Demystifying Viral Marketing

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Available at http://wilsoninternet.com/ebooks/
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Viral Marketing has become a buzz word that's used, misused, abused, and co-opted to cover whatever marketers are trying to push. In this series of articles we'll define viral marketing, examine the basic theory, display a variety of applications of the principles, and give you some direction on how you can use viral marketing principles in your marketing strategies.

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1. The Six Simple Principles of Viral Marketing

I admit it. The term "viral marketing" is offensive. Call yourself a Viral Marketer and people will take two steps back. I would. "Do they have a vaccine for that yet?" you wonder. A sinister thing, the simple virus is fraught with doom, not quite dead yet not fully alive, it exists in that nether genre somewhere between disaster movies and horror flicks.

But you have to admire the virus. He has a way of living in secrecy until he is so numerous that he wins by sheer weight of numbers. He piggybacks on other hosts and uses their resources to increase his tribe. And in the right environment, he grows exponentially. A virus doesn't even have to mate -- he just replicates, again and again with geometrically increasing power, doubling with each iteration:

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In a few short generations, a virus population can explode.

Viral Marketing Defined

What does a virus have to do with marketing? 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. Like viruses, such strategies take advantage of rapid multiplication to explode the message to thousands, to millions.

Off the Internet, viral marketing has been referred to as "word-of-mouth," "creating a buzz," "leveraging the media," "network marketing." But on the Internet, for better or worse, it's called "viral marketing." While others smarter than I have attempted to rename it, to somehow domesticate and tame it, I won't try. The term "viral marketing" has stuck.

The Classic Hotmail.com Example

The classic example of viral marketing is Hotmail.com, one of the first free Web-based e-mail services. The strategy is simple:

- Give away free e-mail addresses and services,

- Attach a simple tag at the bottom of every free message sent out: "Get your private, free email at http://www.hotmail.com" and,

- Then stand back while people e-mail to their own network of friends and associates,

- Who see the message,

- Sign up for their own free e-mail service, and then

- Propel the message still wider to their own ever-increasing circles of friends and associates.

Like tiny waves spreading ever farther from a single pebble dropped into a pond, a carefully designed viral marketing strategy ripples outward extremely rapidly.

Elements of a Viral Marketing Strategy

Accept this fact. Some viral marketing strategies work better than others, and few work as well as the simple Hotmail.com strategy. But below are the six basic elements you hope to include in your strategy. A viral marketing strategy need not contain ALL these elements, but the more elements it embraces, the more powerful the results are likely to be. An effective viral marketing strategy:

- Gives away products or services

- Provides for effortless transfer to others

- Scales easily from small to very large

- Exploits common motivations and behaviors

- Utilizes existing communication networks

- Takes advantage of others' resources

Let's examine each of these elements briefly.

1. Gives away valuable products or services

"Free" is the most powerful word in a marketer's vocabulary. Most viral marketing programs give away valuable products or services to attract attention. Free e-mail services, free information, free "cool" buttons, free software programs that perform powerful functions but not as much as you get in the "pro" version. Wilson's Second Law of Web Marketing is "The Law of Giving and Selling" (http://www.wilsonweb.com/wmta/basic-principles.htm). "Cheap" or "inexpensive" may generate a wave of interest, but "free" will usually do it much faster. Viral marketers practice delayed gratification. They may not profit today, or tomorrow, but if they can generate a groundswell of interest from something free, they know they will profit "soon and for the rest of their lives" (with apologies to "Casablanca"). Patience, my friends. Free attracts eyeballs. Eyeballs then see other desirable things that you are selling, and, presto! you earn money. Eyeballs bring valuable e-mail addresses, advertising revenue, and e-commerce sales opportunities. Give away something, sell something.

2. Provides for effortless transfer to others

Public health nurses offer sage advice at flu season: stay away from people who cough, wash your hands often, and don't touch your eyes, nose, or mouth. Viruses only spread when they're easy to transmit. The medium that carries your marketing message must be easy to transfer and replicate: e-mail, website, graphic, software download. Viral marketing works famously on the Internet because instant communication has become so easy and inexpensive. Digital format make copying simple. From a marketing standpoint, you must simplify your marketing message so it can be transmitted easily and without degradation. Short is better. The classic is: "Get your private, free email at http://www.hotmail.com." The message is compelling, compressed, and copied at the bottom of every free e-mail message.

