

What Terrifies Bill Gates Bill Gates is the richest man in the world. *Forbes* reports his personal fortune is a bank-busting \$40 billion. So what makes a man this powerful nervous? The fact that software is obsolete. And 70% of Americans are already using the technology that will replace it—without paying a dime to Microsoft. Get the full story and the names of 2 companies that will profit most from the death of Microsoft in a free report from The Motley Fool called, "The Two Words Bill Gates Doesn't Want You to Hear..." [Click here for instant access to this FREE report!](#)

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Initiate the conversation

5 smart ways to stimulate word-of-mouth marketing

By [Fuel Net](#) 7/21/2009 - 9:30am [Marketing](#)

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Every day across the U.S., more than 3.5 billion brand-related word-of-mouth conversations take place, according to the Keller Fay Group, a marketing research consultancy in New Brunswick, N.J. And 90 percent of them happen offline. But with the growth of social networks, blogs, consumer review sites, and the like, the number of consumers spreading the word about their experiences with products and services is expected to rise dramatically in the coming years. If your business fails to come up in conversation, there are a number of effective, low-cost ways to get the chatter started as part of a guerilla marketing strategy. Here's how:

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- Enhance your blog.** In his first year of blogging, Alan Brymer, president of The Investor Library in Provo, Utah, landed more than 6,000 subscribers by providing high-quality content, soliciting reader feedback and responding to their comments, and touting free reports. The reports spread like wildfire via a "tell-a-friend" script and were promoted by other bloggers and speakers to their audiences. One free product netted 5,000 new subscribers, Brymer notes.
- Fuel the conversation.** When marketing on social networking sites like Facebook, don't just tout your product or service. Give consumers a legitimate reason to talk about your brand, such as a fun, compelling offer, suggests Britt Peterson, director of business development at Cole & Weber United, a Seattle-based marketing agency. "And don't underestimate the power of true dialogue," she adds. "Ask for input and act on it. Brands that prove they're listening are gaining ground."
- Add customer reviews.** Allow Web site visitors to post comments on your products or services. According to a survey by Nielsen Online, 78 percent of online users view recommendations from other consumers as trustworthy, well ahead of newspaper ads and other traditional media. Worried about negative reviews? Studies show that they actually make a Web site more credible.
- Get out and network.** "Too many businesspeople prefer the insulation of an office," asserts Bruce Libman, founder and president of the Clients for Life Organization, a Melville, N.Y.-based consulting firm. "Networking should be treated as a contact sport. Join a networking group. Learn and adopt effective networking skills."
- Play the match game.** Partner with like-minded businesses to offer customers more value with every purchase, recommends Dallas Teague Snider, president of Birmingham, Ala.-based *Lead Referrals*. "For example, if someone ordered a book online about interviewing skills, it could include a special offer on a pen from another company," she notes. "The two companies could then share the data on that customer for future prospecting."

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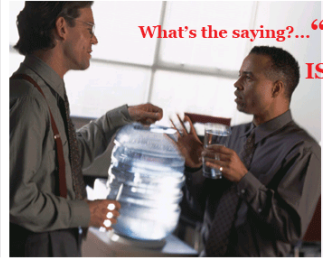
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