

## VIRAL MARKETING THROUGH SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE OF FACEBOOK

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### INTRODUCTION

Viral marketing and viral advertising refer to marketing techniques that use pre-existing social networks to produce exponential increases in brand awareness, through self-replicating viral processes, analogous to the spread of a computer virus. It can often be word-of-mouth delivered and enhanced online; it can harness the network effect of the Internet and can be very useful in reaching a large number of people rapidly. This paper throws light on the concept that how viral marketing takes place through social networking sites by taking example of Facebook.

**KEYWORDS:** Viral Marketing, SNS (Social Networking Site), SNP (Social Networking Potential), Facebook.

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### INTRODUCTION

Viral marketing, viral advertising, or marketing buzz are buzzwords referring to marketing techniques that use pre-existing social networks to produce increases in brand awareness or to achieve other marketing objectives (such as product sales) through self-replicating viral processes, analogous to the spread of viruses or computer viruses (cf. memes and mimetic). It can be delivered by word of mouth or enhanced by the network effects of the Internet.[1] Viral marketing may take the form of video clips, interactive Flash games, advergames, ebooks, brandable software, images, or text messages.

The ultimate goal of marketers interested in creating successful viral marketing programs is to create viral messages that appeal to individuals with high social networking potential (SNP) and that have a high probability of being presented and spread by these individuals and their competitors in their communications with others in a short period of time.

The term "viral marketing" has also been used pejoratively to refer to stealth marketing campaigns—the unscrupulous use of astroturfing online combined with undermarket

advertising [clarification needed]in shopping centers to create the impression of spontaneous word of mouth enthusiasm.[2]

## FUNCTIONING

According to marketing professors Andreas Kaplan and Michael Haenlein,[8] to make viral marketing work, three basic criteria must be met, i.e., giving the right message to the right messengers in the right environment:

**MESSENGER:** Three specific types of messengers are required to ensure the transformation of an ordinary message into a viral one: market mavens, social hubs, and salespeople. Market mavens are individuals who are continuously 'on the pulse' of things (information specialists); they are usually among the first to get exposed to the message and who transmit it to their immediate social network. Social hubs are people with an exceptionally large number of social connections; they often know hundreds of different people and have the ability to serve as connectors or bridges between different subcultures. Salespeople might be needed who receive the message from the market maven, amplify it by making it more relevant and persuasive, and then transmit it to the social hub for further distribution. Market mavens may not be particularly convincing in transmitting the information.

**MESSAGE:** Only messages that are both memorable and sufficiently interesting to be passed on to others have the potential to spur a viral marketing phenomenon. Making a message more memorable and interesting or simply more infectious, is often not a matter of major changes but minor adjustments.

**ENVIRONMENT:** The environment is crucial in the rise of successful viral marketing – small changes in the environment lead to huge results, and people are much more sensitive to environment. The timing and context of the campaign launch must be right.

Whereas Kaplan, Haenlein and others reduce the role of marketers to crafting the initial viral message and seeding it, futurist and sales and marketing analyst Marc Feldman, who conducted IMT Strategies' landmark viral marketing study in 2001,[9] carves a different role for marketers which pushes the 'art' of viral marketing much closer to 'science.'[10]

Feldman points out that when marketers take a disciplined approach to viral marketing by targeting, measuring and continually optimizing their campaigns based on campaign metrics, viral marketing transforms the customer into a new sales channel, a new lead generation channel and a new awareness generating channel. Feldman's innovative reconceptualization of viral marketers went a long way towards making "viral marketing" a strategy that sales and marketing directors at Fortune 500 and Global 1000 companies could legitimately invest in. This disciplined approach to Viral Marketing that Feldman first carved out, pointed the way towards measuring the ROI of every viral marketing campaign and thus making a real business case for investing in viral marketing. The customer-as-a-sales-channel approach to viral marketing went on to become the foundation for an explosion of technology enabled viral marketing services offered online, offline and in blended hybrid approaches.

