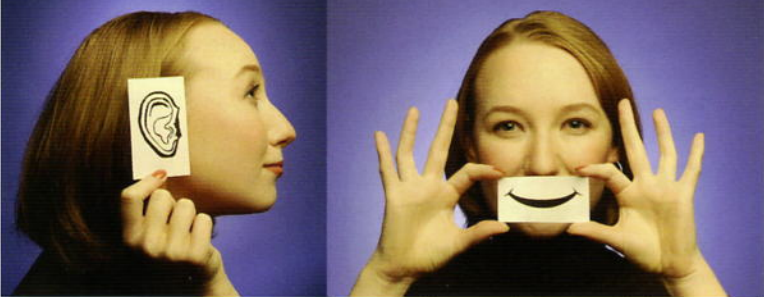


Beyond Advertising:

Building Your Furniture Business with Buzz



There are numerous ways to promote a furniture business. Many believe that advertising is the best way. But, oftentimes it is the most expensive and least effective method.

According to Bob Coen, a Senior Vice President at media buying agency Universal McAnn, American companies will spend approximately \$281 billion advertising in 2005, roughly \$950 per American.

Advertising experts estimate that the typical American is exposed to approximately 10,000 commercial messages a week in various outlets including radio, television, direct mail, telemarketing, newspapers, magazines, billboards, and the Internet.

Consumers are finding many ways to escape from advertisers. The vast majority of homes are equipped with DVD or VCR recorders allowing people to watch their favorite movies with no commercial interruptions. When they turn on their televisions, millions are tuning into HBO and Showtime where they can watch quality programming with no advertising.

Further complicating the life of marketers, consumers are quickly adopting digital video recorders like TiVo and ReplayTV that allow them to record programs and watch them back while fast forwarding through commercials.

XM and Sirius, satellite radio providers with commercial free programming, are quickly grabbing market share from commercial radio stations signing up 2.6 million paid subscribers in their first three years of existence.

Consumers are hungry for information but realize that most commercials are not credible. When was the last time you purchased a product because of an advertised benefit? In contrast, can you recall picking a movie, choosing a restaurant, or buying furniture because you saw a favorable review or a friend made a recommendation? Your answers give you a compelling reason to use buzz marketing techniques to promote your furniture business.

Marketers have found that buzz travels through invisible networks that share some important characteristics. It's more than just Person A speaks with Person B who speaks with Person C. Rather, buzz works in a hub and spoke format. Person A may speak with five or six people. However, Person A's words really only get rapidly diffused when he or she speaks to a key influencer who shares the message with other key influencers. With multiple key influencers now sharing Person A's message, buzz kicks into high gear and the message spreads like wildfire.

In recent years, many companies have learned the value of buzz. In 2004, deli food maker Kayem Foods provided thousands of free samples of Al Fresco, their new line of low-fat chicken sausages, to consumers who agreed to talk up the product to their friends and family as well as request it from stores that didn't carry the product. Al Fresco sales skyrocketed nearly 100% during the summer buzz campaign when no traditional advertising efforts were used.

In 1998, I landed an eight-minute segment featuring my family furniture business, Galvins Workspace Furniture in Redwood City, California, on a one-hour special about home offices broadcast nationally on Home & Garden Television (HGTV). The buzz from this show brought in a stream of both new and repeat customers that continues to this day because people continue watching a streamed version of the broadcast on the store's website at www.galvins.com.

Domain, a 30-store furniture chain in seven Northeastern states, has used buzz as a primary force in its successful growth. Since it opened its first store in 1985, Domain has featured in-store interior decorating classes, sponsored studies and books about the design tastes of Americans, published regular customer newsletters, and had its Chairwoman and CEO Judy George speak as a design expert in many media outlets and conferences to build buzz.

In his book, "The Fall of Advertising and the Rise of PR", marketing expert Al Ries argues the "big-bang marketing approach" that many businesses take on spending millions on advertising that should be replaced with an emphasis on effective buzz marketing techniques.

Advertising, Ries believes, should only be used to maintain companies once they have been established with buzz. In fact, some of the biggest brands like Starbucks, Wal-Mart, Newman's Own, Jet Blue, Viagra, Red Bull, and Krispy Kreme started with buzz alone.

Your furniture company's ability to grow and prosper will depend upon your ability to adopt whole a new way of marketing. Once your customers start spreading the word about your business, you may wonder why you waited so long to embrace the power of buzz. 

Patrick Galvin owns Galvin Communications, a buzz marketing firm in Portland, Oregon, that works with furnishings retailers and manufacturers. He was the marketing director of his family's retail furniture business in the San Francisco Bay Area, Galvins Workspace Furniture, from 1996-2001. For more information, visit www.galvincomm.com or call (503) 249-8800.



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