

THE WORD OF MOUTH MARKETING WORKBOOK

A Guide From FLZZ

Ted Wright

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ISBN-13: 978-1725738553
ISBN-10: 1725738554

INTRODUCTION

This workbook is meant to accompany the book **FIZZ: Harness the Power of Word of Mouth Marketing to Drive Brand Growth**. Each chapter of the book is filled with helpful ideas and case studies. In this workbook I'll provide exercises that will allow you to create a word-of-mouth marketing plan for your business.

It's time for lift off.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PART ONE

Why Word of Mouth Marketing	6
Effective Word of Mouth Marketing	9
Process Overview	10
Practice Creating a Brand Story	12
Exercise One	13
Exercise Two	14

PART TWO

Influencers: Who Are They & Why We Need Them	16
Influencers: Who Are They & Why We Need Them	18
Exercise Three	19
Bonus Content: Influencers Verses Influencer Marketing	20
Exercise Four	21

PART THREE

Creating a Plan for Your Company	22
The Goal	24
Exercise Five	25
The Story	26
What Make Your Brand Talkable?	27
Authentic	28
Exercise Six	29
Interesting	30
Relevant	32
Exercise Seven	33
Testing Your Ideas	34
Exercise Eight	35
The Role of Research	36
The Focus Audience	38
Exercise Nine	41
Bonus Content: Offline or Online Communities	42
Exercise Ten	43

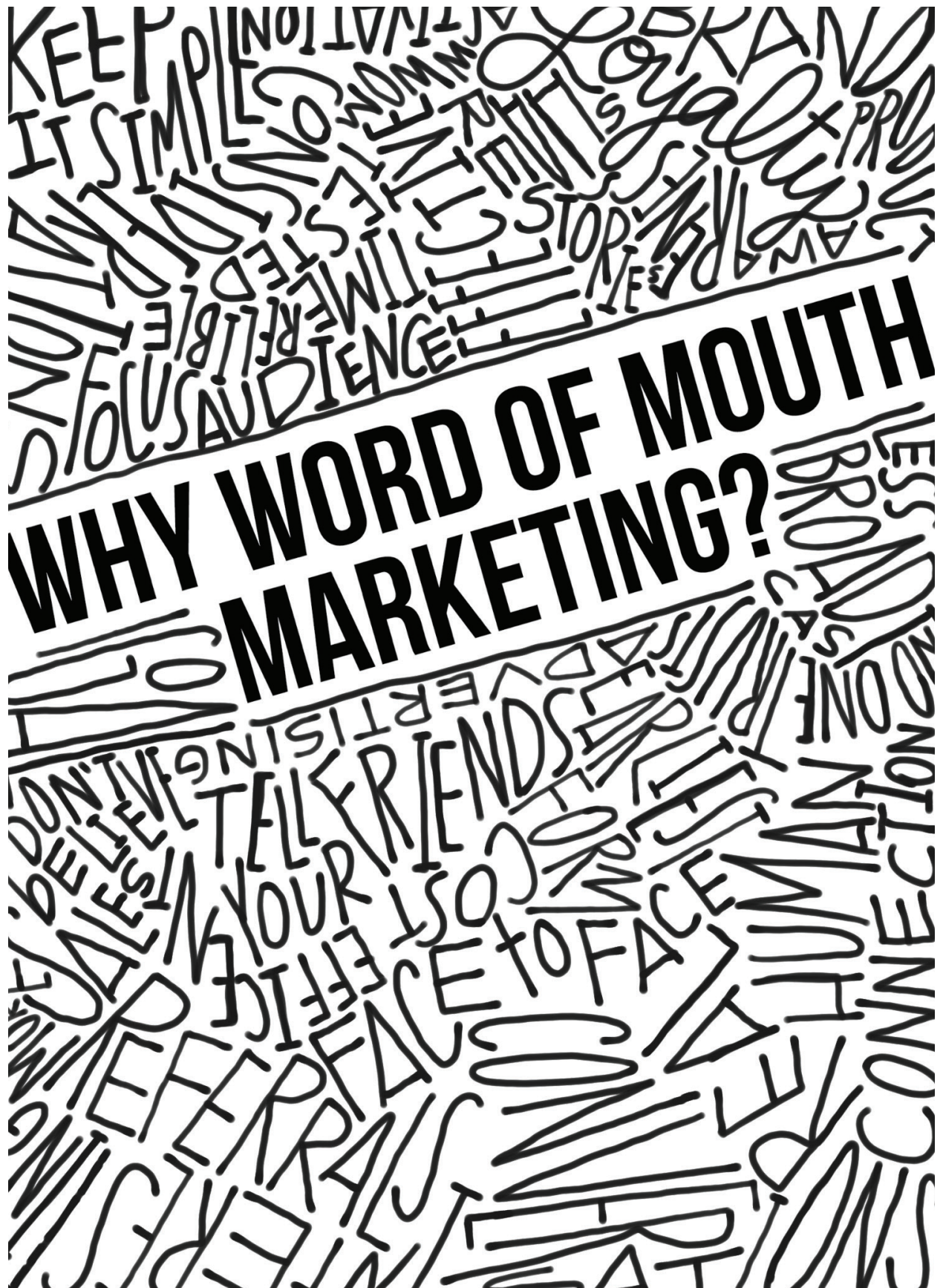
PART FOUR

Activation	44
Activation	46
Exercise Eleven	48
Good Sampling Verses Bad Sampling	49
Sharing Makes Your Story Sticky	50
Getting Out There	51
Exercise Twelve	52
Brand Ambassadors	53
Exercise Thirteen	54
Bonus Content: Social Validation	56
Exercise Fourteen	58

PART FIVE

Traps and Problems	61
Measurement	62
Exercise Fifteen	64
Overcoming Organizational Resistance	65
DIY WOMM	66
Exercise Sixteen	67
Final Thoughts	69
Sources	70

PART 1:



HOORAY!

You're embarking on a new way of connecting with customers that is proven to be more profitable, effective, time-tested ... and perhaps even more personally rewarding.

Word of Mouth Marketing is the very earliest form of marketing ... It's been around since Moses came down from the mountain! Before Facebook, before advertising, before direct mail (before ANY mail!), a face-to-face conversation was how people learned about new products and ideas, and then shared their love of those products with others.

