



The New Rules of Viral Marketing:
How Word-of-Mouse
Spreads Your Ideas for Free
By David Meerman Scott



The New Rules of Viral Marketing

Imagine you're the head of marketing at a theme park, and you're charged with announcing a major new attraction. What would you do?

Well, the old rules of marketing suggest that you pull out your wallet. You'd probably spend millions to buy your way into people's minds, interrupting them with TV spots, billboards by the side of the highway, and other "creative" Madison Avenue advertising techniques. You'd also hire a big PR agency, who would beg the media to write about your attraction. The traditional PR approach requires a self-congratulatory press release replete with company muckety-mucks claiming that the new attraction will bring about world peace by bringing families closer together.

That's not what Cindy Gordon, vice president of new media and marketing partnerships at Universal Orlando Resort, did when she launched The Wizarding World of Harry Potter. Other large entertainment companies would have spent millions of dollars to interrupt everyone in the country with old-rules approaches: Super Bowl TV ads, blimps, direct mail, and magazine ads. Instead, Gordon told just seven people about the new attraction.

And those seven people told tens of thousands.

Then mainstream media listened to those tens of thousands and wrote about the news in their newspaper and magazine articles, in TV and radio reports, and in blog posts. Gordon estimates that 350 million people around the world heard the news that Universal Orlando Resort was creating The Wizarding World of Harry Potter theme park.

All by telling just seven people.

When 7 = 350,000,000

Recognizing that millions of fans around the world are passionate about all things Harry Potter, Gordon knew she could rely on word-of-mouth to spread her story. After all, Harry is a global phenomenon. The series of books by author J.K. Rowling has been translated into sixty-five languages and has sold more than 325 million copies in more than 200 territories around the world. The films, produced by Warner Bros. Pictures, have grossed \$3.5 billion worldwide at the box office.

Gordon and her counterpart at Warner Bros. chose to launch The Wizarding World of Harry Potter by first telling the exciting news to a very small group of rabid fans. Seven people at the top Harry Potter fan sites, such as [Mugglenet](#), were hand-selected by Gordon's team, with Warner Bros. and Rowling herself providing input about the choices. These seven (affectionately referred to by Gordon's team as "the AP of the HP world") were invited to participate in a top-secret Webcast held at midnight on May 31, 2007.

The Webcast was hosted by Scott Trowbridge, vice president of Universal Creative, and featured Stuart Craig, the academy award-winning production designer for all the Harry Potter films. In the Webcast, live from the "Dumbledore's Office" set at Leavesden Studios, Craig discussed how his team of twenty designers is bringing together The Wizarding World of Harry Potter theme park.

"If we hadn't gone to fans first, there could have been a backlash," Gordon says. She imagined the disappointment dedicated Harry Potter fans might feel if they learned about Universal Orlando's plans in, say, *The New York Times* rather than an insider fan site.



On May 31, 2007, a Web micro-site, [The Wizarding World of Harry Potter](#), went live to provide a place for bloggers and the media to link to for information on the theme park, which is slated to open in late 2009 or early 2010.

Soon after the Webcast, the team sent an e-announcement to their in-house, opt-in email list of park guests so they could hear the news directly too. Team members also sent the e-announcement to friends and family. During the secret Webcast, a Web micro-site, [The Wizarding World of Harry Potter](#), went live to provide a place for bloggers and the media to link to for information on the theme park, which is slated to open in late 2009 or early 2010. Visitors to the site learned that the park will feature immersive rides and interactive attractions, as well as experiential shops and restaurants that will enable guests to sample fare from the wizarding world's best known establishments.

Because Gordon's team launched The Wizarding World of Harry Potter through social media—putting fans first—they were able to run the entire promotion in-house, with a very small marketing budget (covering the Webcast infrastructure and the micro-site production) and a tiny development team. They did not hire an agency, and they did no widespread outbound media relations, no marketing stunts, no CEO conference call, and no expensive advertising.

Of course, not all companies have Harry Potter on their team. But Gordon still accomplished a remarkable feat with an approach that most large organizations would not have taken. She told just seven people, and the power of word-of-mouth led to 350 million people hearing the news.

*Viral Marketing advice from Cindy Gordon,
Vice President of New Media and Marketing Partnerships,
Universal Orlando Resort*

“ Nimble companies are using the Web in ways that they could never do before. New media has created a new marketing environment where the old rules of marketing no longer apply. When you have a passionate fan base for your brand, the Internet is especially vital for going viral. Communicating to a small but powerful group of fans first online to enlist their support is a smart way to ensure positive coverage in the mainstream press. The power of the Internet makes it easier for people to fall in love with you faster.