3. Scales easily from small to very large

To spread like wildfire the transmission method must be rapidly scalable from small to very large. The weakness of the Hotmail model is that a free e-mail service requires its own mailservers to transmit the message. If the strategy is wildly successful, mailservers must be added very quickly or the rapid growth will bog down and die. If the virus multiplies only to kill the host before spreading, nothing is accomplished. So long as you have planned ahead of time how you can add mailservers rapidly you're okay. You must build in scalability to your viral model.

4. Exploits common motivations and behaviors

Clever viral marketing plans take advantage of common human motivations. What proliferated "Netscape Now" buttons in the early days of the Web? The desire to be cool. Greed drives people. So does the hunger to be popular, loved, and understood. The resulting urge to communicate produces millions of websites and billions of e-mail messages. Design a marketing strategy that builds on common motivations and behaviors for its transmission, and you have a winner.

5. Utilizes existing communication networks

Most people are social. Nerdy, basement-dwelling computer science grad students are the exception. Social scientists tell us that each person has a network of 8 to 12 people in their close network of friends, family, and associates. A person's broader network may consist of scores, hundreds, or thousands of people, depending upon her position in society. A waitress, for example, may communicate regularly with hundreds of customers in a given week. Network marketers have long understood the power of these human networks, both the strong, close networks as well as the weaker networked relationships. People on the Internet develop networks of relationships, too. They collect e-mail addresses and favorite website URLs. Affiliate programs exploit such networks, as do permission e-mail lists. Learn to place your message into existing communications between people, and you rapidly multiply its dispersion.

6. Takes advantage of others' resources

The most creative viral marketing plans use others' resources to get the word out. Affiliate programs, for example, place text or graphic links on others' websites. Authors who give away free articles seek to position their articles on others' webpages. A news release can be picked up by hundreds of periodicals and form the basis of articles seen by hundreds of thousands of readers. Now someone else's

newsprint or webpage is relaying your marketing message. Someone else's resources are depleted rather than your own.

An Elementary Exercise

Let's put this into practice. I am seeking to promote my newest FREE e-mail marketing newsletter, ***Doctor Ebiz*** (http://doctorebiz.com), which discusses Web marketing and e-commerce trends and strategies. I'm using two viral marketing strategies and I'd appreciate your help in testing them, if you're up to an interesting challenge. I'll report results shortly to give you feedback on the effectiveness of these techniques.

First, I've placed **a Recommend-It button** on every page of the DoctorEbiz.com site to encourage visitors to tell a friend about the site. When you go to http://doctorebiz.com please try the Recommend-It button, and then report at http://www.wilsonweb.com/wmt5/ri-report.htm on how effective you think this strategy is. I'll share some of the results and your comments in a subsequent article: "Review: Recommend-It" (http://wilsonweb.com/reviews/recommend-it.htm).

Second, I grant permission for every reader to reproduce on your website the article you are now reading -- "The Six Simple Principles of Viral Marketing" (see http://www.wilsonweb.com/wmt5/viral-principles-clean.htm for an HTML version you can copy). But copy this article ONLY, without any alteration whatsoever. Include the copyright statement, too, please. If you have a marketing or small business website, it'll provide great content and help your visitors learn important strategies. When you've placed the article on your website, please tell me at http://wilsonweb.com/wmt5/viral-reprint.htm I'll tally the results and report them shortly, so to be included in the count, please do this quickly. (NOTE: I am giving permission to host on your website this article AND NO OTHERS. Reprinting or hosting my articles without express written permission is illegal, immoral, and a violation of my copyright.)

Thank you for helping me carry out and then track this marketing exercise.

To one degree or another, all successful viral marketing strategies use most of the six principles outlined above. In the next article in this series, "Viral Marketing Techniques the Typical Business Website Can Deploy Now" (http://www.wilsonweb.com/wmt5/viral-deploy.htm), we'll move from theory to practice. But first learn these six foundational principles of viral marketing. Master them and wealth will flow your direction.

2. Comparing Viral Marketing Strategies to the Six Principles

by Dr. Ralph F. Wilson, E-Commerce Consultant
Web Marketing Today, Issue 71, February 8, 2000

In a previous article I outlined the Six Simple Principles of Viral Marketing (http://wilsonweb.com/wmt5/viral-principles.htm). If you understand these, you'll be able to develop and adapt viral marketing strategies for your own company.

