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Kellogg On Integrated Marketing

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This cutting-edge book—with contributions by the star faculty of the Kellogg School of Management and the Medill School of Journalism's Integrated Marketing Communications Department at Northwestern University—offers the latest thinking on the art and science of integrated marketing. A must for today's marketing professional, *Kellogg on Integrated Marketing* addresses the daily activities of marketing managers and helps them enhance brand equity with new techniques and strategies from the experts. You'll hear from:

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CHAPTER 6

STRATEGIES FOR VIRAL MARKETING

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It has been around forever, but as a marketing strategy, it goes back only about 50 years. How do you sell a line of kitchen containers without advertising and even without distribution? The answer: Have women hold parties and talk about them to their friends. The Tupperware Party strategy was based on a simple premise that is as valid today as it was then. Consumer-to-consumer contacts are powerful! When one consumer says something to another, the message is likely to be immediate, personal, credible, and relevant. For a while, this sort of communication—one consumer contacting another—was called *word-of-mouth*, or WOM. Currently, it is most often called *buzz*.

The impetus for thinking about WOM or buzz from a strategic point of view originated with the work of Elihu Katz and Paul Lazarsfeld, again, almost 50 years ago. In their book, *Personal Influence*, they contrasted the power of consumer-to-consumer contacts with that of advertising and other types of mass communication and postulated that the process operated through a “two-step flow.” Certain individuals, termed *influentials*, took in information and passed it on to others with whom they were in contact. The key idea was that influentials were influential because of their links to a community of other people who would not otherwise be exposed to or absorb the information. In a well-known example of the two-step flow model, Pfizer had Katz, Herbert Menzel, and James S. Coleman identify the characteristics of physician opinion leaders who spread word-of-mouth about tetracycline among physicians.¹ Gradually, the notion was added that as information “diffuses” through a community, consumers pass through stages from just being aware of the information initially to finally being persuaded to adopt a product.²

The marketing strategy that emerged was to focus on reaching influentials or early adopters, who would then transmit information that eventually would cause others in a community composed of targeted consumers to buy the product. Marketers in the recording industry were attracted early to this strategy. In one instance, they grouped class presidents, cheerleaders, and sports team captains from certain cities into an expert panel to review records. Although these influentials, or opinion leaders, owned very few records, their word-of-mouth was able to pull certain of the records into the top ten in their cities without any radio play.³

Ford Motor Company gave the original Mustangs to airline employees who were then called *stewardesses*. The stewardesses used the cars in towns where they had flight layovers. People in these communities would talk to or at least see glamorous young women driving the cars, and this WOM had more impact than a television ad. According to a recent *Business Week* article titled “Buzz Marketing” (thereby confirming the status of *buzz* as the buzzword today for *word-of-mouth*), Ford continues to pursue the strategy.⁴

Rather than blitzing the airways with 30-second television commercials for its new subcompact, Ford Motor Company recruited just a handful of trendsetters in a few markets and gave them each a Focus to drive for six months. What were their duties? Simply to be seen with the car and to hand out Focus-themed trinkets to anyone who expressed interest in it. “We weren’t looking for celebrities. We were looking for the assistants to celebrities, party planners, disk jockeys—the people who really seem to influence what was cool. . . .”

So, buzz marketing is alive and well. As Renee Dye points out in a *Harvard Business Review* article titled “The Buzz on Buzz,” the strategy is now thought to be widely applicable:⁵

- Not just to edgy products, but to products as routine as prescription drugs.
- Not just something to be left to chance, but a strategy to be used consciously and deliberately.
- Not just for current customers, but for nonusers because countercultures can create buzz.
- Not just for new products or first-mover advantage, but for products anywhere in the life cycle.
- Not just as an extension of advertising or as a replacement for advertising, but as something that is different in kind and that might even be harmed by advertising.

Emanuel Rosen, in his book *The Anatomy of Buzz*, emphasizes the point that buzz marketing must be strategic. Natural contagion, in which a few people are exposed and buzz is left to take care of itself, is not enough. “To get buzz going, a heroic push—*beyond natural contagion*—is usually called for” (p. 123).⁶ Rosen points to the early days of Federal Express in which it proved necessary to send a team to designated cities to get potential customers to give the team a sample package, which they would ship for free to someone in a distant city. In this way, Federal Express actually forced the contact from one customer to the next to the point that buzz was created.

FROM BUZZ TO VIRAL MARKETING

In the last few years, there have been further advances in the strategic use of buzz. The key insight is that buzz can be more than just a matter of actively stimulating the transmission of information from some consumers to others in a community. This insight is most often conveyed in the analogy of viral marketing.

The “viral” analogy views buzz as spreading by “infection.” The consumer is infected by buzz, catches it as someone catches a cold, and passes it on in the same way unless he or she takes actions to stop it. In wired communities, the infection is just a click away. Buzz can cause “epidemics” much more quickly than the traditional two-step flow or diffusion implies. Rather than getting the word to a few opinion leaders or influentials and waiting for them to spread the word, a strategy of viral marketing gets users to pass the word almost involuntarily. Beyond this, what is passed is not mere information. It is something more akin to a virus—something that takes over and alters the consumer’s thinking. That it is readily accepted is as much a consequence of the process of person-to-person contact as the information itself.

Steve Jurvetson, the venture capitalist behind Hotmail, coined the term *viral marketing* to describe the principle behind Hotmail’s growth. Each time a Hotmail user sent someone an e-mail, the e-mail had at the bottom an implicitly user-endorsed solicitation to “Get your free e-mail with Hotmail now.” The technology of the Web enhanced the scripting, passing, and responding to word-of-mouth. More than this, what was being virally “caught” was the idea that Hotmail was the right way to use e-mail.

The insight is that ideas or ways of thinking can be propagated through a community. Ideas “network” through the community and become the *de facto* way the community thinks about something.

Malcolm Gladwell in *The Tipping Point* uses the viral analogy to underscore the speed at which buzz can spread.⁷ Once buzz reaches a critical “tipping point” in a community, it simply takes over. Like the flu, it reaches

large numbers of people in the community very quickly. But the substance of the buzz needs to be, in Gladwell’s phrase, “sticky,” and it needs to fit the context of community. The buzz must be about an idea that is inherently important to the community and that fits the time and place. Gladwell gives as an example the case of Hush Puppies, a dying brand of shoes, in the mid-1990s. The company, Wolverine, learned that the shoes were, improbably, still being sold in small stores in the East Village in New York City. It turned out that kids were buying the shoes, probably with just the thought in mind that the shoes were so different as to be stylishly counter-culture. Suddenly this idea of Hush Puppies reached a tipping point, with the assist of some New York designers, and spread like an epidemic. It went on to infect large numbers of young men’s thinking about shoes.⁸

So what is a viral marketing strategy? Like all buzz, viral marketing is about the power of consumer-to-consumer contacts. But it is more than this. It is about the rapid, almost involuntary, spread of a way of thinking about a product and what it means in the context of a community.

UNDERSTANDING BUZZ BETTER

The viral analogy is useful. It certainly helps marketers to see that the power of buzz goes beyond the diffusion of information. Information may be part of buzz, but, typically, buzz is also about what information means. It is *about* information, about ways of seeing and thinking about things. In short, it is about the evolution of shared culture in a community.

Buzz causes people to think differently. In the case of Hush Puppies, it was not just that the young males learned about a new shoe. In fact, they probably learned very little new about the shoe. What was new was the way they came to see the shoe and its significance in their community. Buzz is subjective. It is about the intersubjectivity of a community of people. Objective information can be part of buzz, but to grasp the true power of buzz, marketers must understand the role it plays in making things culturally relevant.

Actually, there is a better analogy than that of a virus. It was created by the biologist Richard Dawkins in his book *The Selfish Gene*.⁹ Dawkins used the term *memes* as a contrast to “genes.” Genes are passed from person to person and produce biological replication. Memes are cultural ideas that produce cultural replication as they are passed from one person to another. Susan Blackmore, in *The Meme Machine*, argues specifically that evolution applies to memes in the same way as to genes.¹⁰ While there is debate over the scientific status of memes,¹¹ the concept seems useful to us as a metaphor for thinking about buzz.

Viruses are destructive and essentially corrupt their hosts. Memes are constructive and enabling. Memes program people to be more effective, or they do not survive. We think the notion of memes provides a better conceptual understanding of the way in which buzz works.

Take baskets for example. Baskets are useful devices for carrying things (e.g., picnic supplies), and they no doubt have their objective features and intricacies of construction. But how would you like to be selling baskets? It is safe to say the basket industry would not be your first choice. One company, the Longaberger Company of Newark, Ohio, however, does quite well at selling baskets.¹² It does so with a viral marketing strategy that is instructive.

Taking a cue from Tupperware, Longaberger associates get women throughout the United States to host basket parties in their homes. At these parties, women who have bought baskets tell other women about how they have used them in their lives. What is being transmitted is the idea that baskets can fit into your life to provide a sense of relaxing simplicity, authenticity, and personal creativity. The *New Yorker* magazine ran a cartoon that gets the buzz just right. Two women are sitting side-by-side on a couch in a living room. Covering their heads is a large, upside down basket. It is the idea of the basket as it replicates from one person to the next that is the power of buzz. And it's not just parties; the Internet figures in, and there is the founder's book. It is all about the cultural meaning of baskets in the targeted consumer community that has been networked together by the company.

So, understand that viral marketing is more about memes than about viruses. A good viral marketing strategy is one that uses buzz to replicate shared cultural meaning across a community of consumers. Another way of saying this is that the brand itself must become a meme that is conveyed by buzz.

One final thought on understanding buzz—it has not been lost on many observers that viral marketing is right now enjoying considerable buzz in the marketing community. Once you get the idea, you see it everywhere. Seth Godin (*Unleashing the Ideavirus*) even sees the “Mona Lisa” in the Louvre as a nice job of viral marketing.¹³ This can be debated. What cannot be debated is that cultural meaning is everywhere. The key idea for viral marketing is not that brands can be culturally relevant, but that buzz can be used to spread cultural meaning in a self-replicating way.

NETWORKING IN TARGETED COMMUNITIES

A viral marketing strategy calls for creating buzz and networking in an existing community or creating a new community of consumers. Many of

the cases we review later involve electronic communities, where networking is greatly facilitated by the speed of communication. However, remember the case of Tupperware—networking is the key, not electronic communication per se.

We now present our ideas for developing different viral strategies that fit different kinds of communities. First, however, we should describe what we mean by *communities* in more detail. We begin by exploring the nature of communal, networked behavior and the new challenges they present for marketers. We then present the four basic types of networked behavior and corresponding network marketing strategies. In examining the opportunities associated with each strategy, we look at various cases of how viral network marketing strategies have been orchestrated or coordinated with more traditional strategies. Because marketers tend to believe that viral network strategies work only for e-networked communities, we include one case of a highly networked, traditional community in Mexico. It is also worth remembering that business to business (B2B) marketers regularly work with highly networked business communities that may or may not be electronically linked.

