

White Paper

Buzz Marketing – Creating Employee Buzz Part 2



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Motivated and enthusiastic employees are not only more productive, but they also talk up the company to their friends and family; in doing so, they help to generate more sales. As a trusted source of information, your employees' enthusiasm will create excitement among their friends and family, and in turn, these friends will pass the information on to their friends. So you have a built-in buzz marketing machine that extends well outside the company.

In Part 1 of this series on Buzz Marketing (if you have not yet read it, you can get a copy of Part 1 here: <http://www.hallman.com/esp/presentations/buzz031507.pdf>), I talked about creating consumer buzz. In Part 2, I want to concentrate on the employees. Much of what is covered here will also apply to dealers, sales reps, organizations, and even vendors – all of whom have a circle of friends and family of their own.

I spent much the '70s, '80s, and part of the '90s creating business events and “motivational” programs for large companies. During that time, I supervised programs on innovation, customer service, teamwork, change, creativity, mentoring, back-to-basics, leadership, and whatever was the rage at the time. One thing they all had in common was that they simply did not work unless these concepts became or were already part of the corporate personality.

Many were, in fact, a total waste of money. I remember one project that cost the client over a million dollars between the work we did and the consulting firm's fees. The program was to foster innovation, and the company really needed to step up in this area. We started off with a great executive-level meeting and then took the concept to the line managers, who were responsible for bringing the program to the rank and file. It was a first-rate program. That was until the financial officer, speaking at the line managers meeting, told the audience to be as innovative as possible, but “just don't screw up.” You could see it on the faces of the line managers. The program died at that meeting.

I mention this because employee buzz marketing is not a substitute for creating a positive work atmosphere that produces motivated employees. But rather it is a method to get employees to talk about your product(s) or service(s) with each other, and more importantly, with their friends and family. These programs also focus the company's attention on the employee base, which is always a good thing.

One company we worked on projects for and that was noted for being one of the best places to work during the '70s and early '80s was IBM. In all the interactions we had with IBM employees during those years, I never heard anything from them that was disparaging about the company. People liked working at IBM because IBM respected them and paid attention to them. IBM was one of the few – in fact, the only – company we worked for that held an Administrative Assistant's event every year. It was a day-long meeting with thank-you speeches, great audio visuals, awards for outstanding

service, and a wonderful lunch. It certainly got that group buzzing. They had a fantastic motivational work atmosphere and punctuated it with exciting programs and events.

The point is that employee buzz marketing should be the sizzle from the steak, or, if you prefer, the icing on the cake. I have run out of adages, but I believe you get the picture. (-)

Here are a few ideas to help you get started on how to generate employee buzz. I am sure you will think of more:

1. Provide employees with something they can give their friends and family. If you are launching a new product, you might want to give employees a supply they can give to their friends free of charge. Special coupons and discounts are also great giveaways. You can even make a contest out of this type of program. The simple act of giving something away for free creates buzz, and it is an inexpensive “try me for free” program. One more very important aspect of this program is that employees feel a sense of gratification when they are able to give away something that people generally have to pay for. The psychobabble prognosticators call this SOCIAL CAPITAL.
2. Internal promotions can help get people talking. Use email, internal mail, posters, and even mail sent to the home to excite the staff about new products, a new corporate direction, people who have done something above and beyond, or special company initiatives. Market these as you would to clients. All too often second-rate creativity is used to communicate to employees. It sends them the message that they are not important.
3. Contests are also a great way to get people buzzing and learning about new company concepts. Have your staff interact with each other by making suggestions or spreading the word about new products. You can enter them into a drawing for a prize or you can give them points for each time they participate in a contest.
4. Events can really get people buzzing, especially if they are creative and exciting. Celebrations offer a great opportunity to get people together and encourage them to interact with one another. A new product introduction event for employees provides employees with more knowledge and gives them pride in the continued progress of the company. We often hold these types of events for customers, but forget about the staff. Appreciation events, like the one I mentioned above, can create positive buzz. Again, the trick is to apply as much creativity and production value for employee events as you would for customer events.
5. Not only do employee friends and family programs offer an opportunity to create employee buzz, but they also help companies to generate revenue. One way to execute a program like this is to offer points to employees for each friend or family member who buys a product, signs up for a mailing list, or initiates some other desired action. The points can be redeemable for prizes. These can be short- or long-term programs. I wrote a white paper on this concept.

Check it out: "Is Your Best Salesperson the Janitor?"- Download it here
<http://www.hallman.com/esp/presentations/employeesales.pdf>.

6. User-generated media, such as ads, photos, essays, and videos, are all the rage in consumer marketing. Why not have employees do the same thing? Sponsor internal programs that allow employees to submit their concepts. They can be judged by management – or better yet, by the entire staff. Not only will this create buzz, it also starts the process of idea-sharing, and there will no doubt be ideas of great value to the company.
7. Points awarded for learning and desired behavior is another way to generate some excitement for training programs. For each training segment that someone finishes (or passes a test), they can receive points redeemable for prizes. This can be carried to the field by allowing managers to present points cards for desired behavior associated with the training. For instance, if the training was customer service-oriented, a points card might be awarded when a manager observes a team member using a method covered in the training.
8. Recognition of excellent work or input is also a great way to generate repeat behavior, and this is built into most of the programs mentioned above. You can build excitement around this recognition by ensuring that the employees being recognized are held up as examples to others and that they are recognized in front of their peers.

The upshot of this white paper is that communications with your employees should be every bit as exciting and creative as communications with your customers would be. Employees are consumers too, and they know a lot of other people who buy or could buy your product. If your employees are excited about the company, they will pass this excitement on to their friends and family; in doing so, they will create a positive cycle of buying. This is a marketing technique you cannot afford to ignore.

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