1. Gives away products or services

2. Provides for effortless transfer to others

3. Scales easily from small to very large

4. Exploits common motivations and behaviors

5. Utilizes existing communication networks

6. Takes advantage of others' resources

To help you understand these viral marketing principles better, I've set up a comparison table that helps you see quickly how some classic viral marketing approaches utilize these six principles. Remember, to be successful, a strategy doesn't need to use all six principles, but the more principles involved, the more powerful the strategy is likely to be. By necessity I am giving the briefest sketch of a particular example company strategy, but you can explore these strategies in greater detail, both at the company URL and the Viral Marketing section of our Web Marketing Info Center (http://wilsonweb.com/webmarket/viral.htm)

Example	1. Free	2. Transfer	3. Scales	4. Moti-vations	5. Network	6. Resource
Amazon.com (http://www.amazon.com). Affiliate program with 300,000 links on member websites.	Yes	Copy HTML code	Requires robust database	Revenue	Affiliates' site visitors and ezines	Affiliate's website and e-mail
Geocities (http://www.geocities.com) allows members to construct free websites which they invite their friends to see. On each visit an interstitial ad pops up to invite visitor to Geocities.	Yes	Builds website with wizard	Requires larger servers and more disk space	Pride in creativity, family bonds	E-mail personal friends and family	Member's e-mail
eGroups (http://www.egroups.com) allows members to set up discussion and work groups on line, and then invite their friends to be a part, who can then begin a group of their own. Invitations use eGroups resources.	Yes	Wizard sets up a group	Requires larger servers	Work productivity, family connectivity	Family, work, and academic associates	
ICQ (http://www.icq.com) instant messaging system allows members to set up accounts, who then invite friends to sign up for the service themselves.	Yes	Easy set-up	Requires larger servers	Love, keep-in-touch, chat	Family, work associates	Invite friends using own e-mail
Blue Mountain Arts (http://www.bluemountain.com) provides greeting cards which can be e-mailed to friends, who then are invited to send their own; cards. Uses Blue Mountain's mail server to send e-mail	Yes	Easy wizard, wide selection	Requires larger servers	Love, friendship, sympathy, loyalty	Personal friends and family	

Example	1. Free	2. Transfer	3. Scales	4. Moti-vations	5. Network	6. Resource
The Success Doctor (http://www.successdoctor.com), Michel Fortin, allows any site to use his free articles as content, provided they include links to his site.	Yes	Easy download, requires HTML skills	Easily scalable	Growth, desire for content	Visitors to hosts websites	Uses hosts websites
GoLinQ.com (http://www.GoLinQ.com), provides free e-commerce services to retailers, distributes through chambers of commerce partners.	Yes	Wizard set-up	Requires larger servers	Desire to serve members	Local business members	Uses Chambers' traditional communication channels

3. Viral Marketing Techniques the Typical Business Website Can Deploy Now

If you're creative, you may be able to come up with a brilliant viral marketing business plan based on my *"Six Simple Principles of Viral Marketing."* http://www.wilsonweb.com/wmt5/viral-principles.htm In the meantime, here are some viral marketing techniques you can deploy immediately that will do some good:

Encourage Links to Your Site

You can do a number of things to encourage links to your site. Register with search engines, of course, and seek reciprocal links. Here are some approaches designed to set up an exponential response to your efforts.

Write articles and encourage other to post them free as content for their site. If you're an expert in a particular area, write an article about an aspect of it. Then offer it to complementary sites to post on their site as free content, so long as the article contains links to your site. Your article could go far and wide, especially if it is carried on the wings of e-mail to others who will distribute the same article to their network of contacts.

Set up an affiliate program to encourage links to your products. Affiliate programs are a form of network marketing that provides financial incentive for other sites to link to yours. Make sure you pay enough to make this attractive to already-saturated siteowners.

Send out news releases concerning a free service or product available on your site. The key here is to have a truly newsworthy event, contest, free service, or digital download. If your news release is carried by just 5% of the media you send

it to, you could have your URL in front of tens of thousands of readers quite inexpensively.

Encourage Word-of-Mouth Recommendations

Word-of-mouth (on the Web it's "word-of-mouse") is considered the very best advertising, because it is unsolicited. Here are some ways to encourage friends to share with friends, and use their network to promote your site.