Why do we need to revisit this ancient concept? The very foundations of traditional marketing are crumbling before our eyes. The reliable methods that worked just a few years ago may not be as effective in our world today:

- 🗣️ Traditional advertising options are less available, as local newspapers, radio, and television channels struggle to survive. Advertising on some of those channels are down to 1950 spending levels!
- 🗣️ People are viewing less broadcast ads as subscription models such as Netflix, Sirius XM, and digital news eliminate the need for advertising.
- 🗣️ If your ad is seen at all, it may not be believed. Nearly 80 percent of Americans do not believe advertising by companies, and trust in businesses, brands and ads has tumbled for 10 consecutive years.
- 🗣️ Social media, meant to be the great equalizer for organizations of all sizes, is under suspicion as people wade through advertising scams and fake news. The average reach for your company Facebook is probably well below 5 percent.
- 🗣️ Research shows that direct mail responses are in decline nationwide. The reason? There's simply too much of it and people do not have the time.

And this intense rate of change is just the beginning. With the advent of revolutionary technologies like blockchain, mixed reality, and especially artificial intelligence, fasten your seatbelt. We'll see more change in the marketing world in the next two years than the last 20.

While this may seem completely overwhelming, there is a way forward that makes complete sense. Let's focus our efforts on a marketing channel that has NOT changed, on what is reliable, steadfast, cost-efficient, and time-tested.





People love to talk to each other. This. Never. Changes.

EFFECTIVE WORD OF MOUTH MARKETING

If Word Of Mouth Marketing has always worked so well, why aren't more business professionals using it? Because it's harder work. More time. More effort. It's also not as flashy as a Super Bowl commercial, or as glamorous as being on the set with a celebrity.

It's easy to pay for an ad and wait for something to happen, or to purchase a mailing list and count on a small fraction of people to call you, but in the long-term, the most effective way to build relationships is through human, face-to-face connections.

This probably seems logical, but just in case you're on the fence about this idea, here are some relevant statistics:

-  An average American spends about 30 percent of their day in conversation and 15 percent of those conversations mention a product or brand.
-  92 percent of Americans view word of mouth conversations as the best source for product recommendations.
-  Nearly 20 percent of the people you know make product decisions based ONLY on word of mouth recommendations.
-  More than 70 percent of these trusted conversations take place face-to-face.

In short, while trust in companies and advertising is on the decline, trust in friends, experts, and entrepreneurs is up. People trust people.

The opportunity is too big to ignore. There are thousands of people in your community who love to share stories about what is new and interesting. What are you doing to be part of their supply line of information? If your business can become part of the community conversation, that will certainly lead to business benefits over time!

Word of mouth marketing has always existed. This workbook will help you use this ancient method in today's modern world, repeatedly, reliably, consistently, and effectively.

MORE CONVERSATIONS = MORE HUMAN

You can use automation to
spread your story wider...

but you can't
automate your humanity.

STORY

Authentic

Use the "Is this lawyer talk?" test

Interesting

Use the "Brunch" test

Relevant

Use the "Who-Gives-A-F*" test

FOCUS AUDIENCE

Co-location

Where do they congregate physically or virtually?

Pre-existing Communications

Do they already have a communication platform?

Untapped or Personally Interested

Has anyone from your industry reached this group

OR do you share a passion with them?

ACTIVATIONS

DON'T interrupt

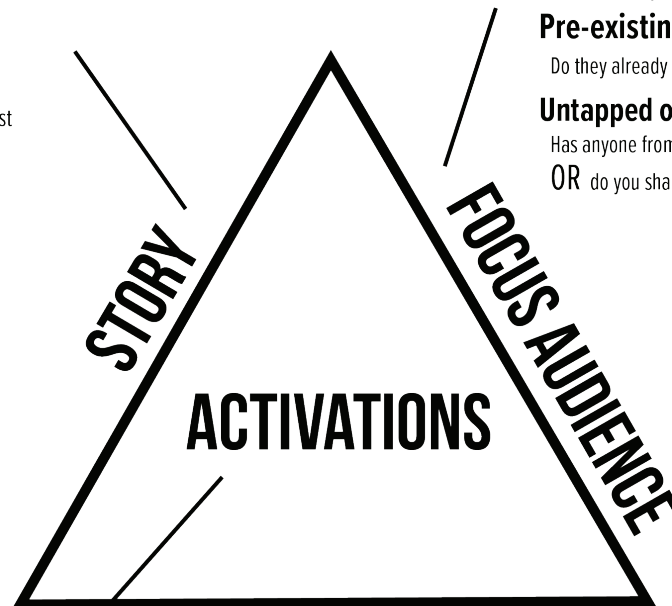
DON'T intercept

FOCUS on conversations

GOAL

GOAL

Simple: You set it!



Feel free to run out and get this as a tattoo!

When starting your journey, you'll have to do a ton of work before you can quickly or easily fill this out, but once you do, questions like “why” and “how” will be more easily understood. In the meantime, here is an overview of the concepts.

GOAL: What is the goal you hope to accomplish? A goal might be awareness, consideration, referrals, loyalty, leads, or sales - you choose. The more specific and fewer the better.

STORY: There are many things about you, your business, your employees, and/or your company that is talkable. Talkable is something that is “Authentic,” “Interesting,” and “Relevant.” You have lots. List them all. Later you will thin this list down.

FOCUS AUDIENCE: It's improbable that the whole world will be interested in everything you have to say. More likely, a focus audience or community, might be more specific, like veterans, realtors, or fishing enthusiasts. Who will care about each of the story points above? List those.

ACTIVATION: These three considerations guide us to the activation. What are you going to do to create conversations using these considerations?

First thoughts?

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PRACTICE CREATING A BRAND STORY USING THIS EXAMPLE

Appreciating word of mouth marketing (WOMM) may take a reset of your view of how business works. Let's start with an example of what WOMM looks like "in the wild."

A few weeks ago, I had a break in a meeting when a friend turned to me and asked if I had heard about a certain furniture company in town. I had not.

