Word-of-mouth marketing is the most powerful and persuasive weapon you can use, and it won’t cost you anything! Based on Silverman’s years of consulting with successful word-of-mouth campaigns of his own clients, here is one of the first resources on how to harness the power of word-of-mouth, and be heard above the media noise. Spread the word about your hot new product or company!

The Copernican Revolution in Marketing
Just as it is untrue that the sun revolves around the earth, marketing does not revolve around advertising, selling, and promotions. Much of marketing is illusion-creation. This encompasses product image, positioning, brand identity, etc.

Word-of-mouth is actually the center of the marketing universe. People talk about ads they see, information they have read, and it is the talk that persuades one to buy, not the actual marketing material. When a satisfied, happy customer recommends your product or service, it comes across as genuine, objective, and unsolicited. The main thing is to build a great relationship with customers so they will always speak favorably about your business. Getting the customer to sell your product through word-of-mouth is the best way to increase sales.

The other side of the coin...
Studies have shown that a satisfied customer will tell an average of three people about a product or service she likes, and eleven people about a product or service with which she had a negative experience. So word-of-mouth marketing can backfire if you don’t watch how you treat your customers, you may create your own bad reputation.

Word of Mouth is more important now than ever before.
Today is the Information Age and none of us have the time to digest huge quantities of information. Traditional advertising is on the decline. It costs more to advertise now, and the results are less effective. Word of mouth becomes a necessary time-saver. Customers will filter the information they receive, and pass it on and give us the benefit of their experience.

E-mail, chat rooms, forums, Websites, and teleconferences will bring us the word of mouth that saves time and money.

1. Dominating your market by shortening the customer decision cycle

It may be widely believed the 3 ways to increase sales are by:

- Increasing number of customers
- Increasing dollar amount each customer spends per purchase
- Increasing the frequency of purchase

But the most important way by which sales can increase is by increasing the speed with which decisions are made.
Decision speed determines product success

Decision speed is the time it takes for your customer to go from initial awareness to enthusiastic use and recommendation of your product or service. Simplicity, ease, and fun govern the decision process.

The company that makes it easier for a customer to decide will acquire customers faster and increase market share. Faster decision cycles can improve the market share by up to 100 times.

Remember: Marketing success is determined more by the time it takes for your customer to decide on your product than by any other single factor. Decision speed is more powerful than positioning, image, value, customer satisfaction, guarantees, or even product superiority. Focusing on it forces you to organize these factors into the most potent combination possible.

Minimize Decision Friction

The process of deciding is slowed down by the effort of gathering information, weighing options, testing and evaluating results, and persuading others. Identify and minimize just a few of those decision bottlenecks for your customers, and you reduce their decision time by more than half! This in effect will multiply sales and market share of your product or service.

Decision Acceleration: The Secret to Shortening the Customer’s Decision Cycle

- Benefits, claims, and promises must be obvious and compelling.
- Information must be clear, balanced, and credible.
- Comparisons must reveal meaningful differences.
- Make trials easy
- Evaluations must be crystal clear and simple.
- Guarantees should be ironclad and generous.
- Testimonials and other word-of-mouth marketing must be relevant and believable.
- Delivery, training, and support offered must be superior.

Some of the better Web sites not only hand out information, but more importantly, they are designed to guide the customer through the decision-making process. Some may have different tracks for beginners, and sophisticated customers, they use comparison charts and rating sheets, and layout information in a manner that is easy to understand. They also include discussion groups, toll-free numbers, ways to download trial software, application samples and help desks. The key word in these Web sites is simplicity.

What has the greatest effect on accelerating customer decisions? Word-of-mouth.

2. The Power of Word of Mouth

People need a trusted advisor to encourage them to use a product or service. To better understand word-of-mouth, remember this path:

- The best way to increase profits is to accelerate favorable product decisions.
- The best way to accelerate product decisions is to make them easier.
- The best way to make the decision easier is to deliver word-of-mouth, instead of low-credibility advertising, salespeople, or traditional marketing.
Word-of-mouth is thousands of times more powerful than conventional marketing. People respond to advertising maybe once in several thousand exposures. The response is rarely to purchase, but to ask for more information. But when a friend tells you about a great book, film, or product, you are more likely to take his word for it. On the average, you’ll two out of five recommendations he makes. Now that’s a major difference in the power of word-of-mouth over advertising.

