

Using Viral Marketing to Your Advantage

In our technologically expanding world, where the Internet is the most available form of media, Viral Marketing is an extremely effective form of advertising. Before the Web explosion, this form of advertising would have been referred to simply as "word of mouth" or getting your message out by having your customer base spread the word.

Why Use Viral Marketing?

There are several studies that state that if someone has a good experience, chances are they will tell a few close friends. However, with a bad experience people will repeat it to anyone who will listen. Since the pace of the Internet is so much faster than that of word of mouth, you will want to be careful with the messages you put out there. The message you put forth can spread, and spread quickly, whether that message is good or bad.

Viral Marketing is exactly what it sounds like - advertising that works like a virus does. It can be as simple as a message that is attached at the bottom of an email. Like a virus, as the email is sent from one person to another, so goes the attached message. It is like an electronic version of that famous television commercial that said "you'll tell two friends, and they will tell two friends, and so on and so on...", only with the World Wide Web, one well placed message can have the ability to reach millions with one click of the mouse.

Remember when Hotmail was starting? You could only get an account if a friend sent you an email with the link. Every one wanted one, and emails spread like wildfire. And BMW had that great campaign with very famous directors, a very new Clive Owen and very short movie - all on the Internet, which was becoming a brand new venue for movies. You may not have enough money in your advertising budget to hire Clive Owen, but there are still things you can do to attempt some viral marketing.

Essential Features

To tap into the potential power of a viral campaign you will need a few essential elements - free products or services that are easily transferred to others using existing communications networks. These products or services should be something that will exploit people's natural behaviors and emotions. Some examples beyond commercials would be how-to guides, surveys, best-of guides, educational guides, tools, widgets, quizzes and badges.

Sometimes nothing grabs peoples attention faster than the word FREE. Free trials, free email accounts, free anything can put you in a potential customer's head. Free can get your name out there and introduce people to the goods or services that will generate future revenues for your business.

There are rewards you can provide as well. Rewarding loyal customers with anything from percentage rebates and coupons for future purchases to free gifts for their continued patronage is another outstanding way to make sure that your 'virus' continues to spread.

Know Your Customers

Knowing and understanding your customer base will make your viral marketing more successful; tracking and analyzing what motivates them to want to pass along your message. You need to know what makes them tick. What is going to make the working mother of three take the time out of an already incredibly busy day to not only be drawn to your message, but also be interested enough to pass that message along to the other extremely busy moms in her address book?

As an example, say you have an errand-running service. You could provide a day of running errands to the lucky winner of a contest. All you have to do to enter to win the free day of errands is to register by clicking the link to your website. Strategies such as these can be a bit more effective as the people that register tend to have an interest in the services you provide.

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If you can zero in on who your customer is, this type of marketing can be quite inexpensive and highly effective. Online surveys and questionnaires can also be quite useful in getting inside your customer's head. They can and should be your most valuable resource when it comes to figuring out what they want. Careful consideration of your customer's needs and the commitment to meet those needs is what will ultimately make you successful in business.

Viral Marketing is a useful tool and it's something to think about along with your other marketing strategies. However, you still need to create something unusual and useful that people will naturally want to share and tell others about.

With the Internet there are opportunities to reach a much larger number of people much faster than in decades past. However, the basic marketing rules still apply if you want your viral marketing campaigns to be successful. Know your products or services. Know what demographics you are targeting. Get in their head and figure out what they need to feel compelled to not only spend their hard earned money with you, but what will make them want to keep coming back, and more importantly, bringing their friends with them. - *Enzo F. Cesario*