He went on to tell me that this company was rejuvenating the American furniture industry by working with craftspeople and small businesses that had been displaced when manufacturing moved overseas in the 1990s. They worked side-by-side with them on exciting new designs and then helped these businesses sell this artisanal furniture at nationwide retail locations and an online store. What a unique and inspiring story!

I was intrigued. I went online to learn more. There was content on the site with stories of their furniture and craftsmen. I scrolled through and also saw the stories of enthusiastic customers. I found the store location and operating hours for my memory bank.

The next week, I happened to be near the store and visited to see for myself what was happening. At the door, I was greeted by a salesperson who had worked at the company for nine years. Here is what I learned:

- 💬 Every piece of furniture and accessory had a story. She was able to tell me about the craftspeople who made it, the history of the materials in the piece, and how her company worked with American craftspeople to bring it to life.
- 💬 The company had a flat delivery fee, for any spot in the country.
- 💬 They had no discounts, deals, or sales. A price was guaranteed for a year so a customer could buy furniture on their own time, not based on a holiday promotion.
- 💬 The store itself was in an old meat-packing warehouse. Redeveloping this space had jump-started urban renewal in the neighborhood.
- 💬 When the store closed at 7 p.m., the company allowed community groups to hold lectures and meetings in the building.

I was sold! I couldn't wait to bring my wife to the store and tell my friends about the great things this company was doing for our country, worthy artisans, and the community.

I wasn't ready to buy furniture, but I was going to talk about this amazing store to anybody who was.

EXERCISE ONE

Let's dissect this furniture store case study and discover some of the elements of WOMM. Think carefully and answer these questions:

What possessed my friend to tell me the story of the furniture company in the first place?

Why was it believable?

After I heard about the company, I visited their site on the internet. Why was that significant, and how did that reinforce my friend's original story?

What role did the store employee play in word of mouth marketing for this company?

Did the product and store experience live up to the story?

If this company was mindfully using WOMM, how would they know it was working?

EXERCISE TWO

Now, think about a time that a recent conversation introduced you to a relevant new product or service and consider these questions:

What was the approximate date that you first heard about this product?

Who told you the story?

Why was it believable?

What did you do next? Did you go online? Share the story with others? Visit a location?

Did the product or service live up to the story?

Did you buy something? If not, why not? If so, what was the approximate date of purchase?

This image shows a full page of blank, lined paper. It features approximately 20 evenly spaced horizontal grey lines across its entire width, typical of notebook or school paper. The background is white, and there are no margins, text, or other markings present.

PART 2:



INFLUENCERS: WHO THEY ARE AND WHY WE NEED THEM




I've never met a business leader who told me they had too much money for marketing! Luckily, smart leaders using word of mouth marketing can depend on influencers to cost-effectively carry their story.

Before we get into the heart of the Word Of Mouth Marketing process, let's step back and consider a very special group of people; a personality type that will be foundational to the rest of the book and workbook: influencers.

Chapter One in the Fizz book highlights the story of Pabst Blue Ribbon beer and its dramatic comeback based on our word of mouth marketing process. A key lesson from this chapter is that PBR had little money for traditional advertising, which became a blessing in disguise. We were able to develop the brand's storyline and leverage untapped target groups to help the word spread naturally and virally – much more believable and cost-effective than TV ads.

Nearly every company and brand has a compelling story to tell (and groups of people out there eager to hear it!). And among every group of people there are influencers – the 10 percent who are compelled by their nature to tell their friends about this cool new thing they found. What can you do to plant the seeds that will grow into stories about your brand or product?

Influencers are not necessarily the wealthiest part of the population, the best-educated, or the social media stars. They are everywhere and they all share three traits:

-  Influencers have arranged their lives to collect information and share new stories. Sharing stories is part of their DNA. It is their love language.
-  They like to try new things because they're new. An influencer knows if she has information first, you will not only listen to what she says but you will also come back to her for another conversation!
-  Influencers are intrinsically motivated. They are compelled by something deep inside to share stories about the brands and products they love. They want to build bonds with people. Trying to motivate them through discounts or coupons won't work. Their love is not transactional.

Influencers play an important role in our busy world. Time and money are scarce. We don't have time to research what tequila we should be buying or what gym we should join. Instead, we let our influencer friends – to whom these things are important – figure this out.

EXERCISE THREE

Think about how influencers operated in the PBR case study and in the personal word of mouth marketing experience you recorded.

Who were the PBR influencers? What elements of this Pabst Blue Ribbon case study are relevant to how you do business in your community today?

How could this work for your company and brand?

Who are the people interested in spreading a story about you?

Why do customers love you and talk about you?

Record any additional thoughts and observations here.

BONUS CONTENT: INFLUENCERS VERSUS INFLUENCER MARKETING

“Influencer marketing” is one of the hottest terms around today. The idea seems to be everywhere, and business leaders are all trying to figure out how to get in on the action.

When I say “influencer,” you may be thinking of YouTube stars selling skateboards or an Instagram celebrity and her make-up tutorials. Is that an influencer? Are they the same as the influencer I describe in my book? I can see why there could be confusion because the term is so broadly used today, so let’s dissect this idea and get to the root of influence.

There are actually three general types of influencers in the world today:

CELEBRITIES – Aligning a brand with a movie star or sports personality began in the early 1900s when Charlie Chaplin and American baseball player Babe Ruth started selling everything from cigarettes to hot dogs. Hiring a celebrity is beneficial for a brand when you’re trying to quickly establish an image and buy access to a celebrity’s fanbase. However, this is extremely expensive and risky in an era of celebrity Twitter meltdowns! And, you’re really paying for influence, you’re not earning it.

CONTENT CREATORS – We live in an empowering time when anyone has the power to establish their own following on the web by publishing content on blogs, videos, podcasts, and social media feeds. Because of the vast reach of these trusted stars, brands are eager to pay them for access to their audiences. This may be a legitimate strategy if you need an immediate boost in brand awareness. However, these content creators are unlikely to commit to a brand without compensation and may even turn on a brand if a better deal comes along. Their primary commitment is to an audience, not necessarily a product or idea.

ADVOCATES – This group may be the most reliable and desirable of all, because they simply love what you have to say and can’t get enough of you. They don’t need to be paid or convinced, in fact, they don’t want to be paid or convinced. Once they know about you and your story, they will authentically and passionately spread the word through their conversations, business meetings, and social media streams. Their primary commitment is to the story and the idea they want to spread.

