VIRAL THINKING

A new logic for a new media landscape

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Introduction

Have you ever dreamt about creating something viral? Have you ever *tried* to create one of those spectacular viral campaigns that win you a Cannes Lion? Did you make it?

I am not going to lie. I don't think there's a sure fire way to create a viral Cannes Lion winner. Not all companies can build their business on the kind of viral successes BlendTec has experienced. But I am an optimist. I *do* believe there are tools you can use to make it more possible. I do think you can optimize for it.

What's more, in the shift that is taking place, the media landscape is fragmented, and companies have to play by the consumer's rules. With the amount of content out there, marketers have to fight for attention not only with other companies, but also with a lot of consumers creating their own content. There are more and more messages, more and more information. So, consumers suffer from information overload, it is hard to get through, and it gets even harder every day. That's why optimizing for spread becomes more and more important.

VIRAL OR NOT – IT'S A NEW WAY OF THINKING Today, whether the goal is to create something viral or not, marketers need to understand a new way of thinking, a new way to work – and that is to participate and create content that is worthy of conversations. Something that breaks through the clutter.

Even though this in a way is a "Viral Marketing Toolkit", I believe the ideas in it are important for any marketing effort, whether online or offline. Creating conversations is fundamental for brands and businesses today. And using the tools in this toolkit will hopefully create better results for your campaign and therefore a higher ROI.

So, let's get to it. Check your current idea against the following tips. Try to improve it, or maybe even come up with something new. I will update this text when I feel I have something to add. So, take a look at the download page to make sure you have the most recent version. Of course, I will also post any additions on the blog, so if you subscribe, you won't miss it.

A little background

WHAT IS VIRAL? A lot of people want to create a viral campaign. However, the fact that you or someone else is talking about creating a viral campaign doesn't mean that it really will be viral. It is something it becomes, if the content is good enough, and it is easy enough to pass it on. To be truly viral, it has to have a basic reproductive rate above 1 ($R > 1$).

So, the term "viral" is something we can really only use after seeing numbers that increase exponentially. We want to see a graph similar to the curvature of a skateboard ramp. Of course, over time the curve flattens out and drops off, as the people interested have already been exposed to it. Then the long tail effects take over. If the content is good, this effect can represent a considerable number of views over time, and also a quite large part of the total number of views.

For marketing purposes, a time factor is also relevant. Even if R is above one, it might not be as interesting for marketers if the viral loop takes a year to complete.

WHAT IS VIRAL MARKETING? Maybe a short definition would be in place? And I will borrow it straight from Wikipedia. Viral marketing is...

> *"Marketing techniques that use pre-existing social networks to produce increases in brand awareness or to achieve other marketing objectives (such as product sales) through selfreplicating viral processes, analogous to the spread of pathological and computer viruses. It can be word-of-mouth delivered or enhanced by the network effects of the Internet."* WIKIPEDIA

Wait a second, what is that R again?

> *"In epidemiology, the basic reproduction number (sometimes called basic reproductive rate or basic reproductive ratio) of an infection is the mean number of secondary cases a typical single infected case will cause in a population with no immunity to the disease in the absence of interventions to control the infection."* WIKIPEDIA

In the marketing world, R is how many people one single person (infected by the message) will pass the message on to, on average.

