phone. The difference between an unhappy customer and an evangelist is often just a phone call. More than anything, unhappy customers just want to be *heard and acknowledged*. Grant an unhappy customer that wish.

**Ask prospective customers specifically how they discovered you.** If it was from a friend or colleague, ask the prospect for the name of the referrer. Keep detailed records of how people discovered you. With some of our clients, we create a Buzz Map, which illustrates the actual routes of how they landed customers via word of mouth. A map of customer connections quickly illuminates your biggest evangelists.

**If you have an opt-in e-mail list, add a field that asks how people discovered you.** Continually refine the quantifiable nature of this field. You want to gather as much information as possible from this field, especially if the referrals are from people. Those are your evangelists!

**Be an active participant in e-mail discussion lists and online bulletin boards that your customers frequent.** Watch for customers who post recommendations about you. Cultivate relationships with them. Keep them in your loop.

**Use Web site tracking software to understand how Web site visitors discover you.** If customers, prospects, fans, or evangelists link to your site, do *not* send them a cease-and-desist letter. This creates customer vigilantes, not customer evangelists. Do *not* let your corporate counsel argue that fan sites contribute to brand dilution. This is pure crap espoused by prosecutorial-minded lawyers intent on making customers play by ridiculous notions of trademark protection. (Note: Protect your trademarks against *competitors*, not customers.) Encourage links to your site, wherever fans would like to create them. Provide fans with pictures of your products, logos, movies, animations—anything that makes them feel connected to you. *They are your volunteer sales force.*

From their research into the best practices of some of the most forward-thinking companies, McConnell and Huba outline and explain the six basic tenets of creating customer evangelists:

**Customer plus-delta:**

Continuously gather customer feedback.

**Napsterize knowledge:**

Make it a point to share knowledge freely.

**Build the buzz:**

Expertly build word-of-mouth networks.

**Create community:**

Encourage communities of customers to meet and share.

**Make bite-size chunks:**

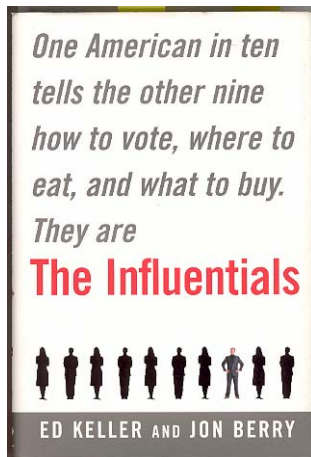
Devise specialized, smaller offerings to get customers to bite.

**Create a cause:**

Focus on making the world, or your industry, better.

And from Guy Kawasaki...

*"Sales is rooted in what's good for me. Evangelism is rooted in what's good for you."*



# Ed Keller and Jon Berry, The Influentials

One American in ten tells the other nine how to vote, where to eat, and what to buy. They are **The Influentials**.

Who are they? The most influential Americans-- the ones who tell their neighbors what to buy, which politicians to support, and where to vacation--are not necessarily the people you'd expect. They're not America's most affluent 10 percent or best-educated 10 percent. They're not the "early adopters," always the first to try everything from Franco-Polynesian fusion cooking to digital cameras. They are, however, the 10 percent of Americans most engaged in their local communities . . . and they wield a huge amount of influence within those communities. They're the campaigners for open-space initiatives. They're church vestrymen and friends of the local public library. They're the Influentials . . . and whether or not they are familiar to you, they're very well known to the researchers at RoperASW. For decades, these researchers have been on a quest for marketing's holy grail: that elusive but supremely powerful channel known as *word of mouth*. What they've learned is that even more important than the "word"--*what* is said, is the "mouth"--*who* says it.

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5. The Influential Vision: Seven Trends For The Future.
6. Developing An Influential Strategy: Six Rules For Getting Into The Conversation.

## SIX RULES FOR GETTING INTO THE CONVERSATION

WHAT'S YOUR INFLUENTIAL STRATEGY?" If you've not asked yourself this question already, you should. To succeed today, you need to connect with the people who are at the center of the conversation. Business, government, and nonprofit organizations need to have influential strategies just as they need marketing, advertising, public relations, promotion, or Internet strategies.

Specifically, you should make sure you are reaching the decision makers who are influential in others' decisions. You should know where the opinion leaders get *their* ideas--the kinds of publications they read, the programs they watch, the radio stations they listen to, and the Web sites they go to. You should make sure you don't have the door shut when opinion leaders come to you with a complaint or question. You should be out in the community to make sure you're listening to opinion leaders' concerns. You should pay attention to what's happening in opinion leaders' lives, the issues that opinion leaders are reading up on, the problems they are focused on, and their short-and long-term goals. Companies should be asking themselves if their products and services, environmental stance, and corporate practices are consonant with opinion leaders' expectations. What the opinion leaders say and think about companies has more of an impact on what their customers are thinking and doing than companies realize.



