



COMPILED BY
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Testify!

How Remarkable Organizations
are Creating Customer Evangelists

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are Creating Customer Evangelists

Compiled by Ben McConnell & Jackie Huba, editors

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An introduction

In January 2003, we set out to change the world of marketing with *Creating Customer Evangelists: How Loyal Customers Become A Volunteer Sales Force*. The word of mouth revolution is upon us, and it's up to organizations to embrace it or lose time and money.

Creating Customer Evangelists argues the best way to grow a business is to create evangelists out of customers who will act as missionary zealots, spreading the word and recruiting new customers. They are, essentially, volunteers for your marketing and sales departments.

To support the book, we hit the road during 2003, spreading the word of customer evangelism from Fargo, North Dakota to Phoenix, Arizona. In between we met friendly audiences in Hartford, Chattanooga, New York, San Francisco, Dallas, Seattle and dozens of other cities for nearly 100 events.

We heard from readers who were putting the tenets of customer evangelism to work in their businesses, large and small. Some said the book changed their view of marketing. Some were happy to have their existing work validated. One person said our work was dangerous. We took that as a compliment.

What really jazzed us were people who pledged to do things differently. They promised to stop bombarding prospects with unwanted advertising. Instead, they pledged to focus on creating a remarkable product or service and then cultivate a throng of true believers. It's usually from the ranks of true believers that evangelists are born. After that, it's just execution.

Did they do it? Some did. Some didn't.

Testify

McConnell | Huba

There's a billion good ideas in the world, but success comes to those who can execute a good idea consistently. The companies featured in this ebook are a few that have taken action. They believe in customer evangelism as a theology, and have results to show for it as a practice.

The stories in this ebook were submitted by the companies themselves.

We reviewed a big batch that arrived during the submission process, and edited the ones that appear in this ebook for length, grammar and style. All claims are their own. Your mileage may vary.

Has the marketing world changed since the original release of *Creating Customer Evangelists*? We hope so, even if it's just a tiny bit.

Happy reading.

Ben McConnell
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If you haven't read *Creating Customer Evangelists*, read this section first

You haven't read the book? It's OK. Don't feel guilty. This handy summary assists you with the context of this ebook.

A loyal customer is one who buys from you on a regular basis.

If you're an airline, loyal customers are usually defined as those who accumulate the most frequent miles.

If you are a grocery store, flower or sandwich shop, your loyal customers may be those who live within easy walking or driving distance. Their loyalty may be driven by convenience. If you sell to other businesses, loyalty may be driven solely by price.

But they are repeat customers, not necessarily loyal customers. A loyal customer is not necessarily promoting you to others.

A customer evangelist does. She spreads the word about you, far and wide. She's like a friend you've known for years. She (or he) supports your organization through good times and bad. She wants you to succeed.

What do customer evangelists look like? What do they do?

- * They purchase and believe in your product or service
- * They passionately recommend you to friends, neighbors, colleagues
- * They purchase your products as gifts for others
- * They provide unsolicited feedback or praise

- * They forgive dips in service and quality
- * They are not bought; they extol your virtues freely
- * They feel part of something bigger than themselves

The lessons from the original evangelists -- the religious believers who roam the back ways of the world to spread the word of their faith -- teach us that beliefs are based on emotional connection, deep-seated convictions and the promise of a better way. Strongly held beliefs compel many of us to tell others. The root of the word “evangelist” is based on “a bringer of the glad tidings.”

But this is not about religion. It’s a business theology. Many rules of marketing taught in business schools are outdated. Traditional marketing tactics are declining in effectiveness, replaced by customer-driven referrals as the valuable new currency in a company’s success.

In studying a vast array of companies with pronounced levels of customer evangelism, we discovered a series of common strategies they shared, which we distilled into six tenets.

1. Customer plus-delta: Continuously gather customer feedback.
2. Napsterized 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 specialized, smaller offerings
6. Create a cause: Focus on making the world, or an industry, better

As they say, the rest is up to you.

Creating student evangelists

Bloomberg Marketing

Atlanta, GA

www.bloombergmarketing.com

Submitted by Toby Bloomberg

How do you turn college juniors and seniors into customer evangelists?

For Alf Nucifora of Nucifora Consulting Group and Toby Bloomberg of Bloomberg Marketing, creating a buzz machine was not their goal. Their challenge: Persuade enough students to fill a course in Management Consulting at Emory University Goizueta Business School...Bus 438.

In 2003, the Dean asked Alf to develop a course that provided students with more practical experience than previous classes had offered. Alf realized one key to success would be close interaction with the students. To ensure that, Alf asked Toby to help.

We developed a syllabus to include guest speakers and classroom discussions based on the book *Flawless Consulting* by Peter Block. It's not an academic text but was written by a consultant for consultants.

However, the heart of the curriculum was the students' consulting assignments. With the class divided into teams, each was responsible for working with a not-for-profit client. The assignments were real-life, hands-on projects of genuine importance to the clients. Students prepared and presented proposals. The course concluded with PowerPoint presentations and written reports developed for each client. Students were responsible for all client relations.

New courses and new instructors can be risky business. Students often hesitate to enroll in classes that have no track record, especially with unknown professors. If Bus 438 didn't attract at least 15 students, it would be cancelled. Sixteen signed up.

Students' assignments were real-life, hands-on projects of **genuine importance**.

From the start, students knew this course was different. On day one, students thanked us for developing the course. Within weeks students were talking it up on campus. By the end of the semester, they were recommending it to friends. Students gave us thank you gifts; the Dean said that was "unheard of."

"Thank you both so much for being great teachers (and great inspirations) to me and to the rest of the class through out this semester," one student wrote. "It was so reassuring to know that you two would stick by our sides and come to our defense when we had problems with our assignment or 'issues' with our client. Regardless of your decision, I look forward to keeping in touch with both of you and recommending this class to future students!" The decision was about a disputed grade.

