

Do you Market like
Led Zeppelin or
The Grateful Dead?

David Meerman Scott

WHERE THE HELL IS MATT?

Matt Harding is the creator of one of the coolest series of YouTube videos I have ever seen. You've probably seen them too. Harding describes himself as "a thirty-one-year-old deadbeat from Connecticut who used to think that all he ever wanted to do in life was make and play videogames." On a trip wandering around Asia several years ago, Harding was in Hanoi when a friend suggested that he film a particular silly dance that he occasionally does when the moment is right. Some time later, a friend posted the video of Matt on his blog, and people passed around a link, one to another, until a lot of people had seen it.

Fast forward to 2006. Marketing people at [Stride gum](#) had seen Harding's video and contacted him, saying, "We like what you're doing. We want to help you." They agreed to sponsor a six-month trip through thirty-nine countries and all seven continents. "In that time, I danced a great deal," Harding writes. The resulting video, which he posted to YouTube himself, is called *Where the Hell is Matt?* and has been seen more than 11 million times. "I didn't do anything to promote the video myself," he says. "It was a featured video on the YouTube site, and that was the kick start. But if people don't pass it around, a video won't get a lot of views. It has to be real for people to be interested."

Matt Harding created what I call a World Wide Rave: when people around the world are talking about you, your company, and your products—whether you're located in San Francisco, Dubai, or Reykjavík. It's when global communities eagerly link to your stuff on the Web. It's when online buzz drives buyers to your virtual doorstep. And it's when tons of fans visit your Web site and your blog because they genuinely want to be there.

After that first trip, things settled down for a while, and then in 2007 Harding went back to Stride with another idea. "With the release of the 2006 video, we created an email list on my site and invited people to sign up," Harding says. "Many people danced with me, and we showed some of

that in an outtake video. I showed [the people from Stride] my inbox, which was overflowing with emails from all over the planet. I told them I wanted to travel around the world one more time and invite the people who'd written me to come out and dance too." Stride agreed and again sponsored his journey.

The resulting video, [Where the Hell is Matt?](#) (2008), is remarkable both for Harding and for Stride. The video was fourteen months in the making, and it features a cast of thousands. This time, Harding visited forty-two countries from Bhutan to Zanzibar and danced in all of them with enthusiastic locals. The first clip was shot in San Francisco on a cross-country road trip, and then he set out abroad. The round-the-world journey required six months and seventy-six airplane flights. The last clip was shot in Seattle a few days after his final landing.

A World Wide Rave: when people around the world are talking about you, your company, and your products.

WHAT'S THE ROI FROM ELEVEN MILLION HAPPY PEOPLE?

I particularly like that the sponsor of the trip only gets a two-second “thank you” from Harding at the very end. Stride’s logo did not appear throughout the video (which is what most companies would have insisted on), and he didn’t do anything to overtly promote the sponsor, like holding Stride gum in his hand while he danced. The product never appears, and yet the video is so powerful that you’re almost compelled to watch until the end and see the credits, where Stride is finally mentioned.

Most importantly, the people at Stride did not require registration to see the video. They did not insist on a marketing ROI (return on investment) that was tied to “sales leads.” Stride stepped back and let the World Wide Rave spread, and tens of millions of people were exposed to the brand as a result.

“When the 2008 video was released, the 10,000 people on my invite list all got a link to the video, helping to generate a lot of early views,” Harding says. “There has been a lot media coverage. *The New York Times* did a story on the front page of the Arts & Leisure section, and six stills of the video were shown as photos. It was a really generous piece. That fed more media because so many members of the media read the Times. Lots of other stories came out, and many new people went to the video.”

Where the Hell is Matt? (2008) is a smash-hit World Wide Rave (more than 11 million people have seen it on YouTube and on [his site](#)). *But if Harding or Stride gum had tried to use the sorts of measurement that most executives insist on, this success never could have happened. Without their willingness to lose control, the video never would have been made, let alone become a hit.*

WHAT DO YOU HAVE TO LOSE (BUT CONTROL)?

You don't have to be a dancing machine to have nothing to lose.

Yes, it's inspiring that the Matt Hardings of the world can reach millions and transform their lives and businesses through the power of the World Wide Rave. But even the biggest, most conservative, multi-national corporations will find appropriate ways to capture the power of word-of-mouth to spread their ideas in new ways and generate buzz that leads to increased sales. Hell, they might even have some fun and reconnect with their customers along the way. (When was the last time *your* marketing was fun?)

