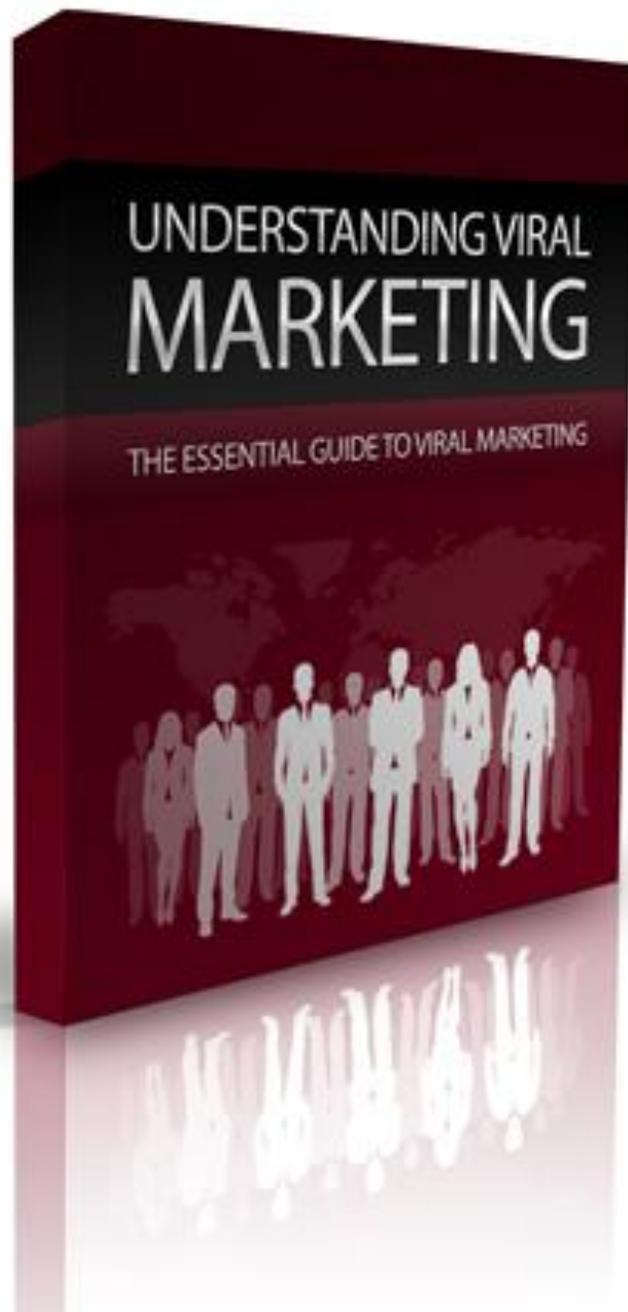


Understanding Viral Marketing



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An Overview of Viral Marketing

Viral marketing is a marketing tactic that depends on people instead of the usual promotional campaigns to relay information to others. This strategy is normally used by internet marketers to promote their products or services. Like the biological virus where the term was derived, viral marketing relies on “carriers” to transmit the message quickly.

The Goal of Viral Marketing

The primary goal of viral marketing is to spur people to pass along promotional messages or advertising to others. These people essentially become product promoters, passing marketing information to others who, in turn, will spread the message to other individuals – all done for free!

Viral marketing first got noticed when email provider Hotmail.com used it in their marketing campaign. When the company went live online, each email message sent carried an ad for Hotmail along with a link to its website. As individuals were sending emails to relatives and friends, they were also sending out messages that promote the email service. After clicking on the link, recipients can easily sign up for a Hotmail account, and as they send out messages using their new account, the advertisement spreads throughout the world in a short time with very little effort from the email provider.

This illustration shows how the primary elements of viral marketing are put into play. The advertising cost is negligible. It uses common tasks to its advantage, such as sending emails. It capitalizes on existing resources, people in particular, to boost their products or services. Without being aware of it, each individual who uses the product becomes its endorser or spokesperson.

