

# [ the ABCs ] Word-of-Mouth Marketing

You need all the assistance you can get when building a business. Word-of-mouth marketing helps create and sustain demand for what you are selling by nurturing a passionate community that speaks positively about you.

This community should consist of your customers, who can serve as references, participate in webinars and speak at conferences. It should also include media and analysts who provide favourable coverage of your company and product. It can also include influencers such as industry luminaries, bloggers and more.

Referrals are especially important when you consider that 57% of B2B purchase decisions, and 72% of B2C ones, are made before a buyer contacts a vendor, according to McKinsey & Company.

### **Nurture Customer Advocates**

Many entrepreneurs think that good customer service is the most influential way to cultivate word-of-mouth marketing and referrals. But it's not. Although being attentive to customers is good policy and vital to the health of your business, it's not at the core of building a referral-based business. This is because people have come to expect good customer service. When considering customer service and its role in the referral process, it unfortunately works much more effectively in reverse: people are more likely to talk about your business when they're unhappy with your service than when they're happy with you.

If you want to build your referrals, you must actively cultivate your referral sources.

When is the best time to ask for a referral? The best to ask is after the product is delivered, not when the deal is closed. And keep in mind



that, whenever possible, provide your customer with a referral first, before you ask them for one.

Invite your best advocates to be vocal. Encourage them to be active on Twitter, and Facebook and LinkedIn, if those social media sites are cornerstones of your outbound marketing strategy.

Customer advisory boards are another good way to build relationships. Having a focused group of customers who can give you strategic input is priceless. But while the majority of companies profess to be customer-centric, does it make sense to talk to your most valued customers only once every few months? Given its importance, an online advisory board should be set up to enable the company to be more agile, with meetings occurring as often as monthly.

**Strive to Go Viral**

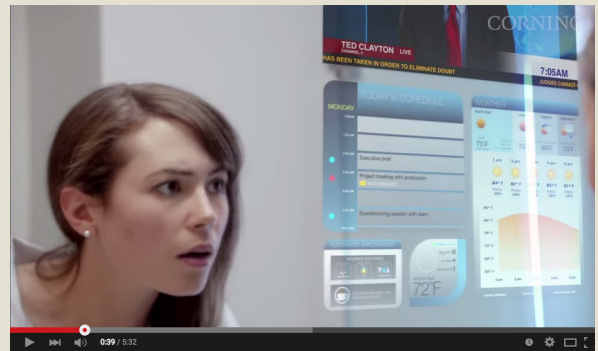
Viral marketing is, arguably, the ultimate form of word-of-mouth marketing and holds the promise of exponentially increase awareness of your product. Although typically associated with B2C sales, viral marketing can also have an impact in B2B environments. See the following insert for an example, of a B2B video that has been viewed by 25 million people.

**Corning Glass Viral Video**

In 2011, Corning succeeded in producing a B2B video that went viral and has so far been viewed by 25 million people ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Cf7IL\\_eZ38](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Cf7IL_eZ38)). The video explored applications for the company's glass in a wide range of innovative products.

One of the reasons for the success of this video is that enabled people to see how their lives could be enriched by Corning and, consequently, made them relate to the company differently than they would otherwise.

