

## CHAPTER 1

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# The Buzz about Buzz Marketing Is Building

Early in 2001, the playgrounds of Chicago's elementary and middle schools were beset by a widespread outbreak of Pox. The mastermind behind the invasion, Hasbro, infected 900 of the city's 1,400 schools.<sup>1</sup> Tapping the coolest boys it could find between the ages of 8 and 13, the toy maker exposed them to Pox and then sent them to school to pass it along to 10 of their closest friends.

This is no diabolical story of biological warfare, but rather a tale representative of the lengths to which marketers will go to ensure the launch of their product into the right circles—the circles that will generate buzz, inspire widespread adoption, and ensure success. Through a cleverly formulated viral marketing campaign, Hasbro generated buzz for its new handheld video game before the toy even hit the market.

How did Hasbro do it? As reported in the *New York Times*, its first step was to deploy teams of field-workers in Chicago to identify and recruit 1,600 “Alpha pups,” elementary-school kids who rule the playground and inspire envy. Rigorously screened and carefully selected, the Alpha pups were introduced to the Pox product by a “cool” coach and then released into the world with 10 of the game sets to distribute to friends. Their progress in play and reactions to the game (“This game is too wicked!” “This is better than Pokémon!”) were observed and recorded by the toy maker, and an instant hit was born.<sup>2</sup>

In global marketing, the current buzz is all about buzz, whether it's regarding Michael Moore's successful campaign to persuade his publisher to release *Stupid White Men and Other Excuses for the State of the Nation*<sup>3</sup> or beverage manufacturers hiring attractive people to consume and talk

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up their products in bars. The whispers started years ago when the industry's forward thinkers began to see that a change was coming, and fast. Since that time, murmuring about the state of the industry has gained volume and ground. What was a late-night worry for some has become the hard-core reality for us all: Advertising in the traditional sense is passé. It ain't working. As the industry struggles to get a grip on the new paradigm, the futurists among us say this: There will be no paradigm.

### A NATURAL FIT

If we accept that we are all a product of our experience, then it seems inevitable that the three of us would be drawn to thinking about buzz and its critical role in the marketing mix. For Ira, it started back in the mid-1980s with Chiat/Day, when the agency created the “1984” breakthrough commercial for the Apple Macintosh launch. Widely considered among the most successful commercials ever, the advertisement created the idea of the Super Bowl as an industry event and demonstrated the extraordinary power of advertising as a creator of buzz. Remember, the advertisement officially ran just one time. Yet it managed to create millions of dollars worth of incremental exposure via conversations that took place in the business, advertising, and general press, as well as around the watercooler on the Monday after the game. It was this kind of sustained chat that ultimately delivered the desired marketing goal: people lining up at Apple dealers to see “the computer for the rest of us,” placing deposits on machines beyond the current inventory.

In fact, Chiat/Day was the kind of agency that was constantly creating buzz—whether about its iconoclastic founding chairperson, Jay Chiat, and his radical views on everything from organization to aesthetics (both the agency's and his own), or about the agency's predilection for breaking rules. For Chiat, buzz making was instinctive. And the key to it was his authenticity. He managed to maintain a relentless focus on keeping the work relevant and distinctive at a time when most agencies were thinking about how to follow client dictates and, seemingly, how to set themselves up for their own sale.

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In the 1980s through the early 1990s, the creation of breakthrough advertising was an agency's primary focus. The media were just beginning to fractionalize; the Internet was a distant dream in terms of marketing application. As the 1990s unfolded, these new factors became the dominant themes of our business. Our jobs began to be less about advertising and more about connecting consumers to brands, as we used to put it, "by any means necessary."

By the late 1990s, we found ourselves outside the day-to-day account management and consumer research responsibilities that had marked our careers until that time. We began talking about change, driving our clients to recognize that business as usual no longer existed. The three of us (Marian and Ann joined Chiat/Day in the early 1990s) did this through our Department of the Future, a unit started at Chiat/Day and then exported to Europe under the auspices of the newly merged TBWA\Chiat\Day.