But beware—it also makes it easier for them to fall out of love with you faster. It’s a double-edged sword. Listen constantly to what’s being said about you. Social media technologies do not make a brand viral; they merely allow consumers to tell others about good brands. The main thing is to be different and relevant with your brand. And when you have that, the sheer power of the Internet can accelerate your brand. Traditional media takes weeks to build brand awareness and months to build preference. The Internet can make your brand famous literally overnight.”



A FORMULA FOR VIRAL MARKETING SUCCESS

One of the coolest things about the Web is that when an idea takes off, it can propel a brand or company to seemingly instant fame and fortune. *For free*. Whatever you call it—viral, buzz, word-of-mouth, or word-of-blog marketing—having other people tell your story drives action. One person sends it to another, that person then sends it to yet another, and on and on.

The challenge for marketers is to harness the amazing power of word-of-mouth.

As you will learn, the formula for success includes a combination of some great—and free—Web content (a video, blog entry, interactive tool, or e-book) that provides valuable information (or is groundbreaking, or amazing, or hilarious, or involves a celebrity), plus a network of people to light the fire and links that make your content very easy to share.

The power of the Internet makes it easier for people to fall in love with you faster.
But beware—it also makes it easier for them to fall out of love with you faster.

WORD-OF-MOUSE EMPOWERS YOU

You and I are incredibly lucky.

For decades, the only way to spread our ideas was to buy expensive advertising or beg the media to write (or broadcast) about our products and services. But now our organizations have a tremendous opportunity to publish great content online—content that people *want to* consume and that they are *eager to share* with their friends, family, and colleagues.

Word-of-mouth is the single most empowering tool available to marketers today. I wrote this e-book so you can take advantage of the power of viral marketing too. In it, I share ideas that will help you create your own viral marketing strategies and campaigns. These are the “new rules” I’ve used to create marketing programs that have sold more than a billion dollars’ worth of products and services worldwide.

I hope the following don’t sound too self-promotional, but I am absolutely blown away by how well viral marketing works, and I just want to share a few comments about how it’s helped me:

- If you had Googled my full name, David Meerman Scott, a few years ago, you would have gotten zero hits. Now there are nearly 100,000 references, all talking about me and my ideas—and all the result of word-of-mouth.
- My first e-book, [The New Rules of PR: How to create a press release strategy for reaching buyers directly](#) (opens PDF), has been downloaded more than 250,000 times since it was released in early 2006, and it has led directly to hundreds of thousands of dollars in speaking engagements in the past couple of years.
- I spent almost no money promoting my latest hardcover book, *The New Rules of Marketing & PR*. Because of word-of-mouth from more than 500 bloggers who wrote about the book on their blogs, it sold nearly 30,000 copies in six months, making it the number-one best-selling PR and

Web marketing book in the world. As of this writing, the book is being translated into twelve languages.

- The power of word-of-mouth led directly to members of the mainstream media finding me without me pitching them. In the past six months, I've had a front page quote in *The Wall Street Journal*, appeared on MSNBC, and had my ideas written about in magazines such as *BusinessWeek*, *Entrepreneur*, and *Publishers Weekly*, as well as many newspapers, radio shows, podcasts, and Webinars.

Imagine how much I would have had to pay to get an equivalent number of people to pay attention via advertising and other old-rules approaches! Millions of dollars, perhaps.

That's the power of viral marketing.

Cindy Gordon of Universal Orlando Resort launched The Wizarding World of Harry Potter by publishing a micro-site and a Webcast. That's it. Using a viral marketing strategy, Gordon reached 350,000,000 people with two pieces of internally created Web content.

You can achieve similar success, and I'll show you how.

Viral marketing success comes from self-publishing
Web content that people want to share...
It's about harnessing word-of-mouth, the most
empowering form of marketing there is.



Steve Chazin started a blog and wrote an e-book, which he offered for free.

A RESUME? OR AN E-BOOK?

I've got another hypothetical situation for you. What would you do if you were a vice president of marketing for a technology company and you were ready to find a new opportunity to advance your career? Well, if you're like virtually every other job seeker, you'd prepare a resume, obsessing over every entry to make sure it paints your background in the best possible light. You'd also begin a networking campaign, emailing and phoning your contacts and using social networking tools like LinkedIn, hoping that someone in your extended network knows of a suitable job opportunity.

Basically, the old rules of job searches required you to interrupt people to tell them that you were on the market and to beg them to help you.

Steve Chazin is not a typical job seeker.

Instead of following the traditional path, in September 2007 Chazin started a [blog](#) and wrote an e-book, [Marketing Apple: 5 Secrets of the World's Best Marketing Machine](#) (opens PDF), which he offered for free.

Then Chazin waited for the world to find him.