In the longterm, nothing can match the effectiveness and value of the word of mouth advocate influencer in your communities. They are the true influencers making stuff happen for your brand and that’s the beauty and magic of word of mouth marketing.

EXERCISE FOUR

Chapter One of Fizz describes three “rules” of connecting with word of mouth influencers.

- 1) **Let them come to you.** Truly passionate influencers will seek out good stories and new information.
- 2) **Use the right bait.** To attract attention, provide something authentic, new, and cool. In short, something worth talking about.
- 3) **Fish where the fish are.** Influencers tend to congregate based on shared interests.

In the following pages, we’ll dive more deeply into the “bait” - your story. But for now, let’s think about where we might find these influencers. Who might be talking about your company and product?

Let’s play a game. Real estate agents and mortgage brokers would naturally be talking about insurance products and services. Where would they gather?

Foodies would gather at farmer’s markets, cooking classes, and hot, new dining spots. How do we create conversations in these spaces, if that is your ideal audience?

Now, think about people who might be interested in your products and services. Where would they gather physically, you know “in real life”? Now list places online or virtually.

PART 3:

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THE GOAL

Let's dig into the WOMM model and consider step one, defining your goal.



This is the easiest part of the process! What do you want to get out of this?

“More sales” is often the answer...but not always. If you’re a start-up company, perhaps you need to build awareness or create buzz that will attract investors. A non-profit seeks donors, a politician wants votes, a rock band wants fans or music downloads.

EXERCISE FIVE

and time you have?

[illegible]

THE STORY

Okay, you've got your goal(s) set. Now, let's talk "story."



We need to spend some time thinking through what it is about you, your products, and your services that would be talkable. Influencers in your community – the people who share stories the most – thrive on information that has three qualities that spell A-I-R. And in fact, for an influencer, this is the air that they breathe.

WHAT MAKES YOUR BRAND TALKABLE?

AUTHENTIC

Influencers are sharers, not sellers. They do not want to be bought, and they will have a negative reaction to anyone they suspect is trying to sell them something. Your story has to be true, and not just cleared-by-the-lawyers true. It has to be honest, and it has to respect your audience's intelligence. If your story is not authentic, influencers will not share it because that story will hurt their credibility with the people they are trying to influence.

INTERESTING

A story has to be interesting, so an influencer will pick it up and investigate it. "Interesting" presents information in a novel or noteworthy manner. If you can present people with something really new, they will stop and pay attention.

RELEVANT

If it's going to be talkable, the story of your brand has to be meaningful to your audience. If you're building race cars, you won't get far talking about trunk size. Why? Because race car enthusiasts don't care about trunk size. But if you're building family sedans, a story about trunk size is relevant to your potential customers.

Not many people are going to talk about things that are only relevant to you and your business. For a story to get passed around, it has to be somehow connected to the lives of the people doing the talking.

Next, we'll apply each of these ideas to you and your business to develop authentic, interesting, and relevant conversations.

AUTHENTIC

Let's go further down this path of Authentic, Interesting, and Relevant (A-I-R) stories and create a specific plan for you and your business.

A story has to be believable. Everybody would believe a story about holiday décor from Martha Stewart. Nobody would believe a story about electrical components from her! Everybody would believe a story about the country music scene from Zac Brown. Not many people would tune in to a story from Zac Brown describing astronomy.

How does your spouse, loved one, or a top employee describe your company/product to others?

How do others describe your company? What description(s) make you most happy? What description(s) do you think are the easiest for others to share?

EXERCISE SIX

What's the #1 question you get about your business? How do you answer it? How you started your business? Why did you start your business? How?

Top 3 distinguishing or unique facts about your business (the first, best, most awarded, etc.).

A special product attribute/feature that is talkable (works even in a hurricane!).

A charity or cause you are passionate about or you're an expert in. A connection to sports, a sporting event, clubs, service organizations, church groups, or university/high school affiliations.

INTERESTING

Now, let's do the "Brunch Test."

If you can honestly see people taking an interest in your story in a social environment, you just might have something talkable.

Let's refine your ideas. Look over the list you've developed on the previous pages and consider this: Which of these ideas would people find interesting at a party, over dinner with friends, at a barbecue or at *brunch*?

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RELEVANT

The third step is to connect your best ideas to the people and groups who would care the most. What people find these conversations relevant? In other words, who cares? Who really cares? For example, if you have a passion for basketball, if you're an armed services veteran, Harley enthusiast, or a writer in your spare time, who will find this relevant and share your enthusiasm and passion?

Sometimes, finding your audience is easy and obvious. If you sell car wax, you need to find car enthusiasts, for example. But often, the products and services we sell do not inspire authentic communities of passionate fans. Sometimes you need to think a little harder and dig a little deeper.

The book uses an example of parents and their kids standing in line waiting for a visit with Santa as an ideal time to demonstrate a vacuum cleaner. Not obvious at first but if your target is Moms/Parents of kids under 7 and you start listing all the places those people might gather then eventually you'd write down "in lines to see Santa" on your list.

EXERCISE SEVEN

Now let's put this together: Authentic – Interesting – Relevant.

Examples of stories that are A-I-R would include:

- “My ancestor fought in the American Revolution.”
- “I graduated from Yale.”
- “Yeti coolers can’t be opened by wild bears.”
- “Our service is so good, I once let a customer borrow my shoes.”
- “This pill will cause hair to regrow on your head.”

Examine your best, most interesting stories from the previous exercise and carefully think this question

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TESTING YOUR IDEAS

Now, let's do the "A.I.R. Test."

Write your list below. Now put an “A” by each story that is “authentic,” an “I” next to the story that is “interesting,” and a “R” by each story that is “relevant.” Go back to the book if you need help defining any terms (pages 65-69).

BE TOUGH! Not every story really has A.I.R. The tougher you are the higher and further your remaining stories will fly!

[illegible]

EXERCISE EIGHT

Through these exercises, you've now developed a list of conversational topics that are authentic, interesting, and relevant, and prioritized a list of potential audiences.

