

### Viral marketing

Is viral marketing the future of commercial advertising? Or is it too controversial?

**Viral** (adj) caused by or relating to a virus  
 Definition from: *Macmillan English Dictionary* Text © Bloomsbury Publishing Plc 2002

1 Think of a television advertisement which you believe works well. Then explain to a partner why it is so effective.

2 Complete the missing information in the following screen shots from a television programme. The information is in the programme transcript below.

**The business programme**  
 'V \_\_\_\_\_ M \_\_\_\_\_',  
 Presented by:

**Special guests**  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 (Creative Director, Viralmania)  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 (Marketing Standards Agency)

**Campaigns**  
 'Cog' advert  
 Company: Honda  
 'Stationery is bad'  
 Company: \_\_\_\_\_

• **Good evening. I'm Eddy Johnson. Tonight's business programme looks at a growing phenomenon: viral marketing. First, let me introduce tonight's guests: Eamon Barrett and Marta Harris. First, Eamon, just what is viral marketing?**

Δ Good evening, Eddy. Well, a viral advertisement could be a video, a simple game or just a message at the end of a web page. The minute an Internet user forwards the clip or the link, then we say it's 'gone viral'. Usually, the video is funny or entertaining, so the user wants to pass it on to someone else – that's what makes it different from normal advertising. It is only watched by someone who wants to watch it.

• **How did it start?**

Δ I guess as a business-to-consumer tool for mass marketing products, like software. In fact, Hotmail really started like this. I think companies just found traditional ad campaigns were too costly and pretty ineffective.

• **So, why do you think viral advertising is ... better?**

Δ Well, it relies on 'word of mouth'. Also, initial costs are so low – the consumer does all the work for you. You can reach a huge number of people and raise brand awareness – maybe

more people saw Honda's famous 'Cog' advert as a video clip than the original ad on television.

• **Marta, I can see that you want to come in here.**

□ Yes, good evening Eddy, Eamon. I think a word of caution is needed here. Many virals are not real company adverts, and they can do the company image a lot of harm. Take one ad featuring a VW car, for instance. It wasn't made by the company – it was made by two guys wanting to make a name for themselves. There's just no control over what people put out there. A lot of these ads are pretty controversial if you ask me – they would be banned on television.

Δ Fair enough, Marta, but some big names are into viral marketing. Did you know that Microsoft's viral – what was it, 'Stationery is bad' – was viewed by 10 million people? All those people were made aware of a new product.

□ Yes Eamon, but virals only work for some kinds of products – those where getting a quick network base is important. I think a lot of people think something you've forwarded is just spam – yet another unwanted mail. People become, er, immune to virals – it's a short buzz and the marketing effect wears off quite quickly.

Δ I disagree. The whole point is that these ads are exciting ...

3 Read the whole transcript. Which speaker do you agree with? Have you ever watched or forwarded a viral advert?

4 Which word in each line does not form a collocation with the word at the beginning?

(1) <b>viral</b>	(a) marketing	(b) video	(c) advertising	(d) game	(e) brand	(f) message
(2) <b>marketing</b>	(a) mix	(b) message	(c) campaign	(d) consumer	(e) manager	(f) plan
(3) <b>advertising</b>	(a) campaign	(b) message	(c) viral	(d) budget	(e) executive	(f) space

5 You are the Creative Director of a viral marketing company. A client has asked you to come up with an idea for a viral advert to raise awareness of their product. It could be an online quiz, game, video clip, image etc. Decide who your client is and what product you will create for them. Plan the creation of your product. Present your idea to the class.