As that agency focused on its own fundamentals and the normal issues facing a newly merged entity, we moved on. We joined Young & Rubicam, a far more traditional, and traditionally successful, global marketing communications entity. In a way, it can be said that our entire responsibility there was about creating buzz for the agency. Our published products, an extensive speaking push, our conversations with clients, and a focused agency PR drive (led by Philippe Krakowsky, another guy who instinctively understood the notion of buzz) were all about building the reputation of this traditional agency in the domain of thought leadership.

Interestingly, Y&R was one of the first companies to institutionalize buzz as a marketing practice. Some very talented people, including John Partilla in the United States and Kees Klomp in Europe, were running business units charged with stewarding buzz. (Klomp has since moved on to a position with Capitol Records.) The units built by Partilla and Klomp are both successful even today. What remains an open question, however, is whether buzz should be siloed as an independent practice or whether it's an idea that should pervade a fully integrated marketing practice, driven first by an integrated strategy, then championed by the public relations people (for message) and the event/promotion groups (for tactics and execution). That's the way we

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are now organized in the newly created Euro RSCG MVBMS Partners, where Ira runs strategy.

With the sale of Y&R to communication services conglomerate WPP, we again found ourselves “merged out.” For a time, we practiced on our own. Again, we found ourselves largely building the fodder for buzz for our key clients—and for ourselves. After a successful run as independents, we saw the economic downturn coming—we *are* trend watchers, after all—and suspected that the kind of work we were doing was likely to be the first to be rationalized. (While we could clearly make the case that our work is *more* important in difficult times, what we have seen over and over again is that when times get tough, traditional, conservative forms tend to come to the fore—to the detriment of our industry overall, in our view.) As we sought a potential new home, advantaged by the reputational buzz we had built in the marketing business, we found it possible to generate a series of conversations with key leaders in our industry.

### The Beginning of Something New

Ultimately, we were drawn to Bob Schmetterer and Euro RSCG Worldwide for the simple reason that Schmetterer clearly “got it” in a way that most of the industry seemed to miss. Schmetterer had made a seminal speech at Cannes in the summer of 2000 on “the end of advertising and the beginning of something new.” He wasn’t just being provocative. Despite having some of the best creative advertising agencies in the world (Euro RSCG MVBMS in New York, BETC Euro RSCG in Paris, Euro RSCG Wnek Gosper in London, and Carillo Pastore Euro RSCG in São Paulo, to name but a few), Schmetterer was building an organization in which advertising and marketing services operations were far more balanced than at most other agency networks. Most important, he was leading the charge for change within the organization. On his near-term horizon (since then realized in the States) was a concept known as the Power of One. The intent was and is to break down the traditional silos that prevent true integration of advertising disciplines. The 2001 Salz Survey of Advertiser-Agency Relations found that whereas 81 percent of clients want total integration of their

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marketing communications—of everything from brand consulting to event marketing, interactive to direct mail—only 16 percent think they have been “very successful” at actually achieving that.<sup>4</sup> Euro RSCG’s Power of One initiative was undertaken to ensure that clients get exactly what they are after.

As of May 2002, 11 of Euro RSCG’s North American entities are housed under one of two brands: Euro RSCG MVBMS Partners or Euro RSCG Tatham Partners. Each entity has a single leadership and, in a radical departure from other agency networks, a single profit and loss center. This means that offices within each entity have every incentive to work as a cohesive unit toward the attainment of client business objectives. For clients, it means that the total breadth of agency resources can be applied to a single business objective.

Euro RSCG is also a great fit for us because it is built on the concept of Creative Business Ideas® (CBIs), creating profitable innovation for clients via ideas that transcend traditional advertising. And one of the components most critical to the success of a CBI? You guessed it: *buzz*.

### **WHY BUZZ MARKETING? WHY NOW?**

Over the past few years, the buzz about buzz marketing has grown louder and more intense. From the seed of an idea through some beautifully executed early campaigns, buzz marketing is now a widely accepted marketing tool. The difference today is that the practice has matured beyond its “we-gotta-have-it” infancy to the more judicious stage where brand managers consider it among their standard options. It is now a distinct discipline to be employed how and when the marketer sees fit.

