The Three Types of People You Need to Create a Commerce Epidemic

Before you can create a commerce epidemic with your product - before it can sweep through the market like Hotmail or iPod - you absolutely must have three types of people supporting it. Malcolm Gladwell discusses this at length in his book, The Tipping Point, and an Internet marketing friend of mine summarized it well on a coaching call not long ago...

These three types of people (he said) are connectors, mavens and sales people. When you have a few of each of these supporting your product, this small number of people can influence the population and create a trend. If you can find a way to group your customers or audiences by those types of people, or target by those types, your message could be customized to speak specifically to them and what motivates them, because they're all motivated by different things.

The main thing is there are three types of people. There are people who know lots of people and keep these loose connections. They're the connectors. There are people who feed on taking information and sharing that information to empower others to be better consumers, because they get some satisfaction out of helping others. These are the mavens.

Then there are the sales people, and I think they are the ones who, if you mentioned that you were going to go buy something at the store, would say, "You need to go buy it at this store instead of this store because the every day price is lower. By the way, I have a coupon you can take."

You'd want to feed those people information, using your copy and the way you manage them as email subscribers to prompt them to share it with others. Same for the others - feed them different information and different copy, track them to see their responses and encourage them to do what they do naturally. If you've established an understanding of the effectiveness of their actions, you could greatly increase the effectiveness of your communications.

Then, with good tracking, you would see greater conversion rates, greater forwarding to friends on pages or emails and greater overall click-throughs.

The next logical question is - on Google, how can you associate certain groups of keywords with a certain type of person? If you group them by the type of person who might use X type of keywords as opposed to Y type, theoretically you could estimate how that type of person would search and then craft your copy to press their hot buttons.

Here's a perfect example: when I've got a project in a particular market, or I'm considering a project, I always ask whether there are some people in that market that are hyper-responsive. For instance, in the golf market, there's a percentage of golfers who are obsessed with the game. They'll do anything... they'll order a $1,600 set of golf clubs on their office credit card, have it shipped to their office, and their wife doesn't even know it. That's the extent they'll go in order to scratch their golf itch. If there is a video that they think will improve their swing, they'll buy it.

Hyper-responsive people exist in politics, religions, social causes, and various kinds of product categories, usually when there's a strong emotional relationship between the buyer and the product, as with golf.

There are other kinds of products where there's not an emotional attachment, like laundry soap. Proctor & Gamble has the majority of that market because they've done a good job with branding, but you couldn't call their customers hyper-responsive. Basically, they've come up with, "My mom used it, I use it, it seems good enough for me, so it's what I buy every time I go to the store," but that's the extent of it. Nobody's

going to go to a Tide laundry detergent convention. Nobody is going to buy a Tide laundry detergent how-to video. Nobody is going to order Tide laundry detergent secretly, a whole case of it and have it shipped to their office because they like it so much.

Usually the hyper-responders are the first to buy. They're the least expensive to market to, and when you come out with a new product, they will be the first ones to try it out.

So once you get a hyper-responder to opt in or buy, if you could then determine if they were a connector, a maven or a sales person, your follow-up messages, auto responder, could be specific to their role in your marketing strategy. If you could figure out who they are socially, you could target your messages specifically to leverage that role so they could in turn, influence the largest number of people for you and create that word-of-mouth phenomenon.

Obviously it takes a mix of all three types: they all come together in a certain social chemistry to create these epidemics. Imagine - if you could take this information and create epidemics of commerce any time you wanted, you'd be one of the world's leading marketers.

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