

WHITE PAPER

# The More, The Better

## Creating Successful Word of Mouth Campaigns

By the Keller Fay Group  
in Cooperation with BzzAgent

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## INTRODUCTION

We learn growing up that we're not supposed to talk to strangers. But as adults, that maxim sometimes gets turned on its head. Most of us have had the experience of standing in a store paralyzed with indecision about what product or brand to buy – “LCD or plasma TV?” “Organic or regular cereal?” “This book or that?” “Which kitchen cleaner?” – and being bailed out by the words of wisdom of fellow shoppers who go out of their way to share their experiences.

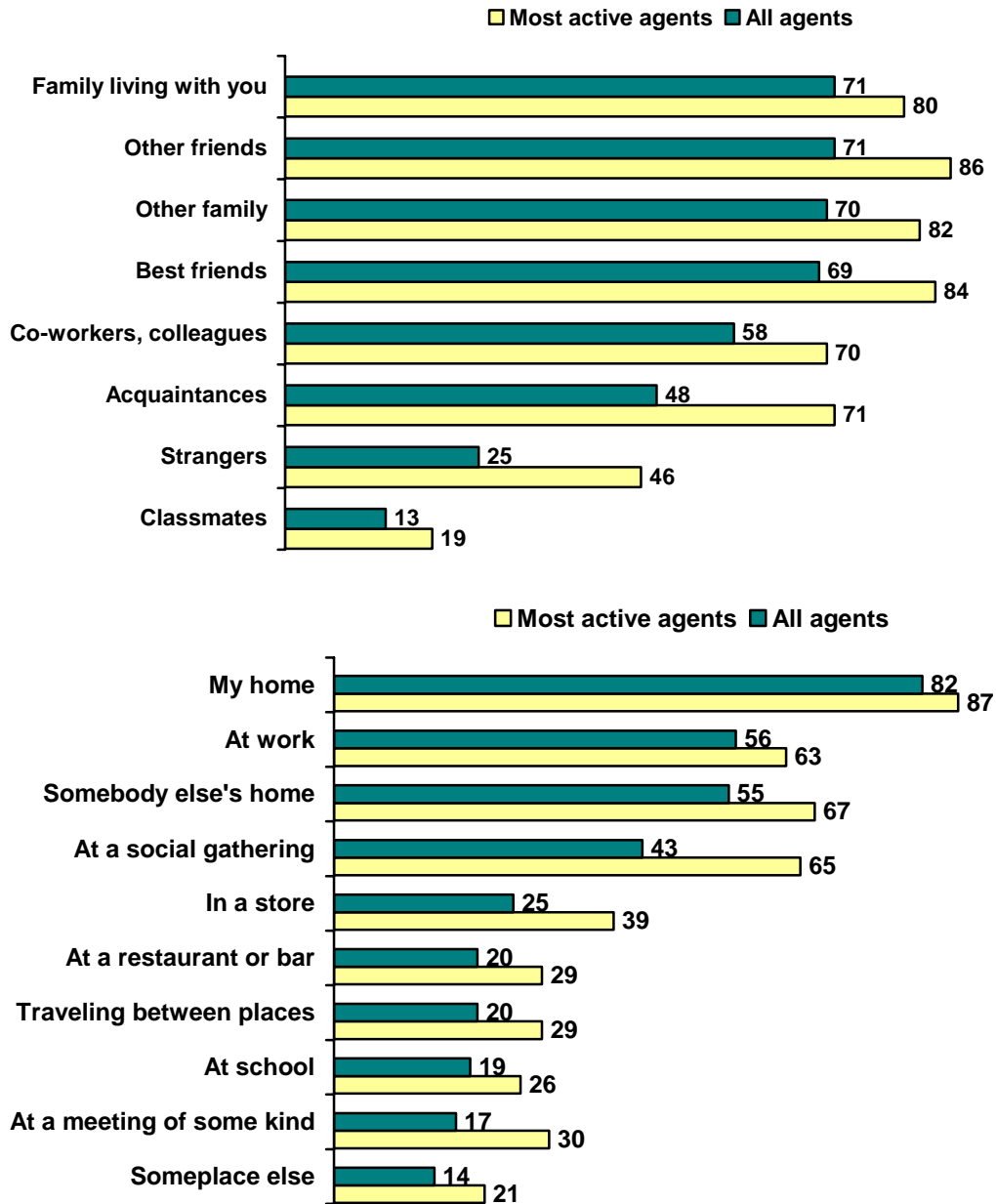
Inspiring consumers to talk about products not only with friends and family, but people they run into, is many marketers' dream. The most successful word of mouth campaigns are distinguished by having many such interactions. They encourage consumers to talk to many people, in many places, and in many ways. And they create multiple impacts, impelling people to not only tell others what they've heard, but to make purchases, seek out information, or remember the brand when they're in the market for the product.