But it's tough sitting in an office and brainstorming about these ideas on your own. If you're progressing through this workbook in your workplace, solicit some help from trusted employees. Show them what you're thinking about and ask them if people would care about your stories.

Invite them to build on the ideas you have so far. Maybe they have their own insights on relevant community groups who would care.

Turn to a colleague or family member and ask for honest feedback – Is this a story that will inspire more conversations? Have you identified community or customer groups who would care?

Record your notes here.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

THE ROLE OF RESEARCH

All good marketing begins with research and every good word of mouth marketing story starts with insight.

In many ways, marketing has strayed away from the basics of this principle. We're too reliant on social media dashboards (which only tell part of the story, at best), we may be overwhelmed by big data, or we may simply not have the resources to conduct complex research.

To construct the best story for your business, you might need to spend some time with the data available to your business, whether that is embedded in a customer report system, analyze Google Analytics, or a compilation of customer service calls. Sit with it for a few days and try to determine:

What do I think is happening with my customers?

What do I suspect they need from us?

What's changing this year?

How can we connect to them through our stories?

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THE FOCUS AUDIENCE

Who will be truly interested in your story?



At this point you should have several interesting ideas and a list of the groups who would be most interested in them. But we can also flip the process by starting with groups we are already connected to. Groups (and influencers) are all around us ... and many of them might be interested in what you have to say.

How do you become aware of new groups that might be interested in your conversational ideas?

The best groups have the following qualities:

STRENGTH OF COMMUNICATION – Do they have a unifying common cause? Have they been through “wars” together? Are the stakes of their mission high or emotional? The strength of a group’s communication is determined by the powerful bonds between its members. You want to be dealing with groups that communicate frequently and efficiently. Word of mouth doesn’t work if people aren’t talking to one another.

SPEED OF COMMUNICATION – How regularly do these groups meet? Are the members physically located near each other? Are there customs, routines, and channels that speed communication, like emails or newsletters? Flight attendants talk to each other during takeoffs or landings. Bartenders talk to waiters having a drink after their shift ends. People in groups like these will spread information faster than those who need to go out of their way to find time to talk to one another.

WELL-ESTABLISHED COMMUNITY – A group that has been active for a long time has tighter bonds and more reliable communication patterns. Do its members meet once a month? Do they talk daily? Or do they share stories only when they see each other at a convention once a year? You want people who are showing up as often as they can because the more they show up, the more they will share stories.

SIZE OF COMMUNITY – Word of mouth is ultimately a numbers game. You need a lot of people to share your story, so a lot of other people will buy your stuff. The bigger the group, the more stuff you can sell.

AUTHENTICITY – Are people there because they want to be there (passion), or because they have to be there (obligation)? Members of an authentic community are there because they love the topic and they want to be around others who share their passion. An authentic community consists of people who would spend money to be part of it if they had to.

EXERCISE NINE

In the last exercise, you brainstormed a list of potential groups who might be interested in your story. Are there any other groups you want to add to the list now?

Prioritize the list of groups based on these criteria of strength, speed, size, age, and passion. Your evaluation doesn't have to be perfect, but from what you know about these groups, which should you target first?

[illegible]

BONUS CONTENT: OFFLINE OR ONLINE COMMUNITIES?

Research shows that most demographic groups are spending more time on their devices. The youngest people in our communities are managing their lives, their relationships, and their daily shopping needs online at a rate never before seen.

As you think about prioritizing audiences, how do you evaluate offline versus online communities? Does it make any difference if stories spread online versus face-to-face?

My official position is that I am “channel neutral,” meaning that it’s a very good thing for a story to spread however it is going to spread. But there are a few guidelines to consider if you have to make a choice.

VISUAL COMMUNICATION – In the Bissel vacuum example from the book, our activation was highly visual – a demonstration at Christmas with children in a mall. Of course, all the moms got their phones out to snap pictures and spread the word about these amazing devices. If a story can be best communicated visually, spreading photos and videos certainly suggests a web-oriented communication strategy.

FAR-FLUNG – In some cases, the target community might be spread all over the world. Perhaps the ideal audience shares a common interest like rare Japanese whiskey, collecting certain types of stamps, or passion for an obscure artist or musician. In that case, the group has probably found each other in online forums or Facebook Groups and is actively communicating there. It would be impractical to meet all these people face-to-face, so find a way to fish where the fish are!

FACE-TO-FACE EFFECTIVENESS – Because people are spending so much time with their heads down looking at a screen, when they do get those face-to-face recommendations, it can be five times more effective because it’s rare. Focus on creating live experiences and conversations whenever possible.

STARTING YOUR OWN GROUP – If you just can’t find the right natural and organic communities, maybe that interest group needs you to start one. Share your interests and passions and watch the audience gather to you.

EXERCISE TEN

Congratulations! You're ready to get to work. You've identified your goal, a story that is A-I-R and a focus audience.

Almost every word of mouth campaign can be condensed down to two fill-in-the-blank sentences. When somebody meets a friend and is excited to tell your story, it usually goes like this:

"I know this about you..."

"I just learned about this exciting (product/service)..."

"and you two (the product/service and the listener) should get together because ..."

PART 4:



ACTIVATION

Now, let's spend some time on creating conversations with your focus audience, story and goal in mind.



Now the fun begins!

In chapter 2, the Fizz book begins with an example from the band Sugarland that demonstrates why the best way to lure people into your “tribe” is giving them a sample of what you have to offer. The band members figured out what was unique about them and created a talkable way to share it (fun and trippy YouTube videos).

In a world dominated by conversations, this is the way to pull people into your brand’s orbit. Average brands advertise. Great brands share.

In this chapter, I also cover the “two-ounce culture” – a deeply-ingrained consumer expectation that we should be able to try something before we buy.

Giving consumers a peek into what you do is a great way to attract attention, build interest, and spur sales. In fact, it’s essential. But sampling is just a gateway into your company, not a marketing solution.

The truth is, the consumer’s switching cost has never been lower, options have exploded, and new product discovery is nearly frictionless thanks to the web. Think of the risk of not providing samples ... and your competitor does. Conversations have never been easier (or less expensive) to start and tug your customers in another direction. In the two-ounce culture, consumers are consistently presented with new options (and this is especially effective if you’re a start-up!).

