Viral Internet Marketing Unleashed

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In Closing

The Untold Secrets to Viral Marketing Riches

By **James Jackson**

What is Viral Marketing?

Viral marketing is like a sneezing into a crowded room without covering your mouth. The idea is to get people to pass it on. Viral marketing can be done in many ways…..email was the first way that viral marketing was used but since the beginning other ways have developed that encourage people to pass along to their friends and relatives information about products, services and internet sites… even jokes and video clips.

Viral marketing can be a very good thing for internet businesses, especially small ones that are just starting up. It can, also, sound the death knoll for those same businesses. You cannot force a product to "go viral". If it is good enough…or bad enough, that just happens. You can, of course, use viral marketing but you can't force the viral thing to happen. People love to share good things with their friends and families…but they will be just as quick to share an unpleasant experience or the name of the company they think ripped them off…..maybe even quicker.

Should you try to capitalize on viral marketing? You certainly should! You would be the worst kind of fool not to use everything at hand to market your product or idea. Without one doubt, you should reap the benefits of reaching more than just your target audience and stretching those advertising dollars as far as they will go. It is important, though, for you to realize that viral marketing is a strategy….just one tactic. One, however, that does work toward achieving your campaign objectives.

Oh….and just one more word of caution. You can craft a brilliant offer and a great message, and follow all the rules of Viral Marketing 101, but if a consumer visits your site and has a bad experience or even a not-as-good experience as expected, you will defiantly achieve viral marketing….the kind you don't want.

Defining Viral Marketing

Viral marketing is unique and quite extraordinary. We share with friends and family the bargains or freebies we were able to get. If we can copy the freebie we will do it and give it to people that we know. Everybody knows somebody and just like rumors, these freebies can spread fast.

You can advertise your newsletter, your web site, products you're selling, anything and you will make a profit if somebody clicks through the advertising on the freebie. I will spare you the details of why the same ad advertised through viral marketing is so much more effective than regular advertising.

It is a great feeling when you receive something for free.

As you can see, viral marketing is giving out free stuff and in turn, this free stuff will be passed around to other people. What better advertising could be accomplished in such a simple manner?

The process is actually very simple. All you have to do is find resources where you can download free stuff, then turn around and give it away to your visitors. There are numerous resources where you can download the freebies. For example, you may get started off by offering your visitors free e-books and free software.

The software might cost a substantial amount of money to develop, but in the long run it's a one time fee for a decent stream of visitors. This is only one idea of many. You will find that the options are endless. Find something your visitors want and watch them roll on in!

Free web hosting is another form of viral marketing. You can provide this for free on your server to small businesses or beginning internet marketers. In return, you place a banner ad at the top of each site advertising your products and web site.

This will increase the number of visitors to your web-site and is an effective means of advertising with little expense.

In summary, Viral Marketing by definition is any form of advertising and/or marketing techniques that "spread" like a virus without you having to do anything.

The Concept of Buzz

Everybody knows certain urban legends. They have never been marketed…
.nobody ever spent the first dime to let the world know that there are
alligators living in the New York City sewer system….big ones….albino
ones. So how is it that we all know stories like that? Better question….what
if it were my product or service that enjoyed such common knowledge?

The grapevine, rumors, the whispers in your ear are what buzz is all about.
Those little bits of information that people share over a cup of coffee….the
outrageous occurrence that someone just saw and can't wait to describe or
the incredibly cool product that a friend of a friend just bought are the heart
and soul of buzz…and buzz marketing or viral marketing, depending on
what you want to call it.

Gigantic billboards rate barely a glance but we all still read the scribbling on
a bathroom wall…ah ha! Buzz! In today's cyber –joined reality, every "have
you heard" can get clicked on a zillion times by others faster than you can
download the latest compromising picture of Madonna.

We all know what a computer virus is. It spreads from one computer to
another in the blink of an eye. The next thing you know it is everywhere.
Now "Buzz" is the virus of marketing… it spreads to other customers and
causes an epidemic of sales of your product or service.

It could be that "e-mail this to a friend" button that is just calling to you to
click it, or a pair of real (and very satisfied) lips whispering persuasive
endorsements into receptive ears, buzz marketing can transmit your business
message at warp speed and do it at no cost to you. How cool is that?

By starting a buzz you can turn your new business into the next urban
legend….that latest piece of juicy gossip that people can't live without.

Message boards, blogs, email listservs and product review sites are the conversations that consumers have with one another and represent the largest collection of word-or-mouth or buzz advertising that has ever existed. It is the old party line phone system taken to the umpteenth power. People talk to each other. They willingly share their opinions on most any subject you can name but especially about products and services that they avail themselves of on the internet and in their brick and mortar worlds.

Consumers listen carefully to what others say about a product they are researching and intend to actually purchase. Users read the recommendations that other users post.

They really like it when other users post pictures or videos….these seem to have the most direct influence. Producers of products and services are slowly beginning to realize that what Consumer reports say about their products and services is not nearly as important as what consumers say to one another about them. Hence we have the ballooning of viral marketing… ..word-of-mouth…or **buzz**.

Buzz has always been an important element of marketing/selling/branding. So how does what is happening now differ from what went on before and why should marketers embrace it?

The answer is that the impact of work-of-mouth or buzz advertising has increased dramatically. Ten years ago, a diabetic patient would have struggled to find other diabetic patients to communicate with. The internet solves that problem by allowing people with similar interests to find and interact with one another.

It is not a coincidence that all of the reports coming out that are showing that word-of-mouth or buzz is becoming more and more important to consumers. It is because the internet has made the whole idea work better and faster than ever before….and it only gets better as the internet expands.

8 Ways to Create Buzz

Buzz marketing is the vehicle that will take your new business to dizzying heights. Here are a few suggestions to help you make that happen.

1. **Pursue what's happening now.** James Dean made rebels out of all of us and Madonna caused nice girls to wear a bustier. So…how did that happen? It happened the same way that Rosie's Tickle-Me Elmo happened. They started a commotion. A commotion can send the world on a buying spree. You need to get the right person to "sneeze" to spread your viral message. For instance, sell the president of the Realtors Association on your house-painting service or gets the urban kids to make your streetwise electronics cool. Just get your message to the influential people who can start the buzz.

2. **Give them something to talk about**. It makes people feel smart to know something that others don't know. "I know where you can get a terrific deal on software" or "My carpet guy can get those stains out". They know the answer. Give your first customers a great product and you become their brag. In order to get them talking, you must fill a need. Remember the first time you saw a Walkman? What IS that and where can I get one? Now you've got them talking.

