

# Go Digital,

VIRAL MARKETING IS INCREASINGLY BECOMING A POPULAR TOOL TO MARKET PRODUCTS IN THE ONLINE AND MOBILE CONTEXTS BECAUSE OF ITS RELATIVELY LOW COST AND DEMONSTRATED EFFECTIVENESS



The name Cassie Booysen might not mean much to you, but Vernon Koekemoer probably does. Vernon – whose real name is Cassie – is a pure product of viral marketing in South Africa. Made famous by fans, Vernon has become a local celebrity appearing in ads and on international news reports.

It all started when a picture was taken of him at an H2O party because of the way he was dressed: shorts, boots, thick gold chain and a checked shirt – topped off with a mullet. That picture was then circulated through emails and people started adapting the picture in Photoshop. Then fans created a group on Facebook called Make Vernon Koekemoer famous.

'In a few days the group had more than a thousand members and the rest was history,' says Patrick Bukasa, brand evolutionist at Evo Media ([www.evomedia.co.za](http://www.evomedia.co.za)), a South African new media design, 3D animation, web design, video production and TV commercial agency. 'From that one picture, Cassie's character now boasts countless videos on YouTube and MyVideo, and he has featured in TV adverts for Vodacom, Nandos and in news reports on BBC in the UK ... Cassie Booysen is a great example of viral marketing – simply because he has no style.'

Although there are different types of viral marketing, viral video ads tend to attract the most attention. These short clips are spread from person to person either by email – if the file size is small enough – or through a link to a site such as YouTube.

As a concept, viral marketing has evolved from a traditional marketing term, Word of Mouth (WOM), which, according to German scholar

Dietmar Wiedemann, refers to 'oral, person-to-person communication between a receiver and a communicator which the receiver perceives as a non-commercial message, regarding a brand, product or service.' This is subtly different from viral marketing itself, which can be defined as 'content that spreads like a virus from one person to another through a specific medium,' says Bukasa.

Industry interest is growing: eMarketer's 'Key Predictions for 2009' report predicted that 'video ad spending growth will run counter to overall economic developments, rising by 45% in 2009 to reach \$850 million.'

While the method is attractive, getting it right requires the same level of creativity and research as in other forms of marketing. 'An effective viral marketing campaign is one that is based on sound target market insights, the creation of messages or communication vehicles that resonate with the target audience and, of course, creativity,' says Pedro van Gaalen, Brand PR Media Director at RedCube Agency ([www.redcube.co.za](http://www.redcube.co.za)), a South African brand communications company. 'These target market insights will allow advertisers to identify trends within the target group and allow them to create messaging and content that is culturally relevant and meaningful.'

He uses the example of Dove Evolution's viral ad ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=5XF66Ku4a9U](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5XF66Ku4a9U)), produced for Dove Canada by Ogilvy of Toronto, that attracted more than four million hits and reportedly boosted worldwide sales by between \$60 million and \$70 million. The ad – part of Dove's Campaign for Real Beauty – shows an ordinary looking woman being made up for

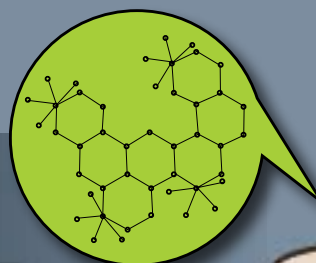
a photo shoot, the photo shoot itself and the retouching done in Photoshop after the shoot, ending with the model on the billboard, in order to comment on the created beauty of the fashion industry. In one segment of the ad, the graphic designer even elongates the woman's neck using Photoshop.

'The Dove Evolution's genius insight [was] the fact that fashion models don't actually look the way they appear on billboards without the extensive airbrushing and "digital cosmetic surgery" that takes place on the computer before going to print,' says van Gaalen. 'If you don't have this powerful insight then the alternative is to create something very controversial that causes debate, is shocking, or downright hilarious.'

And big businesses aren't the only ones to have breakthrough ideas. A small, family-run organic pharmaceutical company in Dublin, Ireland hit on an idea for a viral video ad that saw their sales boosted 500%. Ovelle Pharmaceuticals, producers of the Elave skin-care products, had an old-school approach to marketing their products. Then the 30-something daughter Joanne Gardiner took over from her father and started implementing some huge changes, including making a viral video for the internet, in which she and all the other actors appeared naked to promote her products having 'nothing to hide'.