Research by the Keller Fay Group on BzzAgents' network of volunteer consumer evangelists suggests that companies sell themselves short if they focus on just one aspect of word of mouth. Word of mouth works best when it is incorporated into all facets of daily life, touching many kinds of relationships in many settings. The more it does so, the stronger the results. The analysis is part of an initiative by Keller Fay, a leading word of mouth research firm, and BzzAgent, a leading word of mouth marketing and media firm, to identify best practices in the growing field of word of mouth marketing, using BzzAgent's 220,000-plus agents who evaluate products for the firm's clients and spread the word for ones they like. The study, based on a survey asking 3,235 agents about their most recent campaign, shows these word of mouth agents routinely:

- **Talk to many kinds of people.** Family and friends, the foundation of word of mouth, are central to agents' word of mouth. Seven in 10 say they talked about their product with family members in their household, best friends, and other friends and family. But many break into additional circles. About six in 10 talked with co-workers, about half with acquaintances, and one in four with strangers.
- **Spread the word in many settings.** Agents are most likely to talk about their products in their homes; eight in 10 do so. But many spread the word in other settings as well: more than half at work or at someone else's home; more than four in 10 at a social gathering; and significant numbers in a store, traveling between places, in a restaurant or bar, at school, at a meeting, and other settings.
- **Use multiple channels.** Face-to-face interactions predominate in respondents' word of mouth: 99% say they talked about their product in-person; 91% say it is the method they used most often. But many report using other channels as well, from phone calls to e-mail, instant messaging or text messaging, and online chats or blogs.
- **Create multiple impacts.** These activities add up to more word of mouth. About half report they prompted three or more people to tell others about the product. But they create other impacts as well. More than half inspired three or more people to say they'd buy the product in the future. Four in ten spurred three or more people to seek out more information. One in three prompted three or more to buy the product.

## Spreading the Word to Many People in Many Places

Percentage of all agents and most active agents (those who spread the word to 11 or more people) saying they talked about the product in their most recent campaign with type of person and in type of setting.

