

# He's Not a Target, He's Your Best Sales Tool

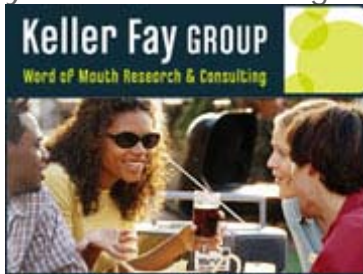
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## Average Joe Talks Brands 56 Times a Week, Says Study

By [Matthew Creamer](#)

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NEW YORK (AdAge.com) -- Get used to it: It's not you selling to them, it's you and them selling together.



The Keller Fay study, conducted in April, included interviews with 1,500 Americans between the ages of 13 and 69.

The bell has been tolling daily for the era of interruption marketing as consumers fling marketers' virals to their friends, distribute product-centric videos of their own on YouTube, and flame your customer-service reps on chatrooms and blogs. But now there's a study that shows just how much brands are a part of life-right down to the conversations of ordinary Americans.

The first findings of an ongoing survey from the Keller Fay Group has found that the average American mentions specific brands 56 times a week, with positive mentions outnumbering negative on the order of 6 to 1. And all you big ad spenders and PR people will be happy to hear that just under half of those conversations refer to marketing materials or editorial coverage.

These numbers should give cheer to the growing ranks of marketers comfortable with ceding some control of their marketing communications and even product design to their customers. And they should chill those who still think the only real way into consumers' hearts is with the saw-and-chest-spreader combo that is the TV ad campaign.

Jim Kite, exec VP-Insight, Research and Accountability at Media-Vest, said that these findings are helping his agency think of word-of-mouth as a marketing outcome rather than a discipline-and that upends the notion that marketing programs must begin with a big mass-media blast.

"We've always talked about marketing in a linear way, when you start with exposure and awareness and get into equity," he said. "This turns things upside down. It's important to get to the advocates, who are so powerful. But the issue with marketers is that with paid-for communications you have control. With word of mouth you don't."

StarcomMediaVest Group, part of Publicis Groupe, is the charter client of Keller Fay, a market research firm that was started last year by Ed Keller, best known as a co-author of the book "The Influentials," and Brad Fay, who like Mr. Keller is a former NOPWorld executive. They launched the TalkTrack survey, which interviews 100 Americans a day about their brand conversations, in order to understand the impact of word-of-mouth and how it spreads.

These are some of the key findings from the survey of 1,500 Americans between the ages of 13 and 69 conducted in April by Keller Fay.

The initial results are based on about 11,000 conversations and 6,000 specific brand mentions. The results confirmed a few suspicions held in the WOM community. For instance, conventional wisdom has held that as much as 80% of brand conversations take place offline, but the recent survey put proportion that at 92%.

That goes to show that while a lot of WOM focuses on digital communication like viral e-mails, social networks and, of course, blogs, much more is happening face-to-face or on the telephone. "As a marketer, you have to go out and talk to you brand evangelists and brand ambassadors and things like blogs can be important," said Mr. Keller, CEO of the firm. "But there's a lot of person-to-person communications going on. This is the way word of mouth gets passed."

conversational tone

Keller Fay's early findings also produced a few surprises, not least some insight into the tone of conversations about brands. There's not nearly as much brand-bashing going on as you might expect. Sixty-two percent of discussions were characterized as "mostly positive" while only 9% are "mostly negative."

They also found that tone has an effect on how far WOM spreads. Consumers are more likely to pass along good mentions than bad ones.

"Good news travels further than bad," Mr. Fay said.

This surprises, he said, because up until now much word-of-mouth analysis has come from the Internet and thus often reflects the negative opinions of people ranting about products and services. "Looking at all kinds of word-of-mouth conversations gives you a different picture," he said.