

Viral Marketing: A Revolutionary Tool for Successful Marketing Campaigns

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Abstract

From the very beginning marketers are adopting various techniques to attract customers. Viral Marketing through networking technology is such a revolutionary tool which is generating a powerful image for a lot of marketing campaigns. Viral Marketing assists the marketers to exploit their potential by transferring of messages across million people of common tastes and preferences within a short span of time. Traditional forms of advertising such as TV or newspaper ads have turned to alternate strategies of viral marketing which exploits existing social networks by encouraging customers to share product and service information with their friends. This paper throw lights on conceptual framework of viral marketing and presents it as a revolutionary tool for many of the successful marketing campaigns. In particular on how an old concept of word-of-mouth has evolved with the influence of the internet into something we call viral marketing today.

Keywords: *Viral marketing, word-of-mouth, social networking sites, marketing campaign.*

Introduction

What makes some marketing campaigns so immensely big and well known when they are marketed through social media or with a viral approach? We have witnessed a myriad of success stories where individuals achieved the kind of exposure and success that was never dreamed of by them. Many of the products and services became popular, a lot of persons got recognition in a single day just after uploading video and messages on youtube, facebook and twitter etc.. How the music video 'Gangnam Style' became so popular online? What made 'Kolaveri di' the sensation it became and lists the elements that make up an ideal viral marketing campaign as Kolaveri Buzz in India? There is one word which is getting familiarity and it is Viral Marketing.

Viral Marketing is a process of creating attention-grabbing, appealing or informative messages, articles or videos which are designed to be passed on by each recipient. It spreads like an epidemic or viral, often by e-mail or SMSs. It uses influencers to generate peer-to-peer product recommendations or buzz with the use of technology. The videos get spread by sharing and recommendations on social media sites. Word-of-Mouth communication is generally performed in offline mode but viral marketing is the combination of internet technology with WOM tactics. Persons with common interest and taste normally share their positive and negative experiences with each other and it generates a multiplier effect in the transfer of a message. Each recipient of the message or video plays a role of potential carrier in spreading it. Viral marketing is helping the marketers in achieving customer acquisition with reduced cost and higher profitability. Phelps et al. (2004) describes it as 'the process of encouraging honest communication among consumer networks'. Another view coherent with these is that of De Bruyn and Lilien (2004) who assert that the 'electronic referral marketing (ERM) is the use consumer-to-consumer (or peer-to-peer) communications. The key driver in effectiveness of referral marketing is to create awareness, trigger interest and generate sales or adoption., to disseminate information about a product or a service, hence leading to its rapid and cost-effective market adoption.'

The word *viral* stems from the word *virus*, symbolizing the manner in which the message spreads, without the negative connotation of the word. Various terms have been used to describe this form of communication including:

- viral marketing (Juverson, 1997)
- word-of-mouth (Goldenberg et al.2001)
- buzz marketing (Thomas, 2004)
- referral marketing (De Bruyn and Lilien, 2004)
- viral advertising (Porter and Golan, 2006)

- viral stealth marketing (Swanepoel et al.2009)

Origins of Viral Marketing

The term Viral Marketing was coined by Rayport (1996) after that more work was done by Steve Juvertson and Tim Draper in 1997 to describe the manner in which free e-mail service called *hotmail* was promoted. Namely, the signature line of every e-mail message sent through *hotmail*, the first online free e-mail agent, contained an invitation to create a free *hotmail.com* account. This method of promotion was understood to be *viral* in character as the message was being passed on by users themselves, thereby *contaminating* one another with this virus.

Wilson (2000) proposes a compromising view by stating that viral marketing is 'any strategy that encourages individuals to pass on a marketing message to others, creating the potential for exponential growth in the message's exposure and influence. According to Helm, Sabrina (2000), "Viral marketing can be understood as a communication and distribution concept that relies on customers to transmit digital products via electronic mail to other potential customers in their social sphere and to animate these contacts to also transmit the products.

Swanepoel et.al(2004) describes that 'viral stealth marketing is an electronic word-of-mouth communication that is spread in an exponential and contagious manner using the highly effective platform of the electronic medium...the people spreading these marketing messages are required not to disclose the fact that they are being paid to promote the product for the organization'.

This view is in line with previously proposed explanation by Kaikati and Kaikati (2004) who consider viral marketing to be one type of six different stealth marketing techniques (besides celebrity marketing, marketing in video games, marketing in pop and rap music, brand pushers and bait-and-tease marketing). Wilson (2005) described viral marketing as "any strategy that encourages individuals to pass on a marketing message to others, creating the potential for exponential growth in the message exposure and influence".

