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## 5 Word of Mouth Rules You Should Tack on Your Wall

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More + Conventional wisdom says that the most interesting promotional giveaways generate the



most compelling word of mouth, or **WOM**. It's embedded in the notion that we generally prefer to talk or tweet about things that burnish our self-image.

But if you have something to sell, don't listen to conventional wisdom. With the right tactics, everyday giveaways can get more and better word-of-mouth than hot new items.

In [What Do People Talk About? Drivers of Immediate and Ongoing Word-of-Mouth](#), two authors at the **University of Pennsylvania** set out to explain what's behind 10% of consumer goods that create 85% of buzz in the marketplace. Novel smart phone apps sound much more arresting than, say, a new yogurt flavor, but hotness alone doesn't govern word of mouth success.

What does? Tack these five word-of-mouth maxims on your wall:

- Promotional giveaways may help boost word of mouth, but certain types of giveaways seem significantly more effective than others.
- If generating more WOM is the goal, sending consumers the full product to try, or related extras, seems to be the best approach.
- More interesting products enjoy more word of mouth right after people first get them, but they do not continue to receive more discussion in the months that follow.
- Whether products continue to be discussed depends less on how interesting they are and more on whether they stay relatively accessible in consumer minds.
- Mundane products can get ample word-of-mouth if they are publicly visible or cued properly in the environment. Consequently, marketing strategies should feature cues with high visibility.

Accessibility to a product and frequent product references, or cues, make the biggest splash in the long run. One academic estimate of social talk reports more than 3 billion daily brand impressions across all consumer product categories. Getting to the front of that giant line takes more than just cool and new.

"Being top of mind is more important than being interesting," says co-author **Jonah Berger**, the James G. Campbell Jr. Assistant Professor of Marketing at Penn. "A cool new movie or high-tech gadget may get talked about when it comes out, but for people to keep talking about it, it has to be cued by the environment. So it's less about making your ad campaign really surprising and more to think about what might cue people to think of it."

### Chart Toppers

As drivers of conversation in 335 WOM marketing campaigns, packaged foods led a list of 14 product categories by a wide margin, followed by books, household and personal care products before hipper "entertainment/games" and "software/technology." Clothing and fashion trailed the rest, behind restaurants and auto care.

If accessible can trump interesting, it should level the playing field in a global scramble for consumers' attention. Even everyday products if plainly visible or cued more effectively will get bang from word of mouth. If WOM is managed well, then frozen foods and skin care products, like sports cars and iPads, can command plenty of buzz.

Case in point, **Boston Market**, a chain of restaurants that turns comfort food like roast turkey and mashed potatoes into fast food. Promotional emails to a target audience featured the subject line "Thinking about Dinner? Think About Boston Market!" A subject line on emails sent to a control group asked instead, "Thinking About a Place to Eat?"

Among consumers with no brand preconception, three email messages with Boston Market cues increased word of mouth by 20%, on par with participants familiar with Boston Market.

As you might expect, social media magnify WOM. The ability to share impressions when still fresh with dozens or hundreds of peers can turn consumers into personal marketing engines, as advertisers hope, but only when WOM campaigns feature the right cues and enough of them.

**Vendor Emptor**

Beware, however. When planning ways to spur consumers to tout products in any media, be mindful that remuneration of any kind can elicit scrutiny by the **Federal Trade Commission**. Unless extra compensation is disclosed in a clear and conspicuous manner, warns [FTC Executive Director Eileen Harrington](#), you may run afoul of laws against deception. That's word of mouth nobody wants.

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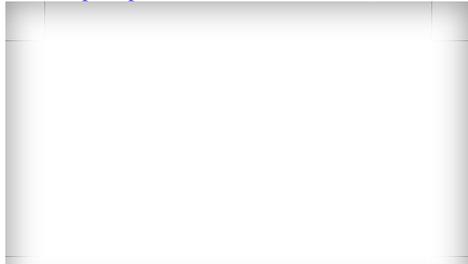


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