As for why buzz marketing has exploded into the industry’s consciousness at this particular point in time, the reasons are quite simple.

### **Mass Advertising Is the Support, Not the Star**

Buzz marketing holds great appeal these days for one very good reason: Traditional advertising can no longer do it alone. It isn’t dead, as some

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people have suggested, but it's no longer capable of reaching the audiences it once did. While it's true that advertising can pass along knowledge to the consumer and build esteem for brands, it is no longer the most vital component in building markets.

The reality is that the world we inhabit is breaking apart and rearranging itself into new and different patterns. Demographics are virtually meaningless. People will not submit to being categorized by numbers and letters, will not stand to have their families toe the line in terms of ratios and decimal points. The term *2.4 children* (or even the more current *2.1 children*) no longer suffices as the description of the eating, drinking, playing, learning, loving little people running around our homes. The television is not God. We don't believe the nightly news. We wake up every morning and scatter, regroup, and then scatter again.

Let's face it, mass audiences are an increasingly rare luxury. While advertising, public relations, and other more traditional forms of marketing are still effective at reaching the mass audiences that remain, these disciplines fall short when the audience is more fragmented. Terrific advertising layered with a good buzz strategy, on the other hand, can greatly amplify the marketer's impact and reach.

**Buzz marketing works among fragmented audiences because it embodies a flexibility and creativity that thus far have eluded many traditional practitioners. When there is no clear forum for communicating the brand message to the audience, what do you do? You have your audience do it for you. You make the message as fluid as the medium and watch as it ripples, flows, and finally gushes through the market.**

Does a "beautiful person" paid to wear branded clothing to a trendy bar really cause other bar-goers to purchase the brand? Does seeing hip and fabulous people zipping around town on a Vespa make the motorbikes more appealing? Well, yes. That's why identifying and exploiting true influencers is such an essential part of buzz marketing. The rules of advertising may have changed, but the role of aspiration continues to run deep.

Later in this book, we investigate the impact of the Alpha consumer and messenger Bees on the spread of information and ideas.

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For now, suffice it to say that Alphas are generally the people least susceptible to regular kinds of advertising, but they can be reached by buzz—and they can ensure that it spreads quickly to the next level of consumer. The Bees are the key connectors between Alphas and the mainstream. If they don't pick up on the buzz and disseminate it widely, the buzz will not extend beyond a niche group. It's the Bees' function to start the momentum. Once the groundswell has begun, marketers can count on the media to pick up on the phenomenon and spread it further. The right press and publicity can take buzz in new directions, can revive careers, can promote discussion, and can fire up the consuming masses.

### **Buzz Marketing Speaks to Prosumers' Desire for Power**

Buzz marketing also succeeds because it speaks to the needs and wants of today's proactive consumers (also known as *prosumers*). These people are savvy about marketing; they take the time to research and compare products; and they are far more demanding than consumers of old when it comes to customer service, store hours, and quality of merchandise. Prosumers know what they want, they know competition among retailers is fierce, and they expect to be courted and have their needs met.

Buzz marketing is effective among prosumers because it provides them an opportunity to interact with—and even, to a certain extent, control—the brands with which they partner. Moreover, it enables them to *experience* a brand rather than simply use it. Whereas the old system required advertisers to pick their audiences, part of the value of buzz is that the audience picks itself. Once buzz gets going, its flow is natural and free. It reaches those who are open to it and passes by those who are not. It is the commercial incarnation of natural selection. Only the fittest messages survive.

In essence, buzz marketing gives power to the people. Every individual in a buzz chain has the freedom to accept or reject the message he or she is given. This plays in perfectly with the overall move we have been seeing toward a more consumer-centric positioning. For more than a decade manufacturers and retailers have been gradually ceding control to the consumer, as have the media. They have no choice, really: As

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more options become available to people, members of the consuming public must be wooed. And even once the match is made, the relationship must be constantly nurtured and grown.