3. **Package your product or service tightly**. Your buzz or viral blurb needs to be short, sweet and make the point. "They sell beautiful shoes" or "You're kids will love this" are the kind of things that don't get lost on the tip of a tongue. Make it easy to remember. Describe what you do right now until you say it virally right. If you can't do it, your customers can't either.

4. **It's like a cold in kindergarten**. The best way to spread your message is to "sneeze" it in the right direction. It needs to be aimed at your target customers and in the places where they can be found. Once you get your "sneeze" aimed in the right direction and at your

general pool of potential customers, the next thing to do is identify the "Typhoid Mary's" in the group.

5. **"To register your own (whatever), click here"**. You have just received one…now buy one yourself. From Bouquets to "gifts for the fisherman", "share-me" products give you the opportunity to spread your message inside what you sell. The product becomes the pitchman. Brilliant! You can find marketing services on the Internet that can create a customized e-newsletter package that will spread your business message to target users all through the Internet grapevine. Your customers will continue to love your product because they will tell and sell others.

6. **Pay it forward**. You can generate more sales pretty easily. "Thanks so much for your business. Share this coupon with a friend and she will receive a complete facial at 20% off. To receive your free gift, please sign below." That's business author Jan Norman's magic. She just helped you land a customer you've never met, and rewarded another one to boot. Just little things like "remember to tell your friends" at the bottom of an invoice are simple, easy and free ways to boost sales and start a buzz. On your web site offer something free for new names on your mailing list and your customers will join your sales force.

7. **Because she'll tell two friends** and they will tell two friends, and so on and on….Forget the fancy marketing theories. Buzz marketing works because it is heard from a friend who liked it and not from some paid pitchman who will sell anything for a buck. If your customers are happy with your product or service, then devise a way for them to share that joy with their friends. Help your customers to tell each other and your product will sell itself.

8. **Overcome their resistance.** Problem solving guru, Jordan Ayan, points to persistence as the key ingredient to championing your business idea. Like that winter flu that some people don't get until

May, some customers will need many exposures before they "catch" it.

Viral Marketing – Success Stories

Success Story #1:
Hotmail – From 0 to 30,000,000 in 30 months

MSN Hotmail's viral marketing success story is practically in the realm of folk lore… actually I guess it is in the realm of Internet folk lore.

Back in 1995, when Sabeer Bhatia and Jack Smith approached the venture capital firm of Draper Fisher & Jervetson with their idea for a free email service, the firm liked the idea but wondered how they would attract members and build a company around it. Today there are more than 30 million active members.

The Hotmail user base grew faster than any media company in history faster than CNN, faster than AOL, even faster than Seinfeld's audience. Hotmail tripled its size in one year. The current sign-up rate for new memberships often exceeds a million per week.

Tom Draper is the one who actually suggested that they should append an advertising message to every outbound email: "P.S. Get your free email at Hotmail" and called it viral marketing. It was a very bold move at the time. Would users balk at having this automatic addition to the content of their private messages? Hotmail tempered the idea by clearly marking the promotional plug and removing the "P.S.".

Still, every outbound message conveyed an advertisement and a subtle implied endorsement by the sender. The recipient knew that the sender was a Hotmail user and that this new free email thing seemed to work for them. Each new user became a salesman and the message spread like…well….an extremely contagious virus.

Of course, if Hotmail had been only mediocre and not provided a terrific free email service, no amount of advertising, paid or free, would have turned it into the wildly successful thing it is today. Hotmail's recipe for success is pretty simple. It delivers the qualities consumers really want in an e-mail service: speed, reliability, ease of use and a rich set of features.

Success Story #2:
ICQ – Free Chat Tool Turned Millions

In 1996, four Israeli men, two of whom didn't even finish high school, Yair Goldfinger, Arik Vardi, Sefi Vigiser and Amnon Amir, is when ICQ (I Seek YOU) came into being. After their army service the four men thought about a holiday trip to India but decided to take jobs at a local computer store instead.

At night they worked on their dream project….a program for instant easy Internet communication. They called their company Mirabilis.

Internet service was very expensive in Israel, so the men moved to California and later to New York. It took less than 18 months for more than 10 million computer users to download and install ICQ. ICQ was free. It wasn't advertised by a big time marketing campaign.

Those 10 million people had heard about ICQ by "word-of-mouse" advertising. What we call Viral marketing or Buzz marketing. Mirabilis said a firm 'NO" to Microsoft, but accepted a 300 million dollar buy out from AOL. ICQ then quickly exploded to 100-million downloads and a million new subscribers each week.

The interesting thing about ICQ is their marketing…or rather the lack thereof. Journalist, Ami Ginsburg came to interview the Israeli founders, all the "marketing" they could show was a brochure they had once produced but that was hardly ever used.

They just didn't do any marketing… at least nothing that resembled any marketing techniques up until that time. All of their efforts were directed at motivating the users to spread the word.

They made it easy to spread the word by using the standard e-mail that will invite your friends to join, but the software can also be instructed to scan your address book and send all your friends invitation letters. Their idea was to build a tool that includes an inherent mechanism for spreading the work and then just letting it grow.

Success Story #3:
The Blair Witch Project

Eduardo Sanchez and Daniel Mynick, two unknown filmmakers, with a budget of less than $100,000.00, wrote and directed a mock documentary about three student filmmakers who disappear while searching for evidence of a legendary witch in the Appalachian foothills of western Maryland. Artisan Entertainment, a film distributor, purchased the right to the movie for $1 million in an all-night bidding session at the 1999 Sundance Film Festival. The Artisan team wanted to maximize the film's success but limit the marketing expense to $1.5 million. The film was called *The Blair Witch Project.*

The marketing strategy for the movie is a classic example of viral marketing and a prime candidate for buzz generation. Some of the horror in the film evokes a strong, emotional response on many levels.

Because of it's shaky handheld, low-budget production values, the film generates visual curiosity, which viewers who are used to more polished Hollywood production values, generates it's own emotional response…. one of displeasure and sometimes vertigo. The key thing here is to realize that you make whatever you have a positive.

Artisan's creative team posted the following pieces of "evidence" on the original **blairwitch.com** web site, embellishing the myth of the Blair Witch and the vanished students:

- Invented journal entries written by one of the three characters
- Fictional but seemingly authentic police reports
- A fictional legend of the Blair Witch dating back to the 18th century.

Artisan updated the web site weekly, each time revealing more information and features in order to build suspense and encourage repeat visits. The web site was averaging 2 million hits a day.

Of course, Artisan didn't stop there….they continued to bait and intrigue audience's right up to and past the release of the film. Wow! That is what I call Viral Advertising at its very best!

eBooks as Your Viral Salesmen

How can eBooks be used as a tool for viral marketing? Let's say that you sell products used in baking. If on your website you offer a free download of an eBook with recipes that call for ingredients you sell, it is possible…even probable that you will sell more of the products that you manufacture. That is the basic concept but there are many ways that eBooks can help get free viral marketing for you.

