

'What's Your Virus?'

By Kem Thompson

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WHAT'S YOUR VIRUS?

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The term 'viral marketing' is the current buzzword in the business world. It refers to a method of marketing in which a product is spread fast and wide (similar to an infectious virus in medicine) by a 'carrier' other than the originator of the virus. In most cases of viral marketing, the carriers of the virus are satisfied customers. Other products act as self-propagating viruses – the viral product is its own carrier.

Viral marketing works best when the product or service (or idea) in question is of high value. Think of hotmail, a perfect example of a virus. Hotmail offers free email. What a great idea! In each email you send or receive however, notice the small ad encouraging you to get your free email account from hotmail.

That way the virus propagates itself.

Because it's free, though, you get all your friends to sign up for it as well – you're acting as a 'carrier' for the virus now.

In each case, notice that Microsoft is not spending much extra money in advertising. Yet hotmail has over 40 million users today.

This is the beauty and power of viral marketing: it is very cost effective. Instead of spending tons in advertising, give away something of value to 'prove your worth'. Happy users of your product or service will spread the word for you. Remember, people are more likely to use something recommended to them by a trusted friend than by some stranger.

This brings up another benefit of viral marketing: with your product in the hands of someone who's got it through a friend's recommendation, the user gets to know you.

The more word spreads about how good your product is, users begin to trust you (and associate your name with quality products or services) and they ultimately like you.

Once you've got someone to know, like and trust you, you have become their friend, and thus are very likely to successfully sell to that person whenever you want to.

A further benefit of viral marketing is that it gives you a chance to seek permission to market to prospects.

People don't like to be sold to, but they do want to be informed about something that might be of value to them. If you include a feedback form or further information request form on your viral product, then anyone who sends you the forms is a hot prospect for you to sell to. They have indicated to you that they are interested in your product or service.

These are the easiest people to sell to, as opposed to cold prospects. Permission marketing is more effective than 'interruption' marketing.

I cannot emphasize enough the importance of having a good quality product to use as a virus, though.

If your product is of poor quality, it won't 'catch on' as a virus. Worse than that, the wrong sort of word of mouth could spread about it, ruining your chances of making a sale of that product.

Other examples of viral marketing strategies include Blue Mountain and their free electronic cards. ICQ and their free chat system. Adobe Acrobat and their free pdf file reader.

As a consultant/business owner, what can you use as a viral product?

There are many examples such as e-books, email newsletters (ezines), reports, articles, postcard sites, services – be creative, and you can come up with many more. Aim for high quality.

Remember, 'give first to prove your worth'.

Information products such as e-books are some of the best viral products because in addition to the benefits of viral marketing mentioned above, info products increase your credibility and place you as an expert in your field. This makes it easier for people to buy from you, because they respect you as well.

At this point you may get concerned if you feel you can't write. Not to despair. You can get someone to write for you. As long as the quality of the material is good, it's well worth the price when you think of the return on your investment. Also consider the long lifespan of information products.

Viral marketing and permission marketing are the future of marketing. People are getting wise to sneaky sales gimmicks and 'switch off' the moment they sense you're trying to sell to them. Viral marketing gives them a chance to experience you, to 'try before they buy'.

This builds trust, which is a vital ingredient in the sales process.

Viral marketing is also very cost and time effective, as you only have to send out the virus once and watch it spread by itself or by happy 'carriers'.
It is a powerful form of word of mouth marketing.

This year, develop a viral product to start spreading. You can't afford not to, actually. Find something of good value you can give away to prospects. Then they will be happy to spread the word for you.

What more could you ask?

Here's to a successful and prosperous year,
and best of luck in your marketing!!

Dr Kem Thompson is a Personal and Business Coach. She also offers Business Writing Services to Consultants and other Business owners. For information on starting your own ezine today, send a blank email to ezinebiz@daysofsuccess.com.
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