

Media Post Publications

Behind the Numbers: The Word About Word of Mouth
by Lynn Russo Whyly, January 2007 issue

How to incorporate buzz into everyday life

Word of mouth as a marketing tool has moved well beyond buzz status and now ranks among the valuable strategies discussed at the marketing planning table, according to "The More, the Better: Creating Successful Word of Mouth Campaigns," a report by WOM research and consulting firm *Keller Fay Group* and BzzAgent, a WOM promotional firm.

"I think we're still in the early days, but we are well ahead of where we were two years ago," says Ed Keller, CEO of Keller Fay Group and president of the Word of Mouth Marketing Association. "And we're moving up the curve quickly." Also, the overwhelming majority of word-of-mouth transactions still happen face to face and will continue to do so for some time, Keller says.

The report, which surveyed 3,235 of BzzAgent's live agents, found that the "more active agents," those who spoke with 11 or more people, had more success directly relating to sales than "all agents." Consumers who achieve the most impact with their word-of-mouth efforts are much more likely than the average to tap into more kinds of people, in more settings, and in more ways.

Keller calls the more active agents "influencers," saying, "There are certain people who have a series of characteristics that, from a marketer's point of view, make them more important. They're information-seeking; they have wide social networks; they're good listeners as well as smart and helpful speakers; and they have a wide variety of interests." And overall, "they have a desire to be learning as well as a lot to say that people can benefit from, which makes them sought out."

About half of respondents said they prompted three or more people to tell others; more than half inspired three or more people to say they'd buy the product in the future; four in 10 spurred three or more people to seek out more information; while one in three prompted three or more to buy the product. The most active agents inspired three or more people to take action.

Results show that word of mouth works best when it is incorporated into all facets of daily life, touching many kinds of relationships in diverse settings. Seven in 10 agents said they talked about their product with family members in their household, best friends, and other friends and family. About six in 10 talked with coworkers, half with acquaintances, and one in four with strangers.

Ninety-nine percent talked about products in person, while 91 percent said it was the method they used most often. Other channels agents reported using included phone, e-mail, IM, text messaging, online chat, and blogs.

Eight in 10 agents were most likely to talk about products in their homes; half at work or someone else's home; four in 10 at a social gathering; and significant numbers in a store, traveling between places, in a restaurant or bar, at school, or at a meeting and other settings. However, Keller notes that few retailers take advantage of the face-to-face interaction in their stores to promote products via word of mouth.

In a recent Keller Fay study of "Word of Mouth All-Stars," among the 10 most positively talked-about brands, Toyota ranked No. 1, followed by Wal-Mart, Honda, Apple/iPod, and Chevrolet.