

WOMMA Terminology Framework

A Standard Method for Discussing and Measuring Word of Mouth Marketing

Co-Authored by the Members of
WOMMA's Research and Metrics Council

July 12, 2005

The practice of word of mouth marketing is composed of a diverse set of techniques, many of which are being newly implemented by firms from a wide range of industries and specialties. Until now, there has been no common language or methodology available for discussing, measuring, or comparing the impact of various word of mouth marketing efforts.

Word of mouth marketing is increasingly viewed as an important complement to traditional media and an essential part of the marketing mix. However, the lack of consistent measurement tools has made it extremely difficult to allocate budgets or plan campaigns using these techniques.

WOMMA Research and Metrics Council

Co-Chairs

Jonathan Carson - BuzzMetrics
Ed Keller - GfK NOP
David Godes - Harvard Business School

Council Members

Terry Pittman - AOL
Sarahbeth Grossman - Buena Vista Home Entertainment
Joe Pilotta - BIGresearch
John Moore - Brand Autopsy
Matt McGlenn - BzzAgent
Ted Morris, Bradley Silver - Brandimensions
Sarah Dietz - Burson-Marsteller
Max Kalehoff - BuzzMetrics
Kathy Baughman, Steve Hershberger - ComBlu
Daniel Hess, Alissa Ostrowski, Jeremy Shermak - comScore Networks
Laurent Florès - CRM Metrix
Andrew Bernstein, Jeffrey Feldman, Cindy Sullivan - Cymfony
David Reis - DEI Worldwide
Karen Kraft - Decision Analyst
Carl Mela - Duke University
Lori Henderson - Fidelity Investments
Jeff Eisenberg - Future Now
Dave Evans - GSD&M
Sean Glass - Higher One

Drafting Committee

Idil Çakim - Burson-Marsteller
Walter Carl - Northeastern University
Karthik Iyer - Intelliseek
Gregory Wester - VoodooVox

Pete Blackshaw - Intelliseek
Trish Powell - Intuit
Gary Stein - Jupiter Research
Joshua Sinel - Kaava
Lance Porter - Louisiana State University
George Silverman - Market Navigation
Matthew Stradiotto - Matchstick
Pete McCoy - Moroch
Ann Green, Lisa Parente - Millward Brown
Charles Buchwalter - Nielsen//NetRatings
Jon Berry, Brad Fay - GfK NOP
Michael Lewis - OnMessage Communications
Promise Phelon - The Phelon Group
Neil Foote - Reach Media
Dan Buczaczer, Richard Fielding - Starcom
Max Kilger - Simmons Market Research Bureau
Larry Burns, Michael Weiss - StartSampling
Jim Sterne - Target Marketing
Barbara Venza - Thomas Industrial Network
Chris Dellarocas - University of Maryland



Objective

Purpose

The purpose of the WOMMA Terminology Framework is to provide a unified framework for describing and measuring word of mouth marketing.

This Framework provides the units and nomenclature that media companies, word of mouth marketing services firms, and brand marketers can use to plan, price, buy, and measure word of mouth marketing campaigns.

The goals of the WOMMA Terminology Framework are:

- Create common terminology that enables discussion and measurement across techniques.
- Support existing research and services without requiring major reconfiguration.
- Remain media-neutral and support both offline and online word of mouth.
- Enable calculation of the ROI of word of mouth campaigns that work with standard media plans.
- Support non-traditional campaign objectives, in addition to impression-, conversion-, or awareness-based goals.

Scope

Rather than produce a definitive set of rigid standards, the goal has been to keep this document simple. WOMMA members hope to build on the proposed framework through open discussions with the larger marketing community.

Basic Building Blocks: As the official trade association for the word of mouth marketing industry, our job is to create building blocks for this marketing technique. Individual companies can then tailor these blocks to build more sophisticated models according to their own business needs and requirements.

