

National DPP Job Aid

Word-of-Mouth Marketing: What It Is, Why It's Important, and How to Use It Effectively

This job aid is designed to help you better understand word-of-mouth (WOM) marketing, how it works, and how you can use it to promote the lifestyle change program in your community. WOM marketing is an unpaid form of promotion in which people tell others how much they like a business, product, or service.

WOM Types

There are two types of WOM efforts: organic WOM and amplified WOM, otherwise known as WOM marketing.

Organic WOM	Amplified WOM (WOM Marketing)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Occurs naturally when people want to encourage or discourage use of a product or service based on their own experience. • Relies on what people communicate to others; it's not a communication you can control. • Is usually delivered in person and among members of your community, although it can also be shared through phone calls, text messages, testimonials, and direct messages on social media platforms. • Relies heavily on relationships to spread the word. People tend to share their likes and dislikes with their friends and loved ones. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Occurs when marketers launch campaigns or initiatives to encourage or accelerate WOM in communities where they already do business or would like to. • Goes beyond interpersonal communication and uses other ways to spread the word about a program or service. These may include newsletters, bulletin boards, blogs, websites, social media platforms, and community events. • Is a cost-effective strategy that can help you increase program enrollment. • Expands the conversation to the digital space where people can share a review or recommendation about a specific product or service. • Helps you to be strategic and intentional with the messaging community members receive about your program.

Why is WOM marketing important?

WOM marketing is based on trust, and it relies on influential people and trusted sources to convey a message from voices your audience is already listening to. This makes WOM marketing a valuable form of promotion. Most people take into account the opinions and recommendations of their family members, friends, loved ones, and trusted community or spiritual leaders. WOM marketing can extend a message from one person to another or to a group of people using other forms of promotion and it usually doesn't stop after just one interaction.

According to a Nielsen study, 92% of consumers prefer recommendations from friends and family above all other forms of advertising.

Key elements for successful WOM marketing

The following elements can help make WOM marketing a success:

- **Have a trusted and credible messenger.** Identify a relatable and credible source in your community. This person should be able to talk authentically about your program and encourage people to learn more and/or enroll.
- **Deliver a clear and concise message.** Consider the message you want to deliver about your program in the community. Your message should be brief and clear, and it should use phrasing that will resonate with your audience.
- **Offer value or a benefit for your audience.** Clearly state the value of the program and its benefits for individuals and the community. Consider the things that matter to your intended audience. For example, parents may be motivated by how achieving better health through the program can benefit their children.

Identifying WOM messengers

The messenger is the key to the success of your WOM efforts. This person will be responsible for relaying your message and building trust in your organization and your program.

Qualities that all WOM messengers should have

Your messenger should meet the following criteria:

- Be an active member of your community.
- Be a trusted and credible source of information.
- Have a compelling story that will inspire and motivate potential participants.
- Be aware of the current needs, concerns, and health issues in your community.
- Be invested in the health and well-being of your community.

Who can be a messenger?

- Lifestyle change program alumnus
- Health educator and/or program coach
- Community leader
- Faith community leader
- Community health worker
- Employer

Ideas for recruiting WOM messengers

Identifying and engaging messengers for your program can be challenging. Here are some tips to help you get started:

- **Use program sessions and activities.** Take a moment before or after your program sessions to ask participants if anyone would be interested in sharing their story to help promote the program.
- **Use your communication channels.** Use your organization's communication channels (e.g., bulletin boards and newsletters) to ask coaches, staff, and program participants for help in recruiting messengers.
- **Seek referrals in your organization.** Directly ask lifestyle coaches, receptionists, recruiters, promotoras, or community health workers to help you identify potential messengers.
- **Seek candidates in your community.** Reach out to trusted community leaders outside of your organization (e.g., business owners, faith leaders, public officials, and health educators) who may be willing to promote your program.

Once potential messengers have agreed to learn more, set up an in-person meeting to talk about the goal for your WOM marketing efforts. If they agree to become a voice for the lifestyle change program in your community, create a system to keep track of conversations and capture the level of interest in the program. This is something the messenger can do by simply taking notes after participating in community events and keeping track of how many people they engage. This process will give you an idea of how messages are being received and can help you see if your WOM efforts create any spikes in enrollment or requests for information.

How can you get started?

Follow these four steps to use WOM marketing to promote your lifestyle change program.

1. **Establish your main message.** It should be clear and state the value of the program for community members. It should also be relevant for your community. Think about what makes your program unique and fun and weave that into your message.
2. **Identify program messengers.** Identify the best messengers for your local program. They should be able to speak about the program in a way that will motivate others to join or to want to learn more. See the next section on identifying messengers.
3. **Engage local partners.** Use your relationships and connections with other organizations to enhance your WOM efforts. You can reach out to community and faith-based organizations, health care providers and clinics, and employers to identify opportunities to collaborate and expand the reach of your program. For example, you can work with an employer in your area to identify ways your messenger can share program information at an upcoming job fair. You can also connect with a local faith leader to discuss how you can engage the congregation and share program resources.
4. **Identify events in your community.** Think about the different types of activities that take place in your community and identify potential opportunities for engagement. These may be health fairs, health screenings, festivals, concerts, races or marathons, street parties, or other community events. Your messengers could participate in these events to engage community members face to face, talk about their health concerns, and share information about your program. Remember to work with your partners to identify events they may be planning.

Enhancing your WOM efforts

Digital and Social Media. Use digital (e.g., websites, digital display ads, email) and social media to spread the word about your program online. Consider including positive quotes from previous or current program participants on your organization's website and social media platforms. If your organization is active on social media, make sure that you link to those platforms. Your messengers can also post about your program on their social media platforms and tag your organization. Share your social media content calendar with messengers and highlight messages that they can share throughout the year.

Program Resources. Make good use of your and CDC's educational resources and marketing materials for your lifestyle change program. Identify any relevant resources that your messengers can use or reference when they are engaging the community. Your messengers may want to share a flyer or postcard about your program when they talk to people at community events.

Additional Help. CDC offers the following resources with useful information and tips for engaging different groups in your community.

- [Faith Leaders Toolkit for Diabetes Prevention and Management](#)
- [Working with Employers and Insurers Guide](#)
- [Emerging Practices: Approaches to Employer Coverage of the National DPP for Employees at Risk for Type 2 Diabetes](#)
- [CDC Diabetes Kickstart Video Series](#)