

# Marketing

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## BIRTH OF BUZZ

By Eric Blais

### The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference BY MALCOLM GLADWELL (LITTLE BROWN, 2000)

Nowhere in this book is the word "marketing" mentioned. Yet this is a book that marketers should definitely read. Even if you're skeptical about buzz marketing, viral marketing, guerrilla marketing or word-of-mouth marketing, it's hard to deny that it works. Let's face it, ideas can now spread faster and more credibly through interpersonal networks via the Internet than through more conventional marketing activities.

I first read about Gladwell's ideas in a 1997 article from *The New Yorker* about a cool-hunter from Boston named DeeDee who had predicted the sandal craze and ended up working with Converse to design a retro sneaker-sandal that became a huge success. DeeDee is what Gladwell calls a market maven and connector. Market mavens are people who are especially involved with or fascinated by a particular product category, and actively seek out new ideas, trends and innovations. Connectors are people who mostly acquire their information about what's cool from hanging out with mavens and then spread the message. There are also super-connectors with "gold-plated Rolodexes" who, although not especially innovative themselves, network incessantly.

Recognizing that the buzz about buzz marketing was growing, Marian Salzman, Ira Matathia and Ann O'Reilly subsequently authored *Buzz: Harness the Power of Influence and Create Demand* (Wiley, 2003). Market mavens became alphas and connectors became bees but the theory isn't much different. While *Buzz* is a business book about demand creation, *The Tipping Point* is "an intellectual adventure story" which makes it a more mind-opening read. Another book, the rather scholarly *Diffusion of Innovations* by Everett Rogers (1962), introduced marketers to innovators, early adopters, early and late majority and laggards. It remains the textbook on how people adopt innovations, but Gladwell's book about social epidemics brings the theory to life with rich examples and provides guidelines and rules to harness buzz for a brand.

**ERIC BLAIS**, president of Toronto consultancy Headspace Marketing, writes monthly on the 10 must-read books for marketers