

9

DRIVERS OF
WORD of
MOUTH
AT YOUR SCHOOL

Rick **Newberry**



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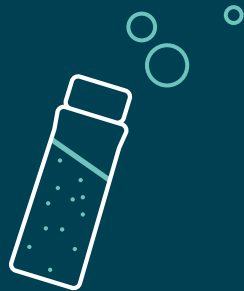
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DO YOU REMEMBER THE OLD FABERGÉ ORGANIC SHAMPOO TELEVISION COMMERCIAL?

If you don't, you can go to YouTube and search for it.



Complete with 80s hair, a young model appears on the screen and begins by saying: "I told two friends about Fabergé Organic Shampoo with pure wheat germ oil and honey."

She concludes by saying: "You will tell two friends, and they'll tell two friends, and so on and so on and so on."

Remember how the screen multiplied at the end of the commercial for added emphasis?

Go ahead and watch it for yourself

It brings back memories doesn't it? (*Unless you weren't born yet.*)

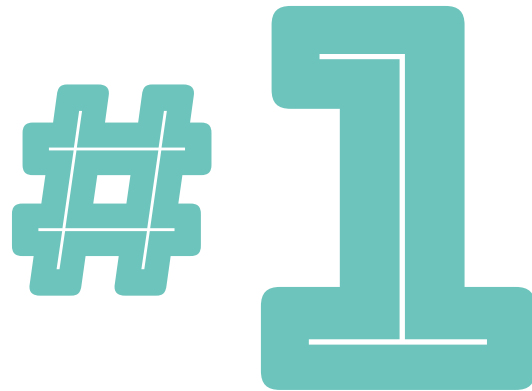
I never used Fabergé as my shampoo of choice, nor did I tell two friends and so on and so on and so on.

However, the marketing concept was right on. Those who use the product, like it and are satisfied, will tell their friends. This is word of mouth marketing at its best.

While this commercial may be outdated, it definitely was memorable. And certainly, this message is very applicable today for your school.

WORD *of* MOUTH

is always



I have conducted countless focus groups and parent surveys in schools. Whenever I ask the question,

“How did you first learn of the school?”

to parents, the response is always

“word of mouth.”

Word of mouth is the number one way that your prospective parents first learn about your school.

When we apply marketing to word of mouth, Andy Sernovitz defines this as,

“Giving people a reason to talk about your stuff and making it easier for that conversation to take place”

(Word of Mouth Marketing, page 1).

OUTBOUND, INBOUND, *and* WOMBOUND

TYPICALLY, MARKETING HAS BEEN DIVIDED INTO TWO MAIN STRATEGIES.

Outbound Marketing

is the strategy of pushing messages out to your targeted audience and hoping that they will respond. It is advertising that attempts to gain the viewer's attention by interrupting them with a billboard, newspaper ad, or radio spot. This traditional advertising is least effective.

Inbound Marketing

as coined by Brian Halligan and Dharmesh Shah, *"is a set of marketing strategies and techniques focused on pulling relevant prospects and customers towards a business and its products. Inbound marketing is about pulling people in by sharing relevant information, creating useful content, and generally being helpful."* (Halligan, Brian; Shah, Dharmesh, *Inbound Marketing*)

It is how we harness the power of the web to engage with our current and prospective community.

FOLLOWING THIS SAME APPROACH,
I COINED THE TERM

≡ *WOMbound Marketing* ≡

WOMbound Marketing is the intentional and proactive strategy to generate, facilitate, and inspire word of mouth through your advocates. It is how brand advocacy works by harnessing the power of word of mouth to reach your potential customers most effectively.

It's always amazing to me that school leaders know that word of mouth is the number one way that prospective parents learn about their school, however, they do little to drive this most effective method of marketing.

SOUTHWEST AIRLINES



SOME OF THE THINGS I LOVE ABOUT SOUTHWEST AIRLINES INCLUDE THEIR AFFORDABILITY, CONSISTENT EXPERIENCE, NO-CHANGE FEES, AND OUTSTANDING SERVICE. I REALLY LIKE THE NUMBERED LINE-UP PROCESS INSTEAD OF HOW OTHER AIRLINES INVITE ZONES TO CROWD THE PRE-BOARDING AREA.