There are four general principles of highly networked environments that marketers must take into account. Understanding and acting in accordance with these principles is a matter of basic viral network marketing hygiene.

1. Networked communities are frequently formed without a company's support and maintain their autonomy no matter how much support they get. This is clear for industry groups but also true for people who care deeply and talk to each other about cars, music, wines, high-tech equipment, and so forth.
2. Networked communities have network leaders who regard themselves and who are regarded by others as experts. Palm gives us an exemplary case of how to treat such experts. When the Palm Pilot was launched at Demo, an invitation-only event for influentials in the high-tech field, it supplied attendants with the product for the course of the show and then offered it to them at a discount at the end of the event. The product was such a hit that attendants showed the Palm to others on their flights home, and they signed purchase orders for Palms once they reached home. It is frequently difficult for B2C marketers, who know products and their creators intimately, to treat the customers as the brand and product experts. However, within a network, the product and brand live in the customers' discussion and shared experience of it.

3. Network leaders frequently promote products and brands in the name of social values that often seem irrelevant to marketers. Network leaders see products and brands standing with them for the kinds of lives they care about. Birkenstock sandals are a famous case. Because the U.S. distributor, Margot Fraser, could not sell them through conventional shoe stores, she came up with the idea of trying to sell them through health food stores. It worked, but the product and the brand have never been able to leave behind their association with the values of the health-food store owners, who were the first network leaders to talk about the sandals in the United States.
4. Because network leaders frequently promote products in the name of values they care about and associate with the brand, they love categories and products in a category for their own reasons, which must be respected, indeed, often endorsed. Sylvester Stallone, for instance, knew that his film *Driven* was not only an action, racecar film that would appeal to core Stallone fans but also a teen film. He thought that teens would care about it for their own reasons. Since the film was going to be marketed conventionally as an action, racecar film, Stallone asked for help from Marc Schiller of Electric Artists, a company that specializes in developing and deploying communications strategies for talking with people in online communities to create positive word of mouth. Schiller has been particularly successful with teen communities as well as working with a variety of other communities. The point is to “put the products into contexts relevant to people talking in those communities so that they can continue talking about the products to their friends and coworkers.” For Stallone, Electric Artists developed, tested, and deployed a strategy that included talking online about *Driven*’s young actors such as Estella Warren. It turned out that Stallone and Electric Artists were right. Teens talked about the younger actors, not the action, not Stallone, not the conventional or expected values or concerns. The Electric Artists campaign correlated closely with increased ticket sales.

These principles show that intervening in discussions over a product and the brand can no longer focus on conveying the benefit of a few product attributes. There must be a memic quality. Here is an example of a failed intervention into a bulletin board at [fashion.alt](#).

Hi, I’ve noticed a lot of talk about *Glamour* on this site. I know some of you are saying the magazine isn’t into serious issues anymore. Well, I work at the magazine and there’s plenty of substantial stuff in here! Did you check out the

June issue? There’s a story on women who’ve been jailed unjustly, a fascinating report on “Is Your Body Aging Faster than You Are?” and a health investigation on what happened to a young woman whose savings were wiped out when she became ill with a chronic disease. Yes, we cover fashion and beauty and sex and love, but those topics are part of life—why wouldn’t we cover them? We’re dying to know more about what you think of these articles, and the rest of what’s in the magazine. So please write us directly!

A flurry of harsh responses followed. Here is a shortened version of a typical one:

I assure you that everyone here, like me, who has complained about the way *Glamour* has gone down hill, and everyone, like me, who has cancelled her subscription, is able to read and can easily see that the magazine has not in any way changed from a disappointing *Cosmo*-wannabe. Telling us that it is not something that we know very well it is will not magically make it so. If *Glamour* is serious about winning subscribers back, there are other, less annoying and insulting ways to do this than telling us we are wrong. Since I am not being paid to improve the magazine, I do not feel like listing what these things are.

The women who are speaking about these fashion magazines love them. They are genuinely disappointed by the direction of *Glamour*. They would not be spending time talking to each other about it if this were not the case. The conversations are not casual. The women who are most vocal on this bulletin board see themselves as experts. And telling an expert that she is wrong in some simple way will not do. A marketer has to *ask* experts. Why did the article on unjustly jailed woman fail to change their view? These experts, moreover, saw some small changes in some of the attributes—a little more “fashion and beauty and sex and love”—as having shifted the whole memic meaning of *Glamour* and the social values they see the magazine standing for. To these experts, *Glamour* had changed the values it stood for. It had declined into a “*Cosmo*-wannabe,” which roughly translates, for these networked experts, into a product that values sexual voraciousness and ignorance. The editor’s reason for writing about “fashion and beauty and sex and love,” because “those topics are part of life” insults these readers because it does not take into account their reasons for reading the magazine. The reasons were there to see in their exchanges. (They cared about certain accessible and economically reasonable fashions.) These women are well networked and they are not going to be swayed from their conversational experience of the brand by cute and upbeat notes written by an editor. Both the reading experience and the conversation must change.

In summary, networked communities have their own lives. They have their own vocal brand and product experts, who focus attention on the way products and brands support cultural values. These leaders, therefore, promote the product and brand more for reasons having to do with their connection to the social values than for clear and easily communicable benefits backed by attributes. In such a setting, the dynamics of communicating to such groups are different from those of more broad-based mass communication. As we see later, broad-based communication plays a critical role in any promotional campaign, but it cannot be the center of network marketing. All interventions in networks succeed best when they follow the guidelines that we now set forth for setting the principles into action. Again, these guidelines are basic. Viral networking strategies can be deployed only after the basic network marketing is mastered.

GUIDELINES FOR COMMUNICATION WITHIN NETWORKED COMMUNITIES

Approach members of networked communities, particularly their vocal leaders, with a genuinely questioning attitude and with questions. Members of networked communities often begin conversations with questions among themselves. Here are two examples, the first from Jack B. of autos.alt, in which he is asking about what happened to BMW and the kind of cars it stands for.

Is there anyone out there that produces cars that have the “spirit” of the old 2002, 320i (which I remember being hotly debated upon arrival), the 533i, and first-generation M3? Cars that are light but not flimsy-feeling, fun to drive, and not priced well above their competition?

The following is from Martha Stewart’s online community:

I really miss Thanksgiving now that I live in England and my husband is Australian. But, I still want to celebrate. Does anyone have a suggestion for a turkey substitute (I am only cooking for two, so I can’t make a whole turkey)?

It is necessary to begin with questions because in the face of complex subject and group dynamics, respect must be shown—respect for expertise, the way the subject matter matters, and the informal roles that exist in the group. Even though some conversations may look as though infobits

or other snippets are being exchanged, these small exchanges can have highly charged content. People are writing because they love the topic or product category. They are interested in talking only to others who also love the category.

Indeed, this point about respecting the love of the conversants for their subject is so crucial for network strategies that Christopher Locke makes it the foundation of *Gonzo Marketing*. In his book on the subject, he suggests that businesses subsidize sites where their products are discussed and allow and incent only their own employees who have the same interests as members of the site make comments there. Otherwise, the “industry insiders” will come across as phonies who are only trying to get money and will thereby injure the company’s reputation.¹⁴

Intervening in a group requires showing your personal connection and love of the category—show your personal bona fides. To see this, we return to the same two conversations, first the one about BMWs.

Fourteen years ago I worked in the parts department of a BMW dealership in Columbus, Ohio. I would occasionally have the chance to drive the cars. My parents also had a 733i and a 325e, so I was definitely well-exposed to the “BMW mentality.” I remember the first time I drove a 533i—it was unbelievable, a light-footed, tail-swinging beast (at the time).

Those in the Martha Stewart group who respond to the question about England show as a matter of good form their personal connection to the question.

When my husband and I were in grad school, we were poorer than poor and couldn’t afford to buy a huge turkey for just two of us. Several years ago my husband, parents, and I were in the Cotswolds for Thanksgiving. We landed up cooking Thanksgiving dinner in our little Cotswold stone cottage that we had rented for the year.

Assume that every conversation takes up cherished memories and hard-won insights. For this reason, personal and social values are confidently mixed together with attributes in evaluations of the product.

Conversational interventions take up both attributes and personal and social values seriously and fluently. One of the responses shows how seamless the combination of attributes and values is:

I believe that the BMW is good for what it does best. It makes small sedans that make you smile when you drive. It’s what BMW did best then, and I

personally believe what BMW does now. Head to head, a new 325 or 330 is a generation or two past a 2002 when all fond memories are put aside. It's like remembering that old IBM PC with 256K of memory and the 5Mb hard drive. It did a great job when I needed it most, but now my watch is a hair more powerful.

The respondent responds with a claim about attributes: The technology of the new 325 is two generations ahead of the 2002. He speaks of benefits. You smile when you drive. And he puts the values of having self-knowledge and tough-mindedness ahead of sentimentalizing the past. In an unquoted section, he explains why, given the past competition to BMW, it seemed like more of a step up. The Martha Stewart writers do the same. One, for instance, talks not only about what to cook but also about how to invite the English to the dinner so that it does not have to be only for two. Obviously, she is promoting the value of a large celebratory feast. That brings out the point of the complicated social dynamics of any networked community.

Interventions are complicated actions of personal positioning and positioning of others. Networked community members use their knowledge of products constantly to promote themselves and their values. Networked community members are intensely aware of their value inside the community. They are not just trying to win points in conversations but to gain followings. That is why the best name for them is probably *colloquists*. They are speaking to each other but also need to be heard by a much larger, quiet audience. They speak and act as though their value increases by about the square of the number of people listening to or citing them. Thus, they constantly, carefully, and craftily position themselves and others. The respondent we have already cited in the BMW conversation actively positions himself as young and nonsentimental while positioning the initial questioner as an over-the-hill, romantic baby boomer whose past makes him hyper-subtle.

The new BMWs are superior cars. Perhaps those who have not experienced the dramatic difference (that used to exist between BMWs and other brands) cannot appreciate some subtle ones. Perhaps those who have experienced the dramatic difference give it too much credence. It is a generational thing.

A following response neatly repositions both earlier comments:

I sold my BMW and bought a Honda, and it's the best car I've ever had. The Honda is far superior in design to a BMW and never breaks down.

Further, my Honda dealer never screws up and doesn't charge an arm and a leg for routine maintenance. Though I remain Teutonic at heart, the smart money no longer buys BMWs.

Though this respondent loves the value of German engineering and longs, as does the first colloquist, for the BMW of the past, he values even more being smart. Being smart is better than suffering the indignities that go with smiling while you drive.

Interventions must deepen and modulate the developing memic understanding of product and brand internal to the conversation of the networked community rather than simply return it to the brand's basic positioning. As people interested in product categories and making purchases are increasingly listening in on and taking part in conversations like the one on BMWs, an important part of the meaning of the brand and product involves these reflections. Marketers can no longer assume that brand equity lives in the hearts and minds of individual consumers. Instead, brands are increasingly coming to live in networked communities' conversations. And as conversations in these communities develop, the meaning of the brand and product develops as well.

