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## SEVEN OFFLINE VIRAL MARKETING IDEAS

Recently I participated in a forum discussion about offline marketing – that is using more traditional marketing offline to drive traffic to your website or blog. I can still remember the first time I saw a URL in a TV commercial and how cool I thought that was.

The offline world has the constraint of geography, so the least expensive forms of viral marketing are going to be geographically bound, which can be challenging for some sites. Someone on the forum said that offline marketing is a waste of time for most sites or blogs. I think that is a false generalization. In fact, every site should practice some form of offline viral promotion. We call these efforts drive to web programs and they can be very successful.

There are two important pieces to all promotion, and they become even more important in promoting your site offline. Just like the online world, your success at offline promotion is going to hinge on putting your message in front of the prospect in the right context – meaning at the right time and when they are in the right mood to perform the action you are looking for, which in this case is a visit to your website.

You need two elements for each viral marketing idea – the hook and the context. Once you figure out how you're going to do it, you need to determine where you're going to do it. If the niche and scope of your business won't lend itself well to local leads, passing out business cards isn't going to work as a viral marketing idea. I think every site could benefit from offline leads – it's just a matter of how much time and money you want to throw at them.

So here are ten ideas with an explanation of hook and context for each:

1. Idea: Use your URL like your phone number. Most people get it on their business cards but leave it off many equally important items that become marketing materials. Here are a few: letterheads, press releases, yellow page ads, newspaper advertising, radio and TV ads, company vehicles, brochures, sell sheets, the bottom of every page of your catalog. Wherever there is a phone number there should be both a URL and contact email address that is generic (contact@yourco.com).

Cost: Nothing. You're already paying for the materials anyway.

Context: Global, because all of your marketing materials travel all over the place, and your ads should be seen and heard everywhere in the markets you choose.

2. Idea: Webcards. You can get business cards pretty cheap this days. Companies like DCP Print offer 250 free business cards with their ad on the back (their own viral marketing) or \$9.99 for 500 cards. They seem a little thin, but they'll do. What you want to do is choose an attention-getting color that fits with the image of your site (a nice sky blue or yellow), and put your URL right in the middle in huge letters. Put a short description of the site and maybe your email and/or telephone number, and give them out.

Cost: Minimal.

Context: More locally focused, because you are handing them out. But check out the next idea.

3. Idea: Make every customer contact a viral marketing opportunity. Remember the webcards from the last idea? It's a no-brainer to hand them out directly to customers, right? How about paper clipping a couple of them to an invoice or statement or other correspondence with a small postit note personally written by you asking them to keep one of the cards and give the other one to someone who might be able to use it.

This will work with many of the ideas on this page.

If you spend enough time building relationships with your customers they should be happy to help. Be sure to thank them for any referrals.

Cost: Minimal.

Context: Sort of a viral marketing meets chain letter idea that has potential. Global in scope.

4. Idea: Referral Bribes. This is a terrific idea, because it works both offline and online. For online you can send an email to your customers or put a link on your pages. There are tools like refer-a-buddy for websites and there are plenty of free refer this page to a friend scripts out there.

Offer your current customers an incentive to refer new customers. Maybe it's a coupon for a percentage off their next order, or an entry into a prize raffle or something else of value. This encourages people to tell you who referred them so you can see who's helping you out.

For the offline equivalent, make up a coupon and hand it out to people to hand out to other people.

Always send a thank you to people who refer other people, even if you bribe them.

Cost: A little to a lot, depending on the bribe.

Context: Global if you combine offline with online.

5. Idea: Tchochkes . Tchochkes [choch-kez] are little gifts (knick knacks) emblazoned with your URL that you give out to people. The webcard could actually be considered a tchochke, but they usually are stuff we have on our desk or around our house like paperweights, coffee cups, T-Shirts, refrigerator magnets and other stuff.

At my wine shop we give out corkscrews with foil cutters that have our info printed in gold on them. I never have them out where people can see them but people often ask for them so I know they are getting around.

These can be very effective, but they can also be very expensive. If you come up with a well-designed coffee cup or paperweight it will end up on the desk of your customer, where everyone that comes into his office can see it. Make sure the URL is prominent, and try to make it fun and unique.

Cost: Could get very expensive.

Context: Global depending on where you send them.

6. Idea: Direct Mail with a personalized offer I have done this successfully many times, and your success is going to depend on how well you target your prospects and the quality of your offer.

If you have a super-niche site, subscription-based site, or high ticket niche item this idea is probably a winner for you, though it may get expensive. There are (snail mail) mailing lists for everything. I have used a broker, Edith Roman for years. Put together a mailing list and a good offer, like a trial subscription or free gift or special coupon or free knick knack or something like that.

Use a well designed, neat, personalized letter with a personalized URL (an easy one), and send them off to redeem their offer. Use a personalized splash page and a good offer.

Cost: Fairly expensive to very expensive.

Context: Global.

7. Idea: The World as Your Billboard If there is opportunity in a more local focus for your drive to web program, you should figure out how to get your URL in front of as many people as you can locally. Creative and unique wins the day.

I've seen posters, yard signs, billboards, bumper stickers, pens and pencils, car window signs. Think about it and come up with something good.

Don't clutter them with text. Use your URL and a few descriptive words:

www.yankeewine.com  
Bigger is better

One person had bookmarks made up and inserted them into books at the local bookstore (owned by a friend) in relevant categories. Brilliant. Another person created PDF viral marketing kits for site fans to spread the word in their town. Another brilliant idea.

Cost: Inexpensive.

Context: Local.

Always, always, always have business cards, web cards, brochures, tchockes or some viral marketing medium on you, because you never know when an opportunity to pass them out will arise.

I have a supply of business cards and brochures in the trunk of my car. I even have a stack of cards in the saddlebag of my motorcycle.

All of these ideas are combinable, and you should be implementing at least one or two of them. I'd love to hear your offline viral marketing ideas. Post them at [AffiliateBlog](#).

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