The course evolved into a life-teaching experience for students and instructors. Students dealt with conflict and internal politics. They strengthened their presentation, analytical and problem solving skills. However, the greatest lessons learned were about themselves. One graduating senior said that this was the most important and best class of his college education.

We were asked to teach Bus 438 again. The Dean anticipates the class will close out at 60 students, the maximum allowed.

Blowfly beer: Punch drunk love

Brewtopia

Makers of Blowfly Beer

Sydney, Australia

www.blowfly.com.au

Submitted by Liam Mulhall

If you're going to build a brand or product from scratch in the high profile, commodity fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) industry without spending a dime on advertising, traditional marketing, or even having a production facility, then you'd better hope the six tenets of customer evangelism work!

We learned the six tenets of *Creating Customer Evangelists* the hard way -- without the book -- when we started in 2002. The idea was simple: build the company upside down.

1. *Sell the experience.* "The ride" to the people first - empower them. Let them behind the curtain to make decisions on the development of the beer from information we give to them via www.blowfly.com.au (*Customer plus-delta, Napsterize Knowledge*)

2. *Keep it simple.* The premise: 'Own the Beer You Drink'. Give the customer an emotional attachment, through their decision making, and a physical ownership -- give them stock allocations when they vote or purchase the product. (*Create a Cause*)

3. *Incentives spread the word.* "Beer owned by the People" spread among networks of friends. For every one that partakes, they get additional share allocations plus they're invited to the launch of their beer! (*Bite-size chunks, Build the Buzz*)

4. *Adjust policy, content or messages based on feedback.* Most companies don't

realise customers rarely think the same about their company as they do (when was the last time you received a letter from the Managing Director of any company thanking you for buying their product? *Create Community*)

As the member base grows globally, we observe where we need distribution and focus energies in those areas. This translates into a relatively measurable production volume, which is contracted out to breweries with appropriate capacity. We email members a week after registering or purchasing and ask them “Why they did it.” Simple but rarely done.

Most companies don't realise customers rarely think the same about their company as they do

Some of our results:

- a. From initial 140 contacts, customer base is now 20,000+ in 27 countries.
- b. Turnover: 2,000 cartons per month average.
- c. 90% sold over the web, 10% in traditional outlets.
- d. First full year in sales expected to top \$1million.
- e. 64 of 100 referrals to www.blowfly.com.au register (up from 32 in 100).
- f. Sales: 1 in 2.25 members buy the beer or merchandise (up from 1 in 9).
- g. Licensing deals being struck in UK, US, NZ.
- h. Customer feedback initiates new lines of business, e.g. Corporate label beer.
- i. STILL never advertised, owned a brewery or had more than 4 staff..

LESSONS:

1. Be patient. Get to critical mass. It's slow going early, but a more solid foundation -- a friends' friends network. Post-sales advertising at its best!

2. Don't advertise too early. Build credibility, trust, word-of-mouth sales and publicity - only then you've earned the "right" to advertise.
3. If we mess up -- no matter whose fault -- we admit it immediately and rectify sharpish, above expectations. Customers for life!
4. Stay singly focused on the evangelist strategy. Don't waver. Happy customers who tell friends without prompting is a great "rush!"

Marketing as retail education

Buffalo Exchange

Tucson, AZ

www.buffaloexchange.com

Submitted by Michelle Livingston

Buffalo Exchange, the hip used clothing store chain, is unique because clothing and accessories are bought, sold and traded directly with store customers. Buffalo Exchange is headquartered in Tucson, Arizona, and has 23 stores and 6 franchises in 10 states, with over \$29 million a year in sales.

Some of our recent customer evangelism projects:

** Trendspotter summer program with local Tucson teens.* Middle and high school students interested in fashion meet with us for six sessions and receive a \$50 gift certificate to Buffalo Exchange when they “graduate.” We offer the opportunity to learn about the retail apparel industry through guest speakers from our company. “Homework” includes shopping assignments, making a scrapbook, trend research, and sharing finds with the group. Projects include learning how to dress mannequins, which are then displayed at one of our stores.

Last year, the Trendspotters’ mannequins were great and the clothes sold quickly. We have 17 Trendspotters this year, including a returning Trendspotter serving as coordinator to help organize, facilitate and work with the other Trendspotters. She’s 14 years old.

** Celebrating “Surf Day” for Earth Day 2004.* All proceeds from Buffalo Exchange’s Dollar Day Sale on April 24 benefited Surfrider Foundation, a grassroots nonprofit organization popular with surfers that works to protect oceans and beaches (www.surfrider.org). Buffalo

Exchange raised \$21,938.45 for Surfrider. We recruited customers, friends, and Surfrider members to help Buffalo Exchange promote our Surf Day benefit.

Some customers elect to have their personal email addresses posted so other browsers can contact them

Julie Bernath, our store manager at Pacific Beach in San Diego told us, “We had six Surfriders show up to help with the dollar sale. They were so into it! They were a perfect match for our store! They made things a lot of fun. They hustled the raffle tickets and talked up not only Surfrider but Buffalo Exchange too! We will be doing more events with the San Diego Chapter of Surfriders in the future.”

* “Buffalo Groupies” presentation by marketing director to managers, 11/2003. Key concepts based on Customer Evangelism:

- o Talk & listen to your groupies
- o Share info on style & how to sell/trade
- o Build the buzz through networks
- o Create Buffalo community
- o Let people sample what Buffalo Exchange offers
- o Demonstrate our vision & cause.

* Posting customer emails on our website. Some customers elect to have their personal email addresses posted so other browsers can contact them!

* Retro-style trailer tour in 10 states by the owners of Buffalo Exchange for our 30th Anniversary this year. Customers can meet the founders during their tour.

Customers as company mechanics

C&M Auto Service Inc.

