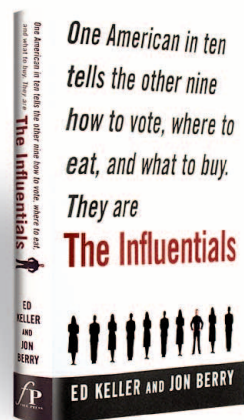


SOUNDVIEW Executive Book Summaries®

FILE: MARKETING



By Ed Keller and Jon Berry

One American in Ten Tells the Other Nine How to Vote, Where to Eat, and What to Buy

THE INFLUENTIALS

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Who are they? They are the most influential Americans — the ones who tell their neighbors what to buy, which politician to support and where to vacation. They aren't necessarily who you expect. They aren't the richest 10 percent or the best educated 10 percent. They aren't the early adopters who are always the first to try everything. They are, however, the 10 percent of Americans most engaged in their communities — where they wield a huge amount of influence. They're the campaigners for open-space initiatives and friends of the public library. They're the Influentials. Together they are the best marketing tool around — using word of mouth to create spirals of influence. With word of mouth increasingly important, they've never been more powerful than now. Today, a fragmented market has made it possible for Influentials to opt-out of mass-message advertising, which means that you must take a different route to reach them.

CONTENTS

**Who Are
The Influentials?**
Pages 2, 3

**The Influential
Personality**
Pages 3, 4

**The Influential
Spiral**
Pages 4, 5

**The Message
Of Influentials**
Pages 5, 6

**The Influential
Vision**
Pages 6, 7

**Developing
An Influential
Strategy**
Pages 7, 8

What You'll Learn In This Summary

This summary will help you reach the Influentials by:

- ✓ Showing you who the Influentials are and where they live and work.
- ✓ Giving you a sense of the Influential personality so you understand what's important to them and why they're so important to you.
- ✓ Showing you how Influentials get ideas and more importantly, how they spread them. If you can reach an Influential, he or she can create a powerful word of mouth influence spiral that spreads the message about your product or service far beyond the individual.
- ✓ Explaining why we're in an age of autonomy and self-reliance and what this means to you and your products and services. You will also learn what seven trends Influentials indicate will guide the marketing future in the next few decades.

Finally, you will discover the six rules for reaching Influentials and getting them on board.

THE INFLUENTIALS

by Ed Keller and Jon Berry

— THE COMPLETE SUMMARY

Who Are the Influentials?

About 25 minutes north of New York City lies Irvington, the kind of small town idealized as the perfect place to raise a family. In Irvington, Isabel Milano stands out as an active member of the community. The 42-year-old mother of two was one of the organizers of the Irvington Education Foundation. She ran for village trustee, and won. In the process, she has become a community leader. Because she gets around and knows lots of people, she is often asked questions about topics unrelated to her role as volunteer and trustee. The questions range from restaurant recommendations to child care advice to how to secure a patent for an invention. She didn't have the answer to the last one, but found it.

Isabel Milano is an Influential American. About one

Demographics: Who Is the Typical Influential?

A man or a woman (50 percent each)

Middle-aged

.... 45.2 years old for median (+2.3 years from the total public)

Middle/upper-middle class

.... \$55,300 median household income (+\$17,900 from the total public)

College educated

.... 80 percent have attended college (+30 points from total public)

.... 49 percent are college graduates (+26 points from total public)

Married with children

.... 70 percent are married (+13 points from total public)

.... 53 percent with children at home

Homeowners

.... 74 percent own their own home

Employed

.... 72 percent are in work force

.... 58 percent in full-time job

Executive or professional

.... 34 percent as the leading occupation (+19 points from total public)

Source: Roper Reports

out of 10 Americans are, and their effect in their communities is easy to see. They hear where people are going on vacation and get feedback when travelers return. They then spread the good or bad reviews much like continuously updated Zagat's guides. Because of their strategic placement at the center of conversations in their communities and the nation, the Influentials are an important intersection for business, government and society. Because they know many people and get around, they have a powerful multiplier effect, spreading the word quickly across a broad network when they find something they want to tell others about. The result can accelerate trends in the broader society or bring them to a crawl.