If the free eBook you give away on your site is good, informative, funny, or contains timely information, the public will pass that information along to their friends and family and thereby, generate a lot more traffic on your site. Just the fact that they found something interesting or useful on your site will make them return again and again.

Each time they return is another opportunity for them to become a customer.

The cost of an eBook is just about <u>zero</u>, which makes it a pretty attractive tool for marketers large and small. The only cost is in time and creativity and the benefits are endless.

Of course, eBooks do not have to be free. They can also be sold. The trick to selling your eBooks is to be certain that they are worth the price you charge for them.

So what is the consumer's advantage of an eBook?

- eBooks are ideal for those who want information in the quickest possible time.
- eBooks can include video, sound, games, children's activities and many other interactive multi-media elements.

- eBooks have search engine and electronic navigation technology. No more flipping back and forth through pages to find that elusive paragraph.
- How to... eBooks can included video clips or many different color images to show you exactly how to piece together that Antique Grandfather Clock Kit, without having any bits left over.

eBook Formats

At first most of the marketing eBooks came in EXE format. The eBook is delivered to the reader in one EXE file which can be opened from windows like a program but lately more and more eBooks are being published in PDF format. The PDF format required that a reader have an Adobe reader. Adobe readers can be downloaded free.

There are advantages to both the EXE format and the PDF format.

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The advantage of the PDF format is that you can very easily and quickly convert a text document to the PDF format. The document need not be created in HTML first. You can have images and hyperlinks to web pages in a PDF eBook. One of the biggest advantages is that the PDF format can be read by both windows and MAC users.

One disadvantage of the EXE format is that MAC users cannot read them and that if you want to make your eBook using Microsoft Word, you must take the time to add the HTML code to the document. It isn't all that hard to

do but it can be time consuming. You do get faster, however, with a little practice.

The disadvantage of the PDF format is that you can't put a lot of the fancy stuff in that you can when you use the EXE format. PDF format books read more like a traditional book.

What to do with your eBook

Once you have your eBook written and checked and re-checked and checked again for grammar, spelling, punctuation, and that the links all work, you are ready to put it to work for you. Be absolutely certain that the links to your pages and especially to your sales page all are working links.

The object is to get your eBook to as many different places as possible. Some of your readers will help you to get it to different places and each place it goes it becomes a new salesman for you. Post your eBook to as many of the eBook directories as you can. Many will let you post it for free or will let you post a link on their site to your eBook. To find these sites go to Google and type in "ebook directories". This is now your personal viral marketing system. Once it gets going, you can't stop it…..not that you want to stop it.

It is certainly not a requirement but it is a good idea if you can create a cover for your eBook. Some sites offer free eBook cover templates. You just choose a pattern and then add the text. You can buy cover templates. There are even sites that will create a cover just for you and do it for free. Statistics prove that an eBook will be downloaded more when a nice cover is displayed. Search the internet for these sites.

The traditional book is here to stay. Advertising on paper is here to stay, as well. The marketing eBook as a viral salesman is here to stay, too. Don't discount the value or underestimate its worth to you and your online marketing. It can be one of your best marketing tools and it is free.

Use Your eBook to Build Your List

Using your eBooks, e-reports and e-courses is a great way to build your list. You can use all these things as an "incentive" for joining your affiliate program as a "thank you" for visiting your web site or as a "bonus" when someone purchases a product or service from you.

A lot of e-Businesses use them but some are make two big mistakes when they do.

Mistake number 1: They upload these things to their web site and publish the download link without capturing a name or an email address. They are missing the point of using these things. The point is to build a list. You don't market to ghosts.

Instead of uploading your items to your server and just publishing the download link, be a little smarter. Set yourself up a mini-site where you can direct people to and for the <u>price</u> of their email addresses and names they can have the link sent to them.

Now you not only have a person to market to, you also know they are interested in your product or service. Presto! **Your list just grew**.

Mistake number 2: They just don't take the time to customize eBooks, etc with their own links inserted into them. The thing is….if you are giving away an eBook with someone else's links in it then all your marketing is paying off all right….for the person whose links are in the eBook. Why would you do that? You are working for them instead of helping yourself.

So do you want to be "they" or do you want to use eBooks a little smarter? Take the trouble and go to the expense of getting a customization license. It's worth it. If others don't…then they will be marketing for you. Search the Internet for "customization license".

Leverage on Email Marketing

Viral advertising using email was the earliest form of this phenomenon. Everyone wants his or her marketing message to be viral, or have a viral aspect and capitalize on viral marketing. Why not? It's free and effective. The problem is that most people don't understand what it is that makes their marketing email message worth of being passed along.

The concept of making an advertisement on email become viral is actually pretty simple. You put something in there that people will want to share with their family and friends, something they will want to spread around. Something interesting or funny that will get your message forwarded and forwarded again. The forwarding is what makes it viral. If it gets deleted or just ignored it isn't going to be viral.

What won't work:

1. Simply suggesting that your email be forwarded is ineffective. A note at the bottom that says "Feel free to forward this message to a friend" isn't going to make it happen.

2. An email that offers nothing more than information about the product or service you are trying to sell won't work either. Competition is stiff on all fronts.

What <u>will work</u>:

1. The message must be perceived as having value. Relevant or timely information, research or studies are examples of content that may be viewed as potential pass-along material. Interactive content like quizzes or personality tests are things that do get passed along because they are entertaining.

2.   Multimedia experiences get passed along. Rich media email is getting a lot of press of late. People, myself included, are always touting the benefits. Yes, it is does take a bit more time and money investment but the messages have a great appeal and they do get shared with others….which is the objective of viral advertising.

Using E-Mail as a Viral Marketing Strategy

Viral Marketing using e-mail is not an objective. It is part of a campaign strategy that is used to achieve objectives. In order to achieve greater branding success exposure, you craft your e-mail message or offer in a way that it encourages pass-along.

Viral marketing is all about producing a message with a quality offer or incentive for pass-along.

Just suggesting that email recipients forward your message to their friends is not viral marketing. Just a message at the bottom of your email that says, "Feel free to forward this message to a friend" is certainly not viral marketing at its best.

You must offer something worthy of being shared… a valuable discount, vital and timely information, a bit of humor, or a quiz or personality test. Offer an incentive for sharing like additional entries into a sweepstakes or an added discount. Viral Marketing happens naturally. It is very often quite successful.

Let's say that you receive two e-commerce offers in your in-box. Both of them are for an electronic product that you are interested in buying yourself or know that a friend is shopping around for. One offers a discount…a good one of maybe 25%, and the other offers free shipping. Shipping costs are high today but free shipping is pretty much expected. A 25% discount is

certainly attractive. Of the two offers, which offer are you more likely to forward to a friend?

