



Live from NEMOA: Use Word of Mouth to Spread Awareness

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Cambridge, MA--Want the best exposure for your catalog? Try using word of mouth (WOM). That's the message Julian Aldridge, president of San Francisco-based Ammo Marketing, delivered March 23 at the New England Mail Order Association spring conference.

Consumers are bombarded with upward of 35,000 marketing messages a day, Aldridge said, and act on only a handful of them. But WOM, according to Aldridge's presentation, has become the number-one medium for driving purchases.

Aldridge cited a recent study by "CMO" magazine indicating that more than 70% of U.S. marketers planned to use WOM campaigns in 2006 and that 50% have recognized the importance of WOM campaigns.

Marketers are looking for two groups of people to spread WOM: influencers and brand ambassadors. The brand ambassador route, said Aldridge, has worked well for early adopters such as spirits and beer marketers (think of the Bacardi Girls, who are paid to sample at bars). But choosing someone to represent your brand as a nonpaid influencer can be trickier.

"It's all about finding the right people to fit your brand," Aldridge said. "I had a client [in the spirits industry] tell me they wanted to find an influencer who goes to the bar seven nights a week. I told them it sounded more like [someone who needed] an AA meeting than someone they wanted to represent them."

The best influencers have seven characteristics: a passion for life; a mindset for success; a connection with pop culture; a "people-phile" personality; social altruism; a can-do attitude; and inner confidence. They also need to have a clear set of priorities when it comes to your brand. If possible and practical, Aldridge said, the marketing team should interview potential influencers before using them in a WOM campaign.

But there is no simple answer to what will work and why, or if a WOM campaign would be worth the marketing dollars. But Aldridge said that a merchant should never just rely on a loyalist, because not all loyalists are influencers, and they do not necessarily spread the word about a brand.

With that in mind, Aldridge said arts and crafts merchants might have the best shot at using influencers to spread their name. The influencers among their customers probably belong to a church group or another organization and would talk amongst their peers about products they'd purchased from the merchant.

"But is it the right channel, and can you incentivize a loyalist for bringing in business?" Aldridge said. "That's a question catalog marketers need to ask themselves."

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