

## Evangelism Marketing – Is it the most Compelling Word of Mouth Marketing Tool?

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### Abstract

*In an overcrowded market where dozens of companies seem to sell similar goods, it is a joy to find a business that truly performs an exemplary service. Sharing shopping discoveries with a friend is like passing on secret knowledge -- only those in the know get to share in the benefits. Turning a customer into a mouthpiece for advertising is a marketing dream. As companies have grown and become more impersonal, marketers experience more challenges making meaningful connections with customers. Consumers want to buy products from businesses they can trust, and often turn to their friends for recommendations. This product "evangelism" helps businesses build their reputations and spread word of their highly regarded services. Evangelism marketing is more commonly known as word-of-mouth-marketing, and relies on customers to deliver marketing messages to other potential customers. When someone recommends a new restaurant they liked, a pair of shoes that was particularly comfortable, or a mechanic who offers honest service, they are acting as "customer evangelists." The challenge is convincing people to recommend a company in an honest and organic way. Obviously, not every company can turn their customers into evangelists. Many companies offer mediocre or predictable services that are so ordinary they are not worth taking the time to mention to others. Plus, there is no easy way to influence the conversations people have with their friends. A customer could have an amazing experience at a nail salon but not tell their friends because they have more pressing issues to attend to. Marketing professionals are developing strategies to get others talking about their products and services in a positive way. These include everything from creating online communities for customers to interact, to sponsoring events that help position a brand as part of a lifestyle. The goal of any evangelist marketing strategy is to find out how a brand fits into a customer's life and making that fit as easy as possible. The more effectively a brand satisfies a customer's needs, the more likely they are to mention it to friends and family. It's been shown that Evangelism due to personalization is giving potential and existing customers a free platform to talk about their experiences that they had with the companies.*

**Keywords:** Evangelism, Customer Evangelism, Word-of-Mouth Marketing, Social Networking.

### Introduction

**History:** Many people believe Guy Kawasaki, the former chief evangelist of Apple Computer, to be the father of evangelism marketing. In his books "The Art of the Start" and "How to Drive Your Competition Crazy" Kawasaki states that the driving force behind evangelism marketing is the fact that individuals simply want to make the world a better place. Evangelist customers spread their recommendations and recruit new customers out of pure belief, not for goods or money.

The word "evangelist" comes from Greek word "eu-angelos", meaning "bringer of good news". The customer bhakti or evangelism is nectar for the organization. These days, the customer-evangelism marketing has become the talk of the Internet circle; that is why a search engine specialist, Jody in 2007 commented, "Over the past few weeks and months I have heard more about evangelists and evangelism than I have in my entire life. From Technology evangelists to Enthusiast evangelists to Consumer-evangelists, everyone seems to be promoting evangelists lately."

## Basic Concept of Evangelism Marketing

Conceptually, the evangelist-customer becomes perfect and is satisfied. As a devotee, he does not crave for anything, nor regret, nor envy, nor take interest in the senses, nor to own any objects. Customer-evangelists are vocal consumers and the brand may find them from all walks of life. They share common characteristics that they flood online-offline praises, favourable remarks and experiences for the brand, brand personality, products, services, personality in channel system or ways and means of publicity.

Evangelism marketing is an advanced form of word-of-mouth marketing (WOMM) in which companies develop customers who believe so strongly in a particular product or service that they freely try to convince others to buy and use it. The customers become voluntary advocates, actively spreading the word on behalf of the company.

Evangelism marketing is sometimes confused with affiliate marketing. However, while affiliate programs provide incentives in the form of money or products, evangelist customers spread their recommendations and recruit new customers out of pure belief, not for the receipt of goods or money. Rather, the goal of the customer evangelist is simply to provide benefit to other individuals.

As they act independently, evangelist customers often become key influencers. The fact that evangelists are not paid or associated with any company makes their beliefs perceived by others as credible and trustworthy.

Evangelism comes from the three words of 'bringing good news,' and the marketing term justly draws from the religious sense, as consumers are driven by their beliefs in a product or service, which they preach in an attempt to convert others.

### What is Evangelism Marketing ?

Evangelism marketing relies on customers to recommend a business, its products and services to other potential customers in honest and organic way. Customers, who do this, act as a "customer evangelists".

But, generating such genuine and positive feedbacks and recommendations is a herculean task. Marketing professionals develop strategies to effectively satisfy customer's need, by creating online communities for customers to interact, by sponsoring events, etc. to let their customers talk about their products and services positively.

### Kinds of Evangelism Marketing

1. Evangelism marketing is applicable to any kind of product.
2. Technology evangelism is the evangelism marketing of a tool.
3. Platform Evangelism is the evangelism marketing of the opportunity to create complementary goods for a multi-sided platform, which also involves non-marketing functions such as regulation of the platform's commercial ecosystem to maximize network effects.

