

# SUMMARY

## UNLEASHING THE IDEAVIRUS

SETH GODIN



# **Summary of “Unleashing the Ideavirus” by Seth Godin**

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Unleashing The Ideavirus (2000) provides a radical new approach to re-thinking your marketing strategies.

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# Introduction

In an age of global pandemics, just hearing the word “virus” might be a little scary! But fortunately, the virus we’re going to be talking about is something you’ll want to catch! It’s called “the ideavirus” and it’s all about unleashing your creativity so you can generate the next viral ad campaigns. And if you’re wondering why you need to revamp the way you think about your marketing campaigns, you just have to take a moment to think about how social media works. Consider, for example, your favorite cat videos or that funny commercial you can’t stop laughing at. Whatever your preferences, the defining factor is that something about it resonated with you. And so you liked it and commented on it and shared it with a friend. And you felt comfortable doing so because the content was natural, engaging, and real.

Now, wouldn’t you want people to feel like that about your product? That’s why it’s important to start thinking about your marketing campaigns through the lens of viral video trends. Because if that cute cat video can snowball through social media, catching on like a virus, your ad can too! And that doesn’t mean that your content has to be silly or fluffy or that you have to sacrifice the depth and truth of your message. Because ideas can spread like wildfire too; just think about #MeToo and social justice campaigns! So, through the course of this summary, we’re going to unpack the toolkit you’ll need to completely overhaul your marketing strategy and stop spending money on promoting your product. And in the next few chapters, we’ll take a look at the science behind the ideavirus and how you can unleash it by learning:

- What makes an idea uniquely powerful
- Why you want to “sneeze” your ad campaign into the world, and:
- Why the simplest of products can change the world

# How to Grow Your Ideavirus

When we think about a virus, we usually consider the conditions it needs to thrive. Does it need a moist climate, for example? What does it feed on? How does it find its host? And the ideavirus is no different; the climate has to be right in order for any idea to spread so effectively that it “goes viral.” So, what do our ideal conditions look like? Well, for starters, we have the internet. This fact alone means that every single person in the world has the ability to spread information to millions with just a few strokes of their keyboard. (That’s kind of like a superpower if you really think about it!) And because our culture is always on the lookout for the next big thing and the newest product they just can’t live without, those two factors provide the perfect climate for growing and transmitting the ideavirus!

It’s also revolutionized marketing, perhaps even more than we realize. Because where we used to rely on word of mouth-- which limited a customer’s sphere of influence to the circle of people they knew personally-- individual consumers now have the ability to connect the entire world through likes, re-tweets, and product reviews (just to name a few options!) So, not only is it easier to spread awareness of your product, it’s also easier to get feedback about it! Another major game-changer is the social shift in attitudes toward technology. Gone are the days where tech was only for the nerds; today’s average iPhone is a cutting-edge piece of high-powered technology and yet it’s so mainstream that thousands of people will line up for hours to buy it.

As marketers, this tells us two things: firstly, that cultural shifts are crucial to our success, and secondly, that our culture has transitioned to prioritizing innovation. And because your prospective customer pool is constantly looking for something new and different, something that will surprise and excite them, that means that they’re more receptive than ever and that your market has never been hotter. In short, if you can think up the next big fad, you can bet that not only are there people who are ready to buy it, but the conditions are perfect for spreading an ideavirus.

# You Cannot Live By Ads Alone

We've already briefly mentioned the old days of marketing in our previous chapter, but now it's time to take a closer look. Because as social attitudes toward products are changing, with our culture prioritizing innovation over tradition, it's vital that we alter our approach to marketing those products in response. Put simply, what we can take away from this is that advertising alone isn't enough anymore. And if you take a moment to consider the effect of the traditional approach to advertising, it makes sense. Because whether a product was being marketed through a commercial or a popup ad, all advertising was predicated on forcing your message onto people briefly and unavoidably. Sure, it might have gotten the message out, but rather than thinking, "Ooh, I need that!" most prospective customers were left annoyed and impatient, angrily waiting for the ad to be over so they could get back to the content they really wanted to enjoy.

That no longer works for a couple of reasons. For one thing, it's simply annoying; even if you make commercials, there has likely never been a moment when you said, "Oh, good, a commercial break!" or welcomed a telemarketing call in the middle of your dinner.

