



BRING A FRIEND

FRIEND-GET-FRIEND promotions are very common, but persuading people to sell to their friends can be problematic. People often feel embarrassed to do this, and some research conducted in the 1950s by two American academics (Leon Festinger and James M. Carlsmith) brought out an interesting phenomenon: people who are offered a big reward for persuading a friend to do something are LESS likely to succeed at it than are people who are offered a small reward. This is because people offered a small reward will persuade because they are themselves persuaded—people offered a large reward do so because of the reward.

In many cases, offering a reward to someone for recommending a product makes them feel as if they are betraying a friendship—not the result the company would like, and yet many bring-a-friend schemes do exactly that, offering ever-larger rewards as a way of persuading people to pass on a friend's name.

The idea

Laphroaig is a Scottish single-malt whisky distilled on the island of Islay. It is the strongest-flavored whisky available, so for some people it is too powerful, for others it is a rare treat. Obviously the quality comes at a price—but for its devotees the price is well worth paying.

The distillery has a “Friends of Laphroaig” organization that devotees can join. Periodically, the distillery asks “Friends” for the names of three or four friends, to whom the distillery will send a small bottle of the whisky as a gift. There is nothing in this for

the “Friend”—the other person gets the whisky. What it does do is enable the distillery to expand the number of people who know the product, with the added advantage that the “Friends” are likely to choose people who they think will enjoy the product. Obviously there may be some abuse of the system—choosing three teetotalter friends in order to obtain three free miniatures of the whisky is one obvious possibility—but in general people are very fair about it, because it is after all a very generous offer.

The idea can be extended in other ways—banks might offer £25 to be deposited in the friend’s account, a gym might have a “bring-a-friend” day with a free gift or discount to the friend if he or she joins the gym, a hotel might offer a free room to a friend.

In practice

- The offer needs to be something that the friend will appreciate and benefit from.
- The reward to the recommender is the thanks of a friend—there is usually no need to offer anything to the recommender.
- The reward needs to connect directly to the product—a sample or a trial period, for example.
- If you do give a reward to the recommender, try to make it something they can share with the friend.