

**The Miraculous Conversion**

**By Sam Vaknin, Ph.D.**

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<http://www.ideavirus.com>

The recent bloodbath among online content peddlers and digital media proselytisers can be traced to two deadly sins. The first was to assume that traffic equals sales. In other words, that a miraculous conversion will spontaneously occur among the hordes of visitors to a web site. It was taken as an article of faith that a certain percentage of this mass will inevitably and nigh hypnotically reach for their bulging pocketbooks and purchase content, however packaged. Moreover, ad revenues (more reasonably) were assumed to be closely correlated with "eyeballs". This myth led to an obsession with counters, page hits, impressions, unique visitors, statistics and demographics.

It failed, however, to take into account the dwindling efficacy of what Seth Godin, in his brilliant essay ("Unleashing the IdeaVirus"), calls "Interruption Marketing" - ads, banners, spam and fliers. It also ignored, at its peril, the ethos of free content and open source prevalent among the Internet opinion leaders, movers and shapers. These two neglected aspects of Internet hype and culture led to the trouncing of erstwhile promising web media companies while their business models were exposed as wishful thinking.

The second mistake was to exclusively cater to the needs of a highly idiosyncratic group of people (Silicone Valley geeks and nerds). The assumption that the USA (let alone the rest of the world) is Silicone Valley writ large proved to be calamitous to the industry.

In the 1970s and 1980s, evolutionary biologists like Richard Dawkins and Rupert Sheldrake developed models of cultural evolution. Dawkins' "meme" is a cultural element (like a behaviour or an idea) passed from one individual to another and from one generation to another not through biological -genetic means - but by imitation. Sheldrake added the notion of contagion - "morphic resonance" - which causes behaviour patterns to suddenly emerged in whole populations. Physicists talked about sudden "phase transitions", the emergent results of a critical mass reached. A latter day thinker, Michael Gladwell, called it the "tipping point".

Seth Godin invented the concept of an "ideavirus" and an attendant marketing terminology. In a nutshell, he says, to use his own summation:

"Marketing by interrupting people isn't cost-effective anymore. You can't afford to seek

out people and send them unwanted marketing, in large groups and hope that some will send you money. Instead the future belongs to marketers who establish a foundation and process where interested people can market to each other. Ignite consumer networks and then get out of the way and let them talk."

This is sound advice with a shaky conclusion. The conversion from exposure to a marketing message (even from peers within a consumer network) - to an actual sale is a convoluted, multi-layered, highly complex process. It is not a "black box", better left unattended to. It is the same deadly sin all over again - the belief in a miraculous conversion. And it is highly US-centric. People in other parts of the world interact entirely differently.

You can get them to visit and you get them to talk and you can get them to excite others. But to get them to buy - is a whole different ballgame. Dot.coms had better begin to study its rules.

Sam Vaknin is the author of "Malignant Self Love - Narcissism Revisited" and "After the Rain - How the West Lost the East". He is a columnist in "Central Europe Review", United Press International (UPI) and ebookweb.org and the editor of mental health and Central East Europe categories in The Open Directory, Suite101 and searcheurope.com. Until recently, he served as the Economic Advisor to the Government of Macedonia.

His web site: <http://samvak.tripod.com>

Seinfeld Episode - The Chairs  
By Alex Reidiboim and Martin Winer

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Seinfeld  
The Chairs

Prologue:

Jerry: Coffee is a miraculous drink. Just think of the miraculous chain of events that had to take place to create this beverage. Somewhere, somebody had to figure out to take Coffee beans, burn them in a fire for several hours, grind up the remains and then run boiling water through them. Just think of it. Thousands of years ago in the Colombian mountains there must have been a massive volcanic eruption which burned million of acres of coffee beans. Then the massive earthquakes and fallout crushed the beans. After the eruption, it began to rain and water passed over the ashes. So, here you have it, a Colombian peasant, his family killed, his village destroyed, clamors up to the steaming hot river and takes a swig. Sure every possession he ever had is destroyed, but boy, he sure feels perky!

For the rest of the episode please visit:  
<http://members.rogers.com/mwiner/seinfeld.htm>

This unaired Seinfeld script is an example of the comedic writing skills of Alex Reidiboim and Martin Winer. For any comedic writing needs, feel free to contact [alex.reidiboim@utoronto.ca](mailto:alex.reidiboim@utoronto.ca) or [martin\\_winer@hotmail.com](mailto:martin_winer@hotmail.com)

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