He didn't have to wait long; the first day saw 2,900 downloads of *Marketing Apple*, with 2,100 on the second day and an average of 300 per day in the three months that followed. In a very short time, tens of thousands of people downloaded *Marketing Apple*, and hundreds of people wrote about it on their blogs. Chazin propelled himself into the world as a recognized expert on the kind of marketing used by Apple, Inc. And he instantly set himself far apart from pack of job seekers looking for consulting work or a VP of marketing job.

Chazin had spent nearly a decade at Apple, where he managed a New England sales territory, drove a strategic partnership with the Harvard Business School, and worked with Steve Jobs to rebuild Apple's marketing efforts. His efforts helped return the company to profitability in the late 1990s.

Thus, Chazin understands how Apple markets products, and he offers insider advice in his e-book and on his blog. His five secrets, which should be both interesting to and relevant for all marketing professionals, are neatly packaged to make it easy to learn how Apple operates. Chazin's MarketingApple.com is open to anyone who wants to learn and implement some of the techniques that have made Apple, Inc. the world's best marketing machine.

"Apple is a perfect example of what good design and good marketing can do when you tie them both together," Chazin says. "My background and my love for the company put me in a unique position to help others embrace a similar approach. And I help fellow marketers look good!"

The exposure that the e-book and blog have given Chazin mean he's become a go-to source for reporters looking for insight into Apple's marketing; he's been interviewed by several major publications, including the *Los Angeles Times*. Just a month after releasing the e-book, he was invited to Kiev, Ukraine to deliver a (paid) speech about how better marketing saved Apple from extinction. Since then he's been offered a half-dozen additional invitations to speak in other locations.

"I've got a traditional resume, but it doesn't tell people how I think," Chazin says. "They get a sense of who I am from the e-book and the blog in a way that a resume can't possibly deliver. There is also a sense of importance that the e-book has that a resume doesn't. The e-book is free, but it has a very real perceived value."

Chazin's job-search strategy definitely paid off. He says the blog and e-book have helped him put out a virtual shingle, landing him the consulting work he was seeking. "It has raised my profile significantly," he says. "I've gotten unsolicited emails from people who want my advice and help, and that's led to several consulting deals. Funny enough, it has also given me more notoriety at Apple, and it reconnected me to some of my old colleagues. I'm told that many people at Apple read my blog."

The effects of *Marketing Apple* and Chazin's word-of-mouth effort sure beat being viewed as one resume out of thousands.

*Viral Marketing advice from Steve Chazin,
author of Marketing Apple*

“ One of my simple marketing rules found in the *Marketing Apple* e-book is ‘Make Your Message Memorable.’ Simply put, you have little chance that something will go viral unless, like a disease, it can be spread easily mouth-to-mouth. For that to happen, your message has to be super tight and easy to transmit in as few words as possible. ‘1,000 songs in your pocket’ is the answer to ‘what is an iPod?’ Before that, the Macintosh was introduced as ‘The computer for the rest of us.’ If you can boil your message down to just its syrupy goodness, you can achieve lift—the irresistible force of millions of customers selling your product for you.”



E-BOOKS GO VIRAL: THE STYLISH YOUNGER SISTER TO THE NERDY WHITE PAPER

One of the most powerful forms of word-of-mouth content is the e-book. Steve Chazin found incredible success with this medium. And hey, if you've read this far in *The New Rules of Viral Marketing*, you'd have to agree, because, after all, this is an e-book!

E-books have a great deal of importance to readers. People can instantly see the value of a product that looks like for-purchase content but can actually be downloaded for free. In my opinion, e-books should be material people *want* to read, compared to the dense and usually boring white paper, which our buyers feel they *should* read, but often don't.

How to help your e-book get shared via word-of-mouth

Wondering how to pull all that off? Here are some tips for executing a successful e-book:

- Study this e-book and Chazin's *Marketing Apple* to learn how to put one together.
- Present your e-book in a landscape format, rather than the white paper's typical portrait format. This design choice signals to your readers that the content inside is interesting, unlike a boring old white paper.
- Include interesting graphics and images with the text.
- Consider writing in a lighter, more conversational style than you would in a white paper, marketing brochure, or Web page.
- E-books (as viral marketing tools) should always be free and should never have a registration requirement.

In my opinion, e-books should be material people *want* to read, compared to the dense and usually boring white paper, which our buyers feel they *should* read, but often don't.

- Think like a publisher by understanding your audience. Consider what market problems your audience has, and develop a topic that appeals to these readers.
- Try to make the e-book easy to read. Keep things fun and interesting.
- Open with a story. Use examples and stories throughout.
- Find a great title that grabs the reader's attention. Use a subtitle to describe what the e-book will deliver.
- Hire a professional editor to help you through multiple drafts and a proofreader to finalize the copy.
- Have the e-book professionally designed.
- Put a [Creative Commons](#) license on the content so people know they can freely share your copyrighted material.

