

The top ten viral ad campaigns

Adverts so good people choose to watch them? Send them to their friends, even? Times Online reports on what makes viral ads infectious

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The internet has revolutionised a plethora of pastimes: the way people communicate, find dates, commit crimes, you name it, (Rhys Blakely writes). But the business of selling stuff and of building brands continues to see one of the most radical transformations.

At the cutting edge is the viral campaign; the short video clip that is so compelling much of an advertiser's work is done for them when their prospective customers forward it to their contacts quickly building up an audience of millions.

A whole new industry has sprung up, dedicated to unravelling what makes viral ads infectious. GoViral, for instance, specialises in launching viral campaigns - in part by "seeding" clips on the web in places where they are picked up by the online populace.

What once was much a matter of luck is slowly being transformed into a science. Jimmy Maymann, the group's chairman, has built a polling system, "which every campaign is taken through prior to launch in order ensure virality".

The ideal campaign is edgy, surprising, original, erotic and emotional - and taps into popular culture, he says. His system attempts to quantify these elements.

Below, Mr Maymann presents ten of the richest viral videos on the web today.

NIKE

This clip is one of the all time greatest virals ever, with more than 50 million views globally. Featuring world famous soccer star Ronaldinho hitting the crossbar no less than four times, without the ball touching the floor. The creative material is from Framfab, in Denmark. The product on display is the Nike R10 football boot. A massive discussion on whether the clip was actually real or computer edited drove millions of interested viewers to the campaign.

Framfab won two Gold Lions on the Cannes Lions Festival for the campaign. The other winning clip was The Chain, a user generated initiative, consisting of more than 500 user uploaded soccer sequences edited together as one long clip of soccer celebration.

To watch the ads click here:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lsO6D1rwrKc>

<http://nikefootball.nike.com/nikefootball/siteshell/index.jsp#en,0;chainmix>

AGENT PROVOCATEUR

Kylie Minogue rides a velvet bucking bronco wearing nothing but lingerie from Agent Provocateur.

This video was originally meant for a cinema audience, but after being judged too explicit it went viral and started spreading aggressively throughout the internet.

The video is completely in harmony with the Agent Provocateur corporate vision to provoke and create controversy, which it most definitely did, with more than 360 million views - and still counting - more than five years after its release.

<http://uk.youtube.com/watch?v=HztQbRpKcMo 2>

JOHN WEST SALMON

A John West employee fights a grizzly bear off to land a fish - just to go that extra mile for quality. Obviously, it is set up, but with costumes from the Jim Henson Creature Shop it looks surprisingly real, until the bear starts throwing Kung Fu tricks at the "fisherman".

An unusual viral, it created more than 300 million views and has won ten awards, including Best Commercial of the Year from British Television Advertising Awards and a Gold Lion at the Cannes Lions Festival, 2001. Executed by Leo Burnett, the viral brings together the best of advertising and content in one.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zOpKFPEah3E>

QUICKSILVER DYNAMITE SURFING

How to go surf in a country without waves: a group of young men throw a bundle of dynamite into an urban lake. Whether the clip was real or not was never really discovered, a factor that itself garnered attention.

The creative agency was Danish Saatchi & Saatchi and the client was Quiksilver, trying to create positive brand awareness in Scandinavia. It has so far been watched by more than 20 million people. Four days after launch, it appeared on approx. 95 per cent of all surfer related websites. The viral won a Silver award at this year's Cannes Lions.

<http://uk.youtube.com/watch?v=6xfBNxNds0Q>

BIG AD

The Carlton Draught Big Ad is an award-winning advertisement for Carlton Draught created by George Patterson and Partners (Young & Rubicam) of Melbourne, which used viral marketing techniques before being released on television.

The advertisement was released on the internet two weeks before being shown on television. Just 24 hours after release, the Big Ad had been downloaded 162,000 times and within two weeks it had been seen by over one million viewers in 132 countries. That number has since grown at least twentyfold. The viral release of the Big Ad was in fact so successful that the television media budget was reduced for fears the ad would be overexposed.

<http://uk.youtube.com/watch?v=aWDNy43ATjc>

TROJAN GAMES

In 2003, to launch Trojan Condoms in the United Kingdom, the "official" web site for the so-called "Trojan Games" was created with several clips by UK-based The Viral Factory.

The campaign received several awards including best online creative of the year in the Creative Showcase and also a Gold Lion at the 51st International Advertising Festival in Cannes.

The site, and especially the associated video clips, were quite popular, having been viewed 35 million times. Now four years old the site is still active.

http://uk.youtube.com/watch?v=AbTSmOS_m6Q

DOVE EVOLUTION

Already a classic, even though it is one of the newest campaigns in this selection. Ogilvy & Mather, Toronto, used time-lapse photography to show the transformation of a normal woman into a glamorous billboard model using beauty stylists and Photoshop enhancements. The clip was released under the slogan "No wonder our perception of real beauty is distorted".

Dove Evolution took top honours in both the Cyber and Film categories on this year's Cannes Lions pointing to the colliding worlds of consumer-powered digital distribution and brand building. It's the first time in the festival's history that the same execution won in both categories, an even more impressive achievement if you consider that this huge success was almost single-handedly achieved using online seeding. Only very few times has the commercial been aired on television.

It is fast becoming one of the most watched videos on the internet. In the two years since Dove decided to brand itself as the beauty company that celebrates real beauty that strategy has rewarded the company with double digit sales increases.

<http://uk.youtube.com/watch?v=iYhCn0jf46U>

BERLITZ - WHAT ARE YOU ZINKING ABOUT?

A viral video campaign featuring a language difficulty in a European coast-guard station.

The ad was developed by BTS United Oslo, and originally pointed to a web site where people could download it and send it to their friends, as well as navigating through to Berlitz Norway. The response was so large that Berlitz was forced to shut down the site.

By now - more than a year after the launch of the viral - the clip is represented in more than hundred versions on Youtube alone.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FrYRY6kx550>

DIET COKE & MENTOS BY EEPY-BIRD.COM

This campaign was never planned, neither by The Coca Cola Company nor Mentos. It started out as an experiment by Eepybird with a video showing two men adding Mentos tablets to a Diet coke. Watch to see the results. Several videos resulted, which makes it difficult to estimate exactly how many views the campaign has generated so far. But a qualified guess would be more than 50 million in total, including both the original and all the user generated videos.

This very unofficial campaign has generated loads of PR and causing thousands of consumers to contribute with their own eruption videos. Much of the hype around it was caused by statements whether or not it would be dangerous, or even lethal, to actually drink a Diet Coke and eat Mentos at the same time.

Eepybird's website

<http://www.eepybird.com/>

Spoof site

<http://cocamentos.free.fr/news.php>

MARK ECKO - STILL FREE

The best virals usually lead to massive attention and, in some cases, controversy and outrage. This is exactly what happened to Mark Ecko. Having started several enterprises around the hip/hop, skater and style scene, Ecko decided to create a ideological statement on the First Amendment. He filmed a session of himself "tagging" Air Force One and used the following hype to explain why. Did he really spray graffiti on the President's jet? Judge for yourself by following the link below.

The Still Free campaign has generated several million views worldwide. The US authorities felt compelled to investigate whether it was "real". The video was rewarded several awards at the International Advertising Festival in Cannes, 2006 including the famous and very difficult to achieve Grand Prix award in the Viral Marketing category.

<http://www.stillfree.com>