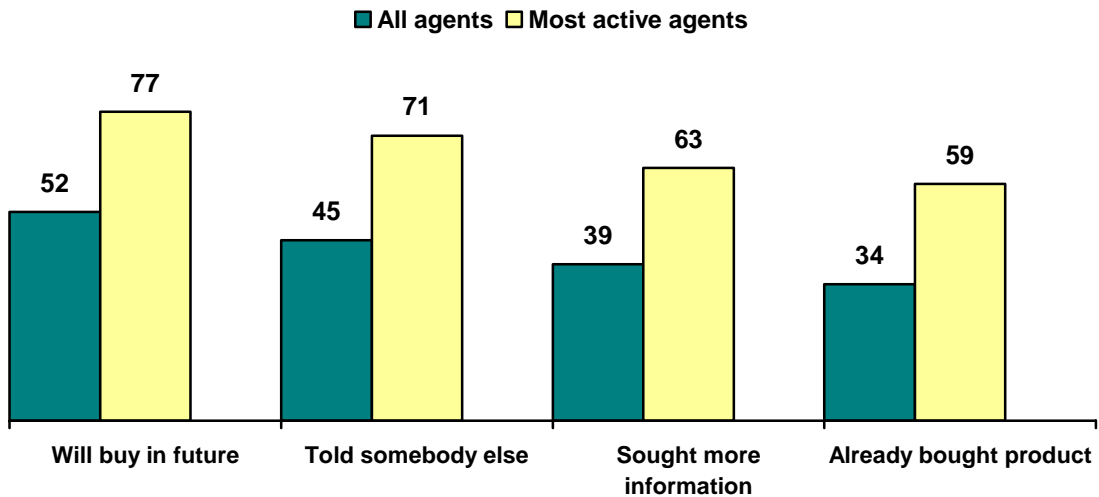
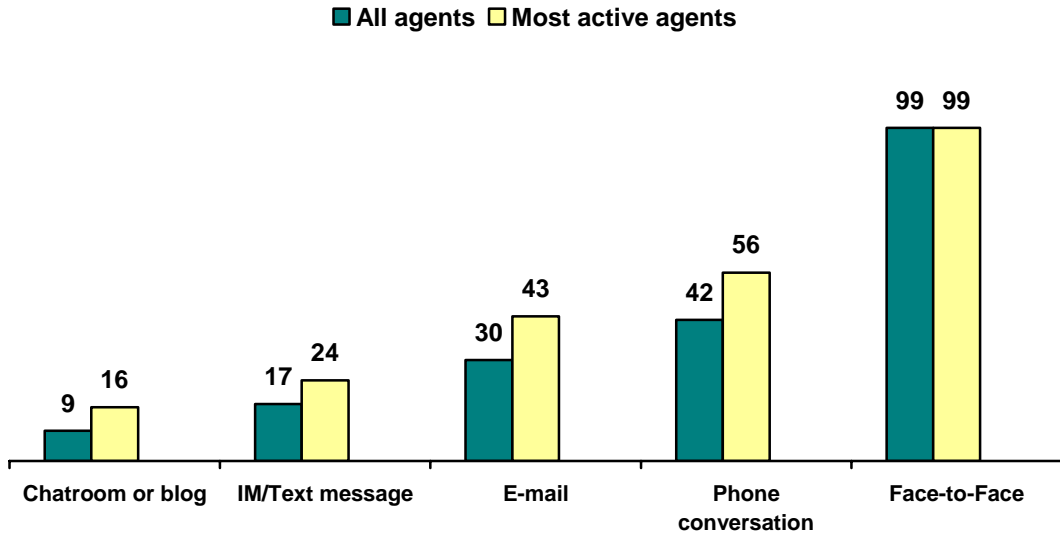


More successful campaigns score higher. Focusing on agents who spread the word to the most people – those who told 11 or more people about the product in their most recent campaign – shows these agents talked:

- **To more kinds of people.** More active agents are more likely than the average to talk to friends and family. But they stand out most in reaching beyond these groups. For example, they're 1½ times more likely than the average to have talked about their product with acquaintances (71% versus 48%) and about twice as likely to have talked with a stranger (46% versus 25%). Such encounters can substantially increase campaigns' reach.
- **In more places.** There's a strong sociability streak in where the more active agents spread the word. They're more apt than the average to talk at home and work. But they're *more* likely to reach further – about 1½ times more likely than the average to carry the message for their products to social gatherings, stores, restaurants or bars, meetings, and other settings.
- **Using more channels.** While face-to-face is most important, they are more apt than the average to use other methods as well, from the phone to e-mail, IMs/texting, and chats and blogs.
- **With more impacts.** Doing more creates more results. Fully 77% of the more active agents inspired three or more people to say they will buy the product in the future; 71% to tell others about the product; 63% to seek more information; and 59% to buy the product. All these are 1½ to 1¾ above the average.

## Carrying the Message in Many Ways, with Multiple Impacts

Percentage of all agents and most active agents (those who spread the word to 11 or more people) saying they talked about product in last campaign using listed means, and saying they inspired three or more people to take action.



Our analysis further suggests that going the next step yields more results. Talking to more kinds of people, in more ways, and in more settings, correlates with higher levels of purchasing, information-seeking, and spreading the word. Agents who inspired six or more people to buy the product are much more likely than average, for example, to have talked about their products with people from family in their household (85%) to casual acquaintances (74%) to strangers (57%); to have talked about the product in settings from their homes (87%) to stores (50%), meetings (40%), and restaurants or bars (39%); and to have talked in different ways beyond face-to-face, from phone calls (67%) to chats and blogs (21%). The more, it seems, the better.

