

9 Things to Share that Start Conversations



Don't expect anyone to remember to talk about you. Put something in their hands that reminds them, motivates them, and makes them look good.

As a word of mouth marketer, it's your job to give them stuff to share. In this article, we're sharing nine different examples for how you can do it.

1. Electronic Pass-Alongs

Create an entire package of electronic cut-and-paste pass-alongs. Include everything talkers might need if they were going to post something about you on the internet. At a minimum, you need:

- Logos, banner ads, and icons. Make them in all the standard sizes so they will fit wherever someone wants to paste them.
- Sample text in different styles and lengths.
- Ready-to-forward email messages.

You get even more word of mouth when you create richer content. More interesting items are more likely to get forwarded. Try sounds, animations, ecards, and cut-and-paste code that inserts the promotion right into web pages. This ready-to-insert web content is called a "widget."

The more you give to your talkers, the easier it is for them to talk. Just as important, you gain a little bit of control over the content and look of the message when you give them the words and images.

2. Handouts and Takeaways

Never let somebody walk out of your store empty-handed.

Give the shopper something to stuff in her pocket and show to a friend, a spouse, or a coworker. Pens, calendars, and magnets are some of the many things you can hand out for free to keep the conversation going. At the very least, have business cards or pocket-sized flyers by the cash register.

These handouts have two simple functions. They remind the talker to talk (when they get taken out of the pocket or shopping bag later), and they give talkers something to talk about.

3. Stuff the Package

If your company sells products via catalog or the web, you don't have face-to-face contact with your customers, and your customers don't rub elbows in your store.

How do you turn those buyers into talkers?

You stuff the box with word of mouth tools.

The package that you ship is a great word of mouth opportunity—and you can put plenty in there without adding any postage expense. Think of all the cool stuff you could throw in that might get your customers talking about you.

At the very least, put the following in every package that you ship: three coupons to share with friends, three catalogs or flyers, and three samples of something. Put the tools to make a referral right in the customer's hands. It's a great time to do it. They are excited about having just received their new product, and they are probably primed to become talkers.

4. Honeymoon Kit

Remember those brand-new customers who may be your most prolific (but short-term) talkers? You need a fast-acting tool to turn them on before they fade away.

Capture that new-customer enthusiasm during the honeymoon period by creating a honeymoon kit that gives them everything they need to start talking. Fill it with the same pass-along items mentioned above. Hand them an envelope with a welcome letter and some coupons to share.

5. Build It to Be Stolen

Market research company eMarketer is a master of the concept of cut-and-paste word of mouth. Their email newsletters and website are full of fantastic graphs and charts. Each image is perfectly sized to paste right into a report or PowerPoint. It is also designed so you can't help but see that it's from eMarketer.

The word of mouth power of this technique is amazing. Every day, executives across the country are showing off eMarketer in meetings, speeches, and memos. Massive word of mouth. eMarketer keeps it going with fresh new topics (ready-to-copy charts) every week. Why advertise when people will show you off for free?

What can you do to make your stuff easier to steal and share?

6. Samples and Seeding

Here's something so obvious that most people miss it:

People don't talk about things that they have never seen or tried. (Okay, some people do, but who listens to them?)

You need to get samples of your products into your talkers' hands to kick off the conversation.

7. The Power of Swag

Never underestimate the power of swag—free hats, shirts, bags, toys, or anything with company logos on it.

If people identify with your brand and love your stuff, wearing or carrying your logo around is a way to support you. Sometimes it's unintentional. I carried around a PayPal backpack for an entire year. (It's a nice bag.) I don't use PayPal often, but I displayed the company's logo at every speech I delivered, in front of hundreds of people each time.

Every item with your logo becomes a word of mouth generator when it's worn by a real person. It starts conversations and gets people asking about it. And precisely because it's not paid advertising but a personal expression, the message is authentic and credible, a recommendation instead of a commercial.

Give away lots of free stuff.

8. Conversation Triggers

Create simple items that prompt a word of mouth conversation. Many talkers won't start a conversation about you but will sing your praises if anyone else mentions you. So do things that get you mentioned.

Word of mouth triggers are little, visible objects that cause people to ask about you. A framed certificate for customers to display in their offices will trigger a "what is that?" from their visitors.

I've taken every business card that I've received in the past ten years, glued my logo to the back, used a laminator to turn it into a luggage tag, and mailed it back to the person I just met. I'll bet that at least 5,000 people have my logo on their briefcase or suitcase. When they meet each other, they talk about my company. That's a lot of word of mouth.

9. Sharable Advertising

Your advertising is a great word of mouth topic—but it's hard to send a TV spot to a friend. After you run any sort of paid ad, be sure to make a word of mouth version. Post PDFs of print ads on your website. Upload TV spots to YouTube. Put audio files on your blog.

You've already paid to run the ad, now let your fans share it again for free.