Creating a World Wide Rave, in which other people help to tell your story for you, is a way to drive action. One person sends it to another, then that person sends it to yet another, and on and on. Each link in the chain exposes your story to someone new, someone *you* never had to contact yourself! It's like when you're at a sporting event or concert in a large stadium and somebody starts "the wave." Isn't it amazing that *just one person* with an idea can convince a group of 50,000 people to join in? Well, you can start a similar wave of interest online, a World Wide Rave. You can create the triggers that get millions of people to tell your stories and spread your ideas.

But first, you've got to lose control.

First, you've got to lose control.

SPREADING IDEAS AND TELLING STORIES

For your ideas to spread and rise to the status of a World Wide Rave, you've got to give up control. Make your information on the Web totally free for people to access, with absolutely no virtual strings attached: no electronic gates, no registration requirements, and no email address checking necessary.

Yes, this advice will come as a shock to many marketers steeped in the tradition of direct mail advertising—a form of marketing that always requires disclosure of personal information via a toll-free phone call or business reply card (“BRC” in the lingo of direct mail gurus). Marketers who learned the secret workings of BRCs, the ins and outs of buying contact lists, and the subtle coercion tactics required when creating “offers” naturally want to transfer these esoteric skills (some might even say “black arts”) to the Web. As a result, many folks create valuable and interesting information online and then do the exact wrong thing to distribute it—require viewers to provide personal information first. This is a terrible strategy for spreading your ideas. (However, if your *only* goal is to build a mailing list, then the strategy may still be valid. But how many companies are in the business of just building a list?) When you make people give an email address to get a white paper or watch a video, only a tiny fraction will do so; you will lose the vast majority of your potential audience.

You need to think in terms of spreading ideas, not generating leads. A World Wide Rave gets the word out to thousands or even millions of potential customers. But only if you make your information easy to find and consume.

SALES LEADS ARE THE WRONG GOAL

I'm often confronted with the issue of how to measure an online initiative's results. Executives at companies large and small as well as marketing and PR people tend to push back on the ideas of a World Wide Rave because they want to apply old rules of measurement to the new world of spreading ideas online.

The *old rules of measurement* used two metrics that don't matter for spreading ideas, especially online:

1. We measured "leads"—how many business cards we collected; how many people called the toll free number; how many people stopped at the tradeshow booth; and how many people filled out a form on our Web site, providing their email address and other personal information.
2. We measured "press clips"—the number of times our company and its products were mentioned in mainstream media like magazines, newspapers, radio, and television.

While applying these forms of measurement might be appropriate offline, using them to track your success on the Web just isn't relevant; they don't capture the way ideas travel. Worse, the very act of tracking leads hampers the spread of ideas. People know from experience that if they supply their personal information to an organization, they're likely to receive unwanted phone calls from salespeople or to find themselves on email marketing lists. Most won't bother. In fact, I have evidence from several companies that have offered information both with and without a registration requirement that when you eliminate the requirement of supplying personal information, the number of downloads or views goes up by as much as a factor of *fifty*. That's right—if you require an email address or other personal information, as little as two percent of your audience may bother to download your stuff. Obsessing over sales leads and press clips is likely to be counter-productive and is highly likely to lead to failure of your World Wide Rave.

For decades, companies have offered Web content as lead bait. But the goal should be to get the word out about your organization, not to misuse the Internet for the sake of an outdated technique.

Similarly, measuring success by focusing only on the number of times the mainstream media write or broadcast about you misses the point. If a blogger is spreading your ideas, that's great. If ten people email a link to your information to their networks or post about you on their Facebook page, that's amazing. You're reaching people, which was the point of seeking media attention in the first place. But most PR people *only* measure traditional media like magazines, newspapers, radio, and TV, and this practice doesn't capture the value of sharing.

To create a World Wide Rave, forget about sales leads and ignore mainstream media. Instead, focus on spreading your ideas. Make your information totally free, with no registration required.

Here are some questions that *can* help you learn to measure a World Wide Rave:

1. How many people are getting exposed to your ideas?
2. How many people are downloading your stuff?
3. How often are bloggers writing about you and your ideas?
4. (And what are those bloggers saying?)
5. Where are you appearing in search results for important phrases?
6. How many people are engaging with you and choosing to speak to you about your offerings?

