

21 Common Viral Marketing Mistakes

Having delivered around 50 viral campaigns over the last five years, we've seen (and made) a fair few marketing mistakes along the way. Commissioning a viral campaign isn't an easy process. To save you the headache, we've put together this handy guide to show you 21 mistakes commonly made when commissioning viral campaigns, and to explain how we can help you through them.

1) Being scared of viral, and not using it: if you're scared of using viral then you probably don't fully understand the medium or have heard brand horror stories of suicide bomber Polo's and cat-chomping Ka's . Read on . . .

2) Thinking viral is about tits, ass and the "ick" factor: viral marketing can be more sophisticated than just pure shock. Sure, it's easy to exceed expectation by shocking the audience, however there are more sophisticated and intelligent ways of making a campaign work.

3) Not knowing why you want a viral: don't simply do a viral because it is fashionable, or because your competitors are doing it. Ensure viral fits in well with your wider marketing strategy.

4) Not knowing what a viral can and can't do for you: viral campaigns can be used to achieve a variety of different marketing objectives. These include:

- Buzz: to launch a product, act as part of an ignition campaign or to create brand awareness
- PR: to form the central "event" around which you can sell PR stories into offline / online press.
- Data-capture: to increase your email database, or find out something about the audience by integrating a polling function.
- Direct sales: to drive traffic through to an e-commerce site and generate direct sales.
- Pure advertainment: to use the viral simply to entertain the audience, while constantly reminding them of your brand.
- Brand participation: to use the interactive nature of the viral to get people interacting with your brand.

5) Misunderstanding the viral campaign process: viral campaigns can be boiled down to 4 core activities:

- Strategy: identify objectives, how viral fits in with the wider brand activity and how to achieve goals within budget.
- Creative: development of creative ideas across different media formats (e.g. game / film / application).
- Production: turning ideas into reality. The different media take differing amounts of time to produce, and incur differing costs.
- Seeding and tracking: launching a campaign, seeding it into the relevant influencer networks and tracking its success.

Most campaigns take between 4 - 8 weeks to launch from a standing start. Game-based virals are generally lower cost than film-based virals.

6) Choosing to use viral at the last minute: you will only get the most out of a viral if it's planned early on as part of the wider campaign.

7) Not using specialist viral web hosting: sure, you can get some good PR out of 'the project was so successful the server crashed', but wouldn't you rather people saw the creative that your budget has been spent on? Viral projects need robust web hosting to cope with traffic.

8) Thinking viral is just about the internet: when planning your campaign you should think about other media viral can reach out into: e.g. mobile (through bluetooth) and offline press / TV. The best viral concepts should be capable of creating a cross-media buzz.

- 9) Thinking viral is global and not local: we're not talking "glocal" here, what we are talking about is the ability of viral to work on both a global and local basis. Localised virality is much more difficult to achieve (i.e. creating a Welsh or Leeds-based campaign), however it is possible with the right strategy and creative.
- 10) Average creative: virals stand or fall according to their creative. When assessing a creative, you need to think "why would someone pass that on to friends?" Simply creating a "splat" or "platform" game involving your brand mascot will not go viral. Remember a viral marketing campaign needs to be a talking point and to lead to a "water cooler moment".
- 11) Using a TV ad: unless your TV ad is outstanding (e.g. the Budweiser "Whassup" advert or the Apple "1984" campaign), a re-purposed TV ad isn't going to go viral. Importantly, the content of a viral needs to be special in some way. Another way you could create mileage out of your TV ad is to do a special pre-release, including out takes or special bonus features. Or, if you want to court controversy, get the ASA to ban your ad on TV and release it for "internet only" amidst a flourish of PR.
- 12) Commission a campaign by saying "I want a game" or "I want a film": the execution and creative should be determined by the campaign objectives and, realistically, by your budget.
- 13) Trying to do too much within a single campaign: make sure your objectives at the beginning of the process are realistic. There will always be a compromise to be made in the campaign between objectives like the levels of brand control and data-capture, against levels of awareness generated through strong unconstrained creative.
- 14) Not thinking long term: it's important to consider the fact that virals are not just for Christmas. Whereas traditional advertising media (e.g. TV / print) are largely limited by media space cost, once you have launched a viral campaign it can work for you in an ongoing way. Based around this premise, you could develop a whole advertainment micro-site containing your different viral executions.
- 15) Ignoring simplicity: viral marketing doesn't have to be overly complicated. Think about using simple marketing mechanics like competitions.
- 16) Referring to the word "viral" in your creative: most people don't know what a "viral" is, and using the term can actually lead to people rejecting your campaign.
- 17) Numbers - getting your ROI metrics wrong: successful viral campaigns are not just about attracting millions of users, as often you'll find that 95% of these users will be spotty Russian teenagers and not your target market. Be clear about what you're looking to achieve at the start of the campaign, and judge a campaign's success against these metrics.
- 18) Under-budgeting: commissioners need to ensure they budget for all stages of a viral campaign, from initial strategy development to the seeding and tracking of a campaign. Seeding is an area that is often overlooked, with campaigns relying on the good-will of the agency to seed the campaign and get it seen. Just as you wouldn't commission a TV ad without buying media space, you shouldn't commission a viral without considering the cost of seeding.
- 19) Understanding how seeding works: seeding is about placing your viral content in front of key influencers within your target networks. If the creative is positioned correctly, your viral will then be passed between people within these networks. The more influential networks often now charge for you to post your campaign on their site, however there are 1000's of other sites that don't charge. One important thing to consider in your seeding strategy is the Russian teenage factor mentioned in point 17, as many of the most popular seeding sites are a haven for pre-pubescent geeks and not much else.
- 20) Buying a mailing list: viral is not the same as a direct email campaign. A viral campaign is designed to work through word-of-mouth / peer-to-peer self referral mechanics. Mailing lists can be effective in as part of the seeding mix, but should always be clearly justified (i.e. in terms of specific targeting).
- 21) Not working with a specialist agency: viral marketing is an art, requiring a whole set of specialist knowledge. Yup, you could get your full-service agency to rustle you up a game or film and then expect it to go viral. However, even if they are a digital agency it is likely the budgets won't be big enough for them to merit

much interest in the viral, compared to the budgets of a TV campaign or a website build. It is also worth considering getting a viral agency to collaborate with your full-service agency.

****21 Common Mistakes**** was written by specialist viral agency (there's a surprise!)

Rubber Republic. For advice on putting together a viral campaign avoiding these 21,

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