> *"The basic reproductive rate is affected by several factors including the duration of infectivity of affected patients, the infectiousness of the organism, and the number of susceptible people in the population that the affected patients are in contact with"* WIKIPEDIA
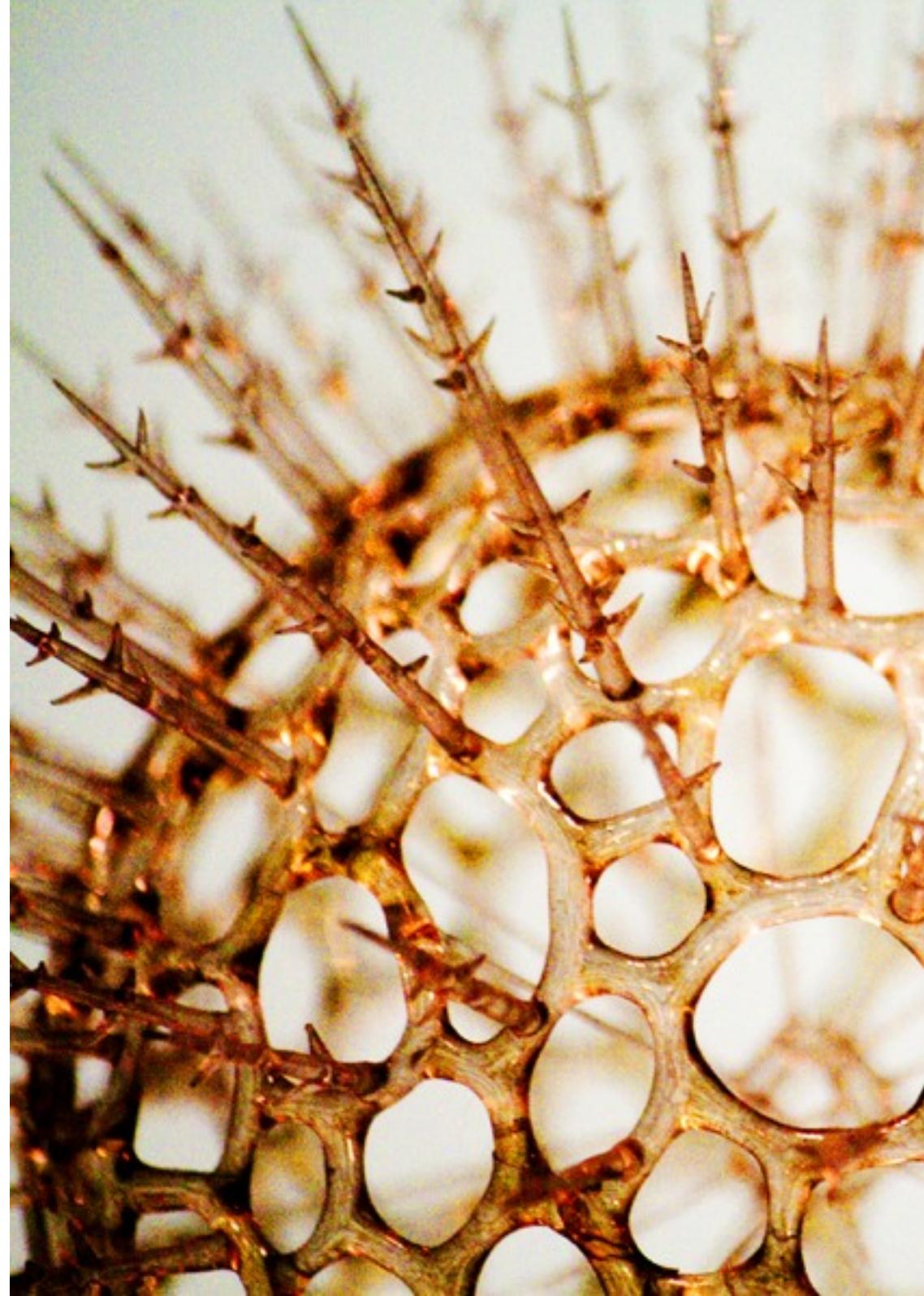
So, there are different variables to play around with to make something reach the threshold of 1. Here are my short interpretations:

I would interpret the duration of infectivity as how long someone actually remembers the content that we want to go viral and is able to pass it on. The quality of the content affects this, as well as if we have created incentives to come back to the content. In a way, the strongest content keeps us infected indefinitely. But, we need to know where to find the content again to be able to pass it on.

The infectiousness of the organism would also have very much to do with the quality of the content, the appeal the content has. So, we have learnt that quality content seems to be key in creating something that might have a chance to go viral.

The number of susceptible people in the population that the affected patients are in contact with would have something to do with the context you chose to seed in. A brownie recipe posted in a car forum might not spread quite as much as the latest paparazzi pictures of a new Ferrari. The car enthusiasts are simply not interested enough in a brownie recipe, even though they might enjoy eating a brownie once in a while. It's like trying to light a fire in a damp forest compared to a very dry one. In the dry one it is much more likely with a forest fire.

Also, some people are more prone to passing things on. I am sure you have some friends that send you stuff a little too often and some that never send you anything. Finding environments where people who tend to pass things on gather could prove vital for a campaign.

WHY DO WE SHARE? I believe that word of mouth has evolutionary origins. Put simply, the human race benefited from telling family and friends about where the best roots and berries could be found, where the year round waterhole was, or where the best hunting grounds were. In a way, something that goes viral can be seen as digital word of mouth. And thanks to the network effects of the Internet, the power of it is manifold. It can spread to in-numerous people in the blink of an eye, and all across the world. It has been freed from time and space.

Today, we don't only share vital information about where to find resources, but also information that connects us to others. In a world where we don't have time to keep up with all our "connections", the act of passing something on is a very easy way to reconnect. It is a way to show that they are present in our minds.

It also boosts our ego. People are quite generous by nature. We like to share. We like to be the one who make others laugh or discover something, or provide useful information. We like it because we know that we will be connected with the positive feeling the content brings the receiver. And we often want to be first to share it – the one who knows, the one who comes with the newest or the one who has that precious invite to an attractive service or tool.

THE "DEAL" in viral marketing is an exchange between the consumer and the business. The business starts by giving. The consumer gets a piece of remarkable content to share with friends and family. In return, the business gets something back that is becoming increasingly hard to get – a moment of undivided attention from a consumer.

