

The Extreme Fundraising Ezine, Vol. II Issue 2

"Creating Donor Evangelists: Harnessing Buzz"

Greetings! This is the Part Three of the "Creating Donor Evangelists" series based on Jackie Huba and Ben McConnell's book "Creating Customer Evangelists."

Why do I feel this series is so important? Fundraising isn't necessarily getting easier. Direct mail is losing its effectiveness, as are phonathons. Our donors have more things competing for their time and attention than ever before. If we want our nonprofit to thrive, let alone survive, we need to help our most loyal supporters become "evangelists" for our program.

This is GREAT news for my alumni relations and donor relations colleagues. Hopefully this series is helping you communicate the need for your work in a language that the budget making people will understand. If you need to catch up, the earlier issues can be found in the archives in the ezine section of the website <http://fundraisingcoach.com/>.

As a reminder, McConnell and Huba have identified six themes in moving customers to advocates:

1. Customer Plus-Delta: Understanding the Love
2. Napsterize Your Knowledge: Give to Receive
3. Build the Buzz: Spreading the Word
4. Create Community: Bringing Customers Together
5. Bite-Size Chunks: From Sampling to Evangelism
6. Create a Cause: When Business is Good

Today we'll explore number 3: Build the Buzz.

WHAT IS BUZZ?

"Buzz" is people talking to people about your nonprofit or service. Buzz is the epitome of what we want to accomplish in creating donor evangelists. Emanuel Rosen, author of "The Anatomy of Buzz," defines buzz as "word of mouth" plus "word of mouse." Communications technology presents an almost infinite variety of ways for our donors to connect with each other and to introduce our programs to prospective donors.

Rosen says that buzz spreads through "hubs"--trusted sources of information that disseminate information quickly. He identifies two types of hubs

- *MEGAHUBS*: famous personalities, authors with large readership, Oprah and
- *INDIVIDUAL NETWORK HUBS*: individuals with considerable influence in their community (however you define "community").

Seth Godin calls these hubs "sneezers." Noteworthy and impressive things (Godin calls them "idea viruses") come across people's path, they sneeze it their networks, and others get infected. A common example is the spread of the PalmPilot. For a large population of people, the PalmPilot was extremely contagious.

HOW CAN BUZZ BE HARNESSSED?

Buzz happens. Good buzz *and* bad buzz. I'm amazed at how quickly alumni can assume the worst when they hear of a change at their alma mater. Fortunately, Huba and McConnell give some tips on using buzz to create evangelists:

1. Be diligent in finding and tracking network hubs.

Find the influencers in the networking groups your donors belong to and form relationships with them. I would advise looking for the influencers within your own donor communities and listservs too.

2. Target the hubs first with a new product or service; network hubs love to be the first to know something new.

This one reminds me of Professors Dumbledore's words to Harry Potter at the end of "Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone." Harry wakes up in the hospital wing and is amazed at the gifts and cards near his bed. Dumbledore says something to the affect of, "Of course, everything that happened is a complete secret between you and Professor Quirrell. So, naturally, everyone knows about it." Share the news with the hubs knowing that they will sneeze the information to others. That's just what they do.

3. Bring network hubs to forums where they can talk with others.

Huba and McConnell cite MacWorld as an example. Tens of thousands of hubs come together twice a year to be courted by CEO Steve Jobs, renew old friendships, and wax eloquent on all things Apple.

Sounds like the traditional Homecoming and regional events, doesn't it? What if you were to get all your high-tech donor hubs together? Or what if you held a donor event in conjunction with something like MacWorld?

Elementary schools may want to do something like this in conjunction with high school or college reunions. The alum will already be in a central area, why not capitalize on that?

4. Devise ways to make sure others see hubs using your products.

For most organizations, individuals will be the key in spreading buzz. Few of us have regular access to Oprah or other megahubs. But we all have access to individual hubs. Court them. Let them know that you know that they know about you. (That last sentence may need to be read a few times for it to make sense.) This intentionality could leverage your efforts and help you focus your already restricted budget.

Perhaps you could offer a prize to donors pictured in newspapers and magazines wearing your organization's sweatshirt? What if you could create a club of these advocates!

MORE ABOUT BUZZ

Huba and McConnell also list some other thoughts about buzz. Buzz doesn't happen only to edgy or outrageous products or events. Even prescription drugs can be buzz worthy.

Also, buzz doesn't just happen. It takes focused, intentional work. But it doesn't necessarily require huge media and advertising budgets. Buzz is often generated on a grassroots level. Finally, our best donors may not be the best buzz starters. Buzz can often be more effectively generated by a counterculture. Can you imagine Greenpeace starting a "Young Republicans" club within their donor base? THAT would probably be buzz worthy!

WHAT ABOUT YOU?

How can you leverage the already existing buzz in your donor community? If you don't know your donor relations folks or alumni relations folks, commit today to getting to know them!

And what are you doing to make your ideas more "sneezable"? Do donors know what to say about your organization? Take a few minutes to go back and read the earlier issues of Extreme Fundraising that dealt with the Rule of Threes.

What can you easily do this week to start harnessing the power of buzz? Let me know by replying to this message or emailing me at: marc@fundraisingcoach.com.

GOALS PROGRAM REMINDER

The early reviews are in; the Goals Program is a hit! People are finding it simplifies their lives while giving them direction. You can subscribe at <http://fundraisingcoach.com>.

Remember that the best suggestion for a better name than "Pitman Coaching Goals Program" receives a free coaching session. Reply to this email with your creative best!

To your extreme fundraising success!

Marc

PS I consider "The Anatomy of Buzz" required reading for fundraisers and donor relations folks. To buy it at Amazon click on my affiliate link:

<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0385496680/marcpitmancom/>

or on the non-affiliate link:

<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0385496680/>

Marc A. Pitman is an executive coach to nonprofit leaders. An expert in helping people identify their natural abilities, he's committed to providing down-to-earth information that will decrease stress and put the "fun" back into fundraising!

The Extreme Fundraising Ezine is a complimentary newsletter of The Fundraising Coach <http://fundraisingcoach.com>. Feel free to pass it on!

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