

eMessaging: Viral Marketing

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Viral marketing describes 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.

The term “Viral Marketing” may seem offensive to you, but it can have dramatic effects on list building, contact acquisition, and building customer relationships. Offline, this has often been referred to as “word of mouth”, “network marketing”, or even “leveraging the media.” What ever the terminology used, this happens normally when someone opens an email and simply forwards it to someone else they know can value from it or has an interest in the topic. We’ve all done it with various types of marketing collateral that we receive, but being able to track those forwards and click-through rates offers additional value for you.

Sometimes when e-marketing responses are higher than normal it can be attributed to viral marketing of this nature. Viral marketing seems to be the highest among IT professionals, computer related professions, and communities of close interest.

It is recommended that you test this strategy of marketing on a seed type of list so that you can track the response rates. For example, if you are offering a sale on a particular service via the internet you could offer an extra \$1 for everyone they forward it to who signs up. If you want people to sign up for an event you are offering such as a homecoming, for example, you could offer an incentive for each person the recipient gets to sign up. The key is to make sure you acquire the contact information of the person who sent it and of those who received it. This allows you the ability to not only analyze, track and measure responses, but also to acquire new contact information in the end.

Viral Components

First of all you have to identify the message and offer you will be making. Not all business organizations will receive overwhelming response either because their offerings aren’t compelling enough to pass along to others or because the concept of viral marketing doesn’t fit with their business or marketing models. The message has to be unique and compelling enough to warrant forwarding.

Types of Messages

Many organizations have monthly newsletters that are published, but they may contain information that others in the organization can benefit from. Newsletters often contain information about services that a company is promoting. With the viral marketing

concept, these messages would be passed along to others in the organization and with the proper information in the email you could direct them to a website to sign up for the newsletter themselves.

Retail discounts and sales promotions can help to leverage a large amount of sales revenue. With this type of model you could send out a discount offering with deeper discounts offered to all those who forward it on to friends who sign up on a web site.

Hotmail.com has done this type of marketing with it's free e-mail account holders. Every message sent out has a tag line at the bottom that says, "Get your private free e-mail at www.hotmail.com." When recipients of this message get these types of e-mails they are essentially being asked to go the site and sign up for a free e-mail account, through which hotmail will market to them via banner ads.

Tully's Coffee did a viral marketing campaign in which they sent out a free eggnog latte coupon that could be printed right from the e-mail. Recipients could then redeem the coupon and also pass it along to friends and family. This campaign was very successful in that it allowed Tully's to up-sell other products once they got customers in the door.

Strategy Elements

Free is one of the most powerful words in marketing today. The offer can be anything from information to software or goods and services. These give away products or services help to promote the pass along email, while providing for effortless transfer to others. This type of marketing can be scaled easily from small to large, while exploiting common motivations and behaviors. It also takes advantage of other resources such as time and recipients e-mail resources. Your marketing is essentially being done for you.

No matter how you decide to deploy a viral marketing eMessaging campaign, make sure to do it with care and due diligence. Be mindful of the permission factor and treat new contacts with care.