THE VIRAL LOOP can be built up in more or less complicated ways. The basic structure is:

Exposure > Interaction > Evaluation > Pass along

Then the loop repeats itself for a new receiver, and hopefully it becomes viral. To achieve that, it is well worth the time to think about how that virality will be achieved. As we've seen, the basic reproductive number (or rate) needs to be above 1 for the campaign to become viral. And, if we simplify it a bit, the two variables we can calculate R from are (I have chosen x and y in this case):

x = *The ratio of receivers of the campaign who pass it on*

y = *The average number of people someone who passes it on, sends it to The first one,* x, *is between 0 and 1, representing 0 % and 100 % of receivers respectively. The second,* y, *could be between 1 up to (theoretically) infinity.*

So, x × y = R

What does this tell us? Well, x × y needs to have a product above 1 to go viral. Since x can be, at most, 1, y needs to be above 1. Some examples:

If x *is 50 %,* y *needs to be more than 2 to become viral (0,5 × 2 = 1)*

If x *is 25 %,* y *needs to be more than 4 to become viral (0,25 × 4 = 1)*

If x *is 10 %,* y *needs to be more than 10 to become viral (0,1 × 10 = 1)*

So, when trying to build in a viral loop, think about the two factors that will affect the basic reproductive number, and try to do some reasonable estimates to set expectations.

Reasons for failure

Before starting off, let's take a quick look at reasons why campaigns generally fail, not necessarily in order of importance.

FIRST, there is just too much information out there. Competition for attention is tougher than ever, and the clutter is incredible. So, only the most interesting material reaches an audience.

SECOND, incentives are not thought through. The proverbial "carrot" is missing or not attractive enough. For example, a competition where your own chances to win decrease when you invite others doesn't incentivize pass-along.

THIRD, businesses are often a bit too eager to squeeze in just a little more branding, and this can make the material uninteresting for the consumer.

FOURTH, the technical set up is not right. It is not easy enough to enjoy the material or to pass it on to others.

FIFTH, the demands on the user are too big – maybe too much information required, like name, email and phone number. This makes the user hesitant to participate and pass it on.

SIXTH, the content is too internal – it is only really funny or interesting to the agency and maybe the advertising world.

AND SEVENTH, it doesn't catch the attention quickly enough. It has to engage quickly. Sometimes within 5–10 seconds.

In all fairness, there is yet another reason campaigns might fail – when a campaign really takes off and server capacity can't handle all the traffic. Make sure the servers have enough capacity and are redundant.

Six areas to work with

I think there are six main areas to work with when trying to create something viral:

1. The target
2. The content
3. The incentives
4. The barriers
5. The seeding
6. Tracking, evaluation & improvement

I have tried to sort my tips into these six areas even though some tips are tangential to, and could belong in, more than one of them. Using more of the tips in each of these areas would hopefully produce even better results.

1 **TARGET** Who do you want to reach? It is very important to know who you want to reach with your content. If you don't know this, you don't know what content to produce, you don't know in what environments to seed it and you probably have very slim chances of creating something viral. But the content does not have to be 100 % adapted to the target.

Sometimes it can be a good idea to give it a little broader appeal. Then more people will enjoy it and these people will know who to pass it on to. In a way, content that is viral can become "intelligent". It finds it's intended audience through the ones who are not in the primary target group. Rather, these people watch the content and instinctively know who would like to watch it – the intended target – and passes it on to them.

2 **CONTENT** If I ask you to mention a viral campaign, or ten viral campaigns, you will give me examples of campaigns with great content. There is no escaping it – for a campaign to go truly viral, amazing content is key.

So, what kind of content works? What will make people want to pass something on? In my experience, you can put one word on it – "remarkable" – something worth remarking about. You need a social object that people can gather around. Something which people want to tell others, something that sparks conversations, something to discuss. The content needs to build social value, tie people closer together or maybe even tear them apart a little. It needs to create engagement and get people involved so they take action.

Even though some material that spreads have a production budget around zero dollars, execution is extremely important to create something viral. Some campaigns benefit if they look like home made. Others, built on a different idea, need a lot more work.

A lot of the viral content triggers depend on this and won't work if the idea isn't successfully carried out.

Without great content, the campaign usually won't spread. And if it doesn't spread, there will not be any value created for the business behind it. Here are some viral content triggers.

SOMETHING FUNNY

We like funny stuff. We like to be funny. And the easiest way is if we can free-ride on something that is funny. So, if we get the chance, we pass it on so that we are associated with that funniness just a little bit. Funny works, because we all love a good laugh. It is one of the best ways to connect with people. [This is pretty funny.](#)

SOMETHING SPECTACULAR

The best place to go to see something spectacular might be a circus. You can almost count on seeing something that seems impossible to do. Maybe it is this "mystery" that appeals to us, a wow-feeling. And if something "wows" us we want to share it, we want to talk about it, and we want others to experience it. [Insane street soccer](#) can count as pretty spectacular, even though it is faked.

SOMETHING SEXY

Well, sex sells. There's no denying it. And believe it or not, it is primarily men who are on the viewing end of this and women who are featured in the content. But, cases of the contrary also exist.

Maybe it is something very ingrained in the male psyche, something evolutionary, that makes men want to see naked women. To be very brief and clear, our sex drive.

I believe the sharing might actually often be smaller for something sexy than for other viral triggers. But the amount of views or interactions it

gets once posted somewhere is higher, so the actual spread is still very high. Marina's "Hot for words" could be an example of something that plays on sexiness to create interest and spread.