My bags also love that they can fly free!

I am a brand ambassador for Southwest and I enjoy sharing the love.

There are several things that drive me to be a word of mouth ambassador which are the same drivers that motivate your current parents to spread the love about your school to their friends.

Think about prospective parents searching for a school for their child.

They are reaching out and talking to their friends at their current school, church, gym, play group, Moms group, or local Starbucks. These conversations are taking place in person and online.

Prospective parents are talking to your current parents right now trying to determine if your school is the right fit for their child.

HAVE YOU EVER THOUGHT ABOUT WHAT DRIVES THESE WORD OF MOUTH CONVERSATIONS?

9

FROM MY EXPERIENCE AND RESEARCH, THERE ARE NINE DRIVERS OF WORD OF MOUTH IN PRIVATE, INDEPENDENT, AND FAITH-BASED SCHOOLS.

If we understand these drivers, then we can better focus on what we need to do to increase word of mouth and growth in our schools.

#1

EXPERIENCE

Word of mouth is shared as a result of an experience.

Think about your own experiences when you purchase a product or a service. These experiences are what make you share your opinion and perspective with your friends. Thus, we share stories from our experiences about a product, service, events or anything else.

I love to experience Disney World. From the pristine landscape to the friendly cast members to the incredible rides and outstanding food, Disney provides a top-notch experience. While it is costly, I know each visit will always be the same.

As your current parents experience – positively or negatively – your school and its culture, they are forming the basis for how they will talk about it when they share with others.

Prospective parents are interested in the experiences of current parents.

Not only does the overall experience at your school drive word of mouth, so will their experiences along the way. From the relationship with your child's teacher to the life-changing impact on a child, the parent will talk from this experience base.

#2

≡ SATISFACTION ≡

Satisfaction is a measure of the experience.

Whenever I first begin working with a school, I am always interested in what the parents have to say about the school. If the parents aren't satisfied and if there is negative "stuff" going on, then it will be a struggle to have a great marketing effort or generate positive word of mouth.

Through this initial process, I measure parent satisfaction in several ways. By conducting a parent satisfaction survey, I can collect quantitative data of the school experience. In addition, through focus group meetings, I can probe deeper with the parents, as well as the faculty to understand their satisfaction level. This gives me a snapshot view of the parent satisfaction level. It is strongly encouraged that school leaders annually measure satisfaction using a parent survey.

Your parents experience your school every day. From the morning car line to interacting with the teacher or front office staff, to viewing online grades or receiving your most recent email newsletter to hearing from their child about their day at school, these experiences can affect parent satisfaction.

Satisfaction is where parent expectations match their experience. This is where we need to focus—we want pleased and happy parents and this will lead to satisfaction.

Are your parents satisfied with your school? It's one of the key drivers of word of mouth. Have you measured this recently?

#3

≡ QUALITY ≡

Quality is focused on the product itself.

The first three drivers are very closely related. Quality is focused on the product itself—the school’s programs and outcomes. Parents “experience” the school itself through the quality of its programs and then are either satisfied or not.

You have to admit that the quality of a school sells itself. If the school has the reputation and repeated success of producing graduates who excel in college and life, the proof is in the results. The higher the quality of your school’s programs, faculty, and facilities, the greater likelihood for positive word of mouth.

A quality program will always drive word of mouth. Take a look at your programs and the faculty you have hired. If you aren’t focused on providing the best program and educators for families, then the quality of your school will suffer. Let’s face it, parents are investing significant dollars in your school’s tuition. As a result, they

expect high quality in return. Therefore, it is important for us to deliver the finest education possible.

In many ways, our most effective marketing strategy is to ensure that we have the best educational program at our school. This includes the entirety of the classroom experience as well as the faculty and staff paid to deliver this.