Comparisons with TalkTrack™, Keller Fay's ongoing study of Americans' word of mouth conversations, suggest that both the agents as a whole and the more active ones exceed the public in word of mouth activities. On the whole, Americans' word of mouth conversations stay mostly in the first circles of people (friends and family), settings (home, work), and methods (in person, by phone). Although not apples to apples, since TalkTrack™'s focus is the past day's conversations (versus agents' last campaigns), the data suggest that the agents do yield significantly more word of mouth activity.

What should marketers do? We believe that four implications in particular stand out:

1. Aim for Multiple Impacts
2. Go In-Store
3. Be Social
4. Help Your Advocates be Online *and* Offline

## IMPLICATION 1: AIM FOR MULTIPLE IMPACTS

One of the most important takeaways from our analysis is that word of mouth marketing can produce impacts beyond spreading the word. Marketers, in turn, should think about how they can encourage additional impact. How can your word of mouth program help get the ball rolling on sales? How can it drive people to the brand's Web site? If the listeners are not in the market now, how can the initiative help them keep you in mind when they are?

Campaigns can encourage these goals in various ways, from creating links to get more information, or disseminating samples and coupons for key consumers to give to the people they connect with.

Agents' accounts of their efforts show how a small step, like giving advocates coupons to distribute, can lead to additional actions. "I was redeeming a coupon for [the product] when the cashier asked how well they worked," one agent says. "I told her they worked really well, and about BzzAgent, how I got the sample, and that I liked [the product] a lot." The exchange ended with the cashier saying she'd buy the product at the end of her shift.

## IMPLICATION 2: GO IN-STORE

The breadth of word of mouth settings suggests there are a number of overlooked areas of opportunity. One that stands out particularly is in stores. The large numbers of agents spreading the word in stores and their relative comfort engaging with fellow shoppers suggests that marketers should think about how they can foster interactions close to the point of purchase.

That can mean special events – a clothing store, for example, staging a fashion show to introduce the season’s new styles, a restaurant hosting a special, invitation-only dinner for new menu items, or consumer electronics or computer stores creating events to introduce the new “must-have” technologies.

It also can mean simply encouraging customers to share their experiences with other shoppers. One agent recalls going into a store to buy more of a men’s face wash she was talking about. A woman next to her remarked that she’d love her boyfriend to try it, “but he thinks it’s a girl thing to take care of your skin.” The woman relayed her story of getting a sample from BzzAgent and giving it to her husband. “He wouldn’t have used [the product] otherwise,” she said. “Now that he has tried it, he really likes it.” She offered the fellow shopper one of her extra coupons. “She took the coupon and said she’d get her boyfriend a few products for their six-month anniversary.” The anecdote underscores several key points. Interactions should be organic and two-way; consumers should know when and when not to talk. While they can encourage purchasing, they cannot be heavy-handed or pushy. Consumers should use their own words, not marketing-speak; they should be themselves.

### IMPLICATION 3: BE SOCIAL

Successful word of mouth campaigns are social phenomena. They are strongly linked with social events, from casual get-togethers at home or in friends’ homes to social gatherings, restaurants, meetings, and other places where people congregate. And they inspire connections across their social networks and to new people.

Marketers should think about how to build sociability into their campaigns. That can mean creating events – special test drives, for example, for key consumers to invite their friends to. It also means helping consumers integrate the product into existing occasions, and helping them reach out to new people.

Agents do this in a variety of ways. One agent who entertains “quite a bit” created a special dessert featuring the product she was discussing. The guests liked it (“I can’t wait to let Brian try this!” one raved). When she identified herself as an agent, the conversation turned into a brainstorming on more ways to use the product.

A number of interactions occur informally. One agent describes going to the bathroom with a pack of girlfriends at a party, and spritzing a fragrance she was evaluating for BzzAgent. “They all stopped what they were doing and sniffed the air.” That led to nods of approval, questions, discussion about the program, and product trials, and vows to purchase.

