

A Successful Viral Campaign Relies on Knowing Your Audience

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Last week in San Jose I found myself reminding people over and over that a good social media campaign focused more on reaching your target audience than it did on reaching “a lot of people.” Sites like Digg, Facebook and YouTube get a lot of press, but they may not be the best outlet for your company’s viral campaign. That’s a lesson that SIGG Switzerland and Gold Group took to heart when working to design a viral campaign targeted at SIGG’s eco-friendly customer base.

SIGG is a Swiss company that manufactures eco-friendly reusable water bottles. The high end aluminum bottles cost around \$20 and come in a wide range of designs. They’re quite popular with the eco-friendly crowd, but SIGG was looking for a viral campaign that would engage users and drive interest in their Lifestyle line of aluminum water bottles. The Lifestyle line features eye catching designs and had already generated quite a bit of interest from customers.



In fact, listening to customers is exactly what launched SIGG and Gold Group’s plans for a viral campaign. I’ve written and spoken about the need to engage your customers in conversation and SIGG’s viral strategy is a perfect example. SIGG USA worked with Gold Group to spread the word about a viral contest that would allow consumers to submit their own designs for a special edition SIGG Lifestyle bottle. According to SIGG USA President Steve Wasik, customers had already begun sending in their own designs for the bottles.

“We were listening to our customers and they were basically saying ‘We love the product, now give us a chance to design something cool,’” Wasik said. “People were constantly asking us if they could submit a bottle design, so we decided it was the right time for a contest to happen.”

The result was a campaign that attracted a small, yet highly engaged niche audience to the SIGG USA contest site. The campaign drew more than 12,000 visits from roughly 8,000 consumers. The average visit length was 17 minutes which smashes the U.S. average of 49 seconds. Before the contest ended, more than 170 bottle designs had been submitted by consumers.



So what made this campaign a success?

Apart from finding inspiration from their customers, SIGG and Gold Group used three valuable tactics for making their campaign

a success.

Social Media Sponsorships

One of the first things SIGG and Gold Group did was set up a paid sponsorship of a highly targeted blog. They started by approaching eco-friendly designer Jill Fehrenbacher, owner of eco design blog Inhabitat about advertising the contest on her site. Fehrenbacher's staff put together an above-the-fold ad and offered up her own post pointing her 450,000 monthly visitors to the contest site.

Fehrenbacher said she was happy to partner with the SIGGART contest. "As a designer, I believe strongly in design democracy, and want to see the wider public more involved in the creative process. In terms of a publicity campaign for a company, I can't think of a better way to connect with, engage and inspire your customers than a design competition. We love design competitions at Inhabitat and are always happy to support them as much as we can."

The move to guarantee exposure to SIGGART's target audience was a smart one. While viral campaigns are often able to spread on their own, purchasing ad space on a related site can help ensure the campaign gets in front of the right audience.

Take the Time to Properly Pitch Bloggers

Another thing that SIGG and Gold Group did right was to take the time to research the best way to approach bloggers about covering the contest. The team used tools like Technorati and Ice Rocket to put together a list of 150 bloggers they wished to target. They then spent time pouring over advice from PR-savvy blogs like B.L. Ochman's What's Next Blog and The Bad Pitch Blog.

The team set the stage for their pitch by issuing an online press release and running the ad on Inhabitat. The team's thinking was that any blogger they pitched would go searching for more information on the contest. The joint impact of the press release running on Google and Yahoo news sites and the existing blog post and advertising at Inhabitat would serve to boost the credibility of the pitch, making coverage more likely.

Their tactic worked, gathering mentions on half the sites they targeted, including a pick-up by popular site Treehugger. Since Treehugger reaches more than 1.4 million eco-conscious readers a month, the coverage provided a huge boost.

Look Beyond the Most Popular Social Media Outlets

The third lesson SIGG and Gold Group took to heart was the idea that social media extends beyond Digg, Facebook and YouTube. The team looked beyond traditional social media outlets and reached out to their target audience in the venues that the audience frequented. They started by approaching local chapters of AIGA, a professional design association. They then targeted design schools and colleges and universities with well known design departments.

Sara McGovern of Gold Group explained: “While MySpace and blogs may be the most popularized examples of social media, I feel that anywhere a community gathers actively online is a key social media space. By moving beyond the typical borders of social media, we were able to find communities that were in fact far more active.”

The team went on to submit the contest to HUGG (a DIGG-like eco-friendly bookmarking site) and to the “green” categories on social bookmarking sites like Ma.gnolia. By focusing on highly targeted social bookmark sites, the contest was able to make its way to the front page of each property and receive a nice amount of traffic.

This is a great example of the need to seek out the places that your target audience frequents and to target your campaign to those sites and outlets. While you may end up with less overall traffic than you would if you scored a big hit on Digg, you have a much higher chance of scoring bit links on niche social media sites. Since the audience is targeted, you’ll also see a much higher response rate.

Practical Application

Overall, the campaign serves as a great example of a company focusing on your audience instead of “what’s hot” in social media.

While 12,000 visits may not seem like much in the way of extra traffic for many sites, the strong engagement rate and long-term word of mouth that this campaign is likely to generate make it clear the campaign paid off for SIGG. Not every business needs to reach millions of consumers to be considered a success. In fact, it’s essential to remember that any viral campaign that gets you in front of targeted customers is a success.

Companies that are worried about how to score big on Digg or how to set MySpace buzzing could take a lesson from SIGG and Gold Group and realize that it’s often more valuable to generate positive buzz among a small, but targeted group of consumers than it is to have a ton of buzz among those with little interest in your product.



SIGG photos courtesy of Chrischang.