

Viral Marketing: a powerful, but dangerous marketing tool

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ABSTRACT

Viral Marketing: a Large-Scale Field Experiment We report the results of a large-scale field experiment performed in the context of the national launch of a new cosmetic product. The manufacturer launched this new product using three promotional tools in parallel: full-page advertisements in fashion magazines, free standing inserts (FSI) in Sunday newspapers, and a viral marketing campaign. Each promotional tool featured an identical discount coupon for the new product, but with different redemption codes across promotional tools. Our data enable us to address the following research questions: (1) How does the effectiveness of viral marketing compare to that of traditional media? (2) What is the relation between online and offline social interactions in viral marketing campaigns? And (3) what characterizes the most active members in a viral marketing campaign? We find that (1) viral marketing compares very favorably to print advertising and FSI, based on the partial but objective measure of coupon redemption rate; (2) although viral marketing campaigns involve a strong online component, most social interactions happen offline and offline social interactions do not substitute online social interactions; (3) a set of simple measures of members' social characteristics may be used to predict word-of-mouth transmission and identify the most active members in a campaign.

INTRODUCTION

Marketing of today is a science, where knowledge of consumer behavior is becoming more essential when it comes to reaching people, together with the

ability to make your brand noticed among the masses of messages (Keller, 1993). Meanwhile, knowledge of marketing channels is even more complex, from the first rumor spreading to newspaper, radio and television. Even the newest channel of marketing, the internet, is evolving into new channels within itself (Rowley, 2004). Among these internet channels we find new names and words like Facebook, Twitter, blogging and Youtube. These are all names of different social-communities or networks where people meet, exchange information and receive marketed messages every day. Marketers now learn how to use new trends in marketing such as viral marketing also known as buzz marketing and word-of-mouth to mention some. This is far from a recent phenomenon, as Ferguson (2008) says; —before the advent of the printing press, broadcast media and the internet, word-of-mouth was the only way to market your goods. It is possible to spread the word of a new product or service at light speed, generate buzz at the approximate level of a Hollywood premiere and leverage brand evangelists to encourage trial and activation (Ferguson, 2008). Since the invention of the internet, people around the world have come closer to each other more rapidly than ever before . The Internet and other new technologies created a flood of interesting and innovative ways to provide and enhance customer value. Not only did this challenge the fundamental basics of traditional marketing, but it also helped to shape the practice of modern marketing. One such form of modern marketing is viral marketing. Owing to increased competition and in an effort to stand out from the crowd, many businesses are now turning towards viral marketing. It is another form of word of mouth that encourages consumers to pass along company developed products and services or audio ,video or written information to others online . It is marketing which spread like a virus which cannot be stop. It referring to marketing techniques that use pre-existing social networks to produce increases in brand awareness or to achieve other marketing objective through self –replicating viral processes.

Elements of viral marketing

Marketers attempting a viral marketing campaign must measure the effort of the campaign by setting targets for it and taking solid baseline reports before starting it. According to Wilson (2000:2), an effective viral marketing strategy comprises six characteristics, namely:

- It gives away products or services for free. Although 'cheap' or 'inexpensive' may generate a wave of interest, 'free' will usually accomplish it much faster. The logic behind this is that 'free' attracts eyeballs, which in turn see desirable things that are purchased in most cases. Therefore, preferably give something away
- It provides for effortless transfer to others. From a marketing standpoint, it is important to simplify the message so it can be transmitted easily and without degradation z It scales easily from small to very large. To spread like wildfire, the transmission method must be rapidly scalable from small to large. Marketers must realize that if the virus multiplies only to kill the host before spreading, nothing is accomplished. Marketers must therefore take care that servers, for instance, can be expanded quickly
- It exploits common motivations and behaviours. Greed can drive people; so can the need to be popular, loved and understood. The resulting urge to communicate produces millions of Web sites and billions of e-mail or other electronic messages. Therefore, clever viral marketing strategies take advantage of common human motivations and behaviours
- It uses existing communication networks. Throughout history, people have formed communities in which networks of human interaction convey social values, daily events and plans for activities that foster the well-being of the individual within the community and the community within the larger environment. Marketers must learn to place messages within the communications that exist between people, because people in digital

environments also develop networks of relationships. By exploiting these networks, marketers can easily spread messages in an even cheaper way

- It takes advantage of other resources to get the word out. Affiliate programmes, for example, place text or graphic links on other people's or organizations' Web sites. The top moment someone else's Web site is relaying your marketing message, someone else's resources are depleted instead of your own.

Advantages of Viral Marketing

1. This marketing strategy enables business proposition to reach out to global audience by effectively putting the internet connectivity to play.
2. It is considered to be cost effective advertising method when compared to traditional advertising modes.
3. Helps to build reputation of firm fast through increased sales and online promotions.
4. It uses existing communication among friends and other association to spread message.
5. Socializing and networking has now made very closer to the people. So relatives and friends are simply accessible over the net.
6. Viral marketing is one of the cost-free methods for promoting a business transaction.
- 7 .The time and resources are easily available. In this type of marketing, one person contacting their friends or relatives. They contacted more and more people and the chain goes on. It generates revenue from advertisement.