When a company goes viral on their ad campaign, their brand gets recognized and their sales go up, resulting in a better payday. The main goal is to send out viral messages that can be passed along rapidly from person to person without investing a lot of time, money and effort.

The Tools of Viral Marketing

Viral marketing takes advantage of existing communications channels such as radio and television. Other strategies ride on blogs, banner ads, as well as social networks like Facebook and Twitter. Hotmail, in its case, used endorsement from other people. The biggest thing about going viral is that it can spread the message like wildfire to more people than traditional advertising.

While there are various strains of viral marketing, they all use the same basic principles.

- *Incentive-driven opt-in pages* offer free items for providing an email address
- *Pass-along messages* can come in the form of interesting emails and funny video clips which people share and forward to others
- *Buzz marketing or gossip* creates controversies about something which get people to start talking
- *Undercover viral marketing* is spawned by strange or false news items and spread by word-of-mouth

Transmitting the Virus

Like an uncontrolled epidemic, many individuals have used viral marketing effectively by transmitting their message within Facebook and other social networking sites. It is a great leap forward from the word-of-mouth concept as it uses the power of lightning-fast Internet to get the message out.

Viral marketing has recently been in the crosshairs of consumers, marketing experts and privacy rights defenders due to spam emails. However, those who have mastered the game use this strategy prudently to avoid drawing fire and ensure that the message will travel far, wide and fast.

The Importance of Viral Marketing

For a business to survive in today's largely competitive environment, it must be able to stand toe to toe against its competition and be able to adapt to the constantly changing landscape. One strategy has come up as a solution for today's business demands and it is called viral marketing. Online or offline, it is essential for business as it can reach your clients faster and it doesn't require a lot of money to launch.

Viral marketing is a type of advertising campaign that relies on individuals to pass on marketing messages to other individuals, so that recognition of a product or service spreads and replicates, yes, like a virus. This approach can create a lot of positive impact during promotional campaigns or product launches.

Here are some reasons why viral marketing is important for the survival of your business.

1. Viral marketing creates a buzz

Creating a buzz about your product brings a sense of anticipation in your buyers. A successful viral marketing campaign can accomplish this. The louder the buzz, the farther the campaign can spread. Messages that are of great public interest, attention-grabbing and easy to pass along will definitely help the campaign.

2. It builds more credibility

As more and more people in the entire network talk about and recommend your brand, more credibility is built. This is so because your company is endorsed by more and more people to their friends and close associates as your message goes viral, adding points to your credibility rating. The loud buzz that is generated will surely help boost product or service recognition.

3. It is inexpensive

Viral marketing costs a lot less to launch but is very fast and effective in getting your message out to prospective buyers. It is the least expensive way to market your business because it doesn't require a large advertising budget. Blogging, newsletters, and email marketing are some of the ways to go viral inexpensively.

4. It keeps your business in the green

Viral marketing helps to keep your business afloat. If your business has already earned more credibility, people will continue to patronize your brand and ensure your business stability.

5. It can launch your business globally

Through viral marketing, your reputation as a reliable company can reach potential clients across the globe, enabling your company to branch out internationally.

6. Viral messages are easy to share

Viral product messages are easy to share. Attention-getting videos can be easily embedded into blog posts, web pages and social networking sites.

What Viral Marketing is Not

Many people erroneously believe that viral marketing requires a huge budget to work. Not even close.

A traditional marketing campaign promotes a brand, singing high praises about its merits, and giving it a lot of exposure and expensive movie star endorsements. With today's consumers being skeptical about nearly everything, this may appear like a hard-sell for a weak product. All that big advertising dollars for so little gain. This is not viral marketing.

What Your Message Should Be

The key here is to create an interesting viral message that will appeal to your market. You will naturally want to include your product here. Sure you can, just don't make it too obvious. It shouldn't appear like it's the heart of your message. Release the message virally and wait for sales to come in.

Your viral message should be relevant, able to solve a problem and credible enough that people will want to share it.

