

## Spreading Ideas

A very effective way to motivate people to action is to persuade them indirectly. Along with direct appeals and arguments, one should also put ideas and stories into circulation through different networks, especially the networks that are likely to be accessed by and have access to the person/people you are trying to persuade.

Put differently, you want to get the idea “out there” so that when (or if) you directly try to persuade a given person, they’ve already heard about the idea and may even already see why it is valuable.

When you are spreading an idea, you have two primary tools to work with:

People who will spread the idea for you  
Opportunities for those people to communicate with other people

### People Who Will Spread the Idea

In his book *Unleash Your Idea Virus*, marketing experts Seth Godin describes people who spread ideas as “sneezers,” and he says there are two kinds:

“Promiscuous” sneezers who will spread an idea just because they like to talk and be the ones who know something interesting.

“Powerful” sneezers who may not talk to as many people as promiscuous sneezers, but have the advantage of being authoritative and credible. If they’re saying it, it must be worth listening to.

In *The Tipping Point*, Malcolm Gladwell identifies three types of functions that people can play in the spread of ideas:

“Mavens”: people who love to collect knowledge and become storehouses of useful information

“Connectors”: people who connect people to people and people to ideas

“Evangelists”: people who actively sell ideas and try to “convert” others to see the value of the idea

Take stock of the people in your network and where or how they might fall into these categories. Think of the people to whom you have access and where they fall into these categories. Recognize that different people may play different roles depending on the idea or the issue.

## HOW IDEAS SPREAD IN A NETWORK

Generally speaking, the more controversial or contentious the idea is, the better it is to have powerful “sneezers” spreading the word, at least initially. Evangelists tend to be the ones who adopt the ideas early on in the process, while “mavens” may not have a particular stake in spreading the ideas, but they are invaluable because they are repositories of useful knowledge—this means they may be able to see connections among ideas that you are not even aware of.

Go for different types of people and groups, not just numbers of people.

### **Opportunities for People to Spread the Idea**

A first level is mediated communication, by which I mean the usual techniques in PR or advertising: flyers, newsletters, websites, press releases, what people typically mean when they talk about marketing.

A second, more important, level is direct communication among people, especially face to face communication. E-mails can be a good method, because they can be sent to many people at once, but nothing is as effective for spreading an idea as a face to face conversation. Not only does the recipient get the info/knowledge, they get the enthusiasm and passion that someone may feel about that idea.

The key idea here is to create opportunities for people to talk to each other informally. Parties, receptions, and other celebrations are a really good way to do this, because people will come but they don't have the expectation of doing business. They are just there to talk. And, if you are able to circulate among the different people who are there, you have that many more opportunities to spread the idea yourself.

When you invite folks think about who is to be represented, what groups you would like to know about the idea, and how you would like them to act on the idea once they understand it.

Create opportunities to get feedback on the ideas and to learn the specifics of how the ideas are being put into practice.