Install a Recommend-It.com referral system. Recommend-It won't save a dismal site, but it will help your visitors promote your site to their network of friends. Read our review at http://www.wilsonweb.com/reviews/recommend-it.htm

Make it easy to e-mail or fax your webpage to a friend. Encourage readers to e-mail your webpage to a friend. (If you know of some good CGI or JavaScript programs to do this, please e-mail me at mailto:rfwilson@wilsonweb.com) This is similar to recommend your site, but allows your visitor to send specific content as well. This is easier to accomplish without a database-driven site.

Encourage people to forward your newsletter to friends. Always encourage readers to forward your e-mail newsletter to their friends. Do this at the end of a newsletter, and you may jog some readers to do it immediately. It's easy to do.

Offer Desirable Products or Services that Spread Your Message

Finally, you can provide free services or products on your site that help spread your message to an increasing number of people who hear about it. Several companies offer free e-mail addresses using your domain name. But it's too late to repeat Hotmail's phenomenal success, and the free services will likely tack their own ads onto the free e-mail messages. Here are some more likely possibilities. See sources on our Viral Marketing Resources page http://www.wilsonweb.com/webmarket/viral.htm

Enable visitors to e-mail post cards or greeting cards from your website. Such scripts are not very expensive. Though you can't compete with the Web's top card sites, if you have a unique spin on your product or service, you may carve out some real interest and traffic.

Offer a digital game or utility for free download that carries your marketing message. Games carrying your ad or screen savers are just a couple of the possibilities. Others are games or graphic demos that people can e-mail to their friends.

Most important of all, think of unique ways you can build viral marketing techniques into your future marketing programs. Programs that carry a strong viral marketing component get you much more traffic for your investment than straight advertising.
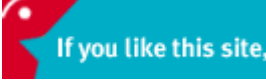
4. Review: Recommend-It.com

Recommend-It.com
Digital Demographics, Inc.
http://www.recommend-it.com

Recommend-It.com provides a service to siteowners that encourages visitors to recommend a site they like to their friends, thus facilitating the vital word-of-mouth advertising principle that all businesses covet. Their system provides:

1. **Several attractive and compelling buttons** you can select from to get people to recommend your page to their friends. All you have to do is copy and paste custom HTML code onto your webpage, and the button appears.

2. **A pop-up form.** Recommend-It's system includes four different forms, displayed sequentially, careful not to ask too much at one time so as to collect the maximum amount of information the recommender is willing to supply. If you are the recommender, this is what you see:

    o **Form 1**, which asks your name and e-mail address, and the e-mail addresses of up to 10 friends, and asks you if you want to enter a free contest for $10,000 and a Sony DVD player. When you submit the form, you get...

    o **Form 2**, which tells you the e-mail has been sent, and asks you if you'd like to sign up for a free e-mail ezine or premium offer from a list of two dozen or so. When you submit the form you get...

    o **Form 3**, which asks your gender, country, and choice of HTML or ASCII e-mail. When you submit this form you get....

- o **Form 4**, which is a reminder that you must confirm your e-mail subscription to the ezines you signed up for.

Sample of Form 1. This is an example only.

3. **Double incentives for the recommender** to submit the form that pops up: (1) desire to share his discovery with a friend, and (2) a contest offering valuable prizes.

4. **Double incentives for siteowners** to include the Recommend-It button on their site: (1) increased traffic, and (2) revenues from recommenders who sign-up for e-mail newsletters.

5. **Trust to encourage giving personal information**, engendered by a clear privacy policy and membership with TRUST-e.

6. **Revenue model** for Recommend-It from selling advertising in e-mail newsletters they publish, opt-in mailing lists, and bonuses for signing up recommenders for premium third-party programs.

How well does the system work? I think a lot depends upon your site. Do you have good content that impresses people? If so, a Recommend-It button makes it easy for visitors to tell their friends.

Eugene Borukhovich of Multi Dimensional Shopping (http://mds-mall.com) says, "We've had the Recommend-It button on our site for several months now and the effect has been very noticeable. We also found that the placement of the button made a big difference in the amount of recommendations we get. Recommend-It makes it very simple, with just one form, to recommend the site to our potential customers. We originally added our own CGI script to do all this, but it was seldom used by our site's visitors. We are not sure why more people choose to use their button, but I think the prize offer might have something to do with it."

On the downside, some find Recommend-It's ezine approach distracting and annoying. Jeff Zweig of AeroScan, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, says, "We've used Recommend-It on several sites, and although it's a really useful service and the usage reporting is great, we've gotten some comments back from site visitors that they feel the recommendation emails they received were a bit 'in your face' in terms of the third party advertising messages Recommend-It includes."

