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# INTRODUCTION



In case you haven't noticed, traditional methods for reaching and engaging customers are losing ground to the power of word-of-mouth for the simple reason that the opinions of trusted individuals carry more weight than the finely crafted copy of professional marketers. The web has aided and abetted word-of-mouth's ascension by enabling people to easily gather information from diverse and far-flung sources and then to propagate their own opinions hither and yon.

And people are indeed listening to what others have to say. As Josh Bernoff of Forrester Research recently wrote in *Forbes*, "Peer influence analysis shows that American consumers generate 500 billion impressions on one another regarding products and services every year. That's a big number, so let's put that in perspective. That's 2,841 impressions per online consumer per year that they're making on each other."

500 billion is a big number—and represents a power that marketers need to tap into if they want to remain competitive.

In this report we explain how 13 companies have leveraged the influence of outspoken opinion-makers and ordinary on-line reviewers to achieve their marketing objectives. By following the examples herein, you will learn how to:

- **Boost brand awareness:** Harness an influencers' popularity by making concrete connections between their personal brands and yours.
- **Foster third-party credibility:** Motivate happy customers to share brand and product experiences in their own words.
- **Introduce new products and services:** Generate buzz around your latest launch by supplying the public with the tools—and motivation—to spread the word.
- **Increase sales:** Maneuver your way up the chain of command and do wonders for the bottom line.
- **Improve customer relations:** Deliver ongoing value for customers by associating them with the people they admire and respect.

Each case study details the tools and approaches used, the outcomes achieved and the lessons learned. The report concludes with a list of insightful tips for getting started so that by the time you're finished reading, you'll have a comprehensive understanding of how to launch an influencer campaign in support of your own marketing goals. Let's get started!

## BOOSTING BRAND AWARENESS

There are people who count as “mass influencers.” Such individuals enjoy a broad audience and are responsible for around 80% of brand impressions generated in the social media realm, according to Forrester Research. Developing a connection with one of these folks can be as golden as landing on Oprah’s list of favorite things.



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### Forbes Digital

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Even big-budget brands are finding that they can save a pretty penny and expand their reach by focusing on offering influencers greater exposure in exchange for their insights.

**Company:** Forbes, Inc. is the family-owned company behind the biweekly business magazine *Forbes*. The Forbes Digital division manages the company’s websites, which include Forbes.com, Investopedia.com, and RealClearPolitics.com

**Challenge:** When Eric Fulwiler joined the Forbes team in November 2009, the company was active in social media but needed a big picture plan to pull everything together and position the brand for future growth.

“I wanted to deliver a unique value-add from Forbes’ social media presence, beyond the basic interaction we were having with our readers,” Fulwiler explained. “I looked at the assets I had access to—the Forbes brand, posts on the blog, editors time—and thought about how I could make something powerful with little investment.”

**Solution:** Fulwiler recognized that social media professionals bank on being influential online. With that in mind, he sought to connect with some of the most well known in the industry—Gary Vaynerchuck, Chris Brogan, Chris Sacca, Garrett Camp and others—and leverage their influence in a way that would involve and promote the Forbes brand while simultaneously delivering content of interest to both Forbes readers and the people in these influencers’ own networks.

Fulwiler started by choosing a convenient technology and then reaching out to said influencers, offering exposure on Forbes.com for three minutes of their time. The outcome was a series of video interviews conducted and recorded via Skype.

“The key with any influencer campaign is aligning incentives,” Fulwiler said. “By providing great exposure for the guest, we were able to harness their influence to share our content.”

## BOOSTING BRAND AWARENESS



After two weeks, twenty guests had agreed, and the Social Media Masters video series was launched on Forbes.com. Each segment allowed the influencer to demonstrate his expertise while providing viewers a range of useful, thought-provoking ideas.

“We made sure to remain dedicated to producing interesting, relevant, value-adding content in each interview because exposure doesn’t stick if it’s not backed up by quality,” Fulwiler explained.



To help encourage word-of-mouth support of the series, Forbes incorporated sharing features into its viewing platform and promoted the series to its various social media communities, as well as to other relevant communities with whom Fulwiler had forged relationships.

