# The Key to Conversion:

## How One Publisher Increased His Subscriber Rate by 1500% - Literally Overnight!

By Paul Myers
http://www.talkbiznews.com

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Scott Stratten, of WorkYourLife.com, had a common problem -- with an unusual twist.

Over a period of 2 years, Scott had built the subscriber base of his newsletter to about 4300 people. He suddenly found he had a lot of traffic coming to his site, but he was getting virtually no new subscribers from it.

That's the common part. The uncommon part is that this traffic was viral, and growing.

Scott had taken a motivational piece that's been passed around the net as text in emails for years and turned it into a Hallmark-quality Flash movie.

You can see it at http://www.talkbiz.com/cgi-bin/db.pl?5,CaseStudy1

He told his subscribers about it and the thing took off. He got 10,456 visitors in about 3 weeks.

Problem: Only about 100 (less than 1%) subscribed to his newsletter.

Ooops.

## HELP!

Scott posted a request for help to a discussion forum. I noticed it, and asked him to send me the email that was going around, as well as the URL of the site that these folks were visiting.

The animation was very well done, with music, a ***full-screen black background*** and very nice transitions between phrases.

After the animation, the following page came up:

## Scott Stratten
Speaker, Trainer & Coach

### Thank-you for viewing our "Time" animation

About
Scott Stratten

Services &
Articles

Clients &
Testimonials

Contact
Information

New CD! Relaxation On Demand was created to give you relaxation in your moment of stress. Click here to go to the site

The majority of the words were taken from a forwarded email that gets sent around, that I found very touching. If anyone knows the original author, please let me know.

Time is all we have, use it wisely. Feel free to take a look around the rest of the site, or send me an email to time@workyourlife.com to let me know your thoughts.

NOW AVAILABLE! The screen saver version of the "Time" movie. Click here to download the program that will automatically install it for you (virus free .exe file). It's free so you can enjoy the words every day like I do.

To find out more about who I am and what this site is all about, drop by the homepage or view the movie again. Feel free to sign-up below for one of our newsletters.

Please Subscribe me to the following free Newsletters (check each box that applies):

☐ Un-Marketing: How to market your business without wasting money (site)
☐ Work Your Life Newsletter (sample)

Enter Email Address   Submit

*Your address will never be rented or sold anytime, period.*

© 2002 Work Your Life
1440 Constance Drive
Oakville, ON L6J 2T8
(905) 844-2818 * info@workyourlife.com

I took a few minutes and typed up some replacement copy and emailed it to Scott. The text was:

> *Sometimes, just sometimes, we all need that reminder. The reminder that life is too short to waste, and too precious to leave to routine.*
>
> *We need a reminder to give more time to our families and friends and, just as importantly, ourselves.*
>
> *"Work Your Life" is that reminder. It's a little nudge, to get you remembering what's important to YOU. It's free, and it's the kind of thinking you'll find adding joy to your life.*
>
> *To start receiving these precious reminders, just twice a month, enter your email address below and click on the button that says, "I deserve more!"*

I then called him and suggested he try it, with white text on a black background. The new page looked like this:
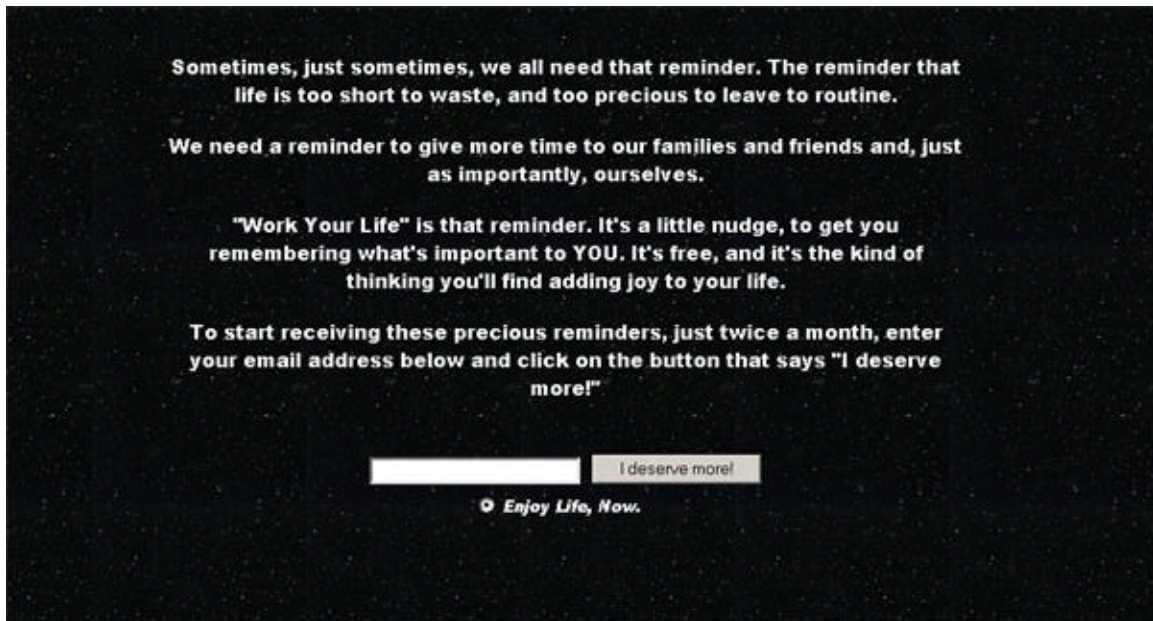


## The Results?

The conversion rate jumped to 11% the first half day, and settled in at 15% in the "long term."

