

Get people talking about your brand

 By [Jason Stewart](#)

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The age-old saying that Word of Mouth (WoM) is the best form of advertising still rings true to this day as we now know, more than ever before, that personal recommendations from our friends have the highest impact on our purchasing decisions.

The internet, and more specifically, social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter, have brought everyone's attention to just how powerful the viral spread of a WOM-generated message can be across the digital landscape.

But how effective is online WoM in actual fact? Keller Fay recently conducted research and surprisingly found that only 5% of brand-related conversations take place online through social media, while 93% took place offline (which includes 11% of phone conversations). So you could say that people are the 'Killer App' of 2012.

So why the huge focus on social media? Keller continues: "It is not that online is small, it is that the rest is SO big!" As one respondent in HaveYouHeard's research project said, "The Township IS Facebook, it doesn't get any better than that. You just stand on the corner and you whistle and wave and there your groups of friends just pop up. That's the real Facebook, that's the Township."

Offline vs. online

It is also important to understand the difference between how and why people talk offline versus online. Offline conversations take place with far fewer people (five to eight) but are more personal, more trusted and more action-orientated.

Online conversations are about broadcasting info that helps to refine your online persona and thereby increases your social status. The reach is wider, although the action rate might be less so.

However, neither can be ignored. A brand needs to be everywhere where it is being discussed so that it can partake in the conversation. If, for example, they are being talked about in hair salons or in clubs - they need to figure out how they can engage in those environments to ensure that the conversation is directed in a positive and reinforcing manner for the brand.

We talk because it is built into our psyche as human beings. It is how we are wired, how we bond and if we don't talk to anyone, eventually we go insane. So we have no option. The big difference in conversation between online and offline, however, is the content being shared, the length of the interaction, as well as the weight of credibility and trust behind it.

These are major factors when we look at the impact of WoM, but marketers tend to get more tied up with reach and so let's explore this a little further.

Humans only have the capacity to maintain functional relationships with around 150 people, but only 80% of our relationships are with the same 5 to 10 people who also take up 62% of our conversation time. 80% of our phone calls are with just four people and while Facebook makes it much easier to connect with more people, the average user (who has an average of 130 friends) will only communicate directly with four people per week via this platform.

If you want to get people talking, you need to first know what makes them want to talk. We share a message because it is interesting, helpful to another, surprising and very importantly, we believe it will improve our social status with the person with whom we are communicating.

There are three main reasons why people share information with others:

- **Emotional:** To connect and bond with other people by helping them.
- **Functional:** To explain how a product works, how it will benefit them (based on experiences).
- **Social:** To impress others and increase our social status.

Passion, however, is the real driver behind Word of Mouth - if people are emotionally charged about something, they will talk about it - good or bad. People become charged by emotion when their expectations are either exceeded or go unmet. That is why there is always a lot of talk around being remarkable - doing something that 'offers a person the opportunity to remark about it'.

Word of Mouth marketing tools generally focus online on how we can help people share that remark. This is a very important aspect that we need to look at. That is, how can we best take the credibility and trust generated by the offline recommendation and use the viral reach of online communications to spread it.

Word of Mouth is taking place everywhere. It is medium and environment 'agnostic', crossing all demographic and psychographic barriers. It is dynamic, hard to measure and tricky to understand. Yet it is a brand's most powerful weapon. The more we can get involved in the conversation, the healthier our brand will be and ultimately the more we will sell.

ABOUT JASON STEWART

Jason Stewart is the co-founder and MD of HaveYouHeard (www.haveyouheard.co.za), a communications agency immersed in culture to influence it. With 11 years' trading experience and offices in Johannesburg, Cape Town and London, HaveYouHeard uncovers unique insights to create innovative ideas that influence the audience by bringing the brands it partners with to the centre of culture.

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