### Who Employs Evangelism Marketing ?

Organisation always looks forward in creating a lifelong relationship with the customers and tries to sustain it.

The study by Ben McConnell and Jackie Huba authors of *Creating Customer Evangelists: How Loyal Customers Become a Volunteer Sales force*. The study provides examples of companies who have successfully turned loyal customers into customer evangelists for their organisation.

### The study mentioned some key factors in defining consumer evangelists

1. Consumer Evangelist purchase and believe in your product or service
2. Consumer Evangelist passionately recommend you to friends, family and colleagues
3. Consumer Evangelist provide unsolicited feedback or praise
4. Consumer Evangelist forgive dips in quality, convenience or service

5. Customer Evangelist are not bought they extol your virtues freely
6. Customer Evangelist makes a point to offer glowing recommendations to family, friends and co-workers
7. Customer Evangelist gives product as a gift
8. Offers praise, criticism, and other feedback without being asked
9. Offers praise without any financial incentive
10. Participating in the brand makes the customer feel like they are part of something larger than themselves

(Source: [www.creatingcustomerevangelist.com](http://www.creatingcustomerevangelist.com))

### Customer Communities

A strong avenue for evangelists is in the form of customer communities, which bring together groups of users of a product or service to share information and discuss common issues. Some companies assist with such events, for example:

1. General Motors' Saturn division in Tennessee organizes an annual summer picnic for thousands of customers.
2. Another example is the Harley Owners Groups (HOGS), organized by Harley Davidson, which associate bikers locally and globally through quarterly and annual meetings held all over the world.
3. Starbucks Corporation, the coffee company, started an online customer community in 2008 called My Starbucks Idea, designed to collect suggestions for products or services and feedback from customers. During the first year of the program, My Starbucks Idea generated 70,000 ideas through the site and approximately 50 changes based on customer suggestions were implemented.

### Role of Social Networking in Evangelism Marketing

Role of social networking has been an effective tool for the marketers. The majority of companies have already started to hold close these social media to integrate them in their marketing and communication strategies. Now a day almost all companies have inclined in adopting this new strategy whereby they are taking advantage of a free platform and modern technology to promote brands and corporate image.

Let us look at some charts which will establish the fact that how important is the role of social networking in the life of marketers.

### Evangelism Marketing Examples

Small businesses use a variety of strategies to entice customers. While many of these marketing methods use media such as television, magazines and the Internet, the most effective marketing has always relied on word of mouth. For this method to be effective, you must convert customers into spokespeople for your products. These satisfied customers become "evangelists" for the brand and bring the "gospel" of the product to their friends and families.

#### 1. **Product Evangelists**

One of the ways that small businesses can use evangelism marketing is to become evangelists about their products themselves. In-house staffers, managers and sales people can carry their enthusiasm about the products to vendors and customers to win them over. As an example, Apple Computers was a struggling high-tech company during the 1980s. In 1983, Apple hired Guy Kawasaki as its "product evangelist." Kawasaki touted the virtues of Apple's newest computer, the Macintosh, to hardware and software developers. His successful evangelism would lead to fierce customer loyalty throughout the following decades.

#### 2. **Social Media**

Social media has also been a powerful force in evangelism marketing. Small businesses can employ Facebook, Twitter and YouTube to create a community around the love of their products. Customers can openly discuss their

likes and dislikes, which allows them to spread the message of your company's mission. Company executives at Domino's Pizza researched the data from these online communities and re-organized many of their processes. These changes showed their customers that the company listened to them, which enhanced their reputation and earned them more converts.

### 3. **Designated Shoppers**

Small retail businesses can recruit product evangelists from their own customer base. These shoppers can try out the merchandise, report on its quality and pass on the information to other prospective customers. Arizona-based used clothing retailer Buffalo Exchange recruited their own "evangelists": high school students with an interest in fashion design. The stores gave the students gift cards and asked them to dress the display mannequins in their preferred styles. The participants then influenced the fashion choices of their friends and classmates.

### 4. **Party Time**

Everybody loves a party, so small businesses can attract potential evangelists by showing them a good time. The customers then associate the product with happy feelings and pass those messages along to their friends. Discovery Education created product evangelists by engaging with educators and administrators from around the U.S. at education technology conferences. Instead of conducting a formal product demo, Discovery created a party atmosphere to get prospects excited about their catalog. When the attendees return to their schools, they spread the word about Discovery's products to their colleagues.

#### **Traits of a customer evangelist**

1. Customers that regularly buy the product and believes in the brand
2. Makes a point to offer glowing recommendations to family, friends and co-workers
3. Gives the product as a gift
4. Offers praise, criticism, and other feedback without being asked
5. Dips in quality, convenience, or service are forgiven
6. Offers praise without any financial incentive
7. Participating in the brand makes the customer feel like they are part of something larger than themselves

Evangelism marketing is a tool that is available to any business in a multitude of industries. Consider a large company like Apple. Apple loyalists are some of the most recognized product evangelists in the market, sharing their experiences with emerging technology in enthusiastic ways.