Vernon Hills and Glenview, IL

www.cmauto.com

Submitted by Angi Semler

We deliver peace of mind to our customers by managing all of their vehicles' service needs to ensure long-term reliability, safety and value.

Creating Customer Evangelists drove home that we needed to solicit input from our customers. The two partners who run C&M Auto Service have always been willing to spend time with any customer who has a concern, but we'd never had a formal feedback system in place.

Our first move was to form a customer advisory board. In May, we held our third and final meeting with the 12 individuals who generously agreed to serve on our debut board. Throughout the meeting, they were thanking us for the opportunity and for all they had gained from the experience. I'm still shaking my head in disbelief about that.

Likewise, we're grateful for what we learned through the candid feedback they gave to every question we asked throughout the year. But what proved most valuable to us-without a doubt-were the topics they brought up that we never would have thought to ask about.

For example, the primary goal with our first meeting was to ask some basic questions: What do you like about C&M? What do you like best? What can we improve upon? We wanted to do this for two reasons. First, we offer a number of courtesy services above and beyond your standard automotive facility or dealership, but we don't know which of those to promote in our marketing materials. Second, we think we

know why our customers love us, but we wanted to see if we were correct.

As we went around the meeting room and they shared their responses, they also asked us a number of simple questions that were a rude awakening to us:

* “Do you offer a towing service?” Yes, of course. We offer 24/7 towing. Just call the shop and follow the phone prompts.

* “My Service Engine Soon light came on last Saturday, and I wish you were open on Saturday because I wasn’t sure if it was safe to drive the car or not.” You can call us anytime, leave a message and the system will page our cell phones. We will call you right back.

* “Have you ever thought about doing one of those 21-point inspections during an oil change service?” Our oil change service always includes a complete inspection. In fact, we inspect 104 components on 26 different vehicle systems.

* “Did you ever think about offering vehicle pick up and delivery?” Um, yes, we already offer that service, too.

It quickly became clear that we offer fabulous services but we need to vastly improve how we tell our customers about said services. (Some of these individuals have been customers for years.)

This same issue resurfaced at our most recent meeting. In January, we began to offer complimentary lifetime tire rotations with the purchase of four new tires. The board members knew about this because it was their suggestion and because they’d read about it in our newsletter. Because of their involvement, they paid attention. But they were savvy enough consumers to tell us that they also need to be reminded about these things. They want us to boldly put it in writing, either with a certificate or a bright colored sticker. Right now, the offering looks more like an end note on term paper. To accommodate different

learning styles, they also suggested that we verbally tell them about the offer on the phone when they agree to the purchase and again when they pay for the tires. They also want to be reminded about their tire rotations via postcards or when they come in for their oil changes.

These individuals see our business through their eyes -- those of a consumer. Our ability to tap into that perspective was an invaluable learning experience for us. At the same time, they asked a lot of probing questions that gave us the opportunity to explain our business to them. They gained a better understanding of and appreciation for our business, and now they are fully educated spokespeople for our company.

Most valuable to us were the topics our customer advisory board brought up that we never would have thought to ask.

Here's a final example of the valuable role our advisory board plays: At the first meeting, the members unanimously agreed that they would love a customer rewards program that repaid them with C&M gift certificates. We agreed. Before we rolled it out, we had doubts it was an ideal program. We took the topic back to the board at the final meeting. We divided them into groups and asked them to brainstorm ideas for a customer loyalty program. Now, we're going to put those ideas into two formal plans, detail both in our newsletter and in a special e-mail survey to our customers, and give our customers the chance to vote on the rewards program they want to see implemented.

Evangelists among the homeland

CARD

(Collaborating Agencies

Responding to Disasters)

Oakland, CA

www.FirstVictims.org

Submitted by Ana-Marie Jones

CARD helps people prepare for disaster.

We are a 501(C)3 nonprofit organization, specializing in simple and standardized disaster preparedness and emergency response programs for community organizations and others serving special needs clients. Our target market: seniors, children, people with disabilities, homeless, low-income, non-English speakers and others needing alternatives to traditional emergency services.

We have created incredible customer evangelists. How? We took an unpopular topic (disaster preparedness) and changed its context and delivery model.

We eliminated almost all of the disaster and fear-related messages. We created a leadership training model with easy-to-understand materials. Intimidating and complicated disaster binders rife with jargon are gone, replaced with information steeped in simplicity and empowerment. Even the least experienced staff and volunteers in poorly funded organization, can feel confident in their ability to take action and respond effectively in emergency situations.

Whether it's how to address the spread of West Nile Virus or how to handle "suspicious white-powder packages," we create simple, empowering, affordable ways for our members to take action.

After each class or training we ask members to help us determine our

success. Out of every 100 people, more than 95% give us the 2 highest possible ratings. Beyond praise and high marks on evaluations and consistently high levels of word-of-mouth referrals, we use another measure to rate our success -- diversity of our evangelical customer pool.

We took an unpopular topic and changed its context and delivery model.

We have hundreds of great reviews and passionate commentary from the non-profits and businesses we serve. We also have awards and letters of endorsement from a variety of community leaders and agencies. Mayors and directors of emergency services speak on our behalf. CARD has also been blessed with diverse media coverage -- from feature stories on network television news, cable TV, radio to local and international newspapers. In Japan, I shared our curriculum and approach with leaders of the Japanese Central Government, various research institutes and members of their emergency response community.

CARD is a very small nonprofit organization with limited resources (gross understatement). Disaster preparedness for hard-to-reach and special needs clients is a painfully not-sexy topic. In the face of unrelenting fear messages and the heavy push for high-tech, high-end, "Homeland Security" type solutions, we've managed to create a robust pool of evangelical customers, by using a low-cost, low-tech, high-touch approach.

Our real-time customer plus-delta

Concord Hospitality, Inc.

