

RESEARCH REPORT

1. Introduction

Can you imagine a group of students working voluntarily in a home for the elderly? If that is the case, these students are studying nursing or social science, otherwise, it would be a miracle, to be honest. Students who are active in supporting good causes are a rare phenomenon. In this case students are said to be the most difficult target group you could ever think of to charter for a good cause.

Within the principles given by our client Pifworld, we try to develop a viral campaign to trigger students to support good causes. A successful viral is the most accessible way to reach this target group. This assignment from Pifworld; to develop a viral campaign in order to trigger students or younger people to become a player or ambassador, seems to us a very big challenge. However, a research about these two elements will help us to proceed to the next phase; the concept and design phase. Therefore we used several research and analysis techniques to get into the results.

In this research report we will outline these two elements in a more profoundly way. First we will run through the goals we are aiming for, and then we will discuss shortly our problem definition along with related research questions. Then we will examine what a viral is, what works, what was successful, several formats and we will also give you a few examples of a viral. In the second part we will dig into the competitors of Pifworld, describe our target group and the results of the interviews we took with students. We also found a comparable tool which will also give the web-visitor an innovative user experience. At last we will conclude this research report with some obstacles, a preview of our next phase and some links we found they might be useful.

1.1 Goals

- Our goals; Pifworld exposure, creative input of (new) users and 10.000 new community members.
- We are aiming to reach younger people and preferable students.

- The time-line we have is based on a viral marketing, which is not infinitely sustainable.

1.2 Problem definition

Pifworld just recently launched their platform online. To promote their renewed experience of charity crowdfunding website, they want to develop a viral campaign to trigger students, younger people or young professionals to become a player or an ambassador. This viral campaign is aiming for 10.000 registrants at Pifworld.com. MediaLAB or we are assigned to develop this viral campaign. Our main research question is: “How do we set up a viral campaign to trigger 10.000 students to become a player or an ambassador?”

The sub questions which come along with the main research questions are:

1. What are successful virals?
 - How do you make a successful viral?
 - Which virals completely fail?
 - Which possible formats of virals exist?
 - Which virals are relevant for our campaign?
2. Who are competitors of Pifworld?
 - Which tools do they use?
3. What are typically student’s characteristics?
 - Describe their behaviours.
 - How do they think of good causes?

With these questions we started our research. This research has been executed by several techniques from Generic Work Process.

2. Examining a viral

In this part of the research report we documented our online research about virals.

2.1 A viral

With consumers showing increasing resistance to traditional forms of advertising such as TV or newspaper ads, marketers have turned to alternate strategies, including viral marketing. Viral marketing exploits existing social networks by encouraging customers to share product information with their friends. Previously, a few in-depth studies have shown that social networks affect the adoption of individual innovations and products.

Viral Marketing Visualized

Dr. Wilson, an e-commerce consultant describes six elements to have an effective viral marketing strategy:

1. Gives away products or services
2. Provides for effortless transfer to others
3. Scales easily from small to very large (the Hotmail effect)
4. Exploits common motivations and behaviors
5. Utilizes existing communication networks
6. Takes advantage of others' resources

Since Pifworld is a rather small social network (352 'players', March 19), we will have to use existing social networks to spread the message about why you should play a part in the Pifworld. We are thinking about the 'open-social' social networks such as Hyves, MySpace and others. Facebook would also be a good option since our target group is highly involved in that platform.

Resource lab sums it all up:

'Utilize more online and fewer printed materials. Online social networking sites, such as facebook.com and myspace.com, are popular among college and university students and are now mainstream marketing techniques. These sites are a free means of spreading information. Online calendars, blogs, and article submission to online newsletters and electronic news sources are also effective means of paperless marketing and communication.'

The sense of 'being part' of the community that you are supporting is an important notion of the Pifworld concept. Besides that, we must take notice of the short lifespan of a viral, the inability to measure the results (at least with video, text messages and virals that require no actions from the viewer/user) and the 'chances' of creating a successful viral. The last thing is that we need to remember how difficult is to create a viral, as Dan Ackerman Greenberg, co-founder of the viral video marketing company The Comotion Group, says: 'You simply can't expect to post great videos on YouTube and have them go viral on their own, even if you think you have the best videos ever. These days, achieving true virality takes serious creativity, some luck, and a lot of hard work.'

The good news is that you do not need a PR firm.

2.2 Successful virals

The first question that comes to mind is what a 'successful' viral actually is. Is a viral successful when you have a 100.000 views? Or when your sales go sky high. Many views does not necessary mean increasing sales or getting the result you wanted, you need to reach the right target group for your product. Douwe Egberts had a lot of viral success with their 'Oma' commercial, but the viral was, unfortunately for them, not reaching the right target market that they wished for. What they did accomplish was that they re-branded the brand to a younger company, which can also be an objective worth striving for. Lifespan is another parameter that is important to virals. Virals are known to only be relevant for a small amount of time. With so many virals out there, a viral is easily replaced by a newer viral. On the other side, a good viral has a very big reach and a very short time of spreading to a large amount of people. We have a clear goal of our Pifworld viral: find 10.000 new players or 'ambassadors' to the platform. Depending on the format of the viral we will choose, we can analyze where the traffic (and subscriptions) are coming from.

2.3 Formats for a viral

There are different formats of a viral that can work. When successful, the viral strategy creates an exponentially growing network of representatives and greatly enriches adopters.

Some examples

The Ponzi scheme and related investment Pyramid schemes, are an early and unfortunate example of viral marketing. In each round, investors are paid interest from the principal deposits of later investors. Early investors are so enthusiastic that they recruit their friends resulting in exponential growth until the pool of available investors is tapped out and the scheme collapses.