Conversely, small businesses with limited marketing budgets often use evangelism marketing in place of more expensive television or print campaigns. A restaurant with delicious desserts often attracts more customers through referrals and word-of-mouth than by sending out coupons for free desserts.

Businesses love evangelism marketing because it produces a high return on investment. The amount of money generated in new sales is typically significantly higher than the money spent on marketing, since customer referrals are usually free.

Customer evangelists are repeat customers who support a brand with their money and their praise. This produces long term benefits for a company. Any business that is interested in creating a committed customer base will have something to gain from evangelism marketing.

#### **How is an Evangelism Marketing Plan Developed and Implemented ?**

1. The most important aspect of any evangelist marketing plan is to establish a connection with customers. The best way to get customers talking about a brand is for businesses to start the dialog themselves. The information that comes out of these conversations can be used to create more useful products and services.

2. Before implementing an evangelism marketing plan, businesses must engage in market research with focus groups, online surveys, or other consumer information gathering strategies. The goal is to create an open, honest, and comprehensive portrait of how a brand is understood in the minds of the public. This analysis should focus on both positives and negative aspects of the brand. The popular perception of a company might be that it has great products but terrible customer service, giving companies a chance to reinforce their strengths and correct their mistakes.
3. Identifying “mainstream” customers is another important feature of an evangelism marketing strategy. If a company wants to maximize the conversation about their product or service, they must market to the broadest possible section of customers.
4. Once a company has collected as much information as possible about their customer's experiences, they have to be prepared to make changes based on that information. These changes can be relatively minor or involve major overhauls. A famous example of this is Amazon's Kindle e-reader. Amazon analyzed the tens of thousands of customer reviews posted on their website to help refine the Kindle as it went through several generations of redesigns.
5. By taking a thoughtful approach to customer feedback, they were able to turn public criticism into public praise. The Kindle is now one of the world's most widely used e-readers.

### Evangelist Marketing in Action

There is not one perfect strategy for turning customers into evangelists. Companies have experimented with a whole range of approaches to get their customers talking about products and brands. Below are a few creative examples from real companies.

**Buffalo Exchange** – The used clothing chain recruited high school students interested in fashion design to act as “trendsetters.” They were given gift cards to the store and asked to dress up mannequins in hip new styles. This simple and cheap program was a way to connect with young, fashion conscious shoppers who influence the choices of their friends.

**C & M Auto Service Inc** – This Illinois based mechanic's shop set up a customer advisory panel to solicit feedback from people who actually used the shop. The panel was able to provide information about how services were perceived. Using this information, the business was able to refine their marketing and service offerings to highlight their strengths. This made them a more useful and, by extension, recommendable company.

**Dewey's Pizza** – This small Midwestern pizza chain creates customer evangelists by turning mistakes into a cause for comment. If a customer's order is incorrect for any reason, their entire meal is free and they are given a gift certificate to use on their next visit. Many customers are so overwhelmed by the generous service that they praise the restaurant even when a mistake has been made.

**Discovery Education** – This educational publisher creates a dialog about its products by connecting with teachers and industry professionals at education technology conferences. The company rents a room, offers free food and drink, and allows conference weary visitors to unwind and mingle in a pampered atmosphere. All visitors are given free trials to some of Discovery's most popular products. By throwing a party, the company is able to offer a fun service to their customers and distinguish themselves from their more formal competitors.

Chart 1 is based on a 2012 survey that asked respondents to identify the ways that they recommend local business to friends. That data is compared to an identical survey from 2010. As the chart illustrates, face to face recommendations are by far the most popular way to give shopping advice. But as more and more of life is lived online, social media sites are becoming important outlets for recommendations.

### Benefits of Evangelism Marketing

Online market is a crowded place where numerous companies sell similar products / services. And, with the increased competition, it has become a major challenge for online marketers to make meaningful and fruitful connections with their customers. Because consumers tend to buy products from businesses they trust. Therefore, product or brand evangelism helps businesses to build their brand reputation and spread word of highly exemplary services.

Now, let's have a look at the benefits of evangelism marketing that helps businesses gain a loyal customer base.

### 1. Unbiased advertising

Customer evangelists are often the best sales representative because their opinion about a product/service is unbiased and is not associated either with a company or with its benefits. Therefore, brand evangelism becomes one of the best marketing strategy companies should follow.

### 2. A committed customer base

A happy customer or a customer evangelist provides genuine feedback to other customers in need. This helps marketers to create a trusted network of helpful and devoted customers.

