

VIRAL MARKETING VALUES

Increase Your Business on a Shoestring Budget

This Guide Brought To You By

Lo Benedict

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What Is 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, if for no other reason than to make ourselves look good. Everybody knows somebody, and just like rumors, these freebies can spread fast.

You can use viral tactics to market your newsletter, your web site, products and services you're selling, practically anything. and you will have an opportunity to make a profit when someone clicks through the advertising on the freebie. The beauty of this technique is that the advertising is free for you and the benefit is free for the user/potential customer.

In other words, it really is one of those rare win/win situations.

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 online resources where you can download the freebies. For example, you may begin 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 website and is an effective means of advertising with little expense.

In summary, Viral Marketing by definition is any advertising and/or marketing technique that, once started, spreads like a "virus" without you having to do any further work.

The Oldest Viral Marketing Tactic of All

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 marketing tool for thousands of years. Some fish seller in Old London undoubtedly said to his customers, "tell your neighbors I have excellent cod today."

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 word 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 if the product is not up to par in the first place.

The Viral Marketing Value of Buzz

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.

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.

Think of it like this.

Everybody knows certain urban and social legends. They have never been marketed nobody spent the first dime to let the world know that there are alligators living in the New York City sewer system or that Bigfoot is happy and well in the backwoods of America.

So how is it that we all know stories like that?

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 .

The incredibly cool product that a friend of a friend just bought.

Those are the heart and soul of buzz marketing or viral marketing, depending on what you want to call it.

A better question is what if it were your product or service that enjoyed such common knowledge?

How to Create the 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 bustierre. 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.

The Viral Marketing Value of Online Video and Audio

More and more advertisers are adopting online video and audio for ad delivery, as broadband availability continues to rise and ad-serving technologies become more sophisticated.

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

It is true that video and audio formats cost more to serve than standard banners or text ads, and they involve a lot more production and implementation work. But they may well be worth the added expense if they achieve greater response

rates.

Where to use online video and audio 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 and audio 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.

The Viral Marketing Value of eBooks

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 zero, 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.

What To Do With Your Viral 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 Viral 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 price 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".

The Viral Marketing Value of Articles

The point here is to write original articles (or have them ghost written) and attach your own bio or resource box to the end of the article, along with a link to your website or your opt-in page.

Then, you allow others "free reprint rights" to your articles on the condition that they leave your resource box intact. If done correctly, high quality articles can be passed on and on, from one reprinted to another, with no further effort from you.

Sounds easy right?

Well, it is. But the traditional methods of article distribution, while they still work to some degree, do not work as well as they once did.

High dollar training courses and a myriad of ebooks have been written about marketing with articles. As a result, competition for article distribution is more fierce than ever before.

Until a couple of years ago, when the floodgates opened, quietly submitting two or three good articles each month to online article directories could gain you a steady flow of incoming traffic and new opt-in list subscribers, all at no cost to

you.

While that is still a good idea, and it does help, directory submissions alone are not as effective as they once were. Nowadays, most article directories are flooded on a daily basis with new submissions. Sometimes it takes several weeks after submission before your article is finally approved and placed online in the directory.

Even then, your article is likely to be just another one of dozens or even hundreds that are freely available for reprinting.

So, effective viral marketing with articles involves using a bit of ingenuity to get your articles out of that huge and ever-growing pool, and make them stand alone in full view of those who will be most likely to reprint them.

Here are a few ideas you can use toward that end.

1. **Offer your articles to your own mailing list** first, before you submit them elsewhere. This will go a long way toward building credibility, good relationships, and making your list members feel special. Chances are your list includes more potential (or established) online publishers than you might realize.
2. **Create an ebook** every month or two that contains at least 10 to 12 of your freshest articles. Then use the viral ebook tactics described elsewhere in this volume to distribute those ebooks. You can allow the articles to be copied directly from the ebook if you wish. **But a better tactic** might be to include links to separate auto responders, one for each article, where reprinters can instantly acquire a formatted copy of the article of their choice, along with an invitation to opt-in to your exclusive articles release mailing list.
3. **Contact webmasters and newsletter publishers** directly, offering to write exclusively or semi-exclusively for them. In this case, it's important to include a link in your article resource box that offers a source of "other free articles for reprint" that you can provide. Getting your articles placed on only a few high traffic websites, or in a few big list newsletters, can quickly increase your traffic up front, and set off a viral distribution effect that can go on for weeks, months, or even years.

The Viral Marketing Value of eMail

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 as possible Pass-along material. Interactive content like a quiz or test can 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 eMail 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) 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.

- 1 **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.
- 2 **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.
- 3 **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."
- 4 **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 eMail 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!**

At the very least, it would be unwise to leave out factors in your e-mail advertising campaign that would inspire forwarding. After all, don't you want maximum penetration into 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 eMail

Making money is exciting Right?

Now, here is the part that bores many people to tears.

But, just like any other type of marketing campaign, tracking your viral results and optimizing performance over time is absolutely necessary.

Fortunately, current technology allows sophisticated e-mail marketers to 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.

The Viral Marketing Value 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 or 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 daily, 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 Days Before Blogs

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.

The Viral Marketing Value of 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.

For example, we'll talk here about music downloads. But don't think for a minute that file sharing applies only to music. Refer back to the section on video and audio files as viral tools.

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... a lot of them. 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.

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.

The Viral Marketing Value of Your Affiliate Program

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.

Don't complicate things - such as adding a link-farm to an eBook!

It will only serve to confuse the reader and the affiliate as well.

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.

The Viral Marketing Value of Tell-A-Friend

This involves a simple programming script that you can attach to a high traffic

webpage 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 sender's 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.

IMPORTANT: Do not think of the referred “friend” as an opt-in subscriber. That can get you in a lot of spam trouble. Instead, invite them to join your list voluntarily from the first message they receive. If they don't take that action, then do not email them again.

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.

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”.

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

The Viral Marketing Value of Online 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.

Viral Value for the Customer

So far, we've talked about the value you, the marketer, can gain from using viral techniques to promote your business.

But equally important are the values involved for the prospects and customers that viral tactics will bring to you. Give some serious consideration in these areas, if you intend to maximize the long term effect of your viral campaigns.

Customer Viral Value #1: Satisfaction

It might seem like something that would be as obvious as the nose on your face, but many marketers 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.

A dissatisfied user will not refer anyone to your website. In fact, the old salesman's rule is:

"A happy customer will tell three people. An unhappy customer will tell 30!"

Failing to keep existing customers satisfied can spell big trouble for e-businesses, since research indicates that word-of-mouth...or word-of-mouth... 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.

Customer Viral Value #2: Trust

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

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.

Customer Viral Value #3: Support

With all of the effort being put into... and attention being given to... "word-of-mouth" 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.

Customer Viral Value #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 by 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 affects the number of fish you are going to catch.

One completely useless bait is the unimaginative, over-used, and uninspired note at 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.

Customer Viral Value #5: Appearance

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 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.

We believe the tactics described in this volume can be of great benefit to anyone who wants to start or expand any online business, regardless of the nature of products or services offered.

But the information you have just read is worthless, unless you put it to use.

Now the ball is in your court, so run with it!

To your success!

Lo Benedict

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