SOMETHING TABOO

Yes, something that is taboo often teases us to pass it on. It is the forbidden fruit that we cannot taste. But, this trigger doesn't work quite like something that is funny or spectacular. The funnier, the more viral. The more spectacular, the more viral. The more taboo, the more viral, up to a point! If it is a bit taboo, you can send it to your friends, but maybe not to your mom and dad. If it is very taboo, you only send it to your very closest friends. And if it is too taboo, you can't send it to anyone, and there is no chance it will be viral. Diesel did a video that can serve as an example of this trigger quite well.

A SECRET

Something secret is in essence "scarce information" and we all know what scarcity does to us. It tells us something has value. And if something has value, we like to pass it on. But, just as with the taboo trigger, if something is too secret, we can't pass it on to everyone we know. If it is too secret, we need to keep it secret to keep the value, so we can't pass it on. Too secret, and it will not be viral at all.

there is something we like to hear it is our own name. And if something is personal, targeted just to us, we tend to like it. With new digital tools, it is also very easy to create personalized campaigns. The kind that wows us just a bit, even though it can be very easy to integrate someone's name in a little flash movie. When we are given the chance to give someone else this experience, we like to do it. So, personal campaign material has a good chance to spread if well done. This is a brilliant example from the marketing of TV series Dexter.

A "REVENGE"

I don't mean revenge in the traditional sense. It would not go viral, just back and forth between two persons. I mean if you are maybe "fooled" by someone, realize your gullibility andthen get the chance to get back. But, you get back on someone else. It wouldn't work with the one who fooled you since they are already aware of the prank. You need to "get back" at someone else, or several others. Somehow, fooling someone else makes you get over that you got fooled yourself in the first place. It restores your self image. Sure, you got fooled, but you also fooled some others. If you're a guy, you might feel a bit fooled by this one!

SOMETHING CONTROVERSIAL

There are several themes that we see over and over again in content that goes viral. Controversy is one of them. If you can build in some controversy, an issue where there is a "pro or con" or maybe something that even breaks the general consensus, you have a good chance to spark conversations and create something that goes viral. This example is no doubt controversial to a lot of people!

A CHALLENGER

The story about David and Goliath is a classic. We always root for the underdog. And when you have sympathizers there is a good possibility they will help you in your struggle and spread the message.

A CURRENT EVENT

Current events are great to tie your content to. It can be some event taking place, a national holiday, or a topic that is on the agenda in the news. The upside is that it can give the content a necessary positive momentum. The downside is of course that it is what it is – a current event. And with that the attention will usually taper out once the event is over. Taking advantage of current news events requires quick action, while calendar events might be easier to plan for. OfficeMax has made the original http://www.elfyourself.com/ success to a yearly recurring campaign.

A CAUSE

Causes circulating on the Internet is something we have gotten used to. Put simply, people want to be part of something greater than themselves, something that matters. It might be most relevant for organizations working for a better world, but businesses can also tap into this in for example CSR efforts. Causes like "Fight Animal Cruelty" attracts a lot of people.

UNCERTAINTY

This is pretty similar to using "something controversial" in the sense that two different "camps" often appear, discussing the issue. But it feeds on uncertainty about something. Is it true or not? Is it possible? Can it be done? I think this one is affected to a certain extent by the Zeigarnik effect. Following tradition here, let's grab the definition directly from wikipedia:

> *"The Zeigarnik effect states that people remember uncompleted or interrupted tasks better than completed ones"*

We like to come to some kind of closure. We don't like unfinished thoughts, and something that is uncertain creates an unfinished thought. It is kind of a cliffhanger. Until we have solved it and come to our own conclusion, we like to talk about it. And once two different camps appear, the discussion can rage for months. The Ronaldinho clip for Nike is a prime example.

SOMETHING NEW

It is always interesting to try new stuff, and being first with something creates social status. New things are often scarce, and scarcity makes it attractive. Diamonds are beautiful, but the reason they are so expensive is that they are scarce. So, something that is new, that hasn't been seen before, is often tried and often passed on. It is a quick way to let others know that you are "in the know", the "go to-guy". Of course, something entirely new might be a bit hard to come up with. But, to be honest, getting the other triggers above right isn't easy either. The good news is that you can combine the triggers. And there are other tools in your box! When [this video] first spread, before Youtube even existed, video on the Internet was rare.

THE UNEXPECTED

The unexpected is by definition a surprise. Surprise is often a positive thing. Surprise is something we want to share. It breaks expectations and puts a smile on your face, makes our jaws drop, or frightens the living daylights out of us. The unexpected is an element in a lot of Internet memes, but most obvious maybe in the ones frightening us.

3 INCENTIVES In addition to great content, there are several incentives you can play around with to make people pass your material on.