What exactly is this powerful marketing tool?

Word-of-mouth is communication about products and services between people who are perceived to be independent of the company providing the product or service, in a medium perceived to be independent of the company.

Advertising, on the other hand, is the communication of a message chosen, designed, and carefully worded by the seller of a product or service in a medium that is either owned or rented.

So in a nutshell, word-of-mouth brings:

- Accelerated customer decisions
- Independent credibility, a third party recommendation
- Experience delivery, or the benefit of someone else’s experience trying the product.

Which can all translate into greater sales and profits!

Other reasons word-of-mouth is a powerful persuader:

It is custom tailored to the individual receiving the information. Your friend will not recommend something unless she knows you will be interested.
It’s more honest, relevant, and complete.
It is customer driven.
It is self-generating. It takes on a life of its own. You can see this as to how fast a good joke can circulate on the E-mails. An ad may be seen by a limited number of people. Word of mouth is passed on to an unlimited number of people. Think of the power Oprah has whenever she talks about a new book, the sales of that book usually hit the roof.
It becomes one of the products attributes, “Everyone is talking about…” A favorite movie star or a film reviewer can make or break the ticket sales for a film.
The source of the word-of-mouth, most preferably an expert, can be critically important.
Word-of-mouth saves time and money. A customer can try a product and recommend it to a friend, or the friend can borrow it. It saves the new customer time and money she would have spent searching the market for the product she needs.

When we understand …

What is the content of the word of mouth?
Who is the source generating the word of mouth?
Who is receiving it? And
What are the channels through which it travels?

Then we will be ready to see how to trigger a chain reaction and make it go in our direction.
3. The Nine Levels of Word of Mouth

Word of mouth levels range from the negative (minus levels) to the positive (plus levels).

Minus 4

People are talking about your product. It is a public scandal. This is what happened to Tylenol and other products that were found to be unsafe.

Minus 3

Customers and ex-customers go out of their way to convince people to boycott your product.

Minus 2

When asked, customers will complain and have bad things to say about your product, but they will not go out of their way to do so.

Minus 1

People are not actively complaining about your product, but they have negative things to say when asked, and they are mildly dissatisfied. People may buy despite the negatives, particularly if they have no other choice.

Level 0

People are using your product, but they are rarely asked to talk about it, and they don't volunteer an opinion either. People generally have nothing much to say about it.

Plus 1

When asked, people have nice things to say about your product, but they will not necessarily go out of their way to tell others about it. If asked, they'll recommend their dry cleaner, dentist, or the new café down at the corner.

Plus 2

When asked, customers will rave and go on and on about how great your product is.

Plus 3

Customers go out of their way to convince others to see the new film, get the latest book, or that they must try this new product or service.

Plus 4

Your product is the talk of the town. Experts, local influencers, customers, and prospects are all talking to each other and raving about its virtues. People will expect a lot, so be careful not to disappoint them.
Examples of Plus 4’s or those that benefited from word of mouth:

- Lexus Automobiles
- Saturn Car Company
- Harley-Davidson
- Netscape Navigator
- Celestial seasonings herbal tea
- The Internet
- Apple Computer

4. Harnessing Word of Mouth

The Six-Step Process:

- Figure out why someone should buy your product, given his values or priorities.
- Identify predominant adopter types: innovators, early adopters, middle majority, late adopters, and laggards.
- Identify the crucial decision stages needed to adopt your product.
- Combine step 2 and 3, using the Decision Matrix* to identify content, the actual words of your word-of-mouth.
- Identify, design and create the sources and delivery mechanisms of word of mouth that will be most persuasive.
- Create and implement the word-of-mouth campaign.

*The Decision Matrix is a chart of the kinds of concerns different types of adopters have at different stages of the decision process, and the specific word of mouth content these people need to hear and that you need to stimulate in order to convince them to take the next steps. It is the result of the author’s 30 years of experience.

