



## Is this buzzword dead?

Dr Paul Marsden, from the Institute of Social Psychology at London School of Economics, has read lots of books about buzz marketing, but enjoys the latest edition's focus on involving consumers and clients

*Buzzmarketing* by Mark Hughes, published by Portfolio, price £10.49



In the world of marketing, where buzzwords have the shelf life of yoghurts, you might ask what buzz marketing, the marketing buzzword of 2001, is doing in the title of a 2005 book. Can we blame an unfortunate accident between a printing press and a time machine? Or has buzz marketing – getting people to talk positively about your brand or company – become more than a blip on marketing's buzz-o-meter?

What with *The Tipping Point*, *The Anatomy of Buzz*, *Buzz Marketing*, *Buzz: Harness the Power of Influence and Create Demand*, you might be thinking that everything there is to say about buzz marketing has already been said. Well, Mark Hughes, marketing vice president of online retailer Half.com, before it was bought by eBay for \$300m (£168m), thinks differently.

In *Buzzmarketing*, Hughes presents a new six-point buzz marketing plan to “capture the attention of consumers and the media to the point where talking about your brand or company becomes entertaining, fascinating, and newsworthy” – the book's definition of buzz marketing.

### The six secrets of buzz

Using entertaining buzz campaigns from Miller Lite, Pepsi, Ford, *American Idol*, Apple, Britney Spears, ClearPlay and others, *Buzzmarketing* debunks the myth (once again) that buzz is random and unmanageable. To create buzz, he argues, first you need to push one or more of the six ‘buzz buttons’, ie the things people talk about: the taboo, the unusual, the outrageous, the hilarious, the remarkable, and secrets. Second, you need to capture media attention with one of the media's five favourite stories: a David and Goliath story, a celebrity story, a controversial story, an unusual and outrageous story, or a story about what's hot in the media at the moment.

Third, you need to advertise for attention, which means finding uncluttered media space where you can achieve a decent share of voice. If you opt only to add

to traditional media ad clutter, you'll be about as attention-grabbing as lift muzak on mute. Fourth, ‘climb buzz Everest’, which means make sure your campaign involves doing something no one has ever done before, but in a way that builds your brand. Shooting gerbils from a canon may be cool, but does it build my brand? Oh, the post-modern angst of it all.

Fifth, ‘discover creativity’ and say no to mediocre campaigns. In today's over-communicated society, if your campaign is not remarkable, it is invisible. Sixth, ‘police your product’ by ensuring that your product or service experience delivers delight by consistently exceeding expectations. Just as advertising only works when you have something worth advertising, buzz marketing only works when you have something worth talking about.

*Buzzmarketing* is an engaging and enjoyable read, written in a personable and enthusiastic style by an author who has all the fervour of a complete convert to the buzz cause. What is particularly welcome, and what sets this book apart from its predecessors, is the focus on running buzz campaigns rather than re-engineering marketing strategy.

### FROM THE BOOKSHELF OF ...

... Russ Lidstone, head of planning, JWT London  
*Heartland* by Marc C Scott

Having spent the summer holiday re-reading a selection of Roald Dahl's finest to my children, I believe that the best stimulation for thinking about brands is as likely to come from *Fantastic Mr Fox* as it is from the latest business titles.

However, some interesting thoughts have been sparked by *Heartland*. Brand is a verb, not a noun, and quite rightly we are tasked with ensuring brand ideas live beyond the pack and the 30-second ad.

While *Heartland* claims to offer guidance on “transforming the national firm into a global powerhouse”, it more usefully provides food for thought

You don't have to start targeting any strange new copyrighted and trademarked types of opinion leader – sneezers, hubs, influentials, alphas, bees, connectors or whatever – nor do you have to become a squiggle-babble-speaking-social-network-ologist before you can build buzz. Just use the six secrets that will get people talking about your stuff.

It would be easy to dismiss *Buzzmarketing* if it were not for the one really huge idea introduced in the book that makes it worth its weight in marketing gold. That idea is what business consultants and change agents call 'empowered involvement', and what the book dubs 'empowered interactivity'.

Empowered involvement/interactivity is all about creating buzz and driving sales by letting your clients, customers or consumers call the shots, by giving them a say in how your product is promoted. Whether you use SMS or web polls to allow people to vote on the actors or models who will appear in your ads, or to vote between packaging options, poster designs or new product concepts, empowered involvement can transform a passive target audience into an army of word-of-mouth advocates.

Take, for example, the success of *American Idol* or *Big Brother*, in which viewers call the shots by voting participants off the show. Or the sales-boosting success of Procter & Gamble's teen web polls in the US: by inviting people to vote on how a new movie should be marketed, P&G doubled teen attendance nationwide for its Hollywood studio partner.

By turning clients, customers or consumers into stakeholders, empowered involvement can create the ownership and loyalty needed to unleash an epidemic of word-of-mouth demand. As a scalable solution for driving sales by word-of-mouth, think of it as buzz marketing with brains.

about the core tenets of successful organisational brands.

Scott proposes that to work well in the global world, corporations must assemble as societies and think more like nation states than companies. He highlights key characteristics of the nation state that condition relationships with it, including a moral framework; common idiom and identity; shared sense of heritage and an optimistic pursuit of betterment.

These characteristics ring true of my experience with successful brands such as Tesco and HSBC, and can be used to explore potential within other brands.

Now, back to *Fantastic Mr Fox*...

### Three blueprints for building buzz

#### *The Tipping Point* by Malcolm Gladwell (2000)

1. The law of the few: Influence the influencers, market with opinion leaders (not at them) and watch the opinion-following majority follow.
2. The stickiness factor: Tweak and test your product or idea until you can make it remarkable.
3. The power of context: Don't underestimate the power of point-of-purchase promotions: people are highly susceptible to influence in the sales context.

#### *Creating Customer Evangelists* by Ben McConnell and Jackie Huba (2002)

1. Customer plus-delta: Continuously gather customer feedback.
2. Napsterize your knowledge: Make it a point to share knowledge freely.
3. Build the buzz: Expertly build word-of-mouth networks.
4. Create community: Encourage communities of customers to meet.
5. Make bite-size chunks: Devise specialised, smaller offerings.
6. Create a cause: Focus on making the world, or an industry, better.

#### *Buzzmarketing* by Mark Hughes (2005)

1. Push the six buttons of buzz: People talk about the taboo, the unusual, the outrageous, the hilarious, the remarkable, and secrets.
2. Capture media: Get column inches with one of the five most frequently written news stories: a David and Goliath story, a celebrity story, a controversial story, an unusual and outrageous story, or a story about what's hot in the media at the moment.
3. Advertise for attention: Use uncluttered media creatively to grab attention.
4. Climb buzz Everest: Do something remarkable that no one has ever done before.
5. Discover creativity: Make content not campaigns.
6. Police your product: Ensure your product experience delivers delight and exceeds expectations.

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