

Chapter 13

The Second Secret—Push the Six Buttons of Buzz

What is great marketing?

Aaahh, yes—identifying the holy grail.

This is the question many CEO's and small business owners ask over and over: "How can we bring great marketing to our company and break out our brand?" A marketer's typical response is, "Let's look at some of the best marketers of all time and duplicate what *they* did."

Follow this line and what happens next? You read articles. You interview professors. You find yourself looking for respected brands and may very well come up with Procter & Gamble as the model to examine.

You discover that Procter & Gamble tests their TV commercials rigorously in focus groups. And before producing their final commercials, they test first-draft versions (called animatics) for persuasion scores. They test intensity levels of media for these commercials.

And maybe, like many others before, you decided that you've discovered the secret to great marketing. They wrote the book on marketing, right? Just duplicate what Procter & Gamble does, right?

Sorry. It won't work.

Why? Chances are you don't have Procter & Gamble's billions of dollars of advertising and resources at your disposal. Furthermore, Procter & Gamble hasn't created buzz in a *long* while. They've been focused more on refining than reinventing.

If you've read Part One of this book, I think you've discovered the power of word of mouth. It's the most powerful form of marketing on earth. Period. Great marketing is marketing that gets people telling other people about your company, your product, or your service. Word-of-mouth marketing connects

with consumers, costs a whale of a lot less, and travels further—exponentially. Just recall the two comparative figures we began with, Figs. 13-1 and—2.

Traditional Marketing

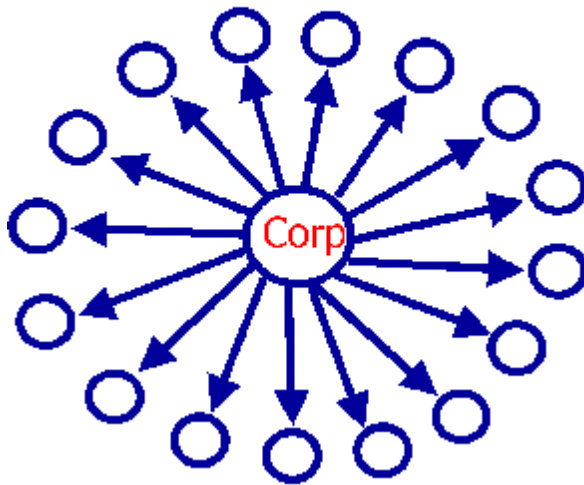


Figure 13-1 — The traditional marketing model

Buzz Marketing

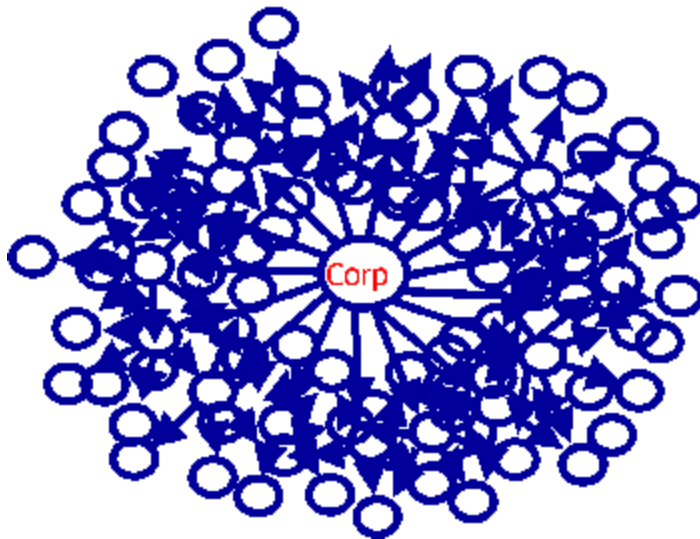


Figure 13-2 — The Buzz marketing model

What's the Secret?

One of the secrets to word of mouth is that you're speaking face-to-face, which gives you what tons of marketers are trying to get every day: attention. Face-to-face attention competes with no other media, grabbing unadulterated mindshare.

Another secret to word of mouth is credibility. When you're a friend, a neighbor, a co-worker, or a family member tells you about a great movie, product, or service—you believe them. They're not being paid to pitch the item and so you give them full credibility. That's why having a great product matters so much: If you can wow 'em, people *will* tell their friends and neighbors.

