

**The Power of  
Online Influencers**

Your Company's Newest  
Stakeholder Group

**e-fluentials<sup>sm</sup>**

# The Power of e-fluentials

For generations, people who win friends and influence others have been in great demand — as colleagues, partners, mentors and customers. Influential people shape public opinion and share the uncanny ability to seamlessly spread information by word-of-mouth. As information exchange on the Internet continues to grow exponentially, relationships, spheres of influence and communications channels will become increasingly virtual.

The group of influential movers and shakers who have mastered these relationships and communications channels have been identified by Burson-Marsteller as e-fluentials and they occupy a key position in a company's future success. In 1999 Burson-Marsteller broke new ground by collaborating with RoperASW to identify this powerful new group of opinion leaders who exert an extraordinary impact on online and offline content and commerce.

E-fluentials, who comprise 10% of the U.S. online adult population (11.1 million), were among the first to explore the Internet frontier. They remain today's most prominent online trailblazers. Compared with the average Internet user, they are far more active users of e-mail, newsgroups, bulletin boards, listservs and other online vehicles when conveying their messages. While extremely influential online, e-fluentials spread their opinions in the offline world as well. Civic-minded e-fluentials are more likely to vote, attend public meetings,

serve on local committees and make speeches. Their families and peers regularly approach them for information, opinions and advice on a wide range of subjects, from business and politics to entertainment and health/lifestyle issues. E-fluentials' influence has been proven to run far and wide.

## Research Results

The results of Burson-Marsteller's 2001 e-fluentials research confirm yet again that e-fluentials have a disproportionate impact, relative to their size, on the buzz surrounding brands, products and services. E-fluentials have a say in the purchasing decisions — online and offline — of approximately 155 million consumers.

The far-reaching effect of this powerful group of men and women can make or break a brand, marshal or dissolve support for business and consumer issues, and provide insight into events as they unfold. For companies and marketers, there is an urgent need to earn e-fluentials' trust, approval and support. The following are the *Six Secrets of E-fluentials*, which were uncovered by Burson-Marsteller's latest research. **Psst....pass them on!**

### Secret # 1: E-fluentials are infectious.

E-fluentials make waves. They project their opinions far beyond the scope of their individual contacts. An e-fluential imparts an experience to 14 individuals on average. The vast majority spreads the word through multiple communication channels. These electronic town criers are as likely to share information on products and services offline as they are to relay their experiences online.

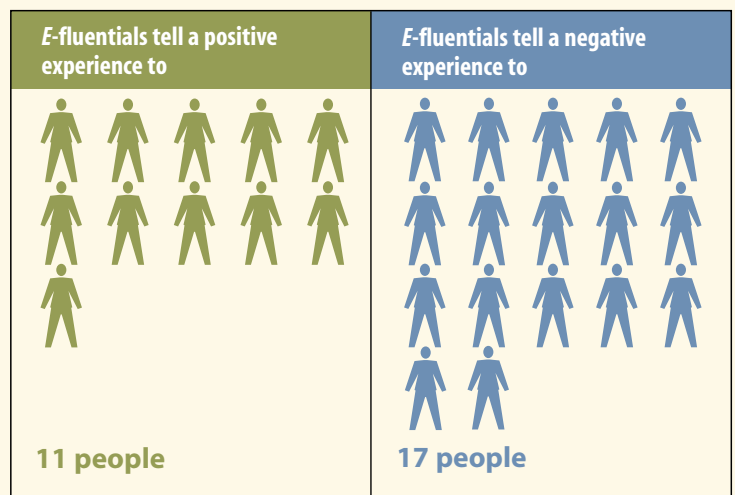
Because of the extensive reach of e-fluentials' opinions, it is critical that companies establish brand recognition and win customer preference among these opinion-brokers in order to expand their customer base.

	E-fluentials relay an experience with a company or its Web site
Tell in person or on telephone	93%
E-mail friends	87%

### Secret # 2: E-fluentials share negative experiences.

E-fluentials spread news describing a negative experience to a wider audience than they do a positive experience. For example, while e-fluentials pass along positive experiences to 11 people on average, they warn 17 people about negative experiences — reverberating to 55% more people than their endorsements.

