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VIRAL MARKETING

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Abstract

Buzz or Word-of-Mouth Marketing influences more people to buy, or not to buy products and services than most other forms of marketing. Basically, we have a need to share information as a means of communication and also as a way of understanding the world around us. Often we make purchasing decisions based on the information gathered from friends and well-respected associates. We tend to listen to them more readily than most mass-media messages. Viral Marketing describes strategies that encourage individuals to pass the marketing message to others. This type of marketing creates the potential for exponential growth in the range of message's exposure and influence among the consumers.

Introduction

Before the introduction of internet and web logs in the world, the entire global economy was considered to be a closed one. The Viral or Buzz Marketing Programs largely depend on stimulating and persuading consumers to tell their friends how much they liked the product. Therefore, the objective of a promotional strategy of simulation is to run advertisements or a direct marketing program that is sufficiently interesting and informative to provoke consumers to discuss with others, the benefit of the product.

Marketing Buzz or simply, Buzz is a term used in the Word-of-Mouth Marketing. The Interaction of Consumers and Users of a product or service serve to amplify the original marketing message. Some describe Buzz as a form of hype among consumers, a vague but positive association, excitement, or anticipation about a product or service. Positive "buzz" is often a goal of Viral Marketing and the term refers both to the execution of the marketing technique and the resulting goodwill that is created. It is possible for firms to track the Marketing Buzz of their products online by

using Buzz Monitoring. For some companies, it is important to understand the buzz surrounding a product before introducing the product to the market.

Concept of Buzz or Viral Marketing

It was once known simply known as Word-of-Mouth. These days it is termed as Buzz Marketing, Wildfire Marketing, Avalanche Marketing or dozens of other names. It is named Viral because it allows a message to spread like a virus. But the concept is the same and a company encourages influential people or other businesses to talk up a product or service to their friends and contacts so that they will buy the company's product or service. The difference is that when the marketing is Viral, it is done via the Internet. Today, with advertising budgets being slashed due to the economic downturn, generating Buzz is growing in importance. With more people logging onto the Internet, an increasing number of companies are targeting friends of friends of friends through e-mail. With an estimated 70% of the online public forwarding e-mail and URL pages to friends, Viral Marketing is becoming increasingly appealing to companies that want

to cut through the clutter to bring their messages to the public. Once a person receives a message in the Internet, he can pass it extremely fast to many people.

Buzz or Viral Marketing- an Outlook

The term “viral advertising” refers to the idea that people will pass on and share interesting and entertaining content which is often sponsored by a brand, which is looking to build awareness of a product or service. These Viral Commercials often take the form of Funny Video Clips, or Interactive Flash Games, Images, and even Text. Viral Marketing is popular because of the ease of executing the marketing campaign, relative low-cost (compared to direct mail), good targeting, and the high and rapid response rate. The main strength of Viral Marketing is its ability to obtain a large number of interested people at a low cost. The hardest task for any company is to acquire and retain a large customer base. Through the use of the internet and the effects of e-mail advertising, the Business-To-Consumer (B2C) efforts have a greater impact than many other tools of marketing. Viral Marketing is a technique that avoids the annoyance of spam mail. It encourages the users of a specific product or service to inform their friends and hence this would be a positive word-of-mouth recommendation. One of the most successful perspectives to achieve the customer base is the Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) Perspective.

‘Buzz’ Marketing Builds on Traditional Strategy

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 as it reaches a

large number of people rapidly. Viral Marketing subsumes Internet-based stealth marketing campaigns, including the use of blogs, seemingly amateur web sites, and other forms of highly attractive campaigns which are designed to create word of mouth for a new product or service. Often the goal of Viral Marketing Campaigns is to generate media coverage via unusual stories worth many times more than the campaigning company’s advertising budget.