I love this quote from Andy Sernovitz’s book, *Word of Mouth Marketing*:

“Word of mouth marketing isn’t about marketing at all ... It’s about having a fantastic product that people can’t resist showing to everyone.”

In our case, the product is an awesome school that people can’t resist showing to everyone.

#3

≡ QUALITY ≡

WALT DISNEY ONCE SAID,

“Do what you do so well that people can’t resist telling others about you.”

A handwritten signature of Walt Disney in a cursive script, rendered in a light gray color.

As we apply that to our context, we need to make sure that our schools are focused on quality. With diminished quality, you will drive word of mouth in the opposite direction. Marketing can’t fix quality issues in your school. This is often where school leaders have to begin.

The best word of mouth is how you do school every day. A couple of years ago, while I was leading a focus group meeting, one teacher said,

“You know, I do what I do best when I close the classroom door and I teach.”

That’s where we want that teacher to have a great impact on that child so they can go home and talk to their parents about their day at school.

A school focused on quality will drive word of mouth in the right direction.

#4

≡ PASSION ≡

Passions drive us in life.

You may be passionate about your work, family, faith, or hobby. **A passion is a focal point. It is what we love and what we embrace.**

I love Starbucks coffee. My day begins with a couple of K-cups of Starbucks in my Keurig. On days that I am not traveling, I will typically go to my local Starbucks to work on a project and enjoy my favorite drink—a quad Grande Americano. That’s four shots of espresso and hot water. I even wrote my dissertation in Starbucks over a three-month period. I am passionate about coffee and this experience.

In our schools, we find that our parents are passionate about their children. Their children are the number one passion in their lives. Because of this, **they will do anything they can to make sure their child gets the best education they deserve.**

Every parent loves to talk about their child. The reality is that your parents love to talk about their kids. They really love to talk about their kids when something great happens to their child in your school—when something memorable happens in the classroom, or the child experiences an “aha” moment, or finally, when their child is walking across the stage and receiving their diploma. Or even better, when their child is admitted to the college or university of their choice.

A parent will talk about their children. When good things happen with their child at your school, this will fuel their conversation. The reverse is also true; when negative things happen to their child, this will also fuel their conversation.

So, as you think about that passion, that’s what parents want to talk about and share. They don’t want to talk about the four bullet points that you pushed out of your marketing office or memorize an elevator speech. They want to talk about their children and their experiences.

#5

LOYALTY

Loyalty is developed over time.

As parents experience your school, they have the potential to become more and more loyal to the educational program you provide.

Loyalty is something that doesn't automatically happen.

As the first four drivers work together, loyalty becomes the faithful commitment that your parents have for your school.

It can and should be built over time as families continue their child's enrollment. Families become more and more committed to the educational experience that your school provides to their child. However, keep in mind that if the experience and satisfaction of the parent goes in the wrong direction, then their loyalty can be lost in a moment.



Loyalty must be earned, developed, and retained. This is a critical driver of word of mouth, as your most loyal advocates will be ambassadors of your school to their friends.

#6

≡ TRUST ≡

Word of mouth will only work if people like you and trust you.

In his book, *Word of Mouth Marketing*, Andy Sernovitz says that word of mouth will only work if people like you and trust you.

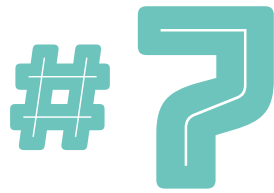
One of the main reasons why parents choose a school and remain enrolled is because they trust the leadership and the staff.

This trust is developed over time in a relationship.

If a parent will spend thousands and thousands of dollars on a school's tuition, it is critical that the leadership is trustworthy. They are responsible for ensuring that the school achieves its mission, hires and retains the best faculty, and implements a high-quality program. This is what the parent is paying for. And, they often will pay for something when they trust in what is being delivered.

In order to be trustworthy, the leadership and staff must be known. I remember partnering with an independent school in Fort Worth, TX. Their head of school greeted every family in the carline every morning of the school year. He knew every child and parent by name. He had a relationship with his school families and through this relationship, trust was developed.

