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FINANCIAL FOCUS



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Heard It Through the Grapevine: The Power of Word of Mouth Marketing

Very few advertising campaigns possess the sheer power of word of mouth – good or bad. Think about it – Are you more likely to see a movie because of a great trailer you saw on TV or because a friend can't stop talking about it. How many books have you read because they came highly recommended from someone you respect?

There is no greater compliment than positive word of mouth, and it's the ultimate prize that everyone strives to achieve. It can give you a marked advantage over your competition, but few organizations know how to get people talking. However, if you do the right things people will notice – and word will spread.

Before you can position yourself properly, you need to know where you stand. Answering the questions below will give you a good idea as to your organization's current reputation and if you have any work to do internally before looking to increase word of mouth.

1. What makes your organization different?

Everyone is different, and by extension, every organization is different. Identify those strengths that separate your organization from the other organizations that have the same focus you do. It could be anything. Is it a cutting edge technology? Maybe you offer a unique online community. Perhaps it's you provide unparalleled customer service. Whatever it is, it's important for you to know what makes your organization so unique. After all, how can you expect anyone else to talk about what makes your organization special until you know it yourself.

2. Is it easy to express your organization's differentiators?

"I like your not-for-profit organization because it's the best and helps a lot of people in need." While these kinds of sentiments can mean the world to those running the organization, they don't make the best testimonials. Whatever your differentiators are, you want to make sure they're specific and easy to put into words. You don't want your customers to have to struggle to identify what they like about your organization. Besides, "I love that your not-for-profit organization provides me online updates, pictures and news stories on the children I help" is a much more powerful testimonial.

3.How do you treat your donors, clients and employees?

Too many not-for-profit organizations underestimate the importance of internal culture. Word of mouth is a fragile seed that needs to be cultivated and nurtured to grow and a single bad experience on can have a damaging, far-reaching impact far into the future. You always want to make sure that your donors and clients have the best possible experience when dealing with your organization, and the best way to do that is to ensure your employees are happy. If your employees love the organization they work for, they will be much more likely to go out of their way to ensure others feel the same way.

Once you've been able to satisfy the requirements of all three questions, you're ready to take your pursuit of positive word of mouth to the next step.

The first thing you need to realize is that people are already talking about your organization. When you're doing all three of the above properly, people want to talk. They've already started spreading the word – Now you just need to harness it!

Identify the “Talkers”

As you go about your day to day operations, pay careful attention to everyone you have dealings with and identify the “talkers”. You know the ones I mean. The “talkers” are the exuberant, outgoing types. They're the extroverts who want to visit and catch up when they speak with you. They have a significant business card collection, and if they don't know everyone when they arrive at a party – they will by the time they leave. These are your influencers. They're the people with the most connections, and any time you deal with them you will want to roll out the red carpet. Keep them close, invite them to events, let them know how much their support means to you because once you've won them over, everyone will know how much your organization means to them.

Facilitate the Conversation

Make it easier for the “talkers” to do what they do best. Be sure to include a “refer a friend” link on your website. Create an organization newsletter for clients and supporters that they can share with friends. Include an organization signature on all electronic correspondence that goes out. Through your website create an online community with news posts, message boards, and a blog to encourage networking and communication between your supporters. If you give “talkers” the tools to communicate on your behalf – they will!

Participate in the Conversation

These days “word of mouth” spreads at the speed of data transfer. Most people will learn the vast majority of information they know about your organization from the internet. Unlike media outlets in the past, the internet wasn't designed to be a passive medium. It's participatory. People are already talking about you. It's time you find out what they're saying. Set up a Google Alert that will inform you of the latest online news about your organization. When you find people complimenting your organization, be sure to thank them. When you see negative posts, rectify the situation openly. What starts off a negative situation can actually turn positive when you offer swift and unexpected solutions. Use these opportunities to your advantage and turn biggest detractors into your biggest fans!

With the successful implementation of the ideas in this article you will soon discover you'll be unable to stop the flow of positive word of mouth.