In the case of media, greater consumer options are having a pronounced effect on advertising and marketing. On the one hand, narrow-casting allows marketers to target more effectively. If you want to reach bird-watchers, there is now a cable channel dedicated to them. On the other hand, this limits the reach of advertising more than ever to ultra-specific audiences. The beauty in the old system is now its downfall: It casts too wide a net.

**The Only Thing Consumers Trust Is Personal Experience**

In this post-dot-com, post-Enron world, we are facing a crisis that stems from the lack of trust with which consumers view companies and their brands, especially in relation to the marketing efforts behind them. Beyond that, we have cast a suspicious eye on the media, which have taken perhaps more than their fair share of bashing in the past decade. If we can't trust the message and we can't trust the messenger, where do we turn?

More and more people are turning to each other—and to themselves. In an attempt to get unbiased and accurate information, consumers have formed communities and help groups online to share information on brands in all manner of industries. Whether you're looking to buy a car, a vacuum cleaner, or a CD, there are people online eager to tell you about their own experiences with the product.

At the same time, people, and that includes children, are becoming far less susceptible to the power of celebrity endorsers or other influencers who are seen as skills for a brand. Rather than believe that Celebrity X actually drinks discount Brand Y—or that it's good simply because he or she says it is—we watch what people we admire are eating and drinking and wearing. Why have celebrities lost their power as endorsers? For one thing, we know too much about them—and they've disappointed us too often. For another thing, as we've had to cope with change 24/7, it just plain feels safer to trust someone we know in the flesh versus through the media.



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This shouldn't be taken to mean that celebrities will cease to influence how we wear our hair or what shoes we find appealing. The distinction is that the influence will be more subtle—and even more powerful once interactive TV opens the door for contextual commerce. Like the wristwatch your favorite character on *Friends* is wearing? Click on it and it's yours, conveniently charged to your store credit or debit card. This scenario has a lot less to do with celebrity worship than with admiring a style or look put together by professionals. If it turns out that Rachel was wearing a brand dictated by a marketing deal, does it really matter? What matters ultimately is that the product caught the eye of people who want to own it.

### **Buzz Marketing Deepens the Brand Experience**

Smart marketers today invite consumers into their world, offering product information, on-the-spot customer service, and brand experiences. It's all about creating trust and involvement, a *relationship*. One of the most intoxicating things about a good buzz campaign is that it takes on a life of its own and touches everyone in its path in a way that traditional advertising rarely does. Buzz marketing often involves staged events, interactions between people, product sampling and giveaways, parties . . . genuinely interactive encounters. When consumers have a chance to come into contact with a brand in a three-dimensional way, they are more likely to form a lasting memory or association with the product.

The maker of Marlboro cigarettes creates buzz and strengthens its relations with customers by inviting young people who embody the spirit of the brand to cool ranch destinations in Arizona and Montana. Selected via sweepstakes at promotional parties hosted by the brand in bars throughout the United States, smokers enjoy an all-expenses-paid, five-day getaway.<sup>5</sup> One of our colleagues in Amsterdam tells us that Dutch food manufacturer Unox promotes its fun attitude and family-friendly products through big, silly events like the New Year's Dive, where people of all ages come annually to take a dip in the freezing North Sea and then share a warm sausage with their fellow "polar bears."



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Invite customers to participate in an exclusive, invitation-only event or a larger celebration that's open to the public. Events such as those put on by Marlboro and Unox create memories for people that are connected to the brand. If the event is a positive experience, the brand has built a foundation for trust beyond what it could have achieved through a traditional campaign.

### IT TAKES ALL KINDS: BUZZ, VIRAL, ROACH BAIT, AND SEEDING

Every day, it seems, brands are going further in their quest to create compelling connections with consumers. These efforts range from paid “whisperers” to sponsored works of art such as the Vans-financed film *Dogtown and Z-Boys* and novelist Fay Weldon’s ode to expensive, branded jewels, *The Bulgari Connection*. While some people are still a little skittish about having their leisure time branded, our experience with members of the next generation has convinced us that they are more comfortable with it.

As long as the brand adds value, convergence is a great buzz builder.