### 3. Long-term promotion

Even if other brand marketing and promotion campaigns come to an end, evangelism marketing is a never ending advertising process. It empowers customers trust in a brand by encouraging positive reviews for longer course of time.

### 4. Better customers

People who are evangelists of your product are often your best sales reps too. Because their opinions are not associated with your company, prospects and prospective buyers will be less skeptical of their advice. This means that brand evangelists have a unique opportunity to convert potential customers into new evangelists, who can in turn recruit even more fans to their ranks.

### 5. Evangelists are like free advisors

Often happy to give advice just because they want to, evangelists will frequently step in to provide free “consulting” to other clients in need. This puts less of the burden on your company and your support team, and creates a trusted network of helpful, enthusiastic clients.

### 6. Case studies and testimonials

These are two great resources to have, but aren't easy to put together if you don't have a network of evangelists who are willing to speak on your behalf. Testimonials are persuasive because they feature the voice of your customers without any interference from your company, which makes them seem more honest and trustworthy. If you have a library of these resources, potential customers can do their own research and reach out to your evangelists on their own, without having to seek out your assistance before they're ready.

## Conclusion

Online customer-evangelism is a craze today in Internet sphere. Due to amplification in various promotional media, it is essential for the marketers that they encourage their old customers to behave like their sales force and public relation managers. Online evangelism marketing is one of the tools to turn the devoted customers into selfless sales force and public relation managers of the company. This article highlights the advantages of evangelism and evangelists for commercial purposes. It also throws light on types of commercial evangelists, approaches and steps of online evangelism marketing and the tools of measuring it.

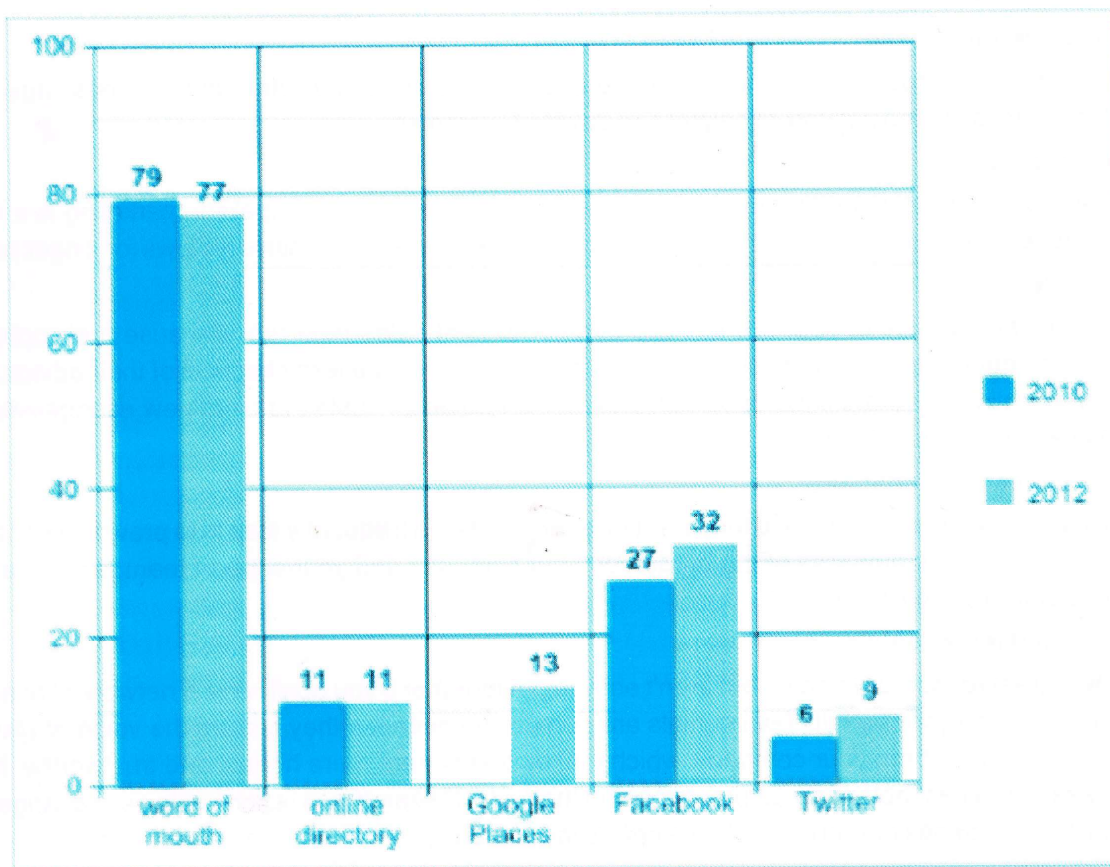
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Chart 1. Ways to recommend local business to friends



Source: (Source:<http://www.marketing-schools.org/types-of-marketing/evangelism-marketing.html>)