Another simple reason is information overload. You have only to turn on the TV or take a glance at social media to realize that every business everywhere is competing for your attention 24/7. And because everyone is trying to develop the next hit product, this has led to an increase in both the items being marketed and in the overall noise of advertising.

But consumers aren't stupid. Just as the culture is evolving to prioritize modernity and innovation, it's also becoming more socially conscious as people seek to raise awareness about best practices for living and ethical causes to support. And as a result, more and more people are recognizing that constant information overload is bad for their mental health, so they're making efforts to unplug and disconnect from the social noise. So, what can you, as a marketer, do when the noise just gets louder and louder and people start unplugging to escape? Well, that's where the ideavirus comes

in! Rather than attempting to scream louder than everybody else or force consumers to listen to you, an ideavirus helps you tap into the changing market by creating content that people will want to engage with! And through the course of these remaining chapters, we'll take a look at a step-by-step plan for doing so.



# You Might Not Realize It, But You're Ultimately Trying to Sell an Idea

When it comes to marketing, you might think you're selling a product-- say, for example, a knife sharpener-- but the truth is, you're actually selling an idea: that using this knife sharpener will make your customer's life faster, better, and more efficient. And if you really think about it, you'll find this premise holds true for pretty much everything that can be sold, whether it's clothing, a household appliance, or the latest Top 50 hit. That's because your ultimate goal is to connect with your consumers on both a personal and intellectual level, inviting them to embrace the feelings embodied in your song or the idea that wearing this outfit or using that product will bring them a certain quality of experience. And when you look at it that way, you realize that your idea is actually your most valuable commodity-- and it's definitely what you should capitalize on when it comes to marketing.

So, what does that look like in practice? Well, unfortunately, no one can tell you how to have a great idea. It would be awesome if I could say, "I get all my ideas from that cute little shop on the corner-- just pop by and pick one up!" but it doesn't work that way. So, while this book can't develop your idea for you, it can tell you what to do once you have one. And the first step of spreading your ideavirus is to think of your marketing strategy like you're creating a manifesto. Consider, for example, the "manifesto" of the makeup and skin care brand TooFaced. When they promote their product through makeup tutorials, they're not simply saying, "We sell pretty makeup!" or even, "Buy our makeup!"

Instead, when you watch their products being used to achieve real results in real time, a prospective customer walks away with the idea, "If I use that concealer, it would solve all the problems I'm having with my skin or my current product. I need that!" And because their product is being promoted to their target market (people who like makeup or are interested in improving their skin care routine) through an effective method (appealing

makeup tutorials that you can watch on the go via Instagram), TooFaced has effectively spread an ideavirus. The fact that their brand is more expensive also works in their favor because-- since TooFaced is considered to be a higher quality brand of makeup-- customers get the idea that they're paying for superiority and are happy to hand over their hard-earned cash as a result.

And with an audience of over 13.4 million followers on Instagram, it's readily apparent that their ideavirus has become highly contagious. You can also see that, ultimately, they've done very little work in terms of paid marketing because their overall strategy is so effective that the ideavirus has spread on its own. Because from their example, you can see that if you invest your time and energy into making one tutorial that just one person loves and then shares to another (and then another and then another), before long, you have a bestselling brand, a few million likes on Instagram, and a global fanbase that's eagerly signing up to try out your newest product.

# Lock Down Your Target Audience

One of the most fantastic benefits of the internet is that it gives you the ability to narrow down your target audience with greater precision. User data from social media enables you to identify consumers' interests and discover that perfect niche of the population who's most likely to engage with your content and, by extension, to help your ideavirus spread. But even with this wealth of resources at your disposal, pinning down that target audience is still a little trickier than you might initially imagine; in fact, there's an entire science behind market cultivation. So, let's examine what that looks like in practical application.

As we discussed in the last chapter, starting with a good idea is of critical importance and that's especially true when it comes to finding your ideal target audience. Because (and this might sting a little) if your idea isn't really worth anything, it's not going to resonate with your audience no matter how great the market is. However, with that said, it's also important to remember that "a great idea" is subjective; to many, crocs are the ugliest footwear ever imagined and to many others, they're an awesome fashion choice. So, keep in mind that opinions vary and they can even fluctuate within your target market as they change their minds about what's in and what's not. For this reason, keeping your finger on the pulse of the current fads-- and learning how to stay one step ahead so you can evolve with the fashions-- is crucial for your development as a company.