In addition to face-to-face attention, audio stimulus stays with you longer, providing superior memory retrieval. In a study of two groups presented with advertising information with the brand removed, only 49 percent of people recalled advertising based on a visual cue, while 70 percent recalled advertising from a thirty-second musical cue¹. Given the right context of attention, audio stimuli can be far superior to visual.

Why It Matters More Than Ever

Why should you care? Not only is word of mouth ten times more effective than print or TV², word of mouth is more important *today* than at any time in the past, for four reasons:

1. The ad clutter is rising to intolerable levels in America (a 283 index on the Clutter Curve; see Chapter 11).
2. Traditional forms of media are rising in cost, compounding the issue of clutter.
3. We've been lied to so many times with advertising, it seems like the only message we trust these days comes from regular people like you and me.

¹ [TNS Marketing Study](#)

² 2002 Worldwide study, Euro RSCG

4. Technology is accelerating word of mouth.

Because of technology, word of mouth is moving faster than ever before. Text messaging, e-mail distribution lists, chat rooms, message boards, Web sites, and blogs. If you see a great movie—bam, you’re sending an e-mail to sixty-three of your friends in an instant and you have the buzz currency of being ‘in the know.’ If the movie stinks—bam, an e-mail goes out to those sixty-three friends warning them to save their money. You become the hero for saving all your good buddies \$20 for a pair of tickets and popcorn. With Blackberrys, Treos, Pocket PCs, and WiFi, we don’t need to be tied to a desktop computer. We’ve got mobile communication with us for instantaneous messaging.

Now more than ever, we can spread word of mouth faster and wider. Most importantly, though, word of mouth used to travel in unique settings where a conversation could never be heard again. Now, with the Internet, a permanent history of word of mouth stays recorded *forever*. Bad or good, the Internet has transformed word of mouth from a single-engine dog-fighter to an F-sixteen. It’s now become fast, powerful, long-range, and dangerous if you can’t harness it. It can be your biggest asset in today’s marketing world, or it can be your biggest nightmare if you can’t control it.

But it’s so simple to say “Just start a word-of-mouth marketing campaign.” Obviously it’s not that simple to do. Flying this powerful machine requires knowledge, patience, and deliberation. Hang on.

Basic Training

The entire crux of word-of-mouth marketing is giving people *something to talk about*. It’s the foundation for word-of-mouth marketing.

Give people a great story to tell.

Why? Because most of us love to be the center of attention; we love to have something interesting, amusing, or novel to talk about, something others will find entertaining, fun to hear...and will remember us for having brightened their day a little. Remember our definition of buzz:

Capturing attention of consumers and the media

to the point where talking about your brand
becomes entertaining, fascinating, and newsworthy.

A conversation starter.

You've got to give 'em something to talk about because most of our products and services are simply boring. Law firm—boring. Exterminator—boring. Green beans—boring. Office supplies—boring. Computers—boring. Boring, boring, boring.

If you want people to talk about your product, you've got to give them a *reason* to talk about your product. Give them a story, and not just any story.

Take yourself back in time to 1984. On the day after the Super Bowl, can you imagine people talking about a computer? Water-cooler conversation centered around MIPS or DRAM? Absolutely not. Boooooorrring! Apple Computer got everyone talking about its computer in America because it *gave people a story to talk about*.

Not the product, not its attributes. People talked about that amazing commercial, about the audacity of poking IBM in the chest, about George Orwell's book, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, about the new era of big brother and how there might be a mini-microphone recording their every word at the water cooler right then and there. The story is not Apple's technology, all its MIPS and DRAM crap, but Apple is at the center of the story, and Apple is the giver of buzz, allowing people to tell a story to their co-workers and neighbors.

A buzz marketer's dream is to start conversations that begin with phrases like "You're never gonna believe..." and "Hey, did you hear..." Yet within the context of these conversations, their brand rests at the center. The giver of buzz.

The membrane of word-of-mouth marketing is that people love to tell stories—ever since the Odyssey and before, all the way back to the first tribal storytellers, the human race has been a culture around the spoken word, revering the elder who could grasp the attention of a circle of listeners and hold them spellbound.