Lincoln, NE

Submitted by Robert Marshall

Concord Hospitality specializes in the hospitality business, operating franchises such as Applebees Neighborhood Grill & Bar, Village Inn Restaurants, Famous Dave's BBQ and Holiday Inn. We operate 43 restaurants, with three more Applebees launching by the end of 2004.

In this fast-paced world where technology is very much alive, the demands of guests requiring speed are expected. No longer is speed a strategic advantage. But Concord is employing new rapid-response technology to stay ahead. We recognize that "speed" drives the business forward.

How has Concord leveraged technology to create customer evangelists? By collecting customer satisfaction data in real time.

After dining with us, guests are selected at random and invited to call a toll-free number to answer a few questions, using a seven-point scale. The survey takes five minutes to complete; the end result is a coupon redeemable on their next visit.

The survey also invites customers to leave their name and phone number if they wish to discuss their visit. If they do, their data is routed to the appropriate Concord area director, who receives a notification on his cellphone. A call from a customer can literally be acted upon within moments.

If a customer is upset, we can resolve it with the manager or associate while they are still working their shift. This allows us to coach and counsel employees and resolve problems immediately and favorably for everyone, even our managers, who may need to make behavioral changes.

We can convert a dissatisfied, revolutionary customer into a company salesperson.

The process nears its closing stages with a return call to the customer, emphasizing that we appreciate their business and would like to know what we can do to continue to serve them. The conversation may lead to a monetary allowance for their next visit. Or it may only be a courtesy call on the part of the customer, requiring no type of resolution.

In the end, it's more than a monetary act; our system allows us to convert a dissatisfied, revolutionary customer who expects little or no action from their complaint into a sales person for our company.

The CEO as feedback machine

Conference Calls Unlimited

Fairfield, IA

www.uconference.com

Submitted by Zane Safrit

Customer plus-delta is how we stand out from our competitors in the conference call business. We relentlessly, passionately, stay in touch with our customers from their first calls as a prospect and through the life of our relationship.

Prompt, courteous, professional, customer contact that results in a remarkable experience for the customer is near the top of our short list of “rules to live by.” Be yourself, but treat the customer or prospect as you want to be treated. Then take it one more step.

That’s a strategy for us to stand out from the herd in our industry. One tactic we use to great benefit is a follow-up phone call. From the CEO through to the sales agents, this provides us with steady, immediate feedback directly from our customers every day. Here’s how it works:

Our sales agents follow-up after the first conference call by a new customer. Customers love this prompt, personal follow-up! They’re astonished at the personal attention and usually on their way to becoming an evangelist. The rare problem or misunderstanding is instantly resolved and we maintain that customer’s loyalty. After all, life’s not perfect and neither is telecom.

Frequently the customer offers a written testimonial, many accompanied by their picture. Our website has all testimonials with double that many waiting to be posted. Customers often offer a referral at this

point, too, which is changing the nature of our business:

1. Referrals now account for over 50% of our new business compared with 10% a year ago, when we started this program.
2. We reduced ad expenses by 20% with no reduction in new business.
3. Our customers are more loyal and committed.

Customer plus-delta works with rudimentary tools: a phone and a few minutes.

Practicing what I preach, I called our largest customers last winter. Each call was short, friendly, and low-key. I apologized for interrupting their busy days. Then I asked, very casually, several questions: “How’s our service treating you? Are you happy? Do you ever use web conference services?” I followed up with an email, thanking them with my direct contact information prominently displayed. Three minutes per call. Another 2-3 minutes for the email.

The results of our focus on simple and fast customer plus-delta:

* *More business.* One-third of the customers I called added new services as a result of our discussion.

* *Personal connection.* I made a personal connection as CEO with each account. It’s a personal dialogue that’s already yielding more business ideas. They were flattered the CEO called.

* *Fun.* The conversation is always pleasant, but that’s due to the passion and professionalism of our staff.

Customer Plus-Delta works with rudimentary tools: a phone and a few minutes.

The non-profit feedback machine

**Delaware Curative Physical
Therapy & Rehabilitation
Centers**

Wilmington, DE

www.delawarecurative.com

Submitted by Cheryl Heiks

We are a non-profit rehabilitation provider in Wilmington, Delaware. Our founders were responding to two compelling issues: results of the polio epidemic, and returning veterans from World War II with life-changing injuries.

We've grown from our Wilmington roots into six Delaware locations, soon to be seven, treating patients in pediatrics through elder-care.

After a management change in 2002, we rediscovered our non-profit roots. We reenergized our staff and board of directors in our mission. We started telling our patients, many of whom had been coming to us for years, about what makes us different. Because of changes in health care delivery, our physical occupational speech and aquatic therapies are different than other providers in our area. We commit to seeing an average of two patients per hour and only use licensed therapists to treat patients.

We started communicating this difference to our patients and their physicians, who are our main source of referrals, using:

- * Verbal and written communication
- * Print media
- * Community and press outreach
- * Open houses and parties to honor Physical, Occupational and Speech Therapy months and the accomplishments of our patients

We encourage patients to tell their physicians, friends and families about the quality of care they receive with us. We updated and expanded our customer satisfaction survey. We installed confidential locked boxes, where patients or visitors could provide unbiased feedback. We launched a mail-in plus-delta program using pre-addressed stamped envelopes. We added feedback and contact areas to our website. We added a comment card for fast responses called “Hey Beth!” The simple card looks like this:

I am: Impressed
Pleasantly Surprised
Satisfied
A Bit Annoyed
Mad as the Dickens

We added a feedback card for fast responses called “Hey Beth!”

The back of the card is for comments, with this message:

“Your opinion is of great value to me as a director in setting policy, designing services and updating our commitment to you. If we have let you down, please tell us about it. If you are pleased with us, we would like to hear that too. As always your satisfaction is our goal.”

It also includes our Executive Director’s name and contact information.