Since e-fluentials highly value one-on-one dialogue and information exchange, companies can better manage their reputations by inviting feedback and providing a forum where e-fluentials can chat about their positive and negative experiences, and query others.

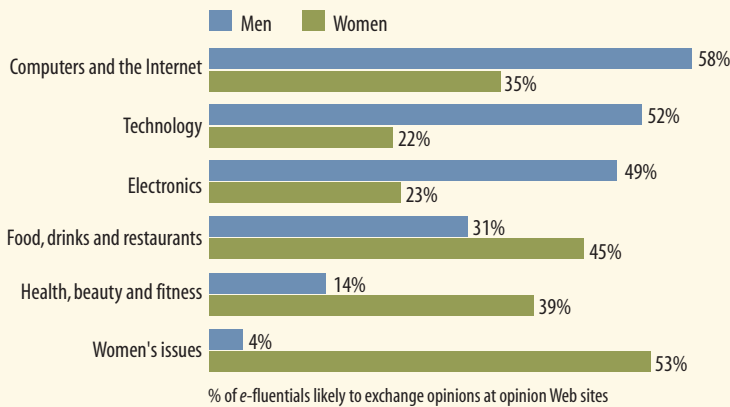


## Secret #3: Gender affects e-fluentials' choice of information sites.

Male and female e-fluentials go online to provide or read opinions with diverging agendas. Marketers should therefore be aware of different categories of e-fluentials when developing customer acquisition and retention campaigns.

Usually men seek opinions and provide advice on technology, while women e-fluentials primarily search for information pertaining to food and health, and they mobilize others on women's issues. By knowing where specific types of e-fluentials surf online, marketers can more precisely personalize their campaigns, and reap greater rewards from their messages, events and cause-related programs.

### Information-Seeking Differences by Gender

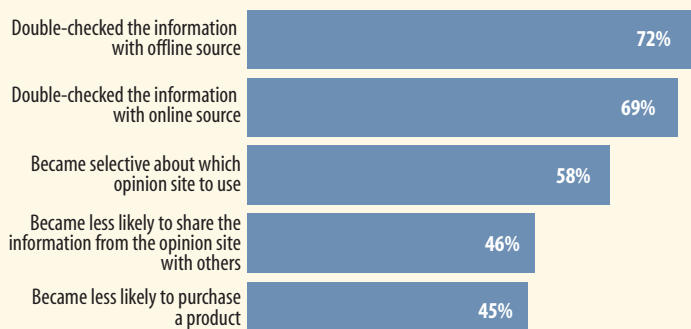


## Secret #4: E-fluentials uncover the inside scoop.

E-fluentials do their homework before embarking on a new purchase. An astounding 84% of e-fluentials have read product- or service-related messages on opinion Web sites in the past year. Many e-fluentials use opinion sites such as Epinions.com, Amazon.com and Planetfeedback.com.

Regardless of how frequently they visit opinion Web sites, e-fluentials cannot be fooled by "opinions" posted by hired professionals. Nearly seven in ten e-fluentials report that if they question the legitimacy of an opinion, they will double-check the potentially questionable information with other offline or online sources (72% double-check offline and 69% double-check online). Companies can ensure the accuracy of online information that rates the quality of their products or services by including on their sites links to external sources that provide ratings.