**Results:** Forbes.com received an average of 2,000 views per video with some reaching the 4,000-view mark. On average, each video was shared via Twitter and Facebook approximately 200 times.

“Enabling users to easily share the content with their networks was a big part of our promotion strategy and we were able to get a few hundred social shares—mostly Twitter and Facebook—on each piece,” Fulwiler said.

### Business Lessons Learned

- Find win-win solutions for promoting your influencers’ agendas as they champion yours.
- Aim for interesting content that the target market will enjoy and influencers will be happy to share with their networks.
- Incorporate sharing features so that readers and viewers can easily spread your message for you.

## FOSTERING THIRD-PARTY CREDIBILITY

A whopping 58% of U.S. adults—and a full 78% of Internet users—say they go online to research products and services, according to the 2010 Online Product Research Report by Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project. More than simply seeking company-sponsored information, these searchers are looking for independent opinions and peer reviews to guide their purchases. If you want to influence this purchasing behavior there’s plenty you can do to motivate users to provide testimonials, share their brand experiences and generate third-party credibility.



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### Altium Limited

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Authenticity reigns, so when inviting influencers to test-drive and comment on your products, make it clear that you value their public feedback, be it positive or negative.

**Company:** Headquartered in Sydney with operations worldwide, Altium Limited produces software and tools for designing electronics. Its solutions are used across a wide range of industries including telecommunications, automotive, aerospace, defense, medicine, science, and consumer electronics.

**Challenge:** As is common in the engineering sector, Altium typically relies on traditional media outlets and trade shows to generate awareness for its products. However, over the last few years they have seen many of these venues fall victim to the troubled economy. To make matters worse, when the company recently reached out to the survivors in the trade press—in hopes of raising awareness for its NanoBoard 3000 technology—no one really took any interest. Willing to try something new but unsure where to start, the company turned to Portland, Ore.-based McClenahan Bruer Communications to generate buzz around the product in the North American marketplace.

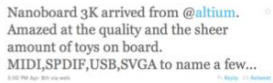
**Solution:** McClenahan Bruer had seen survey after survey name “peer validation” the most important deciding factor when engineers were in the market for new tools. Accordingly, the firm set out to identify citizen journalists from the engineering field who would be interested in reviewing the product. Despite being told that this demographic does not actively participate in social media, the firm’s research found that those who do blog and tweet tend to make very passionate statements about the products they use.

The firm began monitoring the web for terms related to electronics and embedded systems design, the Altium brand and product names, and competitor brand and product names in order to identify those engineering “naturals” who were already talking about technical products online and had a fair following.

## FOSTERING THIRD-PARTY CREDIBILITY



Just received a @NanoBoard 3000 from @Altium - brainstorming on a fun project to show it off.  
3:51 PM Apr 28th via web



Nanoboard 3K arrived from @altium. Amazed at the quality and the sheer amount of toys on board. MIDI,SPDIF,USB,SVGA to name a few...  
3:00 PM Apr 28th via web

In the process, Senior Counsel for McClenahan Bruer Jeff Hardison notes, some measures of individual influence didn't always tell the whole story. "We may have overlooked a number of potential testers if we had only looked at their follower counts on Twitter. An engineer might only have 10 followers on Twitter, but when you dig deeper, you might find that they have a big blog following or huge connection base on LinkedIn. So we had to get to know them all on a more personal level," he said.

In the end, the firm settled on a list of 20 engineering opinion makers and got in touch with them via email, LinkedIn, or Twitter to see if they'd like to test out the Altium NanoBoard 3000 and provide feedback—positive or negative. This last point was important, on the one hand, because the Altium CEO is very keen on transparency, but also because it set the reviewers at ease to hear that the company wanted to hear both the good and the bad.

The company then sent each individual a NanoBoard—at a cost of \$500 a piece—and reinforced that the reviewers had complete freedom to say whatever they felt about the product.

**Results:** Around 80% of the reviewers mentioned the product online as soon as they received it, some including photos. Around half of them went on to use the product (it's highly technical, so there was a bit of a learning curve involved) and write up a review. Typically, they used Twitter to announce that they had received the product and blogs to publish their reviews.