Relevant information, research, or studies are all examples of content that may be viewed at possible Pass-along material. Interactive content like a quiz or test com inspire a recipient to forward an e-mail… especially if it is fun. I have forwarded personality tests, fitness quizzes and compatibility questionnaires myself…haven't you? Entertainment has value.

The bottom line is that the message must be perceived as having value in order to get recipients to forward your message.

How to Make Viral E-Mail Legal

Concerns over sending unsolicited email is at the heart of the legality issue of using viral advertising. By using viral marketing tactics carefully, however, marketers can avoid the negative reactions and gain an excellent return on investment (ROI) t as they increase the reach of their marketing message to a targeted group far beyond their original audience.

Here are a few insights on how to execute a viral marketing campaign most effectively.

- **Offer an incentive**. Viral marketing works best when a valuable and tangible incentive is offered that will encourage people to forward an e-mail message to their friends. Marketers should, however, cap the incentive to a specific quantity to avoid spam-like distribution of the message.

- **Do not consider the referral an opt-in**. When a customer refers a friend, the referral shouldn't be considered an opt-in. A name and e-mail address given by a person's friend does not constitute an opt-in by the individual, so the data should be deleted immediately after the

referral email is sent. The referral email should provide the recipient with the option to opt out if he or she does not want to receive future mailings.

- **Personalize the referral e-mail.** Response rates increase dramatically when users can see that a message is coming from a friend, so it is always best to personalize the e-mail message to show that it is coming from a recognizable source. The subject line is the key component in a viral marketing e-mail because it can immediately identify the e-mail as friendly. A good subject line might read, "FYI: Jane Doe thought you'd like 20% off at ABC.com."

- **Continually promote friendly referrals.** Marketers who would like to have their messages forwarded frequently should place a viral marketing offer in every relevant outgoing e-mail message.

Get Your Viral E-Mail Forwarded

Getting recipients of your viral advertising e-mail to forward it to their friends and coworkers isn't as hard as it sounds. The whole trick is to make them WANT to share it and thereby share your advertisement. Neat! Cool! Free!

Because entertainment has value, interactive content like a quiz or test can inspire forwarding, especially if it's fun. Personality tests, fitness quizzes, or compatibility questionnaires are all things that I have received and sent at one time or another.

A really cool, multimedia experience is always going to achieve some pass-along action. Rich media email is getting a lot of press of late. Someone is always touting the benefits. It does take more time and a little money but the messages have great appeal. Rich media has the advantage of being new and therefore has the novelty and tech factor. That alone is often enough for the message to be seen as valuable and worth forwarding.

There are vendors like RidicalMail and AdTools that have "Forward to a Friend" capabilities built right into their technology. Right now this works but eventually marketers will still rely on the value of the proposition in their message to be enough to distinguish it from the rest.

So should you try to capitalize on viral marketing? **Absolutely**! You would be a fool not to include things in your e-mail advertising campaign that would inspire forwarding. You should certainly try to reap the benefits of reaching more than your target audience.

You need to stretch those advertising dollars so hard you make George cry. You do, however, need to understand that viral marketing is a tactic that works toward achieving your campaign objective.

Oh…one more thing. No matter how brilliant you craft the offer and no matter how great the message, if the customer visits your site and has an experience less than what was promised, it will come back to bite you.

Track and Analyze Results of Viral E-Mail

Like any marketing campaign, tracking the results and optimizing performance over time is absolutely necessary. Thank Heavens; sophisticated e-mail marketers can track insightful and actionable data that can be used to evaluate performance. Important metrics to analyze are pass-along, click-through and conversion rates.

Marketers should separate the click-through and conversion rates by original customers from referrals and evaluate their respective performances. These metrics will alert a marketer to which offers their customers like and respond to the best.

Another concern is; how do you handle the customer dissatisfaction that comes from late, mishandled, and ignored email? With the volumes of

inbound email correspondence to service, marketing, and sales organizations increasing on a daily basis, the chance for a misconnection is growing at an exponential rate annually.

If you're running a marketing program, with a solid combination of advertising media plus direct mail and e-mail, chances are you've got leads and responses coming in from just about everywhere.

So how can you tell which of your marketing tactics are stellar performers and which need to be replaced? Tracking your marketing responses is easier than you think, and it's the smartest way to save marketing dollars by cutting the fat and eliminating any non-performing media and tactics.

There are many programs out there that can help you track your viral e-mail marketing campaigns and do so at a pretty reasonable cost. Constant Contact (http://search.constantcontact.com/index.jsp) is one such program and even offers some pretty handy tools to boot.

They will give you a sixty-day free trial of their product with no obligation to buy, so it might be worth looking into. There are others, of course. Search the Internet and find one that will suit your needs and provide you with the information in a form that is most helpful to you.

Niche Marketing as a Viral Tool

One of the greatest things about the Internet is that people who are interested in a particular subject can come together in one tiny corner of it to share ideas and information and product reviews with one another as a niche community.

Your website needs to have great content that is focused directly at these niche markets. Instead of selling to the masses, you sell to the people who are hungry for information and resources concerning their special interest and are most likely to purchase your products or services.

To accomplish this, you must identify yourself as an expert in the field you are targeting, you must become a guru.

You don't have to sit on a mountain top and dispense advice but you do have to establish yourself as an expert and you do have to know what you are talking about. The way you prove your knowledge online is by supplying your website with great original and valuable content.

The Internet delivers pictures, music and video…we all know that…but the most effective way to impart information is, always has been and always will be, text.

Therefore, articles are the **best** vehicle. If you are a good writer, then you have it made…if you aren't a great writer, there is still a way to achieve the goal.

There are a lot of great places to find content online to add to your website and you can get the content free which makes it even better.

Sites like [GoArticles](#) and [Idea Marketers](#) are famous as article directories. The service they provide is matching well-written, informative content with webmasters who need it. The articles are free for the taking with a stipulation that if you display one on your website, you must also cite the article's author and link to his or her website.

Cash in on Niche Markets

There are basically two avenues to success using niche marketing as your vehicle.

The first is to follow your passion. What is meant by following your passion is that you are already or can quickly become an expert. If you just love what you do, you will automatically be good at it. Niche marketing is the perfect vehicle for you.

First build your web site and chock it full of valuable content like articles, special reports, e-courses, audio tutorials, video presentations, information about products and anything else you can think of that would be helpful to your audience.

You know what your audience will want and find helpful because you are the number one fan of the subject. The only drawback is that you will first need to invest a lot of time, effort, energy and maybe money to build your site.

