

Three steps to making your brand 'talkable'

 By [Jason Stewart](#)

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When it comes to branding in 2012, 'talkability' is currently one of the hottest topics internationally. It's consequently one of the most important questions which a brand custodian should be asking themselves today.

The general definition of a 'talkable' brand is one that provides a reason for people to actively talk about it. Brand PR director of Unilever USA defines it further, saying that, "Talkable brands penetrate the culture. They become so seamlessly woven into the fabric of conversation that sharing brand-related information takes on the value of social currency."

We know people are talking all the time, with about 20% of all conversation related specifically to brands or products. However, only 17% of those conversations are stimulated because of advertising (generating only 3% of our total conversation). This means that the other 83% of conversations are based on experiences that the brand has created through the product itself, through

Is your brand remarkable?

We need to be realistic and understand that advertising often does very little to grab our attention or to get people talking, which is why our focus as brand custodians needs to be more on how we can make our brand more 'talkable'. Social media strategist, John Porcaro, sums it up this way: "First, your brand, product or service has to be worth talking about. What is it that makes your brand remarkable, different or better? Does your brand resonate with your customer? Does it make their life easier? More fun? More interesting? If your brand isn't worth mentioning, it won't be mentioned."

There is often very little consideration given to 'talkability' when communication plans are put together. So what can we do? The first step is to listen to and understand the conversations that are taking place both off-line and online. This, fortunately, is easier than it sounds. Off-line tracking can range from formal research, to asking your existing database for feedback, to simply having honest and natural conversations with your target market. Online tracking allows you to use tools such as Google Alerts, BrandsEye or SaidWot. Once you understand what your target market cares about, you can start developing the right services, experiences and messages that will resonate with this audience.

Consumer must control conversation

Once you action these new initiatives, it is important to track the effect that they have in order to see which messages or initiatives are being talked about the most, and, most importantly, shared. In almost all our dealings with brands, the USP or message that the brand believes will be passed on usually never will be. Which brings about another very important point: For a brand to be truly 'talkable', the consumers need to be able to control the conversation while the brand merely responds, reacts and plants seeds of content that 'flame the fire'.

The final step is that we need to do things that are unexpected. The brain is designed to use as little energy as possible, so it doesn't think as much as we would imagine it does. It retains reserve processing power for potential emergencies. For example, we can drive for a full hour and reach our destination, only to realise that we remember hardly anything about the landscape en route. Our brain was operating using a mental model that allowed us to operate on 'auto-pilot' and save energy. This enables us to assume things and use the model to fill in the missing details. A 'talkable' brand disrupts these mental models or beliefs that are tied to the core of a brand category and 'shocks' our brain back into taking notice.

In summary, you need to always qualify the effectiveness of your brand activity by asking a simple question, "Will my customers want to tell their friends about this?" If the answer is yes, then you have a great idea. If the answer is no, then you need to find something that will. A successful brand is one that people talk about - so make sure your brand is 'talkable'. Your target market will then shout from the rooftops for you.

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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