

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.

Put into practice

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When I first offered this to my readers in February 2000, many took me up on it. Six months later I received a phone call:

"I want to speak to the King of Viral Marketing!"

"Well, I'm not the King," I demurred. "I wrote an article about viral marketing a few months ago, but that's all."

"I've searched all over the Internet about viral marketing," he said, "and your name keeps showing up. You must be the King!"

It worked! Even five years later this webpage is ranked #1 for "viral marketing."

To one degree or another, all successful viral marketing strategies use most of the six principles outlined above. In the next article in this series, "[Viral Marketing Techniques the Typical Business Website Can Deploy Now](http://www.wilsonweb.com/wmt5/viral-deploy.htm)" (<http://www.wilsonweb.com/wmt5/viral-deploy.htm>), we'll move from theory to practice. But first learn these six foundational principles of viral marketing. Master them and wealth will flow your direction.

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