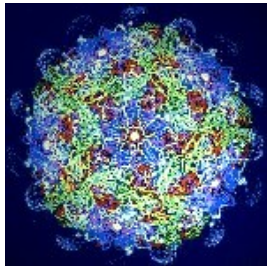


Viral marketing

Viral marketing involves people in passing along a marketing message and can include funny videos, web micro-sites, interactive games, text messages, special offers, interesting stories or images that are passed around interlocking social networks whether they are family, friends or colleagues.



Viral marketing relies on the recipient "buying in" to the message enough to forward it and relies a lot on the quality of the viral and its appeal.

Good virals also generally link to a URL with the original message and more and has an impact on search engine performance by getting other sites to link to it thus increasing link popularity.

Of course, not everybody is going to forward it and/or link to it. Some may not see, or appreciate it, but if enough recipients forward the viral you get exponential audience growth and create a 'buzz' around your product or service very, very cost effectively.

Naturally, if your message is intended for 30 year old women in the UK, it's no good if it becomes popular with 16 year olds in the USA, especially as the success of virals is often based upon them being 'cool'. Additionally quite a lot of virals are also based on "controversial" content to give them an 'edge' – great idea but if taken too far it can backfire like Jonathan Ross' and Russell Brand's phone call to Andrew Sachs.

Any effective viral needs to include sales message in a way that your target audience will like and that doesn't necessarily mean 'beat them over the head with it'. To be effective you have to be clear about your objectives. If you are Coke or Pepsi it might be brand building leading to sales. If you are 'Joe Soap' it's more likely to be more immediate sales.

Make it relevant

A viral must be relevant to your customers and your brand, so what:

- motivates your customer base?
- do you wish people said about you?
- is your biggest challenge?
- do customers love about you?
- do customers hate about you?
- can you do that's controversial?
- can you do that's outrageous?
- can you do that's funny

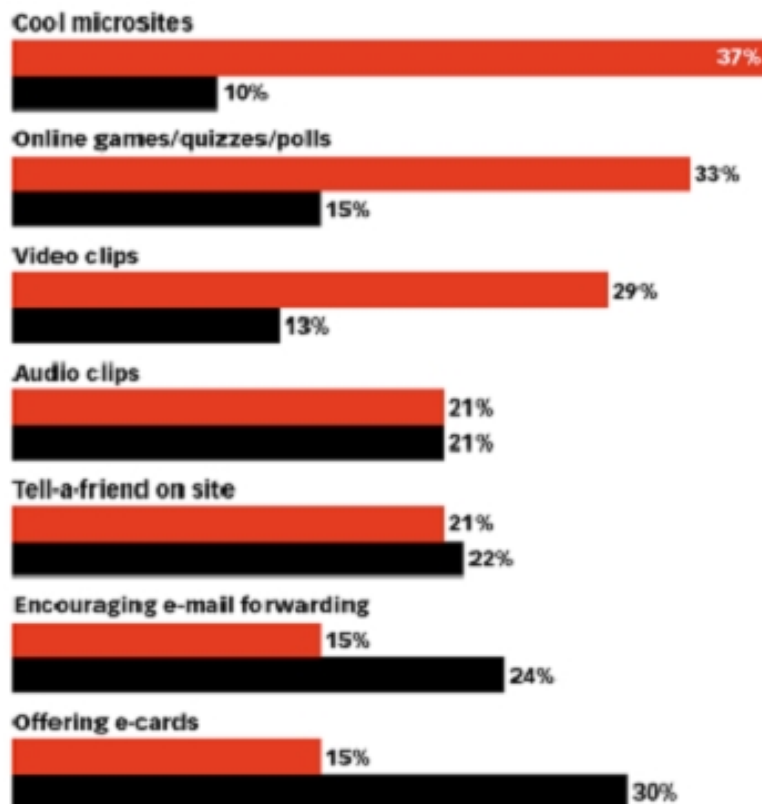


It takes a while to brainstorm all of this and get it right but the viral concept is the most important building block....without it you have nothing.

Now forget about your product or your company. Focus exclusively on creating an interesting and compelling idea that takes in to account everything you have brainstormed above.

Only now do you bring it all together so that the viral and product / service / brand meld together.

To help this is what Marketing Sherpa's 2007 survey says works according to nearly 3,000 practitioners. (Red = good, black = bad).



Incentives and emotions

Understand that most middle class ideal: delayed gratification. Generate interest and action and you may not profit so much today, but later.....

Free – perhaps the most powerful word in marketing. Free information (Google), free minutes (mobile phones), free gifts (look through your direct mail!), free software (pay to upgrade). Discount, time limited, anything that incentivises people to forward things and allows you to build email address lists

If you want people to notice your campaign, you have to do:

- something different
- something exciting
- something unusual
- something unforgettable
- something relevant to today

But perhaps most importantly in viral is a very strong emotion. Laughter and tears, love and hate, happy and angry, liking and disgust, surprise and anticipation - viral marketing takes advantage of these common human emotions plus greed, popularity, sex and fun to make people WANT to pass it on.

Make it easy

Promote transmission, sharing, downloading and embedding. Viruses only spread when they're easy to transmit.

Simplify your message so it can be transmitted easily and without change. (send reinforcements we're going to advance.....send three and four pence we're going to a dance). The classic free and strong viral is Hotmail: "Get your private, free email at <http://www.hotmail.com>." The message is clear, simple and at the bottom of every e-mail and subscribers grew from zero to twelve million users in just 18 months.



So make it easy to:

- forward it to friends
- download the video
- capture the image
- embed the content (look at YouTube)
- publish it on social networks (Facebook, MySpace, Ecademy, Xing, etc.)
- add it to bookmarking sites (Delicious, Stumbleupon, Digg, etc.)

and **don't** require people to:

- register
- become a member
- download special software
- enter "unlock" codes

Have a follow up

People have just seen your campaign. They like it and you have their complete attention. When you have people's attention you need to act, and one the best ways of doing that is to give them more:

- the sequel or prequel (like Hollywood)
- behind the scenes out takes and / or blog about it
- extra goodies whatever they may be

Measure

As with all marketing tracking results and optimizing performance is essential. Important metrics are pass-along, click-through, and conversion rates separating the click-through and conversion rates by original customers from referrals.