When, for instance, the "smart" colloquist says that he sold his BMW and purchased a Honda, suddenly this community sees Honda as a relevant contrast to BMW. That is one surprise for a BMW marketer. Then the colloquist reports, "My old rear-wheel drive BMW spun out many times on rainy roads; my front-wheel drive is sure-footed in the worst New England snow storms." This comment requires a deepening of the "ultimate driving machine" brand. To say that the new BMWs would not spin out only puts them on a par with the new Hondas. What is the new driving experience that fills out the sense of the "ultimate driving machine" in such a way as to put it out of reach of a Honda? These are no longer questions inside the BMW R&D facility. They are not questions that BMW's marketers are anticipating for the new year. They are not even the questions that a few, very savvy customers ask. These are the questions that are absorbing a networked community with many lurkers.

In networked communities, the brand is undergoing constant development. This development gives marketers enormous opportunities for constant brand testing and sharpening, as long as they accept the ways of networked communities.

The new electronic media brings about a general change in the social behavior by reclaiming the networking of industry, hobbyist or special interest, and traditional communities. Instead of commercial conversations that

are primarily between vendor and customer, conversations now include opinion leaders, particularly leading-edge, specialist users rather than public personalities like Michael Jordan and Oprah Winfrey. Influential leading-edge users themselves find the Internet makes it easier for them to get together either through group e-mailings or through one or another kind of conferencing site (bulletin boards, chat rooms, and so forth). In September 1997, there were approximately 96,000 online, topic-based discussion boards. By April 2000, there were more than 300,000.¹⁵ Now, Vanchau Nguyen, founder and CEO of ezboard, says his site hosts more than 500,000 communities, with 10 million unique users and 500 million page views per month.¹⁶ The growth has been entirely through grass-roots word of mouth, and it continues to be double digit.¹⁷ Of course, as online communities become more popular, potential network leaders, particularly leading-edge product users, increasingly seek to build their online stature by successfully promoting products.

While the new communications media reclaim past or specialist networked behavior, it also brings about two changes in networking. As people increasingly communicate in the new media's hybrid of speech and writing that is both transient and lasting, people are increasingly getting in on influential leading-edge users' conversations that were previously heard only at trade shows or by people who were "connected" in the old sense of the word. The Internet remains open 24/7 and holds for years reviews written by influential lead users and, again new, reviews of these reviewers. Amazon, for instance, carries reviews of books, CDs, videos, and electronic equipment. Epinions has reviews on arts and entertainment, autos and motorsports, business and technology, computers and Internet, electronics, home and garden, hotels and travel, children and family, personal finance, restaurants and gourmet, sports and outdoor, and wellness and beauty. Planetfeedback has shared letters on a similar set of categories. Although still in its infancy, WebMD has patient reviews of physicians. Increasingly, customers are checking the accumulated reviews before they make purchase decisions.

Because these network leaders tend to be widely dispersed demographically, psychographically, and geographically, working with them in the context of an online community is one of the most practical ways to proceed. Just as importantly, well-designed communities give the network leaders an important place where they can speak. It gives marketers a primary place where they can monitor and influence the conversations. Online communities also give sympathetic network leaders—normally network leaders to whom marketers have listened—a forum for promoting

the product. By listening to these conversations, marketers can learn how to support the network leaders' claims and how to extend the brand with new products. Forward-looking companies are building online communities, using bulletin boards, forums, and chat rooms to cultivate relations with network leaders. CNN, Disney, Shell, Pentax, Martha Stewart, REI, and Amazon are some examples. Heineken and Nescafé allow their site users to open virtual bars and cafés. WebMD and Weight Watches have support group communities.

Success with network communities requires forming focused strategies for building or enhancing them and for creating buzz. Building or enhancing a networked community requires understanding the different kinds of communities that develop and focusing on those that are best suited to the brand and product line. Each type of community supports a certain type of strategy and disables others. Consequently, we first present a framework for understanding the main types of community. Then we turn to the strategies suited to each. We give some examples of how these viral network strategies can usefully be leveraged in a fully orchestrated campaign and give a framework for this.

COMMUNITY FRAMEWORK AND FOUR TYPICAL KINDS OF COMMUNITY

To work with networked communities, it is critical to understand network behavior and the role that products play in them. This understanding reveals to marketers the distinct levers for strengthening the communities and what they can ask network leaders to do to create buzz. The critical factors for understanding community membership and leadership can be usefully sorted along two dimensions that help us understand the behavior of different types of communities. The first dimension has to do with how networked community members view the role that brands play in their networks. This dimension is a continuum that runs from communities that treat brands as playing an authoritative role in their lives (Apple, Grateful Dead, Harvard, Martha Stewart, the *New York Times*) to communities of people who see brands as critical tools—cool things—for self promotion. Cases in point include Palm, Christina Aguilera, Ferrari, Williams Sonoma, and "Sex in the City." In other words, the dimension ranges from *loving the brand* and giving it a sacred place in the community members' lives to *loving the promotion* of the brand and the meaning that promotion provides network members.

Therefore, at one end of the continuum, we find most religious and political communities—communities that are focused on certain figures, parties,

issues, and the values they stand for. In contrast, at the other end of the continuum lie communities devoted to fashion, the popular, or progress. Most are concerned with promoting new figures, new products, new ideas, and new achievements for the sake of promoting something new. (Note that the new is sometimes the old, like Hush Puppies.) The possibilities for promotion and the relationships that occur because of it are what makes the product interesting to people.

Sports clubs and other sports communities tend to be in the middle of this continuum. They revere the ancient constitutive rules of the sport and some of the historic performers. But they focus on promoting the current season, the newest achievements, newest players, newest plays, newest venues, and so forth. As we move along this continuum, the drivers to join start with reverence and end with innovation.

The second dimension that helps us understand the behavior of types of communities concerns the “texture of recognition” in the community. At one end of the continuum lie communities in which what each member says and the way each member acts matter enormously to others in the community. Differences of opinion seem to require resolution. An inability to appear at a nearby event requires an explanation. Members of such communities seek recognition for an accomplishment only in the name of some common cherished value, as is the case with the Weight Watchers community. These are high recognition or *we-focused* communities.

If you are a Deadhead, it matters which concert you think was the best. Likewise, if you are a Palm promoter, it matters if you were among the *first* users to be given a Palm at a conference or if you were the one who got all your friends to purchase them. It matters, too, if you were a member of the team who recognized Christina Aguilera first and helped get her to the top of the charts. If someone says you did not play that role, then you have to settle the issue.

In networks at the other end of this continuum, the texture of recognition is much looser. In these networks, “I” stay up on what is going on. “I” contribute when “I” feel moved to or can lend a hand. I certainly appreciate it when other members of the community recognize my contributions. But I do not lose sleep over a lost opportunity for recognition or sharing. These are low-recognition or *I-focused* communities, networks of people who join the networks for self-improvement more than for mutual recognition.

Consider the communities around Martha Stewart. Community membership is driven more by the personal benefit that people derive from the products than from the recognition they receive. Similarly, the networks of

reviewers at Amazon or Epinions are composed of people developing their own sensibilities and testing them against the views of others. Amateur sports clubs are again an interesting middle ground in which members can sometimes get caught up in huge arguments over who was a better player or which past team was better as though the fate of the nation were at stake. But sometimes the same members can come and go equally well as the club suits their individual participation and viewing of sporting events.

We put these dimensions together in the matrix in Table 6.1, with authority on the horizontal dimension and recognition as “we-focused” or “I-focused” on the vertical. The upper left-hand box describes solidarity groups that are most like traditional community groups such as churches, and as we move from brand- to self- and from we- to I, we move toward maven networks in the lower right-hand corner. Thus, each cell represents a different type of community that is either already networked or can be networked. We refer to these communities as *networked communities* or more simply as *networks* because their affiliations may be much looser than those that might be associated with the word *communities*.

As depicted in the matrix in Table 6.1, *mavens* are people who are happy when they are informally educating us in the domains of their expertise. You are bound to know a wine, music, electronic equipment, fashion, or car maven. Before the Internet, mavens generally had small groups of friends who came to them for advice. They knew other mavens but did not track them closely. The Web has had a great effect on them, enabling them to track one another and to give their refined advice to larger groups.

Taste-maker communities form around intense taste-makers who are heavily promoting some new or cool thing. Everything can matter for a while to these networked communities, as everything is about creating a

Table 6.1
Types of Networked Communities and the Networked Behavior Typical of Each

	<i>Brand as Authority</i>	<i>Self as Authority</i>
	<i>Solidarity Community</i>	<i>Taste-Maker Community</i>
<i>We-Focus</i>	Networking by sharing experiences with products and brands and the social values they imply	Networking by self-promotion in the name of being the first or coolest
	<i>Appreciator Community</i>	<i>Maven Network</i>
<i>I-Focus</i>	Networking by emulating other appreciators and the brand personality	Networking by educating and broadening horizons

success. However, most of these communities are shorter lived than traditional communities. Appreciator communities, in contrast, can last for a very long time, but the level of ongoing engagement tends to rise and fall.

We now describe each of these networked communities in more detail and describe the kind of viral marketing strategy that is most appropriate to each one.

Solidarity-Networked Communities

A solidarity network forms around a brand that stands for certain social values. Members of the community see the brand as a symbol of the values they love and gather to celebrate a shared sense of purpose. Fans of the Grateful Dead and Apple enthusiasts understand well the values these brands stand for. Deadheads love the laid-back, lyrical, faintly drugged mood of Dead concerts. Being laid-back, lyrical, and having a faintly druggy good mood were values, keys to a way of life. Likewise, Apple enthusiasts see themselves as a band of renegades who were introducing a form of technology that would increase liberty—of the creative, doing what you please sort—in the world. Again, social values, not technical performance features, matter most in these networks. Weight Watchers celebrates certain values of discipline, accomplishment, and good health. In Mexico, CEMEX's *Patrimonio Hoy* clubs, in which low-income, do-it-yourself builders gather for saving and purchasing cement and other building materials, stand for the value of patrimony. They stick together through the tough regimes of saving and building to be able to leave their children a patrimony. Online, Christian rock bands, or those with Christian rock roots, like Creed, have active value-based solidarity communities.

The principle networking action in these communities amounts to attending events that celebrate the values the brand stands for and deepening the experience through interaction. Apple has conventions. MacWorld is part of a viral marketing strategy. Rock groups have concerts. Harley-Davidson and Saturn have celebratory events. Saturn says: "Come visit the factory in Tennessee." After these morally and emotionally intense events, networked community members have to debrief together, either online or in follow-up meetings.

How do you determine whether your brand could gather a networked community in this way? The first step is to find out how brand users are engaging with each other already. What kinds of networks have they formed? Have they formed tightly knit groups on the Web? Are their conversations oriented by a love of the social values they see promoted by the

brand? Are events like conferences, seminars, new releases, new issues, and so forth key parts of their discussion? Do they take pride in reporting to each other what they learned and whom they met?

