

BOOK

Contagious: Why Things Catch On

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SYNOPSIS [From the publisher]

Why are some products and ideas talked about more than others? Why do some articles make the most emailed list? Why do some YouTube videos go viral? Word-of-mouth. Whether through face-to-face conversations, emails from friends, or online product reviews, the information and opinions we get from others have a strong impact on our own behavior. Indeed, word-of-mouth generates more than two times the sales of paid advertising and is the primary factor behind 20-50% of all purchasing decisions. It is between 8.5 and 30 times more effective than traditional media. But want to know the best thing about word-of-mouth? It's available to everyone.

Whether you're a Fortune 500 company trying to increase sales, a corner restaurant trying to raise awareness, a non-profit trying to fight obesity, or a newbie politician running for city council, word-of-mouth can help you succeed. And you don't have to have millions of dollars to spend on an advertising budget. You just have to get people to talk. The challenge, though, is how to do that. This book will show you how.

Six key STEPPS

. . . cause things to be talked about, shared, and imitated.

1. Social Currency

Does talking about your product or your idea make people look good? Can you find the inner remarkability? Leverage game mechanics? Make people feel like insiders?

2. Triggers

Consider the context. What cues make people think about your product or idea? How can you grow the habitat and make it come to mind more often?

3. Emotion

Focus on feelings. Does talking about your product or idea generate emotion? How can you kindle the fire?

4. Public

Does your product or idea advertise itself? Can people see when others are using it? If not, how can you make the private public? Can you create behavioral residue that sticks around even after people use it?

5. Practical Value

Does talking about your product or idea help people help others? How can you highlight incredible value, packing your knowledge and expertise into useful information others will want to disseminate?

6. Stories

What is your Trojan Horse? Is your product or idea embedded in a broader narrative that people want to share? Is the story not only viral, but also valuable?

"The thing restaurants are best at is going out of business. More than 25 percent fail within twelve months of opening their doors. Sixty percent are gone within the first three years."

"Research by the Keller Fay Group finds that only 7 percent of word of mouth happens online."

"People don't think in terms of information. They think in terms of narratives. But while people focus on the story itself, information comes along for the ride."

"People share things that make them look good to others."

"Virality isn't born, it's made."

"Making things more observable makes them easier to imitate, which makes them more likely to become popular."

"Why does it matter if particular thoughts or ideas are top of mind? Because accessible thoughts and ideas lead to action."

"Word of mouth is the primary factor behind 20 percent to 50 percent of all purchasing decisions."

"People don't need to be paid to be motivated."

"Marketing is about spreading the love."

"Word of mouth, then, is a prime tool for making a good impression--as potent as that new car or Prada handbag. Think of it as a kind of currency. Social currency. Just as people use money to buy products or services, they use social currency to achieve desired positive impressions among their families, friends, and colleagues."

"We need to design products and ideas that are frequently triggered by the environment and create new triggers by linking our products and ideas to prevalent cues in that environment. Top of mind leads to tip of tongue."

“most beautiful emotion we can experience is the mysterious. It is the power of all true art and science. He to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer pause to wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead.”

“In contrast to the notion that any publicity is good publicity, negative reviews hurt sales for some books. But for books by new or relatively unknown authors, negative reviews increased sales by 45%.... Even a bad review or negative word of mouth can increase sales if it informs or reminds people that the product or idea exists.”

“How does it make people look to talk about a product or idea? Most people would rather look smart than dumb, rich than poor, and cool than geeky. Just like the clothes we wear and the cars we drive, what we talk about influences how others see us. It’s social currency. Knowing about cool things – like a blender that can tear through an iPhone – makes people seem sharp and in the know. So to get people talking we need to craft messages that help them achieve these desired impressions. We need to find our inner remarkability and make people feel like insiders. We need to leverage game mechanics to give people ways to achieve and provide visible symbols of status that they can show to others.”