Just who are these people? They don't fit the stereotype of who runs the country. Many have reached material success but they aren't among the richest Americans. They are well educated, but not among the most educated. They have done well in their careers but aren't at the top of their industry.

Influentials have some common demographic characteristics. They tend to be well educated — the vast majority have attended college and 20 percent have done graduate work. Most are employed full- or part-time, are married, have children and own homes. The median age is 45 and their median income is healthy — about \$55,000 per year. They're technologically literate. Politically, they are centrists.

What Defines an Influential?

Demographics alone don't define Influentials. What most identified Influential Americans is their activism.

(continued on page 3)

The authors: Ed Keller is the CEO of RoperASW, a global marketing research and consulting company that serves many of the world's leading companies. Jon Berry is a vice president with RoperASW.

Copyright© 2003 by RoperASW, LLC. Summarized by permission of the publisher, The Free Press, a division of Simon & Schuster Inc., 1230 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10020. 353 pages. \$26.00. 0-7432-2729-8.

For Additional Information on a typical Influential, go to:
<http://my.summary.com>

For Additional Information on the authors, go to:
<http://my.summary.com>

Published by Soundview Executive Book Summaries (ISSN 0747-2196), P.O. Box 1053, Concordville, PA 19331 USA, a division of Concentrated Knowledge Corporation. Published monthly. Subscriptions: \$195 per year in U.S., Canada & Mexico, and \$275 to all other countries. Periodicals postage paid at Concordville, PA and additional offices.

Postmaster: Send address changes to Soundview, P.O. Box 1053, Concordville, PA 19331. Copyright © 2003 by Soundview Executive Book Summaries.

Available formats: Summaries are available in print, audio and electronic formats. To subscribe, call us at 1-800-521-1227 (1-610-558-9495 outside U.S. & Canada), or order on the Internet at www.summary.com. Multiple-subscription discounts and Corporate Site Licenses are also available.

Soundview Executive Book Summaries®

GREER MCPHADEN — Senior Contributing Editor
DEBRA A. DEPRINZIO — Art and Design
CHRIS LAUER — Managing Editor
CHRISTOPHER G. MURRAY — Editor-in-Chief
GEORGE Y. CLEMENT — Publisher

Who Are the Influentials?

(continued from page 2)

They attend community meetings, write and call their representatives, serve on committees, attend political events and are active persuading others of their point of view. They are volunteers who lead busy personal lives. They read, listen to music, eat out, spend time on hobbies and have friends over frequently.

Influentials are also connected. They have ties to a significantly larger number of groups than the average American. This focus on people is a major factor in their influence on the larger society. Their contacts create new opportunities that bring them into contact with more people, in turn creating more opportunities and more contacts in an ever-widening network.

Being connected helps Influentials on many levels. It introduces them to different points of view and increases the opportunity to encounter information they might not otherwise get on subjects from social and political issues to everyday decisions. It allows them to traverse economic and social boundaries and establish relationships with people whom they might otherwise not meet. It gives them contacts they can call on if they have a question or are trying to rally support for an issue.

The third essential Influential quality is influence. They are people others look up to for advice. Influentials say people ask them just about anything — from their opinion on politics to raising children to what car to buy to health care. In fact, research suggests that Influentials have the most influence across a breadth of topics compared with other groups.

The Influentials are people with active minds. They typically have a restless intellect — continually taking input from what they see, hear and read, and turning it all over in their minds for new insights and ideas. They maintain interests in many areas. They are heavy readers of books, papers, magazines and online materials.

Influentials are trendsetters for the larger society.

How to Reach Influentials

Want to engage Influentials? You have to go where they go. Influentials expect companies to take an interest in more than profits — to contribute to their communities and other causes. Try these tips:

- ✓ Support groups Influentials support through cause-related marketing programs.
- ✓ Sponsor events for educational foundations and youth sports programs.
- ✓ Encourage employees to volunteer and get involved in community events.

