“MAKE IT SHARE”

Jeffrey Heilbrunn July 4, 2013

One important part of marketing today is to leverage the new technologies to their optimal advantage. The new technology of social media and more generally the internet and email, provide opportunities to generate conversations. This is built not only on the technology (medium) but also on the nature of more recent generational cohorts such as the Millenials and generation “c” who like to stay in touch, who like to converse, and who like to share experiences, ideas, opinions, and more. Marketers see the potential in all this; they see an explosion of word of mouth, considered by many to be the most honest, authentic and trusted of all forms of marketing communications.

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“Make It Share” is built on some combination of thinking and reading and considering I have done over the past few months. I acknowledge the influences of some of my favorite authors and creators of wisdom including Jonah Berger, Malcolm Gladwell, Philip Kotler, the Heath brothers, and many others. Their writings have combined in some way to form the thoughts that follow.

Sharing is quite simply to make join use of something. We find something and we often want others to be aware of the availability of this item. We share things, we share knowledge, and we share experiences and life.

We see the desire to share in every experience we share on Facebook; we share our pictures and experiences on Instagram; we share knowledge and experience on LinkedIn; we share our moments through Twitter; we give a thumbs up and comment on pictures and share videos on YouTube. This sharing behavior has become part of our daily lives, more so than ever before with the available technologies. This sharing behavior can be harnessed and leverage by business and marketers to gain highly effective (believable, trusted and authentic) marketing communications in a highly cost efficient manner.

# The Sharing Process

Most marketing textbooks devote a few pages to the basic process of communications. In the traditional model we have a SENDER who encodes a MESSAGE and that message gets sent through a MEDIUM and is decoded by a RECEIVER who may do something with the message and or provide feedback to the SENDER. There probably is not a principles of marketing textbook out there that does not in some way cover this model.

The process of “sharing” (for marketing purposes) is something similar. Let’s take a look at the sharing model.

* **The Marketer** … this is the party who wants to have their message shared and hopefully shared to the point where it goes viral, that it is spreading like crazy! The marketer needs to prepare her message with certain characteristics in mind to make it highly sharable.
* **The Sharer** … this is the person who uses their personal network or other available network to share the message. The message can be the actual message of the marketer (in the case of simply re-tweeting) or it can be a personally generated message that is based upon the essence of the marketer’s message. The Sharers can be influentials (as referred to by Gladwell) who hold a special position (perhaps of respect or notoriety); they can be people of stature due to their achievements to whom others gravitate; or they could be anyone with a sizeable network. Anyone with a following can be an important sharer including bloggers, highly connected individuals (in business these include those on LinkedIn with over 500+ connections), individuals with large numbers of friends, Twitter followers, etc. A recent example: a story in the Wall Street journal talked about a restaurant that asked patrons who were happy with a meal as served to take a picture and send it to their Instagram following, with the promise of a special offering in return for sharing. Minimum sharing requested was 1,000 to gain the best deal.
* **The “Sharing”** (that which is shared) …. That which is shared is called the “sharing” (by me anyway). It could be a recipe, a picture, an article, a video, or whatever. Jonah Berger in Contagious wrote about the Snapple Company and the trivia they put under the bottle caps as information worth sharing. Video’s on YouTube are often worth sharing if they are interesting, entertaining, informative, controversial or just plain cute (those darn cat videos) etc.

So what makes for a great sharing?

