

Running Head: VIRAL MARKETING

**Viral Marketing:
A low cost and non-traditional advertising
approach for today's economically challenging times**

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Introduction

When looking at Viral Marketing, we must first gain a fundamental understanding of this type of advertising approach. Viral marketing is a technologically enabled form of “word of mouth” marketing. The term was originally coined by Steve Jurvetson to describe the unique referral-marketing program that his company created for Hotmail, which, as we all know, was one of the first free e-mail services offered to the public. Mr. Jurvetson created the tagline, "Get your private, free email at <http://www.hotmail.com>" , which was passed from every hotmail user to those with paid services or who were trying other new services at the time, like Juno. This effect, considered viral due to it being transmitted from person to person, enabled hotmail.com to be successful with both a low cost and a high level of subscribers.

Definition of Terms

Our working definition of viral marketing is that it refers to marketing techniques that use pre-existing social networks to produce increases in brand awareness or to achieve other marketing objectives. It can be word-of-mouth delivered or enhanced by the Internet. It can be in many forms; however, most common are video and website creations.

Discussion

We must also consider what that exists publicly is not viral marketing, but is construed as being so. Advertisements that are developed for traditional media, such as television, which then go on to gain success in an online format, are not viral marketing when discriminating at the purest level. As there is an initial push by companies in which they pay stations to broadcast their message, this creates a hybridization of standard marketing with viral marketing. The viral push occurs after the paid advertisement, so it can be viewed as no viral marketing has occurred, as the product itself may have failed if only utilizing portals to promote their efforts.

Also, viral videos that are popular are not viral marketing videos, as there is no marketing intent. The viral effect is certainly there, but without this aspect we cannot associate these two types. Viral marketing is a possibility for small businesses. Many large businesses utilize viral marketing as a part of their normal marketing plan. This includes careerbuilder.com, Nike, Ray-Ban, Honda, Audi, Levi's, Burger King and many more. Small businesses, however, are much less involved with this type of marketing, even though it permits them to spread their product, brand, or organizational message to the masses at a low cost.

Suggestions for Application

When constructing a viral marketing campaign, consider the following:

- Make people ‘feel’ something (traditional marketing appeals such as humor, intrigue, horror).
- Do something unexpected (causing the viewer to want to share so as to see peers’ reactions).
- Don’t create a traditional advertisement (people want to be entertained, not informed, by entertaining this pushes the potential viral effect).
- Consider sequels or spinoffs (let your previous level of success, even if modest, breed more opportunity).
- Make it easy to share, download, or embed (allow viewers to have free access so as to easily share with friends, or to download to take with them, or to embed on blogs to share with their viewer constituent base)

- Connect with viewers and permit feedback (viewers feel a sense of ownership if it is realized that their feedback is being taken seriously – even if it is not their own personal feedback)
- Allow unrestricted access (it is always a concern for marketers to gather information! Don't turn this into an attempt to have customers sign up for email lists or register on a website. Allow them easy and free access – everyone else is – and by not creating barriers to view, you're permitting the viral effect to occur)

There are several advantages that viral marketing offers to both small and large businesses alike.

- Limited Expense – the cost to produce a viral video can be hundreds of dollars. The cost to have a website host your video (like youtube.com) is zero! Compared to traditional advertising, in hard times, or even in good times, viral marketing may be considered as a part of your arsenal of advertising.
- Extensive Reach – It's not about demographics anymore, time slots, or what group and what channel. Viral marketing, with its online component, can be viewed by anyone, anytime, anywhere – as long as the message is being transmitted.
- Efficient – If you fail, you've lost some effort and some creation cost. If you succeed, as some do with well thought out viral marketing attempts, millions of views can translate to many different areas of success for your business. Either way, this is the most efficient type of advertising in existence.
- Can find both target markets as well as unintended markets – So, I see a viral video about lawn mowers. I live in an apartment, what do I need a lawnmower for? But, I enjoyed the video and posted it to my Facebook page. Out of my network of friends and associates, 10 may watch, potentially 1 needing a lawnmower. I'm not the target of the company, but I've spread their message to someone who is. If this were a traditional advertisement on television, I'd see a lawnmower advertisement, and have no desire to share.

There are several disadvantages that may occur with any viral marketing campaign.

- Brand Misrepresentation – this occurs more with companies with established brands, not with small businesses. If a brand is a part of a parent company, as in the case of Dove who created a beauty viral campaign, then the message may be viewed as contradictory by viewers who also know that Dove is under the same parent company as Axe. Viewers are intelligent and it only takes one to make the association that can spread through the Internet and provide realizations for many others.
- Potential Wasted Effort – if it fails, you have wasted your time!
- SPAM – there are those who send everything to everyone. Your name may become attached to an email that is sent by someone like this, as we all know through experience. There is little you can do about this potential association, but you should be aware that there are a small percentage of viewers who may interpret your campaign as this.
- Unanticipated Growth/Success – quite simply, be prepared for success. You must be prepared for all potential avenues of success that may result from your marketing campaign. Having failure in the world of viral marketing is to be expected as some points, but there is nothing worse than being successful and also being completely unprepared to handle your success.

Power Point slides from this presentation are located after the last page of this document.