#### Shock It to ‘Em

In a column in the *Independent*, Mark Wnek, executive creative director of Euro RSCG Wnek Gosper, wrote, “In the advertising arena everyone is trying to get noticed and this results in clutter. Indeed, the latest figures show that we are each assailed by about 3,000 marketing messages a week. To acknowledge and act upon even a small proportion of these messages is a huge call on our time. And time is the one irreplaceable commodity that more and more of us are guarding more and more jealously.”<sup>6</sup>

Wnek’s solution? He advocates guerrilla-marketing tactics that are media-neutral and sufficiently surprising to capture people’s attention. “While many advertising agencies are still saying, ‘The answer is a

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30-second TV commercial, now what is the question?” says Wnek, “the real world increasingly requires more radical and creative solutions.”

Though the new news around buzz involves contrived strategies for getting the ball rolling, spontaneous buzz takes place when something really powerful strikes the public fancy . . . or a public nerve. This was proved true when a hip British clothing company took the truism “Sex sells” to new levels. French Connection, founded in the United Kingdom, scored a major home run five years ago with an edgy campaign based on the provocative nature of the company’s initials in combination with its home base: fcuk. The company has relished the attention each new piece of publicity brings. In 2001, cab drivers in New York refused to drive around with such statements as “fcuk: all night long” on their cabs, and San Francisco merchants rallied against a billboard that declared “San Francisco’s first fcuk” for the opening of the store in that city. Comparable to other shock tactics employed by Benetton in its death row campaign and Calvin Klein’s periodic dabbling in what some suggest is kiddie porn imagery, the fcuk ads have done exactly what they were designed to do: generate big-time buzz.<sup>7</sup>

If nothing else, the example of fcuk proves that traditional means of advertising are not dead when used in a fresh way. And there is a lesson regarding the holistic nature of brand in determining the relative success or failure of these fashion leaders. fcuk developed stores and product ranges that engaged the newly aware buyer. Calvin Klein continues to be a legitimate style leader. By contrast, Benetton has floundered with a confused product range, a fit model that does not work in many markets, and a consumer base that does not understand what the product stands for, even if they are aware of the imagery that has become part of the brand’s overall identity.<sup>8</sup>

**Buzz is not a panacea for marketplace success any more than is advertising.**

We are reminded yet again of how essential it is to get close to the consumer—to really understand his or her mind-set and needs. In the 1990s Ira worked on a bourbon whiskey brand that experienced a

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sudden and precipitous decline in its leading stock-keeping unit (SKU), the 250-milliliter bottle. What agency and client ultimately discovered was that the product was fine—there was no new competition. The trouble stemmed from an aesthetic change: Shifting the packaging from a flat to a round bottle created a huge problem for farmers who had formerly been able to keep the flat, nonrolling bottle under the seats of their trucks. All the high-flying marketing people didn't understand that image is irrelevant if the farmer has to deal with bottles that won't stay put.



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Do not confuse buzz marketing with publicity stunts and promotional extravaganzas. These flash-in-the-pan techniques fall short of the true potential of targeted buzz. Generating buzz for the sake of buzz is only halfway right. It lacks the content to carry consumer interest through to continued brand loyalty. Other techniques that allow marketers to empower, delight, or respond to consumers can generate an equally effective buzz. A bank's responsiveness to customer problems engenders trust. Attentive touches such as presale postcards announcing rebates on customers' favorite brands elicit delight. These and other techniques are more substantive and enduring than a fleeting moment of hype.

### **Putting Your Products Where You Want Them**

Shock-generated buzz is not for everyone, and most retailers have focused on a milder form of buzz building. One standard buzz starter involves planting knowledgeable, interesting, and/or attractive people in places online and in the real world where they can share their "personal reflections and opinions" on products. Online, this happens through chat-room infiltration, and Hollywood has already been caught red-handed in this ruse, with employees and others paid to talk up new releases. The real-world version of the whisper-campaign tactic is called *roach-bait marketing*. (The terms used to describe the various tactics of buzz marketing sound almost as raw and in-your-face as the tactics themselves can be.)