Look also at the nature of your brand. Does the brand stand for values that serve as a call to action? Compare them with Apple's value of liberation or Saturn's value of small-town caring. Are their values ones around which events have already been developed? If the answers to these last two questions are mostly affirmative, a marketer has reason to engage in viral strategies appropriate to a solidarity-networked community.

Appreciator-Networked Communities

An appreciator network forms around a brand with a strong personality, one with whom people want to identify themselves. Usually, the personality is a human, but it can be some other kind of figure. In the arts, culture, and sports worlds, many individual performers and teams attract networks of appreciators. So do fashion designers, other kinds of designers, chefs, and star CEOs. High-service brands such as the Four Seasons and high-quality brands such as Saab can attract networks of appreciators.

Appreciators are clearly different from members of solidarity communities in that they revel in knowledge of technical details and facts about the brand and emulate each other in being a better exemplar of the brand. For this reason, their conversations include much one-upmanship and many unresolved disputes. People become members of such communities to sharpen their ability to be exemplary.

While Martha Stewart's online community members are in the dead center of appreciator-emulative behavior, as are David Bowie's and Meredith Brooks's fans, others can slip off in the direction of other categories. A Four Seasons' aficionado who delights in the way the hotel wraps underwear is an appreciator. A Four Seasons' aficionado who goes on and on about the number of Four Seasons hotels he or she has stayed at and why they are better than any other hotels is moving away from being an appreciator toward being a taste-maker who is promoting himself by means of the hotel. So how do you tell whether to start a network of appreciators?

As always, start by examining how your brand is being talked about. Find out if people see your brand as a stable, interesting feature of their lives: Do you find discussions where people like to show off their knowledge of your products or company? Are there good-natured, emulative disagreements about the value of this or that product? Do people talk more about your product line's technical features than about how your brand fits into their lives?

Also, find out if there is already a hidden star. Do people talk about your CEO or some other company figure? Do they spend time wondering what your company will do next? Do environmental, social, or financial concerns regularly surface that would ordinarily be addressed only by Investor Relations or Corporate Communications?

Look at your brand. Appreciators experience their love of the product alone in a more or less romantic solitude, like Wordsworth appreciating nature. Are your products ones that enable individuals to experience themselves as solitary individuals with particular tastes? Are they artistic products like jewelry, poetic (as opposed to dance or party) music, and the kind of high-performance product that solicits individual testing? Is the nature of your product, as with culinary products and even some appliances, such that it would make sense to attach a “designer” personality? Is there a tradition of service that makes people feel special individually, as at the Four Seasons? Last, is there a fascinating intricacy in using the product? Is something particularly ingenious about your product line or company that could be leveraged into making a founder, C-level officer, or someone else into a genuine star like Steve Jobs or Jack Welch?

Positive answers to these questions show that your company is positioned to build or join a networked community of appreciators.

Taste-Maker Communities

Taste-makers are opinion leaders who simply love being imitated or persuading others. Malcolm Gladwell, in his book *The Tipping Point*, calls them a sales force.¹⁸ These are people who are driven by the new. They are always finding something that they think is cool or neat and getting others to go along with them.¹⁹ They are admired for the way they carry themselves through life and are trusted for the same reason. They are not experts. The pharmaceutical industry early found that taste-makers among physicians were different from technical or expert opinion leaders. Experts do not carry the same level of trust. Taste-makers draw others to them. They have contagious moods.

Some celebrities such as Oprah Winfrey are taste-makers. Certain disc jockeys count as well, although it is not always clear which are taste-makers by force of admirable personality and which by expertise. But the professional taste-makers are not the interesting ones for viral marketers. Better to find the nonprofessionals who can be enlisted to produce word-of-mouth successes.

Taste-makers network with each other and with their followers by talking about and promoting the new and cool. Their credibility with people is

determined by their spotting and promoting brands that become popular. They talk about what is cool, why it is cool, and what people can do to make it cooler, to get it better known.

Marc Schiller's Electric Artists (mentioned earlier as specializing in building online networked communities for companies and stimulating the networks to promote brands) emphasizes that taste-makers have an uncanny knack for telling people what is cool and then challenging them to do something achievable to make it cooler. “Let’s call the radio station to get the song played.” “Let’s tell retailers how cool the product is and ask them to stock it.” Taste-makers and those who join with them in taste-making want to be in on the action, and that almost always means being first in their social circle to promote something cool.²⁰

In most cases, searching the Web shows whether a company has taste-makers promoting it or its brand. Taste-makers create sites focused on your brand or company. Taste-makers identify what is cool about your company. The company's product need not be trendy. A utility company that tries out a few new environmental programs can come under the eye of taste-makers.

Look also at your products. Do they come in new releases, in new updates? Are the differences between your products and your competition matters of design more than function? Do your designs delight people more than raise their curiosity? Can your designs be broadly appreciated without requiring much special education?

Look at your company's actions. Are you first in cleaning the environment, in making the world better, in ESOPs, in producing something that could be delightful and a cool trend? (It cannot be too complicated.) You will not find taste-makers promoting a new and valuable but arcane engineering standard, even if it does make the earth a better place. However, if your company is buying up and preserving the Rain Forest, that could be a source for taste-making viral activity.

Look also at the channels by which taste-makers could expand in the appreciation of your brand. Can they call retailers and talk shows? What can they do after they have enticed their friends to buy more? Taste-makers have to have a channel for action! If your product is updated regularly, has a design that produces delight of some sort, and is distributed in a way that taste-makers can affect, then building a taste-making community may make sense.

Maven-Networked Communities

Mavens have recently received much recognition. Nick Hornby celebrated music mavens in his novel (later turned into a movie) *High Fidelity* (1996).

Malcolm Gladwell stressed them in *The Tipping Point*.²¹ While taste-makers celebrate and promote the cool and neat, mavens educate us about what is admirable. Mavens study electronics, cars, fashions, music, real estate, finance, wines, or whatever subject they happen to have a strong interest in. They are generally not professionals but rather enthusiasts—car buffs, stereo buffs, and so forth.

Normally, mavens are like teachers who want to educate others to appreciate something that they understand deeply; and like teachers, they gear the lesson according to the student. In music, they recommend not simply what they currently find interesting but music that their interlocutors will like and that will also refine their tastes. Mavens generally do this with the simple hope of more conversation. Mavens tend to build networks of friends or acquaintances whom they advise most often one on one or in small groups.

Businesses like Hear Music and REI have developed maven viral strategies that include hiring mavens as their sales staffs. They gain the maven's enthusiasm and product knowledge but cannot control the maven's fierce independence and his or her own brand building. Commonly, though certainly not always, mavens are charming, witty, and warm when talking about their preoccupation; and that is why the Internet is an extraordinary boon for them. On the Web, they can form relationships focused mainly on what they love.

Epinions, Amazon, Uplister, and, to a lesser extent, REI are creating online maven networks. They are providing a forum for mavens to take positions, review products, and give their accounts of brands. Remember that mavens are educators. Like professional educators, the best of them seek to find the best way to bring their students to the next level of sophistication or refinement. Mavens stand for designing better and more erudite lives. Their currency is their love of their domain. That love builds trust in their followers. Mavens cannot be bought. Their autonomy is their gold.

How do you know whether you want to attract and facilitate mavens? Do your brands or the brands you sell, if you are a retailer or distributor, require developed tastes or skills? If the answer is yes, then you very likely already have mavens commenting on your product. You certainly want to cultivate them. Research the Internet to see what you can find.

To an untrained ear, the difference between taste-makers and mavens can seem slight. The simplest way to tell the difference is to note that taste-makers promote the delightfully cool, the pop; mavens take us beyond it. Mavens try to teach. Retailers have been best at recognizing and cultivating mavens. This is so because mavens are attracted to whoever gives them

the best, most honest inside knowledge. But you may very well want to cultivate mavens for early product design and draw on taste-makers for promotion. We now turn to developing viral marketing strategies appropriate to each type of networked community.

VIRAL MARKETING STRATEGIES FOR EACH TYPE OF NETWORKED COMMUNITY

Viral strategies for building networks should be based on the kind of interaction that takes place in a networked community. Thus, the appropriate strategy for a solidarity community is one that builds allegiance and drives promotions as a matter of celebrating the community. Likewise, a community of appreciators is enhanced and mobilized by strategies designed to increase emulation. Taste-maker communities should be driven by strategies that build excitement over promotional goals. And networks of mavens call for strategies designed to expand their educational influence. Individual mavens are gathered into maven universities like that at Epinions. We must focus on developing the best strategy for each community. When communities and strategies are mismatched, network development is stunted.

The four basic viral strategies called for by each type of networked community are summarized in Table 6.2 on page 112. Descriptions of each strategy and illustrative case studies are given in the following sections.

Allegiance-Building Strategies for Solidarity Communities

The goal of an allegiance-building viral strategy in a solidarity-networked community is to encourage members of the community to make, and incite others to make, product purchases as a display of their commitment to perpetuate and enlarge the community. Solidarity communities are unique in that perpetuation of the community becomes the focus of buzz.

Organizing a Solidarity Community. Solidarity communities are usually organized by grass-roots means with offline events used to familiarize people with the community (whether it is online or off). In the music industry, the concerts of values-based bands such as Christian Rock or Alternative Hip Hop are ideal for introducing fans to the online community. Photographs of the audience and backstage accounts of the concert draw people to the site.

Table 6.2

Viral Strategies by Networked Community Type

	<i>Brand as Authority</i>	<i>Promoter as Authority</i>
<i>We-Focus</i>	<p><i>Foster Allegiance Strategy</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Organize:</i> Grassroots, shared meetings. • <i>Communications approach:</i> Solicit authentic voices, publish members' experiences with community. • <i>Reward for members:</i> Public recognition with testimonials. • <i>Brand role:</i> Symbol of community's shared social values. 	<p><i>Build Excitement Strategy</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Organize:</i> Suggest specific promotional goals. • <i>Communications approach:</i> Appeal to members as powerful tastemakers by giving them product previews and asking about what's cool and why. • <i>Reward for members:</i> Celebrate them as the ones who make products successful; celebrate their promotional successes. • <i>Brand role:</i> Next new thing, trend.
	<p><i>Increase Emulation Strategy</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Organize:</i> Official forums (offline and online). • <i>Communications approach:</i> Encourage emulation through questions that enable members to show how much they know and are like brand personality. • <i>Reward for members:</i> Exclusive technical information on product features. • <i>Brand Role:</i> Network personality who intervenes and acknowledges member likeness. 	<p><i>Creating Dissemination Strategy</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Organize:</i> Give mavens of product category tools to expand audience for their reviews. • <i>Communications Approach:</i> Ask mavens and their followers to review reviewers. • <i>Reward for Members:</i> Special events and special product editions, expand horizons. • <i>Brand Role:</i> Gives mavens and followers a way of feeling wiser, associating them with erudite brands.
<i>I-Focus</i>		

Book tours can do the same, especially for books such as Rebecca Wells's *Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood*, which stimulated communities of mothers and daughters. (Many books develop appreciators.) Events such as owners' barbecues, conventions, seminars, product demonstrations, and even, if done well, public product samplings can have the effect of drawing people to mix with others who are like them and with whom they would like to have further contact. Saturn managed it with its homecoming events. L.L.Bean organizes athletic nature lovers to participate in hiking, kayaking, and other events that they enjoy. This retailer has gone so far as to create an Outdoor Discovery School for budding nature lovers as a way of introducing them to the outdoors and making its products a part of potential customers' lives.