30 Ways of harnessing word of mouth

Using experts:

- Customers
- Suppliers
- Experts
- Salespeople
- Experts’ roundtables
- Experts’ selling groups

Seminars, workshops, and speeches:

- Speakers program
- Seminars
- Group selling
- Dinner meetings
- Peer selling groups
- Teleconferenced experts’ panels
- Trade show events/opportunities
Canned "Word of Mouth:

- Videotapes
- Audiotapes
- World Wide Web
- CDs

Referral Selling:

- Testimonials
- Networking
- Referral Selling Program

New Media:

- Hotlines
- Faxback services
- Web-based word of mouth, forums, e-mail, etc.
- Call centers

Using traditional media for Word of Mouth:

- Customer service as a word-of-mouth engine
- PR
- Placements
- Events
- Promotions
- Word of mouth in ads, sales brochures, or direct mail
- Salesperson programs, sales stars, peer training, or using salespeople as word-of-mouth generators
- Word-of-mouth incentive programs ("Tell-a-friend" programs)
- Useful gifts to customers (articles, how-to manuals) that they can give their friends

Internal Word of Mouth

Employees should be actively spreading word of mouth about your products. Spread stories around about examples of superior customer service. Give people a common mission and make rewards dependent on the accomplishment of that mission.
5. Using Word of Mouth to Speed the Decision Process

The decision process takes place in 5 broad stages:

Stage 1. Deciding to decide. Going from disinterested status to active investigation.

Stage 2. Selecting among options. This entails identifying, studying, and weighing options.

Stage 3. Trial. Observing the product in use and evaluating its performance.


Stage 5. Expanding use and recommending. Moving beyond intended use and becoming a product advocate.

Stage 1

Customers are making a decision whether or not to even pay attention to your claims. Make them a credible promise to give them information about how to get something that they strongly want. The kind of word of mouth that moves people at this stage centers around the claim, the promise, the expected benefits.

"What's your e-mail address? What? How come you don't have one?!!" is one good example of word of mouth for Stage 1. It calls for attention to the product.

Stage 2

Word of mouth centers around "hard" information. "Have you tried x? They have a great selection" the key is it should give information for finding, studying and weighing options. "In your case, I think the best thing they have is..."

Stage 3

With trials, direct experience isn't always the best teacher because of the risk, stress, confusion, cost, time or damage to self-esteem. Indirect experience is often preferred. People can attend a demo, make a site visit, or observe the product in action without being directly involved. Let the prospect learn from someone else's experience. A drug may be recommended by another patient, for instance, to assuage the fears and concerns of an inexperienced patient.

The word of mouth at this stage should be "Hey, I tried it and I liked it. Try it, maybe you'll like it too."

Stage 4

At this stage of purchase and implementation/usage, the word of mouth centers around practicality. "It was very easy for me to learn"
Stage 5

Customers always have a choice whether to keep using your product, once she feels comfortable with it, she will recommend it as justification for her to keep using it and for the benefit of others.

"I use it all the time."

"I really think you should try this."

"I don't know how I would live without it!"

A condensed Decision Matrix

Each type as he/she goes through the decision, weighing information, trial, implementation, and commitment process:

The Innovator

- Wants to be outstanding and is venturesome
- Wants to hear how "far out" the product is. Deciding to decide stage centers on how nobody has tried it before.
- Wants to be among the first to try it. Will spread the word.

Early Adopter

- Driven by excellence
- Concerned about possibilities more than actualities
- Looks for a vision
- Wants an advantage for being one of the leaders/beginners

Middle Majority

- Wants to be competent
- Concerned with practical issues and comparisons without taking too much trouble
- Wants an easy way out if it doesn't work
- Wants to know if this is an industry standard

Late Majority

- Skeptical and wants to reduce risk.
- Promises a good deal on a tried and true product
- Wants to shop around and get the best deal
- Wants a support system
- Wants what everyone else is using
Laggard

- Wants to be completely safe and traditional
- Wants reassurance that nothing will go wrong
- Will find loopholes and problems
- Won't try anything new unless he absolutely has to
- Wants to use it in the standard industry way

6. Delivering the Message

Sources of word of mouth:

- Expert to expert
- Expert to peer
- Peer to peer

When you have experts talking about your product, it may cause a stampede of customers who will want it. Every industry has prime opinion leaders. Expert-to-expert word of mouth can create an explosion of new ideas. The Manhattan Project, The Bauhaus School, Microsoft, Andrew Carnegie's "brain trust" and the Vienna Circle are a few examples of this phenomenon.

Change the opinion of a small handful of experts, and you'll change the entire marketplace.

Organize and fund the forum (audio teleconference, computer conference, etc) and influence their recommendations.

