

Word-of-mouth marketing is dead



By [Tim Wyatt-Gunning](#)

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I love 'word-of-mouth' marketing. Or I did, right up until it died...

I loved it because it provoked a wonderful sense of privilege to be 'in the know.' You couldn't look up word of mouth recommendations in the Yellow Pages because they weren't there. You couldn't find them in the newspaper, on TV or the radio, or in the junk mail cluttering up your letter box.

These companies simply went about their business doing what they did and we, their customers, did their marketing for them. We chose them purely on recommendations from our trusted close circle of friends, family and people richer than us and if they did a good job for us, we then did a bit more marketing for them.

In many ways, this worked rather well but then along came the internet and changed all that.



Image via Fotolia

Now 'word of mouth', at best, merely narrows our Google searches - instead of asking a friend for the phone number of his favourite garden service I make sure that I've got the spelling right to check them out online.

Instead of a general 'garden service cape town', I seek 'wouter's garden service cape town', but would go no further with Wouter because he seems to be too busy gardening to bother with a website.

Then my eye is inevitably drawn to the other 'Wannabe Wouters' who pop up as his substitutes and who seem to be more in bloom digitally speaking.

Clinging onto old world scepticism, I skip the one listed first because it couldn't have got there through fair play.

Number two gives me more comfort because its contact page has a nearby address, but how come I've never heard of it before?

To number three I go and remember that I once bought some proteas from this Mr Hargreaves but his site is comatose, he's not on Facebook (unless he's moved to Melbourne, lost weight and become a Health & Safety expert) and nobody with his name has tweeted anything about gardens. So I assume he is dead.

On I go until I get to the edge of a cliff but I dare not jump. I'm not going to page two of Google because nobody has ever done that and come back.

So back to the top I click even though I know damn well that all the ones in the shaded bit are dodgy because it's advertising and that's bad - I never trusted advertising even in my teenage days, when I thought I was a bit of a rebel in my Levi's, smoking a Marlboro and sipping a Coke.

Suddenly I'm on a site which can smell me. It throws relevant and seductive floral images at me with clear information and, after a quick live chat, the Gardening Gloves team is popping around tomorrow to give me a quote and a free protea.

They're probably no better than Wouter, and if they're not I can only moan on a forum rather than at a dinner party, but that doesn't really matter since my dining room table is now home to more screens and keyboards than cutlery and crockery.

ABOUT TIM WYATT-GUNNING

Tim graduated from Cambridge in 1992, was a banker in London for 4 years, before getting involved in the European telecommunications industry in 1996 with LDI. In 1999, he moved to South Africa to set up Storm Telecom. For 9 years Tim co-ran Storm, driving it to revenues of over R250m with over 6000 business customers across the country, until it was bought by Vox Telecom in January 2008 for R360m. Tim joined WebAfrica as CEO in October 2011.

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