Roach-bait marketing involves people (sometimes paid) who engage consumers in a conversation about a particular brand in locales

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about town. Some liquor and cigarette companies, constrained by strict marketing rules, have adopted this alternative approach. At hip nightclubs, “leaners” are paid to lean into people at the crowded bar and ask them to order a drink for them. Oftentimes, the unsuspecting patrons, unfamiliar with the liquor or drink ordered, will strike up a conversation, and next thing they know an attractive stranger is telling them all about the joys of Brand X.<sup>9</sup> Invasive, yes. Offensive? Depends on whom you ask, how attractive the leaner is—and *whether you get caught!*

Less controversial is product seeding, which has been used for years by companies in industries ranging from apparel to automobiles. In 2001, Reebok prereleased its popular U-Shuffle DMX by targeting 90 young women across Canada who fit the product’s ideal customer profile and giving them a free pair of the shoes. By the time of the official launch of Reebok’s Urban Training collection, which includes the U-Shuffle, the product was off to a running start, and the launch ultimately was considered one of the most successful for women’s shoes in recent times. In a sense, this returns Reebok to its marketing roots; the now classic women’s aerobic trainer came to prominence by being seeded on the feet of aerobics instructors across America.<sup>10</sup>

### **Viral Marketing: An Epidemic**

The pervasiveness of the Internet has taken buzz marketing in new and interesting directions over the past few years as marketers have worked to harness this dynamic medium. With its simple branding accompanying each message sent, Web-based freemail provider Hotmail is one of viral marketing’s biggest success stories. (Hotmail is now owned by Microsoft.) Other successful viral marketers include Sweden’s LetsBuyIt.com, which lets groups of consumers bid down prices on a range of products, and e-tail giant Amazon.com, which set up a profit-sharing referral program.

A notable viral buzz campaign in 2000 launched three characters—including twenty-something race-car-driving “Curry”—into Internet stardom. As reported in *BusinessWeek*, 200,000 strategically selected, “influential” Web surfers were e-mailed video clips of what seemed like homemade movies depicting a ridiculous trio of characters posing

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and posturing for the camera. With no overt indication of the brand behind the films, the e-mails were forwarded across the Web at a rapid clip—with each viewer sending them to an average of six friends. (It's the twenty-first-century incarnation of chain mail.) Ultimately, the users were directed to a site seemingly built by Curry and his clan. In the first week the site was live, an unexpected onslaught of 100,000 visitors caused the server to crash—all without advertising. It was only later that a low-impact TV and radio campaign revealed the source of the characters. Ultimately, the entire effort boosted sales of Lee jeans by 20 percent in 2000.<sup>11</sup> The carefully crafted campaign hit a bull's-eye with the target market (males ages 17 to 22), injecting the tired denim brand with a sense of humor and personality it had been lacking. The campaign stands as a great example of what can happen when the message and the medium are so well integrated.

Buzz marketing online is dependent on creating a message the consumer wants to forward to friends and colleagues. When British company Dulux wanted to sell more paint to women, it created an interactive “belly fluff” game. Yes, you read that right. The idea was for players to match colored bellybutton “fluff” to paint colors. The original e-mail was sent to 10,000 women, inviting them to play—and in so doing become eligible for a £1,000 grand prize. Nearly 13,000 ultimately did.<sup>12</sup> The game was forwarded because it was humorous and perfect for the audience. Honestly, can you think of a better way to spend an afternoon?

In addition to associating its brand with quirky fun, the buzz campaign was intended to draw women to the Dulux website, where they could use a MousePainter™ tool to try out different colors on virtual rooms.

There are numerous ways to persuade consumers to act as viral marketers for one's brand. Entertainment, humor, discount coupons, contests—there are all sorts of motivators. Some marketers are opting to provide branded e-mail. Apple Computer, for instance, offered its customers free e-mail facilities with an address ending in “mac.com.” (It has since begun charging for the service.) Users' e-mail crisscrosses the Web, bringing with it a suggestion of a personal recommendation of the brand and the sense of pride that marks Mac owners. Expect a

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deluge of branded e-mail addresses as real-world and Internet companies wake up to the possibility of presenting themselves as connectors.