No Pricing Discussion: Federal anti-trust law prohibits trade associations from discussing pricing issues or models, so these topics are neither addressed here nor will they be in future documents.

Process

This document was drafted by the WOMMA Research and Metrics Council, a mixed-industry working group of market research experts, agencies, brand marketers, academics, and word of mouth marketing specialists. Drafting took place from November 2004 to June 2005 through online, teleconference, and in-person discussions and debates.

Complex issues and decisions that were faced during the drafting process include:

- **Avoiding pre-existing marketing terms.** Since many of these terms have different meanings in different media, every effort has been made to set media-neutral definitions. To improve clarity, we created new terms to replace terms commonly used in other marketing contexts. For example, the committee suggested using "impression" instead of "receipt" to avoid confusion between online advertising and word of mouth marketing measures.
- **Avoiding bias toward online media.** Word of mouth marketing occurs both in online and offline environments. The council established standards that would apply to any technique.
- **Avoiding bias toward active word of mouth campaigns,** as compared to "organic" word of mouth, which is generated through day-to-day customer experience and product design.

Future Work

This document is the first step in bringing order to a new and complex marketing environment. We expect that this document will continue to evolve as the industry evolves. The terms defined in this document are not being published as final definitions, but as a starting point for intense discussion. We chose to publish at this point because the framework is mature enough to be tested and vetted by the marketplace.

We look forward to your feedback and participation.

Framework Overview

Basic Definitions

- **Word of mouth (WOM):** The act of a consumer creating and/or distributing marketing-relevant information to another consumer.
- **Word of mouth marketing:** An effort by an organization to affect how consumers create and/or distribute marketing-relevant information to other consumers. (Alternative: An effort by an organization to encourage, facilitate, and amplify marketing-relevant communication among consumers.)
- **WOM Episode:** A single occurrence of word of mouth communication, which includes Participants, Actions, WOMUnits, Venues, and Outcomes.

Objects

Participants — Creator, Sender, Receiver

Individuals whose actions make up a WOM Episode. Participants may serve multiple roles.

Action

What participants do to create, pass along, or respond to a WOMUnit.

WOMUnit

A single unit of marketing-relevant information shared by a consumer.

Venue

The medium or physical location where the communication takes place.

Outcomes

The marketing impact of a WOM Episode

- **Consumptions:** The Receiver directly consumes the WOMUnit but takes no further action.
- **Inquiries:** The Receiver seeks more information after consuming the WOMUnit.
- **Conversions:** The Receiver completes a desired action after consuming the WOMUnit.
- **Relays:** The Receiver re-distributes the WOMUnit
- **Re-creations:** The Receiver creates a new WOMUnit after consuming the WOMUnit.

Qualities

Terms that describe Participants

- **Propensity:** The likeliness of a consumer to take an action.
- **Demographics:** Descriptive data such as age, gender, location, etc.
- **Credibility:** Ability to impact the behavior or opinions of others.
- **Reach:** A Participant's potential audience size.

Terms that describe Actions

- **Velocity:** The speed at which a WOMUnit moves
- **Distribution Spread:** The number of Receivers reached by a Sender.
- **Source Diversity:** The number of different Senders that send a WOMUnit to a Receiver.

Terms that describe WOMUnits

- **Topicality:** Degree that the marketing message is contained in the WOMUnit.
- **Timeliness:** Whether the WOMUnit arrives in time to be relevant to a campaign.
- **Polarity:** Whether the message content is positive or negative.
- **Clarity:** Whether the message is understood by the receiver.
- **Depth:** The aspects and/or qualities that increase persuasiveness.

Terms that describe Venues

- **Population:** Total possible audience for a WOMUnit in a Venue.
- **Audience:** Number of Receivers that actually get the WOMUnit.
- **Rules:** Whether a WOMUnit complies with policies set by a Venue.



Visual Summary

This chart illustrates what happens during a Word of Mouth Episode.