* Make it PAY … the act of sharing should give something to the person doing the sharing. The return can be in the form of social standing (it just makes the person look smart to share this); it can infer status (you are sharing something very special and only you are currently privy to this information or perhaps it is secret information that you are sharing); the pay can be tangible but beware that it not take on the appearance of a pay-off as this will not be good for either the marketer or the sender; the pay can confer some level of standing like a leader board…by sharing something and seeing the hits pile up, it can make you a viral marketing phenom!
* Make it ASSOCIATED … try to make your “sharing” tied to other bigger things. Some examples might help here. COKE has tied its brands to our memories of living a good life. I saw a commercial over the past few days for Bushes Baked Beans and they were sharing some recipes…the sharing however was tied to the 4th of July, to picnics, and celebrating the holiday. So the beans and the sharing get tied to the 4th of July. Corona is sharing good times with the image of owning the beach. Share the experience and joy of relaxation and a cold beer … at the beach, at your beach. For my friends and students in healthcare, the sharing of knowledge and testing for various health conditions is important and helps us to live a longer life. Now what might we associate this with to make it viral … perhaps to high school and college reunions where remembering good times and old friends, many who have left us already and perhaps prematurely, and who might have been able to come to the reunion if they had a wellness exam or whatever. The sharing might go viral when it is attached or associated to something bigger then itself.
* Make it Evocative …. The sharing will have greater velocity when it evokes feeling and emotions. The feelings of joy, love, laughter, helpfulness, surprise, mystery, and even the negative feelings of anger and hate and social ill ease. The propagandists of WWII were experts at fanning the fears that created group hate…can you use fear to create a climate good for marketing products? Think about the fear of not being considered a good parent, the fear evoked by the Got Milk? Campaign (it is the bad mother who does not take care of their children!). Games, fun, teams and standings … all part of the bragging rights of winning as a team and the joy of winning and playing together.
* Make it Remarkable …if something is truly remarkable, then others will make remarks about it and others will spread the viral word. Consider the intrinsic value of what is being asked to be shared. Something of value will be shared to the extent that the “sharer” will gain credit for sharing. Tell an awesome story and it will get retold a hundred times to a hundred people.
* Make it Easy (and Simple) to Share … I was talking in class today about product diffusion and thinking about its application as an idea to idea diffusion. The less complex we can make an idea or a story, the more easily it is shared. And the use of easy-to-share tools like Twitter can send a message into viral realms rapidly.
* Make it Visible/Observable (Easily Seen) … visibility attracts attention and grows sharing on an organic basis. Seeing is also very much authentic and believable. So use pictures and videos wherever possible and appropriate. We live in a very visual world …. While text is not dead, it is surviving only in the multi-media world. Newspapers are online, not being read in the old ways. The idea of the APPLE brand becomes highly recognizable and understood with the visuals from their website and the visual itself of an APPLE store. Seeing the APPLE brand logo light up on every computer in Starbucks is an important part of the branding and making the brand viral (seen everywhere, every day at a Starbucks near you). There is a story about this with Steve Jobs having to do with how the logo would appear when the APPLE laptop opens; when closed it is actually upside down to the owner but more importantly, and more virally, when opened, it is visible right side up and lit up to the people looking at the computer from across the room.
* Make it FRESH … keep your viral marketing efforts fresh and renewed on a regular basis. From new ads to new products, viral thrives on new. In fact, if there is a void, and the void does not get filled with new material, the void may get filled by questions and negativity. Even in the case of APPLE, when new product development slows and there is a void in the marketing of APPLE, the void will get filled by questions like, is APPLE still the great company it was under Steve Jobs? What has happened to APPLE?
* **The Medium**

Fifty years ago Marshall McCluen talked about the importance of the medium in his work, “The Medium is the Message”. While only a smallish percentage of Word-of-Mouth is passed along via social media, and while it is still in its infancy, there is no doubt that it is growing in importance daily.

In 1999, the Cluetrain Manifesto which I highly recommend as a read, foresaw the coming of the internet as a place for conversation, and for us, conversation can equate to word of mouth. If you get a chance, read the 95 theses of the manifesto as background. <http://www.cluetrain.com/cluetrain.pdf>

The Manifesto led to additional work by the authors and to a visualization of the internet as a place of conversation. This visualization has come to be known as the Conversation Prism. From the Prism we can see the domains of all the conversations.

<http://www.mktgsensei.com/AMAE/Internet%20Marketing/Conversation%20Prism.pdf>

Consider, based upon circumstances, using any of the following or other media for your viral work.

* + Facebook
  + WordPress
  + Yammer
  + Bebo
  + BlackPlanet
  + Formspring
  + RateMyProfessor
  + Twitter
  + YouTube
  + FlickR
  + BlogSpot
  + Epinions
  + HealthGrades
  + Scribd
  + Instagram
  + LinkedIn
  + iLike
  + Classmates.com
  + Habbo
  + Zebo
  + Kaboodle
  + Amazon
  + Mahalo
  + Flixster
  + Google+
  + MyLife
  + Tumblr
  + FourSquare
  + NING
  + Friendster
  + Hi5
  + Tagged
  + myYearBook
  + MeetUp
  + Orkut
  + Badoo
  + Skyrock
  + Perfspot
  + Focus

But also remember the Snapple Bottle Cap. And if you need to, or if it makes more sense, create your own community and network [www.ning.com](http://www.ning.com)

## Tried and True Other Sharing Methods and Techniques

How do you get people talking and sharing. More and more will be done through social media but let’s not neglect the tried and true …. Which by the way can be combined with the new media for more powerful results.

* Sampling …. I remember when Snapple was bought by Quaker and they started a mass sampling campaign that was quite newsworthy
* Experiences and Events
* News Stories; press releases and articles; feature stories
* Spokespeople and celebrity
* Club and Membership …. Members form the nucleus of a community for further discussion and word of mouth
* Email and Newsletters
* Sponsorships
* Web site promotions; very special promotions; sublime satisfaction

# Monitor and Feedback

Especially in the fast paced world of social media, it is important to monitor your word of mouth, your brand, your promotional efforts and to use the feedback to control and enhance further efforts.

There are several good services out there including Radian6 which is now a part of Salesforce.com. I also helped to establish a service called [www.geeyee.com](http://www.geeyee.com) in this area. These services can monitor the internet, specific sites, and be a listening post for your word of mouth efforts. For a brief video on the Radian6 service, please see. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EH1dcFh_-I4>

The feedback loop has always been a vital part of the communications process model and so it is in this view of the “share” model.

# Make It Share

Being a believer in word of mouth and the “share” model, I hope you will give me your ideas and feedback to improve this model and you are encouraged to share this with your own network. Make it Share!!!

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