

FAST COMPANY

MARCH 2007

“COME ON, WE'RE FROM CALIFORNIA. WE'VE ALWAYS BEEN NUMBER ONE. LET'S SHOW THE REST OF THE WORLD THAT WE CAN COME UP WITH THE BEST IDEAS. LET'S KICK SOME BUTT HERE.”

—ARNOLD SCHWARZENEGGER Governor of California

THE FAST 50

#1

ARNOLD

His Green
Ultimatum
Will Create
Huge New
Markets
Across
California

+
49

Other
Moneymaking,
World-Saving
Ideas—
From a Road
That Heats
Your Water
to Concrete
That Cleans
the Air

\$4.99 US \$5.99 CANADA FASTCOMPANY.COM



OUR 6th ANNUAL
REPORT FROM
THE FUTURE

NEXT Q&A

Share This Article!

Andy Sernovitz > CEO, Word of Mouth Marketing Association

Sernovitz does buzz. In two years, WOMMA has attracted 350 members—qualifying the discipline, Sernovitz avers, as a “genuine movement.” (See? He’s a buzz machine!) He’s also author of Word of Mouth Marketing: How Smart Companies Get People Talking (Kaplan Publishing, 2006). Here, he talks about getting the word out.

I want to be “talk worthy”: How do I make that happen?

First, give people a reason to talk about you. If your business is merely fine, no one is going to care. You have to do little special things that people will go home and tell their friends about. The Carnegie Deli in New York gives you the best corned-beef sandwiches in the world—and they pile it up 7 inches high. If it were only 2 inches, it would still be the best, but you wouldn't run home and tell your friends.

Okay, but the Carnegie Deli has been around since 1937. What's new?

What's new is the extent to which consumer opinion drives reputations. A third of the population has reviewed something online, and any one of those reviews can be read by millions of people. The other side is, we can do something about it. All these phenomena are also tools that marketers can use to participate. We can join the conversation.

I'm not a conversationalist. Help me out.

There are three very basic word-of-mouth tools. The first is just asking people to tell a friend. It's so obvious. Put up a sign on the cash register, or include a sample in the box with the note “Don't forget to tell a friend.” Then, create tell-a-friend links on every page of your Web site: [CLICK HERE, ENTER AN ADDRESS, PRESS THE BUTTON](#). Make it insanely easy. And finally, put everything in an email. It's the classic viral tool. The greatest idea on your Web page is stuck on your Web page; the same idea on your email is one click away from going to thousands of friends. J. Crew and Gap get this. They send around these supposed “friends and family” emails. We all get them from somewhere, and it's wonderful; everyone wants to get a special deal. We share it with our friends, and we feel important because we were in on the offer.

And what happens when the buzz goes sour?

Get an enthusiastic junior employee to search for your company on blogs and message boards, and have him find everyone who is unhappy. Then offer to make it right, or at least apologize. Post a comment: “I'm really sorry we screwed this up. If you want to talk, here's our email address.” Just one junior person out there making people happy—it's a great use of \$8 an hour.

photograph by Brian Ulrich