Remember Bonnie Raitt's song, "Let's give 'em something to talk about"? You've got to do the same thing. Give 'em a *reason* to talk about your brand. What you've got to do is create a ready-made story for water-cooler conversation.

We did this with Half.com. It wasn't an especially exciting product. Talking about a Web site that sold used and overstock books, CDs, and DVDs, isn't exactly titillating—there were competitors in the marketplace doing the same thing, and no one was talking about them.

We had to give people a *reason* to talk about our brand. We had to give them a ready-made story. Renaming a town from Halfway to Half.com gave the world a great story to tell, and it propelled us from a no-name Web site to a top ten retail site in less than six months. The better the story, the faster the spread of word-of mouth.

We talk about things that make us gasp, things that make us laugh, things that make us wonder, things that make us marvel. We talk about things that shock us, and things that thrill us.

But why do we talk about these things?

On the surface, we talk about them because they're emotive and they're *interesting*.

But dig a bit further into the human psyche and you'll discover we talk about these things because we want to be the *center of interest*. Imagine you're at a cocktail party. Introducing interesting news gives you a certain currency. For example, being the first one to discover an unknown gem of a restaurant gives you currency. Introducing entertaining and fascinating news makes *you* entertaining and fascinating.

And after all, who doesn't want to be entertaining and fascinating?

You've got to give 'em something to talk about—because it makes *them* interesting, and it gives *them* currency. Hey, Mr. Motorola and Miss Minolta, it's not about you...it's about them! If you don't create a story that gives *them* currency...word of mouth will not spread.

So you're well on your way in basic training. There are a lot of buttons in

the F-16 of buzz, but there are six magic buttons to push which produce currency and start conversations.

They're tried and true. I call them the "Six Buttons Of Buzz."

Push The Six Buttons of Buzz To Start a Conversation

Creating buzz sounds very tough. But it can be easy...if you know which buttons to push.

Time and time again, these six things push people's buttons and start conversations:

The Six Buttons of Buzz

- The taboo (sex, lies, bathroom humor)
- The unusual
- The outrageous
- The hilarious
- The remarkable
- Secrets (both kept and revealed)

Push any one of these buzz buttons, and you'll give people the currency to start a conversation.

Maxim #1: Push The Taboo Button To Start Conversations

Even Procter & Gamble stumbled upon taboo many years ago with Mr. Whipple and his admonishment, "Don't squeeze the charmin!" Whipple told America it wasn't allowed in the store...we couldn't squeeze the Charmin. And the Mr. Whipple campaign was the most successful campaign in the brand's history. Time after time, a P&G ad agency would try to kill off Whipple and replace him with a new campaign—only to return to Whipple, because sales were higher with Whipple.³ Whipple succeeded because he tapped into our taboo. When we arrived at the supermarket aisle for bathroom tissue—what did we do? Squeeze the darn Charmin, of course! Why? Because we knew we weren't supposed to do it—it was taboo.

³ Luke Sullivan, "Hey Whipple, Squeeze This." *A Guide to Creating Great Ads* (John Wiley & Sons, 1998)

Why did our urinal screens work for Half.com? First, because it suggested a contextual message that was creative (Don't piss away half your money...head to Half.com). But second, because it was bathroom humor.

Bathroom humor is taboo—and we talk about the taboo. If you're ever at a dinner party with parents of babies or toddlers—give yourself thirty minutes before somebody starts talking about “doo-doo” and diapers. Of course you're not supposed to talk about those things at a dinner party—they're taboo. Or Viagra—can you imagine your parents or grandparents talking about bedroom performance except when alone in the bedroom?

Got a boring product like shampoo? Introduce taboo. Herbal Essences did. Each commercial pictures a woman in the shower, orgasming in sheer delight as she washes her hair with Herbal Essences shampoo.

Clairol turned a hum-drum “Herbal Essences Organic” into an industry star with their vibrant commercials playing on the close wording of organic and *orgasmic*. Every time you see their commercial, you see playful (but taboo) images of women enjoying their shampoo...as much as an orgasm.

Just think if GM's Hummer could get Hugh Grant in one of their commercials (slyly reminding us how he was caught by the police for, er, getting a hummer from a lady of the evening). Talk about taboo! That would get the whole world talking!