These blog reviews in turn attracted the attention of the traditional trade media resulting in another 8 high-profile reviews of the NanoBoard 3000, a number of additional mentions in trade publications, as well as consistent inclusion in roundup coverage of related products.

The majority of reviews have been positive, though one engineer did complain about the partner software included. Interestingly, that post led directly to a sale from a reader who mentioned that the rest of the review was compelling enough to purchase!

Other feedback suggests that the campaign helped foster goodwill, with users commending the company for its open and transparent approach.

In addition, one reviewer contacted the company to request that two of his contacts – both engineers at Apple, a company that Altium's sales department had never been able to crack – also review the product, thus offering the company valuable visibility within a potentially huge account. "By making these personal

## FOSTERING THIRD-PARTY CREDIBILITY

“We may have overlooked a number of potential testers if we had only looked at their follower counts on Twitter.”

connections, we were able to find out more about other influencers out there who would be interested in reviewing the product,” Hardison said.

Recognizing here the power of networking and offline word-of-mouth, McClenahan Bruer has since begun visiting engineering clubs across North America, sharing the product with club members and soliciting additional user feedback and reviews.

### Business Lessons Learned

- Build buzz through independent product reviews.
- Spend time identifying and developing relationships with “peers” who are active in social media and have sizable networks of influence.
- Maintain transparency, allow for both positive and negative responses, and prepare yourself (or your client) in advance for a punch.
- Don’t forget about offline networking and community engagement.



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## PrintingForLess.com

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Giving customers creative license to tout your products and services can deepen existing loyalties while stimulating word-of-mouth interest.

**Company:** Founded in 1996, PrintingForLess.com provides high quality commercial color printing in the short- to medium-run printing market.

**Challenge:** PrintingForLess.com has always maintained a focus on excellent customer service. As a result, they receive 50 or more letters a month thanking individual employees for their quality of service and level of responsiveness. While they certainly welcomed the appreciation, the company felt it could—and should—do more to leverage the love and demonstrate to potential customers why they ought to give PrintingForLess.com a try. Of course the key was to avoid coming off as too self-promotional, on the one hand, or just plain boring, on the other.

**Solution:** The company began contacting customers who sent in unsolicited “thank you” letters and asked if they’d be interested in participating in a video project. Those who expressed an interest were sent a package that included a Flip camcorder, copies of the letters they had originally mailed (in case they



## FOSTERING THIRD-PARTY CREDIBILITY



needed any reminders), a note requesting they produce a creative video explaining their experience with PrintingForLess, and general tips for filming (such as speak loudly, use a tripod, etc.). Recipients were also given a deadline just two weeks out to encourage a timely response. In all, they sent out more than 120 packages.

Two weeks after those packages went out, the company followed up with a video email—starring an employee’s dogs—requesting that customers complete their assignment.

All customer videos received were posted to the PrintingForLess.com website with cross-promotional links to the customers’ websites. “It’s part of our overall goal to help our customers be successful,” PrintingForLess team member Jessica Cooper explained.



**Results:** 81 customers submitted videos as well posting them to YouTube, where they collectively received more than 11,000 views. Quite a few participants commented that they proudly shared the video with all their own contacts.

Interestingly, the company noted a “definite uptick” in order frequency among those customers who participated. “It shows we’ve deepened our relationships with them,” Cooper said.

Finally, a number of new customers have mentioned the videos, and at the time of this writing, the company is in the process of hiring up to a dozen new customer service reps to handle the increased sales volume.

### Business Lessons Learned

- Give people an interesting way to tell their stories and provide the necessary tools (such as a camera) to make it easy to participate.
- Remind folks why they reached out to you in the first place, then allow them to take it from there. Don’t require a specific response or script things. It’s better that responses remain authentic.
- Incorporate specific deadlines and clever reminders to spur people to act more quickly.



... and that's just a peek at the bigger picture.

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## IT'S YOUR TURN ...

Now that you've seen how 13 companies are tapping into the power of influencers, it's time to try your hand. When you do, let us know how it goes by emailing your story to [CaseStudies@MarketingProfs.com](mailto:CaseStudies@MarketingProfs.com). Your ingenuity could make it into our next edition.



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