NETWORK EFFECTS

If you can build in network effects in your campaign, built on incentives for the users or receivers, you can also create a campaign that goes viral. And, if you succeed to combine great content with network effects, you might just have one of those spectacular campaigns everybody dream about! In short, a network effect is something that makes doing or owning something more valuable the more other people or other friends are using it. A classic example is the fax machine. If there is only one fax and one user, there's nothing you can do with it. If there is another user and another fax, we can at least fax each other. If there are three, the utility doubles. The more people that have it and use it, the higher the utility. If you can create the same mechanics in your campaign, you've got a shot at viral success.

CHALLENGES & COMPETITIONS (GAME MECHANICS)

If there is something we have learnt from applications such as Farmville and location based iPhone apps such as Gowalla and Foursquare, it's that people like to compete. Feedback mechanisms such as points, badges, leader boards, and different levels can incentivize us to do things we otherwise might not do. In a way, you could say it is classical conditioning. The rewards we get for performing the action teach us to do it again. In viral marketing, game mechanics can form the rules and incentives that encourage a receiver to pass content on.

Stickiness Here I am not really referring to the stickiness of the message, how long you remember it. But rather I am talking about how sticky the campaign material is. If you can create reasons to come back for more of the campaign material, there is a greater chance that users also will want to pass it on to just one more person. The chances for viral spread go up. Reasons to stay longer or to come back could be to get more information or a campaign in several steps, or maybe to get more points.

So, cliffhangers and game mechanics can be a great help. An example of something both sticky and viral is chatroulette.com. Whether you think it's interesting or horrible, there's no denying it is sticky. You never know what awaits you if you click "Next" instead of closing down the browser or going to another site. Just one more click...

4 BARRIERS

MAKE IT EASY

First rule: Keep it simple. Don't force someone who receives the content to climb a wall to pass it on. Make it easy, in as few steps as possible. Don't make them have to leave the computer to participate in a competition. Can they receive their result without even clicking once, or with just one click? Can you eliminate the need to fill in information entirely? Can they pass it on with just one or two clicks and filling in an email address or signing in to Facebook? The more you ask from them, the less people will participate. The easier the more viral.

SHORTER IS BETTER

Short content is better than long content. This is of course because if content is too long, people will not get to the end. If they don't get to the end, they will maybe not even see the brand connection and will definitely not pass it on. But, of course, high quality content can afford to be a bit longer. The most important thing is that the one interacting doesn't get bored. So, the first 5–10 seconds have to captivate the user. A cliffhanger can do the trick. Several cliffhangers throughout the content might sustain the audience longer. For games, videos and applications, load times are essential. They shouldn't take long and shouldn't interrupt the user.

AVOID A BRAND BONANZA

Most companies are interested in brand awareness and liking. They want to be both seen and liked. But, in viral marketing, which doesn't rely on paid media like traditional advertising, there is a very fine line between being totally ignored, being noticed as a brand, or maybe even being liked. If the branding is too obvious, people will react and maybe not pass it on. So, the branding element often has to be balanced with the quality of the content. Stronger content means it can afford more obvious branding.

If the brand has a very strong connection with the content,and it is integrated with the story, it might have an evenstronger virality. The best way is to show in actions why the company should be liked instead of telling in words.

The stronger the connection between brand and content, the better people will remember what brand was behind the content, and maybe

even refer to it with the brand name, just as with "Dove Evolution". If the brand in itself is remarkable, the chances of a viral success multiply. This is because of the brand fans that provide a very loyal base where you can start the spread.

OPTIMIZE FOR SPREAD

Formats – Use the smallest common denominator. If people need a plugin or special software to interact with your content, don't expect it to go viral. Use formats that most people have, and if possible, you can even provide several formats. When it comes to video, embeddable flash is probably the best option for now, but allowing download of a .wmv file can be an added benefit. Posting a video online in .mov is not the best format, but helps when provided in addition to flash. Even though most people in the advertising business can see .mov, a lot of others can't.

For the future, html5 might make things even easier, but for now, stick primarily to flash. Anything that isn't immediately accessible to the normal user should be avoided. And not offering users the possibility to easily snatch the embed-code to post the content on their own site or blog is a big mistake.

The only exception is if the content you have to offer is so spectacular that it doesn't matter if people need to download and install new software – they will happily do it anyway. Then, and only then, is it ok.