The 5 Rules of Viral Marketing

One of the most amazing things about viral marketing is the moment when a brilliant idea takes off, it can launch a company to fame and financial success – inexpensively. People who are compelled to pass on your message drive other people to action. One individual transmits the story to another, which they pass on to yet another, and so on. This is harnessing the power of the buzz, the word-of-mouth, or viral marketing.

Ingredients for Viral Marketing Success

Success in this strategy depends on how you throw the right ingredient into the mix:

- Free web content which includes blogs, e-books and videos.
- Attention-grabbing information. It could be innovative, bizarre, amusing or features a celebrity.
- A group of people to start the fire.
- Links to your content. This is very important if you want your message to go out.

Viral marketing doesn't have to be difficult. The simpler and more engaging your message is, the more widespread its pull will be. Here are some basic rules to follow.

1. Make Your Offer Appealing

Don't put cash value to your offer. Giveaways like access to online webinars, video tutorials, e-books, special reports are examples of low-cost/high-value items which can spur the recipients to take up your offer and pass the message on to others, increasing the chances of making it viral.

2. Make Your Message Easy to Share

Be sure that your message, whether it's a video clip, an audio recording, an e-book, or any other media, can be efficiently and smoothly passed along to other people with a single click. Anything that slows down the forwarding of your message such as an opt-in page that captures emails should be minimized.

3. Take Advantage of Existing Communications Networks

You don't need to own a chain of radio or television stations to reach out to people. Make yourself familiar with the popular and immensely effective social networks like Facebook, Pinterest, Twitter, Google Plus and other marketing platforms that will get

the job done at no cost.

4. Make It Worth Buzzing About

If you want your message to get opened, promote it as the next big thing to make it buzz-worthy. If people think that they are going to benefit from it or look good by using it, your redemption rate will skyrocket.

5. Keep It Short and Simple

As was mentioned earlier, the easier your message is to understand, the greater the chances of it going viral. Keep your message free from fluff and go straight to the point. Due to the huge amount of information that bombard them each day, if people have to spend one more minute to decipher your message, then they'll find it easier to click out of the page and move on to other things.

Know your potential audience and how they are going to respond to a particular offer. One of the key to capturing people's attention is to know what they want and over-deliver. When you provide them with something of value at absolutely no charge, expect a huge avalanche of response to follow. If people are compelled to pass on your message to friends and associates, then your chances of going viral is assured.

The Most Effective Viral Marketing Techniques

For a message to become viral, that is, to spread and replicate like a virus, it has to be easy enough to share, using as very little effort as possible, such as clicking on a link. The message should also be able to stand out effectively and capture the attention of readers. What's more, it should have some value to users but not necessarily in monetary terms. What is important is it has entertainment or educational value.

That being said, the next question would probably be – what technique should one use for viral marketing? There is no best answer for that question. Below are 7 very effective and proven viral marketing techniques that should be part of your marketing arsenal.

1. Social Networks

Hotmail launched a very successful viral marketing campaign long before social media was introduced. Today, it would be impossible for a business to achieve even a fraction of Hotmail's success without becoming active in social networks such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and others. Bottom line is, if properly executed, social media marketing can boost your viral marketing like rocket sled on rails.

2. Article Marketing

Content is king. It was then, it still is. If you are good in writing articles and can get them to be syndicated, it is not too far-fetched that some of your work can go viral. That is, of course, if they are original, captivating, entertaining or educational, and provides great value.

3. Videos

You've probably heard of YouTube videos that have garnered hundreds of thousands of views just within a week of getting viral. If you can upload a video that is hilarious, bizarre, educational, or simply grabs the attention of viewers, you might just be the next YouTube sensation

4. E-Books

E-book production started nearly the same time as the Internet. E-books is considered as one of the best ways to go viral because they are fast and easy to create and has a large audience reach. People want to share a good reading experience. If the e-book you've written is educational and/or entertaining, original, and a hard-to-put-down page-turner, then people will gladly share it with others.

5. Newsletters

Newsletters are not just a great way to keep your subscribers constantly reminded of your business name, they also have that strong potential to go viral. You can grab this wonderful opportunity and not leave money on the table. Here's how. Always write a note at the end of your newsletter which encourages the reader to share the newsletter with other people. Surprisingly, most of them will. All they need is a little encouraging to take action.

