

# Share and share alike: How marketers can exploit infectious sharing behavior

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In the world of marketing, people who are thinking about sharing product information they find in online advertising are likely to first consider whether the information is relevant to friends and family in their social networks.

The notion of a piece of information, a video clip, amusing photo or informative email going "viral" was initially a purely organic concept where every consumers and users shared such an item to the point where few people would remain unaware of its existence. However, marketing and advertising executives quickly recognized the potential and now, it seems, spend a great deal of time and effort attempting to emulate the exponential awareness of this organic sharing. As such, there is a substantial body of research into what makes a natural digital entity "go viral" and how that process might be exploited by business for commercial gain. The not-for-profit and even government sectors are also keen to find success in this area.

James Coyle of Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, and colleagues point out that the old-school marketing techniques are not quite as sharp as they once were. "The effectiveness of the 'create once, run everywhere' traditional marketing method is blunted by the expansion of media options that now include consumer-controlled media online and on [mobile devices](#)," they explain in a forthcoming issue of the *International Journal of Electronic Marketing and Retailing*.

The researchers suggest that there are ways in which business and others

can readily tap into "word-of-mouth" marketing and the so-called web 2.0 world of [social networking](#) and sharing. Unfortunately, the team suggests, the reasons why some viral campaigns succeed where others fail remain a mystery. To gain new insights into the nature of online virality, the team conducted surveys of two audience types: high-tech business-to-business users and people seeking consumer health information.

The team was able to assess the degree to which people in each group was willing to share a given marketing item as well as looking at how much those people shared in general on the internet and offline. They also asked questions to gauge the degree of caution individuals revealed in choosing what to share with scant knowledge about its source or the validity of the content. The team also determined how much information filtering the users undertook as well as measuring their personal involvement in the item being shared.

"In our study, in two very different product categories increased product involvement was a significant predictor in increased likelihood of sharing information from an online ad, " the team says. Similarly, they add, involvement was "how much an ad made participants think of others in their social network also contributed to higher intentions for sharing."

**More information:** "Click here to share with a friend: a uses and gratifications approach to word-of-mouth marketing effectiveness" in *Int. J. Electronic Marketing and Retailing*, vol 4, 225-247

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