

'10

Two Thousand and Ten
Digital Marketing Outlook



Society of
Digital Agencies

The Evolution of Digital Strategy

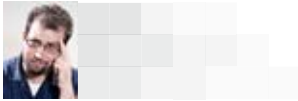
Section Contents

- i. 40% of Your Opportunity is Shifting to Mobile...Are You? *by* Brian Chiger, AgencyNet
- ii. The Social Landscape: Where We've Been, Where We're Going & What Do We Do When We Get There *by* Brian Wiener, 360i
- iii. Stop Spreading Virusues & Start Giving Gifts *by* Ivan Askwith, Big Spaceship
- iv. The Evolving Roles of Producer, Advertiser, and Audience in an On-Demand World *by* Dale Herigstad, Schematic

*The following articles and insights are purely the opinions of the authors and not to be interpreted as facts by SoDA.

A great digital campaign isn't made by technology alone; Strategy is vital. Here's some fresh thinking from the world of digital strategy.

Stop Spreading Viruses & Start Giving Gifts



By Ivan Askwith, Director of Strategy Big Spaceship

Agencies and clients alike often talk about “viral marketing” as if it’s something we choose to create. We describe viral as if it’s an inherent quality we can design into our campaigns, or a deliberate strategy we can execute on. But for the handful of “viral campaigns” that explode into cultural phenomena each year, hundreds of other efforts have little or no impact at all. In spite of this, we often continue to insist that we know how to “make things viral,” while also reassuring ourselves that some efforts “just catch on better than others.”

Unless we want to spend another year burning time and resources in the pursuit of that belief, it’s time to accept a difficult truth: viral isn’t a quality that we, as marketers, have the power to bestow. In fact, viral isn’t an inherent trait that advertising can have at all. Viral isn’t what a marketing campaign is, but how that campaign spreads. And when a campaign does achieve viral propagation, it’s not simply a function of what we do as designers and planners. Instead, it’s a function of deliberate choices that each consumer makes about what is worth sharing and why.

In that context, “viral” is a problematic way of thinking about marketing. As Henry Jenkins points out, viruses are transmitted whether their hosts wish to share them or not; they can’t be stopped, and the participants are helpless victims. Content, on the other hand, is only shared through intentional decisions. Unless consumers have a strong, personal motivation to share with each other, nothing gets passed along to anyone. If we want people to share things, we need to stop thinking in terms of “viruses” and start thinking in terms of “gifts” — things that people choose to give for specific reasons.

This might seem like simple semantics: when we say we want a viral campaign, we mean that we want marketing that will spread at an exponential rate similar to a virus. But when we insist on describing our work as viral marketing, we make two fatal mistakes: first, we forget that exponential pass-along between consumers is a result, rather than a strategy — the end, rather than the means — and

second, we focus on creating better content, rather than better understanding the motives of the people who will choose to share, or not share, that content.

Then, as we begin to plan for 2010, it’s in our best interests to stop thinking about viral marketing, which moves from person to person like a virus, and instead focus on why people choose to share things with each other. We need to understand the spread of media in terms of actively giving gifts, not passively transmitting viruses. And to do that, we need to understand consumer behavior on the consumer’s terms, rather than our own. For now, let’s call this new model “consumer-driven marketing.”

How & Why People Share

Consumer-driven marketing, like traditional word-of-mouth, relies on an exponential growth pattern. Someone encounters a piece of content and chooses to share it with several friends. Each friend, in turn, shares it with several more. From a marketer’s perspective, the critical moment occurs when the consumer chooses whether or not to spread something to others. And unfortunately, since these decisions are expressed through metrics and analytics, both agencies and clients are conditioned to understand this moment in simple “yes-or-no” terms: either the consumer shared something, or they didn’t.

