

How to Implement Viral Marketing With Social Media Platforms

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Okay, so the last few nights I have been suffering from insomnia. It wasn't the typical seasonal insomnia I can look forward to every spring though. This insomnia was derived from gutting a book called the Tipping Point several times over.

This book basically is very well researched book on what it means to go viral and how several factors are required for anything, whether it be syphilis or that opus that took you 2 months to write or that product that you have just produced that is taking the world by storm to reach an epidemic.

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And after reading this, it has left me with a much clearer impression of what going viral or, getting popular really means, at least in the context of the internet.

What the book is really about is marketing though. And because it doesn't really differentiate online marketing from offline, I figured it would be a great subject to really get my hands into.

I should reiterate that the things I talk about are merely my opinions... theories....nothing more and nothing less. In other words, take it for whatever it is worth.

So what does it take for something to go viral/get popular...really?

According to the Tipping Point, there are 3 factors that make things go viral. This is across the board. It doesn't matter what subject you are dealing with. It doesn't matter if we are talking about epidemics such as the flu or that blog post you are hoping will set the world on fire.

The three factors are:

- The Law of the Few
- The Stickiness Factor
- The Power of Context

Law of the Few

I don't know about you but when I think about something going viral, I think of millions of people plugging something until it reaches critical mass. For example, in order for a digg post to make it to the front page, you would think that this would require hundreds of individuals to "digg" it.

But how do you get from point A, where you get your first plug, to point B, where the post has reached an epidemic? After all, the hardest part of going viral is to get the ball moving.

Well, the solution to this is the theory that it isn't the "many" who get the ball moving. It is actually a few people who will initially drive something like a post in order to move it. These people, as Malcolm describes, are three different potential personality types.

The Connector- The connector is the individual that has a huge network of acquaintances. In the blogging world, this could be something as simple as a website that has a huge amount of visitors. They are intricately connected because of the volume of people who come to their site. And usually, this type of person can easily propel something to go viral just by who they are connected with. From a social web perspective, the connector could also be someone who has a lot of reach with their peers...for instance, someone that can reach 6,000 people who are following them on Twitter

The Maven- The Maven is also a unique personality type. The Maven typically knows a lot about whatever they are involved in. Internet Marketers may call them “Gurus”. I like to call them know-it-alls (just kidding). The Maven is highly passionate about what they know and typically it shows. A lot of times the Maven and the Connector are one of the same in the blogosphere.

The Salesman- While Mavens and Connectors have the reach to connect, the salesman is the guy who will propel an idea. He/she has the uncanny ability to not only connect but can also sell the idea convincingly.

The Connector and the 6 degrees of separation

For all practical purposes, I am going to be referencing the connector as the key element for the internet. In all likelihood, the connector is usually also a maven for whatever niche he/she is in as well. The funny thing about the connector is that since they typically are connected to thousands of people, they can be a driving force for starting the ball moving in making something go viral. I would imagine that without them, most of us would be living in a black hole where no one would get noticed.

The connector is a bit different than the majority of us. If I tell someone that I like something and they will too, I may not get the same response if someone like Shoemoney did. This is mainly due to the credibility by volume theory.

We have all heard of 6 degrees of separation. But according to the book, where most go wrong is assuming that each degree is equal to the next. In reality, normally how people get connected through such few degrees is because of one or two connectors in our circle.

In other words, on the internet it is no different. In fact, the degrees are most likely down to 2 or 3...the world has gotten much smaller.

The reason why I even mention this is because when you are just starting out, in order to rise in ranks whether virally or through a will to simply succeed, the connectors are the most important element for gaining a position in your niche. In other words, if you can break the wall between you and the connector, then you should rise fairly quickly. Now, from a practical standpoint...

Let's say that you have just created a blog post and your goal for the post is to get it noticed by a lot of people...what would you do?

Most bloggers and marketers will use the traditional avenues of social bookmarks and other social platforms to get a new blog post noticed. But if you buy into the law of the few, this type of positioning isn't really that effective to set something to go viral....

The ideal situation would be for one of those “connector” types to link to you.

Now obviously, this is unlikely to happen since you are down here....and they are up there....in the blogosphere it is the equivalent of trying to reach a hollywood actor. You have no credibility so therefore, since you aren't proven, you are not even a blip on their screen. Nor will it likely happen even if you comment constantly on their blog or plug them on yours. Simply put, in most cases, they are far too busy to worry about someone else's ambition.

And this is where I think, personally, most bloggers don't get. Since the connectors are the people that will get you heard the fastest, most bloggers and webmasters go after them exclusively. However, they miss the mark because they are just one of many fighting for that bloggers attention.

What if, instead you went for the connectors that connect to the connectors? Wouldn't that be a better strategy for someone trying to rise in the ranks?