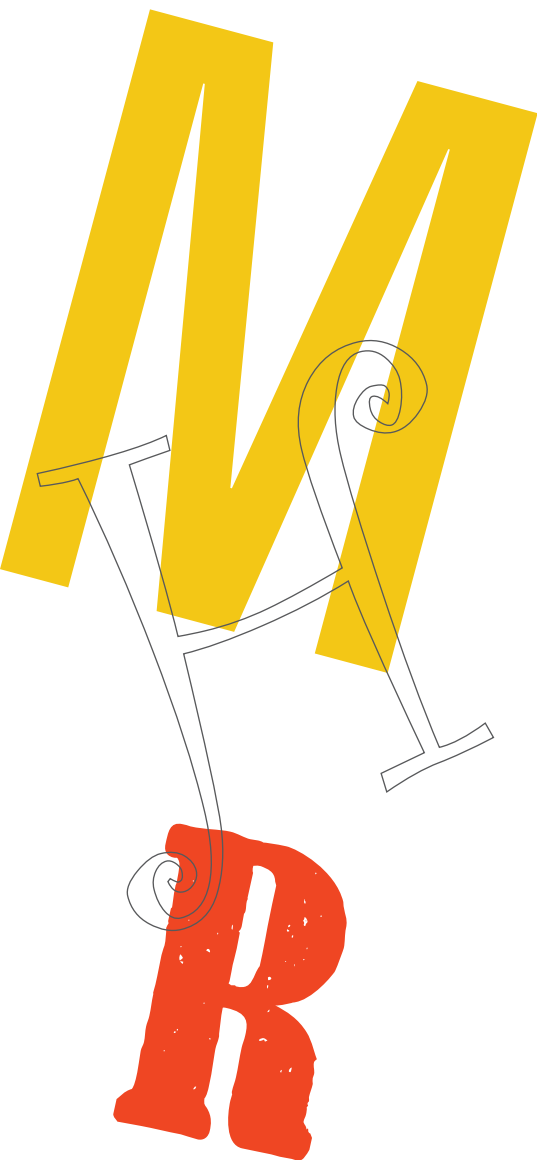
This video is one of the most successful B2B viral videos of all time. Not many people would have expected that for a product as ordinary as glass.



A screen grab from Corning's A Day Made of Glass video

“In sales, a referral is the key to the door of resistance.”

–Bo Bennet



The probability of you creating something that goes viral, however, is about the same as your chances of winning the lottery. There's no proven formula to making something go viral (often they do so unintentionally). Nonetheless, you should never stop trying to find something so unique and interesting that people are compelled to share it with their community.

**Relate to Media**

You don't need an expensive PR agency to get favorable coverage; nor is there a guarantee that you will be positive coverage even if you have an expensive agency. The key to successful PR is to identify your audience and their drivers, and then develop tailored content that is specifically designed to engage and resonate. Compelling stories work; complex acronyms and boring jargon will put media to sleep. Be a sticky read. Stay abreast of the industry – what's hot, what's not, what's game changing, then package your messaging to pick up on these trends.

This content needs to be released at the right time to increase the probability that the buyers you are targeting will consume it. Put together a calendar that aligns your timeline for announcing new products or product features with the editorial calendars of your key media.

Consider briefing key media about upcoming product announcements under embargo, because doing so build relationships and increases the odds of your gaining favourable coverage.

Social media is changing PR. Although there's still a need for traditional press releases, content posted on Twitter, for example, with a link to a blog post, video or article may reach more people.

**Connect with Analysts**

The comments in the prior section are also true of analyst relations. Know your analysts and their interests. Don't simply find out about your target "analysts" upcoming research topics, but identify what topics they're especially interested in covering in future reports. Once you're ready to announce something game-changing in your industry, bring in your most important analyst under NDA and get them a pre-briefing prior to launch.



Be mindful, however, that not all analysts treat small businesses with the same respect they give “the big boys” and there are quite a few egos. On the flip side, there are dozens of wonderful analysts out there for you to cultivate career-long friendships with. Experience shows that AR people who have deep, experienced knowledge of their market, their products and their competitors’ actions get the best shake from analysts.

**Expand your Sphere**

Don’t overlook the importance of bloggers and miscellaneous the “other” influencers in your industry. At a minimum you should identify who these people are and nurture relationships with them. You can “seed” a message in this network, with a goal of getting coverage. You can even consider encouraging word-of-mouth coverage by rewarding the top influencers.

**About Alphabet**

Alphabet is a marketing collaborative dedicated to helping small businesses succeed. Our extensible team consists of experts from every marketing discipline including branding, content creation, demand generation, public relations and video production. Learn more at [www.alphabetworks.com](http://www.alphabetworks.com).

“People influence people. Nothing influences people more than a recommendation from a trusted friend. A trusted referral is the holy grail of advertising.”

– Mark Zuckerberg



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