Tools & Services – What tools does your target audience use? Do they use Twitter? Facebook? Youtube? StumbleUpon? Do they read blogs? Internet is developing fast, and popular tools come and go. But, whatever they use, make sure you offer them an easy way to pass the content on in those
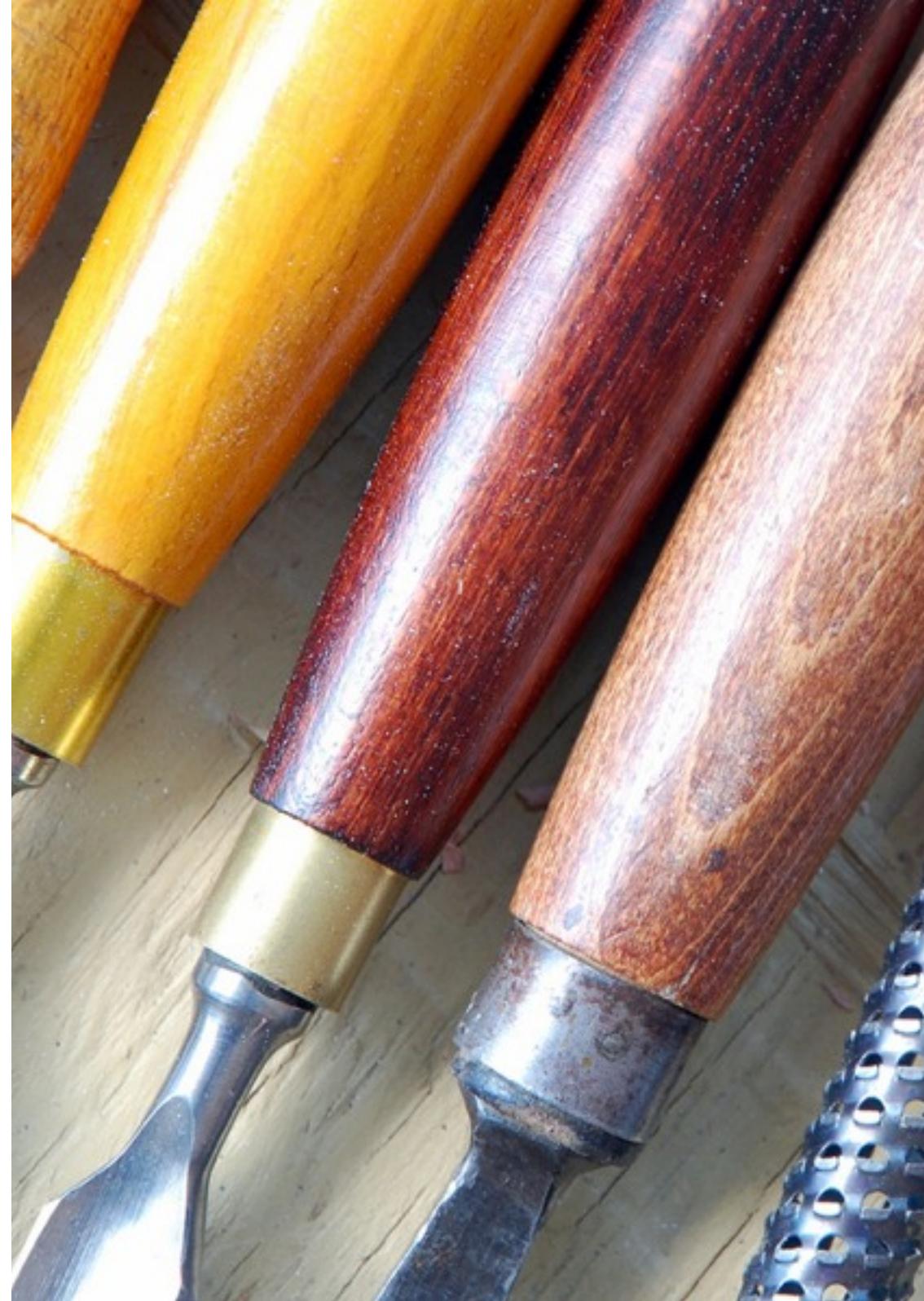
channels. Of course, working deep links that are easy to copy are also required, if someone simply wants to mail it to their friends and family.

These tools might spell the difference between a campaign taking off or not – what makes the basic reproductive rate pass the 1.0 threshold and go viral. The easier it is to pass it on, the more viral it becomes.

5 **SEEDING** What is the idea of quarantine? Well, it is to limit contact with a contagious or poisonous agent. To not expose any more people to it. The idea with seeding is the opposite of quarantine. You want to maximize contact with the viral agent. This means creating "satellites of content" in a lot of different places, where people can be exposed to it.

Without exposing anyone to the material, no one will ever get "infected". So, it is key to expose people to it to start the spread and create a critical volume. Once the right people and the right environments have been exposed, the spread will start to take care of itself. But only if the content really has viral potential.

CONTEXT
How do you start a fire? Well, first of all you need some dry wood. Without it, it will be difficult. Once you have started the fire, it will dry up the rest of the wood and it will set that on fire too.

What does this mean for a viral campaign? Well, you should start seeding the environments most receptive to your idea or campaign. The environments with the "driest tinder". This means not only the biggest video or entertainment sites. If the material is country specific, start with local sites. The more contextual they are the better. Once they have embraced it, it can start spreading to other environments, to a more mainstream audience. And then you can start spreading it on a broader scale.

But, it is often important to first reach the most interested people and try to make them advocates for the idea. To increase adoption, the content needs to be relevant to the target audience, but you have probably already figured that one out. Relevance and the right context also result in a higher quality on the views you get.

A HUB
As a general rule, spreading the content in a lot of locations is good. But, depending on the content, it can also be a good idea to have a hub for the campaign. Either your own site or using for example Youtube. This works as the central location where users can find the content and other related material. If it is your own site, videos should still be available on Youtube though, since that is where most users go to search for videos.