The advantages of viral marketing come out in the numbers: Whereas a high-quality e-mail distribution list typically generates a response rate of about 6 percent, viral marketing has a typical response rate of 25 to 50 percent, according to an analyst from Forrester Research (although that number seems high to us). Many analysts believe viral marketing works best when it is developed as part of an overall marketing strategy. When Gillette launched a \$150 million global marketing campaign for its Venus razor, it deployed in the United States “sensory immersion” trucks from which visitors could send e-postcards to entice their friends to enter a drawing for a trip to Hawaii. A quarter of those who entered the drawing had received the postcards from a friend.<sup>15</sup>

### **MAKING BUZZ WORK ON A GLOBAL SCALE**

As the world becomes increasingly connected, buzz marketers are playing for higher stakes. With the Internet, satellite TV, and global media, it is now possible to use consumer pathways to move from one end of the world to another. Consumers readily pass along information they find and are eager to sop up news and enjoy new experiences from other parts of the globe.

People’s intense interest in culture swapping can be seen in the obsession of the Japanese with all things American and America’s growing obsession with all things Eastern. The Japanese have *otaku*, a word first coined to describe Japanese men obsessed with Manga cartoons, computers, or the like, but which now describes the fanatical obsession of a person for all things related to fashion. And when it comes to fashion, the consumer culture in Japan is almost fetishistic in its intensity. In recent years, young Japanese consumers have shelled out in excess of \$2,000 for a hard-to-find pair of Nike sneakers. Dozens of small shops in Tokyo are devoted to hawking vintage Levi’s jeans, Mickey Mouse merchandise, varsity jackets from U.S. schools, and other symbols of America.<sup>14</sup>

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The market for brands and styles in Japan is almost impossible to predict, as it rides entirely on the whims of youth culture. For the most part, though, the tribal identities these youth adopt to distinguish themselves from each other are Western: surfer, skater, biker, punk, raver. It doesn't matter that most of them have no firsthand experience of the cultural identity they are adopting. The signifiers are being deconstructed to mean something new and distinctly Japanese.

As the Japanese obsess on all things Western, the Western world is nurturing a new affinity for things Eastern. In a recent "Style Special" in the *New Yorker*, a story about Japanese fashionistas was followed by a photo essay depicting the latest lines from top designers, all drawing heavily on Japanese influence: Karl Lagerfeld's leather dress with metal jewelry spelling out the brand in Japanese characters; leather judo jackets for Dior Homme. Down the fashion hierarchy, stores like Urban Outfitters and Anthropologie are filled with Asian-inspired fashion and accessories—paper lamps, kimono shirts, sushi sets, and books on Zen and Buddhism. Not to mention the flood of cosmetics products and spas focused on the holistic treatments of Eastern medicine and ancient beauty rituals.

East or West, local roots give brands their distinctiveness, while the experience of globalization and exposure to other cultures give consumers the ability—and desire—to connect with brands from other parts of the world.

Alpha consumers roam the globe (literally or virtually), feeling comfortable in multiple cultures, bringing the ideas of one to the next and sharing as they go. As the world grows smaller, the possibilities get bigger for multicultural ideas that resonate across regions and make waves throughout the world. The doors are open, the information is out there. Take your pick. As Microsoft put it, "Where do you want to go today?"

**We Don't Need No Stinkin' Logos**

The flip side of global integration and the massification of a few super-brands is a struggle among consumers to maintain their individuality in the face of seemingly overwhelming pressure to conform. Canadian



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writer Naomi Klein, author of *No Logo*, won media attention on both sides of the Atlantic with her thesis that a new movement of youthful political activists is beginning to strike back at the most visible global corporations and brands.<sup>15</sup>

In the wake of antiglobalization riots at the World Trade Organization convention in Seattle and similar disturbances in Britain in the late 1990s, youth marketing consultant Sean Pillot de Chenecey warned big brands that this movement might become more influential than those brands would care to recognize: “Youth movements in the past have always had a focus to their protest, whether it was radical politics in the ’60s or punk in the ’70s. Today that youthful rebellion has turned to questioning consumerism, and what they see as the way global brands are taking over the world.”<sup>16</sup>