Viral Marketing and its Enormous Potential

Personal influence carries especially great weight. Word of Mouth message from one influential person tends to affect the buying attitudes of two other people, on an average. That Circle of Influence, however, jumps to eight online. There is considerable Consumer-To-Consumer Communication on the web on a whole range of subjects. On-line visitors increasingly create product information and not just consume it and they join internet interest groups to share information so that Word of Web is joining with Word of Mouth as an important buying influence. People often ask others for a recommendation for a doctor, plumber, hotel, lawyer, accountant, architect, insurance agent, interior decorator, or financial consultant. If they have confidence in the recommendation, they normally act on the referral. In such cases, the recommender has potentially benefited the Service Provider as well as the Service Seeker. Service Providers clearly have a strong interest in building Referral Sources.

Types of Viral Marketing Campaigns

The following are the various types of Viral Marketing Campaigns which are followed by the corporate sector to launch their product with grand success.

Pass-Along

Among the messages which encourage the user to send the message to others, the

crudest form is Chain Letters where a message at the bottom of the e-mail prompts the reader to forward the message.

Incentivised 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 more effective when the offer requires another person to take action.

Undercover

A Viral Message is Presented as a cool or unusual page, activity, or piece of news, without obvious incitements to link or pass along. In the case of Undercover Marketing, it is not immediately apparent that anything is being marketed.

Edgy Gossip/Buzz Marketing

Ads or Messages are intended to 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.

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.

Seven Tricks to host Viral Marketing

Viral Marketing (Word-of-Mouth Marketing) plays a very predominant role in the field of modern business. Instead of spending an insane amount of money on

newspapers ads, TV commercials or banner ads, they spend nothing and let the customers do all the work for the business growth. With the help of Viral Marketing, campaigns suddenly get a life of its own and start to spread like a virus. Everyone wants to see it, and when they do, they all want to share it. It is immensely powerful, usually having 500-1000 times greater impact than what the business get from regular advertisements.

1. Make people feel something.
2. Do something unexpected.
3. Do not try to make advertisements.
4. Make sequels.
5. Allow sharing, downloading and embedding.
6. Connect with comments.
7. Never restrict access.

Types of Buzz

There appears to be two principal types of Buzz.

(1) Uncodified Buzz

The Uncodified Buzz occurs when an innovator encounters a new product, movie etc, that he or she likes and passes on the information.

(2) Codified Buzz

It is something that is incubated, fostered and underwritten by the firm and may take the form of trial version, testimonials, observable usage, endorsements, gift certificates, hosted chat rooms and so on. The firm should understand that the Observability and the Trial ability of the Viral Marketing Program are critical elements for the new product.

Word of Mouth may be Uncontrollable

Although most marketing managers believe that Word of Mouth Communication is extremely effective, one problem that they sometimes overlook is the fact that informal

communication is difficult to control. Negative comments, frequently in the form of rumors that are untrue, can sweep through the marketplace to the detriment of marketing a product. Some common rumors have plagued marketers in recent years and unfavorably influenced sales and they include:

- (a) The product was produced under unsanitary conditions.
- (b) The product contained an unwholesome or culturally unacceptable ingredient.
- (c) The product functioned as an undesirable depressant or stimulant.
- (d) The product included a hazardous element or agent.
- (e) The firm was owned or influenced by an unfriendly or misguided foreign country, governmental agency or religious culture.

Conclusion

The Marketing Revolution is affecting every one involved in the marketing and

promotional process. Companies recognize that they must change the ways they market and promote their product and services. They can no longer be tied to a specific common tool (such as media, advertising). Rather they should use whatever contact methods offer the best way of delivering the message to their target audiences. Ad Agencies continue to reposition themselves to acquire the market share. Most agencies recognize that their future success would depend on their ability to understand all areas of promotion in order to help their customers. Even Ad Agencies that are heavily invested in traditional brand building techniques, acknowledge that Buzz Marketing has become a phenomenon. Words about good companies travel fast and words about bad companies travel even faster. As one marketer noted, you don't need to reach two million people to let them know about the new product-you just need to reach the right 2,000 people in the right way and they will help you to reach two million.