For this reason, sampling must be viewed in the context of a holistic and continuous marketing program. To build relationships and loyalty, you’ll need to do more than sample, you’ll also need to share.

EXERCISE ELEVEN

In this chapter I describe how the internet helped instill an expectation of sampling in consumers. Sugarland used the web to spread the word about free concert tickets. Friends told friends about new beers they found to help spread the craft beer movement. Book sites allow you to sample a chapter online. Dating sites let people sample ... you!

Today it's easier than ever to give people “a taste” of what you have to offer ... even virtual skydiving!

What can you do to provide a “sample” of what you do? Better yet ... how can you do it in a creative way that makes your company conversational. Think this through carefully and record your thoughts here.

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GOOD SAMPLING VERSUS BAD SAMPLING

Remember that the idea behind sampling is to create conversations in a community that can help spread your idea, buy more stuff, contribute to your charity ... or help you achieve whatever goal you have.

There is a difference between good sampling and bad sampling. Sampling isn't just giving away some tchotchke or trinket. It's creating a conversational moment, an experience that is talkable.

My friend Mark Schaefer, author of the book KNOWN, recently wrote about the fact that \$1.50 can make or break a conversation:

"I recently spoke at two massive conferences back-to-back at the very same hotel, in the same week, in Las Vegas. Although both were sponsored by Fortune 500 companies and each had more than 8,000 attendees, the customer experiences at the two events could not have been more different. And it all hung on \$1.50. Let's compare the events.

- Event One had amazing food. Event Two had terrible food and everybody complained about it. The difference at an event of that scope was probably a choice to spend an extra \$1.50 per person per meal.
- Event One gave out nice branded backpacks that everybody wore proudly all around the event. Event Two handed out some sort of cheap branded net bag thingy that had an indeterminate use. The unloved bags sat in a pile on a table. The difference would have been spending an extra \$1.50 per attendee.
- Both events offered free Wi-Fi. At Event One, the Wi-Fi screamed. At Event Two, I eventually abandoned the Wi-Fi and had to use my own hotspot to work from the conference. How much would it cost to provide decent Wi-Fi for partners and customers? Probably less than \$1.50 per person?

"Food. Swag. Wi-Fi. It adds up. These are not insignificant moments at an event. And moments matter.

"I can understand exactly why Event Two made the decision to skimp. From an accounting perspective, spending more makes no sense. Why invest that extra \$1.50 x 8,000 people if you don't need to? There is probably no measurable 'ROI' from that extra buck fifty.

"But everybody left Event One on a high and sang it praises. Everybody left Event Two grumbling and promising they would not return the next year."

When we're living in a world when our most effective marketing is taking place in conversations, can any brand really skimp on that \$1.50 when you have a chance to create a conversation?

SHARING MAKES YOUR STORY STICKY

Getting people to try your sample is relatively easy. Getting them to stay with you is hard. This is where your brand's story comes in.

Early in the workbook, we learned about the importance of influencers. By constantly providing these influencers with stories about your brand and what makes it amazing, you can turn them into advocates.

Those stories can be any number of things: innovations, some cool promotion, part of your history, a unique aspect of how you conduct your business ... these are the things that keep influencers talking about how great your brand is. It can be the reason people sample your brand, and it can be the reason why they stay.

A great story, internalized by an influencer, is the magic that can stop people from sampling alternatives and decide that they belong with you.

But you have to get the story out there, and that's what we'll work on next.

GETTING OUT THERE

We've identified some ways that your business is conversational and some audiences who might be interested in what you have to say. Now it's time to plan to have those conversations. A formal term for this is an "activation."

Why do we prefer to talk to small communities? Because by talking to small communities, we can eventually talk to everyone who cares about a particular subject. You can't personally share your story with everyone, and you don't necessarily want to. You want to find the people who will care about your story the most, and who have the deepest internal motivation for sharing it.

Talk to the right people in the right community about the right story, and it will spread as far as any commercial message—and with far more force.

Some bad habits to avoid:

- Chasing people. Never be annoying and never force a conversation. Be natural and friendly.
- Trying to have a conversation with every person who passes by or every person standing in line.
- Being more concerned with the process (reports, numbers, amount of swag distributed) than with having good conversations.
- Handing out stuff just for the sake of handing out stuff. Distributing swag too often becomes dangerous when it becomes the marketing objective. It's OK to have something that helps create a conversation, but it must be of high quality in terms of design, material, or cultural resonance (remember the \$1.50 lesson!). It should never be used as a substitute for conversation.

EXERCISE TWELVE

Most people are at ease conversing with people about their ideas and passions. But if getting out to create face-to-face conversations seems awkward, practice through role playing. Expect to make some mistakes – you might even experience rejection -- but commit to trying this consistently for a year and watch your business grow.

Practice your conversation starters by role playing with a co-worker or family member. Outline the conversations below.

This image shows a full page of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page, providing a template for handwriting practice. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the page.

BRAND AMBASSADORS

If you're going to get people talking, you have to get out there and start talking to people. Depending on the size and scope of your business, you might want to enlist help for this.

At Fizz, we normally work with large national, and even global, brands. We use a scientific approach to carefully select groups, geographic areas, and sometimes even specific neighborhoods across the nation where we believe our client stories will take hold. We then hire employees familiar with those communities to help spread the word and train them extensively.

Before they go in "the field," we make sure they are prepared, with the following:

- A deep appreciation of the company and its goals
- The ability to effectively communicate a story
- The answers to every question about that story
- An understanding that the goal is "conversations" not "giving away t-shirts"
- Follow-up and measurement.

For your own business (even a small one), you might want to start recruiting your own employees as ambassadors. Chapter 4 in the Fizz book provides many helpful tips to identify, recruit, and train word of mouth marketing ambassadors, if that makes sense for your business.

It would be unwise to force employees to create community conversations if they don't want to participate. Your ambassadors have to really want to get out there and talk to people. Influencers tend to be natural storytellers, and they're great at making their stories relevant to the people they're talking to.

Like anything new, a bit of training is necessary with employees.