Exchanges sometimes become part of group lore. One agent who showed off a phone at a social gathering recalled her friends getting so excited, “they all took turns playing with its options and making their own personal ring tones so when they called I knew it was them. It was a great time that we will all remember each time my phone rings.”

#### **IMPLICATION 4: HELP YOUR ADVOCATES CONNECT ONLINE *AND* OFFLINE**

Word of mouth marketers often depict their practice in either-or terms. Either you’re doing word of mouth marketing online, through blogs, viral videos and e-mail, Web sites, etc. Or you’re doing it offline, with promotions, events, or

targeted media campaigns. Following the agents' leads, marketers should take an integrated approach and help their advocates connect both offline *and* online.

Marketers should encourage advocates to be both high-touch and high-tech. The above-cited examples show there are many ways to make the connection offline. Agents' accounts show there are a variety of ways to do it online as well. Some have created blogs to talk about their products. Some shoot product demonstration videos and upload them to video web sites. Some create instant messaging icons that show the product they're evaluating. Some make a point of visiting relevant online communities.

Again, the interactions need to be natural. Agents should be upfront about their affiliation. Our study shows agent identification is not a major problem: 93% of agents say they didn't encounter negative reactions about being an agent. As the earlier examples show, identifying the connection can lead to a better conversation.

## CONCLUSIONS

Successful word of mouth campaigns work on many levels. They can inspire people to talk not only to many people but many kinds of people, creating opportunities for the message to ripple out in many directions. They can start conversations in different settings, and encourage people to spread the word in a variety of ways. And they can create more impacts, with people not only passing along the word to others, but also putting the product in their consideration set for future purchases, buying it, or seeking more information.

Marketers, in turn, can achieve results on different levels when they launch a word of mouth campaign. Just as we found in our first paper on product

attributes (see “The Steak Is the Sizzle,” [www.kellerfay.com](http://www.kellerfay.com)) that word of mouth success is attainable by more kinds of products than is often supposed, this new analysis shows word of mouth programs can attain more than is often assumed. Successful word of mouth marketing is a rich, multifaceted phenomenon.

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**About this White Paper:** This white paper is the second in a series on word of mouth marketing written by the Keller Fay Group. Like its predecessor, “The Steak Is the Sizzle: Product Attributes that Drive Word of Mouth Success” (available at [www.kellerfay.com](http://www.kellerfay.com)), it is based on an online survey of 3,235 participants in the word of mouth marketing and media firm BzzAgent’s network of volunteer consumer evangelists. The survey, conducted by Keller Fay Group with the cooperation of BzzAgent, was conducted in May-June 2006 and consisted of about two dozen questions.

**About the Keller Fay Group:** The Keller Fay Group ([www.kellerfay.com](http://www.kellerfay.com)) is the first full-service market research company focused exclusively on word of mouth (WOM). Using a full suite of best-in-class research techniques, the firm measures WOM trends and campaign effectiveness; tests concepts, ads, and messages to maximize WOM potential; and offers a complete array of custom research and advisory services related to WOM. Its TalkTrack™ service is the first continuous study of consumer word of mouth, both offline and online. The firm was founded by Ed Keller, former CEO of RoperASW and NOP World Consumer and co-author with Jon Berry of *The Influentials: One American in Ten Tells the other Nine How to Vote, Where to Eat, and What to Buy*, and Brad Fay, former managing director at Roper and NOP World. For more information, please call (732) 846-6800 or contact us at [info@kellerfay.com](mailto:info@kellerfay.com).

**About BzzAgent, Inc.:** BzzAgent Inc. is a word of mouth marketing and media firm that helps companies to organize and manage honest, real-world conversations among everyday consumers. BzzAgent’s innovative process, platform and programs enable the acceleration and measurement of word of mouth as a marketing medium. Using such systems, BzzAgent’s clients can generate awareness and shape perception about their products and services either via BzzAgent’s growing community of 200,000 trained, volunteer brand evangelists or by way of their own client-branded word of mouth networks that are customized, hosted and built by BzzAgent. For more information, please call (617) 451-2280 or contact us at [bzz@bzzagent.com](mailto:bzz@bzzagent.com).