An Essential Influential Tool: The Cell Phone

Influentials were integral in building the market for cell phones. By 1992, when fewer than half of the public had heard of them, mobile phones had virtually universal awareness among Influentials. Within two years the product was gaining a foothold among them. By 1995, 14 percent of Influentials had a cell phone, double the general public penetration. By 1997, the proportion had reached 40 percent and by 2001, 62 percent. They have been about three years ahead of the public all along. Today, Influentials are ready for cell phones to do more — such as access e-mail and get news updates.

Although they aren't the most voracious consumers, they do seem to discover important products and services early and adopt them. They serve as a test laboratory for the mainstream market. They were among the first to have a personal computer and get online. They were among the first to recognize the Internet's potential. They were among the first to use automated teller machines, VCRs, camcorders, invest in IRAs and bottled water. They also foreshadow the decline of products. For example, Influentials were the first both into and out of the small car market and showed the rest of us the value of sports utility vehicles. ■

For Additional Information on Influentials' entrepreneurial leanings, go to: <http://my.summary.com>

The Influential Personality

Influentials are drawn into action, often overcoming personal obstacles. Sometimes Influentials seem to be the keepers of the flame for the ideas that are central to the larger society. In learning about Influentials' values, we also learn about the values of the nation. The Influentials' sense of priorities comes through on three key questions that have been used for years as gauges of Americans' aspirations — their ideas of what "the American Dream" and "the Good Life" are and what they consider to be life's necessities.

Influentials also think change is a good thing and that people, communities and society are capable of change. They are optimistic about the new century. They believe they will achieve their goals and that an individual can have at least some small effect on the course of the nation. They are clear-headed about their priorities. They don't "want it all." Instead they want opportunity,

(continued on page 4)

The Integrated Influential Home

One of the ways Influentials lead trends is through adapting what they see elsewhere — ideas, products and services — into something that works for them. One example is the integrated life. Through piecing together such new technologies as computers and cell phones and new ideas like flex-time schedules, Influentials very consciously seem to be reshaping their work lives to be able to devote more time to family, activities in the community, hobbies and interests. Rather than separate from each other the workday and the rest of life, work and personal time were brought together in new ways to make life better.

This trend toward integration is especially obvious at home. The Influential's home is a hub of pursuits, a private retreat, a family haven, an entertainment center, a social hub, a financial asset, a workplace and a hobby center. People at one time had only one choice — go out — but they increasingly have an option to stay home. The result has created a growth path for business.

The Influential Personality

(continued from page 3)

freedom, a home, marriage, children, meaningful work, enough leisure time to enjoy life, a secure retirement, and balance. Many seem to have arrived at the goal — suggesting this group knows something about not just what makes for a satisfying life but also how to go about achieving it.

Influentials place a strong value on individual rights but also believe in the value of community. They believe, for example, that they have a responsibility to neighbors and community that goes beyond what the law requires of them. They also believe that business has a similar obligation to consider what is good for society, not just what's good for profits. ■

The Influential Spiral

Because they are the most engaged Americans, Influentials are conduits of information for their communities and the nation. Their activist bent, many connections and active minds as well as the sheer force of their personalities make Influentials natural intersections for intelligence. They know more than others, hear about things first and broadcast what they know to many people.

The result is a spiral of influence. As the Influentials' efforts to learn something new bear results, they're inspired to further exploration and experimentation,

which yields further results — which they share with others in an ever-widening circle of influence and change.

Take, for example, the Influentials' early interest in computers, which was already evident in 1981. They acquired computers early and took to learning first generation applications like word-processing. This in turn led them to see the potential benefits of PCs ahead of others and to take advantage of the technology to work from home, tap into the Internet, shop, invest, file taxes and to store and disseminate their photos. Today 34 percent of Influentials report being regularly asked for advice on computers.

Clearly, it is important for businesses to reach Influentials. But the problem is that traditional methods don't work well. Influentials don't respond well to traditional advertising: They don't watch much television, don't do leisure shopping and don't have time to read ads in newspapers and magazines. Decisions are often a group conversation. The message enters a group. It's dissected, analyzed, and discussed by the group and meshed with other sources of information. More voices make it easier to cut through the marketing to the key issues. Is it really new? Is the quality good? Does it solve a problem?