## THE SIX SIMPLE PRINCIPLES OF VIRAL MARKETING

Accept this fact. Some viral marketing strategies work better than others, and few works as well as the simple Hotmail.com strategy. But below are the six basic elements you hope to include in your strategy. A viral marketing strategy need not contain ALL these elements, but the more elements it embraces, the more powerful the results are likely to be. An effective viral marketing strategy:

### 1. GIVES AWAY VALUABLE PRODUCTS OR SERVICES

"Free" is the most powerful word in a marketer's vocabulary. Most viral marketing programs give away valuable products or services to attract attention. Free e-mail services, free information, free "cool" buttons, free software programs that perform powerful functions but not as much as you get in the "pro" version. Wilson's Second Law of Web Marketing is "The Law of Giving and Selling"(<http://www.wilsonweb.com/wmta/basic-principles.htm>). "Cheap" or "inexpensive" may generate a wave of interest, but "free" will usually do it much faster. Viral marketers practice delayed gratification. They may not profit today, or tomorrow, but if they can generate a groundswell of interest from something free, they know they will profit "soon and for the rest of their lives" (with apologies to "Casablanca"). Patience, my friends. Free attracts eyeballs. Eyeballs then see other desirable things that you are selling, and, presto! you earn money. Eyeballs bring valuable e-mail addresses, advertising revenue, and e-commerce sales opportunities. Give away something, sell something.

### 2. PROVIDES FOR EFFORTLESS TRANSFER TO OTHERS

Public health nurses offer sage advice at flu season: stay away from people who cough, wash your hands often, and don't touch your eyes, nose, or mouth. Viruses only spread when they're easy to transmit. The medium that carries your marketing message must be easy to transfer and replicate: e-mail, website, graphic, software download. Viral marketing works famously on the Internet because instant communication has become so easy and inexpensive. Digital format make copying simple. From a marketing standpoint, you must simplify your marketing message so it can be transmitted easily and without degradation. Short is better. The classic is: "Get your private, free email at <http://www.hotmail.com>." The message is compelling, compressed, and copied at the bottom of every free e-mail message.

### 3. SCALES EASILY FROM SMALL TO VERY LARGE

To spread like wildfire the transmission method must be rapidly scalable from small to very large. The weakness of the Hotmail model is that a free e-mail service requires its own mailservers to transmit the message. If the strategy is wildly successful, mailservers must be added very quickly or the rapid growth will bog down and die. If the virus multiplies only to kill the host before spreading, nothing is accomplished. So long as you have planned ahead of time how you can add mailservers rapidly you're okay. You must build in scalability to your viral model.

#### **4. EXPLOITS COMMON MOTIVATIONS AND BEHAVIORS**

Clever viral marketing plans take advantage of common human motivations. What proliferated "Netscape Now" buttons in the early days of the Web? The desire to be cool. Greed drives people. So does the hunger to be popular, loved, and understood. The resulting urge to communicate produces millions of websites and billions of e-mail messages. Design a marketing strategy that builds on common motivations and behaviors for its transmission, and you have a winner.

#### **5. UTILIZES EXISTING COMMUNICATION NETWORKS**

Most people are social. Nerdy, basement-dwelling computer science grad students are the exception. Social scientists tell us that each person has a network of 8 to 12 people in their close network of friends, family, and associates. A person's broader network may consist of scores, hundreds, or thousands of people, depending upon her position in society. A waitress, for example, may communicate regularly with hundreds of customers in a given week. Network marketers have long understood the power of these human networks, both the strong, close networks as well as the weaker networked relationships. People on the Internet develop networks of relationships, too. They collect e-mail addresses and favorite website URLs. Affiliate programs exploit such networks, as do permission e-mail lists. Learn to place your message into existing communications between people, and you rapidly multiply its dispersion.

#### **6. TAKES ADVANTAGE OF OTHERS' RESOURCES**

The most creative viral marketing plans use others' resources to get the word out. Affiliate programs, for example, place text or graphic links on others' websites. Authors who give away free articles, seek to position their articles on others' webpages. A news release can be picked up by hundreds of periodicals and form the basis of articles seen by hundreds of thousands of readers. Now someone else's newsprint or webpage is relaying your marketing message. Someone else's resources are depleted rather than your own.