A Participant takes an Action on a WOMUnit in a Venue, resulting in an Outcome. Each of these objects can be further described by several Qualities.

WOM Episode	Who	How	What	Where	Result
Objects >	Participant	Action	WOMUnit	Venue	Outcome
Qualities >	Propensity Demographics Credibility Reach	Velocity Distribution Spread Source Diversity	Topicality Timeliness Polarity Clarity Depth	Population Audience Rules	



Participants

Participants are . . .

... the individuals whose actions make up a WOM Episode. In most cases, a Participant is a consumer, not a marketer. (This is one of the key elements that distinguishes a word of mouth communication from traditional marketing.)

Types of Participants

- Creator:** A consumer who creates a WOMUnit
- Sender:** A consumer who distributes a WOMUnit
- Receiver:** A consumer who receives a WOMUnit

Notes:

- Participants can fill multiple roles. A Creator and a Sender are often the same person. For example, someone who posts comments on a message board both created and sent the message. A Creator becomes a Sender when he or she relays a message.
- Marketers may act as Participants to start a WOM campaign, but it doesn't become WOM until a consumer passes it along. Example: A marketer creates a viral email, sends it to consumers, who then become Senders when they pass it along.

Qualities that describe Participants

Quality	Description	Example
Propensity	A measure of how likely a Participant is to take an action.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">A high-Propensity Creator would be a person who frequently makes recommendations about a brand.A frequent blogger who mentions products has high Propensity.A high-Propensity Sender could be someone who forwards the WOMUnit to many different people.
Demographics	Standard descriptive demographic characteristics of Participants.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Age, Income, Gender, Education, etc.
Credibility	A measure of a Participant's ability to impact the behavior or opinions of others, as perceived by the Receivers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">A close friend may have more Credibility than an acquaintance.Other doctors may have more Credibility to a physician than pharmaceutical sales reps.The rating of an Amazon.com reviewer.
Reach	A measure of a Participant's potential audience size.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The number of individuals that an individual has on their IM "Buddy List."The number of blogs that link to a particular blogger.The number of members of organizations to which an individual belongs.The number of people in an individual's social or "recommending" circle.



Actions

Actions are ...

... what Participants do with a WOMUnit in a word of mouth communication.

Types of Actions

Creations: Number of WOMUnits created

- A Participant initiates a conversation with one or more people containing marketing-relevant information.
- A Participant writes a review about a new restaurant on a city entertainment web site.

Distributions: Number of WOMUnits distributed

- A Participant recommends a product they have tried to five friends.
- A Participant forwards an email with a review of a software product their company is considering purchasing to three executives.

Receipts: Number of WOMUnits received

- A Participant reads several posts on a message board.
- A Participant hears a recommendation for a product.

Notes:

- Distributions may not always be separate from Creations. For example, verbally telling a friend about a product involves a simultaneous Creation and Distribution.
- Distributions are related to the traditional media measures of Reach and Frequency.

Qualities that describe Actions

Quality	Description	Example
Velocity	A measure of the speed with which a WOMUnit is being distributed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A high Velocity viral email is forwarded to a large audience very quickly.• A low Velocity WOMUnit is a personal recommendation that reaches a target Audience over months.
Distribution Spread	The number of Receivers reached by a single Sender.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• High Distribution Spread is when one Sender tells many different people about a movie they enjoyed, or posts the review on a web site.• Low Distribution Spread is when one Sender tells only a few friends.
Source Diversity	The number of different Senders that send a WOMUnit to a Receiver.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• High Source Diversity is when someone hears about a movie from many different people.• Low Source Diversity is when someone hears about a movie from just a few people.



A WOMUnit is . . .

. . . a single unit of marketing-relevant information. This term describes the message passed from one consumer to another.

The term "WOMUnit" was chosen because it is media-agnostic. Since word of mouth takes place both online and offline, a WOMUnit is a neutral term that reflects the unique nature of word of mouth as a cross-medium form of communication. Creating a standard unit that works across media is the first step toward measuring ROI across all media.