- Use copies of this workbook as a guide to explain what word of mouth marketing is, and why it's important.
- Provide room for employees to apply their own stories and creativity. Their conversation must be engaging and natural.
- They may have new ideas for natural communication groups in the community and connections to your business.
- Encourage them to practice. Do some role-playing. Have them talk to you about the brand while you act interested, then not interested, then distracted, then flat-out rude.

EXERCISE THIRTEEN

After reading Chapter 4 in the Fizz book, does it make sense to recruit people to help spread your story?

How would these activations be Funded?

Managed?

Monitored?

Sustained?

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BONUS CONTENT: SOCIAL VALIDATION

There is a subtle, yet important, component to the WOMM process: social validation, also known as social proof.

Let's say you're going to buy a new car and you compare two similar models from different manufacturers. One received hundreds of five-star online reviews and the other one mostly had three-star reviews. Which one are you most likely to buy?

In this world of overwhelming choice, people are desperate to find clues about the best people to follow, the right leaders to believe, the ideal products to buy. Trying a new restaurant is low-risk, but when people buy a high-ticket item like a car or a vacation, they'll nearly always talk to friends and conduct a web search to make sure they're making the best decision.

That's why building robust social proof on your website is essential to reinforcing the entire word of mouth marketing process – once you are part of the conversation, people will want to search the web to learn more.

Think back to the furniture example early in the workbook. I learned about the company from a friend at the conference, but before I visited a store, I checked them out online first. What I learned there reinforced everything I heard from my friend and got me even more excited about this company and its story.

You need to have a web presence that will encourage people to continue the customer journey and ultimately contact you. This requires establishing social proof and steadily improving it over time.

What do people look at to validate they are making the right decision?

TESTIMONIES – People want to see real people with real opinions on your website. Do everything you can to encourage customers to provide testimonies suitable for the site -- and the longer and more personal the review, the better. You might even look for ways to highlight your very best testimonies. Testimonies are always more effective if they feature real names and faces.

REVIEWS AND REVIEW SITES – According to Nielsen, 92 percent of consumers trust recommendations from people they know, and 70 percent trust online recommendations from strangers. Yes, they would rather trust a stranger on the Internet than your TV commercial!

Reviews on sites like Yelp and TripAdvisor will never sway people as much as face-to-face recommendations. But they do hold the power to discredit or validate the stories you've worked so hard to put out into the community.

Never ask customers to leave you a “good” review. Just ask your customers to share their experience. And please, don't offer a discount or a reward for one. Doing so violates the terms of service of nearly every review site, and it is also a bit shady and obvious: nobody trusts a Yelp page filled with nothing but five-star reviews.

In fact, a few negative reviews can actually add credibility. The average Yelp reader may look at eight to 12 reviews before deciding whether to patronize a business. What people are looking for is an overall sense of customer satisfaction before they dive in.

As long as your reviews are 85% positive or greater, don't worry too much about bad reviews.

PHOTOS AND VIDEOS – Most websites feature content like business photos and videos. Don't overlook this opportunity to present yourself as a smiling, confident professional who is involved in the community. Focus on positive photos featuring real people from your business instead of cheesy stock photos.

AWARDS – Company awards are nice to see on a site and will position you as a "winner" and a company that can be counted on. Don't forget to include community and service awards.

SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE – Increasingly, consumers are going to stalk you on social media to see if you are a person or company they want to do business with. Remember that everything you post on social media becomes part of your image, your social proof, and your company brand.

One last comment about social media. Research shows that stories shared on social media by others are more credible and gain 600-700 percent more engagement than stories shared by companies. Don't overlook social media as an effective way for influencers to spread your story. When people take photos or post something about you or your company, that can represent powerful, authentic advocacy, and social proof.

EXERCISE FOURTEEN

Do an audit of the current social proof on your website, and if appropriate, Yelp and TripAdvisor. What processes can you implement that will improve your social validation a little bit each month?

Write a few notes on how you can improve:

TESTIMONIES

REVIEWS

PHOTOS AND VIDEOS

AWARDS

SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE

[illegible]

PART 5:



MEASUREMENT

If you launch a solid word of mouth marketing campaign today and stay with it for one year, then 12 months from today you will be sitting in your boss's office celebrating your sales increases.

Measuring word of mouth requires patience. Unlike other forms of marketing, doing a little today will not increase your sales tomorrow. It probably won't increase your sales this quarter either. Or the next one. That's hard to stomach, particularly for people accustomed to seeing a sales spike after investing in TV commercials or print ads.

Word of mouth marketing works slowly. It has to go slowly if it's going to work at all. You're allowing the influencer to deliver the message at her own pace. She may not see the person she wants to tell about your product for three or four weeks after she learns about it. She is talking about your product only when it is socially appropriate. She is not pushing it on anyone. That makes it both authentic and slow moving. Unless you have invented a cure for cancer or baldness, stories about your product will move at a seemingly glacial pace. You have to be patient and stick with the plan.

Remember: It works, and many of the alternatives out there don't work as well any more. But it does require patience.

Measuring word of mouth marketing is extremely challenging. How do you measure the dollar value of a conversation? Statisticians have developed complex equations to figure this out -- beyond the reach of mere mortals -- but we can use some rules of thumb to track leading indicators of our progress:

NUMBER OF CONVERSATIONS - Create a tally of the intentional, face-to-face conversations you, your team, and ambassadors are having each day. Forming a culture of word of mouth marketing takes time and practice. If your rate of conversations is consistent and growing, it would indicate that you are following the plan, and progress will follow.

[illegible]

WEB TRAFFIC -- Is your website suddenly getting more hits? This would be a very good indicator that you are creating a customer journey that leads to your website.

ENGAGEMENT - Are you receiving more comments on Facebook/Instagram/LinkedIn? These are all great indicators that people are taking an interest in your business.

CONSIDERATION - Are you receiving more requests for quotes? Are you being considered in the customer evaluation process more often?

ADVOCACY AND RECOMMENDATIONS - Word-of-mouth referrals correlate to sales more than any other metric.

It's difficult to measure the impact of WOMM, but it has been difficult to measure any kind of marketing. What's the ROI of a billboard or ad? Marketers have always relied on math to help answer these questions, and we can for WOMM too.

One of the key ideas in this chapter is that not all conversations are taking place online, as many of the bloggers would like you to believe. It may be tempting to use social media mentions as a proxy for your success (and it may be a factor), but depending on your product, there may be no social media chatter at all, especially if you're in B2B.