Influentials are not waiting for a product or service like a relay runner waiting for a baton. They want what they want when they want it. Influentials are more like marathon runners stopping briefly at a water station. If you want to reach them, you must place your water station along their route. These are the rules of their route:

- **They use multiple sources of information.**
- **They put people first.** Word-of-mouth is more important than traditional media.
- **They believe in sharing what they know.**
- **They are voracious readers.**
- **The companies they buy from must practice continuous meaningful improvements or risk being overtaken by competitors who do.**
- **Buzz is not guaranteed.** Influentials want better products and services but don't always have time to keep up with what's new.
- **Influentials trust their instincts.**

Multiple Sources of Information

How can businesses become part of Influentials' conversations? Influentials consume an eclectic media mix. An Influential may read the local newspaper, the *New York Times*, the *New Yorker*, listen to *NPR* and leaf through *People* and *Martha Stewart Living* while reading a book for a book club or one discovered in a good review. In short, they are information sponges.

Influentials also use more channels to communicate.

(continued on page 5)

The Influential Spiral

(continued from page 4)

On average, they use six channels, including the phone, one on one, the mail, online services, e-mail and faxes. The average person uses just the first three.

Yet personal recommendations remain the favorite way for Influentials to receive information. With Influentials, nothing beats word of mouth. The cue for institutions from business to government should be obvious: The door should always be open for Influentials when they have a question or concern. Those who represent the company — particularly salespeople, customer service representatives, investor relations personnel and others in public positions — should be well-informed about the business and its products, and empowered to address concerns.

Influentials don't hold back their opinions when they find something they like or don't like. Over the course of a year, Influentials have an aggregate impact of millions of word-of-mouth recommendations. Since they broadcast their recommendations to a large network of friends, relatives and acquaintances, they create a large multiplier effect, multiplying the scope of their influence beyond the size of the group.

Companies need to practice "continuous improvement" by continuously re-proving their value to consumers. You must make significant and meaningful improvements to your products and services to keep the buzz going. To keep the Influentials' attention, you must find compelling messages to deliver.

So how do you become part of the conversation? For many Influentials, the starting point is the printed word. Influentials are big readers. They love newspapers, magazines and books and rate them as great idea sources. In particular, they use newspapers for ideas about new jobs, new products, new movies and which products are best. They use magazines for ideas about home improvement, places to visit, cooking, clothing and which car to buy. They turn to books for ideas on retirement, investing and health. ■

The Message of Influentials

Influentials are at the forefront of the self-reliance movement. They focus on doing something about the problems facing their communities and the challenges in their personal lives. This movement toward self-reliance and local grassroots activism is a theme that connects many of the changes taking place in society today, from the growing priority Americans place on saving for retirement to their willingness to learn new technologies and the comeback of traditional values. Americans are increasingly looking inward for answers.

An important marketplace manifestation of the emerging trend of self-reliance is "the tactical consumer." Americans are looking for product promotions and sales. They reject brands that carry a premium price and instead demand quality at a good price. They've become smart shoppers and aren't likely to turn back anytime soon. The population today can be self-reliant because it is more mature, older on average, more educated and more adept than earlier generations. This is a good set of ingredients for brewing more responsible, self-reliant workers, consumers and citizens.

There is good reason to believe that the movement toward self-reliance will continue to be a defining theme for years to come. Businesses and institutions need to take account of these attitudes and behaviors with their products, services, communications and operations. The trend has a strong force behind it. A wealth of new technologies and businesses are now predicated on self-reliance, from the mutual fund industry to retailers like Home Depot. Those businesses who are adapting well to the new American are those who tap into this new independent-minded, tactical, self-reliant and autonomous consumer by not providing a solution. Instead, they provide resources to facilitate solutions in tandem with consumer-citizens. They are equipped to be full partners.

The Role of Influentials

Influentials have played a dual role in the self-reliance movement. They have led the way in adopting many of the new products and services that enhance self-reliance: computers, the Internet, cell phones and self-directed retirement plans. On the other hand, their basic ideas have not changed much at all. Instead, it seems that it is the general public that has changed to become more like the Influentials. In essence, they have become role models for the national agenda.