MAINSTREAM MEDIA
Usually it is best to take advantage of the fact that people want to be first with the latest. No one feels good about passing something on that has also gotten full pages in newspapers, and is used in a banner bombardment.

If you have the budget and are thinking about using bought media, it is usually better to roll it out a bit later, once the early adopters have embraced the material. And when you start, focus on the most relevant environments. So, even a viral campaign should be planned with different phases where different media are used. Smaller, non-paid and more contextual sites in the beginning and larger, maybe paid and more mainstream sites later on.

PROMOTE PARTICIPATION

What if you already engaged a lot of people in your production? If they are proud to have been part of it, you already have a lot of advocates for your material, and they will be happy to post it in their own networks or pass it on, to create an initial spread. Make sure to ask them if they want to be informed when the campaign material is ready and make sure to get their contact information.

A GREAT TITLE

"Dynamite surfing" is a great title. It tells you a bit what it's about and is memorable, but most of all it sparks in interest. It makes us curious. A great title makes people click on the link, it makes them remember it and find it again, and it makes other people find it more easily, since people use the same words to link to the content. It becomes easier to find in search engines or on searches on Youtube and similar.

GREAT FOOTAGE

We are often very visual. We scan information, and our eyes often stop briefly on images. A great image catches our eye and makes us interested. Whenever you can, choose the images used for thumbnails. If autogenerated, make sure you cut the movie in a way so that the

autogenerated thumbnail isn't taken from an uninteresting sequence of the movie. A movie that starts by fading in from black could end up with an entirely black thumbnail. Make sure it doesn't happen to your campaign.

6 TRACKING, EVALUATION & IMPROVEMENT

TRACKING

Proper tracking is essential to be able to say if the campaign has been a success or not. But, it can also help you during the campaign. A good tracking system lets you know in what environments the content has been well received, where it has spread the most and how many people interact with it.

With this information, you can figure out in which environments the likelihood of viral spread and interaction is the highest. Reach out there and you might just reach the tipping point.

EVALUATE AND IMPROVE

Once you have created a campaign, viral or not, you should use what you have learnt to make the next one better, even more successful. Ask yourself: Did it go viral? Where did it work? Why did it work? What worked best? What didn't work well? What could have been done better? How could we have tweaked the content to make it even more attractive? How could we have made it even easier to pass it on? How could we have reached out in even more contextual environments? Use your learnings when creating your next campaign.

Four quick questions

Let's finish off with a little cheat sheet. There are four questions you should ask yourself when creating a campaign:

1. Why notice?
2. Why interact?
3. Why act?
4. Why not act?

WHY NOTICE – *what catches the attention?* If there is nothing that catches the attention of a consumer, there is nothing that will be passed on. It could be a striking headline, an interesting image, or maybe top ratings by other consumers. A lot of comments means it is something people care about. Therefore, it is interesting. Make sure to think through titles, headlines, images and the thumbnails that are created by video sites for example.

WHY INTERACT – *what keeps the attention?* Once someone has started interacting, there is a small window of opportunity. Take well care of it! The first 10 seconds of a video are very important. Could there be a little cliffhanger included? What is it that will keep the attention? Make sure load times are quick. If no one watches a video to the end, no one will pass it on.

WHY ACT – *what makes someone want to pass it on?* What is the incentive that will make a consumer pass the content on? Is there an expected positive experience for the receiver? Does the one passing it on stand to gain something from passing it on; points, social value or something else?

WHY NOT ACT – *what could prevent someone from passing it on?* Have you minimized any reasons that the consumer would not want to pass something on? Is it too commercial? Do you demand too much from the consumer in terms of information? Have you made the process to pass it on as easy and quick as possible? Have you optimized it for sharing on the platforms the target group uses? In general, is the value the consumer gets higher than the effort it takes to pass it on? Hard to evaluate, yes, but worth thinking about.