On the other hand, you will have a lot of fun doing it. The way you will make money from this is through advertising of relevant, high quality merchandise that is applicable to your subject, through direct sales of products that you are selling, through membership revenues that you might sell to members to gain access and through licensing deals that you might make be letting your content be used by other sites.

The second is to follow the money. The alternative approach of going where the money trail leads, isn't as exciting but the financial rewards are greater.

You will need to research which niches are highly in demand, design websites that are optimized to rank high on search engines and put up as many web pares as possible on related keywords.

The major drawback is the need for expertise in niche research, and the ability to create multiple web pages quickly.

Where to Find Niche Articles

When you are looking for great content for your niche website, you are usually looking for articles that are well-written and contain timely information. If you are a great writer, you write your own articles, of course….but how many of us are great writers?

If you can't (or don't want to or don't have the time to) write the articles you need for your niche website, there are a couple of ways you can get what you need.

Alternative Number One: You can go to sites like GoArticles or Idea Marketers. They are known as article directories and provide a service that matches articles with webmasters who need them. The articles are free but you are required to link your site to the author's site. So….free isn't exactly free.

Here you are trying to establish yourself as a knowledgeable expert in the niche market and, by linking to the author's website; you are really establishing him as the expert. You are providing this competing guru with the ultimate marketing tool and sending your potential customers to him. Duh!

Alternative Number Two: Running articles on your website that you can claim as your own seems to be a much better idea. "OK," you say, "but I still can't write them." You want articles ghostwritten for you and the way to obtain them is to go to article brokers. Using your favorite search engine (like Google), type in "Niche Article Brokers" and you will get a lot of hits.

These companies deal with private label articles. It is content that you can claim as your own because all rights to the article have been sold by the author. Now, instead of advertising someone else as the expert, you've just shown your customers that you, yourself, are the knowledgeable one.

Newsletters

You want to make the most of the traffic you're getting on your website. So why not ensure that every visitor to your Web site is offered a free subscription to your newsletter within moments of arriving?

At least this way, until your sales process is converting visitors to customers, you can capture the names and e-mail addresses of these valuable leads! Make certain that your directions are clear. "We offer a free newsletter" vs. "Subscribe to our free newsletter." If you don't provide clear take-action statements, they're going to leave.

Plus, to add a little viral marketing to the mix, include special "pass it on" suggestions at the bottom of every newsletter. This way, readers are encouraged to share articles with close friends and associates, driving more traffic to your Web site and generating even more subscriptions.

You could even post your subscription offer in your signature file when responding to posts in newsgroups and chat rooms.

A compelling newsletter offer paired with a simple "pass it on" strategy like this will not only allow you to squeeze the most value out of every visitor to your Web site, but also give you an opt-in list of targeted leads ready and waiting to purchase from you!

A newsletter should contain valuable information, not just sales copy - otherwise interest will quickly drop off and you'll be getting a number of un-subscriptions.

Worse still, your newsletter will be deleted as soon as it arrives, leaving you with a valueless list that only sucks up your time and resources and does nothing to increase your sales.

One of the successful attributes of a website is to maintain a newsletter by which you can keep in contact with your web visitors in order to maintain a reliable and long term relationship with them through your regular email to those opt-in subscribers. It will help them to remember your website and increase your web traffics in the long term.

The days are long gone where a catchy buzz marketing campaign could be launched and you could just sit back, watch it take off and start raking in the profits.

Users are getting more knowledgeable and opportunities are getting slim. Now you are going to have to use your know-how to make viral marketing campaigns work.

Viral Marketing is all about information and the information has got to be good, timely and relevant. One effect the Internet has had on the world is that it is teaching people how to be effective searchers, as well as, savvy searchers. Information has become a commodity on the Internet much like coffee beans and oranges are in the brick and mortar world.

If one site charges you for the information you are seeking, while another site gives away that information for free, which site will you most likely use? This means that when it comes to your viral marketing campaign, the better the information you distribute to your users, subscribers, and website visitors, the better your chances are for success.

Newsletters are a perfect example of informational marketing. You are giving something of value for nothing. That value could be hard-to-find knowledge or it could be you…yourself.

After all, individuality is something that can never be a commodity. Knowledge is power and if it is free, well then it is free power and that is pretty cool. You have to rely on what you have and what you know to move that marketing virus along.

Fill that newsletter up with great information…always exceed expectations. Viral marketing is more "grassroots" now than it has ever been before. Hook onto a feeling like prestige or drive with something like a contest or a giveaway.

Know what you market considers contagious, then you only need to figure out a way to deliver it.

Flash Games as Viral Marketing

If you have ever received an e-mail from a friend with a link to an interesting or intriguing game, you are part of the growing target list for viral games, an online marketing tool which counts on users sending a web address to other people in order to promote and idea, product or company.

Six or seven years ago, or roughly the same time that Flash became main stream, is when viral games started. Greeting cards were one of the first to use flash.

Advertising agencies employ some of the most talented designers and programmers on the market to design flash games that will catch peoples' attention quickly and make users pass them on.

One huge advantage is that flash games tend to have a shelf life of years… but not always. Sometimes the shelf life is only a matter of weeks or months. However, sometimes you can get away with something that is a bit risqué.

Interaction is the key.

Viral movies or pictures can be great and very funny but people will look at them once or twice and that's it. If you can find a concept that is simple to grasp, make it enjoyable and incredibly easy to use and then get your user to keep coming back for more, you will have the opportunity of exposing them a greater number of times to your message.

If you can add something as simple as keeping score to make a game competitive you can get people to play over and over. Quirky games have the same effect. The Burger King Subservient Chicken proved to be extremely effective.

The only disadvantage is that games are more expensive than other kinds of viral marketing. However, the return from a successful viral game exceeds the initial investment.

The Present and Future of Flash Games

The Present: The initial cost of creating a viral game is more than other viral marketing methods but, compared to print campaigns, buying advertising space, radio or television advertising, viral games are a pretty cost-effective way of reaching your market.

The other thing about games which is hard to put a price on is that you can reach your target audience with content that is relevant and interesting to them with ease and, once the game is launched, with very little effort.

There have been a lot of extremely successful campaigns using Flash. One of my personal favorites is the Burger King Subservient Chicken simply because when it came out it was a new concept and it has spawned several copycats since, which is always a good sign of a successful campaign.

The biggest problem today is connection speed. The game must be streamlined and kept catchy and easy to use. Broadband is slowly getting rid of the download time problem.

Other problems revolve around restricted technology within businesses. Companies sometimes block Flash in their company machines because of security concerns. JavaScript is, also, occasionally blocked.

The Future: The distant future in the world of cyberspace is within the next two years…things move fast.

