

# Viral Marketing: The Hope, Hype and Helplessness

*By Frank Strong, Author of the blog,  
[Sword and The Script](#)*



It's every marketer's dream to go viral, but only a handful will ever experience it. While marketers can do things to set the conditions for going viral, things can't be made to go viral. At best, viral marketing is usually a gamble with [marketing](#) credibility.

A cursory investigation into any theme, meme or idea that went viral will usually find a healthy dose of luck and years of effort. It's not uncommon to find that what appears to be an overnight success, was actually years in the making.

## **The Hope of Viral Marketing**

Yet the allure is too hard for many marketers to resist. Going viral becomes a call-to-action, a rallying cry, where enthusiasm stands shoulder-to-shoulder with promises that stretch too thin – promises to go viral.

## **The Hype of Viral Marketing**

The hype is the mere presence, a grand appearance even, of a slick video, insightful infographic, or clever meme, which when timed and slipped into an emerging hashtag, will be enough to galvanize thousands to share. People will beat their way to a brand's social channels all for the opportunity cast a like and set off the cash register with a ring.

## **The Helplessness of Viral Marketing**

The helplessness of viral [marketing](#) is a cautionary tale. It's not unlike a gambler steeped in debt who believes in his heart of hearts that one more round of cards is sure to carry the winning hand.

That hand never comes and the debt piles on. In marketing departments across business, credibility is the currency to be gained or lost. Lost credibility is marketing's debt. The compound interest is crippling.

### **A Better Approach than Hope**

A better approach is to jettison the very idea of viral marketing altogether. In place, focus on building foundations – repeatable programs and processes – that can be fine-tuned and scaled. Develop a playbook for launching products, content and ideas – then iterate and improve. Iterate and improve.

If you go viral, well then that's an accident marketing can attribute to process. If you don't, then you still have an effective process with something to show for it.

*About the Author: Frank Strong is a communications director with more than 15 years of experience in the high-tech sector. He previously served as director of public relations for Vocus, which developed marketing, PR and media monitoring software. He has held multiple roles both in-house with corporations, ranging from startups to global organizations, and with PR firms including the top 10 global firm Hill & Knowlton.*