The same could be said for having affiliates sell your stuff...

You would think that the best thing that could happen to something you are selling is to have tons of individuals sell your stuff. However, the hard part is actually getting the ball moving. And just like the key bloggers who are integral to creating massive shifts in position, the affiliate world has major players that are able to shift the balance to your side.

These guys control a huge part of the proverbial affiliate pie. When they move, hundreds if not thousands of sales are made. If you can get one of the major affiliates to promote your item, then you can expect big gains very quickly. The challenge of course, comes with getting noticed by these so called uber affiliates.....

Which has got me to thinking...

Just because the uber affiliates seem so hard to reach doesn't necessarily mean that a small player can't make moves of their own. After all, the connectors are connected to smaller connectors who are connected to smaller connectors and so on and so forth, right?

For the affiliate or blogger who is just starting out, the key is to find the connections that the connectors make and slowly moving through the ranks until the connectors start to notice you. I know that that sounds like a no-brainer but I don't think that most bloggers or affiliates view it like that. I guess it is human nature to reach for the stars and hope that you will gain footing.

The more reasonable strategy would be to build a tower to the stars instead.

- Find other peers that are slightly more successful than you and network with them.
- Use their connections to climb higher in the ranks.
- Repeat this strategy until you are in the upper echelon.

The Stickiness Factor

It isn't enough to get noticed by your peers. The hard part is once you are noticed, living up to your new found fame may prove more challenging than getting there. In the Tipping Point, Malcolm gives some pretty good examples such as Sesame Street and Blues Clues to illustrate what it takes to be sticky.

Stickiness simply implies that once you are "there", whatever you have to say or are selling should be good enough for word of mouth to spread. For instance, if as a blogger, you got lucky enough for Darren Rouse to plug a post, you had better have content worthy enough to get linked back from the webmasters who may take a look at your page.

After all, just because Darren is a connector and a link would prove to be a powerful way to build traffic very quickly, if all you have is that one article then chances are you will be nothing more than a shooting star. Your 15 minutes of "fame" would come and go and the traffic will quickly dry up.

Using the affiliate route as an example...just because a Frank Kern or John Reese suggests your product to their minions doesn't necessarily imply that you are on your way either. The product had better be good enough to raise a stink in whatever niche you are in.

The "connection" is only a part of the equation. The connector can only suggest but in order to really get going, the people who are getting "connected" have to warrant the page or product as meritable enough to mention to their "connections".

And in this day and age, considering exactly how fast the internet moves, if you don't have all your i's dotted and t's crossed.... you blink & you will miss the chance.

The Power of Context and the Rule of 150

So, to summarize, the Law of the Few is critical to actually spreading information and the stickiness factor means that in order for it even be capable of spreading, it must be memorable and move people to acting. The final part of going viral is just as important....it is the power of context.

One of the most brilliant illustrations that Malcolm uses is Paul Revere's ride. Most of us know the story...Paul set out on a four hour horseride banging on doors with the message "the british are coming". But what if instead of setting off at night, Paul had instead made his famous ride in the middle of the day? Chances are that his horse ride was so successful because people were most likely in their beds asleep, making them much easier to reach. Think about it this way....had he rode in at noon, he probably wouldn't have reached near as many people and history, as we know it, may have been changed.

So, using this as an example, it would be safe to assume that Paul Revere's midnight ride made for his message to be recieved by far more people because of the context.

It is the little things that matter and that can actually be the difference between going viral and not.

What is really interesting to me is the Rule of 150 and how it applies to the Power of context.....

The Rule of 150 is basically the theory that 150 people is the maximum that any one person can have a genuinely social relationship with. Malcolm defines this "social" relationship as "the number of people that you would not feel embarressed about joining uninvited for a drink if you happened to bump into them in a bar."

What makes this even more interesting is that many tribes adhere to this rule. A group any larger and it may splinter into factions.

The Sisterhood of Ya-Ya is one of the best examples that Malcolm uses. Basically, the success of this book hinged on small pockets of women's book clubs. It started in Northern California but quickly spread across the U.S. What it essentially did was kept the book within small "clans" of less than 150.

So, what could a webmaster or product designer glean from this?... In every niche, there are pockets of websites that are somehow incestuously involved. They link up websites to each other and their audience seems to go inbetween the two. Even the A-list tend to link up to other A-list blogs.

Perhaps, by identifying and infiltrating these website circles, you may be able to bring more people into the fold that identifies with your own message. If you identify the circles, then you can infiltrate the social groups.

Of course, this sounds sinister when I use the word infiltrate but really it is anything but. After all, in many ways getting popular and becoming a "connector" yourself is key to going viral on the web at least. Can't get enough? Want more?

Here are some of my other articles that may interest you:

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