

MediaPost

Bank of America Is 'Most-Talked About'

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ACCORDING TO A NEW SURVEY from The Keller & Fay Group, researchers who specialize in tracking the effect of word-of-mouth marketing, Bank of America receives the most word of mouth among U.S. bank brands with a 17% share. Following Bank of America for the largest percentage of word of mouth are JP Morgan Chase (9%), Citibank (7%), Wells Fargo (7%) and Wachovia (6%).

What makes BofA the most talked about? Keller & Fay COO Brad Fay says BofA's size and visibility are important factors, noting that typically there is a correlation between market share and what he calls "talk share."

People in general tend to talk more often about their banks in one-on-one conversations, but here's the rub: 36% of those conversations contain no recommendation, and only 26% contain a strong recommendation to buy or try the brand. According to Keller & Fay's tracking, that's 11 points lower than other consumer categories.

Fay says the low result for banks could be symptomatic of at least two shortfalls.

"It's possible banks haven't cemented a relationship so it could be a customer service issue, or the other factor could be that their customers aren't getting the right messaging," Fay says. "People need help finding the words to use to describe what makes them happy about a brand."

The report found that on a typical day, 35% of Americans have word-of-mouth conversations about financial services products or brands. Furthermore, banks account for 44% of all brand-specific word of mouth, a much greater share of WOM than financial conglomerates (18%), investment firms (14%), general "stock talk" (10%), and credit cards (8%). That's not too surprising. As Fay notes, people in general aren't likely to broadcast personal financial details, but they are more likely to chat about such matters with a friend or family member in person or over the phone.

"A lot of word of mouth happens one on one, and it happens even more in financial services because that's a topic people don't always broadcast--and that you would relay more individually," Fay says.

Survey results are based on feedback from 6,241 adults between August and November who agreed to participate by filling out a daily diary of their

conversations and then going online to answer questions that drill down on the specific brands they talked about, in what context, with whom, and where and how the conversation took place. Keller & Fay will continue to track consumers' live chat. Results could be made more interesting in upcoming months, since both BofA and Citi recently launched new branding initiatives, and Wachovia is becoming a more aggressive marketer.

Following are other key results from the survey, the first of its kind to specifically track bank chat:

*Consumers on average have five conversations per week on financial products and services, and talk about 3.7 financial brands per week.

*The majority of financial word of mouth occurs "offline" in face-to-face conversations (70%); phone calls (23%) account for more than 9 in 10 of word-of-mouth conversations.

*83% of the conversations about financial products and services take place one on one. That's 10 points higher than the average for all categories measured.

*Six in 10 recipients of bank recommendations rate them to be highly credible, and about half are highly likely to pass along what they've heard and to make a buying decision based on the recommendation.

*Only 31% of conversations about banks cite marketing or media--significantly less than the average for all categories about which consumers have word-of-mouth conversations (48%).

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