Our survey results help us make needed operational changes, give management and staff feedback and recognition and develop personalized follow-up contact material for physicians. Over 40% of our new patients come to us because of a friend, co-worker or family member referral.

Marketing education as party favor

Discovery Education

Evanston, IL

www.discoveryschool.com

www.unitedstreaming.com

Submitted by David Pendery

The education industry is a tight-knit market that values stability.

It's also an industry where funds are tight and budgets are ever changing. Keeping in line with the pace of the business, Discovery Education has embraced the idea of creating evangelists to build its business and generate excitement, passion, and dedication among its customers and stakeholders.

Discovery Education, a division of Discovery Communications, Inc., creates digital video and multimedia-based learning programs. It incorporates the existing Discovery School product line of over 750 DVDs, videos, CD-ROMs, and print resources, the recently acquired United Learning line of health-education and prevention-curriculum programs, the cutting-edge teacher and student resources of DiscoverySchool.com, and the *unitedstreaming* digital video-on-demand application—a collection of over 2,200 core-curriculum, standards-based videos. Discovery Education products reach 90,000 schools in the United States, serving 1.5 million teachers and their 35 million students each year.

So how does a company generate excitement for a product that is new and different in a very traditional marketplace? That was the challenge the Discovery Education marketing team faced in 2003. It was preparing to ramp up its flagship educational video-on-demand product, *unitedstreaming* which makes over 2,200 video programs available at any

time via the Internet to teachers in classrooms. This new technology was well received in some areas, but not everyone was ready to bring this level of technology into their classrooms. Some educators instantly “got it” and were eager to share their success stories with others; the company just had to facilitate that collaboration.

The solution? Throw a party! But not just any party.

“In the Education market, there’s a real sense of closeness and cooperation,” said Coni Rechner, Marketing Director for Discovery Education. “We took that feeling and expanded on it to create the ‘unitedstreaming Community,’ a way for educators to meet and share their ideas about our products and the general use of technology in education.”

At educational technology conferences across the country, Discovery Education rents a room, brings in great food and drinks, and invites current and potential customers to relax after a long day of workshops and exhibits. The company also hires massage therapists to pamper customers.

“Educators never treat themselves to anything luxurious,” Rechner says. Each event has its own theme, from a South-of-the-border “fiesta,” with a traveling mariachi band, to a night in a 1920s basement speakeasy.

The events are more than just social, though. Attendees are given a business card folder. Each is embossed with “I’m a member of the unitedstreaming community!” and contains the business cards of the Discovery Education employees in attendance. Attendees are challenged to fill the folder with business cards of everyone they’ve met. Attendees hear from and talk with company executives, distribution and content partners, and industry influencers.

Potential customers leave with a 30-day product trial through partnerships with educational publishers. All attendees receive free subscriptions to top educational journals and magazines.

To facilitate collaboration, the company throws a party.

Discovery Education leaves with something even better: a network of dedicated, passionate customers ready to spread the word about their products. These customers provide product feedback on a regular and ongoing basis, as well as quotes and testimonials to use in ads and other marketing materials. But more importantly, they leave behind an empowered, energized group of passionate advocates ready to spread the company's message across the country.

[Editor's note: Discovery Education includes a copy of *Creating Customer Evangelists* in welcome packets for new employees.]

One company's non-profit spinoff

Interaction Associates

Boston, San Francisco

www.interactionassociates.com

Submitted by Pat Milton

Interaction Associates has lived the customer evangelism tenet *Create a Cause* since 1993.

IA was the first firm of our kind to found, fund, and provide pro bono staffing to a nonprofit institute, The Interaction Institute for Social Change. The IISC provides learning and consulting services at discounted rates to nonprofits, social and public sector organizations, schools, and communities.

As a performance improvement company specializing in leadership development, teamwork and consulting, IA has been a consultant to the Fortune 500 for 35 years, equipping them to achieve sustained, multidimensional success.

With the IISC, we're helping change the world of non-profits with:

- * Access to our knowledge base
- * 10% of our annual pre-tax profits
- * 5-10 days of employees' time annually

An early partnership between IISC and IA designed a 2-year civic leadership program to develop nonprofit, business sector and government leaders in the depressed area of Portland, Maine. IA consultants deliver the learning. The leaders address real-time issues facing the city, while developing leadership capability and a powerful network. They emerge with new skills, a common language and approach, and the

ability to view problems from various perspectives.

The results:

- * 200 leaders have participated in the program more than 10 years.
- * The Portland program has become a national model for civic leadership programs in the United States.
- * Quality of life for citizens in Portland has been enhanced.
- * IA and IISC have landed new clients from local business and non profit communities.

Another example: One of our clients, a large mutual fund company, has a strong commitment to social responsibility. It wants its leaders involved in the communities in which it does business. The IISC was involved in a project to assist the Ella J. Baker House, a Boston nonprofit community organization. IA and IISC partnered to provide consulting and coaching services to help the Baker House succeed. The mutual fund client later approached us to help its internal development consultants boost their skills by participating with the IISC in this and similar projects.

This program allows mutual fund employees to:

- * Develop their own skills
- * Give back to the community
- * Practice their craft

The IISC continues to refer clients to us, such as the Library of Congress. This referral led to IA's delivery of Facilitative Leadership workshops to 650 LOC managers. The workshop later became mandatory for all new LOC managers.

When evangelists arrive via a FW:

MarketingSherpa, Inc

Portsmouth, RI

www.marketingsherpa.com

Submitted by Anne Holland

MarketingSherpa is a media company

publishing useful case studies, results data, and best practices for marketing, advertising, and public relations professionals.

Our reporters and editors interview experienced and innovative marketing professionals to ask them, “What’s really working for you?” Then we share their tactics, advice, and results data with you in our newsletters, and special reports.

Our entire business is based on evangelism.