EXERCISE FIFTEEN

Measure what you treasure!

When developing a measurement dashboard, it's smart to combine what we can observe and quantify (like the number of conversations we're having, reviews, and web traffic), with what we can't (estimating how many conversations are occurring without us). Decide what might be useful indicators and estimates for your business and plot out a plan to achieve those goals

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OVERCOMING ORGANIZATIONAL RESISTANCE

Word of mouth marketing can seem weird and scary. This is not how your boss did marketing, it's not how your company has done it, and it doesn't fit into the existing company marketing dashboard. And if you need to plan for an uptick in sales every quarter, this leap of faith can be terrifying.

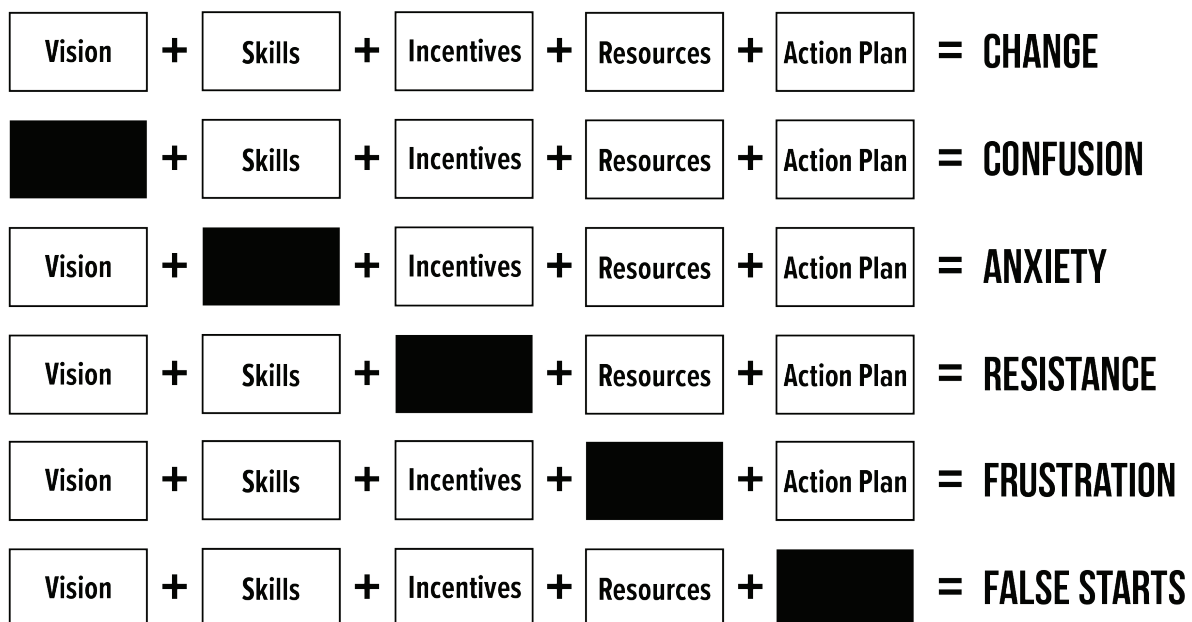
Will you be successful with WOMM?

That will not be determined by how much money you put into it, how many people you put into it, or how much you promote it. It will ultimately be determined by your company culture. Are you ready to financially support and sustain a new, patient approach to marketing? Do you have the patience and tenacity to see it through? Are you forward-thinking, or more dependent on maintaining a status quo?

There is no such thing as a grassroots change of a company culture. That has to come from the top, the person who controls the strategy and budget. And that internal sponsor has to be active in the project and the cultural change, by setting goals and expectations, holding people accountable, and showing interest by asking questions about the project's progress.

If the company culture isn't ready for something bold and new, it might take a period of executive education to get people to understand why this approach is vital ... especially when the stuff they've been doing for years stopped working long ago.









MANAGING COMPLEX CHANGE



Adapted from Knoster, T., Villa R., & Thousand, J. (2000). A framework for thinking about system change. In R. Villa & J. Thousand (Eds.), Restructuring for caring and effective education; Piecing the puzzle together (pp. 93-128). Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.

DIY WOMM

You don't need to have a big budget to do word of mouth marketing, but you do need to be persistent, consistent, and patient. Key points made in this chapter:

-  Small businesses do well with WOMM when the owner is personally invested in the process. You're small but you can scale conversations in your community without a lot of investment.
-  Owners probably have a lot of routine connection with customers and instinctively know what is "talkable."
-  Some of your marketing materials probably already point to what is conversational about your business.
-  The key to success is taking the time to create face-to-face conversations (an example was the restaurant owner who welcomed new neighbors at their door) and get that "two-ounce sample" in somebody's hands.
-  Look for ways to make the ordinary conversational (like the Decatur parking tickets).
-  Sometimes how you act is more conversational than what you say.
-  The right employees can be natural WOMM advocates for your business.
-  Online reviews via Yelp and Trip Advisor are like an online WOMM forum. They are very important. Don't be afraid to ask customers for reviews.

EXERCISE SIXTEEN

Word of mouth marketing is in within reach of any business, including small businesses. It's not an all-day thing, but it's an everyday thing. The benefits accrue the more you keep at it.

What are you doing today to create more conversations tomorrow? What are you doing this month to create new conversations next month?

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FINAL THOUGHTS

Since I wrote Fizz, the world has continued to change at a blistering pace. It occurs to me that the fundamental ideas I shared about word of mouth marketing are more important, and more relevant, than ever.

Although it seems we're more connected than ever through our constant digital immersion, we're not. Research shows that increased screen time on social media doesn't lead to more friendships, belonging, and connectedness. Instead, it is leading to rising levels of depression, isolation, and unhealthy lifestyles to the point where we are reaching a crisis in many countries.

Deep down, we want a human connection, we need a human relationship. Perhaps emphasizing the importance of face-to-face communications isn't just the effective thing to do for a business, maybe it's the best thing to do for our world.

Thank you for reading my book and following along on the workbook. I hope we'll get a chance to meet soon. And ... talk.

Ted Wright

SOURCES