RETURN ON INVESTMENT MAKES YOU BORING

Once you understand that the metrics of a World Wide Rave are different from what marketers typically measure, you'll need to think differently about ROI. Again, I often get pushback on this idea from executives, who demand that their marketing ROI be measured in precise financial terms. It seems that business schools teach their students to obsess over measurement and insist that marketing results be treated in the same way you'd treat electricity use at company headquarters or revenue from the Canadian market. These executives want to know exactly how much revenue each dollar spent on marketing is producing, and they want to see it in detailed campaign-by-campaign spreadsheets.

For many executives, an obsession with ROI is just a convenient excuse to shy away from something new and untested.

This trend is causing marketers to become too cautious and boring. Measuring ROI for everything means choosing techniques like direct mail programs, where you can measure *exactly* how many business reply cards are returned. While that information is useful, lusting after it often prevents marketers from investing in efforts that could become World Wide Raves—solely because traditional measurement data are not available from those efforts.

For many executives, an obsession with ROI is just a convenient excuse to shy away from something new and untested. Yet that's exactly what the best ideas for creating a World Wide Rave are—new and untested.

Here's the contradiction. The same executives who insist on ROI measurements from marketing departments happily invest huge sums of money on other things whose returns are also incalculable from an ROI perspective, like the lobby of the building, the fresh coat of paint in the hallway, or even the accounting staff. When CEOs and executives resort to ROI excuses, I ask, "What's the return on investment of the army of landscapers who are constantly at work on the plantings around your corporate headquarters?" Usually my question is met with embarrassment.

Take a chance. Make the assumption that if millions of people are sharing your ideas (that's a number you can measure), then some percentage of them will buy your products.

MAKE IT FREE

Search for the phrase “[email marketing metrics](#)” on Google and you’ll find nearly 400,000 hits plus dozens of paid advertisements. This is a hot search phrase because people who want to manage an email marketing program for their organization—small business owners, consultants, people who work in marketing departments of large organizations, and nonprofit employees—often search for important email marketing benchmarks (things like click-through rates and the best days to begin campaigns). With so many companies fighting over the high search positions for the phrase “email marketing metrics,” only one can be the top dog. Meet MailerMailer, the company that controls the Number 1 position. MailerMailer sells an online tool that makes it easy to create, send, and track email campaigns. The tool is used by musicians, restaurants, software companies, event promoters, nonprofits, and other organizations. This small company is Number 1 because of its free *Email Marketing Metrics Report*.

Of course, it’s no surprise at all that the Number 1 spot for an important search term was garnered by a company that creates some very valuable information and offers it to anyone for free. “We analyzed over 300 million opt-in email newsletters and campaigns sent by a sample of over 3,200 MailerMailer customers in the second half of 2007,” says Raj Khera, CEO of MailerMailer. “This free report reveals the most recent email marketing trends.” For example, readers will discover which industries experienced the highest percentage of email opening rates and how frequently to send them to reach the most people. Chock-full of charts and graphs, the valuable data made available here for free would likely command a price of \$10,000 (or more) if a consulting firm put it out.

TWENTY OR ONE: WHICH IS BETTER?

The free *Email Marketing Metrics Report* has helped MailerMailer create a World Wide Rave. “Our metrics are now quoted all over the Web, in places like eMarketer and Marketing Sherpa, and by ad agencies, companies, bloggers, reporters, analysts, and others who use it for data in their stories and reports,” Khera says. “We’ve seen over 500 blogs pointing to the data. There was a tremendous amount of industry recognition about the report.”

The *Email Marketing Metrics Report* was first released October 2004. “Initially we required registration to get the report [downloaders needed to supply an email address], and we got some initial interest, but not big numbers,” Khera says. “When we opened it up and made the report available totally free, we found that twenty times the number of people downloaded it. Thousands of people were getting it.”

Wow, stop and think about that. Many companies put registration requirements on their most valuable information. But here is real evidence that, if you do, only a fraction of potential readers or viewers will request it. As I mentioned earlier, other companies have cited to me that as few as one person in fifty will download something if personal information is required, compared to when the same information is offered totally free.

Clearly, having one of the most popular and most referenced sources of email marketing data is a huge marketing asset. When people read about email marketing metrics in a report from MailerMailer, they naturally consider purchasing MailerMailer products and services to help them with their email marketing programs. Right in the report is a free trial offer for MailerMailer services. “We’re one of the top ten companies in the email marketing space,” says Khera. “The product promotes itself.”

ARE YOU SMOKING DOPE?