- Create a landing page from which people can download your e-book. For an example, check out the [Pragmatic Marketing, Inc. e-book The Secrets of Market-Driven Leaders: How technology company CEOs create success \(and why most fail\)](#) by Craig Stull, Phil Myers, and David Meerman Scott.
- Promote the e-book like crazy. Offer it on your Web site with easy-to-find links. If you have a blog, write about it there. Add a link to your employees' email signatures. Get partners to offer links.
- To drive viral marketing, alert bloggers, analysts, and members of the mainstream media that the e-book is available and send them a download link. Don't send the actual PDF document directly unless asked.

This is a new world for marketers and corporate communicators. Never before has a medium allowed an idea (or a product) to spread instantly to millions of consumers the way that the Web does. E-books are true examples of thought leadership at work, and they hold the potential to influence many thousands of people in ways that traditional marketing cannot.

E-books are a great way to dip your toes into the word-of-mouth ocean. If you're a thought leader—a person recognized as having innovative and important ideas—go ahead and write an e-book. I dare you. (And if you do, please send me the link!)

NOTHING IS GUARANTEED TO GO VIRAL

There are people who will tell you that it is possible to create a viral campaign that will certainly be a hit, and there are agencies specializing in taking money and making promises. But I've noticed that when organizations (and their agencies) set out to go viral, the vast majority of their campaigns fail.

It is virtually impossible to create a Web marketing program that is *guaranteed* to go viral; it requires a huge amount of luck and timing. That's an important point to remember as you work on viral marketing ideas, because it's unlike the old-rules, numbers-based marketing techniques you're probably used to. Consider a direct mail campaign: You could always count on a direct mail piece to generate a known number of responses, say 2 percent. So if you needed to have 100 people respond, you sent out 5,000 mailers. Easy, right?

Viral marketing is much different. You just can't count on numbers in the same way. Many efforts fail miserably, and there are countless Web sites, e-books, and videos that only their creators' mothers and bosses have seen. However, tomorrow those same marketers might get lucky and get a million people to view their content, driving tens of thousands of people's interest in their products and services.

However, this importance of timing and luck shouldn't discourage you from using viral marketing techniques; you just need to learn how to turn the odds in your favor.

THINK LIKE A VENTURE CAPITALIST

The best way to initiate viral marketing is to think like a venture capitalist or film producer. While I think it is difficult to purposely create viral marketing buzz, it is certainly possible, and the best strategy is to emulate the way venture capitalists (VCs) invest in start-up companies and studios create films. A typical VC follows a maxim stating that most ventures will fail, a few might do okay, and—hopefully—one will take off and become a large enterprise that will repay investors many times the initial investment. Record companies and movie studios follow the same principles, expecting that most of the projects they green-light will have meager sales but that the one hit will more than repay the cost of a bunch of flops.

Nobody knows with certainty which movie or venture-backed company in the portfolio will succeed, so finding a success is a numbers game requiring investment in many prospects. The same goes for viral marketing efforts.

To gain some additional insight into how VCs think (so we can apply their theories to the creation of viral marketing campaigns), I spoke at length with Chris Greendale, a general partner at Kodiak Venture Partners. [Kodiak](#) is a VC firm investing in seed and early-stage technology companies. Greendale and I are both on the board of directors of [Kadient](#), a Kodiak-funded company that provides salespeople with the information tools they need to close deals. Before working with Kodiak, Greendale was a founder of Cambridge Technology Partners and an early investor in Seibel Systems.

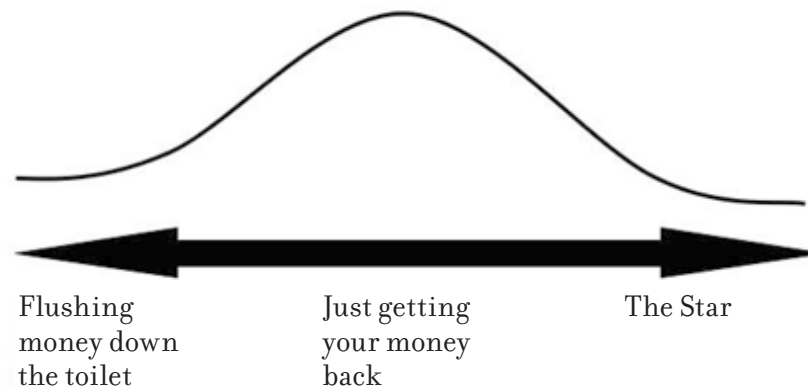
“Putting a film together is no different than investing in a company,” Greendale says. “It is a roll of the dice. With a film, you start with a good script. I’m like a producer, and I get a lot of scripts in the form of business plans. I look at the quality of the value proposition, the go-to-market strategy, and the quality of the individual. I probably see 200 deals a year, which is about one each working day, and I’ll likely do only two deals a year. So that means only one in a hundred gets funded. If you look at our size fund, which is \$300 million, we look to invest \$8–10 million per company, all in.”