### **VIRAL MARKETING IDEAS AND EXAMPLES - 7 POWERFUL STRATEGIES**

There are 7 powerful strategies which are helpful to generate ideas such as :

#### **1. ORGANIZE A REFERRAL CONTEST**

Organizing a referral contest has been an old-schooled viral marketing idea, yet it is still extremely effective. The thing about contest is that it can stir up people's adrenaline and encourage people to work extra hard to promote for you.

#### **2. PROVIDE FREE 'VIRAL' ONLINE SERVICES**

Whenever I talk about free viral services, I like to mention Google. Besides being a search engine, Google has really created tons of useful applications, such as Google Map, Google Doc,

Google Analytics, Google Mail, etc that we can use free. Whenever we use these applications, we are indirectly helping Google to establish its branding and increase its market awareness.

### 3. TARGET-BASED REFERRAL PROGRAM

Another viral strategy that we adopt is target-based referral program, where we set a minimum target for our referrals to hit. In specific, when our members reach 20 referrals, they will receive free advertising credits EVERY MONTH. This is another strategy that has worked wonders.

### 4. BAIT POST

The idea of a bait post is to turn your blog post into an online resource that other people will link to. You must have seen in forums and Q&A type of sites such as Ask Yahoo! where people reference an external site for the answer to a particular question. That's an example of a bait post.

### 5. 'SURE-WIN' REFERRAL PROGRAM

I have a client who pays people 5 cents to every email sent out to promote his business. I call this 'sure-win' referral program because regardless of whether people make any purchase, as long as you send out the email, you will be paid. He has been doing that since 2007 and have paid over \$20k to people. I'm sure this trick has worked well for him.

### 6. VIDEO MARKETING

The power of video marketing is well known. If you can produce useful how-to videos for your niche site and publish them on Youtube, those videos can bring you traffic for years.

### 7. LEVERAGE ON SOCIAL NETWORKING

Last but not least is viral marketing through social networking. One good example is the use of Facebook Like. By encouraging people to 'like' you on their Facebook, you are exposed to all their friends who potentially have the same interest. Eventhough the exposure is short-lived, if some of their friends also start to 'like' you, this thing can go very viral.

### TYPES OF VIRAL MARKETING CAMPAIGNS

1. **PASS-ALONG:** A message which encourages the user to send the message to others. The crudest form of this is chain letters where a message at the bottom of the e-mail prompts the reader to forward the message.
2. **INCENTIVIZED VIRAL:** A reward is offered for either passing a message along or providing someone else's address. This can dramatically increase referrals. However, this is most effective when the offer requires another person to take action.

3. **UNDERCOVER:** A viral message presented as a cool or unusual page, activity, or piece of news, without obvious incitements to link or pass along. In Undercover Marketing, it is not immediately apparent that anything is being marketed.
4. **"EDGY GOSSIP/BUZZ MARKETING"** ads or messages that create controversy by challenging the borders of taste or appropriateness. Discussion of the resulting controversy can be considered to generate buzz and word of mouth advertising. Prior to releasing a movie, some Hollywood movie stars get married, get divorced, or get arrested, or become involved in some controversy that directs conversational attention to them.
5. **USER-MANAGED DATABASE:** Users create and manage their own lists of contacts using a database provided by an online service provider. By inviting other members to participate in their community, users create a viral, self-propagating chain of contacts that naturally grows and encourages others to sign up as well.

## METHODS OF VIRAL MARKETING

- Customer participation & polling services
- Industry-specific organization contributions
- Internet search engines & blogs
- Mobile smart phone integration
- Multiple forms of print and direct marketing
- Outbound/inbound call center services
- Target marketing Web services
- Search engine optimization (SEO) web development
- Social media interconnectivity
- Television & radio

## VMS TARGET MARKETING IS BASED ON THREE IMPORTANT PRINCIPLES

1. Social profile gathering
2. Proximity market analysis
3. Real-time key word density analysis

By applying these three important disciplines to an advertising model, a VMS company is able to match a client with their targeted customers at a cost effective advantage.