Companies that produce controversial products such as firearms can easily draw their users into a community that speaks for controversial values. Offline advocacy events remain critical for the solidarity community. The core experience of such embattled groups is sharing heightened experiences of expressing values they love in extremely high-trust, face-to-face venues.

Communications Approach. The heart of any viral strategy directed at networked communities lies in its approach to communications. Allegiance is built in solidarity networks as members feel increasingly an active part of the community. For that reason, the typical strategy is to develop a community bulletin board that functions as the community's daily Op-Ed page. Members of the community are encouraged to report on events they attended together, submit photographs, and write about their experiences living with the values they have. Seeing their reports appear and draw answers gives members the sense that they are recognized, critical members of the community. These bulletin boards have a number of different themes about which members regularly contribute. Members of solidarity networks that form around Christian rock bands obviously write about themes related to spiritual, ethical, and biblical matters. For example, the following is from the site of the Christian band P.O.D.:

I think the cool thing with P.O.D. doing the worship stuff at their Cornerstone slot is not only cause it's worship music, but lately I've been meeting a lot of people who think they're sellouts. So if any people there thought P.O.D. sold out, I certainly hope they realized that P.O.D. is still playing for God. Later, peace out.

Believe, Receive, Obtain, Withstand, Never die!!

Weight Watchers is also forming a large solidarity community. Weight Watchers—which stands for health, forming a team to succeed, designing your own life, and an attractive appearance that inspires self-confidence—has made publication of its members' experiences its key promotional strategy. People still give accounts of their struggles and successes with weight loss in their local meetings. But Weight Watchers has created a much broader international community, which contains more than 30 bulletin boards on its Web site. People discuss such themes as "stress and overeating," join "inspiration groups," and recount their aspirations toward losing 100, 200, or 300-plus pounds. Setting up such a forum is only half the battle. Members join such groups to be celebrated in their affection for the values the community stands for, and this must also occur.

Rewards for Members. One critical part of this allegiance-building strategy is to recruit leaders in the community to edit and write accounts of those who have achieved something important. Indeed, being identified as community leaders and being appointed to positions of responsibility in running the publication operation has to count as one of the highest rewards. Online community leaders write more than others, receive high levels of responses from people, are more articulate than the average writer, and exhibit high levels of passion for the values at the site. In addition to editing, these leaders must also celebrate other members for achievements. Being the subject of a leader's story or standing in the limelight as your own story is republished, as critical for everyone to note, is a second common form of recognition in solidarity groups.

Weight Watchers, for example, has network leaders interview others and publish their stories online. Communities live and die by how well the voices of the members are heightened while remaining authentic. Here are some excerpts from the story of Debbie Watts:

"My sister Robyn was my inspiration for trying Weight Watchers meetings," explains Debbie Watts. Since joining in September 2000, this grateful sibling has lopped 34.8 pounds off her 5'5" frame. Twenty-seven-year old Debbie is now a shapely 126 pounds.

She has had lots of family help in her quest, as her parents, also inspired by Robyn, are Weight Watchers meeting members as well. Debbie says, "The problem to me was that 'diet' was a four-letter word." Weight Watchers, of course, eliminated that problem, as it's more a lifestyle plan than a diet."

No woman is an island. Debbie stresses, "It's possible to succeed alone but it's so much easier with help. At meetings I get recipes, tips on how to handle myself at weddings, and so much more. And I have my built-in team with my parents and sister. They cheered me on when I got back into my old size-6 jeans."

Appearing in such a glowing column as this rewards Debbie and inspires others to equal achievements to receive similar recognition. Indeed, if the network leaders do a good job, many who have had similar achievements are willing to bask in the light of a Debbie.

Brand Role. Because the brand has to play the role of standing for social values that the community cares about, it must be established with a clear understanding of how members of the community express those values. Then it must give members a way to express their values. In the case of P.O.D., the band led concert-goers in prayer. Weight Watchers draws on the

values of teamwork, family, shared meals, and honoring weddings and other festivals. Fitting into smaller sizes for a wedding is part of the celebration. For brands that focus on solidarity communities, the brand design has both to establish the connection between the branded product, the social value of which it is an expression, and to set up an enhanced practice of expressing and celebrating the value that includes using or purchasing the branded product.

A good example, and one drawn from the authors' own work, of how a company positions its brand with a social value and creates a new expression of this value around purchasing the branded product is the case of CEMEX's *Patrimonio Hoy*. In this case, the networked community was a traditional low-income community in Mexico. Yet, the same basic principles apply here as are potent in creating online solidarity communities among the wired, first-world affluent.

CEMEX, the third largest cement manufacturer in the world, discovered that its largest and most stable growing market, both in Mexico and internationally, consisted of low-income do-it-yourself homebuilders. In investigating these communities, CEMEX found that these Mexican do-it-yourselfers frequently got together in informal money-pooling associations to pay for materials to build homes they could leave to their children.

Most of the time, however, the money ended up going to unplanned celebrations or emergencies, not the home. Because patrimony mattered so much, CEMEX sought to establish its brand as the one that stood for patrimony. To do this, it developed a program called *Patrimonio Hoy*. In this program, do-it-yourselfers joined together to pool their money in a new version of the old practice. The pooled money was committed to building materials, and the pooling had to last long enough for each person to accumulate the materials for a nine-meter square room.

In this way, the group activity was both a celebration of patrimony and the purchase of branded cement. Hence, a practice was instituted for celebrating patrimony that involved purchasing the product. Weight Watchers groups do the same thing. They celebrate teams, life, life's events, managing weight and health, and do so as a prelude to purchasing more Weight Watchers' supplies.

Designing a brand to become strongly associated with a social value and to make the purchase of the branded product an expression of care for the value flows into the other elements of the allegiance-building strategy. Like Weight Watchers, CEMEX enhanced the basic money pooling, patrimony-building groups by including them in broader Patrimonio clubs, which consisted of all the groups in a region. CEMEX identified the natural leaders in these clubs—usually the women who formed the old money-pooling

groups—and gave them positions of leadership and offered them incentives to recruit and motivate members of the clubs. To keep motivation and customer loyalty high, CEMEX managers developed a publication strategy. Because more than 50 percent of consumers had less than a sixth-grade education, CEMEX turned to festive celebrations at the completion of each room. At each celebration, the builder would deliver a speech consisting of thanks and tips for how to do it better next time. Both members of Patrimony clubs and other members of the community attended these events. Thus, the events further enticed people to join *Patrimonio Hoy*.

Emulation Strategies for Appreciators Communities

Most companies fall into building sites with an emulation strategy dimly in view whether or not they have the appropriate brand personality. Appreciators are, after all, customers who write individual letters of appreciation or criticism to companies, performers, teachers, physicians, or lawyers. The stronger the personality of the brand and its primary disseminators—star CEO's like Disney's Michael Eisner or the people who have direct customer contact—the more likely appreciators are drawn to it. They write because they seek a response. Ultimately, they would love a response from the personality that they associate with the brand. Good direct marketers have learned how to maintain their loyalty and increase a company's share of the wallet of appreciators by putting them on mailing lists and sending them timely, useful promotions.

The strategy of increasing emulation among appreciators should have three specific goals. First, by stimulating emulation, appreciators develop reasons for purchasing more of the product. Second, as appreciators find increasing amounts of their interest being captured, they tell others about the brand. Well-managed appreciator Web sites are especially useful in converting people into community members following such recommendations. Third, encouraging emulation naturally brings community members to talk about themselves. They can even be solicited to write about themselves, and this enables marketers to learn more about members' preferences, their understanding of the brand, and how these types of people can best be reached. Such information helps marketers decide which alliances and cross-promotions can most profitably be developed.

In the music industry, product endorsements are as important as shared stages. Partly based on what he learns from his appreciators, David Bowie invites relevant artists to be interviewed or to perform on his site. In other industries, knowledge of such preferences can be used to determine where

and how to promote—what rewards matter—as well as where alliances could be formed.

Organizing a Community of Appreciators. Appreciators are drawn to the official place or site. You can drive them by letting them know that there is a brand personality there who is going to speak, perform, or otherwise appear. Techniques include offering an exclusive, privileged look at one or another aspect of the product. What will the new release or generation look like? How will it perform? Do you want a free sample? Do you want to learn more? Offering to take up such questions, as we see every day on Netscape, AOL, and Yahoo, attracts appreciators. So do simple requests from the brand personality for evaluations of product or service. As much as possible, let appreciators know that the brand personality pays attention and will even sometimes respond.

Communications Approach. Emulation begins when appreciators are asked to respond, often to answer questions that they pride themselves on being able to answer. They find themselves empowered by answering the questions because they identify themselves with the brand personality.

David Bowie and Meredith Brooks (rock singer and guitar player) run effective appreciator Web sites as they solicit their appreciators for help in creating new albums, writing lyrics, choosing the single, programming the order, remixing, and so forth. David Bowie received more than 80,000 submissions of lyrics for a song he was composing with his fans. Both Brooks and Bowie frequently turn their questions to community members into contests with the reward of working with them to mix the album. Successful contests are effective in letting appreciators show their sophisticated skills, which are like those of the brand personality they admire.

Other sorts of responses can be used. Appreciators at Tori Amos' Web site compete with one another in telling Tori Amos about themselves in lyrical and considerable detail. Tori Amos' fans tell her about all the books, films, cars, trucks, tattoos, and so forth that they like. At the Plus 6 site (Plus 6 is a Christian rock group), the conversation on the bulletin board reveals that many Plus 6 appreciators have been home schooled or had parents who strongly considered it. They could be asked to describe this schooling.

Any innovative company can solicit ideas from appreciators. Usually marketers ask the questions, but members of R&D teams and other experts might well play that role. Commonly, a network of appreciators is built around events, conventions, seminars, or Webinars. Oracle and General Electric work with communities of appreciators this way. The

key is for company leaders who speak to represent the core competence and basic personality of the company. C-level officers, if available, are ideal for this purpose.

It is critical to ask questions that appreciators can answer and that can make them feel good about answering. Asking other kinds of questions may provide valuable information or affect sales drivers, but it will not build a community of emulative appreciators. If the brand personality is strong enough, simply opening a bulletin board for appreciators to ask questions of one another can stimulate emulative conversation. Martha Stewart's site is constructed this way and is exemplary of the kind of emulative conversation sought.