Some key dynamics worth watching include:

A different kind of activism: Americans are doing some things more than they were a decade ago. More are volunteering and more are setting up new community groups to address problems.

Thinking outside of the orthodox box: When getting involved, the emphasis seems to be on being effective and relevant. Influentials don't migrate to old interest groups or charities: They may even form their own.

Return to values: Influentials appreciate their background and strive to preserve traditions and customs. They also see lack of morals as a major societal problem. To that end, they believe that parents and others in the community have a responsibility to guide children, including businesses that cater to children and youth.

Levels of confidence: Influentials know being self-

(continued on page 6)

The Message of Influentials

(continued from page 5)

reliant doesn't mean knowing everything. People bring different levels of confidence to different subjects. But Influentials seek out knowledge to fill the gaps. Businesses must work hard to reach the right level of communication — not so complicated that customers can't follow, not so simple that they are offended.

Self-improvement and learning: A major component of the self-reliant mind-set is learning. ■

The Influential Vision

Influentials catch ideas well before they move into the mainstream. They do this by moving back and forth between different communities while keeping their eyes open to the world around them. Through their sense of priorities and their ability to engage others in what they care about through their activism and broad social networks, they drive their ideas into the broader culture.

Their orientation toward growth and change inevitably lead Influentials to think more about the future than the average person. They daydream about the future and are in effect the “early majority,” seeing what the majority of Americans will be doing in two to five years. The subjects that interest them, the projects they're involved with, the activities they're pursuing, and the products they're intrigued by are leading indicators of what is to come in the broader culture.

Influentials think the future will bring severe problems, particularly problems related to technology, like privacy and techno-terrorism. But they aren't crippled by these problems. They aren't pessimistic. Instead, they think future problems can be tackled — just like they're tackling present ones. Building on what they have accomplished, they think society can take steps forward and address the issues one by one.

Seven Trends Important to Influentials

This combination of interest in the future and confidence about what it holds can be counted on to create further “spirals of influence” for the initiatives, issues, products and services that the Influentials deem to “matter” in creating a better future. Together, Influentials illuminate these seven trends that have great importance for business, government, culture and society:

The Legacies Agenda: Every era has an issue that defines it. In the 1960s it was the civil rights movement and the sexual and cultural revolution of the Baby Boom. In the first decades of the 21st century the issue the United States will focus on is its legacy. The focus is the children of the Boomers and future generations. This concentration on what the legacy will be for the

next generation will be the impetus for major social and political initiatives. There will be government reform, new monuments and public buildings and parks. Three issues will predominate — quality public education, the breakdown of the family, and the way young people think and act. The rising cost of health care and wrongdoing by elected government officials are also issues.

Global Connections: The American lifestyle is a lot like modern cars — assembled from parts made all over the world. Between travel, work, the globalization of the marketplace, and the innate curiosity Influentials have, the globally connected lifestyle will accelerate at a faster pace than many people appreciate. New global standards may emerge. So far, people in business have concentrated in the “act local” part of the call to “think global, act local.” The future will include greater focus on thinking globally. Influentials are likely to continue cross-fertilization of ideas, tastes, fashions, reading, popular culture, home furnishings and even beliefs.

High Pace, High Peace: Influentials integrate periods of relaxation in their day. It may be a regular stop at a coffee shop, diner, park or church, but it is regular. As the pace of life has picked up, demands for peace have accelerated. Americans work harder, juggling busy personal schedules and their kids, lessons, practices, and play dates. But the pace was wearing Americans down. In response, growing numbers of Americans are carving out “high peace” from life's “high pace,” creating a haven where they can get away from it all. It may be vacations, weekend trips, dinners out, spa days, massages, church, yoga and coffee breaks. Upcoming years will see more opportunities for businesses to help Americans manage their stress.

The PC-Centered World: Want to watch *Casablanca* tonight? Push a few buttons and ask the television to retrieve it from the movie database on the server. Not there? Ask it to go onto the Web and find it. Going to the doctor? Call up the records from last year's checkup and download them onto your medical smart card. It's all possible. Influentials are expanding the influence of the computer in the home. Influentials have a tech-oriented view of the future. They worry about privacy, but embrace the promise of technology anyway. But there is a wide gap between those Influentials who want to apply computer technologies to their lives and those who do. There is substantial room for businesses to capitalize on that gap and help Influentials fulfill the promise of their computers and other electronic tools.