Maxim #2: Push The Unusual Button To Start Conversations

David Letterman's got the “unusual” buzz button nailed with his stupid human tricks and his Top Ten lists. For marketers, look as far as Pepsi's decision to put a competing product, Coke, in the Pepsi Challenge commercials (revolutionary in its day, and still not much done). Unusual marketing makes its way into pop-culture and gives people currency.

In a very different kind of business, a man named Ian Klein five years ago decided to go into the online dating business. But when you're competing against Match.com, things get pretty competitive. His sister was one of the 64 percent of overweight Americans, and also one of the eighty million single people in America. In time he made the connection, pushed an unusual button, and created a niche site called OverweightDate.com. Among

overweight singles, the whispers started. At Weight Watchers meetings, at bars, everywhere.

Best of all, the idea worked. People who had been shelling out \$40 a month on Match.com and getting zero dates because of their weight were now getting dates left and right. These days when founder Ian Klein walks through the mall in the Boston area where the site is based, people stop him to ask about it. Put on a tee-shirt with the OverweightDate.com name, and he gets stopped even more.

Will he resort to having flyers slipped to people eating at In-N-Out Burger locations in California? You bet. They're handed to everyone—overweight people, athletic people, skinny people. People laugh, they actually read the flyer, and most important of all—they talk. It becomes an unusual conversation piece.

With marketing held to word of mouth, flyers at In-N-Out Burgers, some keyword buys online, and a few tee-shirts, OverweightDate.com's registered user count tallies in the millions. Push the unusual button.

Maxim #3: Push The *Outrageous* Button To Start Conversations

You can't get more outrageous than asking a town to rename itself. Still, the town went for it.

But a word to the wise when you push this button. Outrageousness for the pure sake of outrageousness doesn't resonate too well. If you try to get attention by shooting gerbils out of a cannon, that's certainly outrageous. But if you push this button just for the sake of being outrageous, it will probably work—giving people something to talk about. But what's the connection to your brand or product?

There needs to be *some* connection. In renaming our town, the “half” connection was obvious to everyone—and plenty of people found it outrageous. What you'll find with gerbils being blown out of a cannon is that people might not remember your brand or make a connection to your brand...unless there is *a connection*.

Here's the difference. A hypothetical situation: a porn star in the GM

Hummer commercial. Outrageous? Yes. Any connection? NO. So—a bad decision.

Now let's put Hugh Grant in a GM Hummer commercial. Outrageous? Yes (and taboo). Is there a connection, YES. A good decision? Debatable.

The point is: the outrageous button will always work. It just works ten times better if there's a *connection* between your product and the outrageousness.

Maxim #4: Push The *Hilarious* Button To Start Conversations

The hilarious button works, but it may be one of the harder buttons to push—being truly funny is never easy. It can work to your advantage if done right, and to your disadvantage if you're on the wrong end of it.

A client of ours, the foods and household products company Reckitt Benckiser (they sell nine million household and personal care products every day) came to us with one of its tougher challenges. The brand was French's Potato Sticks, and it was a classic case of milking the profits with not much marketing spend. As a test, they asked what we could do. The budget wasn't huge, and we weren't sure if we would even accept the project, but off I went to the grocery store for three hours one night to make my decision.

The baseline situation was awful. French's Potato Sticks used to be sold in a can but the company had recently started putting it in a stand-up pouch. It reduced the visibility of the product, but the cost savings of switching to a pouch were too attractive to pass up.

The positioning in the grocery aisle was awful. Right next to Pringles, but low down on the shelf. Hard to see, hard to find, more competitors from the Dorito family arriving. A recipe for disaster, but it was a small cash cow. I lurked in the aisle and asked every one who walked by if they knew about potato sticks (making clear I was a marketing and PR person, not a wacko). Nearly every person paused, squinted, and seemed to reach in the recess of their brain and said, "Yeah, I used to have them as a kid." Bingo.

It wasn't so bad after all. All it took was a prompt...a conversation...and people remembered.

The next day we called to take on the project. I didn't know what we were going to do, but I knew if we could spark some word of mouth conversation, it would be easy to recall a brand people knew when they were kids. We later presented a two week, intensive campaign that focused on nostalgia and comedy.

