

Industrial Myth & Magic

How to start a Viral Marketing campaign

© 2007 By Steve Glines
Creative Director, Industrial Myth and Magic

Viral marketing is the latest magic marketing bullet that promises to transform a sow's ear into a silk purse, a dud into a winner. It's the dream of every marketer to create a marketing environment that is self-perpetuating and inexpensive, a viral marketing campaign. There are companies that will go out and hire hordes of teenage girls to shill some new product in the hope that it will take off through simple word of mouth. "Oh Buffy, look at my new toy, squeal, squeal." Campaigns like this rarely work for teenage centric products and not at all for industrial or commercial goods.

Viral marketing does work! Here's how to do it:

1. A good story: You need a compelling story. Without a good story there is nothing to repeat.
2. A web site: You need an attractive, easy to load and navigate web site that's been optimized for search engines. People use the web the way we once used the yellow pages. If it doesn't show up on the web it might as well not exist. Right now Google is the only search engine that counts.
3. Drive them to your web site: You need to drive people to your web site; you need to give them a reason to go there.
 - a. Articles: Magazines and newspapers (both on and offline) pay writers very little so the quality of independent articles (even in major newspapers) is very low. The majority of quality articles (specially in trade journals) are "planted" by writers hired to make a point. Make sure you're one of them and make sure that your web site's URL is mentioned so that that Google's web crawling robots find the reference.
 - b. Press releases: Targeted articles are expensive and time consuming. An easier way (and more effective from a web crawler's perspective) is the press release. A press release serves the same purpose as a ghost written story and can be broadcast to many outlets. Remember what we said about newspapers and magazines, they exist to sell advertising not pay writers yet it's the writing that attracts the readers that advertisers crave. When the media need content to carry advertising (no one is going to willingly go to a page with nothing but ads on it) they turn to the pool of press releases. If

yours is written well there is a good chance it will be reproduced as written.

4. Advertise: Finally, to reinforce the message and the story it does pay to advertise. Advertising is most effective when it's used as a way of reinforcing an existing message, when the reader (or viewer) is expected to already know the story.

Once you have a web site the most effective thing to do is send out lots of press releases. The chances are that multiple "news services" will pick up your press release and that Google will scan your press release multiple times within a day or two. Each time it scans a press release it will register your web site. A good portion of Google's page rank system is based on how many times your site is referenced by other unrelated sites. A well-written press release might well show up in hundreds of sources, that's hundreds of Google references to your web site.

Anatomy of a Press Release

Is it news? If you do a Google search on the phrase "anatomy of a press release" you'll be told over and over "make sure it's really newsworthy." Good, that discourages your competition from sending out press releases. Pay no attention to that. You'd be surprised what can be made newsworthy. The annual arrival of Spring is not news but the emergence of the first crocus of the season is and could be used to your advantage. Indeed the emergence of the first crocus could be the occasion of several press releases. For example, you announce that you are going to have some event contingent upon the emergence of the first crocus. Then you announce a contest for spotting the first crocus, then you announce (with pictures) the first crocus, then you announce the results of the event contingent the emergence of the first crocus. There is no such thing as a slow news day in the mind of a good publicist.

So you obviously need "news" in a press release or there is no reason for anyone to carry your press release but the "news" portion of your press release is really irrelevant except to the harried editor who needs filler to wrap paying ads around. What's important is the viral payload.

Crafting the payload

If news is the vehicle for getting your story into the media then the payload is what you really want repeated. Since you are in control of the story, this payload should reflect the story as you wish it to be told and retold. Before writing the payload, before writing press releases clarify what your goals are. Is the goal to sell a product or service, or the company or even an executive within the company? The story, the payload should have the following elements:

1. The name, the buzzword, the hook, the logo that can be used to trigger a memory later on through advertising, word of mouth or planted stories.

2. A story that separates you from your competition. It doesn't have to be much but it does have to be there. This is what you want people to remember and the simpler the better.
3. A way to get in touch with you and (most importantly) a pointer to your web site. This is what Google will see and use to point back to your web site. This is what you want Google's web crawler to see.

The story you convey in your payload should reflect the end point of your marketing campaign. If you're a little one man (or woman) shop but plan to become Gigantic Humongous Corporation (GHC) then write your payload from the perspective of the Chairman of the Board of GHC. Using the hook of "news" you want to repeat the payload as often as you can. Repeat it over and over again and eventually it will become "fact." Everyone will know the story of Gigantic Humongous Corporation because they have seen it over and over again. That's how you create a viral marketing campaign, that's how you create an industrial myth and that's magic.

Industrial Myth & Magic is a cooperative amalgam of poets, playwrights, novelists, freelance journalists and a frustrated assortment of fine and commercial artists who make it a point of thinking outside the box. At Industrial Myth & Magic it's our mission to tell an intriguing story that will resonate with your customers and draw them to you, your company and your products. It's not good enough to build a better mousetrap you need a more compelling story. You need a story that will be told and retold. It's not just advertising, it's not just marketing, it's not just corporate design ... it's everything. Its an industrial myth and that's magic.

www.industrialmyth.com