AVOID THE "PROBLEMS" WITH SUCCESS What happens if the campaign really takes off? Is server capacity enough? What about bandwidth? The server set up of a campaign is extremely important, and maybe even more so when the campaign really has the potential to be a success. This set up needs to be thought through and made redundant. You also need to make sure the mailing server doesn't make all mails sent become marked as spam in inboxes, which would effectively kill the campaign.
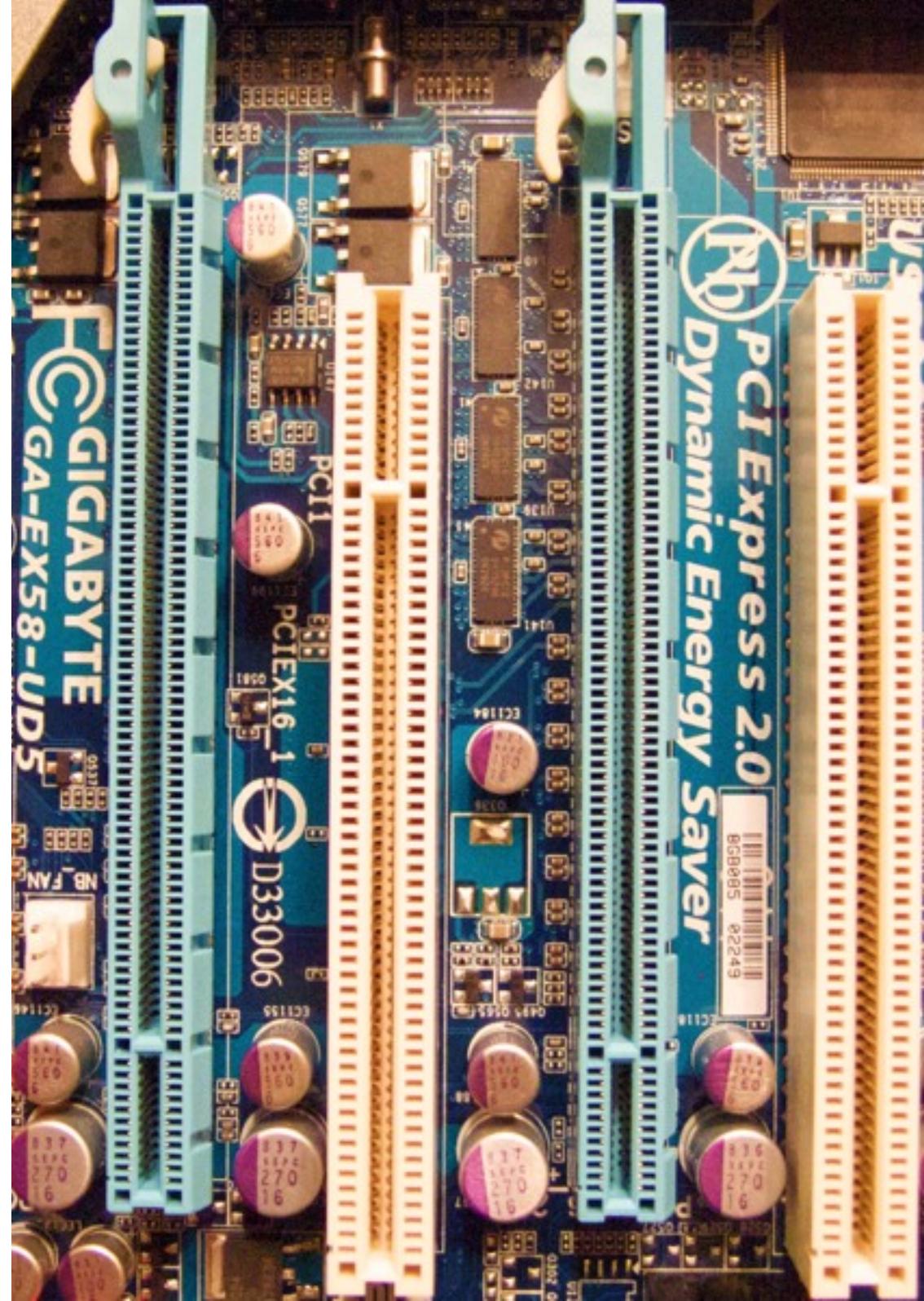
Extras

GATHER DATA Some campaigns also have clever ways to gather more data on who interacts with the content. One of my favorites is the [campaign made for TV-series Dexter.](#) It actually gathered the name, age, sex, email address, industry you work in and in some cases even the phone number of the recipients of the campaign. It was done brilliantly in that campaign, creating a personal touch and remarkability. The information gathered was included in the content and actually improved on the experience. But beware, in general, the more information you gather, the higher the barrier to spread, and the lower the virality. So, it should preferably be done in a smart way and add to the experience.

AN INTERESTING TWIST Mark Granovetter once wrote about [the strength of weak ties.](#) In short, it concludes that we get more interesting information, such as job tips, from our weak ties, the people we know more as acquaintances rather than close friends. They constitute the outer limits of our network, so therefore they are more likely to sit on information that is not immediately available to ourselves or our closest. What about using these weaker ties in a campaign? I guess it could spread quicker around the world, jumping from network to network. Burger King did this with the campaign Whopper Sacrifice, where Facebook users were encouraged to "defriend" 10 connections on Facebook to get a free Whopper. I assume most of the defriended people were among people's weaker ties. No doubt an interesting twist.

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And of course, if you have feedback to give, do not hesitate to send me an email on kristofermencak@gmail.com.

ABOUT ME My name is Kristofer Mencák and I have a background from Stockholm School of Economics where I took a M.Sc. in Business Administration. After a couple of years working within webdesign and SEO my interest in customer satisfaction, word of mouth and viral marketing grew. I read about it a lot and decided I needed to start practicing.

So, I joined GoViral in 2005 and worked with igniting viral campaigns for three years. After that I worked for communications agency JMW Kommunikation with a focus on social media.

Now I am back 100% in the online world, at The Viral Company in Stockholm, working with online strategy and communication. I have learnt a lot when it comes to understanding human motivation and what can help a campaign go viral, both from theory and practice, and I hope I have been able to pass some of that on to you. Feel free to pass this on to your friends and collegues.

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