The 2008 film Cloverfield was first publicized with a teaser trailer that did not advertise the film's title, only its release date: "01-18-08." Elements of the viral marketing campaign included MySpace pages created for fictional characters and websites created for fictional companies alluded to in the film.

The release of the 2007 concept album Year Zero by Nine Inch Nails involved a viral marketing campaign, including the band leaving USB drives at concerts during NIN's 2007 European Tour. This was followed up with a series of interlinked websites revealing clues and information about the dystopian future in which the album is set.

With the limited budget we have, our viral has to be cheap, fast to implement and it has to trigger people to become an active member of the Pifworld community. Ambassadors have to find players that are willing to spend money on the projects they love. ‘Activating’ people to do something, is the keyword in the virals we have discussed earlier and are shown on our website. With the help from the Pifworld team and the staff members of the Medialab, we hope to develop a viral that can be called a ‘successful’ one according to the goals and conditions we have put together.

3. Competitors and target group

In this second part of the research report, we analysed the competitors and our target group. We did a qualitative research with personal interviews.

3.1 Competitors

Pifworld wants to be a channel between the supporter and the good cause. We discovered that Pifworld isn’t the only one with this idea. I’m going to look at two examples in the Dutch landscape that have a similar kind of idea; to become the channel between the good causes and the supporters. How will or can Pifworld differentiate their selves from their competitors? Their core values are engagement and transparency with a social network that should take care of this. Two other examples are:

-procentclub.nl is a Dutch-oriented organization that has a main goal; to fight against poverty in the world. Each project has an own page with information, photo’s and video’s and as a member you have your own personal page. The philosophy of the organization is that users give one percent of their income, time or knowledge to a good cause they want to support. The projects are on a small scale and are taking place in a third-world country.

- geefsamen.nl is a website where everybody can create an own project for a good cause or support an already existing one. Everybody can make a support page for all sorts of things, like your birthday or a marriage. Even if you do nothing at all, a form of online begging perhaps? This non-profit organization is active since 2001 and has more than 1250 good causes connected.

Pifworld.com just went online so they must offer something unique for possible supporters. For Pifworld it is important that the social network is going to work the way they want it to. With a lot of international good causes

and innovative projects over the whole world, Pifworld differentiates itself by having a global ambition and also supporting all kinds of causes, from wildlife to education, to poverty. With a user-friendly interface and a 3-D globe where all projects are visible on, Pifworld wants to add a new dimension to the good cause landscape.

3.2 Target

Our campaign will not be (only) for students, but they are an important target for the Pifworld campaign. Our audience is hard to trigger, critical, part of many groups, cheapskate, rebellious, busy, hard to convince, educated, socially engaged; especially to social networks, highly active online and looking for a path of life. An important question we have to ask according to Erwin Blom is, which value do we, Pifworld, provide for our target group. If students have a close connection to the cause, they are more likely to look up information and donate some money to the cause. Most of them are already member of an online social network, so it won't be easy to allure them into another social network. We should add some value to the social network, maybe in the form of a price or gadget you would get when you sign up. Because students haven't got a lot of money to spend it is important to explain that they only pay money for the good cause and not for other things, like the website or the company itself. Our research also shows that students won't go looking up information on the web about good causes. We mustn't think that students will look up information about Pif on their own. With our viral we must have a direct link available between the student and the website pifworld.com. With this information in mind, we know that students are socially engaged, but hard to trigger. They are critical about projects they have to invest money in and their right about that.

To further investigate our target group we made a short video about students and their interests in good causes. With a camera and some prepared questions we shot some footage in the HvA building. The goal was to get a clearer image about 'Youth and good causes'. The result was a three and a half minute long video in which the following questions were answered:

1. Which social networks do you use? Twitter? Hyves? Facebook? MySpace?
Are you a supporter of a good cause?
2. Yes? Which cause?
- Do you support regularly or once only?

- Do you know what happens with your money?
 - Do you look at the Internet site?
 - Do you know other people who are supporting the same cause?
 - Do you really feel engaged/connected to the cause?
3. No?
- Do you want too?
 - Are you looking on the Internet for information?
4. If possible, what kind of good cause organization would you prefer to establish?

3.3 Tools

During the research phase we got a tip from one of our fellow students at the Medialab about a Google tool. It's called Google outreach, which is a part of Google Earth. Google says non-profit organizations can have huge benefits when they use this software. The software allows you to take a virtual tour through the landscape and gives information about the projects happening there. Outreach is a program for donating and supporting non-profit organizations that uses Google earth and maps together to help them spread knowledge about global awareness. In Google Earth you can tag Outreach and implement a social layer to the program. All sorts of icons from different organizations appear on the globe. You can click on them and get information about

4. Conclusion

A viral can have a short lifespan; this might be an obstacle for us if this effects our goal of gaining 10.000 players/ ambassadors. Secondly the effect of a viral is hardly measurable for us and our final obstacle we found out for our project is that the success and effect is unpredictable. All these issues brought us to awareness of the negative issues in developing a viral.

In conclusion of the target group research we noticed the following concerns:

- Students are socially engaged in multiple social networks.
- They have a lack of money.
- They also have a lack of information about the traditional non-profit projects.

- They are socially engaged, but really hard to target.

4.1 Next phase

We would like to use other kinds of virals than the standard video. Given the fact that we haven't got much technical skills, we should come up with an idea about what we can contribute. Possibilities lie in the making of cool images and logos we could spread around. Also possible is the use of memes. Memes are used for the spreading of interesting ideas or symbols through the use of speech, text, rituals, etc. Also interesting is the idea of maybe creating a hoax or a campaign that's completely the opposite of what the company stands for. These kinds of virals are more daring and risky, but we think it's a waste if we don't look at these possibilities.