Eighty-seven percent of our 173,000 weekly readers have come from the personal recommendation of friends. (The rest are from search engines, cross-promotions with related companies, and PR.) We’re now over \$1 million in sales per year, and have bootstrapped every step of the way.

And it’s built from one tiny evangelism concept -- putting “Please forward” in every single email subject line, and at the top, and at the bottom of every single email newsletter we’ve sent each week for four years.

The response to this simple, repeated, unremitting tactic is enormous. The idea that you should -- and even must -- forward our newsletters, is now an inbuilt part of our brand.

Testify

McConnell | Huba

Nearly every customer who calls or writes in mentions “I forward your emails!” as they start the conversation. This happens daily. They say it as though it makes them credentialed, they really count, they deserve a gold star. (And they do!)

87% of our readers have come from
personal recommendations.

They know forwarding is the way they should show support. They know it means the world to us.

In love with the phone company

PAETEC Communications

Rochester, NY

www.paetec.com

Submitted by Tracy Robertson

PAETEC Communications creates customer evangelists through customer advisory boards.

PAETEC is a nationwide, integrated communications provider offering broadband services, including advanced voice and video, enhanced data and communications management services to medium-sized and large businesses in 27 U.S. markets.

We invite 10-15 of our key customers from various industries to serve on our boards. As we prepare for growth in the marketplace, and to fulfill our company's mission "to be the most employee and customer oriented company in all markets we serve," we are turning to our customers to help us build and improve our business.

We listen to our customers every day -- on the sales front, in our customer service center, through our automated response systems. But never had we made the process of listening to customers an intimate, immediate practice. We have achieved a new level of customer evangelism through our customer advisory board.

We launched our CAB program in November 2003 and beta-tested it in three cities. With overwhelmingly positive customer feedback and participation, we have created 10 boards with nine more in development. We have 114 active CAB members across the country, and the program continues to expand.

The CABs have both short- and long-term impact, including:

- * Providing our customers with a sense of belonging, networking, and on-time feedback, which in turn, increases long-term customer loyalty and evangelism.
- * Providing PAETEC with an ability to execute on what customers need and want versus what we “think” they need and want. This knowledge increases customer satisfaction, long-term customer loyalty, and evangelism.

Customer advisory boards are an opportunity for us to listen, but they offer customers the chance to **listen to one another.**

The great news is that our customers want to have impact on our business, and they want to see the results. A few examples:

- * PAETEC responded to customer input by delaying the rollout of a new market-specific program. The program was redesigned.
- * A new process for handling network outage notifications is being redesigned by our CAB members, side-by-side with our Network Operations team.
- * Several new products are being built. CAB members have volunteered to assist with product design and testing.
- * New marketing and product sales strategies are being revamped to better align with customer and potential customer preferences.

Perhaps the most important result of the program is the impact that it has on the customer as a professional and technology expert. The CABs are an opportunity for us to listen, but they offer customers the chance to listen to one another. To do that, PAETEC employs an outside firm, PeerHQ, to build and facilitate board meetings.

PeerHQ's objectivity ensures that sessions stay customer-focused instead of PAETEC-focused. Half of each board meeting is dedicated to processing customer business issues. Customers talk about challenges they face within their organizations. They share ideas, advice, and hard-won knowledge and leave the meetings with information they can utilize that day.

Furthermore, PAETEC has established email and communication tools allowing customers to continue networking and supporting one another outside the CAB forum.

Encouraging online evangelism

Principled Profits

Shel Horowitz, marketing copy-

writer/consultant

Northampton, MA

www.principledprofits.com

Submitted by Shel Horowitz

I combine testimonials with participation

on Internet discussion lists; when a customer locates me through a discussion list, if he or she is happy with my work, I ask the client to post a little note about the experience of working with me. These lists have not only brought me dozens of clients directly, they have also encouraged a number of colleagues and competitors to refer work to me. Some of them have even listed me as a resource in their published books.

I examined my income for March 2004. I had six new and eight repeat clients. Of the new clients, four were referred from these sources, one found me in a web search and one read one of my books. Of the repeat clients, six originally found me through these same sources. Of 14 clients in these lines that month, ten were traceable directly to my participation on these lists.

Referrals and direct purchases from discussion list members, including competitors, now account for over 70% of new copywriting and marketing consulting business annually, representing tens of thousands of dollars in business for this one-person shop.

Customers, colleagues, and competitors can be a business's most effective marketing agents, often far outpulling advertising and PR.

Marketing as community exercise

PsychoTactics

Northcote, Auckland, New Zealand

www.PsychoTactics.com

Submitted by Sean D'Souza

Small businesses struggle.

Like really, really struggle. They work hard and long, but they just can't seem to pull out of the loop. And that's not why they started. Their founders wanted a life of relative freedom, yet they're caught up in a whirlpool of sorts.

PsychoTactics shows small businesses how customers think. How to read a customer's brain. This is done through various articles and training systems on our site. We help customers see that marketing isn't the answer to a business' problem. Structure is. With the right structure and the right marketing, a small business doesn't have to struggle. Ever.

Our most effective tactic is called "Care, Protection and Guidance." We treat customers as if they're our friends, our babies. So nothing we do is against them.

You asked for tactics. It's not a tactic. It's a strategy. And it's called *giving*. As a result, customers write. They refer without reward. They complain like crazy. They're family, not some credit card swiping machines we don't know. As customers, they pay back by being fiercely loyal. In a world where marketing sites and products are a dime for ten dozen, our customers stay put with us.

1. *Customer plus-delta.* We have a “what bugs me” on every page. We get approximately 2-3 bugs (or feedback) per day.

We treat customers as if they're our friends,
our babies.

2. *Napsterize your knowledge.* You've hit the node. We are in the process of doing just this. On our website there's tons of articles in the Free Article Section. Once you get inside 5000 B.C. you literally hit Aladdin's Cave. And it costs \$2 a month. That's it for a wealth of information.

