*n*Lightened **Thoughts**

Seven Key Components of Viral Marketing

VIRAL MARKETING IS ONE OF THE MOST POWERFUL WAYS TO PROMOTE YOUR BUSINESS OR PRODUCT, SO IT'S IMPORTANT TO CONSIDER SEVERAL TECHNIQUES THAT WILL IMPROVE THE CHANCE OF SUCCESS. THESE APPLY TO ALL TYPES OF MARKETING, NOT JUST THE VIRAL TYPE.

Creating a viral marketing campaign isn't easy, but it's also not impossible. Here are seven important techniques that you should consider when designing your program.

1. **Design with viral marketing in mind:** *Vital* and *viral* differ by just one letter. To be viral, what you design must be vital. A brochure-like device is not enough for a viral marketing campaign.

   No matter whether you have a still image, an electronic publication, or a video, if it's effectively just a brochure, it will create no buzz. There is no guaranteed method for creating an effective viral marketing piece, but it must be vital to go viral. Create some excitement!

2. **Encourage pass-alongs:** Some people will pass your message on even if you offer no incentive, but an incentive usually helps.

   People like to be rewarded. What can you offer to encourage people to pass your message on to others? Consider free membership to a private section of your website or additional articles or e-books at no charge for those who spread the word.

Several enterprising marketers offer buyers the opportunity to receive free products when they are developed. Captive Cables, for example, lets customers know when they're about to launch a new product and offers to send one for review. The customer has to order it through Amazon using a coupon code that reduces the cost to zero and provides free shipping.

Customers are encouraged to review the item on social media.

3. **Make it interesting and worthwhile:** If you use an article or an e-book to promote your business, it must not be boring.

   Self-serving, self-congratulatory drivel will not be received well. The person who

receives it probably won't even finish reading it and certainly won't pass it along.

On the other hand, if what you offer is useful and informative, people will share it even without any incentives.

4. **Offer rewards:** Aim rewards at people who you want to attract. Offering a free download or a free e-book to those who respond is often a good way to boost participation.

   People love free things. The gift must be relevant to the subject of your campaign, but it doesn't need to be expensive. *Perceived value* is far more important than actual cost.

5. **Ask:** It's easy to forget that a simple line like this can convince people to spread the word: *If you find this information useful, please consider telling others about it.*

   The first time legendary congressman Tip O'Neill ran for a public office, a neighbor told him that she would vote for him, "even though you didn't ask me." When O'Neill protested
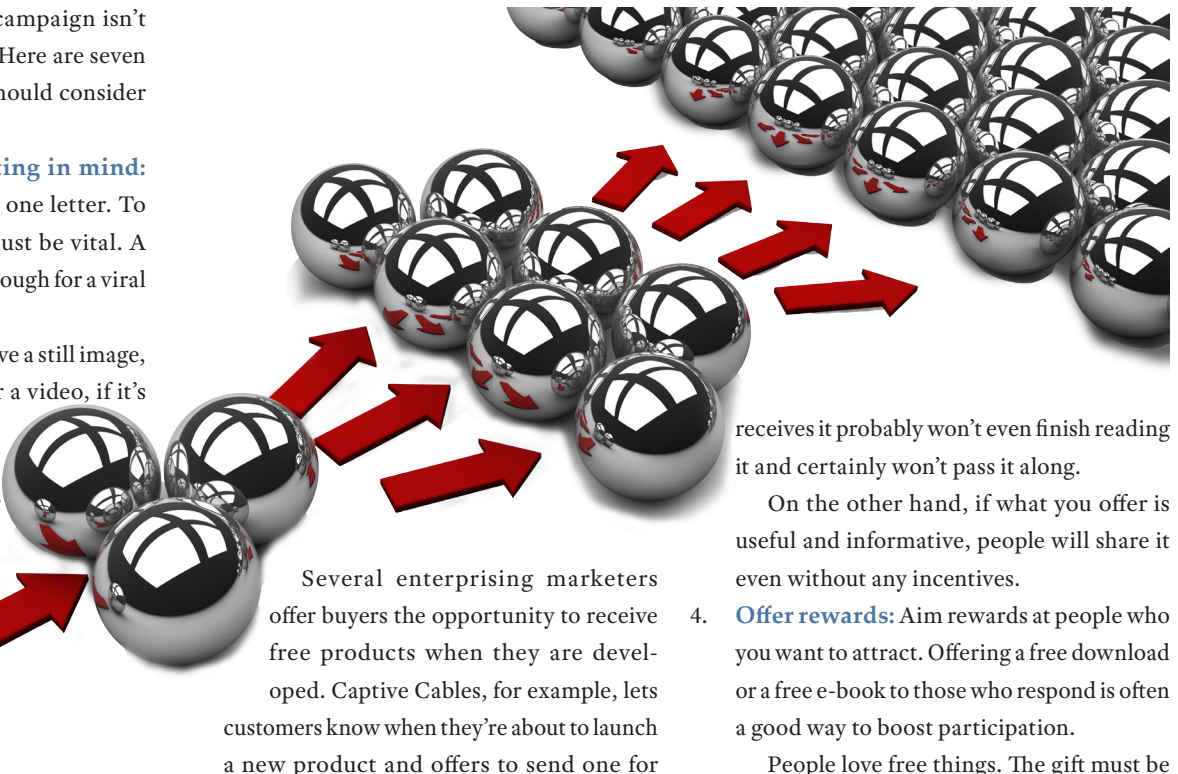
that he had known her since he was a child, had shoveled her walk and cut her grass, and didn't think he had to ask for her vote, she replied, "Tom, let me tell you something. People like to be asked." O'Neill lost that election, but he never forgot the lesson and he never again lost a campaign.