You may have noticed a fascinating parallel in the music industry. For decades, selling music has been about *exerting control* over music copyright. Before the Web came along, it was fairly difficult to find illegal copies of music because you needed the physical record or tape. You had to either ask friends to make a copy or go to a dodgy part of town to find a cassette-tape or CD seller on a street corner. When the Internet made possible the easy dissemination of music, the geniuses in the music industry clamped down in control mode—the only way they know how to market and sell. They forced Napster, a centralized music-sharing service that could have been a boon to the industry, to close. This closure forced illegal copying even further underground, where it is virtually impossible to monitor. Today, many players in the industry patrol YouTube and other sites in order to say “no.” Instead of looking at the new medium of electronic information as an opportunity, they see it as a threat to the old way of selling. The music industry says: “Give away our music? No way! Are you smoking dope? Why would we do that?”

Think about that: the music industry is trying to prevent the spread of its product!

But if you step back and look at the ways musicians make money besides the recordings—concerts, endorsement deals, merchandise (such as \$35 t-shirts), and “souvenir” packaging of the music (booklets included in a CD case, for example), not to mention royalties for the use of music in television, movies, and advertising—you start to suspect that clamping down with rigid controls may not be the best strategy. Think about that: the music industry is trying to prevent the spread of its product!

If I were a music executive (or musician), I'd make much of my music available for free online, and I'd encourage people to share it. I would have the confidence that providing music for free would drive sales of my other products. Many unsigned bands are prospering with this strategy through their own MySpace pages or Web sites, and some are finding absolutely tremendous success.

THE SONG REMAINS THE SAME? OR GREATEST STORY EVER TOLD?

This idea of offering free access to music to promote artists is not new. Starting in the 1960s, the Grateful Dead encouraged concertgoers to record their live shows, establishing “taper sections” where fans’ equipment could be set up for the best sound quality. The band was happy to have Deadheads trade tapes and make copies for friends. The cult of the Grateful Dead concert became a pre-Internet World Wide Rave, driving millions of fans to the band’s live shows for over thirty years and generating hundreds of millions of dollars in revenue.

Contrast the Grateful Dead and their open attitude to that of Led Zeppelin and their current label, Warner Music Group. The BBC reports that 20 million people wanted to purchase tickets to the historic Led Zeppelin reunion show held at the O2 Arena on December 10, 2007. Needless to say, the single show (rather than a multi-night engagement or entire tour) left many disappointed fans unable to witness the band’s first stage performance in nineteen years.

Immediately after the show, grainy, low-fidelity clips appeared on YouTube and were eagerly watched by fans. I was one—hoping to see how the band had changed since I’d seen them as a teenager in June 1977 at New York City’s Madison Square Garden. Alas, Warner pulled down the clips within hours, claiming copyright infringement.

These music executives actively tried to stop a World Wide Rave!

In my opinion, they completely underestimate a rabid fan base’s power to help sell legal recordings and drive interest in a band. I am absolutely confident that the buzz generated by the concerts sold millions of dollars’ worth of Led Zeppelin recordings in the weeks after the concert. The availability of YouTube clips would have enhanced sales. Bands and labels shouldn’t worry about low-quality fan tributes. I, for one, am replacing my vinyl recordings with Led Zeppelin CDs, and I’m sure many other people are as well (and some are going the other way, getting new vinyl to replace CDs, because

records are considered superior by many audiophiles). And all because we've been briefly re-exposed to the power of this band, which we may have ignored for several decades, via fleeting images of a concert we would have traveled halfway around the world to see if tickets had been available.

The music industry needs to rethink its knee-jerk legal impulses to clamp down on fans with draconian measures and to consider instead the power of the Web to sell music. Lighten up. Fans are promoting bands for you ... for free.

If you want to remain relevant in an always-on, fan-centric, YouTube world, you need to embrace—not restrict—your most important supporters.

If you want to remain relevant in an always-on, fan-centric, YouTube world, you need to embrace—not restrict—your most important supporters. You need to believe in the power of a World Wide Rave to sell your products and services.

Of course, the music world serves as just one example. The same ideas apply to everything on the Web. John Wiley & Sons, the publisher of my book *World Wide Rave*, was thrilled when I suggested making parts of it available for free in this manifesto you are now reading. I'm happy to give away free e-books, manifestos, write a blog, and allow people to record my speeches—all techniques that help my ideas spread. My publisher and I know that free information sells books because people love to get a taste of what they will be buying.

The free publicity that's generated by people like you reading this e-book will likely result in some people wanting more, so they may purchase a copy of *World Wide Rave*. But if we had clamped down with controls, you wouldn't be reading this and would probably never have heard of my print books.

