

Women – Your Word-of-Mouth Competitive Advantage

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Word-of-Mouth has become THE buzz word in many marketing and advertising circles. WOMMA (the Word-of-Mouth Marketing Association) defines Word-of-Mouth (WOM) as “the act of individuals providing marketing information to other people”. Whether you are working in the BtoC or BtoB space, having your customers tell their friends, family and work colleagues about your product or service is what we all hope to achieve, and translate into new leads, new customers, increased sales and improved brand awareness.

Organic WOM

iPod, Jones Soda, Starbucks—WOM endorsement for these products spread like wild fire across the US and the globe achieving brand success and bottom line results for each of their corporations. Then and today, little if any advertising is done for Jones Soda and Starbucks, their customers pledging their loyalty daily as they order their favorite latte or submit their suggestions for a new soda name and flavor. While iPod certainly has great advertising, its loyal followers were hooked on the product first...the advertising became the manifestation of iPod's audience's reaction to a great product. One can almost feel the customer experience coming alive in their commercials.

What drove the powerful organic WOM in these brands so quickly? Each of the company's delivered a superior product and customer experience. Each of the company's leadership had a vision which penetrated their entire organization. These ingredients led to high volumes of organic WOM activity. This type of market buzz can't be orchestrated, and it can't be faked—true organic WOM requires vision, leadership, product superiority, creativity, a sense of timing and yes, even a little bit of luck.

But what about the rest of us? Can we leverage WOM or build more awareness and create positive referrals for our product and services? The answer of course is yes, and you can increase your success rate using WOM techniques if you design your programs with women in mind.

Word-Of-Mouth – A Natural Fit for Women

In the early 1960's, pre MRI and PET brain scans, social and political pressure groups persuaded both men and women to “buck” their biological legacies. With the knowledge they had at their disposal, their arguments were well founded for their time. However, since the early 1990's, research studies conducted by leading psychologists, biologist, neuroscientists, paleontologists and ethnologist have clearly shown that there are in fact brain differences between men and women and these differences do impact each genders “best way” of communicating, learning and socialization.

For those readers who are female the following findings will be stating the obvious—things we have known in our “gut” since the time we were little; for our male readers, you will gain a better understanding of the *why* behind the actions that at times, I am sure, have driven you crazy!

Interaction, Community and Collaboration

In the days of the caveman, a woman's role was that of nurturing, caring and working together with other women in her tribe to keep the “fires burning” while her husband hunted for food. The hunt often left her alone for days at a time so out of necessity women grouped, huddled, collaborated and supported each other to assure their joint survival as well as their children's. Today, you see this same desire to group manifested in the millions of social, recreational, religious and career clubs that women create, participate and sustain. This need to group has evolved into a preference for grouping and the net result is a wider social network.

leveraging the network effect of the Internet. The result is a huge reach to a large number of people quickly. In 2002, women became the majority of Internet users. According to a recent eMarketer study, women continue dominating the use of the Internet in increasing numbers. Their adoption rate for blogs is quickly surpassing male bloggers (some research studies indicate women have already reached majority blogger status). Add women's community building skills to these facts and one can see why she's a natural for all viral building tactics.

- **Guerilla Marketing**

Guerrilla marketing covers a wide range of activities, each with a common link: they all use non-traditional channels to get a message to a targeted group. It's marketing that takes place 'in the field', whether that's the real world or an online community. In order to work effectively it must have community or build community and infiltrate the community. Interactive, spontaneous, fun, playful...all elements of this technique speak to women's sensibilities. Depending on the product being pushed, women's communities and their propensity to build and quickly form communities of like interest for support, education and socializing make her a critical factor in successful guerilla marketing efforts.

- **Unpaid Media**

A close sister to PR, this could include things such as human interest stories about your product or service that the press picks up, customer testimonials, quotes and success stories that are written about a person. The fact that your company's product or service just happens to be used by her and mentioned in her story is a bonus!

Women are story tellers. They scrapbook and archive family photographs, they tell their network of friends when things happen – both good and bad...one only has to look at our email transmissions versus our husbands, brothers and sons to see our dominance in this area in both sheer numbers of emails sent but also our "cc" list. Importantly, we don't just pass along a sentence or two, we write at great length and provide content to support our stories. Women could be viewed as your virtual PR, happy customer testimonial presales force.

- **Consumer Generated Media**

Consumer Generated Media (CMG) is a term coined by Pete Blackshaw of Intelliseek. Pete's definition is a "high-impact media created by consumers, typically informed by relevant experience and commonly archived online for ready consumption by other consumers and key influencers (media, analysts, regulators). CGM typically manifests itself via blogs, boards, forums, online reviews, and direct company feedback."

Creative, right brain driven, CGM is the consumer voice being seen AND heard. To see how women are fairing in this area, a look at Jones Soda's label submissions or Converse tennis shoes animated commercial submissions or a review of the many online opinion sites demonstrate that women are embracing any and all vehicles that give voice to her concerns, opinions and vision.

A Word of Caution

There's a difference between using women to spread WOM and implementing WOM marketing strategies with women. The techniques fit the women's market well, how you implement your strategies and integrate them into your total marketing mix, how you co-create with women to fit her needs will gain you her trust AND entrée into her world.

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