

VIROLOGY

WORKBOOK



CHAPTER 2

GOING VIRAL



GOING VIRAL

I got a call one night, as I was prepping to teach a night class. It was a woman, who was a senior account manager at a boutique advertising agency. She'd promised a new client, who had a new underwear brand, that she could make something for them that would go viral. The problem was, it wasn't going viral, and her client now wanted answers. Sounded like they were getting ready to sue. She wanted my advice on how to fix it and make it go viral...

I knew that what she was asking me was impossible. If something isn't already getting a lot of attention, then it's unlikely it ever will. Making marketing content popular begins on day one, before a line of text is written, before any photos are taken before any footage is shot. You can't MAKE something go viral after the fact. It doesn't work that way.

Viral marketing begins at the beginning. At the planning stage.

GOING VIRAL

THE POWER OF SHARE

Let me give you an example of failed marketing. The advertising executive who called me in a panic because her video ad for a new underwear brand wasn't going viral.

The movie featured an apartment with a woman dressed in lingerie flicking through a magazine. She stopped on a page that featured a man wearing underwear—like a centrefold. She used some technology where the movie included the face of the viewer—my face had been superimposed onto the male body.

It was immediately obvious to me why the movie wasn't getting the attention she was expecting. It wasn't sharable. In fact, it created a disincentive to share—people feel awkward about sharing sexually motivated content on the internet.

The number one most critical factor that makes something go viral is how sharable it is. It **MUST** give the viewer a reason to want to share it with others. Popular things get talked about and shared. If something isn't sharable, it will never become popular.



Controversy is not viral marketing

Back in the day, before we were blessed with the power of the internet, brands used to fight for the attention of journalists, since Public Relations was seen as a magic bullet. Getting coverage in the newspapers and on news channels was the most efficient way to get noticed by the public, and avoid being drowned out by the thousands of other brands in the market all competing for the scarce attention of consumers.

One way brands used to get noticed was by creating something controversial. Calvin Klein posted almost naked pictures of models in Times Square for example. Benetton more recently photoshopped an image of the Pope French kissing a Muslim leader.

I mean, sure these examples are going to get a lot of attention, because they're shocking.

But creating controversy is very different to creating something that has the potential to go viral. These examples might get some attention in the newspapers, but they can also damage the brand by creating the wrong

associations. Controversy is difficult to pull off without challenging people's value systems. You must ask yourself whether you really want to build a brand that people think of as an attention seeker. Remember, people build strong associations about your brand at every touch point and every interaction.

You want to build a brand that people trust and respect. That will win you the game in the end.

Worse, controversial content is often not sharable. People nowadays think twice about sharing stuff that might make them wince or feel uncomfortable.

Viral content is not the same as creating something that's controversial. Creating viral content is all about creating something that has a reason to be shared.

SEX SELLS?

Brooke Shields was one of earliest models to spark controversy for Calvin Klein in the early 1980s. Calvin Klein's controversial tactics might have contributed to the brand's success, but the shareability of such content in modern times is questionable.

Action Plan

GOING VIRAL

TUTORIAL

The secret to creating something that goes viral is creating a reason to share. There are three guiding principles or laws that should be adhered to from the ideation stage through to final production and release.

1. Every decision guiding the development of an online campaign should be based on motivating consumers' reasons to share.
2. Every care in the development of an online campaign should be taken to eliminate or minimise consumers' reasons to not share.
3. The main motive to share your content must be chosen from a careful evaluation of (a) the strength of the motive to share, and; (b) the number of people who have the motive to share.

SHARING A WANT

People have a tendency and desire to tell others about their wants and wishes. It's a mainstay of conversation: "One day I want to visit..." or "I saw an amazing pair of shoes that I want..." If you give someone a picture of a particular pair of shoes that they want to own, they'll show it to people they know. The social website Pinterest is a great example of this.

The problem is that people's wants and wishes are not always universal—the person who is shown the picture of the shoes won't in turn share it to someone else if they don't also have a strong desire to own the same shoes. Therefore, the trick is to identify a want or wish that everyone wants at the same point in time. Consider for example the pain people feel stuck in a dull work routine during the middle of winter, with no holiday in sight. It's safe to say there would be significant numbers of people in this predicament. It's also safe to say that most if not all of the people in this predicament have a strong desire to escape. Therefore, something like an image of an idyllic ocean villa in tropical Bora Bora would likely appeal to these people in the sense of wanting to escape to paradise quite urgently. People would feel an urge to share

the picture, particularly if they know others in their network are in the same predicament. There have been several idyllic location-based photos that have gone viral in this way.

Other options could include: products that solve a well-defined problem that's suffered by many, situations that almost everyone would rather avoid, or unusual situations that most people would like to experience.

TASK 1

Think about your target customer. What is a common trait amongst your target customers? Think about something they all want in the world more than anything, and craft a meme addressing the need. Tip: Appealing to your customers' core values is a good place to start.

MAKING PEOPLE LOOK INTERESTING

People want to be perceived as interesting, since interesting people are liked, and it earns them social currency. One way people portray themselves as interesting is by saying interesting or witty things, but not everyone has a natural ability to entertain in this way. Inspirational type content makes the person who is sharing appear interesting, since the ability to inspire is associated with strength of character and diversity of knowledge. A pre-packaged image with an inspiring quote is one example, though any content that provokes thoughtful reflection can make the sharer look interesting.

TASK 2

Think about your target customer. What is a common trait amongst your target customer? Craft a meme that they would relate to, and that would make them look interesting. Tip: Appealing to your customers' core values is a good place to start.

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