Allowing Recommend-It.com to try for opt-in e-mail addresses is the toll siteowners pay. Siteowners don't lose traffic, since the pop-up box goes away when submission is complete, and the visitor is still on your site. But if your customers are offended by the e-mail they receive, it could affect your reputation. Recommend-It.com claims 50,000 website members and 1.7 million newsletter subscriptions, so it is widely used. The company's e-mail lists are managed by NetCreations, Inc., a leader in opt-in e-mail lists.

As an exercise I placed Recommend-It buttons on my **new DoctorEbiz.com site**. http://doctorebiz.com In 8 days there were 3,198 unique visitors (according to HitBox statistics), 2,184 subscribed via the form (according to my logfile records), 251 recommended the site to others using the Recommend-It.com button, and 15 signed up for one of their ezines (according to Recommend-It statistics, which earned me $4.50 so far at 30 cents per sign-up). This tells me that less than 6% of the recommenders got distracted with the ezines. The 11.5% recommendation rate of subscribers, however, is probably abnormally high considering I asked my *Web Marketing Today* subscribers to test the button, and the new site had practically no content to recommend. (That'll change soon!)

Here's a conservative prediction of what putting the Recommend-It button on a site might do.

- Assuming a 5% click-through-rate and referral rate using a Recommend-It button, and

- Assuming that 50% of the recommendation recipients click-through to see the site,

- Then a site could experience a traffic increase of 2.5% per month from this method.

Placing buttons at the bottom of articles would probably be especially effective, because it gives the visitor something to do after finishing her reading.

A similar but much smaller service is Let 'Em Know! http://www.letemknow.com It doesn't use a button but a small form on the siteowner's webpage. Can you develop your own tell-a-friend referral form? A free CGI program at BigNoseBird.com is available. http://bignosebird.com/cgi-bin/birdcast.cgi Others are available free from various CGI/Perl sites.

Can you get as good a referral rate with your own home-brew form as you can with Recommend-It.com's? I don't think so. In July 1999 I set up a "Tell a Friend" link on every page of my website. But by February 2000, only about 125 people had used the service. I've concluded that since Recommend-It.com's very business model depends upon getting the highest possible referral response, and since they've been refining their collection method for several years, you'll get YOUR highest referral rate using their button.

Notice that the first screen (Form 1) that collects referral information is the only one important to YOUR referral rate, and there is no extraneous clutter of other ezines until AFTER that form has been submitted. Even though you may not prefer the solicitation for ezine lists, it won't affect your referral rate. I've decided to experiment with using Recommend-It.com on my larger WilsonWeb.com site -- I think it'll help in word-of-mouth advertising that will build my site traffic. If you have a strong content site, your traffic will probably see some growth from Recommend-It.com, too.
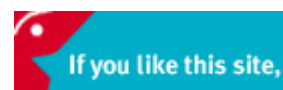
5. E-Mail to the Editor on Viral Marketing

Web Marketing Today, Issue 71, February 8, 2000

"How is Viral Marketing different from 'word-of-mouth'? Word-of-mouth has been helped along for years by all the clever tricks described in your article... How many times have you had a salesman say, 'I'll let you have this for 10% over cost...just tell your friends.' So, am I dense, or just not foolish enough to buy into a new marketing theory that is just a rehash of the second oldest marketing ploy?" -- Bruce Golub, REBUS Interactive

Editor: There's nothing new under the sun. This IS a rehash of relationship marketing, referral networking, word-of-mouth advertising, etc. But when advertising media change, tried and true concepts can get lost in the shuffle. So-called Viral Marketing is important because it reminds us to devise ways of Internet marketing that capitalize on existing networks to zoom your message quickly before skadillions of people quickly and inexpensively, rather than just frontal assaults by dumping millions of dollars into straight advertising.

"Here's a viral marketing idea we're developing for one of our clients: An online contest where the top X people who visit the web site and send out the most e-cards (to valid email addresses, of course!) win prizes. The e-cards feature the company logo/URL, unique graphics of popular musical artists that are not available anywhere else and sound clips from the artists' latest albums. The e-card display page and notification email sent to the recipients also promote the contest to encourage the recipients to take part." -- Jeff Zweig, AeroScan Malaysia, www.aeroscanasia.com

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"I have produced an E-book 'The SuperTips Book of Internet Marketing' which I give away for free at my site. I encourage visitors to also give it away free explaining a variety of ways in which they can benefit from offering a free gift.