At Stewart's site, a community member—perhaps one incited by a community leader—will ask a question about how to handle some matter of living a fulfilling life. Without guidelines, other community members help with advice written in tones that approach Martha Stewart's own. When a response finally comes in that sounds fully Martha Stewart-ish, the conversation ends by mutual consent. Here is a sample:

- *From: claradiaz.* "For the past few years 'Christmas-Eve' dinner has been at my house and every year I add to my table settings. This year, however, 'Thanksgiving' dinner will be at my house. For Christmas, my tablecloth and napkins have been a 'X-mas red.' What color should I buy my tablecloth and napkins for Thanksgiving? Thank you! Clara"
- *From: tmd523.* "Hi, my suggestion is it really depends on your own style; everyone is different. I always have Thanksgiving at home, and I'm cooking and setting a table for 20-plus people. I usually use a contemporary light green cloth, and I've purchased very cozy autumn napkins. I use a ring in which I insert a cinnamon stick with a small flower and a place card, which everyone loves. I usually have a turkey centerpiece made of chocolate. It really dresses everything up. It's all preference. Go with your own style, and I'm sure it will be a hit. Tracy good luck!"
- *From: nsadam.* "I always go with classic white tablecloth, and then I can use whatever colour I want for napkins, décor, etc. For Thanksgiving, I particularly like white with celadon green napkins with leaves on them. I have some turkey candles in an antique orange colour. Stems of soft green kale, hypericum berries, and fresh stems of oak leaves all seem to blend well."
- *From: linny7.* "Clara, I have Thanksgiving every year for over 25 people with Royal Dalton Lady Caryle (which has pink, blue, and

gold trim on it). In order to match fall colors, I include gold and use different colors of centerpieces and candles like butternut color or brown colors. I sometimes use a small cornucopia with fall chocolate kisses, or wreaths for favors. Also place cards with a bible verse or something to be thankful for at each setting for the guest to read. Napkins are gold or natural with matching tablecloth. I have one table with Turkey dishes and a Turkey centerpiece. Every year I get something special to surprise my guests like napkin holders. This is fun if you have children who like to create. Children make the best turkeys with their outlined fingers. Have fun! It is my favorite holiday. Start early and use Martha's suggestion about labeling bowls ahead of time so people can help. I wish Martha would put on her Thanksgiving TV show again. It was great. Blessings to you all. Linny"

Everyone who has written in response to Clara's question has enjoyed herself, shown off, will want to do it again, and probably does not want to get topped by Linny again. In the process, each respondent also gets better at gracious living and is thereby more attracted to the site. These responses give Martha Stewart corporate a cornucopia of products to endorse and promote on the same site.

Reward for Members. In these messages, Linny can be seen to ask for precisely what appreciators want. They want to be recognized by the brand personality. Linny wants Martha Stewart to drop her a note about the Thanksgiving special she is dreaming up. Recognition is reward.

Martha Stewart does not appear to monitor or drop in on exchanges at her site. Other appreciator sites have brand personalities who do. Meredith Brooks makes it a habit to respond to some of the comments on her bulletin board every Monday. Fans at her site turn toward the kinds of conversation that catch her eye. Brooks's appreciators care about the technical details of guitar playing and music production.

Generally, appreciators are different from solidarity group members in that they can glory in the technical details they learn about products without ever caring much about wider social, value-oriented considerations. They are attracted to the personality of the brand and to the branded products' technical success. Technical details matter. Getting together does not. Martha Stewart's appreciators need never meet one another to celebrate gracious living together. They need never talk about why gracious living is the best way to live. They are content to be the technicians of gracious living, admiring Martha Stewart as their ideal.

Brand Role. Many companies create costly appreciator events or sites that fail because they have not designed a strong enough brand personality. Obviously, the strongest brand personalities are professional performers or innovative entrepreneurs like Martha Stewart who have a public biography, have developed their business, and have created something new in the process. However, businesses can have corporate personalities as well. Appreciators are obviously willing to respond to a group that has a corporate passion. Shell's forum, for instance, continues to receive and publish a great deal of mail. Its correspondents are clearly seeking conversations. Many have gripes about Shell. Others are classic Shell appreciators who come to Shell's defense. But both show signs of deep disappointment whenever the Shell team answers in a way that sounds scripted or checked over by the lawyers. The brand personality that speaks on such sites, whether it is a marketing team, an R&D team, a corporate communications team, or some other, must exhibit six attributes that are taken for granted when the brand personality is, for instance, a Sam Walton. The six attributes are:

1. *Vision.* The brand personality must be able to answer in a way that would appeal to a diverse group of people: "Why would the world be a better place if the company magically achieved all its corporate goals?"
2. *Passion.* The brand personality must love the company's culture and have a story about why that culture will enable the company to succeed at making the world a better place.
3. *Details.* Because the brand personality has a vision and a passion, it must love to talk about the details of the business. That does not mean that it has to know all the details at once, but loving the business and believing the vision mean being interested in the details of how to do things, especially how to do them better.
4. *Reasons for listening and responding now.* The brand personality has to know what its particular goal is in listening today (not just in general). Teams need to be consistent on this.
5. *Commitment to act.* No matter what the corporate rank of the brand personality, it must be able to take action and speak about actions it has taken. That means making promises to appreciators. Announcing contests with prizes is the easy way of showing commitment. However, offering contests with prizes too often comes across as inauthentic.
6. *Honest evaluation and appreciation of valuable comments.* Appreciators want to be genuinely appreciated. They want to be told why a seemingly important comment cannot be made useful, and they want to be told when they are on to something important.

In short, for an appreciator viral strategy to work, the voice of the corporate brand has to have passion. It has to speak as though the corporation's business and its take on its business are among the best things in life. Appreciators are not value based. Passion need not be defended; it just needs to be enacted. Appreciators seek a response from someone they wish to emulate.

The next two networked community strategies draw even more powerfully on the change that is taking place as our society becomes more networked. Customers are explicitly taking for themselves large parts of the role that used to be the exclusive preserve of professional marketers. Especially among people born after the baby boomers, promoting particular products can be an important part of designing a life. Consequently, the overriding question for marketers in dealing with taste-makers and mavens is how to let them in on the act. These communities are fully conscious that they are creating buzz.

Excitement Strategies for Taste-Maker Communities

Building excitement is an element of virtually any viral strategy. But in dealing with a networked community of taste-makers, the goal is to turn *them* into critical excitement builders. We depend on them to reach on their own particular goals of getting increasing numbers of people talking, listening, and purchasing. Taste-makers are powerful even when their actions are not coordinated. Hush Puppies' sales, for instance, grew four times in one year, mostly by the uncoordinated activities of taste-makers (with some help from mavens).

Organizing Taste-Makers. For virtually any new and relatively simple product, taste-makers are already advocating it. Taste-makers talk to others, post on sites, and even set up their own Web sites for such promotion. According to Marc Schiller, the key to finding and cultivating taste-makers is adopting a new credo.

People, not marketing departments, break brands and artists. Taste-makers are in control and like to feel in control. No industry should rely on mass marketing techniques with taste-makers. You should avoid the appearance of mass marketing and bring them into the process of finding out and developing buzz for what is cool.

Based on this credo, a marketer like Schiller organizes taste-makers by going online and asking those engaged in relevant conversations what they think of this or that brand or artist. For those who answer positively, you escalate the conversation by giving a free and exclusive sample (or account)

of what is to come. Ask whether it is cool. Get the taste-maker talking to you and, as a matter of technical ease, on your Web site if possible. Unlike appreciator sites, which have to be “official,” the sites that organize taste-makers need no frills. The taste-makers find the product cool, mostly without much persuasion.

Many taste-maker organizers let the interested taste-makers know that they will make or break the product. A company sends some marketing material and challenges the potential taste-makers to show their ability to create buzz. If they succeed, they then get more samples and more marketing material. Promotional tests can be any of the basics of grass-roots marketing—telling friends, putting up posters, calling retailers, and so forth.

For example, when Marc Schiller’s Electric Artists’ team sought to locate Christina Aguilera taste-makers, they went to 25 teen sites and asked, “Does anyone remember Christina Aguilera—she sang the song ‘Reflection’ from ‘Mulan’? Once the Electric Artists team located avid taste-makers, they were invited to get, as Schiller says, “a ‘behind the scenes view’ of the marketing machine behind Christina.” An exclusive initiation into the marketing of the product, brand, or performer is a critical part of cultivating taste-makers. Taste-makers want to know what is going on before others know. They want to be in on what is happening. Schiller’s team initiates them into the marketing process and gives them early knowledge. Only then could an Electric Artists marketer say, “Call your local station to request *Genie*. It is now 19 and we can make it number 1. Please help!”²²

Communications Approach. Communicating with taste-makers is like communicating with prima donnas. You must constantly remind them that they are the ones who produce the success. Set exciting and achievable goals. Monitor and publish their progress toward reaching the goals. Taste-makers do best when they are brought inside the marketing process as much as possible. They thrive when they can develop their own ways of promoting the product to others. In addition, it is critical for them to understand why the goals, such as gaining a certain amount of retail space, matter for the product’s success.

Taste-makers love to organize themselves and their friends to achieve goals. They love to be imitated. However, there are things a marketing department must do for them. It must enable them to coordinate in larger numbers than would otherwise be possible. The coordinated actions of even 150 taste-makers can produce amazing results. But the marketing department must monitor and publish results. If taste-makers can be told that so many more sales, so many more calls, so many more postings, so many more anything makes a significant difference, they can mobilize to achieve

that. Taste-makers love having the information. If they come close to the goal but fail, they want to know. Armed with that information, a marketer can turn to them repeatedly.

Rewards for Taste-Makers. Taste-makers love to receive anything cool. Just being in the presence of a brand or performer that they think is cool is a reward. Receiving inside information from a company on product design, being awarded cool merchandise, or being recognized as a contributor in any way can count as cool. These are the standard rewards. But taste-makers love making a marketing success. So they love having their advice solicited for each new thing and, in effect, can create their own rewards.

Brand Role. Taste-makers promote the next new and cool thing. Therefore, forms of entertainment, software, fashions, lines of cookware, furniture, and so forth that have regular *new* releases are ideal for taste-makers. A corporate brand that can engage in trendy activity can also benefit from taste-makers. For taste-makers to support any brand over time, it has to be one that is extended year in, year out—even better, season in, season out. Otherwise, the taste-maker cannot be involved. There must be change that the taste-maker can feel responsible for.

To be cool, the brand has to have an appeal that, relative to the sophistication of the taste-maker, is not too personally demanding. An esoteric mutual fund specializing in derivatives would be too demanding for the ordinary financial services taste-maker. Thus, although their delight may appear complex at first, it must turn out to be simple in the end.

Because of the nature of the new and the cool, taste-making is often a matter of crossing communities. To show how marketers can work effectively with taste-makers, we draw on how Brian Cohen and Al Branch of Elektra Records guided Missy Elliott’s 2001 summer success single “Get UR Freak On” (on “Miss E . . . So Addictive”) from hip-hop’s taste-makers to those of the mainstream market. They learned in January 2001 that Missy Elliott would be delivering the tracks of her new album within the month. Missy Elliott is an innovative hip-hop artist who successfully broke new ground with her first album (1997) and subsequently went on to work with many other artists in the hip-hop community. Her second album (1999), as is common in the recording industry, did not succeed commercially.

