

The Three Must-Use Word of Mouth Marketing Tools



Grab a pencil. Write this down.

If you do nothing else we recommend, if you ignore all other word of mouth marketing advice, put these three things on your to-do list. They will start more conversations than anything:

1. Ask people to spread the word.
2. Put everything in an email.
3. Put a tell-a-friend link on every page of your website.

These tools are free, they are easy, and they are the most effective ways to turn a single recommendation into powerful word of mouth. In this article, we're sharing the details of how to put these tools to work for you.

1. Ask People to Spread the Word

Sometimes all you need to do is ask.

The first and foremost tool for creating word of mouth is the easiest and most obvious: asking nicely. Most people won't talk until you ask them to. So ask often and ask everywhere.

The challenge isn't necessarily finding talkers—it's triggering the talking action. Often the implied compliment of asking customers to help is what starts them down the road to becoming talkers. Remember that inviting your talkers to spread the word is a way of conferring status and making them insiders.

The term for this is a call to action. These are visual and verbal requests for people to do something. Weave calls to action into everything you do. Use the power of suggestion. It works. Here are some ideas:

- Put the words "Tell a friend," "Pass it on," or something like that all over your website. (It doesn't matter if they click on them. The visual reminder puts the idea in their heads.)
- Put these words in every email, too.
- Train your sales staff to end each sale with a thank you and a friendly, "Don't forget to tell your friends."
- Put a request on the receipt.
- Put a sign on the door.
- Send a reminder email after each online order.

Before my organization's annual conference, we sent a message to every one of our members, asking them to email

their clients and associates about the conference. We also asked them to post a reminder to their blogs and newsletters. Each recipient was given a unique "secret" discount code, which made them look good when they passed it along. The codes were fun, and they encouraged sharing. (Company XYZ's secret code was "weloveXYZ.")

Volunteers need to be asked to volunteer. Most people won't step up on their own. Nonprofit organizations are good at doing this. They know that raising money or getting converts is the second step, after asking a bunch of talkers to go out and spread the word.

Asking is easy, but most companies forget to do it.

2. Put It in an Email

Put it in an email. Put it in an email. Put *everything* in an email.

Email is the fastest, most portable, most effective word of mouth tool ever invented. Email is freedom for ideas to move. When you put a topic in an email, you are making it sharable.

Take everything you are doing and email it to someone. Create an email newsletter so you can send topics to lots of people. Let talkers sign up for your email lists on your home page.

- *Make sure it's forwardable.* Far too many overdesigned emails fall apart when forwarded, with broken graphics and links. Send it to yourself on different accounts and computers, and make sure it looks great when passed along.

- *Write it for the second recipient.* Make sure that your email makes sense to pass-along readers who get it from a friend. They may not know who you are. Add sections for “About the Company,” “About This Newsletter,” and anything else that tells your exciting story to someone who is seeing you for the first time.
- *Capture new talkers.* Every email should have sign-up instructions right in the message. Don’t expect secondhand recipients to go to your site and search for how to get on the list. Grab them while they are hot and ready to act.
- *Tell recipients to tell a friend.* Put a big, bold call to action right at the top. Remember, talkers talk when you ask them to. Include a link to a tell-a-friend form right in the message.

These great email tricks are also worth a try:

Be funny. Put something amusing at the end of every message just to get it forwarded. The last story of my newsletter is always funny, often weird, and rarely related to the rest of the message. People love to pass along odd stuff, so the fun bit causes the forwarding, and the marketing messages go along for the ride.

Tell readers NOT to forward the message. Works every time. My most-forwarded messages all start with the phrase “PRIVATE: DO NOT FORWARD.”

3. Tell-a-Friend Forms

Put a tell-a-friend form or link on every page of your website.

It can be a little icon or link that says “tell a friend” or “email this page” or whatever. You can get fancy and add a little form right on the page for people to fill out.

Think about it. Someone is on your website, looking at something that you are selling—and they feel the urge to tell someone else. *Make it easy.* That person is about to advertise for

you, for free, with their personal endorsement. Or they need to ask someone a question before they buy. Or they just like what they see. Do whatever it takes to let that word of mouth happen.

A desire to make a referral is a magic moment. Make sure the magic is only one click away. Plus, this reinforces the “just ask” principle.

Don’t let your webmaster get in the way or tell you that this is too complicated or expensive. You can use one of many low-cost or free plug-ins for your website to have this installed in less than one hour.

Here are the secrets to creating effective referral forms:

- *Make it fast.* Design a form that can be filled out in less than 15 seconds. Get rid of optional fields, passwords, or anything that gets in the way of the referral.
- *Ask for several referrals.* Be sure to explicitly ask users to forward the message to multiple friends. The more you ask, the more you get. Design the form so it’s easy to add lots of names without confusion.
- *Use the sender’s name.* When you deliver the message, make sure it is from the referrer, not your website. The recipient isn’t expecting mail from you and might delete it. The recipient will open a message from a friend.
- *Include a personal message.* Let the sender add text to the message. The referral is far more powerful when the talker gets to put it in her own words.
- *Make it reforwardable.* Take a look at the message that recipients get. Is that message a ready-to-go viral email, or is it some cryptic link? Follow the advice above for creating a message that will get shared.
- *Protect privacy.* And brag about it. Be clear and explicit that you respect the privacy of the senders and recipients using the form and that you won’t use their emails for any other purpose (and stick to what you promise). Usage will skyrocket when you do this.