Delivery of Word of Mouth

The following flow of the most persuasive combination in marketing can compress a many-year process into a few weeks or months:

- Initial information from an expert
- Followed by organized trial
- Followed by a means of pooling peer experience

Hunt down and reward your champions

Aggressively identify and track those who are championing your product or service. Most companies have a procedure for logging complaints, but not for logging letters of praise. Give special treatment to the authors of these letters of praise. Invite them to dinner, and have a crew ready to tape testimonials with permission, of course. When you find people who are getting other people to become your customers, contact them and interview them to find out what they said that sold the product.

Why Conventional Media loses effectiveness

Many products are at a point where no amount of money poured into advertising will make people respond. There just isn't anything really new or different to cause a stir. People have a wait-and-see attitude towards the product. Because conventional marketing methods are directed at getting across information, usually the information given out is not enough. The information must:
Come from the right source
Be presented in the right sequence
Be relevant to the particular customer
Be credible
Be presented in a context in which the customer is receptive

The Two Phases of the Product Adoption Cycle

Traditional media can cover the information phase, but the verification phase (trial, evaluation, adoption, where the customer is trying to see if the claims are true) is where marketers fail to convince. Why?

Prospects already have the information. They need verification, from an independent source.

People will try to get the objective verification they need through:

Direct experience with the product
Experience of peers like themselves
Experts' experience
Scientific journals, studies, panels
Independent rating and reviews, opinion services

How to accelerate experience gathering:

Demonstrations and free trials
Indirect experience through the experiences of others
A good true story, something that easily passes on from person to person

The Science of Memes

This is a science that studies the kinds of ideas that spread rapidly through a society, primarily via word of mouth. When a crisis occurs that affects us all, people tend to want to spread the word, ergo the more people who are concerned, the less of a threat the impending crisis seems.

Richard Brodie, author of Virus of the Mind cites 5 situations in which the spreading of ideas is important to human survival:

Crisis
Mission
Problem
Danger
Opportunity

Evangelism

Do not only spread ideas through word of mouth, but also incorporate reasons for people to convince others of the value of not only accepting the idea but also of passing it on.
Ideas with "legs"

Incorporate into the idea you are trying to spread with

- News
- Unique results, effects, or activities
- Sex
- Secrets
- Helping others
- The unusual

7. Viral Marketing

How to spread ideas like the plague:

- Find a compelling, intriguing idea.
- Make it easy for people to try or experience immediately and without risk.
- Spread this idea where people are in close contact. Take advantage of existing communication channels.
- Make the very act of using the product a way of creating new triers.

Examples of viral marketing on the Internet:

- Napster
- EBay
- Geocities
- www.rogerwilco.com
- AOL instant messenger
- ICQ
- MSN messenger service
- Hotmail
- Winamp
- Those ";tell a friend" buttons
- E-greeting cards

Six things you should be doing to benefit from Word of Mouth on the Internet:

- Assign people to monitor every forum, listgroup, and discussion medium that could influence your sales.
- Build in word of mouth components into your Web site.
- Sprinkle testimonials all over your Web site. They should fit the stage of the decision cycle or adoption phase of the customer you are trying to convince.
- Set up distribution lists in your e-mail account. Send out regular short notes to inform people about useful things and ask them to pass it on. If the message is long, post it onto your Web site and e-mail people the address of the page.
- Use your Web site to demonstrate all of the extraordinary things you are doing that will get people talking.
- Plug into experts and services that recommend products to their constituencies.
Non-Internet Viral marketing

Palm Pilots, Pocket PCs, and cellular phones are great tools for spreading the word.

8. Researching Word of Mouth

People talk about the extraordinary, surprising, the unusual, and the remarkable. Train your people to go out of their way to do things so constructively outrageous that people will talk about them. Heard of the FedEx story about the employee who hires a chopper to deliver a package that was forgotten? Communicate your own company stories; they should be outrageous, and True.

How to research word of mouth:

- What are the users willing to tell the non-users?
- Exactly how do your customers describe your product?
- What are the non-users willing to ask the users?
- What are the things they need to know, but are unwilling to ask?
- What happens when these issues are raised?
- Exactly what do your prospects have to know in order to trigger purchase?
- Exactly how do your customers answer the objections, concerns, and qualms of your prospects?
- How do your customers persuade their friends to use your product?
- How do your customers suggest they initially get to know or try your product?
- What warnings, safeguards, tips, and suggestions do your customers suggest to your prospects?
- Are your sales messages, positioning, and important facts about your product getting through and surviving word of mouth?
- What messages do you need to inject into the marketplace in order to turn the tide in your favor and how will you deliver them?