We would literally bring Potato Sticks to life—with comedians. We recruited amateur comedians and gave them the exposure and the prayer (long shot) of getting on The Ellen Degeneres Show or The Tonight Show. Each day, we would have three comedians show up in Potato Stick costumes that looked like your eight-year-old made them. Talk about rough around the edges, these were made from UHaul cardboard boxes and spray paint. When people saw these people in costumes, they couldn't help but stop, approach, laugh, and ask, "What the heck...?"

Purposefully, we designed the costumes to look home-made versus corporate. The costume begged inquiry. They were our conversation openers. But once you start a conversation, you've got to continue it, make people laugh (in this case) and give them a ready-made story to take away with them and talk to other people about.

The comedians had no problem making people laugh—office workers, cabbies, teenagers, tourists, gays, straights, hot chicks, metrosexuals, old ladies, cops, and suits...they all stopped, listened, and laughed. Along with a product sample to eat, the punch line was, "Potato sticks...they're back!"

Combined with two weeks of appearances all over Boston, and a Web site with riddles to guess the next Boston location, these comedians gave out twelve thousand packages of Potato Sticks .

Since this was a test, Reckitt Benckiser wanted to measure awareness results as well as sales. They spent \$15,000 on the awareness study, and to be honest, we were nervous, even though we knew it would work. We were pushing the hilarious button, it was planned extremely carefully and deliberately, with locations chosen to cross-pollinate wide across all the Boston metro area.

Before our campaign, unaided awareness of French's Potato Sticks tallied a mere 10 percent. With three comedians and twelve thousand packs of

Potato Sticks—unaided awareness in the Boston Metro more than doubled from 10 percent to 21 percent.

If you know anything about awareness statistics, they are like glaciers. It takes mountains to move them. What we had done was to start conversations and make connections. We pushed the hilarious button to do it. Humor isn't easy, but when it works, it works well. We weren't just getting exposure and impressions. We made people laugh. They took pictures of our comedians, and our comedians took pictures of them. The entire purpose was not to sell, but to give. Give people something to laugh about...and a ready-made story to talk about.

Maxim #5: Push The Remarkable Button to Start Conversations

How do you make auto parts worth talking about, among people who ordinarily wouldn't? When I ran marketing and advertising for Pep Boys, we looked at all the categories that moved the needle in our business and picked a few 'leader' categories to promote. One of these categories was brakes. Whether you're a do-it-yourselfer or prefer to have a mechanic fix your brakes for you, you need reliable brakes. Everybody does.

So how do you create advertising about brakes that starts conversations and gets people remarking on brakes? First, we had a creative team at DDB that produced a great commercial. It opened up with two guys driving back from a weekend in the mountains clad in plaid shirts. They're driving their Ford Explorer along a winding mountain road as country music plays on the radio. They pass a "moose crossing" sign...then another sign labeled "really big ones." Looking at each other bemused, they continue driving. They pass another moose crossing sign labeled "no kidding." They now look at each other confused, then immediately jam on the brakes—stopping just short of a huge moose, standing twelve inches in front of their vehicle. The moose calmly looks at the drivers...and begins to speak.

"Hey, d'you get them brakes at Pep Boys?" says the moose.

The camera cuts to the two guys—shocked by the talking moose. The driver responds in bewilderment, "Yeah...I did."

The unscathed moose then responds, "I appreciate it," followed by a

closing promotion on brakes at an attractive price-point.

The commercial itself was very good, and bordered on the type of marketing that people would talk about. But we needed a boost. So to enhance the word of mouth and got people remarking on it, we created an in-store campaign with the moose. Tapes of the moose commercial were sent to all the stores, and the employees loved it.

We then had employees in every store wear a round button with a picture of the moose saying, “Ask me about Raybestos brakes.” And guess what? When a customer sees a moose button on your shirt with an “Ask me about” ...they remark “What’s up with the moose?” It started conversations between customers and the sales associates.

It also started a conversation among our employees. They talked about the commercial, and they also talked about the new line of Raybestos brakes promoted on the button. So when customers asked about the brakes, employees knew the features and benefits and were prepared to make the sale.