6. Like, Tweet and Share buttons

These buttons provide an excellent and convenient way for your site visitors to broadcast your content via the social networking sites.

There are other forms of content you can use for viral marketing, but in some cases, real success comes from the way you promote your content to your target audience. However, it is truly possible, provided you have an amazing story that you can put in front of your audience, that they will respond positively and willingly share your content.

How to Launch a Low-Cost Viral Marketing Campaign

It doesn't have to cost an arm and a leg to drive laser-focused traffic to your company website. Viral marketing is a low-cost yet effective tool to do just that. Here are some useful tips to help you launch a low-cost viral marketing campaign that will yield positive results.

Write Articles That Promote Your Product or Service.

You can post these articles on your website as well as submit them to article directories. If people find your articles entertaining or useful, they can reprint them on their website, e-books, e-zine, or newsletter. Don't forget to include your author resource box and the article reprint option below the article body.

If you don't like writing or just don't have the time, there are free or low-cost PLR articles you can use. However, to prevent being de-indexed by Google for dupe content, you should rewrite portions of these articles to alter their content and make them more unique as other people use these PLR articles as well.

Set Up Your Forum or Bulletin Board

Forums and bulletin boards are useful tools where people can post their comments and links on your site which can help your advertising campaign go viral. You can also embed an affiliate banner or one of your own above the bulletin board's header area.

Most hosting companies include these programs at no extra cost as part of their hosting package. Installing them can be done automatically using the control panel. Just type in your name, password, and other required information and your forum or bulletin board is ready to go. All you need to do is log in and manage it.

Purchase the Branding Rights to a Successfully Viral E-book

After branding the e-book with your site URL and links, you can give it away to people at no charge and allow them to pass it along to others. Your e-book will be received or downloaded repeatedly by other individuals down the line until it virally spreads across the internet.

Write Your Own E-book

Create an e-book and allow people to place their ads in it for free, with the understanding that they will, in return, give away the e-book to their newsletter subscribers and website visitors.

Build Your Product Website

If you have the experience and skill, you can build a website that promotes your product. You can also allow people to download your products for free and provide them with give-away rights so they can distribute them freely to other people. This will enable your product and your links to propagate across the internet until your brand gains recognition and, as a result, pull in traffic to your website.

To make this possible, your free give-away product should carry your advertisement or you should require product recipients to directly link to your website. They should also keep your copyright notice untampered as this is where you will include a link back to your website.

If you don't want to spend on paid web hosting, you can also use free websites like Blogger and WordPress to get you started.

How to Succeed in Viral Marketing Using Pinterest

There's marketing and there's Pinterest marketing and succeeding in it only requires your understanding of how Pinterest can work to your advantage. This pinboard-style of marketing has seen tremendous web traffic since its debut in March 2013. The photo-sharing website has, in fact, already generated more than \$54 million in funding from foreign and local investors alike.

There is such excitement in using Pinterest for users when they create images and redefine them as "collections" of events, hobbies and interests and more so when other users "re-pin" them to their own pinboards. Recipes, craft projects, gardening tools, no-rip hosiery, retro fashion, shabby chic furniture, sand art, it's an endless array of everything and anything. Connections, friendships, relationships and collaborations have been established, and continue to flourish, because of Pinterest.

Using Pinterest for Business

Business is no exception and has steadily gained a niche in the Pinterest environment. Because it's such a highly visual medium, business has a particularly good opportunity to maximize its marketing strategies when it uses Pinterest. You just have to understand how it works to get information on what kind of content gets shared and why. Women make up the majority of Pinterest users, you have to take note of that, so technology and other traditionally "macho" interests like cars, golf, wrestling and PC games are still in the process of garnering their shares of audiences.

Exposure is obviously what happens as you inevitably progress on viral marketing in Pinterest, that's why you have to keep on being creative. Pinterest is visual, and your content has to be more eye-catching than the other visuals, and your textual content has to be more informative, too, to capture more users of your pinboard. While photography is the name of the game here, you have to go the extra mile and choose carefully on what kind of photography is most suitable for your line of business, which is, for instance, shoes.