Thus, if we apply our venture capital/viral marketing analogy, we might suppose that one needs to think of hundreds of ideas and then choose a handful to “fund” (i.e., actually create). I’ve worked with organizations that have thought up literally hundreds of viral marketing ideas over the course of a day’s brainstorming session. That’s great! You never really know which one is likely to succeed, so the more good ideas, the better

To minimize poisonous internal groupthink, invite people from outside your organization to help. Teenagers are especially tuned in to Internet trends and viral phenomena, so you might want to recruit some to help you come up with ideas. I’ve gotten involved with Facebook, which has started to go viral for me, and I now have several hundred “friends” as a result of my fourteen-year-old daughter’s help and encouragement. My Facebook friends share my ideas with *their* friends and colleagues to help me meet new people online.

Once Greendale funds a company and it becomes part of the Kodiak portfolio, he uses a simple rule-of-thumb to monitor performance. “There is a bell curve, and we are constantly managing our portfolio on a weekly basis based on that,” Greendale says. “We look at each company based on three buckets: We expect that, out of ten companies, three will be winners that we can sell for a profit or that might even go public, three are companies where we will only get our money back but no profit, and four are companies where we end up just flushing our money down the toilet.”

THE VENTURE CAPITAL / VIRAL MARKETING BELL CURVE



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You should think of your viral marketing campaigns in much the same way. Many will be duds that won't spark any interest; a few will generate some notice and basically pay back your investment of the time required to create them; and a handful will go viral and make the entire program of ten or twenty viral marketing campaigns worthwhile.

It's important to note what Greendale does once he and his partners have identified which bucket an investment falls into.

"When an investment is bad, we try to sell the deadbeat company for even pennies on a dollar," he says. "We want to get out in these cases because we don't want to waste money and time." The same should be true for a campaign you hoped would go viral but didn't. Just walk away from the effort and learn from it rather than trying to force on more and more people a campaign that doesn't resonate.

My Facebook friends share my ideas with *their* friends and colleagues to help me meet new people online.

On the other hand, Greendale calls the right side the star column. "We put a great deal of money and energy into this category," he says. "When it is going great and going towards an IPO [initial public offering], we give it all of the resources that we can." You should too! When a campaign starts to take off via word-of-mouth, give it all the care and attention you can, in order to move it forward.

But we can't do *that*! Our bosses won't let us!

I often get questions and comments about corporate viral marketing. People say things like "But we're a _____ company. We can't put video on YouTube!" (Fill in the blank with "big" or "famous" or "conservative" or "business-to-business" or "nonprofit" or "sports team" or whatever excuse you've got.) The fact is that some of the best viral marketing efforts come from unlikely sources.



IBM VP of Worldwide Sales Bob Hoey stars in this “mockumentary,” titled “Mainframe: The Art of the Sale, Lesson One,” viewed by more than 175,000 people.

One of my favorite videos is a series of “mockumentaries” produced by IBM. The multi-episode *The Art of the Sale* is a terrific spoof on corporate training videos. Until the end of the video, you don’t even know who produced it. Hundreds of thousands of people have watched the series, humanizing a large company in the process.

“We did an internal video in 2004 for our sales meeting,” says Tim Washer, manager of new media web video at IBM Communications. “It was the key things that people needed to know in 2005, but it also included some laughter. It went really well and people liked it, so in summer 2006 I asked the VP of communications if we could make some videos for external use.”

Washer and his colleagues at IBM produced the entire video series in-house. “We wanted the videos to make sense for broad sales and corporate audiences,” he says. “Many people have seen *The Office*, so they get the concept of a ‘mockumentary.’ We wrote the scripts and cast the actors—all are IBMers, including the series star, Bob Hoey, who really is the vice president of worldwide sales for System Z, the IBM Mainframe. Lessons one, two, and three were all shot in just a day-and-a-half at our IBM offices.”

The first three episodes came out in August 2006. Washer put them onto [YouTube](#) and linked to them from the IBM mainframe blog.

“We originally sent the video to friends in a very informal way,” Washer says. “We also included it in one of the IBM newsletters to the sales team, and that helped it to go viral. Then some bloggers picked it up and pushed it along some more.”

Washer wasn’t surprised when the videos started to take off via word-of-mouth. “Humor always works,” he says. “These videos are self-deprecating humor. There are often a lot of barriers to doing this kind of thing within organizations, but to be successful it is critical that this not be done by committee. We’re lucky because IBM is big on trusting employees, and they trusted us to do

something that would work. The self-deprecation softens the image of IBM with many people—it puts a human face on IBM because we can laugh at ourselves.”

