



The Best Advertising Money Can Buy

The price of making a powerful statement is cheap compared to the cost of ads that don't work. So make a statement that counts. This is the best advertising advice I can give you.

I'm not talking about making a grand and sweeping claim, such as "Lowest prices anywhere. We won't be undersold." No one believes hype anymore. I'm talking about a statement that's bona fide, no loopholes, easy to experience. And it only takes one such statement to put a business over the top. That's why you should designate a percentage of your ad budget to purchase word-of-mouth advertising.

Word-of-mouth is one of the most credible forms of advertising because a person puts their reputation on the line every time they make a recommendation and that person has nothing to gain but the appreciation of those who are listening. What are you doing to make sure your potential ambassadors feel confident enough in your business to recommend it? What are you doing to trigger word-of-mouth?

Here are some tips for generating word-of-mouth:

- **Word-of-mouth is triggered when a customer experiences something far beyond what was expected.** Slightly exceeding their expectations just won't do it. You've got to go above and beyond the call of duty if you want your customers to talk about you.
- **Don't depend on your staff to trigger word-of-mouth by delivering "exceptional customer experience."** Good customer service is sporadic, even in the best establishments. The customer who receives exceptional service today can't be sure their friends will receive the same tomorrow, so even the most well-served are unlikely to put their necks on the line and make a recommendation.

Deep down, customers know service comes from an individual, not from an establishment. And even the best people have bad days.

- **Physical, nonverbal statements are the most dependable in triggering word-of-mouth.** These statements can be architectural, kinetic or generous, but they must go far beyond the boundaries of what's normal. If you don't want to be average, why do you insist on being normal? Here are some examples of these statements:

Architectural. The piano store that looks like a huge piano, with black and white keys forming the long awning over the long front porch. The erupting volcano outside the Mirage in Las Vegas. A glass-bottom floor that allows customers to see what's happening on the floor below them. Do you remember when McDonalds began building attached playgrounds to all their restaurants? It's worked like magic for more than 20 years.

Kinetic. The tossing of fresh fish from one employee to another at Pike Place Market in Seattle. The magical, twirling knives of the tableside chefs at Benihana. Kissing the codfish when you get "screeched in" at any pub in Newfoundland. (A screech is a loud and funny ceremony during which non-Newfoundlanders down a shot of cheap rum, repeat some phrases in the local dialect and kiss a codfish. Everyone who visits that wonderful island returns home with a story of being "screeched in.") While it may at first seem like a kinetic word-of-mouth trigger is a violation of #2 above, "Don't depend on your staff..." it's really not. A kinetic word-of-mouth trigger is constantly observable by management. It isn't a "customer service" experience delivered privately, one on one.

Generous. Are you willing to become known as the restaurant that allows its guests to select--at no charge--their choice of desserts from an expensive dessert menu? You can cover the hard cost of it in the prices of your entrees and drinks. Flour, butter and sugar are cheap advertising. Are you the jewelry store that's willing to become known for replacing watch batteries at no charge, even when the customer hasn't purchased anything and didn't buy the watch from your store? Word will spread. And watch batteries cost less than any type of advertising.

Architectural, kinetic, generous: These are the flour, butter and sugar of effective word-of-mouth. Will you put these rich ingredients into the mouths of your potential word-of-mouth ambassadors?

- **Budget to deliver the experience that will trigger word-of-mouth.** Sometimes your word-of-mouth budget will be incremental, so that its cost is tied to your customer count. Other times it'll require a capital investment, so that repayment will have to be withheld from your advertising budget over a period of years. The greatest danger isn't in overspending but in under spending. Under spending on a word-of-mouth trigger is like buying a ticket that only takes you halfway to Europe.
- **Don't promise it in your ads.** Although it's tempting to promise the thing you're counting on to trigger word-of-mouth, these promises will only eliminate the possibility of your customers becoming your ambassadors. Why would a

customer repeat what you say about yourself in your ads? You must allow your customers to deliver the good news. Don't rob your ambassadors of their moment in the sun.

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**About Author**

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