More than the Usual Marketing

Viral marketing of shoes is done by big name stores and competing with them will take more than the usual viral marketing because they already do that. Use Pinterest by scouring for great shots of shoes worn by ordinary people instead of celebrities, for example, a pair of Jimmy Choo on a little girl or a pair of Doc Martens on a grandfather.

Create your own images by taking the ordinary a notch higher to make them extraordinary and Pinterest can help you achieve that. Take a seasonal holiday, for instance, like Valentine's Day. If you're into the costume business, make the occasion to your advantage. Instead of yet overemphasizing that Valentine's Day is meant mostly for lovers, couples and significant others, take on a stand on it and introduce love on February 14 as a universal form of affection between parents and children, between neighbors, between teachers and students or even between friends. Pinterest has hundreds of thousands of images which speak of that kind of platonic love.

Diligent Commenting

Riding on a trend using Pinterest is, of course, a trend by itself. If you want to know how to succeed in Pinterest viral marketing all you need to do is actively share your information and connect to other social media sites like Facebook.

Likewise, diligently posting comments on your content, and on others' comments as well, will help you rope in more viewers and subsequently gain you potential customers. Because somewhere out there, someone, or a whole lot of someone's, will be people who not only share your interests but are willing to shell a few bucks to see them come true.

How to Succeed in Viral Marketing Using Facebook

Strategy is what you apply when you want to rope in visitors to your website and teaching you how to succeed in viral marketing using facebook can only mean that there are some factors which you have to take into consideration to achieve success.

A free product is always welcome. Whether the recipient uses it or not, a freebie is exciting to receive. And if the freebie is useful to the recipient, it attains more value and attracts attention to the product itself. An ebook, software, gift certificates, a pair of ear plugs, it could be anything that will be interesting to own or have. No strings attached, no contests, no free trials, no surveys, not even a small fee to sign up for to be able to get it, just plain old giveaways.

Getting Your Message Across

Social networks have begun their competitive battle against traditional marketing tools like the telephone, television, print ads and billboards. Because marketing through social media is faster and can potentially reach four times the number of real time users, your first stop is going through your email contacts. On the surface, emailing each one personally and not sending them auto-generated information introducing your product will seem daunting.

But think of it from the recipient's point of view: getting an email which begins with a "Dear James," addressing the recipient in an informal, almost intimate manner, is way better than receiving something that greets the recipient with a generic "Dear Beloved Consumer," that makes even the word "beloved" sound too desperate for a sale.

Set Up Another Account

If you already have a Facebook account but use it primarily for social interaction, register for another account for your business and set up a business fan page to reach out to potential customers. A personal Facebook account will not be effective as a business tool because not all of the people in your personal circle are necessarily interested in your business or have need for the product or service which you offer. Do the same if you have a Twitter account; concentrate on being followed and followed by individuals already in your business niche.

Again, use your Facebook and Twitter accounts to "feel" your readers by actively interacting with them. Ask them questions regularly on topics directly related to your business, share photos and other images with them, get them to invite each other to expand into more networks, because spreading out the buzz about your business will

be easier. The adage “the more, the merrier” doesn’t hold more true than in this case when you know how to succeed with viral marketing using facebook.

Blogging Your Way

Start a blog on your business. If you’re not much of a writer, hire people who write for a living to do the blogging for you. Make sure that your blog is updated often and take note of your readers’ comments and ensure that you pay attention to their questions, if any, as well as their suggestions. Never underestimate the power of the follow up.

Readers who tune in to your blog may be repetitive but your patience in faithfully answering their queries will encourage other readers to note that your blog cares about them, even when they play like a broken record.

Knowing viral marketing using Facebook and Twitter and still other social network accounts is really just putting out informative but engaging content and images which others can see, relate to and appreciate. And if you have a business which can maximize these visual, cerebral and emotional results, you are halfway into generating more interest and, hopefully, more sales in the future.