A WOMUnit is a consumer comment — not advertising, PR, or other corporate-driven messaging. If a company purchases an ad, it's an ad. If people talk about the ad, it's a WOMUnit.

Examples: Conversation, comment on a message board, letter to the editor, Amazon.com author review, email, blog post, comment on a blog post, or talk about a news story or PR event.

Qualities that describe WOMUnits

Quality	Description	Example
Topicality	A measure of the degree to which a desired marketing message is contained in the WOMUnit.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In a campaign to promote brightly colored PCs, a message about microprocessors would have low Topicality. A protest campaign about chicken-raising practices against a fast food outlet would have low Topicality for the restaurant, but high Topicality for an activist group.
Timeliness	A measure of whether the WOMUnit arrives in time to be relevant to a specific campaign.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An email about a retail promotion has low Timeliness if it is forwarded after the sale is over.
Polarity	A measure of the positive vs. negative content of the WOMUnit.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants on a travel web site can post reviews and rate their vacation experiences as positive or negative.
Clarity	A measure that determines if a message is understood by the Receiver as it was intended by the Sender.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many customer service web sites now include a link that asks "Was this helpful?"
Depth	The "richness" or amount of visual, written, or verbal information included in a WOMUnit, assuming that these aspects increase message persuasiveness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High-production-value video email may be more persuasive than a text email. An in-depth conversation with a friend is a richer WOMUnit than a casual mention. A communication that gives specific reasons why a consumer had a positive experience with a brand will usually be more persuasive than a simple recommendation.



Venue

A Venue is...

... the medium or location where the communication takes place.

Examples

- In-person conversation
- Blog
- Email
- Concert
- Online community
- Water cooler
- User-group meetings
- Trade shows or conferences
- Social gatherings or civic meetings

Qualities that describe Venues

Quality	Description	Example
Population	The total possible audience for a WOM Unit in the Venue.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The total number of people at a concert is the Population. Those who get told by a street team about a special promotion are the Audience.
Audience	The number of Recipients who receive or are exposed to the WOMUnit, in a given Venue.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A popular blog has a large Population; those who actually read or forward a particular post are the Audience.• A small Population fan club for a band could still be an important WOM venue.
Rules	Rules set by the Venue that limit WOM activities or make a WOMUnit invalid.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• WOMUnits created by a blog-spammer, an actor impersonating a consumer, or vandalizing property would be against the Rules.• WOMMA encourages reporting that identifies unethical WOMUnits that violate the Rules of a Venue.



Outcomes

Outcomes are . . .

. . . the marketing impacts of a WOM Episode. Preferred outcomes vary based on the campaign objectives.

Types of Outcomes

Consumptions

The Receiver directly consumes the WOMUnit and forms an impression of the brand or product/service, but takes no further action. Consumptions correlate to the Action of “Receipt.”

Inquiries

The Receiver seeks more information after consuming the WOMUnit.

Conversions

The Receiver completes a desired action after consuming the WOMUnit.

Relays

The Receiver re-distributes the WOMUnit (thereby becoming a Sender).

Recreations

The Receiver creates a new WOMUnit after consuming the WOMUnit (thereby becoming a Creator).

Discussion of Outcomes

When discussing Outcomes, perspectives and priorities varied widely based on the drafters' fields. For example, agencies were strongly in favor of creating Outcomes that correlated much more strongly with traditional purchase-focused media measures. Grassroots or PR firms saw the Actions themselves as the priority — where getting people to relay or create a message was a worthy outcome in its own right. We chose to take the broader definitions to avoid limiting campaign objectives (and the utility of WOM in general). Objectives may be purchase-related or they may be intermediate objectives (awareness, favorability, consideration).

Many WOM programs address different aspects of the communications lifecycle.

