

# WOM: Embracing the unknown, changing the status quo

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The most commonly cited reason for lack of breakthrough, is fear of the unknown. Most companies, in their marketing strategies, stick to the known and mostly reach expected results. Sometimes, on the rare occasion, they exceed targets.



It is only logical that when launching a new product, you want to reach as many people as you can. You actually want to reach the right people, who are not always the masses. And the social web allows us to connect with people who are most likely to use our new products.

Now what? Do you target the masses or go for perfectly matched individuals who are likely to care about your offering?

## Targeting the perfectly matched

Suppose you go the less travelled route of targeting perfectly matched people that care about both your product and their image. They talk to a few friends, who then express interest in your offer and a few conversations later you are smiling to the bank. The route less taken ensures that you become an early adopter. Being the first, or among the innovators yields returns that are far greater than the next sale and it also accounts for sales.

Most companies search for the known thought leaders, the most commonly subscribed to influencers - as brand evangelists. The upside is, the most approached influencers and thought leaders are known to be credible in their networks. They have a large enough following to sway conversations positively for your brand and offering. On the downside, they may not like what you have on offer and turn valuable word-Of-mouth against you. These individuals are also highly subscribed to by many other brands, some of which can make it into their conversations and others won't.

## Exciting the right people

Targeting influencers and networks that mention your new product can be quite challenging with all the clutter that surrounds us. This makes searching for willing evangelists even more difficult. Studies in word-of-mouth prove that around 70% of purchase-related decisions are driven more by recommendations from friends and credible influencers, than by marketing messages. When your new product excites the right people, you are well on your way to more sales. It is also true, however, that the right people are not always the ones with a following.

Creating a message for the masses means it will be diluted and lack the punch you need to cause ripples. That leaves us with reaching niche audiences with multiple, and product-related messaging. It can be difficult to do when you have no idea where to start. One of the solutions is to let your potential customer test the product and give you feedback, while spreading news to their network. You now have a base of people who are brand evangelists, who - in their networks - spread conversation about your product without a marketer in sight.

## In comes fear of the unknown...

When you are not the one talking about your product, how do you ensure positive feedback? Well, you don't. You have a high quality product that you are confident to take to market. All the perceptions that brand evangelists have, provide you with even more insights about your product. How you use those insights can enable you to craft your message even better and make it more solid. The customer wants to be spoken to by another person who knows them well enough to be a friend.

**This is a call for the innovator in you. The one who wants to:**

- start conversations about your new offering,
- measure perceptions,
- build a community of customers who care about your offering,
- lead the masses in your field, and
- find new influencers and be the first to involve them.

Like many other things that have transformed how we now communicate and reach people, very few companies will be first to do it. When these emerging influencers have built social currency, they will then be part of the earlier mentioned thought leaders. By then, it may be too late to approach them.

Your customer is always evolving and the message platforms change as rapidly as the market, if not more so. Fear of the unknown only means your ever moving target slips farther and farther away, every time you launch a new product. Now is the most appropriate time to embrace the unknown and let your audience spread the message organically.

How are you embracing the unknown and changing the status quo?

## ABOUT MONGEZI MTATI

Mongezi Mati founded WordStart to help companies generate buzz around their products and services among South African influencers. He is passionate about helping brands to connect the dots from social media, digital data and human interactions outside the web. Mati is also digital analyst, a speaker and a contributor on some of South Africa's leading platforms.

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