The 7 Most Effective Viral Marketing Videos

Social media has become every business’s dream marketing tool and there are more and more viral marketing videos coming up every day because of the proven effect that viral marketing, and videos in particular, has had on consumers over the past five years.

People use the internet for almost anything they need, a condition which most of us did not think possible ten or even 15 years ago. Today, we go online to pay our bills, buy merchandise, connect with long lost schoolmates, meet new friends, participate in conferences, watch films, listen to music and transact business.

YouTube, for instance, has revolutionized the way of discovering new talents (think Charice or Gangnam style dancing), espousing causes (think PETA’s anti-fur campaigns showing how animals are methodically slaughtered, without anesthesia, for their skins) and providing blow-by-blow coverage of news (think hostage situations, natural disasters like Katrina, fires and sniper battles).

More than Text Messaging

Video watchers fall under the 17 to 58 age range with an even distribution of both genders and geography. In some places in the world where access to the internet is minimal, people still find a way to view the news, chat with friends, email relatives, purchase new clothes and write down a recipe by watching videos online in internet

cafes or on their mobile phones. Viral marketing using video has, in fact, gained more ground than any other form of marketing, including text messaging.

Attention is what a business needs and there is no better way to capture it than a video uploaded and viewed by the more than ten million people who go online everyday looking for something new to watch. It has to be admitted, even by traditionalists of advertising, that video commercials are more effective than print ads, or even televised ads.

There are certainly more interesting to watch online than television can ever produce, and because what television airs can almost always be aired online as a video as well, watching television has even become a so-so activity in the past couple of years.

Being Unconventional

Video marketing is definitely "it." Videos have this uncanny way of drawing attention to themselves merely by being "unconventional" and that word can have different meanings to different people. While the written word of print ads and texting stimulate the visual senses, videos cover both the visual and the auditory areas and provoke the mind even more.

When watching some of the viral marketing videos the viewer participates in the creation of images that engages the mind to think beyond what is seen. For instance, a video marketing nail art that is done with good lighting, convincing textual content, the latest music and overall engaging approach will persuade even nail biters to grow their nails and try on some polish and eventually have the desire to have nail art done. To watch how a product works through a video online makes the viewer so interested he would want to see how that product works for himself.

To Charge or Not to Charge

Promoting your business via viral marketing videos is cost effective. It requires very little or no cost to make a video and uploading it on most sites, especially the popular ones, is free. The choice is then yours on whether you want to charge people who view your video or let them watch it for free and let your product speak for itself.

You can categorize your video to ensure that it lands in your business niche and make target marketing easier for your product. Ensuring the correct category where your video will be in increases your product's visibility and availability. When choosing viral marketing videos, make sure that the category it is in can reach out to the most number of people who can be your potential customers.

Viral Marketing Dos and Don'ts

In the frenzy world that characterizes the internet, online marketing has done more for business than all the traditional approaches combined but there are several viral marketing do's and don'ts which you must be aware of to ensure success in generating success for your business.

Relevancy is of prime significance because very few people will be attracted to what you put out if that content is not related in some way to what they are attracted to or interested in. For your content to be relevant, it has to be recognizable as important to the reader. Information about retro icons, for instance, should have updated news about what's going on in the lives of these icons or whether they are staging a comeback or lending their names to certain products (which, hopefully, is one of yours) or simply letting their fans and followers know that they are still alive and kicking.

Getting Instant Customers

Another one of the viral marketing do's and don'ts is creating marketing content which appeals to the sense of humor of the target audience. So make your content funny in some way that reading or viewing it triggers the laugh button in people. Along with the humor factor, marketing your product in a shockingly attractive manner will certainly provoke people to think about it and develop their own ideas. Controversial topics which may have bearing on your product, for example, can trigger so many responses from viewers that demand for your product becomes more than the supply.

If you are trying to get people to buy your vacuum-packed fresh vegetables, use their photos side by side with photos of vegetables infested with chemical insecticides by choosing those with magnifying glasses superimposed on them. By letting people know that fresh vegetables, your organically grown, chemical free veggies, are available and do exist, by showing the kind of other vegetables there are in their chemical-sprayed appearance, you captivate your viewers into becoming instant customers.

