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Book Review

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MarketingSherpa Toolkit: How to: Viral Market

MarketingSherpa, 2008; 69pp; Spiral bound; \$97 from the publisher
ISSN: 1559-5137

The viral marketing (VM) concept is not all that difficult to comprehend: Develop some type of promotion that is so clever, fascinating, just plain fun and/or completely bizarre that it generates ‘buzz’ and gets passed along perhaps thousands (even millions) of times by viewers to their friends by e-mail and/or social networks. As a result it drives more and more people to the source website, and if things go well it helps enhance that site’s brand, increase sales and ultimately improve profits.

The VM concept sounds quite attractive, of course, but how does one actually develop a VM campaign? In other words, how does one

The book's objective is achieved by combining research, expertise and case studies of successful VM campaigns

do VM? The fundamental objective of MarketingSherpa's *How to Viral Market* toolkit is, through a combination of research, expert savvy and case studies of successful VM campaigns, to help answer that question.

The book encompasses four sections.

1. *Overview.* This section defines VM, examines characteristics of good and bad VM campaigns, discusses how one can measure the success of VM campaigns, reviews the VM campaign budgeting process and presents an overview of the process of planning a VM campaign.
2. *The planning phase.* This section, which includes a number of pages of step-by-step instruction, is the heartbeat of the book. It discusses the creation of personas to help define target audiences, demonstrates how to 'seed' VM campaigns and examines a variety of VM tactics, including microsites, games, polls, surveys, quizzes, contests, widgets, eCards, podcasts, audio and video. It also delineates four factors that enable the online marketer to predict viral success.
3. *Spreadsheets and tools.* This utilitarian section provides worksheets designed to estimate VM labour and other campaign expenses. It also includes a timeline for VM, as well as a chart for tracking and reporting campaign results.
4. *Glossary.* The fourth section of the book includes definitions of VM terms.

A close look at strategies relating to game and video VM campaigns

Some observers believe that VM campaigns are quite expensive. But are they? Allowing for successful surprise campaigns that no one could have predicted, this book includes the results of surveys of companies that have taken VM seriously. These results provide actual cost ranges for a VM campaign, suggest which media appear to have the greatest potential for producing the desired results and suggest the types of campaign where goals have the greatest likelihood of being attained. Specifically, the book points out that direct sales and an immediate revenue increase are *not* goals that VM campaigns can quickly achieve; instead, lead generation, brand recognition and brand 're-invigoration' are more realistic targets.

Many will find the content of this book to be especially helpful in outlining successful and unsuccessful strategies related to game and video VM campaigns. Included in the discussion are specific recommendations for using YouTube, complete with suggestions regarding what video, lighting and sound equipment to use. A VM video checklist is also provided.

Other beneficial features of this book include the following:

Features include: SherpaTips, Case studies and Success Predictors

- *SherpaTips*, which are scattered throughout the book, and which normally include items that frequently are overlooked by uninitiated viral marketers.
- *Case studies*, 16 of which are discussed in some detail in the book itself, while some are the subject of papers located on the MarketingSherpa website www.marketingsherpa.com. While many

discussions of VM deal with the topic solely on a theoretical level and lack real-world examples, this book comments on actual VM campaigns. And while the authors chose not to provide URLs to the examples book itself, one can easily locate most of them by searching on the appropriate keywords on Google or YouTube.

- *Success Predictors*, which is a special report on how to predict the success of a VM campaign. In this discussion, the book outlines the ‘social velocity’ system developed by Jalali Harman, founder of social media firm Yovia. In one study, Harman’s company asked, ‘What causes something to “go viral”?’ Their findings show that there are many variables that, when working in unison, are necessary for the fostering of viral growth. Yovia reduced these variables down to what they call ‘The Four Cs of Social Velocity:’ Content, Connections, Community and Conversion. This is not the proper venue for discussing these variables (what some might call the ‘science of VM’) in detail, as the book itself deals with them.

The reviewers believe that *How to Viral Market* is one of the best books on the fundamentals of VM that they ever have reviewed. The book is a bit pricey, but for a firm that is serious about developing VM campaigns, which have great potential for success, the investment could have a substantial ROI. Indeed, the reader most likely will soon come to believe that this book is one of his/her most important guides to online marketing.

Ralph F. Wilson and James B. Pettijohn