Another compromising view is that of Watts and Peretti (2007) who introduce the *big-seed* marketing 'which combines viral marketing tools with old-fashioned mass media in a way that yields far more predictable results than 'purely' viral approaches like word-of-mouth marketing. They suggest that

marketers create and launch multiple viral initiatives simultaneously thereby increasing the chance that at least one of them *catches on* and spreads like a virus instead of relying on the content of just one campaign to generate the desired results."

Danilo Cruz and Chris Fill (2008) who conducted a research on viral marketing evaluation state that the approaches used to measure and evaluate the relative success of viral marketing communications are many and varied. Furthermore, they claim that these approaches range from changes in attitude and behavior, including the number of new users or levels of loyalty, to measures of reach, frequency, penetration, speed of transmission and the content of conversations. Essentially, they assert that there is no single criterion that could be used as a measure of success of a VM campaign – instead they propose distinct goal setting at the beginning of the planning process which then serves as a success evaluation tool for the campaign. They propose a framework which starts with defining a viral marketing campaign's goal as being either cognitive (reach, awareness, knowledge), behavioral (hits, downloads, dissemination rate) or financial (ROI, brand equity developments as a result of the campaign). Subsequent steps involve defining the target audience, deciding whether the message is commercial or non-commercial and finally choosing the media to launch it from (e-mail, mobile phone, seeding website, blog) and the message format.

Larson (2009) argued that viral marketing through e-mails, SMSs, videos and social media is the new format of the traditional word-of-mouth marketing; only difference being that it is exponentially quicker. It enables the word-of-mouth to spread at the speed of thought marketing is an ideal.

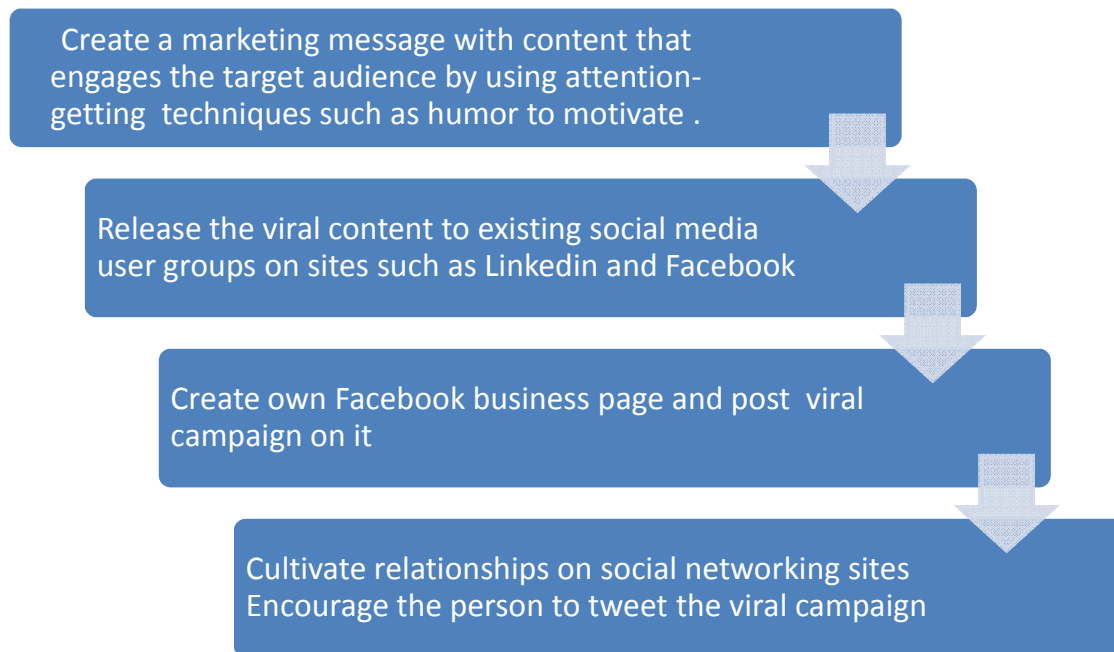
Importance of Viral Marketing

1. It harnesses the advantages of Internet and is very effective in covering a large geographical area rapidly.
2. Viral marketing seeks to exploit pre-existing social networks of an individual to produce exponential increase in brand awareness.
3. It is a very cost-effective way to reach large target audiences.