It’s time to move past this oversimplified understanding and accept three important truths: First, people share things for their own reasons, not ours. When consumers tell friends about a brand, they’re not trying to help the brand; they’re trying to help their friends. At the same time, they’re also making a statement about themselves and the recipient: “I want you to understand that I found this interesting, and believe you will too.” When we want consumers to share things, we need to focus on understanding and supporting their motives, rather than pretending consumers can be convinced to do something for our benefit.

Second, when people share, it impacts their reputation and relationships. When we give a gift, it's because we assume it will have some value and relevance to the recipient. When it doesn't, we waste the recipient's time, reveal that we don't know them well enough to recognize what interests them, and lower the odds that they will be interested in the next thing we share. If we expect consumers to give our marketing content to each other as gifts, we need to make sure it has enough value to reflect well on the consumer who gives it.

Third, when people give gifts, they don't ask for favors in return. When giving gifts, we can't also ask for something without undermining the gesture or seeming to be selfish. It makes sense that consumers are reluctant to send overt advertisements to each other, since such ads "want something" from them. In order for our work to spread, we need to focus on giving a lot of value, and asking little in return.

It's also useful to understand that there are at least three specific scenarios in which people share content, each with distinct purposes, motives and behavior patterns:

1. Contributing (1-to-Many): When users participate in online interest communities, such as message boards or discussion-driven blogs, the act of sharing relevant content is often more casual and less deliberate. Within communities, where members share a common interest but have limited personal knowledge about other members, anything that might be interesting or useful has a good chance of being shared. At the same time, making valuable contributions within a community is an important way for members to "prove" that they belong, and the pride of being the first to discover something of value offers a powerful incentive to share.

2. Broadcasting (1-to-World): In more public spaces, such as Twitter, Facebook status messages and personal blogs, where consumers often speak without having an exact awareness of who they are speaking to, the act of sharing is more self-centric, and more about the person sharing than the person receiving. When a consumer shares something in these broadcast spaces, they generally offer an opinion to contextualize it, so that the act of sharing makes a statement about who they are, what they like, and how they wish to be perceived. In this context, consumers are likely to share anything that expresses their identities, opinions or strengths.

3. Gifting (1-to-1/Few): In more private, focused channels, such as email, IM and offline conversation, the act of sharing is most akin to gifting. Whether a person shares something will depend on how relevant and valuable it is to both the giver and the recipient, since the act of sharing something relevant — much like gossip — is intended to strengthen relationships and reinforce shared values. In this context, consumers are most likely to share anything that helps generate, strengthen or sustain connections.

What This Means for 2010

Rather than spending another misguided year trying to "engineer" viral campaigns that will propagate themselves, regardless of consumer intentions, it's time to refocus our marketing efforts to align with the way that people actually behave.

It's time to accept that all of our marketing efforts should start with an understanding of the needs and motives that guide consumer decisions and social behaviors, and not clever creative executions. We

need to stop thinking about a mass audience that can be influenced and guided, and start thinking about the individual people we want to engage, as well as the people they want to engage. And we need to understand that effective marketing is no longer about making consumers serve our agenda, but finding meaningful opportunities to serve theirs.

It's time to focus on creating value that consumers will have a personal stake in sharing with each other. We need to develop content that people will share because it reflects their personal values and sensibilities, helps them recognize others who share those values, and creates opportunities for satisfying interactions. We need to create services and experiences that people will use because they enable useful, meaningful and enjoyable social connections, or help them express their own personalities and identities, rather than making people into unwitting carriers of our taglines and brand propositions. We need to provide creative frameworks that let people express their own values and messages as a way of owning and aligning themselves with our brands. Above all, we need to stop asking people to talk about our brands, and start helping them talk through them.

When our campaigns meet those goals, the outcome will be both logical and inevitable: consumers will share them with each other, and the result will be an exponential increase in both brand engagement and endorsements. But when it happens, it will be because consumers got what they want from us, and not because we got what we wanted from them.

By Ivan Askwith, Director of Strategy Big Spaceship

BIG SPACESHIP™