

## **VIRAL MARKETING TIPS**

“Viral marketing” is basically word-of-mouth/referral marketing via the Internet. From emails to video clips and games, marketers have developed this strategy with sometimes exponential results. As Thomas Baekdal, an internet coordinator, says, viral marketing usually has “500-1000 times greater impact than what you get from regular advertisements.”

We’ve gathered some information on the pros and cons of viral marketing, along with tips on making it more effective for you as photographers.

### **WHAT CAN IT DO FOR ME?**

Viral marketing does not necessarily guarantee a sale. For instance, some of the people who receive the forwarded link to your email, clip, or website promotion will just not be interested at the time. However, the increase in those seeing your message will increase your brand exposure. It gets your name noticed. What’s more, it usually becomes connected with the “referral,” the acquaintance who forwarded the message to the end reader (that can be both good and bad, depending on the relationship).

In addition, viral marketing can help drive traffic to your website. Whatever format your message is in, be sure to include a link to your company’s website. That way, those interested can learn more about you and be more exposed to your product line, services, quality, etc.

You can even develop loyalty programs, thanking those who forward your messages the most. Basically, this is the same as a word-of-mouth referral program. Whether it is VIP status or discounts, rewarding loyal customers can help them stay even longer and refer more often (as long as the service they receive stays the same!)

And viral marketing can be used by those with little or no marketing budget, as email is “an extremely fast and cost-effective marketing tool,” says Lynda Partner, CEO of GotMarketing.

### **TIPS FOR DOING IT RIGHT**

Just like word-of-mouth marketing, viral marketing is deceptively simple. But it requires more thought than blasting out your newest promotion or ad.

- **Concentrate on the content...the story**

Yes, you want to create a strong emotion (strong enough that the readers want to share it with others). However, creating a mini advertisement is not going to do that by itself. Consider the consumer-created ad clips on major company websites (such as Doritos’ contest for the Super Bowl commercial). Those clips were shared on YouTube and other places, not for the product, but for the humor and the people behind the clip.

You want to, instead, focus on creating and showcasing a good, attention-grabbing “story.” For Doritos, it was the story that their consumers cared enough to create their own commercials. For a photographer, perhaps it is the testimonial of a bride; montage of funny blooper shots interspersed with the real, professional images; or even a notice about the sweepstakes you’re having! (Just make sure to get model releases for such a use!)

If you post a message about a recent photo shoot and provide preview images, let the people involved know. They will likely shoot off links to that blog message to all their friends and family. The point is, the content will determine who sends it to whom. And it usually has to have a “fun” factor to it!

- **Be careful when you ask readers to forward something**

Although you can (and probably should) remind readers that they are free to forward your message on to others, remind them to send it only to those they believe would be interested. Otherwise, it could be interpreted as SPAM by some unsuspecting recipient who is not interested in photographic services at all.

- **Keep your brand image clear**

While the “story” should be the main focus of the email/clip, you should still include your company name, logo, and contact information. It both lends credibility to the message and makes you more recognizable, especially to those who don’t know you personally...as may well be the case if the message is forwarded on.

- **Make the “forward” link stand out**

To make it even more simple for your readers, you can embed a “forward” link in the message. Whether it is a clickable button saying “Click to send to others who will enjoy” or a plain hyperlink, it can increase the chances of it being forwarded.

You may even want to change the placement, size, color, wording of your “forward” link in each message you send. That way, it is always fresh...which is more likely to catch attention.

- **Keep the unknown recipients in mind**

Since you want this message or clip to be forwarded, you might end up with recipients who have never heard of you or your company. This is good! But does your message include enough information for these new people to know what you’re talking about? Make sure you specifically mention photography, or link to your photographic website. Don’t give your resume...rely on creating a combination of information and curiosity. But don’t be too vague, or you will be disregarded. Let the reader know what you are offering, or what is exciting or funny about this message, and show them where to get more information (your website is the best bet).

- **Make it sharable**

You want the message to be forwarded and shared beyond your own email list. That means you have to make it easy to share! Make sure the content is easily downloadable or copied; allow links to your website; allow publishing on YouTube and other networks; and so on.

You may even want to connect the message/clip with a blog (whether new or created). This can serve several purposes: One, customers can talk about it on your own site. Two, new people (recipients of viral marketing) can learn more directly from your current customers. And three, people can talk directly to you!

## RESOURCES

Baekdal, Thomas. “7 tricks to viral web marketing.” *Baekdal.com*. (November 23, 2006)  
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<http://www.marketingprofs.com/print.asp?source=/2/partner1.asp>.

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