The Internet makes it possible for a campaign to go viral very fast. However, the Internet and in particular, social media technologies do not make a brand viral; they just enable people to tell other people faster. The Internet can, so to speak, make a brand famous overnight.

## **THE FACEBOOK MARKETING**

A large and growing portion of some of the most valuable demographics is spending more of their time and attention on Facebook and less on other channels and media. Not only are US college students and teenagers fully engaged in Facebook, but adults, professionals, and people from around the world now constitute a substantial portion of the Facebook userbase as well.

However, most marketers lack a comprehensive understanding of the vast array of explicit and implicit marketing channels Facebook offers – most of which are viral. My goal here is to provide an introduction to what's possible on Facebook to the spectrum of marketers from brand advertisers to volunteer grassroots evangelists.

Facebook offers many ways to get the word out and bring the people in. Here's how to get started.

### **I. TOOLS FOR GUERILLA MARKETERS**

For the aggressive guerilla marketer, Facebook offers a bevy of viral channels to get the word out to your friends and creatively reach your target audience. The best part about these guerilla tactics is their cost: \$free. Everyone on Facebook can use these strategies to recruit and evangelize their causes.

#### **1. PROFILE PAGE**

The starting point for your presence on Facebook is your profile page. Your profile page is basically a landing page that you design in order to convert your friends to engage with certain parts of your identity. Not only is your profile the page that you have the most control over, it's the place where you can most deeply and authentically express your passion for the brand, company, or product you want to promote.

#### **2. FACEBOOK GROUPS**

Groups are oldest and simplest way to build community around your brand or company on Facebook. By starting a group, you create a central place for customers, partners, and friends to participate in conversations around your brand. Facebook groups come with boards for posting discussion topics, photos, videos, and links right out of the box. You can also easily send news and updates to your group members as often as you like – messages



arrive in their Facebook Inbox. And the best part about Groups is you can create as many as you like for free.

### **3. FACEBOOK PAGES**

Pages were launched by Facebook in November 2007 as a way for businesses of many types to easily establish a brand presence on Facebook. Pages are a lot like groups, with some important differences:

- Pages are more customizable than groups. You can add HTML, Flash, or even Facebook applications to your pages to extend their functionality and the depth of experience users can have with your brand.
- Pages get more prominent “Bumper Stickers” real estate than groups on the profile pages of your fans.
- There is no limitation to the number of fans in your group that you can message.
- “Fans” who join your group are NOT able to invite their friends to be fans of your Page. Fans must either “Share” your page with their friends, or their friends must observe that they “are a fan” of your Page either via their profile page or News Feed.
- Facebook has taken an active role in cracking down on Pages not created by authorized agents.
- Pages are a good option for small or local businesses that want to establish a presence on Facebook. Like groups, they’re another free and easy way to do viral marketing.

### **4. FACEBOOK EVENTS**

Facebook Events is a free application developed by Facebook that anyone can use to promote marketing events, sponsored parties, or even product launches, transactions, or company milestones.

### **5. FACEBOOK NOTES AND PHOTOS**

Notes and Photos are two Facebook applications that allow you to share blog posts and pictures with your friends. You can use these features to post content about your brand, but be careful to always do it authentically – don’t be spammy. If your photo albums are all company logos, for example, you’ll lose a lot of credibility.

### **6. FACEBOOK MESSAGES**

The rise of Facebook Messages as a popular alternative to email has confused many “old”



people. Nevertheless, Messages can be a powerful vehicle for targeted marketing on Facebook.

Messages are like email, except a lot less fully featured – Facebook offers no way to search, sort, filter, categorize, or star messages. While Facebook’s default privacy settings prevent you from seeing the full profile page of most Facebook users, Facebook allows you to send messages to users you have no connection with.

## **7. FACEBOOK MARKETPLACE**

Marketplace is Facebook’s classifieds listing service. You can post a for-sale ad or wanted ad in any of your networks for free. However, if you want to post your ad in multiple networks, you have to pay \$1 per network per listing.