“In fact, the messages actually seemed to increase drug use. Kids aged twelve and a half to eighteen who saw the ads were actually more likely to smoke marijuana. Why? Because it made drug use more public. Think about observability and social proof. Before seeing the message, some kids might never have thought about taking drugs. Others might have considered it but have been wary about doing the wrong thing. But anti-drug ads often say two things simultaneously. They say that drugs are bad, but they also say that other people are doing them. And as we’ve discussed throughout this chapter, the more others seem to be doing something, the more likely people are to think that thing is right or normal and what they should be doing as well.”

“Contagious content is like that – so inherently viral that it spreads regardless of who is doing the talking.”

“When we care, we share.”

"Scarcity and exclusivity help products catch on by making them seem more desirable. If something is difficult to obtain, people assume that it must be worth the effort."

“Even in cases where most people are doing the right thing, talking about the minority who are doing the wrong thing can encourage people to give in to temptation.”

“It has been said that when people are free to do as they please, they usually imitate one another. We look to others for information about what is right or good to do in a given situation, and this social proof shapes everything from the products we buy to the candidates we vote for. The phrase ‘Monkey see, monkey do’ captures more than just our tendency to follow others. If people can’t see what others are doing, they can’t imitate them. So to get our products and ideas to become popular we need to make them more publicly observable”

“Great game mechanics can even create achievement out of nothing. Airlines turned loyalty into a status symbol. Foursquare made it a mark of distinction to be a fixture at the corner bar. And by encouraging players to post their achievements on Facebook, online game makers have managed to convince people to proclaim loudly – even boast – that they spend hours playing computer games every day.”

“Harvard neuroscientists Jason Mitchell and Diana Tamir found that disclosing information about the self is intrinsically rewarding. In one study, Mitchell and Tamir hooked subjects up to brain scanners and asked them to share either their own opinions and attitudes (“I like snowboarding”) or the opinions and attitudes of another person (“He likes puppies”). They found that sharing personal opinions activated the same brain circuits that respond to rewards like food and money. So talking about what you did this weekend might feel just as good as taking a delicious bite of double chocolate cake.”

"But sharing something useful with others is a quick and easy way to help them out."

“If something is built to show, it’s built to grow.”

“So to get people talking, companies and organizations need to mint social currency. Give people a way to make themselves look good while promoting their products and ideas along the way. There are three ways to do that: (1) find inner remarkability; (2) leverage game mechanics; and (3) make people feel like insiders.”

“Yet science articles, like Denise Grady’s piece about the cough, made the Most E-Mailed list more than politics, fashion, or business news. Why? It turns out that science articles frequently chronicle innovations and discoveries that evoke a particular emotion in readers. That emotion? Awe.”

“Nobody talks about boring companies, boring products, or boring ads,” argues one prominent word-of-mouth advocate.”

“Word of mouth is more effective than traditional advertising for two key reasons. First, it’s more persuasive. Second, word of mouth is more targeted. It is naturally directed towards an interested audience. But want to know the best thing about word of mouth? It’s available to everyone. And it doesn’t require millions of dollars spent on advertising. It just requires getting people to talk.”

“If word-of-mouth pundits agree on anything, it’s that being interesting is essential if you want people to talk. Most buzz marketing books will tell you that. So will social media gurus.

“Nobody talks about boring companies, boring products, or boring ads,” argues one prominent word-of-mouth advocate. Unfortunately, he’s wrong.”

“A five-star review on Amazon.com leads to approximately twenty more books sold than a one-star review.”

“Word of mouth is more effective than traditional advertising for two key reasons. First, it’s more persuasive.”

“But the key word here is “seeing.” If it’s hard to see what others are doing, it’s hard to imitate it. Making something more observable makes it easier to imitate. Thus a key factor in driving products to catch on is public visibility. If something is built to show, it’s built to grow.”

“Why do some products, ideas, and behaviors succeed when others fail?”

“Advertising also plays a role. Consumers need to know about something before they can buy it.”