Two reasons why word of mouth research is essential:

- To hear the real attitudes and perceptions of people when they talk about your product.
- To determine what the word of mouth itself is, its sequence, and source.

Designing word of mouth research:

The “2-2-2” model

Two groups of customers, two focus groups of prospects, and two mixed groups of enthusiastic customers and skeptics.

Ask your customers:

- What would you tell a friend?
- How would you persuade a skeptic?
- What questions would you anticipate from a skeptic?
- How would you answer their objections?
The best way to conduct focus groups is via telephone conference. It allows people the psychological safety to be more frank and open.

9. Constructing A Word of Mouth Campaign

Ingredients:

A superior product
A way of reaching key influencers in your marketplace
A cadre of experts willing to bat for you
A large number of enthusiastic consumers
A way of reaching the right prospects
One or more compelling stories that people will want to tell to illustrate your product's superiority
A way to substantiate, prove, or back up your claims and how the product will work in the real world
A way for people to have direct, low-risk experience, a demo, sample, or free trial
A way of reducing overall risk, an ironclad guarantee

Situations that benefit from word of mouth programs:

When there are credibility problems
When there are breakthroughs
When there are marginal improvements
Where the product has to be tried in large numbers or over time
Where there is high risk in trying the product
With older or mature products that have a new story that people tend to ignore
With unfair competitive practices such as spreading rumors, or telling lies about your product
When there are governmental or other restrictions on what you may say or claim directly

Products with which to avoid word of mouth sessions:

"Me-too" products where a seminar would not provide meaningful added value
Products that can't be tried and where there is no consensus among experts
Products that are clearly inferior, without having a compensating superiority for a particular application
Products that are so much a matter of personal taste or emotion that rational discussion is irrelevant to the decision
Products where the decision value is so small (low price/low volume) that the medium will not be cost-effective. However there are times when the program is not justified by the amount the participants purchase, or recommend, but where they are influential enough to start a word-of-mouth chain that more than justifies the program.
10. Word of Mouth, the "Tried and True" Way

The author offers lessons learned from his father's drugstore:

- Give them something worth talking about
- Cater to your initial customers shamelessly
- Give them incentives to engage in word of mouth
- Ask them to tell their friends
- The customer is always right
- Always tell the truth
- Surprise the customers by giving them a little more than they expected
- Give them a reason to buy, make them come back and refuse service from anyone else other than you
- Make eye contact, and smile, even through the telephone
- Find ways to make doing business with you a little better: a warmer greeting, a cleaner floor, nicer lighting, a better shopping bag, extra matches, faster service, free delivery, lower prices, more selection.
- Never be annoyed when a customer asks you to change a large bill even if he doesn't buy anything.
- The customer is your reason for being. Never take her for granted. If you do, she will never come back, and will go straight to your competition.
- Always dust off items, but never let the customer see you doing it.
- Never embarrass a customer, especially by making him feel ignorant.
- Never answer a question coming from a desire to show how smart you are. Answer with a desire to help the customer make the best decision.
- Never shout across the store, "How much are these condoms?" or anything about the personal items a customer is buying.
- When you don't know, say so. Do whatever you can to find out the answer.
- Every customer is special. Try to remember their names.
- Don't allow known shoplifters into the store.
- Don't ever let two sales staff talk when a customer is waiting. The worst thing you can do is count your cash while a customer is waiting.
- If you can suggest something better, they will be grateful. Always respect their choice.
- Never pressure anyone into buying anything.
- Never knowingly give bad advice. Just help people come to the right decision.
- Personally visit the store of the competition or assign people to visit and report back to you.
- Hire a shopping service to prepare periodic reports on how your people are treating your customers.
- If you hear of a store where the management is insulting the customers, buy it, then put up the sign "Under New Management" outside. Then sell it later based on the increased sales.
- One expert (in the drugstore's case, a nurse or physician) who is convinced you are better brings hundreds of customers and their friends through word of mouth.
- Always look for ways to make a stranger a customer.
- People will walk several blocks to save a dollar, or see a smile, or be treated right.
- Always run a sale promotion or an offbeat event. Make them come back to see what you are cooking up next.
- Use the best sign-maker you can find and pay him more than anybody else.
- If someone is mad at you, they will tell everyone who will listen for as long as they are angry, maybe even longer. So correct any dissatisfaction, and ask customers to send their friends. Treat your employees and salespeople who sell to you the same way you treat your customers.
- Have a zero error system. There may be terrible consequences for example, if a mistake is made filling a prescription. Have people check each other's work for safety. Occasionally
make intentional mistakes to see if people are checking.
Always measure your performance.
Always ask a customer to "come back soon"
If customers say they are moving away, offer to send them their favorite items by mail.
Tell jokes.

