

## Viral Marketing

One of the greatest gifts the internet has given us is the ability to share with others information, and sometimes access, to products and services that we find useful, distinctive, and cool. Our willingness to do this comes from our satisfaction with the products or services, but equally so through the ease with which we are able to spread the good word – usually with just the touch of a button. Marketers have labeled this kind of “word of mouth” campaign “viral marketing” because it spreads like a virus from computer to computer. Yet, like all marketing, there are strategies and tactics that need to be conceived and executed in order for a viral campaign to deliver maximum results.

The opening of the internet to so many players has led to confusion over what exactly constitutes a viral campaign. Too often spammers and adware companies that infringe on our space and violate our computers claim to be acting in the name of viral marketing. This is not only a further example of their manipulation of the system, it is also a huge distortion of what viral marketing is.

Viral marketing is a strategy that aims to gain exposure to a marketing message by actively encouraging people to pass on the message on to others. The exponential growth of the message increases its influence, especially because it is disseminated via a highly credible distribution source (average people, and friends and family).

Using viral marketing as part of your web-based marketing effort is as essential as trying to create a buzz for your company through traditional marketing efforts. Tudog has identified six elements that constitute the fundamentals of a successful viral marketing campaign. They are:

### 1. Create the Urge

People have a predisposition to communicate with one another, meaning that if you give people something to share, they are inclined to do the sharing. A good viral campaign incorporates elements that create the urge to share. These can include special offers, humor, or useful facts.

### 2. Make it Simple

Like a real virus, a viral marketing campaign is more likely to spread when it is easily transmitted. The use of complex transmission procedures, or making people sign up in order to pass it on, are all antibiotics that render your virus ineffective. The use of easy channels, like email, makes certain your virus is going to spread.

### 3. Provide Incentive

Sometimes the inclusion of an incentive will help people pass a message on. For example, by including a limited time only offer, the creation of urgency, combined with the attractiveness of the offer, will encourage people to let others know about the opportunity you are presenting. Naturally, if you have some sort of free give-away (including a free introduction of your service), also helps, as most people like the idea of getting something for free. However, you need to make sure that your offer is genuine. Otherwise people will hesitate passing it on, as they do not want to be associated with an offer that is considered disingenuous.

#### 4. Use OPR (Other People's Resources)

As in the old days of Other People's Money, the internet allows us the opportunity to use Other People's Resources, such as their websites (through affiliate programs). The use of email also allows you to use OPR by deploying people's networks and email infrastructure. When you use OPR you preserve your own resources, and in the case of the web, gain access to people you otherwise would not be able to reach.

#### 5. Be Prepared for the Response

Viral campaigns really do have the capacity of catching on and growing at tremendous rates, leaving a company with the need to fulfill offers at a speed it may not have the manpower or infrastructure to handle. If you make your model scalable you'll be able to handle the demand, and keep the viral chain alive. If you fail to handle the load, you will lose momentum, perhaps to a point that you won't be able to revive your campaign. So make sure you're fully prepared for the demand you are seeking to create.

#### 6. Be Where Your Target Is

The potential of leveraging networks of people can only fully be realized if your starting point is one that pinpoints your target and gets the ball rolling, and that you remain in arenas that are relevant and compelling to your target. You would not, for example try to start a woman's beauty aid product on a sports network, just as you would not start a sports related product on a women's health channel. The closer you are when you begin – and the better you remain close – to your target market, the more effectively you will find your viral campaign spreads.

Viral marketing is an extremely effective tool for making a large number of people aware of your company, your products, and your offer. If you construct a viral campaign properly, you will have you offer delivered to targeted customers by the most trusted of sources – their friends and family. Moreover, if executed well, the cost to such a campaign should be relatively minimal, not counting costs related to the offer. With viral marketing as a alternative, the use of email (especially spam) becomes less attractive, and at best a second preference alternative. Viral marketing is electronic word of mouth marketing, and is perhaps the most under-utilized online option available. Use it, and watch the network work its wonders.