

the soho club

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Are you a virus marketer?

According to the world's media and their ever-sensationalistic intrepid reporters, Canada is a hotbed of SARS suffering Canadians and is a country that should be avoided at all costs. We have been depicted as mask-wearing, infectious-filled human beings who should be avoided at all costs.

The fact that more people die each year in Canada from swallowing the tips of their ballpoint pens, crossing the street, driving their cars, the common cold or influenza has no relevance in the minds of the sensational-story-seeking media. That is all old news, SARS is new and today!

For a few weeks during the height of the SARS outbreak I was receiving emails and calls from my family in the UK asking if I was alright. "Aren't you afraid?" "Do you want to come home?" "Are you going to stay there?" I told them that I stood more chance of being abducted by aliens than I did of catching SARS ... what's that hovering above my head in the sky. -is it a SARS germ? No, it's OK, it's just an alien space ship!!!!

What's fascinating about this 'SARS outbreak' is the way in which the story captured the imagination of the reporters, who in turn captured the imagination of the buying public, who started boycotting Chinese restaurants and Chinese shopping malls, bringing that important sector of the Canadian community to its knees.

Soon the general public started staying away from the downtown Toronto area. They stopped shopping. Hotels emptied as conventions and conferences were cancelled because of the media hype surrounding this scare. Theatres were also emptied. Toronto was closed as the advice circulating the world was: avoid Toronto – do not go there!

Then lo and behold within weeks the media was pointing the finger at the Government, blaming them and asking what was going to be done to combat the tremendous loss of business that traders were experiencing. Different initiatives were established, in an attempt to woo tourists back to this beautiful city of Toronto, including a massive open-air concert by none other than Mick Jagger and the Rolling Stones for a ticket price of a mere Cdn\$21.50. These by the way are the same tourists, that the same journalists

drove away. Funny old world, but never-the-less welcome to the world of 'VIRUS MARKETING'.

No doubt you operate from an office and just like the rest of us the first thing you do in the morning is to boot up, watching the little white icon blinking at you in the corner as your programmes warm-up, ready for the day's activity. The screen jumps into life, you open your emails, you press send and receive and wait for the downloading to finish. Then there it is, without notice - VIRUS WARNING!!

You receive an email from a trusting friend that a new virus has been created, and you are warned not to open any emails containing a certain word or message. This same email also asks that you pass this message on to everyone in your address book so that they too might avoid this virus. You send it to everyone you know, little realising that within the body of the email is a 'return to sender' code that now has all your email addresses to whom he or she can market and sell their products to. Once again, welcome to the world of Virus Marketing.

So what is 'virus marketing' and how can you get it to work for you?

You have a cold! You sneeze and the germs float through the air. Others breathe in that air so now they too have that same cold. They sneeze, spreading their germs, and so the multiplication process continues. Virus Marketing.

You have a tasty bit of gossip. You know something that others do not. But where's the enjoyment in that? There's only enjoyment if other people know that you know something that they don't know. Gossip is no use unless you can share it. So you tell your best friend your secret, your gossip. You tell them in confidence. But because everyone has a different best friend they go and tell their best friend, and so it goes around and around, until the whole world knows – Virus Marketing.

Virus marketing is all about taking your product, service, idea, or promotional event and spreading the word about it around the world just like a virus. To affect a thousand people you first have to affect one, and to affect one you first have to affect yourself.

Your incubator, where you develop the

culture for your virus, is in your office and in your staff. They have to be 100% infectious. They have to be totally absorbed and infected by you, your company, your mission, your goals, your beliefs and your dreams. This does not come easily to the average employee – but then SOHO entrepreneurs don't have average employees, failures have those!!

Successful SOHO Entrepreneurs train their staff. They motivate and continually develop their staff each and every day. SOHO Entrepreneurs infect their staff with the 'success virus', so much so that they stay infected carriers for the rest of their lives. As carriers become more infected, so they too will affect and infect your customers. Their attitude will become infectious, as will their belief in you, your company and your goals.

Your customers will become infectious also passing onto their friends and neighbours until YOUR virus has contaminated the whole town, city, and country.

They say that charity begins at home, well so does your virus. Are you about to launch a new product, a new service or initiative? If you are then make sure that each of your staff gets it for free – contaminate them! Bring in your best 5 customers, contaminate them by letting them have it for free – they will pass the word, Turn them into your ambassadors, they will spread your virus.

Marketing is not about selling, it is about infecting people with your mission, it's about turning customers and staff alike into carriers.

We so often get bogged down with the running of a business that we forget how to 'run' a business. We forget what staff are for, we forget the value of training and motivating them on a daily basis – we forget their value.

Contaminate yourself with your own dreams and desires, and then infect others so that they too may infect others with your desires.

Become a Virus Marketeer!