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VOL. 126 | NO. 107 | Thursday, June 02, 2011

Guerrilla Sales & Marketing

The Power Of Influence

Lori Turner-Wilson

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Editor's Note: This is the first in a two-part series.

Up to 90 percent of people favor word of mouth as their preferred source of product information, according to a 2005 study by Paul Marsden, and more than 90 percent of consumers would try a product or service if recommended to them by a friend.

Savvy marketers know this, with PR Week reporting 69 percent of marketing managers now incorporating influencer-marketing practices into their overall marketing strategies.

Influencer marketing is a form of guerrilla marketing that focuses on key individuals versus the market as a whole. These individuals have a disproportionate share of influence over your prospective buyers. Influencer marketing strategies are designed to encourage these "influentials" to spread word-of-mouth buzz about your brand across their networks.

It works due to the power of third-party credibility and because the endorsement doesn't feel like a hard sell. It's a way to counteract the growing tendency of consumers to ignore marketing.

Influencers can take on many forms such as celebrity endorsement, but in all cases, the endorsement is transparent. Stealth marketing, third-party endorsement that isn't publicly disclosed, is now restricted by the Federal Trade Commission.

Other forms of influencers are the media elite (journalists and bloggers), the culturally elite (socialites or other trendsetters in your market), and the socially connected (leaders of community or business groups, high-powered networkers, and those in your market with a significant social media following).

The key is in finding the right influencers to target and in properly motivating them to "talk up" your brand.

In selecting targeted influencers, assess their market reach, how independent they are with their rhetoric (meaning, there are no obvious agendas that could harm your brand), how often they message to their network, and how persuasive they are. Some influencers simply push out other people's content versus having a persuasive opinion of their own. You're looking for the latter.

Don't confuse popularity with influence. Being well known doesn't necessarily mean they have real influence over the buying decisions of your specific prospective customer group.

Once you've identified your influencer group, which might only be a half-dozen people, then determine what motivation you'll offer them to engage with your brand. You might ask for feedback on a new product or service – good or bad – where they share that feedback with their network. You might invite your influencers to an exclusive event. The ability to network with other influencers might be incentive enough. Or you may offer them a gift or reward for trying your product and service –



Lori Turner-Wilson

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PROPERTY SALES	66	335	10,905
MORTGAGES	74	512	15,886
FORECLOSURE NOTICES	2	122	7,372
BUILDING PERMITS	0	699	28,123
BANKRUPTCIES	67	426	13,041
BUSINESS LICENSES	24	114	4,270
UTILITY CONNECTIONS	131	536	19,643
MARRIAGE LICENSES	23	121	4,101

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a gift they could keep or offer to their followers in the form of a contest.

Kmart, a brand you wouldn't expect to see dabbling with innovative guerrilla marketing strategies, deployed a well-executed influencer marketing strategy to improve brand perception, raise awareness within the social media space, and drive shoppers to their website. Check back next week to learn what the secret to their success was and how other brands are incorporating influencer campaigns into their marketing strategies.

Lori Turner-Wilson is an award-winning columnist and managing partner of RedRover Sales & Marketing, www.redrovercompany.com. You can follow RedRover on Facebook and Twitter.

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