4. Due to viral marketing there is no need of a professional tool to create a good viral message
5. There is a high possibility to attain high level of trust, value, position and brand knowledge.
6. It is more powerful than other means of advertising because it conveys an implied endorsement from a known person.
7. Viral message will convert and retain a large number of recipients as new users, penetration, loyalty and frequency are appropriate evaluative criteria.

Campaign Seeding

Seeding is the term used for planting the original campaign with the initial group who will proceed in spreading the campaign to others. It refers to techniques for launching a viral marketing campaign via social media and the blogosphere. Successful viral marketing depends on appealing to the mindset of the social media user. They will pass on content that helps them build rapport with their online friends. Seeding refers to the placement of content so that it gains traction with your target market. Users are compelled to share it with their social network in order to strengthen their relationships the following steps can be implemented for a successful campaign.



Successful Campaigns

- ❖ *Kolaveri Di* :- Within three weeks of its release on YouTube, the Kolaveri Di video garnered 19 million views and was shared by 6.5 million Facebook users. It was drawing more than 10,000 tweets daily by the end of its first online week. Having

- garnered over 45 million views so far, it has proved with its success that viral marketing works in India too. This case study explores
- ❖ *IKEA Facebook Showroom*: – IKEA published photos of furnished rooms on their facebook page and invited members to tag pieces of furniture with their own names thereby winning them. The tagging functioned on a first-come-first-served basis.

- ❖ *The Blair Witch Project5*: – the filmmakers created a website containing a false piece of information about the film being a true story and its makers disappearing during the production of the film. This sparked interest in the public and resulted in the highest ROI in the film industry ever recorded.
- ❖ *Campaign for Bull guard*: - The 2004 online viral campaign for Bullguard (www.bullguard.com/pamelaspeak) proves that you don't need to be a big brand to make viral marketing work. Bull guard makes anti-virus and firewall software and distributes their product only online. They created a viral campaign using a home-video style clip and specialist viral site seeding. The campaign generated over 6 million clip views and over 30,000 post-view trial products download globally in less than seven months.
- ❖ *Zinedine Zidane Game* :- In the final game of the 2006 FIFA Football World Cup, Zinedine Zidane, the captain of the French team, head butted an opponent on the pitch in front of millions of football enthusiasts. The referee penalized Zidane and sent him off the pitch for his violent act against the Italian player in the 110th minute of the game. Famously, Italy went on to win the World Cup in a penalty shoot-out. In a matter of a few hours the Internet was taken by storm by the 'Zinedine Zidane Game', developed by Alberto Zanot, an Italian graphic designer from Milan. The game encourages the computer user to head-butt the Italian player by way of mouse movements and mouse clicks. Zanot took less than an hour to develop the game using Macromedia flash, Action Script language, and TV shots of the football players (Heffernan, 2006). He initially emailed the game to friends, effectively initiating the viral marketing campaign. On July 11th, in a matter of one single day, the game had been viewed more than 1.5 million times (Heffernan, 2006).

How Any Business Can Create Successful Viral Content Marketing Campaigns

1. Great content: For a campaign to truly go viral, content is everything. Make sure that Content breaks

the consensus, surprises the audience in some way, is really funny or is just outstanding in some other way. The idea has to be genuinely creative and the content should be relevant to the target audience. Certain specific emotions were extremely common in highly viral content such as:

- Curiosity
- Amazement
- Interest
- Astonishment
- Uncertainty

2. Create conversations: Campaign contains at least one element people would want to talk about. Creating conversations and topics to talk about is what it's all about. Without a reason to talk, the campaign won't spread and it will not generate value to your brand.

3. Social value: Consider content that has social value to people. It can be an experiment to tie the campaign to a holiday, some event, or free-ride on a current issue. Starting a discussion about a topic is a great way to create conversations.

4. Branding: Demonstrate why people should like it instead of telling them why. Content that is too commercial is often not passed on. Balance the branding element with the quality of the content. Really good content can afford to have some more branding, and sometimes it even makes it better.

5. Length: Content should not be very long. The first 5-10 seconds should really captivate the user. Avoid long load times for games and applications. Try to make the content interesting immediately, regardless if it is a video, a game or something else. In general, the longer it takes to get through the content, the lower the chance that someone will see the brand connection and also pass it on.