Traditionally, radio play drives sales, and Cohen and Branch were certain that they could get tracks from the new Missy Elliott played on the traditional Black urban stations. However, the sales that resulted from such limited play would count as another commercial failure. The key to Elliott’s

success was to get her to move from the mainstream urban to the crossover urban and then to top 40 stations. Achieving the crossover is quite tricky because songs that are too commercial alienate the mix DJs who are the initial influential taste-makers. Yet, if a song is not commercial enough, crossover is never achieved. Having a song that is both noncommercial and commercial is only half the problem. Programmers and DJs at urban and crossover stations do not like to continue playing a song that is moving to top 40 stations. Therefore, marketers have first to get the record played at urban and crossover stations in the 10 prime markets (including Los Angeles, Atlanta, New Orleans, New York, and San Francisco), then keep listener enthusiasm high in these markets as it crosses over to pop markets. Any loss of audience causes a loss in momentum and threatens the crossover.

In preparation, Cohen and Branch developed a list of the 100 most influential (taste-maker) mix DJs who played their own selections on Friday and Saturday nights and who are listened to by other DJs, prime time programmers, and the hip-hop cognoscenti (mavens). They also compiled a secondary list of 500 for the second round of taste-maker network marketing. They set the release date for May 15 to give themselves enough time to get the relevant communities talking before the release and the traditional marketing blitz that would come then. The basic plan included four steps:

1. Secure taste-maker DJs in a core African American hip-hop community by sending them exclusive early versions of the single and following up to get radio and club play.
2. Build buzz by event marketing and quality (commemorative) giveaways at African American elite and middle-class lifestyle events.
3. Use Internet e-cards and tell-a-friend contests to cross over to other taste-makers (especially outside the core hip-hop community).
4. Start standard MTV, broadcast radio advertising, and actual Missy Elliott appearances both before and after the release date to keep interest high and to secure crossover.

When Cohen and Branch heard the album tracks, “Get UR Freak On” and “Lick Shots,” they realized that both had single potential but both tracks sounded unedited. There were strong arguments that the tracks should be sent back for editing, but they determined that they could not afford delay. They immediately burned 100 CDs with “Get UR Freak On” that night and sent them to the 100 preselected DJs.

Next, Cohen and Branch had to make “Get UR Freak On” part of people’s lives in the communities where the song was played. They worked the

10 critical urban markets and events that generally appealed to the African American community. They bought Billboard space and sent wrapped vans around the critical urban neighborhoods to establish a presence for Missy Elliott. They also formed street teams of taste-makers to pass out fliers and poster empty walls. At critical African American celebrations like the NBA All-Star Game, they had street teams of taste-makers hand out commemorative Missy Elliott foam basketballs. They also distributed 10,000 “Get UR Freak On” hotel door hangers with condoms and passed out fliers and posters. The goal of the taste-makers involved in the street teams was to get dialogue going. According to Branch, the tools that work best either establish the artist in the community or get people talking about the artist as part of the event. The goal was to motivate taste-makers by enabling them to have a role in creating buzz.

Meanwhile, to keep DJs talking, 12-inch vinyl records of “Get UR Freak On” were shipped to the 600 most influential taste-making DJs. Again, the goal was to increase radio and club play. Branch regularly contacted the DJs to check in on what they thought of the single and how much play they were giving it. Momentum kept building in the African American community.

To begin the crossover, they started an e-mail campaign in which they located 200,000 online Missy Elliott taste-makers and sent them e-cards featuring Missy Elliott’s own filming of her video shoot of “Get UR Freak On.” (This taste-maker community includes kids who are learning from and promoting what goes on in the African American community.) The one who forwarded the card to the greatest number of friends got the chance to attend Missy Elliott’s next video shoot. When sales reached 10,000, Cohen and Branch knew that the single had crossed over to new, non-urban, non-African American taste-makers.

Dissemination Strategies for Maven Communities

Because mavens tend to form highly interactive, thoughtful relationships with relatively small groups of followers, networks of mavens have been slow to emerge. Mavens find space in solidarity, appreciator, and taste-making communities. Nevertheless, like offline business, e-businesses have been trying to use mavens; and although robust maven networks have yet to emerge, results to date show the value of encouraging mavens to act as reviewers. A recent study of reviews on Amazon.com, 800.com, and Barnesandnoble.com showed the following value of having mavens—most of the reviewers are mavens—write product reviews:

- Review readers are twice as likely to purchase as nonreaders of reviews.
- Review readers return to the site nine times more frequently than nonreaders of reviews.
- Review readers are twice as unlikely to stop using the site as nonreaders of reviews.

Although review readers account for only one-third of site users, they account for two-thirds of the sales.²³ The importance of on-site mavens is expected to increase as the number of competing market offerings increases and as their quality becomes increasingly complicated and similar.

If you sell erudite goods, the strategy of forming a maven network is essentially to become the *university* of mavens in your category. Once people interested in the product category come to you for learned information, the popularity of the maven information channel will enhance the sales channel.

Organizing Mavens. If you sell products that require sophistication, or that are increasingly valued as you develop increasing discrimination, mavens already know about you, visit your site, read your press, and follow your offerings. Many of them have probably written to ask for additional information. Attracting them often means only giving them better tools for contacting you and for reaching others.

Amazon.com attracts mavens by offering readers the opportunity to write reviews on books and other merchandise that it sells. To enhance the relationship and enable real mavens to stand out, it allows readers of reviews to rate their usefulness. Amazon and Epinion suppose that reviewers whose reviews are highly rated are mavens. Amazon and Epinion thus let readers look up the reviewers, find out what they have reviewed, and see how their reviews have fared. Customers can also find out a little about who the maven is. In this way, an Amazon.com or Epinion customer can feel a sense of familiarity with the maven-reviewer. Even though there is no interactivity, Amazon has assisted mavens in reaching others. Epinion goes further by featuring certain mavens monthly. These features give Epinion users a little more material for building a relationship with a maven.

Communications Approach. A robust communications approach has to enable mavens to build up their own kind of networks, as professors at universities do. The key to this process is enhancing the space and kind of

communication that enables customers to identify themselves with the mavens. Mavens gain this identification best when they speak in their own, mostly earnest, voices about who they are and why they care about giving advice. The communications approach should focus on enabling mavens to develop their own niche brands as mini Ann Landers-type advice gurus.

Uplister leads here. This is a site where music mavens explain their lists of favorite songs concerning particular themes. Not only do mavens give general accounts of themselves, but also Uplister encourages them to explain how they understand the theme for which they have collected songs. Mavens on Uplister continually engage in both personalization and education. Potential followers can find ways of identifying themselves with the maven as they learn. Uplister finds that providing the structure in which this identification can occur and where mavens appear admirable to followers can go a long way toward replacing the personal understanding and friendly respect of offline maven relationships.

Both online and offline sites could help mavens with many more additional tools and themes for building their personal advice brands. In the future, for instance, maven communities are likely to become more interactive as mavens begin responding to each other and to one or another of their followers in a public forum, much as occurs for appreciators now.

Reward for Mavens. Mavens live for the opportunity to be acknowledged for their special interests. Any way in which mavens can see that what they say counts is an important reward. For that reason, Amazon's and Epinion's reviews of the reviewers are an important reward for the mavens.

Some maven network builders reward mavens with special conventions for meeting one another. Conventions have had some success with mavens who already use chat rooms and bulletin boards. Mavens also like to have advance and detailed knowledge of product offerings. They are interested in what people in R&D are thinking, and they like special product editions such as the early vinyl releases DJs get in the music industry. Therefore, bringing mavens closer to the inside of the industry remains an important inducement. The more a reward increases knowledge and sophistication that can be passed on, the more appeal it is likely to have.

Brand Role. Maven networks make sense for brands that require a developed understanding. The main problem mavens have is sharing their understanding with others. Consequently, viral strategies in this area are likely to follow the current path of Amazon and the like. This still leaves a range of underexplored techniques. Mavens could issue reviews and

recommendations on certain subjects according to the level of the reader, years of experience, and so on. They would love the challenge. Mavens could select the mavens they most like to read or listen to. Contacting highly regarded mavens could then be organized and might even require a membership or subscription. In some cases, certain kinds of mavens could even require that their readers pass an admissions test to receive their reviews and recommendations. Again, look to the university as the model.

Aside from the few pure maven strategies of companies like Uplister and Epinions, mavens are often targeted in conjunction with other networked communities. Hasbro's release of its 2001 game Pox gives a good example of that. That campaign also serves well as an example of the general guidelines for orchestrating viral marketing as part of an overall marketing plan. We turn to this subject next.

INCLUDING VIRAL MARKETING IN A MARKETING PLAN

Orchestrating viral and traditional campaigns involves 10 basic keys deployed in three phases. The keys are listed next:

- *Preparatory.*
 - Start network marketing generally at least three months before traditional marketing.
 - Plan to start with several communities so that you can learn from successes. (Include a plan for moving from community to community.)
 - Develop a clear goal of what you want network leaders to accomplish within the general marketing goals.
 - Draw on mass promotion to lend credibility to word-of-mouth and then capture a broader market.
- *First set of communities.*
 - Seed with product or critical information.
 - Market around lifestyle events or leader appearances.
 - Use early broadcast marketing to enhance buzz and to establish awareness of events.
- *Climax by adding direct marketing and a traditional media campaign.*
 - Use early direct marketing to cross-communities and cultivate new network leaders.
 - Always keep the network leaders ahead with premier information and contests that yield commemorative promotional materials that fit with their lifestyles.

- Begin the traditional media campaign shortly before the product release and enhance it so that it can also serve as the climax of word-of-mouth as well as the beginning of traditional public relations events.

VIRAL MARKETING FOR THE POX GAME

Hasbro's marketing campaign around the release of Pox provides a good summary of how viral marketing works and how it can play a role in an overall marketing plan in terms of the previous points.

Matt Collins, director of marketing at Hasbro Games, was introduced to the brand concept of Pox roughly two years before he took it to a national rollout. Pox is a game played roughly like a Gameboy, except that the device has a radio transmitter and receiver built into it. One Pox player can play against another person directly or play against multiple people. The idea is to train (create) a warrior by giving him certain kinds of armor, weapons, and a basic fighting script. This warrior can play against other warriors and capture their armor if he wins or have his armor captured if he loses. The back story involves these warriors saving earth from a strand of alien DNA that threatens to disable all machinery on the planet.

Collins saw the game as a potential brand for 8- to 12-year-olds. The possibility of collecting different armor types, which could then be used in battles, gave it an appeal similar to Pokemon. The wireless technology took it beyond Pokemon by making it aspirational. Kids, especially 9- and 10-year-olds, aspire to having the technology—cell phones and beepers—of older kids and their parents. It also played into the well-known love among kids of that age for constructing and destroying constructed things.