But I go even further. I show them examples, which they can copy or adapt, of exactly how to offer the book to their customers - what to put in their ads or sales letters, or at their web site, and even how other sites are offering it. As a result 70% of my visitors come from sites which have links to my book." -- Harvey Segal, www.supertips.com

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"We run a Virtual Marketing Department on the web for growing companies. One of our services is a directory of Marketing Vendors. When you search for a vendor, they are ranked according to how many customer 'testimonials' have been posted to their profile. When a vendor lists, he/she is told this and given the option to easily send an e-mail to prospective reviewers asking them to come to GotMarketing.com to post their review. When they come to do so, they are exposed to our services, as many are prospective customers for us. Adding value to a vendor adds value to us and hopefully to them too. Win/Win/Win. -- Lynda Partner www.GotMarketing.com Ottawa, Canada

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The most effective technique to date I would have to say are what companies such as NVision Designs are doing with their mini, cute, PC video game promotions such as Elf Bowl or Frogpult. These games are so cool that everyone just has to send one to their friends. Great marketing technique, probably the most effective! -- Spiro Georges Mandylor, www.ActFit.com Toronto, Canada.

"Ireland has a very competitive IT industry, and personnel are becoming more and more difficult to attract... Supposing John gets sent the URL for www.BoredSenseless.com and thinks 'Mary's a great designer, and she's really bored with her job. He fills in her details and e-mail address, the information is stored in a database, along with John's details. If Mary is hired, John gets money. Even if Mary isn't interested in being recruited herself, she can still suggest someone and the website address gets passed around... People who work in the industry and 'get' the net, respond really well to it: It's also been an incredibly successful device for raising Labyrinth's profile as an Irish web development company. The website is even being circulated by people who don't want to enter anyone but just want to show their friends something diverting and funny." -- Crona Barrett, Labyrinth, Dublin www.labyrinth.ie

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"A viral marketing technique I have used is to place a 'Send this Page to a Friend' script at the bottom of each of the pages I designed to promote American Military University's degree/major programs. This sends an e-mail from the surfer with a

pre-scripted subject line." -- Scott A. Cason, American Military University, www.amunet.edu/mh.asp

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"I have my weekly column and cartoon hosted on several sites. I also offer the cartoon free to anyone who wishes to add it to his or her site. The code is easy to copy and the cartoon updates automatically: http://www.wahm.com/comic_code.html In my last log, I had hits from links on 5200 sites." -- Cheryl Demas, www.WAHM.com, the online magazine for work at home moms.

"I did not find the Recommend-It service to be particularly effective when I trialed it about 18 months ago, but articles on websites and e-mail lists IS very effective." -- Ian Traynor, Traynor Kitching & Associates, York, England www.tka.co.uk

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"I tell people they can reproduce material within their organisation, providing they retain my details. This applies to handouts at external seminars for practitioners and to people printing out my webpages. I also have a general statement on my site saying that people can reproduce pages for non-profit purposes. My marketing aim is to gain a widespread reputation for being knowledgeable about (in particular) business information on the Internet. From that point of view people recommending my site on webpages, articles, word-of-mouth etc is achieving my marketing objective." -- Sheila Webber, University of Strathclyde, Scotland www.strath.ac.uk

6. Viral Marketing Plan Case Study: DoctorEbiz.com

Since my study of viral marketing techniques coincided with the launch of my third business newsletter, Doctor Ebiz (http://www.doctorebiz.com), I thought I would incorporate as many viral marketing techniques as possible in its promotion. I'm sharing this as a way of stimulating various viral visions of how to promote your own products and services.

Press Releases. I think for the money, press releases can be a rather effective way of exponentially multiplying one's marketing message by means of others' communication networks and resources. One release, sent to 100 newspapers, could be viewed by hundreds of thousands of readers. I ordered XpressPress.com's $225 "Distribution Circuits" offer (http://www.interferenza.net/xpresspress/al/affiliates.cgi?112) that sent my release to about 825 editors and writers who voluntarily subscribe to their news release distribution service -- and therefore aren't as likely to delete it unread. It's hard to evaluate my results so far. My first release announcing the "debut" of a new service probably wasn't too compelling, and it's hard to see a specific traffic "bump" as a result. Also, articles may not all be coming out immediately; it may work like a time-release capsule. But I'm not going to give up that easily. I have a couple more "events" planned that I'll feature in news releases. You'll see some free news release submission services in our Web Marketing Info Center. http://www.wilsonweb.com/webmarket/pr.htm