Based on the expected trend of sales from the prior year, brakes showed a double-digit net increase. The commercial itself was very good. But what pushed it over the edge was the in-store campaign causing employees and customers to talk about this crazy moose. We created a campaign that would push people’s buttons and start conversations.

Maxim #6: Push The Secret Button To Start Conversations

How many times has someone said to you, “I’m not supposed to tell you this, but...”

Secrets are currency. Revealing a secret is a definite conversation starter. People love to talk about secrets, and when they do, they become ‘in the know.’ They become part of an exclusive circle, and exclusivity is the cousin of secrecy.

Sometimes withholding can work better than flooding. Limit supply and everybody’s interested. Limit those in the know of a secret, those not ‘in the know’ *want* the currency of knowing—they want to be part of the exclusive

circle. Withholding a secret can push people's buzz buttons, and get people talking.

While not intentional, Google's Gmail created secrecy and exclusivity in its Gmail account. At one point, people were paying \$200 on eBay for an account (I admit I paid for one on eBay myself). But the crazy thing is...it's a lousy email account (yes, it does have one gig of storage...perhaps enough for twenty years of one person's e-mail archives). But you can get e-mail accounts anywhere.

Although it's standard practice in the world of technology to create a very small list of beta test users, Gmail was kept a secret. It became exclusive to have an address like Joe@gmail.com. Limit supply, create exclusivity, know the secret, and more people want to know also. They get interested in what they can't readily have, and people talk. Shhh...push the secret button

Who's Got Marketing Power?

Do brands with big budgets have marketing power? Maybe.

The brands with real marketing power are the ones pushing the Six Buttons of Buzz—and letting word of mouth proliferate exponentially. When consumers start talking, they begin marketing your brand *for you*.

Word-of-mouth marketing works well because of attention. When people talk to each other, they've got undivided, face-to-face attention—something conventional advertising rarely achieves. Word-of-mouth marketing also succeeds because of credibility. When an advertisement tells us to buy a product, we know it to be biased; we know it to be advocacy. When our friends and family members tell us about a great product, we believe them.

Big brands and small start-ups using word-of-mouth marketing achieve *three- to ten-times higher sales* versus using traditional marketing.⁴ George Lois, who put Tommy Hilfiger on the map, puts it at the top end of that

⁴ George Silverman, *The Secrets of Word of Mouth Marketing: How to Trigger Exponential Sales Through Word Of Mouth* (AMACOM, 2001)

range, claiming a ten-times impact when you create buzz.⁵

But remember, word-of-mouth marketing ain't easy. You've got to create a story...ready-made for water-cooler conversation. It's got to be entertaining, fascinating, and newsworthy. You've got to give 'em something to talk about. Connections count, impressions don't.

When people begin talking about your brand, you'll break away from the pack in no-time. Push people's buttons—the Six Buttons of Buzz.

Recap

Can you reach far more people with one TV ad than with word-of-mouth marketing?

If you call impressions meaningful, yes. If you're talking about consumer connection—people who actually pay attention to you—not in a million years.

First, remember our secret about attention. Then remember the clutter issue. You could create a Mr. Whipple ad—but how long will it take you? And remember the odds against management actually recognizing a great, buzzworthy campaign.

Word-of-mouth marketing isn't about you and your brand. It's about them—the people who will start the conversation for you. You have to be a buzz giver—creating a ready-made story to make *them* the center of interest.

Push the six buttons of buzz. They're tried and true:

- The taboo (sex, lies, bathroom humor)
- The unusual
- The outrageous
- The hilarious
- The remarkable
- Secrets (both kept and revealed)

Are people really that easy to figure out? Aren't we much more involved

⁵ George Lois, *What's The Big Idea? How to Win With Outrageous Ideas (That Sell!)* (Plume, 1991)

and more intricate as human beings? Of course we are. We read books. We talk about philosophy. We all seek a deeper level.

But at the same time, we want to be entertained, and we want to entertain others. There's nothing new about this. The playwrights of the ancient Greek comedies understood about entertaining to hold people's attention; Shakespeare understood it. Buzz and word of mouth are just as predictable.

Give people currency, give them entertainment, and discover an explosion about to happen with your brand.

