

Why Viral Will Take Over the World

How long will it take for the South African advertising community to realise that consumers have become brand immune?

By [Rudi Kok](#) 27 Oct 2003

You want an example? Great. You wake up and turn on the radio: info overload. You drive to work, radio, billboards, pamphlets, signage and bergies with "Please feed my family" signs: overload. You go for lunch new billboards and pamphlets, more signage and bergies: overload. And so it continues until we reach the sweet spot I like to call, "Critical overload". Critical overload means that consumer minds are effectively closed for business. More products and new product information every day means that consumers have less time to consider each input which means they have to reject and discard before they can assess, so they ignore.

So many brands competing for withering attention spans, (Think brand ADD), increases desperation among advertising types, which brings irrelevant messages, which in turn desensitises consumer minds. The challenge we have to accept as brand-custodians is that consumers want relevance. They want sense but above all, they want simplicity. We have all become victims of fast time in a time-obsessed society. Living speed, rushing through life trying to keep up with fast food, fast ovens, fast credit, fast-forwarding, one-night stands, speed dialing, quick playback, instant replay and all in real time please! And we forget the simple things.

Sid Peimer mentioned in an article once, "Clients are only interested in relevance". Mr. Peimer, you are right. But what Mr. Peimer did not mention and what most agencies seem to forget is that the product offering of those clients must be relevant to the people they want to sell it to. And that's all that viral advertising really does; it takes the relevance of the brand to the consumer's world. It doesn't try to force-feed the consumer it just opens the packet and the consumer feeds himself, and in theory his friends.

Every time I mention the word "Viral" to someone they respond with, "Ah, the internet". Incredible! A campaign is viral in nature when it influences behaviour. It's really like starting a trend. Trends start very small. They are started by influencing a small group of very influential people who in turn act as willing missionaries to sell to a larger group by using their influence. The secret is really to find the key people to influence so that they can quietly spread the message until they reach a point where everything tips over and mass behaviour changes.

This is how it's done: we create a viral message that almost becomes a secret, a secret we reveal to a select few who we know will "Get it". Then we plan and buy media that will carry the message in an infectious way. The method must always be cost effective, in keeping with the message and be able to deliver the secret inside the heads of the "Missionaries". Of course the missionaries must be clearly defined and their feelings and behaviour understood. Once we've obtained and applied this information the game is afoot, because word of mouth must now take over to compensate for minimal media expenditure to reach new people. The viral message, (Secret), is sometimes so insidious that the missionaries don't even know that they are spreading the message for you.

Why is viral the new way? Because it truly creates advertising that reaches from the inside out. It also makes it easier to measure success and failure. Viral advertising simply means that behaviour inside a demo or

psycho graphic spreads beyond all boundaries, creating epidemic sales. Or at least that's what I tell the people who pay me.

ABOUT RUDI KOK

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