Asking can do wonders. Many people don't pass your message along simply because they didn't think it was needed. You didn't ask for it. So make sure you ask people to invite others to visit your website.

6. **Diversify:** It's easy to think that one gigantic campaign will cut through the clutter. So you try it, results are disappointing, and you give up. How many successful people do you know who achieved success with just one try?

Anyone who has ever sold advertising has dealt with business owners who say *Yeah, I tried advertising once and it didn't work.*

Instead of focusing all of your effort on a single promotion, establish a process for creating, promoting, testing, and measuring continual viral marketing efforts.

Some will work. Some won't. Repeat the ones that worked. Modify the ones that failed and try again.

7. **Experiment:** This is closely linked to the previous point. Trial end error is one of the basics of most successful businesses. Test different methods. Change things up and see which ones work better.

For example, if you write an article and see poor results, try a new title, additional

content, add photos or other images, make it shorter, or make it longer. Test various combinations and measure the results to find out what works and what doesn't.

Ongoing promotions are the difference between an active, thriving business and one that's failing.

The more successful you are in promoting your product or service, the more popular and profitable your business will be. Viral marketing can be an effective part of your success story. Ω

How Email Scams Take Over Your Computer

Dangerous messages seem to crawl out from the undergrowth this time of year. Let's look at how they work.

The message shown here claims to be a payment reminder from Macmillan Publishing in England. It says a payment of either $666.39 or £666.39 is overdue, but represents it as ¡666.39. That's clue number one that it's a fraud.
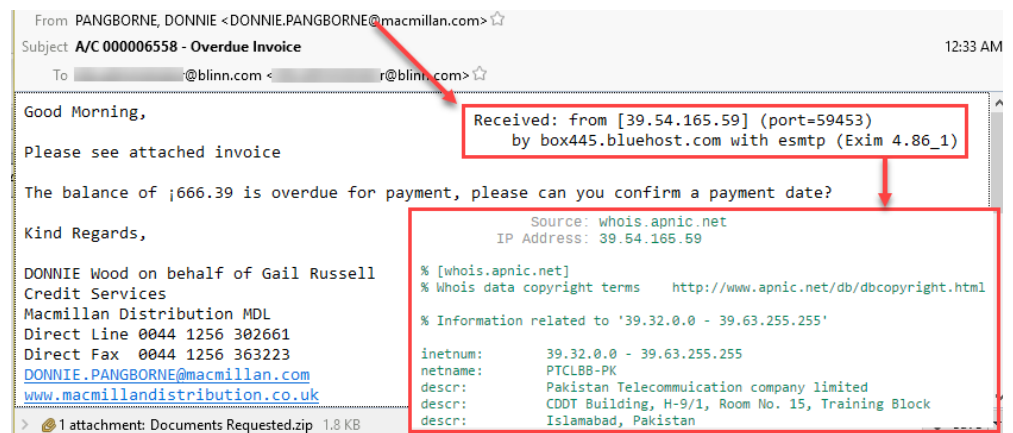
An accounts payable clerk should know enough to find an invoice before paying and that is the point of the attached zip file. It's "the invoice".

Open the zip file, open the file contained in zip, and the computer will be infected.

The most convincing part of the document is the "From" line: PANGBORNE, DONNIE <DONNIE.PANGBORNE@macmillan.com>. It cites the Macmillan domain, but employees who have received even minimal security training should know not to trust this information because it can be easily changed. And by "easily", I mean that the average high school student would be able to do it or find out how with a bit of searching.

The inset image shows the IP address of the originating server. I obtained that by examining the message source. The message came from 39.54.165.59 on port 59453. The port number is unusual, but let's disregard that for now because it's the IP address that reveals the fraud.

To my great lack of surprise, I found that the IP address belongs to the Pakistan Telecommui-

cation Company. At this point, an attentive and conscientious accounts payable clerk would simply discard the message.

The Mechanism

Zip files are harmless by themselves, but they can contain malicious content.

I saved the zip file and examined it. The file inside was a Javascript file. Zip files don't automatically extract their contents and, even if they did, the Javascript file would be harmless until the user clicked it. So two mistakes are needed.

First, you have to save the zip file and extract the contents. Second, you need to double-click the Javascript file. But how does that work?

It's surprisingly simple: Double-clicking a Javascript file (which may be disguised as something else) will launch the Windows Script Host (WSH) and execute the script. Scripts run by WSH are not sandboxed as they would be in a browser.

By default, Windows hides the extensions of "known" file types. So *MyStuff.doc.js* will appear to be *MyStuff.doc* in Windows Explorer. This kind of obfuscation goes all the way back to the original "I Love You" malware that caught a lot of people (including me) by surprise so many years ago.

It's important to be vigilant with every email message that comes in, but it's wise to be even more vigilant this time of year. Ω