

The holy grail of marketing - word of mouth

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Holy Grail; noun: a thing which is eagerly pursued or sought after.

Mention "the holy grail of marketing" to any agency exec and you're bound to have a bunch of buzzwords and the latest digital trends thrown your way. Sure, each has their place and is a strong contender for "the holy grail" status, but one element in marketing stands out head and shoulders above them all: word of mouth. It's not a new concept by any means, which is probably what makes it so valuable.

It's stood the test of time. There's no hidden agenda to it. There's a lot of credibility tied to it. It's simple, and best of all, it's free.

According to recent research released by McKinsey & Company, a consumer is 50x more likely to buy a product if it's recommended by close family, friends or trusting and reliable sources to them. That's great and all, but with all of the clutter and noise online and above-the-line, how do you and your brand stand out and cement your place in the mind of a consumer, which ultimately stimulates word of mouth marketing?



Image via Fotolia

Through visceral experiences. If you want someone to buy from you, you need to motivate them. You need to give them a valid reason to talk about you and spread the brand love within their circles. Humans are social creatures. We're wired for social influence and word of mouth.

In South Africa, 75% of a consumer's decision is made at the point of purchase. That's a big number. And an even bigger opportunity for brands to hone in on that almost "snap judgement" made at the point of purchase - the opportune moment to influence whether the word of mouth marketing you'll receive will be awesome or awful.

Creating visceral in-store experiences that engage with the customer in a memorable way - where they're afforded the opportunity to interact with a product first-hand - can do incredible things for a brand and be the best way to build brand believers.

There's almost a kind of butterfly effect that happens with visceral experiences and word of mouth marketing. By definition, a butterfly effect is the phenomenon whereby a minute localised change in a complex system can have large effects elsewhere. Give a consumer a fantastic experience with your brand, product or service, and when they get home or are at their next family get together, it's highly likely that they'll recount their memorable experience and highly praise and recommend you and your product or service to anyone they know and meet who is interested to hear about it. That's how you build brand advocates.

Think of the biggest word of mouth success story you know, which also has ties to the holy grail concept. Religion. It survived centuries, why? Because of the impact it made on people in the early days, and was driven from person to person, century to century, all by means of word of mouth marketing.

An important element in creating visceral experiences to drive positive word of mouth, is to not "box" your consumer profile. Don't segment or paint a picture of exactly who you think your target market is (which is so easy for brands and agencies to do) because this will close you off to so many opportunities to generate talkability to a wider audience of potential consumers at the point of purchase. Also, it's vital to bear in mind that you are not just selling a product - you are selling a "belief." You're setting out to stimulate sales, and to convert a person into becoming a brand believer which leads them to being an advocate for your brand through word of mouth.

Having said that, the visceral experience with the consumer at the point of purchase and in-store is where we actually get the most quantified results. Instead of having a promotions team touch a product or demonstrating a product in-store, a consumer should be encouraged to do it for themselves; letting them engage with the product, first hand. Because only then, when they personally experience the product and brand, can they visually apply it to their lifestyle. The more innovative and memorable the experience, the stronger post-purchase word of mouth marketing you and your brand will receive. Two things supercharge the creation of positive word of mouth: interactivity and creativity; both of which are interrelated and important for brands.

It's not rocket science. Provide consumers with a visually stimulating and memorable experience with your product or brand, and their affinity and advocacy toward it will strengthen into something long term - way beyond the point of purchase. Visceral engagement really does lead to advocacy of products and brands, which in turn drives positive word of mouth.

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