Living Longer Stronger: Sixty-year-olds have climbed Mount Everest while ninety-year-olds have topped the best-seller lists. Second, third and fourth careers are possible. And this is only the beginning as most of the U.S.

(continued on page 7)

The Influential Vision

(continued from page 6)

population growth in the decades to come will be in its older population. Influentials are pointing out that old age isn't what it used to be. Old is getting older and is viewed more favorably. Being old is also getting easier, as is looking younger. Older Americans expect to remain self-reliant. Expect a boom in new products, services and technologies, as well as self-help books and seminars on how to get more out of old age.

No Big Brothers: The Influential Americans are all too aware of the possibility that the future will be like George Orwell's *1984*, with Big Brother monitoring even the minutest detail of life. They're doing their best, though, to construct a life that resounds with empowerment. They want a future with parity between people in the currency of information. Their self-reliant desire to have autonomy over personal information is already bumping up against the relationship marketing goal of many businesses that want to collect more information on consumers to serve them better. Privacy is a major concern of Influentials.

The Limits of Convenience: For decades, companies have preached the gospel of convenience, dedicating themselves to making everything faster and more efficient. Consumers generally have welcomed this. But among Influentials, convenience has begun to hit a wall. Sometimes convenience is not enough, especially if convenience comes at the cost of quality. Influentials aren't fond of convenience staples like fast food and microwave meals. Instead, Influentials save time by cleaning less, buying in bulk, multitasking in the car, and shopping online and via catalogs. Discount stores and nonstore shopping venues will benefit as will the market for gourmet food and good restaurants. ■

For Additional Information on how Influentials feel about customer relationship programs, go to: <http://my.summary.com>

Developing an Influential Strategy

"What's your influential strategy?" If you haven't asked yourself this question already, you should. To succeed today, you need to connect with people who are at the center of the conversation. Businesses, governments and nonprofit organizations must have Influential strategies just as they need marketing, advertising, public relations, promotion and Internet strategies.

Specifically, you should make sure you are reaching the decision makers who are influential in others' decisions. You should know where the opinion leaders get their ideas — the kinds of publications they read, the programs

they watch, the radio stations they listen to and the Web sites they visit. You must not shut the door when an opinion leader comes to you with a complaint or a question. You need to be out in the community listening to opinion leaders' concerns and paying attention to what's happening in opinion leaders' lives. Ask yourself if your products and services, environmental stance and corporate practices would be met with Influential approval.

Be Prepared to Enter the Conversation

Realize that you are in an all-important battle for share of mind — the space in the consumer's thinking that holds opinions about products, services, companies, political candidates, solicitations from nonprofit groups, and other issues. You must be prepared to enter the conversations of everyday life, discovering common ground with opinion leaders and offering solutions to their problems. Speak to Influential values.

There are clear business benefits to winning the favor of opinion leaders. Influentials are not only active in their communities: They have an active approach to life. They are connected to nearly twice as many groups as the average American and are intellectually engaged in a variety of topics from news and current events to health and fitness, history, technology, travel, art and cooking.

With the multiplier effect of Influentials, the result can generate buzz far beyond their proportion in the population. But how do you go about getting into the conversation of the opinion leaders? You must find a way to reach the people whom people turn to when they need ideas and information. There are six rules you should use to reach the Influentials. They are:

1. Be Where the Information Is

Succeeding with Influentials begins with information. A salient, meaningful piece of information is a conversation starter. It can also make a difference in a decision that is critical to Influentials, such as achieving financial independence. Getting good information is integral to Influentials' decision process. They value information; businesses that want their attention should begin with offering them good, high-quality information. Where do you place the information? In media that are rich in information because that's where Influentials migrate.