Mainstream media also picked up on the videos with some comments on what the use of humor does for IBM’s reputation. For example, an article titled “What are they drinking in Armonk?” appeared on the [San Francisco Chronicle blog](#) and said, “You’ve gotta see this video! ... IBM is re-positioning the mainframe as a back-to-the-future alternative. The tone of Hoey’s spoof training video is in keeping with the kinder, humbler image IBM now seeks to project.”

Some of the ways that these The Art of the Sale videos have spread virally have been surprising to Washer. “Our first series was selected as one of Comedy Central’s ‘Staff Favorites,’” he says. “We even got requests from other large companies, such as Price Waterhouse, to show our videos at their sales conferences!”

Washer had the videos translated into several different languages, including Japanese. “This approach works in many cultures because many things within the video itself are visual.”

The fourth, fifth, and sixth installments of The Art of the Sale were launched in November 2007 on the [IBM Mainframe blog](#).

With these videos’ success in reaching hundreds of thousands of people and improving IBM’s corporate image, Washer is very surprised that more companies haven’t followed his example. “I thought that so many people would be using humor, but it just hasn’t happened yet,” he says.

*Viral Marketing advice from Tim Washer,
Manager of New Media Web video, IBM Communications*

“When producing a viral video, enlist the best artists and storytellers on the team, and give them license to create a compelling, engaging spot which may have nothing to do with the brand or message points. Spend your thirty to ninety seconds entertaining the audience instead of forcing message points. Be willing to experiment with a video that might not be consistent with your brand image. Most likely, you’ll have a better chance to reach a new, different audience on YouTube if the video is ‘off-brand.’”



ONLINE VIDEO GOES VIRAL

Before YouTube made video commonplace on the Web, you'd only see small forays into corporate video, and usually these efforts were mundane and predictable—stuff like broadcasts of the CEO's speech at the annual meeting. Well, OK, some people might have watched, but unless the CEO made a dramatic gaffe (picking his nose while talking, perhaps), a video like that was highly unlikely to go viral.

The idea of companies using video for Web marketing is still new. Video follows both blogs and podcasting on the adoption curve at organizations that don't have a service that naturally lends itself to video. Some companies are experimenting, often by imbedding video (typically hosted at YouTube) into their existing blogs.

Creating and publishing a simple video is really easy; all that's required is a basic digital video camera and a YouTube account. There are all sorts of available enhancements and editing techniques to make video look more professional, but some organizations prefer to go with the grainy and jerky "homemade" look. Other companies (like IBM) create a regular series of videos that might be delivered through a video blog (vlog), an online video channel at a company site, or a "vodcast" (a video series syndicated with iTunes or RSS feeds).

NINE TIPS FOR USING YOUTUBE FOR VIRAL MARKETING

Ready to try out your production skills and post some hopefully buzz-generating content on YouTube? Here are some things to keep in mind:

1. Creating a video is easy, and posting on YouTube is free.

Shoot the video using a digital video camera and copy it to your computer. You can then either upload the video to YouTube as is or edit it with software such as iMovie or Windows Movie Maker to add titles and special effects. You might shoot from different angles with one or more cameras and then piece together the footage to create a unified final product. But remember, less is usually more when it comes to special effects. When you're ready to upload the video, you just need to create a free YouTube account and follow the directions to add the video.

2. Homemade is just fine. You don't need to hire a professional.

A homemade-quality video can work well and is sometimes preferable. We're bombarded with overproduced TV commercials all the time—so often that we usually just turn off our minds when they come on. An authentic and interesting video (rather than a slick and polished one) in which your personality shines through can make people notice. But plan ahead and shoot several takes to get it right.

3. Your video should be no longer than three minutes (preferably shorter).

Think very short. When people watch video, they have extremely short attention spans. There are millions of videos on YouTube, and it's very easy to click away from yours. Although YouTube will accept videos shorter than 10 minutes (smaller than 100 MB), try to make yours between thirty seconds and two minutes. If you have more to say, consider creating a series of videos rather than making one too long.

4. Make your description clear and specific.

A critical component of your video will be its title—the name the world will associate with your work—so think carefully about it. Make it descriptive and unique. To best promote your video, create an accurate and interesting text blurb. Use descriptive keywords and language that people will use when they search for videos like yours. And use the correct categorizations on YouTube so people can find it.

5. Don't attempt “stealth” fake customer insertions.

Some companies attempt sneaky stealth insertions of corporate-sponsored videos made to appear consumer-generated. A typical case might feature happy twenty-somethings at a party having fun while using products of a certain brand. The YouTube community is remarkably skilled at ratting out inauthentic video, so this approach is likely to backfire and cause harm to a brand. Remember, if your video is worth watching, viewers won't care that it was submitted by a company.