Specific steps in creating a word of mouth campaign:

Seed the market. Find some way to get the product into the hands of key influencers.
Provide a channel for the influencers to talk and get all fired up about your product.
Testimonials, endorsements
Form an ongoing group that meets once a year in a resort but once a month by teleconference or daily by list group
Create fun events to bring users together and invite non-users. Saturn, Harley-Davidson, and Lexus have been successful with this approach.
Produce cassettes, videotapes, and clips on your Web site featuring enthusiastic customers talking with other enthusiastic customers. Custom-create some CDs for each potential customer.
Conduct seminars and workshops
Create a club with membership benefits
Pass out flyers. Tell friends. Offer special incentives and discounts for friends who tell their friends.
Use the Internet
Do at least one outrageous thing to generate word of mouth.
Empower employees to go the extra mile.
Network and brainstorm ideas
Run special sales
Referrals
Script. Tell people exactly what to say in their word of mouth communication

Word-of-Mouth Checklist

Are all of your communications sending the same simple message? If it doesn't survive word of mouth, it is not a compelling story.
Is your product positioned as part of a category? E.g. "The dandruff shampoo that doesn't dry your hair"
Are your examples outrageous enough to be repeated?
Do you sprinkle your materials with success stories from real people?
Are you using experts effectively and in an objective manner?
Have you created mechanisms so people can follow up on the word of mouth they hear, simple ways of inquiring or ordering?
Have you made the decision process easy for customers?
Have you created events and mechanisms so that once a year your prospects hear about your product, and it is easier to try or buy?
The Emperor’s New Marketing

The emperor may call in ad agencies far and wide to tailor for him the most slick campaigns, zippy copy, and fancy shows, with the master hype-creators of the day, but all the catchy slogans and clever copy and image direction falls flat when a little boy (or an honest critic) steps forward and says “The Emperor’s new marketing is naked. It doesn’t make any sense. It’s pretty, but what does it mean? What does it stand for? It has no easy way to decide and worse, people won’t talk about it for a long time to come. The Emperor’s new marketing has no close!”

Ask yourself these questions:

Do you brainstorm to analyze what’s in the hearts and minds of your customers?
Do your animated GIF’s distract customers, or do they sell products?
Do people buy without recalling your fancy ads?
Do our pretty, clever, award-winning materials actually influence decisions?
Do we really know why our customers bought the product?
Are our products truly positioned, or just tagged with clever slogans?
Have we listened to what people are saying about us?
Early on, most speakers just want to be loved. They want an endless, ongoing standing ovation from their audiences from the very start. And so presenters placate their audiences, tell them what they think the audience wants to hear, and avoid challenging their audiences really to think hard.  

8. You’ve got to take care of yourself, but not too carefully. Some of my clients, when they become successful, become divas. It’s hilarious to watch, and I secretly love it precisely because it is a sign of success. You get the only-brown-M&Ms-in-the-bowl-in-the-hotel-room-which-is-set-to-69-degrees phenomenon. It happens, truly. She is the author of Secrets of Successful Speakers and coauthor of Speak & Grow Rich. Read more. Product details.  

But he is successful because he is authentic, cares for his audience, and is sincere. Although I know a lot of public speakers, do paid public speaking myself, and read a lot about public speaking, I found that more than half of the material in this book was new to me. And it all made good common sense. So I’m converted! Other speakers went beyond general life advice. In a year focused heavily on politics, presidential elections, and social change, many speakers used their commencement speeches to call on graduates to change the world. Unsurprisingly, President Obama made the case for change in his addresses at Howard University and Rutgers University, encouraging the graduates at Howard to move beyond “righteous anger” towards organization and activism.  

Using humor effectively, sharing personal stories, and calling for action all play important roles in successful graduation speeches. Like a great chef, each speaker uses those ingredients in different combinations to create something uniquely personal.