Advertising isn't always the way to go. Placement in magazine or newspaper articles works better. When you do advertise, you must entertain and inform. Respect their intelligence. Don't exaggerate the benefits of your products or services or make unfair or misleading comparisons. Remember that public television gets high marks among Influentials. Sponsorship may help there, as can selective ads on special interest cable outlets like the History Channel and Home and Garden TV.

(continued on page 8)

Developing an Influential Strategy

(continued from page 7)

2. When Critics Come Knocking, Invite Them In

For several years now, Leonard Pitt has been waging a one-person campaign to get companies from whom he buys products online and through mail order to stop packing merchandise with plastic foam peanuts. He's written letters, sent e-mail, called customer service representatives, and he's stopped buying from companies that don't listen. He's not alone among Influentials. At any given time, large numbers of Influentials are doing the same thing. About 40 percent have had a problem with a product or service in the last year and many try to do something about it. According to one survey, virtually all Influentials who did have a complaint did something about it. When someone comes to you with a complaint, he or she is probably an Influential.

What did Influentials do when they complained? Many returned the product or complained to management. Many told friends and family about the problem and stopped buying the product or service. When a call comes into a consumer complaint center, companies should assume it's from an Influential. Don't shy away from their criticism: Engage it and assess its merit with the individual making the call. Keep tabs on Influential criticism.

3. Get Out Into the Community

One of the best ways to win Influential favor is to become active in a cause that will produce tangible benefits in peoples' lives. Build sports fields, sponsor Girl Scout activities and create or maintain parks. In surveys, Influentials say they would welcome more locally cause-related marketing. They prefer programs with tangible results over softer, feel-good campaigns. College scholarships, internships, donations directly to schools to buy supplies and sponsorship of after-school activities score high. While cause-marketing campaigns can't make up for a poor product, they can tip the scale in your favor when price and quality is equal. Influentials are willing to switch brands for a good cause.

Most Influentials think businesses have obligations to four groups: consumers, workers, community and shareholders. They want businesses to make safe products, protect the health and safety of workers and the environment, advertise honestly, pay their fair share of taxes, charge fair prices, be good citizens in the communities in which they operate, and provide good wages and benefits for workers. In other words, they expect customers to come first, then the nation, and then shareholders.

4. Make it Easier and Then Make it Easier Still

When Influentials talk about brands, they usually do so in terms of how easy the brand has made their life. Saving money, getting good value for the dollar, and

Decisions Are Conversations: The Growing Power of Word of Mouth

Do the Influentials compete with your marketing efforts? The evidence says, "Yes." Businesses were once able to build huge consumer brands by sending out messages to consumers through television advertisements. Today, those advertisements — in fact, any marketing message through any outlet — are being filtered through the word-of-mouth analyses of friends, family and colleagues.

The research proves it. Twelve consumer decisions — including decisions about places to visit, movies to see, the merits of one car versus another and improving the appearance of home — were tracked over a number of years (in some cases back to 1977). In every category, the total percentage of Americans citing "friends," "family" and "other people" among the "two or three best sources of ideas or information" is substantially higher than at the start of the trend.

Since 1977, for example, the percentage of Americans citing word-of-mouth among the best sources of ideas and information for decisions on improving the appearance of your home rose 25 percent points (from 44 percent to 69 percent). As for deciding where to eat, word-of-mouth today has an astounding 85 point edge over the second source of information: advertising.

making life easier are the main focus when Influentials go shopping. They are, however, willing to pay extra for making life easier. They aren't impulse buyers, either, and they don't care about "prestigious" brands and often buy brands they know and trust. Your marketing must convey the practical benefits of your products or services.

5. Know the 'Exceptions' and Keep Up With Them

Influentials are utilitarians in many areas, but they make "exceptions to the rule." Their homes are one as are automobiles. They also indulge in travel and personal health. Another frequent exception to the rule that products must be good quality and at a fair price is their penchant to shop locally, such as at an organic farm or farmers market and non-chain stores.

6. Be a Brand and Tell the World

Influentials are skeptical of marketing and demanding of businesses, but they hold a high opinion of brands. They often believe a particular brand is worth paying more for. Don't be afraid to market your brand to Influentials. They likely will stick with it once they're sold on its quality and other benefits. ■