6. Consider inviting your customer communities to submit video.

One of the most effective ways to use video to drive viral marketing is for companies to develop a contest in which users submit their own video, which then is made available for others to see. The best would-be directors are given prizes, and their videos are usually showcased on the company site. In some cases, the winning videos are also played on TV as “real” commercials. For example, more than 100 people submitted videos for a Mentos contest seeking the best customer-created videos of geysers made by [combining the popular mints with Diet Coke](#).

7. Try a series of similar videos to build interest.

Sometimes a series of videos, such as those from Blendtec, a small company that makes household blenders, works well. Blendtec created a huge hit with their series of YouTube videos called “Will It Blend?” The following videos have each been viewed more than a million times:

- Will It Blend? [iPhone](#)
- Will It Blend? [Golf Balls](#)
- Will It Blend? [Marbles](#)

8. Tell everyone about your video!

When you upload your first few videos, you are likely to hear a deafening silence. You'll be waiting for comments, but none will come. You'll check your video statistics and be disappointed by the tiny number of viewers. Don't get discouraged—that's normal! It takes time to build an audience. When you're just getting started, make sure people know it's there and can find it. Create links to your video from your home page, product pages, or online media room. Mention your video in your email or off-line newsletters, and create links to your video as part of your email signature and those of other people in your organization.

9. Make sure bloggers know about the video.

Sending bloggers a link to the video or commenting on other people's blogs (and including a link to your video) is a good way to build an audience. If you comment on blogs in the same space as yours, you might be surprised at how quickly you will get viewers to your video. However, when commenting on someone else's blog real estate, make sure you're on topic and genuinely contributing to the conversation in addition to linking to your video. Don't just spam bloggers with your link without adding value.

Above all, have fun! Don't be afraid to go out there and experiment.

Video content on the Web is still very new for marketers and communicators. But the potential to deliver information to buyers in new and surprising ways is greater when you use a new medium. And while your competition is still trying to figure out "that blogging thing," you can tap into the world of video and leave the competition behind.



Website Grader is a free diagnostic tool that measures the marketing effectiveness of any site.

GRADE YOUR WEB SITE

[HubSpot](#), provider of an inbound marketing system that small businesses use to leverage search engines, get found by more prospects, and then convert a higher percentage of prospects into customers, created the nifty [Website Grader](#) as a free diagnostic tool to measure the marketing effectiveness of any Web site. The tool has spread through word-of-mouth to their target customers, including marketing professionals, Web designers, and business owners interested in improving their Internet marketing. These people see tremendous value in learning how successful their site is at attracting visitors.

The free Website Grader tool helps identify companies in need of HubSpot's paid services by drawing those companies to the HubSpot site. Plus, after using the tool, many users of Website Grader conclude on their own that they need help improving their Web marketing.

"We wanted a tool that would both help us figure out if a company was a good fit for the product we sell... and hopefully would actually attract people to the tool to let them self-select by running a report on their own Web site," says Dharmesh Shah, founder and chief software architect at HubSpot. "We thought that if we built a valuable enough tool it would generate a lot of viral traffic, helping us to generate lots of leads at a really low cost and grow our business."

To build buzz around Website Grader, Shah and his colleagues at HubSpot promoted the free tool on the popular [HubSpot blog](#) and then leveraged the blogosphere and social media to drive word-of-mouth. The team posted messages in discussion forums, submitted the site to social media Web sites like Del.icio.us and StumbleUpon, and commented on other people's blogs with a link recommending Website Grader as valuable tool people might like to try.

The success of the Website Grader tool has been staggering. HubSpot launched Website Grader on February 23, 2007, and in only nine months over 150,000 unique URLs were submitted for grading. The tool was featured in a *PC Magazine* article as one of the Top 100 Undiscovered Websites and “A-list” bloggers such as Guy Kawasaki have written about it.

“We’ve captured over 35,000 opt-in email addresses from people who have used Website Grader and have produced over 1,000 sales leads,” says Shah. That’s a remarkable result for a tool that cost virtually nothing to create and to promote through viral marketing strategies. “Our salespeople use a Website Grader report in every deal they work on as a diagnostic tool to review with the prospect. That [report] then shows how HubSpot software, our paid product, can help them with Internet marketing. Therefore, even when it is not the original lead source, it is a valuable tool for closing a lot of other business.”

The real proof of the success of Website Grader comes from the amount of new business it has created. “We’ve closed deals with over thirty new customers to date as a result of the Website Grader viral marketing strategy,” Shah says. “That represents about \$250,000 in customer lifetime value. We’ve also produced another sixty sales opportunities currently in our pipeline, with a potential customer lifetime value of \$500,000 if we close them all.”