3. *Build the buzz.* This buzz is still a work in progress. All the same, our customers refer us all the time. Strategic alliances become our voices, too. Our partners will move mountains to let their customers know about us.

4. *Create community.* We have the Cave at 5000 B.C. It's warm and there's always a fire going. Plus there's the blog. All secret and accessible normally if you know where to find it.

5. *Make bite-size chunks.* First you buy the book. Then the membership. Then the \$2,000 workshop. Then the consulting. Yes, it's a bite at a time alright.

6. *Create a cause.* It's on the front page of our website. People write and say, “I'm from Brazil. I can never afford your products. Why do you do this? I could

never pay you back.” And the answer is always the same. Pay it forward. :)

Our results:

1. We’ve grown our subscriber list from 1,000 in Aug 2002, to nearly 10,000 in 2004.
2. We have over 1,000 testimonials for one book alone.
3. Business has gone from \$US28 per month to \$10,000 per month.
4. All of this has been achieved through no advertising. No publicity. No Google ads.

We’ve spent less than \$500 in promotion in the last 2 years (because one of our partners wanted us to). All success has been through word of mouth. What makes this a bit more remarkable is that we’re not based in downtown New York, but in far off New Zealand - a million miles from anywhere you know. Yes, we know Shrek the sheep :)

Creating home-field evangelists

Seattle SuperSonics

Seattle, WA

www.SuperSonics.com

Submitted by Pete Winemiller

Eight years ago during the Seattle

SuperSonics' appearance in the NBA Finals, the club's fans were part of a frenzied scene and not necessarily focused on the care they were receiving from the staff at Seattle's Key Arena.

We understood that being on top of the standings nearly evaporates problems fans may encounter in their relationship with a team. Conversely, fewer wins on the court amplifies problems during a fan's "driveway-to-driveway experience."

With this in mind, the Sonics decided to focus on fan complaints, knowing that for every complaint received, 26 are not. Without guaranteeing annual trips to the NBA Finals, the Sonics emphasize consistent customer care to enhance fan experience and loyalty:

- * A division of the franchise is dedicated to handling fan concerns.
- * The franchise is focused on a "fans-first" culture, with extensive training for all front-line arena employees. Sonics employees refer to all ticket buyers as "guests."
- * We repositioned negative feedback as "free consulting." We encourage guests to be forthcoming with problems.

To ensure this approach is profitable, we tied it to season ticket holder loyalty. We continually emphasize that "front-line" employees significantly affect the company's bottom line. We know we can't change the team's success on the court, but we can control the culture and delivery

of consistent, first-class service in the arena.

Landing a new customer is about nine times more expensive than retaining an existing one, so our success is measured by season ticket holder retention, our largest source of revenue. Exemplary guest care results in greater loyalty.

Business goes where it's invited but stays where it's appreciated.

As our emphasis on guest relations progresses, our "guest care" culture has evolved. This culture empowers employees to attend to guests' needs through an interactive "attitude of invitation." It has transformed the arena staff.

Confirmed by positive reviews by fans, the improved service delivered by arena employees is based on our CLICK! program. Webster's defines click as "clicking with a person" and "to be successful with a person." We made it an acronym and theme for the arena's employees to enhance a fan's experience - even if the team happens to be playing poorly.

C: "Communicate Courteously" with guests

L: "Listen To Learn," rather than listening to respond

I: "Initiate Immediately" so a guest's concerns are met quickly and effectively

C: "Create Connections," so guests know they are among hospitable friends

K: "Know Your Stuff" so guests know they are interacting with a professional.

CLICK! is based on extensive training and incentives. Once an employee is "CLICK! certified," she knows to take ownership of a guest's problem and create solutions quickly. As an equation, it reads:

Know Your Stuff

+ Listen to Learn

+ Go with Your Heart

= Being a Problem Solver!

Business goes where it's invited, but stays where it's appreciated. The volume of positive comments we've received strongly suggests that the fans-first, CLICK! culture has solidly contributed to season ticket holder retention.

As one guest recently told us: "Every employee I have encountered...has been more than friendly, and the treatment my 3-year-old daughter received tonight at the arena was excellent. I don't know what (Sonics chairman) Mr. (Howard) Schultz said to the staff, but whatever it was, it worked. Keep up the good work!"

Turning customers into rock stars

Sesame Communications

Seattle, WA

www.SesameCommunications.com

Submitted by Cheryl Isen

To reinforce goodwill among customers, Sesame Communications has created a funnel of evangelists by recognizing customers who use our products the most.

Sesame Communications facilitates doctor-patient and doctor-doctor online communications for the dental industry using automated email. Benefits include reduced no-shows, time savings for staff administration and significant improvements in patient satisfaction.

For our recognition program, we set up parameters, established milestones, measured performance and announced winners at industry events and in our newsletter, on the website, in case studies and press releases.

The results? Evangelical customers have asked for more platforms to share their stories. So, we've given up traditional advertising in favor of letting our evangelists speak for us. Ultimately, it means we have built a marketing channel for the voice of the evangelist. This year we selected six customer evangelists and are promoting their experiences in their own words in trade ads, direct mail marketing, case studies and tradeshow graphics.

Our strategy for our business and this program:

* Love your customers. If a client isn't an evangelist now, they will be when we get them up to speed.

* Our motto is simple: We will leave no customer behind.

* We guarantee patient satisfaction. In June 2004, 250,000 patients will log on to their orthodontists' and dentists' web sites to get information they need about their accounts and appointments. We've received almost 18,000 survey responses from patients; 98% report that clicking is "more convenient than calling the doctor's office." Ninety-nine percent say they found the answers they needed. As our user base has grown, these percentages have risen steadily.

We want to make every one of our customer evangelists **a star** through our marketing vehicles.

