

Chapter 25

Online Social Media as a Driver of Buzz Marketing: Who's Riding?

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ABSTRACT

'Buzz Marketing' is an alternative strategy of creating preference and demand among prospective customers. Though given caution, this geometrically progressive marketing strategy offers significant opportunities for firms. The popularity of online social media adds a new dimension of buzz marketing, as these social networking sites accommodate a massive exchange of views among the users. Companies planning to use online social media as a driver of their buzz marketing efforts inevitably face the challenge of acquiring favorable response from a versatile and almost uncontrollable mass of users. Hence, profiling the users of social media is valuable. This paper examines the users of online social media and creates profiles of these "buzz riders." Qualitative in nature, this study also proposes strategic implications for the different categories of online social media users to elicit positive responses of the buzz marketing efforts of the companies.

INTRODUCTION

For over fifty years marketers have recognized the importance of customer orientation (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). However, developing a good product that satisfies customers' needs and wants is not

enough. Companies must also communicate with their present and potential customers and make them aware of the offerings available (Kotler, Bowen, & Makens, 1996). To communicate with customers, a firm can use the promotion mix, which consists of advertising, sales promotion, personal selling, direct marketing, public relation and publicity.

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In the last years, conventional marketing strategies and marketing communication are being classified as less effective (Oosterwijk & Loeffen, 2005). Companies are not satisfied with their marketing results compared to their expenses; therefore its effectiveness is questioned (Oosterwijk & Loeffen, 2005). Consumers are paying less attention to advertising because of advertising clutter and selective perception (Oosterwijk & Loeffen, 2005). Also, where we once started with less than five TV channels, new cable packages now offer hundreds of channels to choose from (Weiner, 2005). It is thus not surprising that customers are becoming more skeptical towards advertisements (Oosterwijk & Loeffen, 2005). The results of conventional mass-marketing advertising are not only decreasing but even run the risk of becoming obsolete (Weiner, 2005). However, companies still need to generate new and repeat-sales (Oosterwijk & Loeffen, 2005). Therefore, they are in search for more reliable ways of getting attention for their brands and products (Oosterwijk & Loeffen, 2005).

WHAT IS BUZZ MARKETING ALL ABOUT?

Though young, the concept of buzz marketing has acquired attention of scholars from all around the discipline, mostly due to its rather 'off the track' nature. As a result, different ideas and definitions exist about buzz marketing. Greg (2004) defined buzz marketing as, "the amplification of initial marketing efforts by third parties through their passive or active influence". Whereas, WOMMA (2004) defined the same as: "Using high-profile entertainment or news to get people to talk about your brand". Apart from attribute based definitions, Hughes (2004) has defined buzz marketing on its functional characteristics as: "Capturing attention of consumers and the media to the point where talking about your brand becomes entertaining, fascinating, and newsworthy; A

conversation starter". According to SearchCRM.com (2010), buzz marketing is a viral marketing technique that attempts to make each encounter with a consumer appear to be a unique, spontaneous personal exchange of information instead of a calculated marketing pitch choreographed by a professional advertiser. Historically, buzz marketing campaigns have been designed to be very theatrical in nature. The advertiser reveals information about the product or service to only a few "knowing" people in the target audience. By purposely seeking out one-on-one conversations with those who heavily influence their peers, buzz marketers create a sophisticated word-of-mouth campaign where consumers are flattered to be included in the elite group of those "in the know" and willingly spread the word to their friends and colleagues. By looking at the above definitions, we can form an understanding that buzz marketing is when consumers talk about the brand to other consumers. In other words, buzz marketing is nothing but word-of-mouth communication. At this point, confusion might arise whether there is any difference between buzz marketing and word-of-mouth marketing.

WORD-OF-MOUTH AND BUZZ MARKETING

Word-of-mouth has existed since humankind; people have always talked with each other about products, issues and events that are important in their lives (Oosterwijk & Loeffen, 2005). There is a difference between word-of-mouth that results from day-to-day interaction with customers and the kind of word-of-mouth that occurs as a result of a specific campaign to create or encourage it (WOMMA, 2005; Riegner, 2007). If people talk about a product because they are just happy with it, this is 'organic' word-of-mouth, while 'amplified' word-of-mouth occurs when a firm tries to encourage and accelerate word-of-mouth with the launch of a campaign (WOMMA, 2005). From

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