

Brand Managers Have to *Listen* to Influentials, Not Influence Them



Source - *Robin Hood*, Warner Brothers

“That's it then. Cancel the kitchen scraps for lepers and orphans, no more merciful beheadings, and call off Christmas.” – Sheriff of Nottingham, *“Robin Hood,”* Warner Bros, 1991

According to half of all marketers in a recent Duke University study they can't measure how their social media spending helps their brands.

Of course the only time they think much about ROI (return on investment) is when sales targets (customers) go online and complain about shoddy treatment or products.

That's when the boss wants you to get the complaint removed.

Sane, logical people know that's a rotten crusade tactic.

But when folks write rave reviews or post product/service compliments, there's silence.

They're ignored because well, they “get it” so marketing can focus on crafting new outbound “conversations.”

You know great stuff that defines / refines the ethos people are drawn to; stuff that lifts the esteem of your brand and moves people to favor your product, service and you. Then, these folks carry your message to the masses.

Unfortunately marketing-driven social media conversations just aren't effective, aren't as engaging as marketing people like to believe.

Nate Elliot, of Forrester Research, went so far as to say the approach is delusional.

A conversation isn't a limp, thinly veiled, hackneyed product pitch.

If that's your approach, no wonder folks won't talk with you ... you're not *listening!*

If you listened and lurked (hung around the edges of social media, not butting in) you'd quickly realize people want to find out about stuff, exchange information about things and come together with folks who have a common interests – family, friends, technology, career, fun, games.

While the Society for New Communications Research found that only 24 percent of people share online one or more times per month, 67 percent rely on online sites to make purchasing decisions by studying consumer ratings or commentary.

Social media wasn't rolled out to be an ad platform and data gathering spot ... that came later when investors wanted their own ROI.

None of the sites will tell you (so I will).

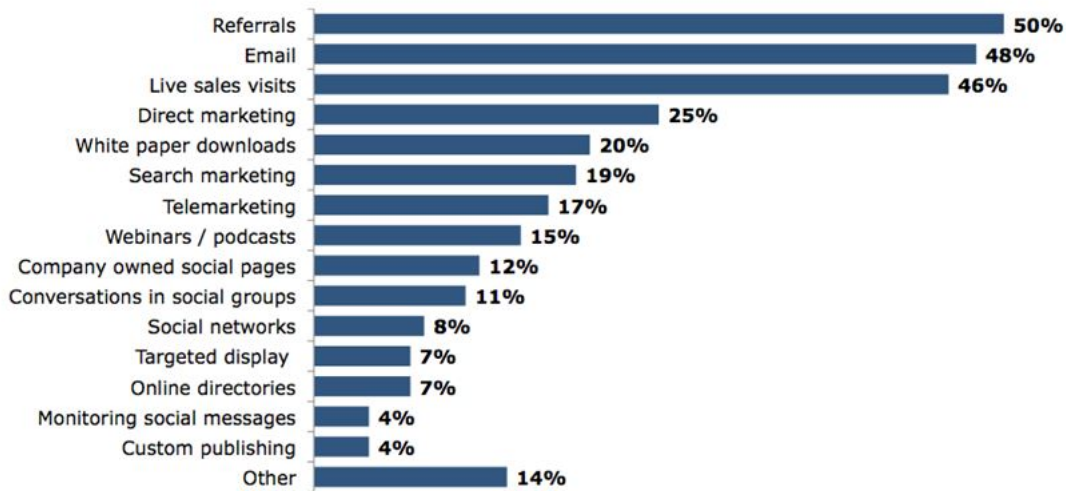
It turns out the best, most valuable thing for marketing isn't the ad space but regular people getting inputs from other regular people.

The Internet and social sites have put tremendous power in the hands of consumers and they're not afraid to use it.

My significantly better half is deft when it comes to product, service research. She reads peer reviews. She checks ratings, customer compliments/complaints. She scrutinizes specs and performance. By the time she's through, she knows more about you than you know about you.

Me? Look, buy. That's about it.

Most Effective Lead Gen Tactics



Source – [Chief Marketer](#)

Helping Hand – *The Internet and social media have empowered today's consumers so they have an almost unlimited number of locations where they can research products, services, companies and prices. All the information they want/ need is at their fingertips.*

The shift in who controls the message doesn't sit well with top-down marketing/advertising people or C-level executives.

Some people get upset that consumers tell each other what the product/service is, especially when it doesn't follow the positioning script marketing carefully crafted.

When they get over themselves, marvelous things happen.

McKinsey's research reported:

- Twice as many sales come from word-of-mouth than from traditional ads
- Peer-to-peer reviews and social media discussions influence their decisions
- These vocal consumers are more loyal
- Community is everything

That's why, while building loyalty among discerning advocates is difficult, getting it right can create a lasting impact.

Today, consumers expect to be heard and the better a company listens and connects on a human level, the more likely they are to gain loyal customers and advocates.



Source - Zuberance

Ask Around – While people spend a lot of time researching their purchases they still will turn to friends, family and their peers to make their ultimate purchasing decision. Word of mouth travels fast and has immense credibility.

Suddenly, it's more personal ... less personalized.

Of course, there's that grinding sound in the pit of the company's stomach that the review might not be "quite" right or worse, damning.

It turns out that's not a big deal.

Revinate's global review studies found:

- 75 percent of the reviews were 4 or 5 stars
- 1-2 stars accounted for less than 10 percent

That's the good news. The bad news is that only 36 percent of the reviewers hear from marketing (or anyone in the company) and most were just to tell the reviewer what they didn't like about the review or why marketing felt they were wrong.

Consumers, on the other hand, feel that online reviews provide an improved and balanced real world view of the product/service and the company's claims.

While firms used to be able to ignore complaints about products, services or companies; online posts are taken seriously and quickly addressed by the company before the issues balloon out of control.

Instead of being defensive about a review that isn't 100 percent favorable, companies are finding customers can help them improve/enhance products; develop better documentation and at times, even come up with new, different products.

According Alterian, real customer reviews have become so important that:

- 78 percent of consumers regularly check online reviews before making a purchase
- 44 percent of the respondents have written at least one or two
- 13 percent believe online reviews are very trustworthy
- Consumers often feel overly positive reviews are written by the company, overly negative reviews are written by the competition and those that are balanced with some points of issue are written by real users
- Whether the review is positive or negative, nine out of ten people still look to friends, family, peers for WOM recommendations

It shouldn't come as any surprise that people like helping friends and family members make the right buying decision.

It's not free advertising, it's earned media coverage/exposure.

Giving the reviewer/customer a positive experience doesn't seem like a big expense.



Source - *Robin Hood*, Warner Brothers

As Azeem noted, “A wise man once said: *“There are no perfect men in the world; only perfect intentions.”*”

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