There are signs that the antiglobalization movement is being heard: In early 2002, the World Economic Forum, normally held in Davos, Switzerland, was moved to New York City to show the world’s solidarity with New York following the terrorist attacks of September 11. Interestingly, corporate and political leaders—including Microsoft chairman Bill Gates, U.N. secretary-general Kofi Annan, and U.S. senator Hillary Clinton—took the time during the forum to express sympathy for the protesters’ cause. “It’s a healthy thing that there are demonstrators in the streets. We need a discussion about whether the rich world is giving back what it should in the developing world. There is a legitimate question whether we are,” said Bill Gates. (And who was speaking with Bill Gates at Davos? None other than U2 lead singer Bono—who then went on to tour parts of Africa with then Secretary of the Treasury Paul O’Neill. Bono the Alpha buzzes about a lot more than music.) McDonald’s even held a session called “Understanding Global Anger.”<sup>17</sup>

In one of our sessions with members of our youth X-Plorer Panel, we heard firsthand why McDonald’s inspires such a high degree of antipathy among global youth. And it is not simply because it’s ubiquitous and American (rarely a popular combo). After all, one could say the same thing about Coca-Cola and Microsoft. McDonald’s was singled out by some of the panelists because they regarded it as a brand that preaches, that dictates, that tends to overwhelm “cozier” cultures. They

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see it as a corporate bulldozer that lacks the essential sense of authenticity that is so highly valued by youth. Even as it makes some terrific attempts at localization (adapting menu items to local tastes and customs, for instance), it suffers by association with . . . itself. Despite such localized offerings as the McFalafel in Egypt and the McKroket in the Netherlands, some of the panelists said, each restaurant is indelibly linked to the global brand—for good and for bad.

Youth's embrace of anticonsumerism messages should not be taken to mean that young people are refusing global brands altogether. Quite the contrary. Asked to name the brands they use most, teens surveyed in Germany, Italy, France, the United Kingdom, and the United States in 1999 offered strikingly similar responses: 59 percent named, yes, McDonald's and Coca-Cola. Next came Wrigley's gum, at 43 percent, followed by Kellogg's cereal, at 41 percent. More than one in three named Levi's jeans and Colgate toothpaste (35 percent each), Nike shoes (34 percent), and Pepsi (34 percent); and more than one in four named Dannon yogurt and Burger King fast food.<sup>18</sup> It seems unquestionable that as teens soak up technology, travel, and Hollywood entertainment, their tastes and attitudes are beginning to merge. It's widely understood that the young will adopt a much more uniform buying behavior than their parents. In fact, it's that very uniformity that may well lead to a backlash on the part of youth searching for authenticity and individuality.

This is where buzz marketing comes in. Obviously, traditional advertising and marketing had a lot to do with the incredible strength of the aforementioned brands. It is true that advertising can create awareness, pass along knowledge, and build esteem for brands in wide-spread ways. All these elements are critical to product introduction and to the sustained success of most brands. But where antiglobalization is synonymous with anticonsumerism, overt displays and campaigns do more to hurt the brand than help it. Growing sensitivities are changing our experience of traditional marketing, making what was once merely a nuisance downright offensive.

Buzz marketing, on the other hand, is generally conveyed through a trusted source in a one-on-one format. In buzz marketing, spreading the message is dependent on the acceptance of each link in the chain.

## THE BUZZ ABOUT BUZZ IS GETTING LOUDER

Think about advertising in the context of the brands that are thriving outside of network television and massive print campaigns. These brands—from eBay to Hotmail—are succeeding by layering messages and narrowcasting them to influencers only, by recruiting users as brand evangelists, by growing organically through the “six degrees of separation” chain.

Buzz isn’t a new concept, but today it is imbued with more value. So put the media plan down and open your mind to the next wave of targeted marketing. In our increasingly fractured markets, buzz offers possibilities for brands and products as diverse as the audiences out there.

