

# Going viral: a digital marketing myth

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One of the biggest myths in digital marketing today is the belief that you can purposefully create content with the intention of it going viral. The truth is there is no method, formula or recipe to create viral content.

The internet's users are largely unpredictable and inconsistent. There's just no way of knowing what piece of content will go viral. Yes, we can see trends and analytics. But these are showing us what happened in the rear-view mirror. They don't show us what's to come. What goes viral and what doesn't is completely subjective.



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Importantly, sometimes content *shouldn't* go viral. Often when content is being discussed and shared online, it's for negative reasons. There are [too many cases](#) of campaigns, adverts and tweets going viral because the message wasn't properly thought about.

## Origin of a myth

We have seen so many examples of incredibly random content going viral, the series of [Damn Daniel](#) videos, for instance. It seems like it's easy to produce this type of content.

But Joe Pulizzi, founder of the [Content Marketing Institute](#), agrees that there isn't a fool proof way of creating viral content. Speaking on the [Born to Influence](#) marketing podcast, he said: "The ones that are seeing success do it on a consistent basis. The ones that are going for the viral hit usually fail. Viral usually happens after 1,000 pieces of great content. You never know when it is going to hit viral. You don't know which ones are going to go viral. But we think that with video, because we've been dazzled by so many viral hits, that's the way to get it. But that's lightning in a bottle, very hard to get that."

## Debunking this myth

We all need to fight against the notion that we can simply create content with the sole intention of it going viral. We need to push back in meetings with clients and bosses.

Marketing guru Seth Godin, one of my personal heroes, speaks about marketing having to stand out to be seen by customers. He tells a story of people not noticing cows along the side of the road. But make the cow purple and suddenly people are going to notice.

During a [TED Radio Hour interview](#), he said: “The thing that's going to decide what gets talked about, what gets done, what gets changed, what gets purchased, what gets built is, is it remarkable? And remarkable's a really cool word 'cause we think it just means neat, but it also means worth making a remark about, and that is the essence of where idea diffusion is going.”

## Don't be average, be niche

As marketers, we need to create content for the people who want to see it by researching the market and audience. Content needs to be created with the intention of informing and educating an audience who are interested in that subject, rather than to everyone.

That way, people will get excited about it. Because that's what they're interested in. That's what their friends are interested in. And that's why they'll share it. You no longer want your content to go viral, you want it to go niche.

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## ABOUT MICHELLE JONES

Passionate about media and digital, for almost four years I have worked at digital marketing agency Rogerwilco where I combine both interests. I was recently promoted to head up the team of content writers. My days are spent managing the content team and writing copy for clients. Previously I worked in hard news journalism for more than six years. I worked at the Cape Times as part of my National Diploma requirements and after obtaining my BTech in Journalism.

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