

Research: This Conversation Made Possible By . . .

Report shows what people talk about when they talk about brands.

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By Todd Wasserman

If you want to get people to talk about your brand, advertise on TV and the Internet and don't be in the household products category, according to a new study.

The report, a joint project between The Keller Fay Group and pr firm Manning Selvage & Lee, is based on conversations with 1,100 people between June and August.

The goal, said Ed Keller, CEO of Keller Fay, New Brunswick, N.J., was to quantify brand mentions in offline conversations. Keller has contended that more than 80% of conversations about brands happens offline. "What we're seeing here is reflections of everyday conversations," he said.

One of the most important findings, Keller said, is that 15% of the population consists of what he calls "conversation catalysts," or "influencers." People are characterized as such because they tend to recommend brands and products more often and, when they do, people listen. The study found that CCs mention brands 149 times a week versus 79 for the average population. CCs also tend to have more conversations per week: 184 versus 114.

In general, CCs mention brands much more often than others. The categories they emphasize are consistent with the rest of the population, though. For example, while CCs mention entertainment and media brands 16 times a week, the average person mentions them nine times. That's higher than any other category in both cases.

Other popular segments include beverages, public affairs, food and dining, shopping and retail, and travel. The least popular are children's products, household items, home improvement products and lifestyle and hobbies. Keller said that while some brands can get mentions despite the category, in general, some segments are handicapped. "People don't sit around talking to each other about household products," he said.

That, however, is a general measure. Parsing the data closer reveals some exceptions. Not surprisingly, for instance, women tend to talk about personal care, beauty and fashion products much more than men (13 mentions versus seven). Men talk about tech and auto brands slightly more than women do (13 mentions versus 10 and 12 versus eight, respectively.)

Much of the rest of the study looked at how media influences those CC brand conversations. Perhaps not surprisingly, TV and the Internet are almost tied as the media that spark the most brand mentions. TV prompts such mentions 12% of the time while the Internet does 10% of the time. The least effective media are billboards (1%) and radio (2%).

On the other hand, when you break the data into the types of ads, the numbers are a little different. TV ads are still most effective for prompting brand mentions and do so 7% of the time. No. 2 is TV programs at 5%, which is an argument for product placement. Surprisingly, the most effective ad medium on the Internet, meanwhile, is the company Web site (4%). Among the least effective are online consumer reviews, radio ads, other Web sites, blogs and chat rooms, billboards and sporting events, all of which tie at 1%.

Beyond that, the report found that certain types of marketing worked better for various categories. If you're marketing a beverage, for instance, you may want to emphasize point of sale and promotions, which are tied with TV ads in the percentage of brand mentions they spark. In that case, 10% of the time when a CC mentions a brand it's mentioned in the context of having seen a point-of-purchase display, or heard of a promotion or saw a TV ad. If you're selling cars, ads on the Internet seem the most effective, sparking 12% of such mentions versus 11% for TV. Promotions are most effective in the beauty, personal care and fashion segments (14%), far eclipsing TV (6%).

Renee Wilson, svp-direct strategies, services and innovation at MSL, New York, said the main thing marketers should take away from the survey is that it makes a lot of sense to focus on that 15% of

the population, the CCs. "We believe influencer marketing is what's going to help marketers in this day and age," she said. "The few can affect the many."