## Paul Rand, Partner, Director, Global Technology Practice, and Managing Director, Chicago office

# Ketchum Public Relations

NEW YORK, Sept. 15, 2003 - Ketchum, capturing the growing importance of influencers in shaping buying decisions, today launched Ketchum Influencer Relationship Management<sup>SM</sup> (Ketchum IRM). The proprietary program identifies and reaches that select group of people who, for each company or organization, mold the perceptions and behaviors of customers and decision makers. The global initiative features a customized Web-based portal to manage and measure relationships with these influencers.

Ketchum IRM embraces a proven seven-step process and a proprietary technology infrastructure. The secure portal database, overseen by a certified Ketchum team, captures key data on each influencer, making it simple to manage the program's progress.

The offering reflects Ketchum's extensive experience helping companies work more closely with the key individuals and small groups that can affect -- positively or negatively -- broad market perceptions and behaviors quickly and directly. Several Fortune 500 companies have piloted the program successfully to accelerate the effectiveness of their overall marketing campaigns.

Ketchum IRM extends far beyond traditional influencers such as media, government and analysts to include others whose opinions and advice people trust highly. Researchers at RoperASW indicate that consumers and buyers increasingly look to this mix of key individuals or small groups possessing specific, relevant knowledge that can help simplify how they think and act.

"Today, a fragmented market has made it possible for buyers and decision makers to opt out of mass-market advertising, which means a different route must be taken to capture their hearts and minds," said Ed Keller, chief executive officer of RoperASW and co-author of *The Influentials: One American in Ten Tells the Other Nine How to Vote, Where to Eat, and What to Buy*. "The Ketchum IRM program is a thoughtful and organized approach to help get influencers on your side."

Directly reaching consumers, buyers and other key targets is getting tougher. The typical consumer faces information overload, bombarded by 10,000 to 30,000 commercial messages daily, plus an additional 200 or so personalized messages in the form of phone calls, e-mails, faxes and memos.

Add recent questioning of corporate credibility to this mix and it's easy to see why an outbreak of recent books, articles and stories question the value of simply using current mass-advertising and mass-marketing strategies while highlighting the growing importance of influencers.

"In a time when people drown in information, influentials play a crucial role in how people think and act. They serve to filter and validate information for people who want trusted counsel," said Paul M. Rand, a Ketchum partner and leader of the IRM development team. "Ketchum IRM becomes a marketer's new currency in strengthening relationships with its most powerful and vocal advocates."

Ketchum used to draw up lists of 2,000-3,000 names, but the IRM system focuses on 150-200- "the cream of the crop," said Paul Rand, director of Ketchum's global technology practice in Chicago and head of the IRM practice. "We as an industry are going through a big evolution; what typically worked in the past does not necessarily work today," said Rand.

# VBMA Global

## (Viral + Buzz Marketing Association)

### **VBMA Manifesto 1: Mission and Affiliation**

All members of the VBMA share the conviction that Viral Marketing, Buzz Marketing and Word-of-Mouth Marketing (and other related marketing approaches that harness network-enhanced word of mouth) are based on the principles outlined below, and that we work constantly on improving these marketing techniques:

The Viral & Buzz Marketing Association (VBMA) is an international group for the development, validation and promotion of consumer-oriented marketing trends and techniques.

Our members are viral and buzz marketing practitioners and academics who specialize in consumer-focused marketing. We aim to create international collaborations, swap case studies, develop best practice and dispel the myths surrounding viral and buzz marketing in order to help it become more widely accepted as a credible, key part of brands overall marketing activities.

If you would like to apply to join and help drive the VBMA, please click on [www.vbma.net](http://www.vbma.net)

All members of the VBMA share the conviction that Viral Marketing, Buzz Marketing and Word-of-Mouth Marketing (and other related marketing approaches that harness network-enhanced word of mouth) are based on the principles outlined on [www.vbma.net/mission.html](http://www.vbma.net/mission.html)

1) We strive to identify only those people who will be interested in a particular marketing message; deliver the message to them in a way that makes it an enjoyable or valuable experience; provide it in a manner that encourages them to share it with others.

We will therefore be providing a benefit to our audiences and their acquaintances and in so doing, to the brands for which we work.

2) Our goal is to foster genuine enthusiasm about brands and brand communications, which can spread through networks in a way that is enjoyed, appreciated and / or valued.

3) We believe that network-enhanced word of mouth has a critical role to play in the future of integrated marketing communications. Marketers need to offer content in the media and through one-to-one connections that the recipients themselves choose to propagate to those that they deem appropriate, thereby eliminating irrelevant, untimely and (as a consequence) annoying marketing messages.

4) We believe that whatever our target, we will always be dealing with educated people who detect when they are being deceived.