Viral games will be pushed to mobiles and be made location-based. Won't it be fun when the game you are playing on the bus is using your location to

provide clues to get you to a certain retail outlet to collect a prize? That is going to happen.

Multiplayer viral games are going to be on the move and once they are multiplayer kids at school will be playing them, people will be playing them with their fellow commuters on the train to work…the games are going to spread like wildfire.

The Power of Blogging

How to increase the flow of traffic on a website is the recurring dilemma of webmasters. One of the methods that have spawned many success stories in driving traffic into websites is viral marketing.

Viral marketing is simply making use of the tendency of a person to share something they find informative, entertaining of amazing and blogging is one of the ways that viral marketing is facilitated.

These days, everybody is blogging and you can incorporate blogging into your sales marketing and have a lot more success.

It isn't that hard to do. Just have your customers write diary entries about goals they have reached using your product, the good emotions it's given them, the fears and worries your product has taken out of their lives, how bad their lives were before they bought it, how it has helped other people in their lives, how much better their lives are since they began using your product, and on and on.

Customers could update their blog daylily, weekly or monthly. It will depend on how often they use your product. If you are teaching them a skill, they can blog their progress.

You must provide your customers with web space for writing their online diary (blog) or have them e-mail you the blog entries for you to publish.

Your customer's online blogs can be made extra persuasive by including personal profiles, pictures, online video of them using your product, net audio of them talking about your product, and so forth.

An online blog would likely outsell the common testimonial because it is updated on a regular basis and gives more personal information and since a diary (blog) is considered private, it makes people more curious to read it and believe that what is said is true.

In the Early Days…

… of online listserv or discussion groups, a company that launched a product or new technology without the proper testing could be literally crippled by these groups. There were instances where companies would discount the opinions of listservs as they watched their sales decline until they finally realized they couldn't simply ignore it and continue with business as usual.

It took a while, but companies finally understood that they had to go into the groups and communicate and manage customers and customer messaging with facts.

They had to be heard and they had to manage crises. A similar situation could occur today but we have the opportunity to build relationships with bloggers by giving them the facts that tell our story.

The power of communication belongs to bloggers and they lead the way with word-of-mouth (or mouse) marketing. They are serious enough about communication that they sign up for RSS feeds that alert them when one of their favorite blogs has been updated or modified.

It is a 'reminder" to check the blog. I'm sure you recall that listservs or bulletin boards drew many "authorities" who were able to shape consumer confidence of newly released tech products by posting and positioning themselves with their peers.

Bloggers are positioning themselves as experts to their peers. If the value of your company is in the hands of bloggers, shouldn't you know what they are saying about you?

Blogging is communication in, perhaps, its purest form. A big debate is currently underway regarding the usefulness of blogs as advertising vehicles.

The fact is that they are a very important channel through which we can reach our audience and one of the primary new ways we can effectively communicate brand messages in a genuine way to very specific groups of people who have hundreds of online acquaintances with those same specific interest.

Other Viral Marketing Methods

Affiliate Programs

Some eBooks combine very well with an affiliate program. When the affiliate receives some extra benefit from promoting the viral message, like being able to brand your eBook with his affiliate links, the affiliate makes a sale when a reader buys through a branded link. You benefit from increased traffic on your website because the affiliate is willing to promote the eBooks for you.

Be absolutely certain that your message includes a clear call to action. There shouldn't be any doubt whatsoever about what you intend recipients to do. Make sure that the instructions are perfectly clear so that recipients know HOW to act.

The action that you require should be simple and obvious as well. Don't make things complicated or it will confuse the reader, such as by adding numerous links. Remember the K.I.S.S. principle: <u>Keep It Simple Stupid</u>!

The incentive should be clear to those you want to take an action. Readers will look at your offering for about seven seconds before they move on. If it takes longer than that for them to figure out what it is you want them to do, they will move on. Don't make your message vague or difficult to comprehend. If you do, chances are you will lose them. You must respect your readers enough to express your message clearly.

Once you are sure you have an eBook that will be of value to an affiliate program, approach them with your idea and be able to show that it will be mutually beneficial.

Viral Marketing using eBooks is one of many techniques that all together have a cumulative effect in attracting customers and subscribers to your business and in attracting targeted visitors to your website. You will very soon find out that this is an excellent way of increasing sales, subscribers and referrals.

"Folksonomies" (short for folks and taxonomy)

A new consumer phenomenon is called "tagging" or "folksonomies" (short for folks and taxonomy). Tagging is powerful because consumers are creating an organizational structure for online content. Folksonomies not only enable people to file away content under tags, but, even better, share it with others by filing it under a global taxonomy that they created.

Here's how tagging works: using sites such as del.icio.us - a bookmark sharing site – and Flickr - a photo sharing site - consumers are collaborating on categorizing online content under certain keywords, or tags. For instance, an individual can post photographs of their iPod on Flickr and file it under the tag "iPod." These images are now not only visible under the individual user's iPod tag but also under the community iPod tag that displays all images consumers are generating and filing under the keyword. Right now Flickr has more than 3,500 photos that are labeled "iPod."

Tagging is catching on because it is a natural complement to search. Type the word "blogs" into Google and it can't tell if you are searching for information about how to launch a blog, how to read blogs, or just what. Large and small sites alike are already getting on to the folksonomy train. They are rolling out tag-like structures to help users more easily locate content that's relevant to them.

Although tags are far from perfect, marketers should, nevertheless, be using them to keep a finger on the pulse of the American public. Start subscribing to RSS feeds to monitor how consumers are tagging information related to

your product, service, company or space. These are living focus groups that are available for free, **24/7**.

Folksonomy sites can be also be carefully used to unleash viral marketing campaigns - with a caveat. Marketers should be transparent in who they are, why they are posting the link/photos and avoid spamming the services.

Tell-A-Friend Script

One method of viral marketing is using tell-a-friend script on your website. This is a simple programming script that you can attach to the programming on your site. Usually tell a friend scripts are installed in pages where a media is placed so that a person can easily send the media to any of his friends or family members and do it quickly.

Basically the tell a friend script is a script where a person can input his name, e-mail address, the recipient's e-mail address and send the media to his friend or family member much like an e-mail with an attachment.

When the recipient gets the e-mail he won't think of it as spam mail because he sees the senders name as someone he knows and trusts. Tell a friend script practically eliminates the chances of being blocked because it uses the information supplied by the sender. It is a little sneaky….but it is very effective.

When the e-mail is opened it will be read, viewed or played. Included in the e-mail would be a brief description of the company or site that sponsors the media sent and another tell a friend script. Then the process begins again. Viral? **You bet**!

Tell a friend script is very simple and doesn't require a complicated method of programming. You can just copy and paste a script and simply put it on an intended page.