Like with messages, spamming up the Marketplace will get your account deleted and your ads removed. It’s most likely not worth your time to try to evade their systems.

Unlike other Facebook-developed applications, Marketplace does not get heavily used by most members. My Marketplace ads have only yielded a few leads. However, unlike Craigslist, which is anonymous, all Marketplace responses are tied to real Facebook accounts. When you receive a response to your Marketplace listing, you can see the respondent’s profile page even if they’re not your friend.

## **8. FACEBOOK SHARE / POSTED ITEMS**

Facebook Share is a Facebook application that lets you promote any Group, Event, Photo, Link, or Application you come across by a) giving it real estate in your “Posted Items” list on your profile page, or b) sending it directly to your friends’ Inbox.

By posting it on your profile page, you can direct some clicks to the shared item. However, while this is an effective promotional tactic, it’s not as targeted as sending it directly to friends’ Inboxes. Those messages are more likely to convert into valuable clicks.

## **9. FACEBOOK NETWORKS**

Facebook Networks are like group pages for everyone who’s a member of an Educational, Work, or Geographical network. While no Facebook members “own” any pieces of network pages, network pages offer 1) another way for users to discover events, posted items, and marketplace listings, and 2) discussion forums and walls which any members can post to.

Network pages are probably the most commonly accepted places to spam in Facebook. While you can post there, keep in mind that your messages may be considered spammy even if they’re real and relevant.

## **10. MINI FEED AND NEWS FEED**

While all the channels I've described above are useful for grassroots marketing on Facebook, the wind that blows your marketing seeds is Facebook's News Feed. While you're not able to publish directly to the feeds (unless you're willing to pay or build an application), Facebook's Mini Feed and News Feed archive your users' engagement with your brand and syndicate it to their friends, networks, and beyond, amplifying the reach of your campaign by orders of magnitude.

## **II. TOOLS FOR ADVERTISERS**

For marketers with a budget, Facebook offers both integrated and self-serve solutions to reach broader slices of the Facebook audience. Depending on your budget, you can get started as an advertiser on Facebook with as little as a few dollars for a short-run flyer or as much as several hundred thousand dollars for a customized "sponsored group" destination inside Facebook.

### **11. SOCIAL ADS**

Social Ads replaced Facebook Flyers in November 2007 at the same time Facebook launched Pages. With Social Ads, Facebook offers advertisers the option to pay on a CPC or CPM basis, whichever they prefer. Social Ads offers very powerful targeting capabilities: when you create your ad, you have the option to limit who sees your ad by age, sex, location, keywords, education level, workplaces, political views, and relationship status.

### **12. INTEGRATED OPPORTUNITIES**

If you represent a large account, Facebook has partnered with Microsoft to serve advertisers with higher campaign budgets (above around \$50,000). Just contact Facebook and a sales rep will work with you to explore more integrated advertising opportunities than are available via the self-serve Social Ads service.

### **13. BEACON**

Beacon is Facebook's new program (launched in November 2007) that allows partners to send Facebook information about the activities Facebook users do on partner websites, in order to be published inside Facebook via the Mini Feed and News Feed. For example, Amazon might use Beacon to send a feed item to Facebook about a book you just bought.

### **14. POLLS**

Polls offer an easy way for marketers to quickly conduct research within their targeted audience. Results are streamed in real time to a dashboard that allows marketers to break down results by gender and age. Based on your targeting preferences, you can get hundreds

of responses within an hour.

## **15. FACEBOOK PLATFORM AD NETWORKS**

When Facebook launched the Facebook Platform in May 2007, they also made a promise to allow application developers to monetize their applications however they like and keep 100% of the revenue. This market green-field led to the birth of a new niche of ad networks dedicated to serving the inventory created by Facebook Platform applications.

## **16. FACEBOOK PLATFORM APPLICATION SPONSORSHIPS**

Advertisers looking for more integrated opportunities inside Facebook applications can consider approaching application developers and negotiating a sponsorship directly. For example, beverage companies have sponsored “drink-sharing” applications, while contact lens companies have sponsored “winking” applications.