Free Articles Containing Links. I offered (and extend the offer) for my readers to host my "Six Simple Principles of Viral Marketing" article (http://www.wilsonweb.com/wmt5/viral-principles-clean.htm) on their own site -- an offer I just *do not make* for my other articles. Several readers took me up on it, but I was surprised by how few. Then I realized that I had offered you an HTML page with a very complex layout rather than a "clean" HTML page that would be

easy to put on your own website. So I've corrected that. And in order to increase the value the article hosted on other sites, I have placed the URLs of the hosted copies on a page on my site, and then am continually submitting it to the search engines. http://www.wilsonweb.com/wmt5/viral-linking.htm That not only promotes my partners' sites, but increases both the findability of the article with links to Doctor Ebiz, and the "popularity" of http://www.doctorebiz.com as perceived by search engines. ("Popularity" in number of links pointing to a site boosts ranking in some search engines.) If you haven't hosted my article yet, why don't you? I'll help promote your site, and you'll get great content with your own look and feel. http://www.wilsonweb.com/wmt5/viral-principles-clean.htm Just make sure you tell me the URL where I can find it on your site so I can boost your site, too. http://www.wilsonweb.com/wmt5/viral-reprint.htm

Free For All (FFA) Sites. This technique doesn't exactly qualify as a viral technique, though it purportedly places a link to my site on hundreds of pages quickly. While these pages probably won't bring too many clicks to visit my site -- FFA pages are too cluttered with "junk" URLs -- the number of URLs pointing to my site will increase perceived search engine "popularity," and it's painless (if you follow my advice). Here's how to do it, but be SURE you use a "free" e-mail address, not the one you use for your regular e-mail, because you'll get a great deal of SPAM as a result of your submission. You can submit to sites using these interfaces: LinkStation Free Submission Service http://www.global.gr/mtools/linkstation/ and JimTools.com http://www.jimtools.com/?wmt72 Jim Wilson, the well-known editor of JimWorld Gazette (http://www.jimworld.com/gazette1.html?wmt72), believes that FFA sites can be an important source of traffic. I tried FFA sites, but concluded that it's worthless.

"Plugs" in Newsletters of My Network of Friends. Over the past 4-1/2 years I've taught literally thousands of Web marketers how to use newsletters to promote their business. I hoping that as a favor to me, that hundreds of you will include a plug for Doctor Ebiz in your newsletter. To help facilitate that I've put some newsletter copy on my site ready to copy and paste. http://www.doctorebiz.com/press/blurbs.htm This is a very powerful viral marketing technique, but it is based on the strength of your personal network, and the loyalty of your friends. Blatant appeal: If I've taught you something in the last several years, please plug Doctor Ebiz in your newsletter. http://www.doctorebiz.com/press/blurbs.htm I'll REALLY appreciate it. A variation of this is to barter for ad space with newsletters of similar size to your own.

Recommend-It.com I'm actively using Recommend-It.com buttons on each page of my new Doctor Ebiz site, and they seem to be working. So far in the last month a total of 447 people have recommended my site out of a current 9,000 subscribers, about 5%. Since word-of-mouse is the most powerful kind of referral, I value these referrals very highly. Read my recent [review of Recommend-It.com](http://www.wilsonweb.com/reviews/recommend-it.htm) http://www.wilsonweb.com/reviews/recommend-it.htm

Requests to Forward. In every newsletter I send out, I ALWAYS encourage people to forward a copy to a friend or business associate. I have no way to track the success of this, but I'm sure the reminder helps some copies to be forwarded and results in wider distribution of my marketing message.

Free Syndication of Up-to-Date Content. You can [syndicate the up-to-date Doctor Ebiz column on your own website](http://www.doctorebiz.com/syndicate/). http://www.doctorebiz.com/syndicate/ It's still another way to spread the word. This is similar to free articles with links, but different.

I realize that this article is about my own marketing project, but I hope it has given you ideas of how you can add to or extend your marketing efforts through viral techniques. I'll report later on which of these techniques worked the best for me. Notice that I'm not "putting all my eggs in one basket," but launching a variety of at least seven viral techniques simultaneously. In case one or two fail, others will hopefully pick up the slack.

Hey, friends. Among your other Web marketing efforts don't forget to Go Viral!