Disadvantages of viral marketing

1. It focuses more on short term success rather than building differentiation to gain long term advantages.
2. Viral marketing uses means such as email and connecting on blogs forums. When viral marketing is done on large scale it become annoying from email receiver to receive large amount of emails in their inbox and are made filtered as spam messages.
3. It can easily imitated by competitors as anyone on internet can launch marketing campaigns.
4. Continuous viral marketing can cause product message reaching out of target audience which will result in brand dilution by sales occurring at non targated users.
5. Association with unknown groups – The strength of viral marketing depends on the transfer of messages from person to person. During this process, it may reach someone you would rather not be associated with.
6. Spam threats – If made badly, viral marketing can guide to significant spam issues.
7. Keep away from making merely financial-based offer.
8. Brand dilution

Strategies

Viral marketing describes any strategy that encourages individuals to pass on a marketing message to others, creating a potential for exponential growth in the message's influence and exposure

there are six basic principles of any viral marketing strategy –

- **Gives away products or services**
- **Provides effortless and easy transfer to others**

- **Scales up easily**
- **Exploits general behavior and common motivations**
- **Works using existing networks of communication**
- **Takes full advantage of resources that are others'**

1. The best way to ensure that a viral marketing campaign succeeds is to build in this viral into the product. Make the product such that it spreads, because that is how it was made. The product should be spreadable, interesting and should somehow benefit all those who spread it. The real hard part about viral marketing is to make it work to create something valuable. But, if used wisely with proper planning, viral marketing can be the best tool to showcase a product in the market, directly to the customers, on a meagre budget. It will help in slashing down the marketing costs. And if Kolaveri di, Youtube, Hotmail, Paranormal activity, etc can work, everything if worked on properly can go viral.

Examples of viral marketing

Dove

Dove's "Real Beauty Sketches" campaign is the new face of viral marketing success. The uplifting promotional video generated record-breaking online interest, yielding more than 114 million views the first month. This was thanks in part to the Unilever brand's efforts to spread its message worldwide: Dove uploaded the video in 25 languages to 33 of its official YouTube channels, reaching consumers in more than 110 countries.

"Real Beauty Sketches" aims to underline the stark contrast between how women view themselves and what others see. According to data cited by Dove, 54 percent of women worldwide confess to being their own worst critic of how they look. The video features Gil Zamora, an FBI-trained forensic artist who

draws a series of women from out of sight behind a curtain, completing the sketches based on each woman's verbal description of her appearance. Zamora also created drawings based on strangers' accounts of the same women. In most cases, the sketches based on the strangers' perspectives corresponded to more accurate and flattering depictions than those based on the women's own self-effacing descriptions.

Evian

Evian's babies are giants across the digital-marketing landscape. Danone's luxury water brand earned its first taste of viral immortality with 2009's "Roller Babies," which featured CGI infants tackling extreme roller-skating stunts. One of the first YouTube-exclusive campaigns by a major brand, the clip earned a spot in the Guinness World Records as the most viewed online ad ever, with more than 25 million views in less than two months.

Evian has continued to nurture the concept of CGI-aided babies performing outlandish stunts: "Baby Inside" followed in 2011, and in April 2013 the company went back to the well for "Baby & Me," which features adult actors who bear an uncanny resemblance to the tiny stars. "Baby & Me" notched 50 million YouTube views and 100 million total views within a matter of weeks, bolstered by a dedicated Facebook page, a sweepstakes to promote the ad and other promotional tools.

Hotmail

Hotmail- Hotmail is one of the most classic examples of successful viral marketing. They offered free e-mail to the masses, and simply attached a signature at the bottom of each e-mail message that promoted their free service.

Every single e-mail sent by a Hotmail user contained this message, thus spreading it like a virus. Recipients would see the ad, and as a result, they too signed up for Hotmail.

Watchmen

Watchmen- One of the most recent examples on this list, Watchmen's viral campaign has consisted of fake newscasts and mock PSAs. Judging from the buzz online, these videos are doing their job. Fans are pumped up, and anxiously awaiting the movie's release.

Conclusion

- ▶ Viral marketing uses people electronic connectivity to increase the velocity of word of mouth. People with similar interest, need and life style tend to pass on and share interesting and entertaining content.
- ▶ Viral marketing campaign can be unpredictable but careful planning can go long way to ensuring success.
- ▶ Successful viral marketing relies on solid understanding of social media. Most viral marketing messages are hosted, shared and even created with tools of social media.
- ▶ Viral campaign can be seeded in a number of ways including online advertising to ensure maximum audience .

References

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