### E-fluentials' Responses to Potentially Biased Reviews on Opinion Web sites

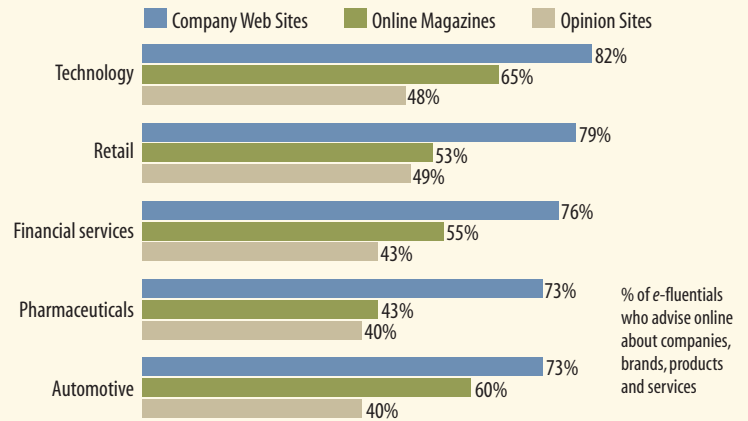


## Secret #5: E-fluentials value company Web sites.

Company Web sites attract e-fluentials. Across a wide variety of sectors — technology, retail, finance, pharmaceutical and automotive — company Web sites are the most widely used online information source of brands, products and services among e-fluentials.

E-fluentials are more likely to turn to company Web sites than to online magazines or opinion Web sites for industry information. Because e-fluentials can be categorized as "information sponges," companies need to develop a straightforward, easy-to-use information-retrieval system for the products and services featured on their Web sites.

### Online Information Sources by Sector



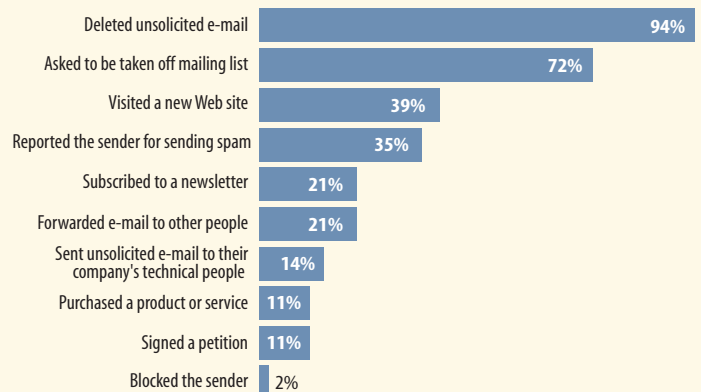
## Secret #6: E-fluentials are ready to commit.

E-fluentials respond to direct e-mail campaigns. Although e-fluentials are critical of unsolicited e-mails — 94% have deleted them and 72% have requested to be taken off a mailing list at one time or another — a significant group takes action.

A sizeable 90% of e-fluentials report that they have read unsolicited e-mails from *known* sources they trust. A driving force behind e-fluentials' decision to open unsolicited e-mail is familiarity with the company brand. Because an admired brand name has the power to motivate e-fluentials to act positively, companies with favorable reputations will succeed in having their messages heard.

More than one-third (39%) of e-fluentials have visited a new Web site after opening an unsolicited e-mail. Close to one-fifth (21%) have subscribed to a newsletter or forwarded the e-mail to someone else. These findings reveal that marketing dollars are better spent building trusted brands online and offline than aimlessly attracting visitors to Web sites.

### Actions Ever Taken in Response to Unsolicited E-mail



# e-fluentials :

## The 21st Century's Most Valued Customer

E-fluentials are active purchasers and influencers — both online and offline — who have a tremendous impact on a company's ability to grow. All-important customers no longer wait passively for marketers to inform them of purchasing options. They empower themselves with information they receive from trusted sources — chief among them e-fluentials — and make purchasing decisions accordingly.

Industry leaders need to identify and create relationships with the e-fluentials that reside in their own customer database. They also need to win their favor by offering high-quality products/services, customer support and easy-to-use Web sites. If successful, these companies will not only win the loyalty of the e-fluential community, but also the loyalty of existing and potential customers within the e-fluentials' extensive network.

Building a trusted brand that commands the respect of e-fluentials and satisfies customers to whom they make recommendations is the winning formula for success in the 21<sup>st</sup> century marketplace.

Burson-Marsteller offers the following e-fluentials products and services:

- E-fluentials omnibus and customized surveys
- E-fluentials.com polling
- Web-site auditing and development
- Direct marketing and grassroots campaign management

If you are interested in using Burson-Marsteller's e-fluentials research to achieve new levels of success for your business, please visit our Web site [www.efluentials.com](http://www.efluentials.com) or contact a Burson-Marsteller team member listed below.

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