These people appreciate brands that find smart ways to entertain, educate or inform them. They are well-informed in the area of marketing, peer-to-peer exchange and consumption, enabling them to function as partners and stakeholders in marketing communication activities. As partners, we treat these people with care and respect. We will not only develop or send information or content to them, but will also listen to their opinions. We value their contributions. Our audience-centric vision of connected marketing seeks to put the target networks at the center of marketing.

These positions are unifying principles shared by all members of the VBMA. We agree that working in this field is considered acceptable, professional and valuable when these principles are respected.

Companies or individuals who do not adhere to these principles are not considered to be carrying out viral/buzz/word-of-mouth marketing by the VBMA.



# Andy Sernovitz, WOMMA (Word of Mouth Marketing Association)

**WOMMA is Word of Mouth Marketing. Andy Sernovitz its founding CEO.**

WOMMA is the official trade association for the word of mouth marketing industry. WOMMA's mission is to promote and improve word of mouth marketing by:

- Protecting consumers and the industry with strong ethical guidelines.
- Promoting WOM as an effective marketing tool.
- Setting standards to encourage its use.

WOMMA members are building a prosperous word of mouth (WOM) marketing profession. Thriving markets are built on best practices, effective standards, and ethical leadership. Those are the qualities that bring WOMMA members together -- and we hope that you will join us if you share these values.

You can explore WOMMA at [www.womma.org](http://www.womma.org).

## **What is Word of Mouth Marketing?**

Word of mouth is a pre-existing phenomenon that marketers are only now learning how to harness, amplify, and improve. Word of mouth marketing isn't about creating word of mouth -- it's learning how to make it work within a marketing objective.

That said, word of mouth can be encouraged and facilitated. Companies can work hard to make people happier, they can listen to consumers, they can make it easier for them to tell their friends, and they can make certain that influential individuals know about the good qualities of a product or service.

Word of mouth marketing empowers people to share their experiences. It's harnessing the voice of the customer for the good of the brand. And it's acknowledging that the unsatisfied customer is equally powerful.

Word of mouth can't be faked or invented. Attempting to fake word of mouth is unethical and creates a backlash, damages the brand, and tarnishes the corporate reputation. Legitimate word of mouth marketing acknowledges consumers' intelligence -- it never attempts to fool them. Ethical marketers reject all tactics related to manipulation, deception, infiltration, or dishonesty.

All word of mouth marketing techniques are based on the concepts of customer satisfaction, two-way dialog, and transparent communications. The basic elements are:

- Educating people about your products and services
- Identifying people most likely to share their opinions
- Providing tools that make it easier to share information
- Studying how, where, and when opinions are being shared
- Listening and responding to supporters, detractors, and neutrals



...to add wings to your marketing, spurs to your sales

## Conclusion—Call to Action

**Now that we understand the concept behind word of mouth marketing and the various tools required for its implementation perhaps its time to consider putting it work for us.**

Tell me again why I need WOMM.

It's not an overnight panacea for inadequate lead flow but it offers a powerful resource for adding credibility to your marketing messages ... something that is sorely needed in a world that just doesn't want to hear it anymore from traditional marketers. It's the secret weapon behind *qualified* leads.

Why the departure from tradition? Traditional marketing is just not effective anymore because the speed of information diffusion, enabled by the Internet, is weakening the ability of *companies* to communicate with customers and strengthening the ability of *customers* to communicate with customers. An effective WOM campaign will establish a foundation process where interested people market to each other.

**Inspired by Metcalfe's law, case studies, and practitioner's comments... where do we begin?**

You begin by making an assessment of your product, your market and your needs. This leads to a choice of which is best – a corporate contact program to influentials, or a virals program employing customer word of mouth.

First, the product. Before considering a viral marketing program take a moment for introspection. What is the buzz that your company wishes to spread, hopefully to epidemic proportions? In ten words or less, what makes your product virusworthy? If you can't come up with an answer fix the product or reposition your marketing message. Next the market. How great is the need? And

how will the perception of your message be received, i.e. is your product/service really innovative or just incrementally better? And lastly your needs, which are influenced to a certain degree by marketing dollars available. Would a low key, slower moving influencer program do the job? Or do you want to gamble on a fast return viral effort? Many people do both because there is a similarity in the startup procedure relative to the development of a customer and/or influencer database.

**Creative is king when launching WOM!**

Messaging concepts, copy, graphics will largely determine the success of your venture ... assuming you have something the market needs, and can get excited about. But remember to integrate that messaging within an entire communications support plan ... which must embrace and include the sales force (whether direct, channel, or OEM) as well.

**Understanding network hubs**

Without a good set of names, researched through both primary and secondary research, you have no place to begin. It's critical that you understand network hubs, so perhaps you should reread that section.