6. Brand integration: Try to integrate the brand with the story, either directly or indirectly, and make sure that users don't miss the connection between content and brand. The best virals often tie the brand, product or service very closely to the content, and are later known by their brand name. Then it is impossible for the user to forget who was behind the content.

7. Technical set-up: Make sure it is easy for people spread the content. Try to optimize the viral spread by providing formats that everyone can use. Do not use formats that aren't common and do not require special plug-ins or software upgrades. Instead, provide several different common formats, and maximize the number of possible ways to forward or publish the content.

8. Seeding: Without exposing the material to a lot of users, only the very best material goes viral. To increase the chances, and create critical volume for the campaign, seed properly. Do not seed only on well-known video sites, but try to geo-target by focusing on local sites in your target territories and to contextualize the seeding so that the content appears on sites which focus on the subject of your campaign.

9. Media Plan: Don't start the campaign by placing the content everywhere at the same time with banners, buttons, pre-rolls etc. Rather, consider in which environments it is most relevant and likely to get picked up voluntarily. Once the campaign goes mainstream and is published in traditional media, it loses momentum among the most important users. The novelty is lost. Plan the different phases of the campaign with this in mind, and start with the media where the users themselves choose to pick it up.

10. Gather information: Make sure that tracking of the campaign is properly to get a lot of data/feedback. This way you know who has interacted with the content and where. If you want even more information, like e-mail addresses, names, etc, be aware that gathering a lot of info raises the barriers to pass it on and can diminish the viral spread. But, it is possible to gather information without stopping the spread. An excellent way to do this is by integrating the actual data in the content, so that it becomes better by providing more information.

11. Evaluate and improve: Evaluate the campaign: What worked? What didn't work? How could content be better made? How could barriers to pass-on be lowered? How could we improve reach in our target audience? Make sure to use every learning from this campaign and use it for the next one.

Strategy for a successful viral marketing campaign

- 1. Demographic and psychographic segmentation:** The marketer should have a sense of how to sow the seed of the idea or product or service within its target customers. However most of the viral phenomenon start, not knowing that it will become viral. Somebody creates an interesting ad, a funny e-mail or joke, a video clip, a sketch, or an incident to amuse friends or inform consumers, and sends it to someone.
- 2. Social Media Marketing strategy:** Many companies are employing today so as to be a part of a community, society, group and network of people on the internet. It is the process of driving customer traffic from social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Orkut, LinkedIn, My Space, You tube etc. The click on an ad on these sites directs the users to the company's website. A social networking site is an online platform that focuses on building and strengthening of networks or relations among people who share ideas, interests, activities, tastes and preferences.
- 3. Branding strategies:** People who are satisfied with the product they often post their comments through these social networking, sites and influences other prospects to buy the product. Large corporate create a blogs in relation with the social network to give customer a wide area to discuss about product and give reviews. The feedback generated is generally used by corporate for product enhancement and introducing change in their products and services.

Conclusion

Viral marketing may take the form of Video clips, Interactive Flash games, Adver games, EBooks, Brand able software, Images, Text messages. Viral marketing is a credible marketing tactic that can deliver positive ROI when properly executed as a component of overarching strategies. Viral marketing is helping in generating brand awareness and brand equity. Marketers need to recognize that customers are an additional sales channel, a lead-generating

channel, and an awareness-generating channel. Viral marketing is a powerful way to enlist customers in a marketing strategy, and when applied correctly, can boost sales for the right product and speed the transition from the stage of early adoption to widespread use. Viral marketing appears to be an open invitation for marketers to make some quick money by using friendship to sell their goods and services to customers.

The following characteristics are true of all successful viral marketing campaigns:

- I. Understand the target audience craft and test the message, and target influentials in the relevant communities to implement the campaign.
- II. Motivate people to pass along the marketing message, but not so much that encourages spamming.
- III. Make it easy for people to participate in the marketing campaign.
- IV. Most of customers worry about companies selling their personal information to others. To remove this privacy security assurity should be provided
- V. Let people know their e-mail address or personal information will not be used without their permission.
- VI. Offer a product or service that is worthy of conversation.
- VII. Have on-line and off-line components in the viral marketing campaign.
- VIII. Make sure the campaign is integrated with the larger marketing strategy and not a one-time incident.
- IX. Track and analyze the results of the campaign.
- X. Don't "rely on incentivizing in the long-term, but build customer loyalty through good value, excellent service, entertainment, or an emotional attachment."

to the new era of marketing" Volume 1, No. 3, December 2012.

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