Finding a script is as easy as falling off the proverbial log. Use your favorite search engine and type in "tell a friend script". There will be a lot of results. There are free ones and paid ones. You just use the one that best fits your needs.

By using tell a friend script, you can potentially drive traffic into your site and that could spell profits.

Use File Sharing

There are probably ten million people online, looking for downloads at any given time. Of course, a lot of them could be looking for pornography or free software but still, reaching a minimum on a million people on any given day does offer some rather intriguing possibilities.

People like using file services to download music for two simple reasons, they're free, and there is an incredible selection. The fact is Pandora's Box has been opened. In Napster's wake, other quasi-legal services quickly emerged… <u>a lot of them</u>. Even if they are closed, others will succeed them.

Major record companies would like to thing otherwise but they are never going to stop file sharing. Net users are file sharers…plain and simple. Long before the Internet came into being, people made cassette tapes of their favorite music for their friends… CD burners are so much easier and faster.

So how can you use this to help your viral marketing campaign along?

Think about this. Once someone downloads your MP3 files and those files are available on that listener's hard drive, viral marketing begins. After two users start sharing your files, suddenly, your music is on the hard drive of a second computer…then a third…and on and on.

When users are searching and they find your music on a lot of different computers, they are more likely to download the files. It's just a matter of time before you'll find your files showing up in more and more places.

No matter what genre music you play…Rock and Roll, Country, Tejano, Mozart sonatas, Heavy Metal, of Brazilian Jazz, there is an audience for it somewhere.

In this new paradigm, you aren't hawking a product, you are offering free music via a medium that lets you be directly connected with your audience.

Using Forums

Recently, forum marketing has been touted as a kind of free, organic, viral marketing. But because so many marketers go into forums purely with the intention of marketing products or services, their actions and attitude unwittingly causes the exact opposite of the desired effect.

Forums aren't marketplaces but when used as such, the marketers' actions become offensive and will only inspire the wrath of fellow members and marketers, not to mention moderators who can ban them from the site with the click of their mouse.

In order to be effective, this kind of marketing carries a certain degree of commitment, responsibility and respect. The first requirement is to take a personal interest in the main topic of the forum.

Not only does that mean visiting it regularly, but it also means developing a good relationship with both other members and the moderators, as well as taking an active interest in helping others. Of course, it also means abiding by and all rules that exist. By doing this, one can develop a reputation and, since it is human nature to work with a trusted colleague, business will naturally develop from this.

This type of marketing has already suffered some abuse and because of this, many forums have recently developed stringent rules designed to protect their members from abusive or overly-aggressive marketing tactics. One forum grants .sig files only after a member has created one hundred valid posts and another has disallowed ads in sig files altogether.

Marketers must respect that the purpose of a forum is to be a platform to exchange ideas on a given topic. It is not there to advertise products and services. By focusing on the topic and posting questions and answers, a marketer's reputation will grow and this creates the potential for sales naturally.

Using Videos

More and more advertisers are adopting video as broadband continues to rise and ad-serving technologies become more sophisticated.

Online video advertising is really taking off. Users' attention can be captured and ads stand out from the crowd in an increasingly ad-cluttered online environment.

It is true that video formats cost five to ten times more to serve than standard banners and they involve a lot more production and implementation work but they may well be worth all of that if they achieve greater response rates.

Where to use online video if wishing to maximize its effect, is what advertisers must carefully consider. Video to be used on the Internet should be information and communication focused while video to be used on television should be focused on entertainment.

Like everything else, there are good ways and bad ways to use video advertising. Right now most marketers are incorporating their audio-visual content into existing embedded ad formats like banners or over-content formats like pop-ups.

Though this could reach a potentially large audience, viewers are likely to be less captivated and more annoyed by these disruptive and distracting placements.

Cached or streaming video on a specific destination site offers the best chance of interesting consumers in brand messages, but it is not likely to reach a large audience unless it generates a viral outcome.

Whatever you come up with, don't forget to make it easy to open and distribute. File size is important, as is the media format. If your viral video has been created for a particular type of software that not many people use, how will you get people to spread it like wildfire? Also, if you've made a video the impact will be better if you send the clip as an attachment rather than stream it. It's cheaper and, if you're not hosting it, it's more viral, too.

Word of Mouth Advertising

The concept of viral marketing is an old idea made new again by the internet. Word of mouth advertising has been recognized as a worthwhile tool for years among savvy marketers. The idea of giving a little to get a lot has been around for centuries.

Remember the washing powder manufacturer who put dishtowels or drinking glasses in the boxes of detergent or was that before your time? They advertised it on radio a few times but mostly depended on people to pass the word around… and they did. That was a horse and buggy version of what we call viral marketing today.

Word of mouth advertising is simply direct communication between people about some product, service, brand, or event. Most of the time one of the people in the conversation has had some experience with what is being discussed.

Many times, but not always, the person who is doing the talking will have some relationship with the product, service, brand or event being discussed.

Word of mouth… viral marketing… is a two way street. I remember once my mother had a bad experience with a non-stick pan that she had just bought. The first thing she did was spread the work among her friends (who then spread the word among their friends) that the pan wasn't good. That is also viral marketing… the bad kind.

In today's internet connected world, I would feel very sorry for the manufacturer of that pan that ruined a birthday cake.

There are a lot of people in the big, wide world and a lot of them will have a lot of things to say about your product. Some marketers are taking word of mouth advertising to the next level by trying to influence what is being said about their product.

That might not necessarily be a bad thing but it could be a bit risky to the uninformed.

Success Factor #1: User Satisfaction

It might seem like something that would be as obvious as the nose on your face but e-tailers ignore the fact that they have to keep existing users happy to reap the benefits of new client referrals. Viral marketing efforts can provide enormous benefits to e-commerce sites by bringing in new users but most fail to fully appreciate the promotional benefits of user satisfaction.

Failing to keep existing customers satisfied can spell big trouble for e-businesses, since research indicates that word-of-mouth…or word-of-mouse… referrals contributes to building a regular customer base more than search engines ever hoped to.

Not only that… viral marketing is a two-way street. The news that your e-business did not deliver as promised travels like a speeding bullet and twice as fast as the speed of light.

Nearly twice as many regular users of an e-business site say that they first visited after being referred by friends or relatives, rather than reaching the site via a search engine.

That should tell you something. Referrals are the back bone of growing an online business. You need to be sure that your site delivers what it offers… .and even more. The content needs to be interesting and timely. Giving away free gifts is always a good thing and encourages pass-along among your customer base.

Research shows that as user demands evolve, companies need to continually strive to understand exactly what satisfies their users, ensuring they regularly visit the site and personally recommend it to their friends and family. User demands do evolve…what was satisfactory last month is old hat this month and you need to continually update your content.

