

Going viral becomes cool again!

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Date : June 28, 2016



WHY IT'S OKAY TO SAY "VIRAL" AGAIN

"How are we going to make it go viral?"

It was a question that I dreaded hearing for years. And I wasn't alone. During the time that saw the rise of **social** media, the advent of "two way" **marketing** and the increased incidence of people being labeled "ninjas," there was a lot to be wary of.

It was a turbulent time, fraught with new **marketing** approaches, rampant insecurity of **marketing** budgets and a lack of overall understanding of what was happening to the consumer attention landscape. It was also an exciting time, because the old mass media model had finally been bucked and there was an appetite for **innovation**.

Marketers became unduly obsessed with the idea that "going viral" was the cure to all **marketing** ailments. But since then, interest has waned. In fact, Google Trends data shows that, from 2004 to 2016, search queries for "viral **marketing**" have decreased by 80%. Concurrently, we have also seen an increase in marketers' sophistication in and appetite for **marketing** accountability. There's a realization that it's not enough for **marketing** to be infective. It must be effective.

So while we may have taken a break from our obsession with "going viral" for now, effectively spreading our **brands** through word-of-mouth networks is still vitally important. After all, we know that **brands** with the highest levels of advocacy averaged 27% higher topline growth than the most criticized **brands**.

But don't be tricked into thinking that getting value from virality is as simple as racking up millions of views on so-called "viral videos." As Wharton Professor and Researcher, [Jonah Berger](#), points out, "85% of word of mouth is face-to-face. Only 7% is online." He also emphasizes the opportunity that **brands** have if they can make it into those word-of-mouth conversations: It's up to 30 times more effective than traditional **advertising** at helping things become popular. At Jack Morton Worldwide, we call this area of increased sophistication The New Viral.

Inherent in what makes New Viral **marketing** powerful is the fact that it:

- Leverages peer-to-peer implied endorsement, which carries weight with consumers,
- Encourages marketers to think about ideas that are, by **design**, worthy of being talked about, and
- Is efficient because it leverages the targeted sharing of content as an amplified media opportunity.

The predominant industry understanding of viral **marketing**—what we're affectionately referring to as "The Old Viral"—has actually been redefined and renamed several times. Popular definitions strayed from the way it was used to describe Hotmail's meteoric rise to the point that it simply became a euphemism for reaching a large audience through peer-to-peer sharing. Marketers have continually kept on eye on viral video charts and top viral videos of the year lists, which essentially reduces the term to a reference to video views.

At the same time, researchers and scientists, including the [MIT Sloan Management Review](#), came to the realization that "research suggests the term 'viral' **marketing** does not describe accurately what happens in the market." That led to the inventions of new terms like Jenkin's "spreadable media," Berger's "contagious" and Nelson-Field's "content diffusion."

For the sake of comparison and differentiation, we refer to this new understanding of virality, which benefits from nearly 20 years of evolutions since its initial creation, as "The New Viral." We've defined The New Viral as "Content or an idea that achieves success by gaining targeted engagement through advantageous contexts to achieve business goals."

We've identified four New Viral "prescriptions" that **brands** are seeing success with today, each of which should be considered for different scenarios:

1. **Microviral Targeting Brands** with specific, targeted audiences are favoring deeper engagement and targeted pass-along over broad, surface exposure to audiences.
2. **Conversational Carriers Brands** that have broad audiences can still create ideas that are **designed** to spread and impact the bottom line—beginning by thinking about the conversational context that will allow for the right conversations.
3. **Pandemic Proportions Brands** are focusing efforts on creating huge quantities and various manifestations of content across a plethora of different channels and optimizing in real-time.
4. **Chronic Content** Renewed focus is being placed on establishing relationships where consumers turn to **brands** for more than just a one-hit-wonder, instead seeking the **brand's** content out.

Of course understanding what The New Viral is only begins the journey forward to **brand** success. If you're interested in taking that journey with us and our clients around the world, we've written a guide called "[The New Viral: Effective, Not Just Infective](#)" and it's available [here](#). We'd love to hear your thoughts as you reflect on what it means to you—and we are completely comfortable if you want to ask us the previously forbidden question: "How are we going to make it go viral?"

This article first appeared in www.chiefmarketer.com