## **17. SPONSORED FACEBOOK GROUPS**

Before Facebook Pages launched, the only option available to advertisers wanting to establish a certified presence on Facebook was through the Sponsored Group program. Sponsored Groups are Facebook Groups with the ability to customize the HTML of certain regions on the page.

Surprisingly, the cost to rent a Sponsored Group on Facebook starts at US \$100,000 a month. Not surprisingly, the number of Sponsored Groups purchased over the years has remained small. I expect Facebook to phase out Sponsored Groups as they seek to bolster Social Ads and Pages.

## **III. TOOLS FOR APPLICATION DEVELOPERS**

For marketers who can harness technical resources, the Facebook Platform offers the most powerful way to create engaging connections with your target audience on Facebook. Thousands of third-party applications have already been built on the Platform APIs—many of which have allowed for new kinds of deep brand experiences, and many of which turned out to be transient ad delivery vehicles that failed to take user experience into account. While I can't tell you how to dream up a good app for your business here, I will explain the channels that your applications must absolutely take advantage of in order to achieve maximum success.

## **18. PROFILE BOX**

Surprisingly, the most common way new users find applications is through application profile boxes on their friends' profile pages. The challenge of profile box design is making it both compelling for an existing user to keep it on his/her profile, and appealing enough to a new user to click on and install the application. If your profile box doesn't provide the profile owner sufficient value to merit its presence on the profile page, your user will hide

your profile box, or worse, uninstall your application. Simultaneously, if your profile box is too spammy, your user will get rid of it instantly.

## **19. MINI FEED**

The Mini Feed is a powerful part of the Facebook Platform API that allows developers to publish news about a user's engagement with their applications. Like the profile box, your feed items must be compelling to the profile owner while not being spammy, AND attract your user's friends to click on the feed item and explore the app. If you mess up in either direction, users will hide your feed item, and thanks to a recent new feature from Facebook, uninstall it in-line.

## **20. NEWS FEED**

As I mentioned earlier, the Facebook News Feed offers immense value by syndicating your feed items to thousands of users' home pages inside Facebook. In a previous post, I examined some of the tactics application developers can employ to optimize their feed items for News Feed performance.

## **21. INVITATIONS**

One of the most powerful viral channels available to Facebook Platform application developers is invitations. The invitations API allows users of your application to invite up to 20 of their friends per day to install your app. When maximized, invitations can lead to very quick growth.

## **22. FACEBOOK NOTIFICATIONS**

Notifications get less press than feed items and invitations because they're not as effective at spreading your app. Because Facebook mysteriously assigns your apps a spamminess rating based on the number of notifications your apps send out, many developers choose to use notifications sparingly to prevent having their notification channel shut down by Facebook. However, notifications have been proven to be an effective tool for retaining existing users of your app.

## **23. EMAIL NOTIFICATIONS**

Email notifications are just like Facebook Notifications, except they are delivered directly to your users' email address INSTEAD of to their Facebook Notifications inbox. While originally scheduled to be deprecated by Facebook, Facebook recently enabled a new API method for email notifications that allows developers to send users up to 5 email notifications per day.

## **24. APPLICATION DIRECTORY**

Although hard to find, a surprising number of application installations come directly from

the Application Directory. When submitting your application for inclusion in the directory, be sure to create compelling art and copy for the listing, as well as your application's About page. Doing this up front will create a meaningful difference in the number of users that add your application from the directory in the long run!

## CONCLUSION

Never before has a social platform emerged that combines the authenticity of Facebook's culture with the raw power of Facebook's multitude of viral channels to offer such an unprecedented marketing opportunity. While some remain pessimistic about the potential of social networks to become viable direct marketing channels, I believe that direct marketers who craft intelligent strategies for the Facebook environment—which will require much more creativity than SEM campaigns—will find success. At the same time, Facebook offers brand marketers entirely new paradigms for designing immersive and persuasive brand experiences. At the same time, we are still early in the game, and we have a lot left to learn. Only when marketers learn how to capture new kinds of value available for the first time ever inside Facebook will the markets realize just how valuable Facebook is.

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