As you seek to cultivate your awareness, it might help to think of your target audience as bees. Bees, of course, carry out their lives in hives, developing what's known as a "hive mind" in which all members think collectively, operating on a set of key thoughts that promote the good of the group. At first, that might sound like a bad thing, but actually, as a marketer, you really want a hive! Because in order to market your product successfully, you need a hive who shares the same interests and communication preferences. Those core commonalities are what will take

your hive from being a simple group of random people to a specific niche market-- one that you can tailor your product to fit.

This transformation can occur in pretty much any category where you find a group of people who aren't yet part of a hive and who have a need or interest that the current products on the market aren't meeting. For example, let's say you're a content developer who want to develop a publication that appeals to a group of people who really need something that's just for them. Whether that's because their interests aren't being represented by the mainstream media or because they feel their voices aren't being heard, you recognize that there are groups of people out there who need that representation.

So, you do a bit of research and find that women of color who have disabilities are one of the most underrepresented groups in the world and that few (if any!) publications attempt to document their struggles or offer them a platform to share their struggles. And that's where you see your opportunity to launch a magazine that specifically targets the needs and interests of this community. And even though there are many women in this demographic all around the world, they might not yet be a hive because limited representation could prevent them from finding each other to connect and share similar interests. So, when you put this magazine together and offer your demographic a chance to connect, they can become a hive because they share the same needs, interests, and desire to communicate with each other. This in turn will generate opportunities for your product to promote itself because members of your newly-formed hive will gladly spread the word to others. And that's exactly how your ideavirus begins to spread.

## It's Sneezing Season!

When it comes to the spread of a communicable disease, the first thing we're taught is to cover our mouths and cough and sneeze into our elbows. Why? Because we want to avoid spreading germs to others. But when it comes to an ideavirus, more than anything, you want sneezers: people who will explosively spread your idea to everyone! Because sure, every member of your hive is pretty much guaranteed to spread the word in some way or another, but some might have limited spheres of influence and some people are simply more talkative than others. Those extra chatty people are the ones you really covet because they're the people who won't shut up once they discover something they like. If you've ever listened to your mom tell a grocery store clerk (and the bank teller and someone random on the street) about her new diet fad, you know exactly what we're talking about here.

So, you definitely want those everyday sneezers who will spread you all over their communities. But you also want sneezers who have a little more oomph. People who fall into this category include small businesses, local newspapers, and independent bookstores because even though they don't have as much influence as, say, the Kardashians, they definitely have more impact than your average Joe. So, if we return to the hypothetical example we used in the earlier chapter, a marketer who's trying to promote a new magazine for women of color with disabilities might turn to each and every one of these sources for help. These outlets can sneeze your idea out to hundreds-- maybe even thousands!-- simply by promoting it to their own hives. They may not be able to get your product trending on Twitter overnight, but they can definitely expand your awareness and connect with members of your target market who might not yet be on your radar!

However, with that said, it's important to be strategic in your recruitment of these sneezers and to keep in mind that, above all, you're looking for reliability. After all, if someone is willing to endorse any and every product they encounter, they'll quickly lose their credibility as a reliable source and people will no longer listen to them. Of course, this in turn reduces their

impact and influence, so remember to be judicious when it comes to choosing your sneezers. This is especially true with social media influencers and others who can quickly and easily be bought, so always take the credibility and reputation of your sneezers into account from the beginning.

# Final Summary

The internet has changed marketing forever, both when it comes to the attitudes of consumers and the strategies we need to employ. And even though advertising was once considered the only way to go, the success of that strategy has become a thing of the past, lost in customers' annoyance with these flagrant interruptions to their lives and the overwhelming amount of information overload that's present any time we turn our phones or TVs.

That's why it's vital to recalibrate your approach to marketing not by simply changing a few things or reconsidering one ad campaign, but by upending the way you think about marketing altogether. And you can start by finding the best way to unleash your ideavirus. As you seek to spread your product like a virus, remember that a great idea is the best starting place. Once you have that idea, the marketing will come easily as you cultivate your hive, adapt your product accordingly, and seek out the best people to "sneeze" your idea all over their spheres of influence.



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