Only a few online marketers attempt to track the success of their viral marketing efforts. As a result, few e-businesses understand the significant contribution that referrals play in their business.

Success Factor #2: Trust

Assuming your products or services are priced competitively and are of good quality, **your most significant sales barrier is <u>trust</u>**.

Trust is the essential lubricant of Web business; without trust, business grinds to a halt and building trust takes time and effort on your part. It isn't something that customers give freely. You must earn it and continue to earn it with every sale.

Established store brand names come from hundreds of positive impressions built by expensive advertising campaigns. These ads purchase brand trust but if you're a small business you can't afford such advertising.

Still, you can build trust by means of your website in a lot of different ways. First, nail down your business in time and space by giving a full address and phone number. If you have an office or brick-and-mortar store, show a photograph.

Even better, show pictures of yourself or your staff. Now your customers view you as real people rather than some faceless entity who-knows-where.

You build trust by selling good and reliable products, by displaying clear shipping and return policies, by joining nationally-respected organizations, and by offering guarantees.

You build trust with a customer-friendly navigation system and intuitive interface, and an SSL secure server for credit card transactions. You gain trust by having a professionally designed site, rather than something your teenage son cooked up on the weekends.

Your customer service needs to be reliable and right there on the spot when needed. If a customer can't reach you when they have a problem…and

problems happen even with the best laid plans… they will not trust you and will not refer their friends and family to you. The result is you didn't just lose one customer…you lost a lot of customers.

You also build trust by repeated contact with your visitors. Once you've established trust, sales result.

Success Factor #3: Customer Care

With all of the effort being put into… and attention being given to… "word-of-mouse" advertising these days, it is really amazing how many companies don't at least put forth minimal effort to take care of the customers that they get from the advertising.

Customers are the life blood of any business. After a customer has chosen a company to do business with, wouldn't a smart marketer want to ensure that the customer is taken care of well enough to ensure that he remains a customer and makes future purchases? Wasn't that covered in Business 101?

A fellow by the name of Tom Locke put customer care practices to the test by running an experiment to test it. He sent letters to one hundred companies asking for free stuff to see how they would respond.

The first finding was that it was exceedingly difficult to even figure out a way to send a letter to a big corporation…and smaller ones weren't any better.

Of course, that isn't all that surprising in a world where customer calls are viewed as expenses to be minimized, rather than opportunities to build a relationship.

His test is on-going and is being racked to see what the responses are. So far, Mercedes is leading. They sent a thirty dollar keychain. However, over two-thirds of the companies have failed to respond at all. Half of those that have responded gave flat rejections.

When customers are acquired, by whatever means, they should be treated like the valuable asset they are. They should be told (and shown) on a regular basis that they are valued.

Their inquires should always be answered promptly and requests granted as often as is feasible. Ignoring customers is the first step to losing their business entirely…and the business of their friends and family they might have sent your way.

Success Factor #4: Content

The success of any viral marketing campaign is directly related to the content of the viral message by whatever vehicle it is delivered be it, e-mail, newsletters, websites, etc. Think of viral advertising like you would think of fishing. You need bait. How good and effective your bait is directly effects the number of fish you are going to catch.

One completely useless bait is the unimaginative, over-used, and uninspired note ate the bottom of an e-mail or newsletter that says, "Please feel free to forward this message to your friends and family". That sentence amounts to no bait at all…just a bare hook that isn't going to catch anything.

Really good, creative, and inspired content (bait) can and does bring in customers by the numbers. "So", you ask, "what exactly does good, creative and inspired content consist of?" Here are a few suggestions that might help:

1. Offering something worthy of sharing like a valuable discount, vital information or offering an incentive for sharing like additional entries into a sweepstakes or an added discount or premium service will work.

2. Relevant or timely information, research, or studies that are included in your e-mail might encourage the recipients to share with their family and friends. Interactive content like a quiz or test, especially if it's fun, will inspire forwarding.

3. Jokes and cartoons are almost always forwarded to everybody the recipient knows. Why? Because they are entertaining and entertainment is meant to be shared.

4. A really cool multimedia experience is always going to achieve a lot of pass-along. Rich media is new and the novelty and tech factors alone are often enough to make the e-mail recipient eager to share it.

Remember that the better the content (bait) in your viral marketing message is, the better your catch is going to be.

Success Factor #5: Make It Look Good

Web users form first impressions of web pages in as little as 50 milliseconds (1/20th of a second). In the blink of an eye, web surfers make nearly instantaneous judgments of a web site's "visual appeal."

Through the "halo effect" first impressions can color subsequent judgments of perceived credibility, usability, and ultimately influence purchasing decisions. Creating a fast-loading, visually appealing site can help websites succeed.

The speed at which users form value judgments of web pages precludes much cognitive thought. This pre-cognitive "affective reaction" is a physiological response to what they see on the screen - a gut reaction.

This carry-over of first impressions to other attributes of products is sometimes called the "halo effect," or cognitive "confirmation bias" where users search for confirming evidence and ignore evidence contrary to their initial impression. People want to be right, and tend to look for clues that validate their initial hypothesis.

There clearly is a connection between our emotional reaction to a webpage, and our conscious thought process. "Consumers apply both holistic (emotional) and analytic (cognitive) judgment in the decision to buy a product." So that feeling you evoke in users through a "clean, professional design" can have a halo effect on their buying judgments.

The strong impact of visual appeal to a site might even tend to draw attention away from usability problems. It could it be that aesthetics, or visual appeal, factors might be detected first and that these could influence how users judge their subsequent experience.

Hence, even if a website is highly usable and provides very useful information presented in a logical arrangement, this may fail to impress a user whose first impression of the site was negative

Websites need to look good at first glance so that prospective customers will stick around long enough to take a second look. If their senses are pleased in the first instant they see a site, they will even look for reasons to support that belief.

Summary

We've finally come to an end in this exciting guide to leveraging your marketing on other people's efforts. You've also come to learn that this is very possible as long as you give people a good initiative or reason to willingly do the marketing for you – sometimes "on the house"!

As there are "good" buzz and "bad" buzz, you've discovered what it takes to market online using other people's efforts and the buttons to push in making this a reality.

So with that said, all the best in your viral marketing campaigns in time to come!

Sincerely,
James Jackson

Recommended Resources

"Here's How To Get Unlimited Ideas For Topics That You Can Create Viral Marketing Ebooks For!"...

"Grab This <mark>Free</mark> Keyword Research Software Pre-Loaded With <mark>42,000+</mark> Topics Containing Over <mark>7.7MILLION</mark> Extractable Niche Keyword Phrases!...

...With Estimated Search Counts Included!

Click Here To Get This Software Absolutely Free Right Now!