But hitting on that genius insight isn't easy. There is no magic bullet for creating a viral ad that works. 'Many clients come to me and ask to make a standard campaign "viral", but it doesn't work that way,' says Robert Gourley, creative director at Mojave ([www.mojaveinteractive.com](http://www.mojaveinteractive.com)), an agency that creates participation marketing campaigns,

# Go Viral



*'Vernon Koekemoer is a pure product of viral marketing in South Africa: dressed in shorts, boots, thick gold chain and a checked shirt – topped off with a mullet'*



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including viral campaigns. 'Brands looking to go viral need to have the courage to take risks and throw out the standard marketing rule book.'

Gourley and his team believe that in order to be viral, the message needs to do three things: it must engage, inspire and entertain. 'Today's consumers can spot marketing a mile away, and a standard marketing message wrapped in a viral package will fizzle before it ever gets going,' he warns, adding that viral marketing isn't a new concept. In fact, probably the most famous of the early viral campaigns is the Blendtec 'Will it blend?' YouTube series, where they show their blenders pulverising everything from coffee to iPods. 'Each video received millions of views and helped catapult a little-known company to internet fame,' he says.

Harnessing the power of user-generated content can be significant in the success of an online viral marketing campaign. Rather than produce your own viral video, ask your customers and fans to do it for you. This is what Bidorbuy ([www.bidorbuy.co.za](http://www.bidorbuy.co.za)) did in 2007 when it launched its Crazy for Cash campaign. The online competition asked users to submit their video or photograph (featuring the words bidorbuy) and stand a chance to win R50 000.

Users had to visit [www.crazyforcash.co.za](http://www.crazyforcash.co.za), and register as an entrant before uploading their content to the site. Site visitors could vote on their favourite clips and send them onto friends,

thereby extending the reach of the campaign, while driving up a lead generation base for Bidorbuy. Similar concepts have been adopted by other brands such as iBurst.

Since the SA internet audience is small, but mobile access is widespread, the mobile platform could be an important tool for bringing viral marketing to the masses. 'Mobile viral campaigns are growing in sophistication as advertisers get to grips with the technology and as users' handsets are increasingly able to access the web via faster broadband connections,' van Gaalen says. 'However, many campaigns still use SMSs as the basis of a mobile viral campaign, which is often not the most effective form. While this may work for redeemable coupon-type campaigns, the growth of the mobile web holds the key to making mobile viral marketing a success in this country.'

This form of marketing, whether online or mobile, is unlikely to challenge traditional forms any time soon, but it does offer small and large businesses alike the opportunity to speak to their customers and stakeholders in an engaging – if they do it right – and different way. As part of the overall marketing mix, viral marketing in online and mobile environments still has a way to go, but the interest is there and savvy business owners will capitalise on the opportunities offered by this medium. □

#### HERE ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF POPULAR LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL VIRAL ADS:

FNB Whiskey Festival: Chicks Dig It:  
[www.myvideo.co.za/video/chicks-dig-it](http://www.myvideo.co.za/video/chicks-dig-it)

Floyd's 99 Barbershop:  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=dF8vwc5dsH4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dF8vwc5dsH4);  
[vids.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=vids.channel&ChannelID=69045835](http://vids.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=vids.channel&ChannelID=69045835)

Cadbury: Eyebrows:  
[www.viralvideochart.com/dailymotion/cadbury\\_eyebrows?id=kubO7iioUO14zvVeFQ](http://www.viralvideochart.com/dailymotion/cadbury_eyebrows?id=kubO7iioUO14zvVeFQ)

BlendTec: Will it blend?:  
[www.youtube.com/user/Blendtec](http://www.youtube.com/user/Blendtec)

T-Mobile: Dance:  
[www.viralvideochart.com/dailymotion/the\\_tmobile\\_dance?id=x84qek](http://www.viralvideochart.com/dailymotion/the_tmobile_dance?id=x84qek)

Gary Vaynerchuk's Daily Wine:  
[tv.winelibrary.com](http://tv.winelibrary.com)

MTV: Pimp My Lift:  
[www.pimpmylift.ca](http://www.pimpmylift.ca)

Greenpeace: Sunshine:  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=B7APLxvwQ0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B7APLxvwQ0)

Dove: The Evolution of Beauty:  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=hibyAJOSW8U](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hibyAJOSW8U)