- A traditional promotional campaign may desire Conversions or Inquiries.
- An evangelism/grassroots motivational campaign may desire to inspire a high number of Actions.
- An information-gathering objective may desire participants to provide feedback for study without attempting to drive sales.



Sample Usage of Framework Terms

Objective: Drive brand awareness of a product.

- Example: Use a viral email campaign.
- 600 Participants were recruited to Distribute 6,000 messages (the WOMUnits). These were further Relayed by another 1,000 Receivers, who became Senders. The messages had a high Topicality because they were Relayed with the original text. The Outcome was 15,000 Inquiries to the target web site.

Objective: Activate a loyal user base to get them involved with a product.

- Example: Use an outreach campaign with active users.
- A postcard was sent to 800 active users of the company's online community, asking them to post messages on the community site. There were few Senders and Receivers since the objective was not to have messages sent outside the community. A total of 300 WOMUnits were created by Participants who Re-created their own posts based on the content. The Polarity was highly positive because everyone was a supporter of the cause.

Objective: Promote awareness of a food product using evangelists.

- Example: Give out free samples to recruited evangelists.
- 150 evangelists took the samples and talked about them in real world settings such as stores and community centers. Credibility was very high because Receivers knew the Senders personally. Topicality was low because the desired brand message was about health and most of the conversations were about low price. Nonetheless, Consumptions and Inquiries were very high even if they weren't based on the original brand message.

Objective: Create buzz about an upcoming movie premiere.

- Example: Outreach to blogs read by three groups of highly influential consumers.
- Readers of Group 1 were very high Propensity Senders, which resulted in 1,000 Distributions and a large number of Consumptions. Readers of Group 2 had very low Propensity to become Creators themselves, but those who did turned out to have high Credibility. Group 3 was very actively viral, resulting in a large number of new Creations and Distributions. However, Polarity was negative and Topicality was low because this group was active mainly because they were angry about intrusive marketing on their favorite blogs.

Objective: Drive sales to a retail store.

- Example: Shoppers were sent coupon codes in the mail that they could give to friends via email or in person.
- 60% of the seed group became Senders, each Distributing to an average of 7 Receivers. More than 14% of those Receivers visited the store and 10% of them Converted. Timeliness was low, because a significant number of visits happened after the promotion had ended. 20% of Recipients also became Senders by Relaying the offer.

Objective: Create awareness of an issue.

- Example: Team hats were distributed to consumers at a basketball game Venue to promote a sale of new merchandise.
- Group 1 had very appealing Demographics and mid-level Propensity to share the message. Their message had low Topicality because all that was mentioned was the brand name, not the target attributes. Group 2 was much smaller, but much more active. They described the product with a great deal of detail about colors, features, and other attributes, providing a much more Credible and Deep WOMUnit. This group resulted in far more Inquiries and Conversions.

Objective: Introduce a new portable electronics product.

- Example: Advertise in a series of magazines whose audience Demographics are skewed toward people interested in the product category and have a high Propensity to engage in word of mouth. The ad includes a "call to action" that offers a free product demonstration for "you and your friends."
- The promotion resulted in more than the target number of Inquiries from friends of those who read the ad. Velocity was low, but Topicality was high based on the number of well-informed Receivers asking about the product.



About WOMMA

WOMMA is the official trade association for the word of mouth marketing industry.

Our mission is to build a prosperous word of mouth marketing industry based on ethics, best practices, and measurable ROI.

Our members are leading the efforts necessary to create a new, successful marketing field. We're growing WOM from a small specialty into an essential part of the marketing mix.

- We're fantastic brands and marketers who know that happy customers are our most powerful advocates.
- We're innovative agencies who understand how to empower and amplify the voice of the consumer.
- And we're the good guys, committed to protecting consumers with strong ethical guidelines.

Join us!

Contact Us

Word of Mouth Marketing Association
333 W. North Avenue, #500
Chicago, IL 60610

312-335-0035

www.womma.org