* We are diligent about rewarding high-performance users; that's the basis of our loyalty program. For example, the office of Dr. Mark Mappes in Nashville, Tennessee, took the challenge of our incentive program and delivered a 404% increase in usage of our service in six weeks.

* We want to make every customer evangelist a star through one of our marketing vehicles. We take responsibility for our customers' success, helping them to embrace our technology by overcoming hurdles such as staff technophobia.

Evangelism as company practice

TechSmith Corporation

Okemos, MI

www.techsmith.com

Submitted by Betsy Weber

TechSmith is the world's leading provider of screen capture and screen recording software such as SnagIt, Camtasia Studio, Morae and EnSharpen. To promote customer evangelism, we cover as many communication modes possible.

We maintain several customer advisory boards for each product. The dedicated board members get sneak peeks of new versions. We solicit feedback on usability, features, marketing and ad placement. In the end, they get products that meet their needs, and we are aware of the best ways to speak to people just like them.

We use our Web site to cultivate our evangelist community. We *create community* by providing forums on our site so people can talk directly with each other. Users discuss work, offer suggestions and provide general advice to one another. We monitor the forums to know what our community is talking about and learn what it needs.

We practice *Customer Plus-Delta* and get instant feedback from our customers by asking them to rate our tutorials and share a story. With each product tutorial, we ask customers to rate the utility of the document. A form helps them pinpoint exactly what they did or didn't like. We use these comments to help us tailor the site to their preferences.

By asking them to share a story, we accumulate great vignettes that tell us how our product helped customers succeed. They're reaching out to us, and we welcome them with open arms! We conduct in-depth interviews to create case studies, complete with authentic examples, which we post on the site. Customers say the stories assist them with their own ideas, tasks and presentation style, strengthening a sense of "we're all in this together!"

We're consistent with our evangelism messages.

We offer *bite size chunks* by letting people evaluate our products and the training before buying. Trying a product free for 30 days helps people make smart decisions. And by trying the training, they can tell if it will meet their needs. This method has worked wonders for us. Customers know the value of what they're getting so there are no surprises. Evaluation downloads per week sometimes exceed 275,000 for SnagIt and 350,000 for Camtasia Studio.

We keep the company informed about our customer evangelism efforts. Internally, our "Evangelist of the Week" newsletter profiles our latest outstanding customer. Each department knows how people are using our products in new and exciting ways.

Tell us what you want! Talk to other people in your field! Let us know how to help! Tell us about your experiences! By being consistent with our message of evangelism, we're building a community that has a strong bond -- with us, with each other, and most importantly, with our products.

The grassroots business group

Women's Business Exchange

Fargo, ND

[uweb.und.nodak.edu/~scott.sor-](http://uweb.und.nodak.edu/~scott.sor-vaag/index.html)

[vaag/index.html](http://uweb.und.nodak.edu/~scott.sor-vaag/index.html)

Submitted by Jodee Bock and

Karen Stensrud

In October 2003, a small group of

likeminded businesswomen in Fargo, N.D., met to discuss how to create a group for women who want to learn more about the business-women in our community.

After brainstorming over several gatherings (and a few glasses of wine), we formed the Women's Business Exchange. Our mission: "Connecting women who want to take their businesses or careers to the next level through networking, conversation and mentorship."

Capitalizing on our love of food, conversation and networking, we set our first "Food for Thought" event for February 2004. Each event has featured time for networking and introductions, followed by facilitated conversations on topics like leadership or creativity. Businesswomen can ally with others to build relationships, transform businesses and share strategies and resources.

Building on the tenets of customer evangelism that a number of us had heard presented by Ben McConnell, we successfully got the group rolling:

* With e-mail invitations, we've created buzz by advertising exclusively through "word of mouth and word of mouse." For our inaugural event, we filled our limit of 50 spots in six days. Those who had missed the first event heard from others how great it was. Our next event had 75 registered participants.

* We incorporate *customer-plus delta*, surveying participants at the end of each event to find out what they enjoyed, what didn't work for them, what kind of events and topics they'd attend in the future, and who else should be included on our e-mail list.

* By virtue of our event structure, information is delivered in *bite-sized chunks* to participants. We bill our facilitated conversations as "just a taste" -- we want people to connect with one another or attend further events for additional courses!

We create buzz exclusively through word of mouth and word of mouse.

* We are working on *Napsterizing our knowledge* by incorporating a Web site with contact information, e-connections and free newspaper coverage.

* Women's Business Exchange is *creating a cause*, as women who share our mission think about what changes women's lives and establish connections and new relationships that help them reach the next level.

* We often hear we are creating community. Participants feel they're part of a greater community of businesswomen, most of whom they hadn't met before.

As we plan our third event, we see the potential for smaller offshoot groups and larger events. We are moving beyond the newness and "what are we?" into the realm of longevity, planning, and "what do we want to become?"

Free stuff

How do you start creating customer evangelists? Here are some free resources to help.

* In our blog, Church of the Customer, we highlight ways to live in customer heaven or rot in customer hell.

www.creatingcustomerevangelists.com/blog/

* Our monthly email newsletter has actionable ideas to get your customers to spread the word. Subscribe at:

www.CreatingCustomerEvangelists.com/resources/newsletter/

* Subscribe to our email newsletter and receive a copy of the first chapter of the book, *Creating Customer Evangelists*.

* Read articles like how to “market like a rock star,” or how to create employee evangelists, and other fun stuff at:

www.creatingcustomerevangelists.com/resources/columnsarticles/

* Learn how leaders such as Meg Whitman, Herb Kelleher, Chris Pirillo and others inspire legions of evangelists:

www.creatingcustomerevangelists.com/resources/evangelists/

* Get your own official *Creating Customer Evangelists* poster by buying a copy of *Creating Customer Evangelists* at Amazon.com. Forward your Amazon email receipt to us at ebook@customerevangelists, and we'll send you a poster that illustrates the six tenets of customer evangelism. Suitable for framing.