**If you're ready to put WOM into action** revisit

[www.womma.org](http://www.womma.org) not only for it's wealth of information but for the listings of resources among its membership. Study the presentations from the recent WOMMA Summit. Ask Andy Sernovitz, CEO, of WOMMA for advice. He knows everybody in the business. Contact him at [andy@womma.com](mailto:andy@womma.com).

**For do-it-yourselfers read Rosen's and Silverman's books or at least keep copies handy for questions, and then follow the simple steps outlined on pages 11 through 14. Good luck!**

# A KBA COMMUNICATIONS SUPPORT PLAN FOCUSED ON WOMM

**PREFACE:** Keep in mind that the most successful use of WOMM, whether Influential or Viral focused, is not as a standalone tactic but as an integrated part of a brand's overall marketing strategy.

Note also that this Communications Support Plan should be preceded by the Market Development Strategy Checklist from Paul Wiefels *The Chasm Companion*, a fieldbook to Geoffrey Moore's *Crossing the Chasm* and *Inside the Tornado*.

**Why choose word of mouth marketing? Because traditional advertising is seriously lacking in credibility! And because the ROI metrics are poorly defined.**

Word of mouth marketing, as defined by Regis McKenna, the guru of technology PR, is the planning and use of established person-to-person relationships.

While WOMM / Viral / Buzz are all the same thing there are nuances one should be aware of:

- WOMM leverages social networks
- Viral leverages digital networks
- Buzz leverages media networks

Be sure to explore each carefully before making a choice as they can be quite different in nature.

The differences:

**WOM-Influentials** is long term and directed to *known* influencers within both social and media networks.

**WOM-Viral** is short term and directed to *unknown* user / prospect recipients after online seeding to a small *known* base.

**Deliverables required for both influencers and viral recipients:**

- Prospect database
- A noteworthy product/service
- Powerful creative concepts

## I. INTRODUCTION

Program Name, Brief Description, Definitions, Target Audiences, and Launch Date, Summary:

- WOM choice rationale
- Influentials: The 90-10 Rule
- Virals: The 3 Rules: stickiness, law of the few, context
- Developing network hubs
- 7 Steps to an Influentials plan
- 7 Steps to a Virals plan

## II. PLANNING COMPONENTS OF THE KBA MARCOM ENGINE

### One: AUDIT

#### Marketing Focused Checklist

- Target customer / influencer
- Compelling reason to buy / influence
- Whole product, or a component
- Partners and allies
- Distribution
- Pricing
- Competition
- Positioning

#### Communications Focused Checklist

- Segmentation of Network Hubs
- External—one voice
- Internal—shared vision

### Two: STRATEGY

#### Communications audience—defined

#### Reason to buy—the 5 whys

#### Communications Objective

- Create awareness, interest, then buzz among key influencers in client community.
- Generate excitement, then enthusiasm for sharing of an online viral presentation.

#### Communications Strategies

- Develop Strategy Statement short forms for both Influencer Relations and Viral Advertising
- Key message / USP
- Reasons to believe
- Accelerated contagion / Blitz

#### Influencer Relations Tactics

- Segmentation of influencers
  - Influencer analysis
  - Benchmarking and metrics
  - Keeping in touch: personal and impersonal
  - Measurement & management
- #### Viral Marketing Tactics
- Create “viral agent” and how to spread (text, image, or video).
  - Seeding: ID websites, blogs, people to send email to.

- Tracking: monitor effect, assess the return from cost of developing viral agent and seeding. the few, power of context

### Three: A CREATIVE REPOSITORY IS DEVELOPED TO SUPPORT THEME/IMAGE STANDARDS AND THE CREATIVE PLATFORM

- Craft messages for influencers.
- Craft integrated ad messages and images across all components of interactive and traditional marketing efforts.
- Craft mega hub/PR messages.
- Craft seminar copy, speeches to various market segment leaders, white papers, etc.

## III. EXECUTION COMPONENTS OF THE KBA MARCOM ENGINE

### One: ARSENAL

#### WOM-Influentials

Personalized correspondence, e-mail, direct response efforts, samples, info kits, articles of interest, awards, conferences, briefings, webinars, road trips, lunch and dinners, group brainstorming, testimonials, facilities visit, CEO summit meetings at HQ.

#### WOM-Viral advertising

20 to 30 second viral, incentives to participate, email support

### Two: DEPLOYMENT OF THE PROCESS

Development of Time Lines and Scheduling

- To seeding resources for virals
- To network Hubs for influencers
- Place ads, mail, email, broadcast fax, telemarketing, etc. (elements of 90 Day Blitz)
- Promote seminars
- Plan for trade shows
- Build chat rooms

Dependencies.

Issues to Be Resolved.

### Three: TRACKING, TESTING & KEEPING BUZZ ALIVE

- It's hard to get it going, still harder to maintain
- Focus, test, and believe