Free information can be worth millions of dollars, and if you insist on maintaining control, you're missing a tremendous opportunity to harness that power.

STOP MAKING EXCUSES

Excuses.

I constantly hear excuses.

Marketing people have excuses for why they can't create a World Wide Rave. CEOs, company presidents, and other executives have excuses for why their particular product, service, or organization doesn't have potential to spread online. Authors and musicians offer excuses for why their books or music aren't selling. Often, the excuse comes to me like this: "But David, we're a _____. We can't do that." You can fill in the blank with *your* organization's excuse. I've already heard most of them: big company, small company, public company, venture-funded company, nonprofit, church, accountant, blood donation center, indie rock band, famous university, blah, blah, blah. Sorry, but they're all just excuses.

If you're obsessed with ROI measurements that worked in an offline world, then you're just making an excuse. If you worry about losing control of your message, then you're making an excuse.

Another excuse I hear a lot these days comes from people pointing to polls and research reports that ask questions such as "Do you read blogs?" or "Do you use social media?" or "Do you go to video-sharing sites?" Often the data show rather small use compared to those who, say, use search engines or email.

This sort of data is misleading and dangerous to an organization's overall marketing and PR efforts, dangerous enough that I've decided to close with this point. Why? Because these data are used by resistant executives to justify sticking exclusively to the methods that worked decades ago, like image advertising, direct mail, and the yellow pages. I frequently hear CEOs, CFOs, and VPs of marketing say things like: "See, social media, blogs, and YouTube are not important, so we won't do them here. They're a waste of time." Others say: "I don't read blogs, so how important are they?"

These excuses miss two tremendously important points.

First, practically everyone uses Google and other search engines regularly, and the searches frequently return blog posts, YouTube videos, or other social media content high in the results. So even though people may report “no” when asked if they use social media like blogs and video-sharing sites, nearly everyone has found this content via search.

A World Wide Rave—having others tell and spread your story for you—is one of the most exciting and powerful ways to reach your audiences.

Similarly, when people who are not regular users of social media ask their (non-social-media) networks for advice, they often do it via email. Frequently the answers that come back include URLs to company and product pages. And those links from friends, colleagues, or family members often include blog posts and other social media content. A mother may ask her friends a question like: “What’s the best baby stroller to buy?” The answer may include a link to a blog post or a site with an embedded video. Again, the person asking for advice probably didn’t even know she’d been sent to a blog or video-sharing site.

Many people who reach information via search don’t know what sort of “media” they’re enjoying! Don’t let your bosses diminish the hidden value of social media as search engine fodder and as valuable sources of information that people share with their networks.


A World Wide Rave—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 that power, 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.

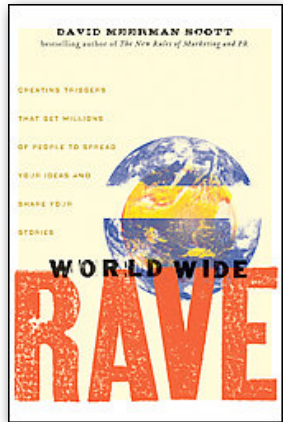
The biggest requirement is that you change your behavior, so let me remind you of the most important strategies for successful marketing in a world of social media:

- Stop obsessing over the old measurements of sales leads and marketing ROI.
- Make your valuable online content free and registration-less.
- Give away lots of good information (videos, photos, data, graphs, audio, blogs, e-books, and the like) to enthusiastic or curious people interested in your products and services.
- Encourage an organizational culture of sharing.

While this all seems simple enough, it's practiced surprisingly rarely. But those who adopt these ideas usually win big.

Most importantly, you can only be successful if you lose control. Your challenge is to let go of your excuses and corporate inhibitions. Go out and create something interesting that people will be eager to share.

What do you have to lose? (Besides control.) 



BUY THE BOOK

Get more details or buy a copy of David Meerman Scott's [World Wide Rave](#).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Meerman Scott is a marketing strategist, entrepreneur, keynote speaker, seminar leader, and 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*, which is being published in 22 languages. He is also the author of the hit new book *World Wide Rave*.

Check out his popular blog at www.WebInkNow.com or follow him on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/dmscott>. (Portions of this e-book appear in *World Wide Rave*, the new book by David Meerman Scott, published by John Wiley & Sons, Inc. March 2009. ISBN 9780470395004. Used with permission.)

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