Basic Do's

Still another "Do" is responding personally to comments and messages posted by readers or viewers. Yes, it's a lot of nitty-gritty work but a personal reply is always appreciated more than an automated response. "Do" post regularly and frequently sensibly because once you have introduced your product, people would want to know more about it, including new variants or any improvements to it, change of packaging, promos and giveaways associated with it and other updates. Do make use of social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter but remember to register your business as a separate account. Choose what page your business is most suitable, and, whether

it is on a fan or community page, work your way from there in gathering reader- or viewership.

Just a Few Don'ts

The "Don'ts" are comparatively few. Don't spam is Rule Number One. Spamming is a nuisance to email inboxes and can be so irritating that the recipient can be induced to homicidal proportions to find their email flooded with spam.

Don't neglect the Terms of Service condition of whatever platforms you are using to avoid future lawsuits or the closure of your site or the upload of your video, two vital conditions which translate to loss of business for you. If the Terms of Service include prohibition of posting photos which can be classified as soft porn, for example, don't be reckless and post half-nude images just to draw attention to your lingerie or intimate apparel product. Yes, you want to connect with people who will be potential customers, but no, you don't want sex addicts, pedophiles and other deviants to flock to your site or watch your video, do you?

When using Twitter as a viral marketing tool, the last of viral marketing do's and don'ts include going overboard on the hashtags and tag every word, or make long descriptive tags, in your tweet. Don't. Go. Overboard. Use them wisely. Highlight keywords which are current, interesting and attention-getting so people can easily find your tweet. And unless you a real mutant like Mystique and still manage to look like the real Jennifer Lawrence, don't use words which only you can understand or find exciting such as #100RandomFactsAboutMe.

The Biggest Mistakes Even Experts Make in Viral Marketing

Viral marketing is a powerful business strategy which can generate continuous sales for your business but remember that doing it right to avoid mistakes people make in viral marketing is no less important than putting out great content.

Even the most seasoned marketers can make the same kinds of mistakes over and over again yet most of these are avoidable. For the viral marketing rookie, being informed of them can cut the time, and the regret, not to mention the loss business, it will take to actually experience them.

Timely and Updated

Put information in quickly. People don't want to be kept waiting, especially for something they need to use at once. Make sure your server isn't slow or use graphics which take forever to download. Never subscribe to technical arrogance and assume

that everyone has Macromedia because people who have plain HTML and text versions installed in their computers are potential customers as well.

See to it that your site or video has these versions readily available. Manually list search engines which people use to view your site. Business people use search engines so much yet often don't see the wisdom in having their own sites listed on the very search engines they use. Learn about Search Engine Optimization (SEO) techniques and use them to strengthen the impact of your content and to stay "in" with the latest in viral marketing.

Choose who you partner with. Don't commit common mistakes in viral marketing by associating with spyware companies and spammers who operate profusely online because if you get involved with them as co-registrants or affiliates, you may be dragged into future lawsuits. Your product may be interesting enough, but having a business relationship with people like those can lose you a substantial number of already existing customers. One questionable mail can be enough for you to be labeled as a spammer by internet service providers (ISPs), making it hard for you to market online in the future.

Retaining Customers

And speaking of customers, your potential ones should not be given the third degree when they sign up with your website or open an account to buy your product or receive your newsletter. Your questions should never be beyond name, age, email address and other contact information of your future subscriber. And don't forget to include asking their permission to use their information for other activities which your business might have such as promotions and events.

Be aware of the right timing, because not being so means that you're either up in the boondocks where they know Eisenhower to still be the American president or you're simply "out of touch" with the rest of the world. If your product mainly caters to specialized markets, for instance, children of school age, and your product is school supplies in general, you do your sales and promotions of these in August before school starts in September and not in December when school is out for the holidays. And remember that although marketing is done most effectively and quickly online, don't fall for the biggest mistakes people make in viral marketing and stop marketing offline.