*Viral Marketing advice from Dharmesh Shah,
Founder and Chief Software Architect, HubSpot*

“ People love tools that provide a grade or comparison and the potential for competition. Anything that has an evaluation in it, and a way to compare yourself to others, has a great chance to be a viral success. You first get your own score, and then naturally you email your friends to compare scores with them.”



A TOOL FOR SPREADING YOUR IDEAS

As HubSpot has shown, sometimes the best form of online content to spread your ideas far and wide is an interactive tool. Any organization can come up with a widget that helps people calculate something useful or makes their lives a little better. Like the other techniques in this e-book, interactive tools that you create to spread your ideas must be totally free.

For instance, nonprofits such as CARE USA mobilize constituents to support the fight against global poverty through an email tool on the CARE Web site. Members use the tool to contact government leaders about particular topics, bills, or other issues. In the world of health and fitness, Sharp HealthCare, San Diego's leading healthcare system, provides several useful tools and calculators, including one to determine whether someone's drinking habits indicate an alcohol problem and one to calculate body mass index (BMI), the standard measure for determining healthy (and unhealthy) weight ranges for a given height.

WHAT VIRAL MARKETING IS *NOT*

Viral marketing is a popular buzzword out there but is misunderstood by many. It's also gotten a bad rap in some quarters. Why? Because there are a cadre of viral marketing “experts” who will happily take (large amounts of) your money to create a viral marketing “campaign” for you. However, these old-line agency approaches typically depend on some gimmicky game or contest that just feels forced and advertisement-like. Typically, advertising agency-developed viral campaigns involve buying access in the same old ways, such as purchasing an email list to spam people or launching the campaign with a pricey print or TV ad. Often these viral ideas dreamed up by agencies have absolutely nothing to do with your company or its products. Sure, an email subject line “Get Your Free iPod!” will drive viral buzz, because people want to take a chance on a free iPod. But unless your company has something to do with iPods, this bait-and-switch game is unlikely to educate people about your organization or drive sales.

Worse, some companies (urged on by their unscrupulous agencies) set up fake viral campaigns where people who are employed or in some way compensated by the agency write about a product or create a video purported to be from a customer. The Web is hyper-efficient at collective investigative reporting and smoking out trickery, so these campaigns rarely succeed. And, in the worst case, your organizational reputation may suffer great harm.

That's why I named this e-book *The New Rules of Viral Marketing*—to draw the clear distinction that valuable content that going viral via word-of-mouth is the new way to spread ideas, while silly contests are yesterday's news.

YOU MUST IGNORE THE OLD RULES

Viral marketing is not about coercion, and it is not about buying access. Don't get sucked into gimmicks.

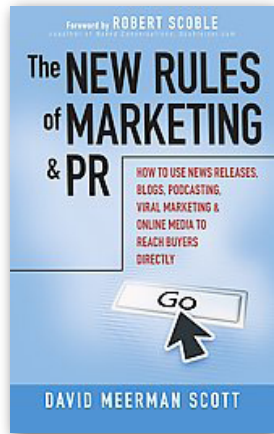
The best word-of-mouth efforts promote your organization and its products and services by delivering great online content (video, an e-book, a great blog post, an interesting photo or graphic) that is directly tied to your products, services, and ideas. Successful viral marketing campaigns sell your ideas in a creative way that people want to share with their friends, colleagues, and family members.

This isn't the same old marketing and PR you've tried before:

- **Don't** obsess about being "on message."
- **Don't** break the bank with expensive advertising.
- **Don't** beg mainstream media to write about you.
- **Do** tell your story directly to an interested market.
- **Do** make it easy for people to share your content with their friends, colleagues, and family members.

What do you have to lose?

Viral marketing—having others tell and spread your story for you—is one of the most exciting and powerful ways to reach your audiences. It's not easy to harness the power of word-of-mouth, but any company with thoughtful ideas to share—and clever ways to create interest in them—can, after some careful preparation, become famous and find success on the Web. 📺



BUY THE BOOK

Get more details or buy a copy of Scott's [The New Rules of Marketing and PR](#).

To book David to speak at your next event or to run a seminar for your company, please contact him at davidmeermanscott.com.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Meerman Scott is an online thought leadership and viral marketing strategist. The programs he has developed have won numerous awards and are responsible for selling over \$1 billion in products and services worldwide. Scott has developed word-of-mouth strategies that for just a few hundred bucks earned him spots in the [Marketing Sherpa Viral Marketing Hall of Fame](#) twice: in 2006 and again in 2007. He is the author of the number-one best-selling PR and marketing book *The New Rules of Marketing and PR: How to use news releases, blogs, viral marketing and online media to reach buyers directly*. Check out his popular blog at www.WebInkNow.com.

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