Pox seemed at first like a toy that could be marketed successfully with a conventional marketing plan. That would involve a strong showing at the February toy show, which all major toy retailers attend. Then, send it out to be manufactured in April, ship to the retailers in August, and start television advertising at the beginning of school to produce “kid nag” and make the necessary sales during the holiday season. (In the toy industry, 60 percent to 70 percent of revenue comes during the December holiday season.)

Collins, however, decided to expand his thinking by working with maven gamers both inside and older than the target range. He found young maven gamers in the New York, Boston, and Chicago areas. The older ones were at Babbages and similar places. The results were unanimous. The game was cool to play alone. The Pokemon-collecting aspect of the game was cool, and that made playing with another kid also fun. However, what made

the game awesome was its stealth nature. You could leave the radio on and then attack anyone else within range simply by passing by. Best, you could see kids playing and attack them unseen from afar. The mavens were willing participants in the initial viral marketing phase and, in fact, made a real contribution to the brand concept.

That good result, however, produced a new challenge for Collins. The multiplayer experience drew the greatest “Wow” from players; but for most purchasers, it required a market that already had 15 percent penetration. How could a toy be efficiently launched into markets that required such levels of penetration at the time of launch (not an uncommon problem with so-called networked products)? Launching an advertising campaign that promised a multiplayer experience would lead to insurmountably bad word-of-mouth unless kids could experience it.

Collins decided to start in the Midwest, the region with the greatest Gameboy/Nintendo/Sony use and the best positioning of Hasbro’s business customers, and move from there east and then west. He determined to work one Midwestern urban region at a time, starting with the Chicagoland area, which had 400,000 eligible boys. He decided to find the coolest of the cool kids (taste-makers), supply them each with 10 Pox games to give away to their friends, pay them \$30, and put them on the Pox mission to spread Pox. Collins started with three cool Pox ambassadors per school in roughly 150 qualified schools. (Schools qualified by meeting criteria involving the size of the population of boys ages 9 and 10; families of middle income; local Target, FAO Schwartz, or Toys“R”Us stores; and sales of hand-held games in the area.) Collins wanted to start the taste-making process in April before school was out, support word-of-mouth with local promotions, and reach the necessary penetration by the end of the summer. Toys“R”Us and Target would track the number of Pox sold to determine if the word-of-mouth strategy lifted penetration to the level where regular mass promotion could effectively begin.

The coolest of the cool kids were selected through surveying. A video was made to excite them about their mission. It showed other kids, like them, playing Pox and finding it cool. The kids knew, of course, that the back story was marketing, yet they loved it. Collins’ team delivered Pox to 15 kids at a time in more than 100 orientation sessions and followed up with telephone calls. The most important promise that the kids made was to give the game to 10 other recruits (friends). The second promise was to see to it that the Pox message was not lost. Later, researchers interviewed the kids to keep alive the sense that they were bringing the newest, coolest thing to their communities.

To support these “ambassadors,” Pox.com was launched in late April to get the opportunity to reach taste-makers. The efforts of these taste-makers were, in turn, supported by mobile billboards, such as those used in urban neighborhoods for Missy Elliott, deployed in the neighborhoods. Routes were worked out so that kids would see them on their way home from school and while playing with one another after school. Hasbro bought some spot television time for this purpose.

The results from the viral marketing were so strong at the toy stores that Hasbro’s main customers, particularly Toys“R”Us and Target, demanded a national launch instead of going from urban area to urban area through the Midwest. Consequently, Hasbro had to prepare a traditional media launch and figure out a way to bring in viral marketing after the start of a mass media blitz. To do this, Collins has had the retailers in new cities agree to biweekly Pox Saturday tournaments during the fall. In these tournaments, kids have the multiplayer experience. Hasbro is targeting key taste-makers to come to these events.

VIRAL MARKETING IN THE MUSIC INDUSTRY

We offer another example of viral marketing as part of an overall marketing plan. This example is drawn from the music industry, long a hotbed of viral marketing innovation.

The recording industry is paradigmatic in its use of networked communities for marketing artists. However, Steve Lerner of Wind-Up Entertainment has outperformed the rest of the industry. His most famous case remains his viral marketing of the rock band Creed around solidarity-networked communities. Lerner was able to do what, at the time, the record industry considered impossible, indeed suicidal. Wind-Up released Creed’s album “Human Clay” with radio play in only 20 percent of the United States geographically. Radio play is usually both the most costly and the most critical part of a successful release. But with most regions represented in the online community, Lerner took the chance that the online community would drive an initial burst of widespread sales and that those sales, together with calls to radio stations, would increase radio play. It worked. The album sold virtually everywhere, showing the strength of the community as a driver of sales. Wind-Up had spent no more than \$50,000 (an unheard-of small sum) by the time 316,000 copies of “Human Clay” had been sold at the end of the first week. Its sales even exceeded the sales of Garth Brooks’s release, which had been promoted with a television

special. “Human Clay” has now gone quintuple platinum with the band engaging in the normal kinds of promotion: television appearances, videos, and so forth. In short, Lerner changed the front end of music promotion with the use of a solidarity community. How did he do it?

As part of the decision to sign Creed, Lerner found that Creed had already built up a following among Christian rock fans in the South. So, when he signed the band, he gave them a laptop computer, a digital camera, and spelled out certain online promotional duties. (Lerner also took control of Creed’s cyber-rights.) After signing the label, he immediately built an artist site to post news (with a bulletin board and a chat room) and then started driving the artists’ listeners to the site. Because it is no longer easy to find fans on the Internet (it used to be a matter of going to the *Rolling Stone* site), Lerner had Creed members prime the pump by posting their journals, engaging in chats, and providing videos and music that could be streamed or downloaded. Also, Lerner promoted the site at all offline Creed appearances.

Lerner even schedules offline events based on what they can do for the site, how they can extend its geographical coverage. Once listeners started posting on the bulletin board and speaking in the chat rooms, he recruited the opinion leaders to maintain and direct the community. Theirs are the authentic voices. Lerner sets the goal of having fans (prompted by leaders) provide 90 percent of the site’s content in the form of comments, posted pictures, online diaries, and so forth. Beyond using the community leaders, Wind-Up has to provide some editing and take care of frequently asked questions. After two years of promoting “My Own Prison,” the re-release of Creed’s earlier self-published album, the Creed site was getting 600,000 views per month.

Most artist promotion begins building interest in a new album four months before its release with concerts, artist appearances, and news releases. Then the label spends the largest amount of its promotional budget on promotion to radio stations to get the all-important play of the single. Getting one radio station to catch on from another to increase radio play is its own science of careful timing and constant persuasion. If the radio promoter’s timing is off, a song is quickly categorized as fitting one or another niche and is never heard by a mass audience. Sometimes a video is produced to follow radio play of the single. Finally, retailers are brought into the picture with promotions designed to get real estate in the store.

Lerner used the experience of the Creed site to engage the mass media in a new way. Drawing on retailers’ interest in keeping their own Web sites fresh, Wind-Up offered eight major retailers the single “Higher” for download and another exclusive track from the album to stream during the

month before release. In exchange, Wind-Up received premium retail display space for the CD, including prominent display of Creed posters and so forth. Best Buy and Musicland were among those who participated. Additionally, members of the online community called retailers.

Wind-Up also offered “Higher” for download at 100 radio stations’ own sites. To ensure that the radio stations promoted the song at their site and to enhance the station’s interest in playing it, Creed offered a free concert in the listening area of the radio station with the highest number of downloads. Such a concert obviously would promote both the radio station and help build Creed’s online community. As with retail, members of the online community called stations asking for more spin.

Lerner then released with only 20 percent geographical coverage in spin. The results astonished the industry. Increasing radio spin and producing a video were key in driving “Human Clay” to its later multiplatinum sales. However, the all-out promotional spending on these elements came much later and was supported by the early success. Indeed, Lerner lengthened the promotional lifetime from four months before release to one year before release. In an industry where only one in ten albums makes back the promotional money spent on it, Lerner’s use of the networked community for the initial build-up was a revolutionary addition to the usual marketing practices.

CONCLUSION

Leading companies are currently learning how to use networked communities. We believe that companies that understand the different types of networks and the appropriate strategies for each will succeed. They will take buzz to a new level in terms of ever more innovative viral marketing strategies. Moreover, as viral marketing increases, knowing how to work virally with online communities will be a growing source of competitive advantage.

Beyond this, we think that the viral marketing use of networked communities may well open the door to a new era in marketing—an era in which brand concepts will *emerge* from networked communities of consumers as well as be transmitted to them. We have seen evidence of such *brand emergence* in several of the case examples discussed here. We expect buzz to become not only what marketers try to infect target consumers with, but also something that they try to infect themselves with.

Notes

1. Everett Rogers and F. Floyd Shoemaker, *Communication of Innovations: Across-Cultural Approach* (New York: Free Press).

2. For more on the history of research into opinion leaders, the academic term for influencers or influential lead users, see Emanuel Rosen, *The Anatomy of Buzz* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), pp. 56–57.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 144–145.
4. “Buzz Marketing,” *Business Week* (July 30, 2001), p. 52.
5. Renee Dye, “The Buzz on Buzz,” *Harvard Business Review* (November/December, 2000), pp. 139–146.
6. See note 2.
7. Malcolm Gladwell, *The Tipping Point* (Boston: Little Brown, 2000).
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 70–78.
9. Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976).
10. Susan Blackmore, *The Meme Machine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).
11. See Robert Aunger, ed., *Darwinizing Culture: The Status of Memetics as a Science* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).
12. James Surowiecki, “A Basket Case,” *The New Yorker* (April 9, 2001), p. 42.
13. Seth Godin, *Unleashing the Ideavirus*.
14. Christopher Locke, *Gonzo Marketing* (Cambridge, MA: Perseus, 2001), pp. 183–202, esp. 195.
15. Gil McWilliam, “Building Stronger Brands through Online Communities,” *Sloan Management Review*, vol. 41 (spring 2000), p. 44.
16. These figures are as of December 17, 2001. See Jim Cashell, “Top Ten Trends for Online Communities” (December 17, 2001), <http://www.OnlineCommunityReport.com>.
17. Jim Cashell, “Interview with Vanchau Nguyen, ezboard,” *Online Community Report* (March 15, 2001), <http://www.OnlineCommunityReport.com/features/nguyen> (Forum One Communications, 2001).
18. See note 7, pp. 70–78.
19. See note 7, pp. 74–87.
20. www.electricartists.com.
21. See note 7, pp. 61–69.
22. See Erin White, “Chatting a Singer Up the Pop Charts: How Music Makers Used the Web to Generate Buzz before the Album Debuted,” *Wall Street Journal*, (October 5, 1999). Marc Schiller points out that there is one subtle mistake in this article. Some of the quotations suggest that members of the Electric Artist team impersonated fans. Schiller has a rule that people in his company will only work on products that they like. But he is religious—as are others who successfully engage in marketing to highly-networked communities—about genuineness.
23. Peoplelink.com, “What’s the Value of eCommunity?” (2000), based on a study by McKinsey & Co.