Word of mouth will be driven based on this trusted relationship. The more that parents trust the leadership and the staff at your school, the stronger this word of mouth will be in the community. If this trust isn't there, then the opposite will be true, and word of mouth will be negative.



≡ SERVICE ≡

Every day we have experiences with customer service.

This is how we are treated in a store, a restaurant, or some other business.

Whether we like the language or not, our school is in the business of customer service. Since parents pay for their child's tuition, we have a responsibility to treat them well. This doesn't mean, however, that they are always right. It does mean that we need to find ways to solve their problems and answer their questions.

Service is essentially how we treat another person. In Donna Cutting's book, *The Celebrity Experience*, she talks about *rolling out the red carpet for your customers and finding a way to say "yes" to their problems*. We need to consider how we are treating our parents.

Do you treat them with kindness and respect when they call your office?

Do you and your staff return their calls and emails in a timely manner?

Exceptional service can help your school stand out in a crowded market. In addition, when you provide exceptional service or when you do something that is memorable, your parents will remember this. In turn, they will share these positive experiences with others.

This is where the positive word of mouth is created and driven. However, this word of mouth can definitely go in a different direction if the service is poor.

#8

≡ STORIES ≡

I love to read and listen to stories.

Stories grab our attention and they help us to better understand a concept, lecture, sermon, or presentation.

My favorite marketing quote is from the authors of *Brains on Fire*:

“Stories are part of who we are. After all, you don’t tell slogans about your grandfather, or how your parents met, or even how you were treated in a restaurant.”

When one of your school’s parents connects with a friend for coffee, they will tell stories about their experiences at your school. These stories are how they communicate and relate to their friends. These stories will drive word of mouth. Therefore, one of the primary ways to drive word of mouth is for you to encourage your parents to share stories of their child’s school experiences with their friends.

Also, storytelling should be your core marketing strategy.

As you share stories, your parents will connect more in social media and in person with their friends.

Prospective parents can then imagine themselves in the story that is being told. Do they see stories of parents who are similar to them? Can they relate to the stories that are being told in a way which makes them want that experience for their child?

Storytelling, whether it is your parents sharing the stories or you telling stories in your school’s marketing effort, will drive word of mouth.

#9

≡ PEOPLE ≡

The final driver of word of mouth comes down to people.

People drive word of mouth. It's your parents, faculty, board members, alumni, students, and anyone else connected to your school that drives word of mouth.

As a head of school, admissions director, or marketing director, your goal is to promote more positive word of mouth in the community. You will be able to accomplish this when you proactively and intentionally focus on these nine drivers.

In the hundreds and hundreds of schools I have coached, parents always tell me that word of mouth is the number one way that they first heard about the school.

What is always amazing to me is that even though we know this, school leaders don't have a plan to facilitate more word of mouth.

This is why you need a highly effective ambassador program. Most ambassador programs are typically focused on open house events and campus tours. While this can be helpful, it is more important to inspire parents to be word of mouth marketers in the community.

This is why I like the concept of a fan better. A fan is someone who cheers for their team, wears spirit wear, brags, and tells stories.

ARE YOU READY TO TAKE THE NEXT STEP AND PUT A WORD OF MOUTH STRATEGY IN ACTION?

THROUGH MY COMPREHENSIVE AND COMPLETE PROGRAM, I WILL
SHOW YOU HOW TO EFFECTIVELY BUILD A WORD OF MOUTH PROGRAM
THAT INSPIRES YOUR PARENTS TO TELL THEIR STORY.

You will receive everything you
need to develop and implement
your word of mouth marketing
plan through an intentional
parent ambassador network.

- Recorded training videos led by Dr. Rick Newberry
- Step-by-step guide to implement your program
- Materials to prepare for your program launch
- Access to a private Facebook group
- Opportunity for a bonus Net Promoter Score Survey



Click here to Get Started Today!

Contact Rick at rick.newberry@enrollmentcatalyst.com or call 727.647.0378