**A 1500% increase.**

That's *MUCH* more like it.

# Part One:
# Conversion

Why such a big jump?

The first thing that jumps out when looking at the original (I'm sure you noticed it) is the jarring transition from the black background and "feel good" motivational message of the movie to a white background with a sales message.

That disconnect ends the experience for the visitor. Especially since the first words of text in the main body were "Thank you for viewing our 'Time' animation."

They're done. They came expecting a motivational experience. They got it. It's over. They're leaving.

If they did read past that, the next thing they'd notice was a sales message. They weren't even going to look far enough past that to see the mention of a free screensaver.

The coup de grace was the double subscription option, starting with "Un-Marketing."

That is definitely not what they came to his site for.

# Dude! It's The Experience!

This sort of problem is the rule, not the exception. Very few businessfolk online realize that changing the rules in the middle of the experience simply stops the experience. They think of it as their fair price for the offered material.

Logically, that makes sense. But only logically, and only if that's the deal in advance.

It even works in some markets. Business to business offers can sometimes be handled successfully this way, as that's part of the norm in such transactions. Businesspeople expect it, as long as it's fair, and as long as it's consistent with what they came to the site for in the first place.

That last phrase holds the key to the enormous change in conversion rate.

**A consistent user experience.**

The traffic is created by an email that promises something motivational and inspiring. Since the email is being forwarded from friend to friend, the people visiting because of it expect that they really will get what's promised. And they do.

What we did with the new follow-up page is simply extend the experience.

By leaving the color the same as was used in the movie, we keep the mindset of the piece long enough to get them to read the copy. Rather than jarring them into leaving, the copy reinforces the message they've just seen, while letting them know that they're not alone… "We all need that reminder."

Notice that the words "newsletter" and "subscribe" don't appear on that page anywhere. They're told they'll get periodic emails, but they're not "ezine issues." They're *reminders* that will ***add joy*** to the readers' lives.

By removing words that have taken on connotations of overload and work-related thought, and replacing them with words that feel good, we take much of the stress out of the process.

It only offers one newsletter. One that's obviously related to what they're experiencing.

It makes it quite clear they're going to get emails on the subject roughly every two weeks, but it says it in a way that considerately offers to extend the experience they're having right now into the future.

Not only does this dramatically increase the conversion rate, but the new subscribers are going to be looking forward to those emails. They're going to be much more likely to open and read them.

Bingo. Everyone wins.

# So, How's That Help Me?

Simple. Take the principles described above and see how many ways you can use them to improve your processes, whether lead and subscriber generation, sales, or other goal-oriented content.

**Is the experience consistent from start to finish?**

Look for consistent themes and styles within sites or sub-sections. Smooth out the experience, and make it richer for the visitor.

Look at your choice of language, especially in the call to action. Does it paint a picture of an enjoyable experience, or does it make the visitor question the value/safety/convenience of taking the action you ask?

Is it clear what you want the visitor to do, and does that fit within the reason they came to the page they're on when you ask them?

**Are they getting the experience they wanted when they clicked through to your site?**

The closer that answer gets to yes *in the visitor's mind*, the more often you'll get the outcome you want.

There are a lot of more subtle factors that can affect conversion rates, but this is the most important. After you get this in line, the rest is fine-tuning.

Look over your site, especially the opening page and any pages that have important calls to action. Look over the links within the site to make sure they create the proper expectation.

Then have someone else look it over for you, with these ideas in mind. There's a very good chance that the visitor has a different view of getting what they wanted than you do.

Look at your promotions. Do your ads, article resource boxes, pay-per-click descriptions and emails set up the experience in a way that will have them expecting just what they find when they click through to your site?

If not, make some adjustments. **This is especially important in pay-per-click advertising.**

I can't guarantee that you'll see improvements of 1500%. I can't *guarantee* that you'll see any at all, but I'd bet that you could improve your results by at least 30%, and often double them … or more.

Every improvement you make in your processes can carry through to every other part of the process, if you keep the experience consistent with the user's expectations.

And that goes straight to the bottom line.

# Part Two:
# Viral Considerations

The fact that the traffic is coming from a viral campaign adds some complexity to the promotion.

First, Scott now has to manage bandwidth. With a half-meg movie, and the potential for growing to 10,000 or more visitors a day, this isn't something that can be easily ignored. Bandwidth can be expensive if you don't shop carefully.

Keep this in mind if you try to engineer a viral promotion.

Even if you start small and have only a modest growth rate of 10% per week, this can become a serious issue. Remember, viral traffic growth, by definition, is compounding. It gets bigger all the time, unless it's a time-sensitive topic.

You should consider possible ways to introduce viral components into your promotional mix. Keep them focused on topics of interest to your target market, so that your new visitors show up already interested in what you're offering.

Scott took two years to get his first 4,300 subscribers. Many of those came from co-registration pages, and weren't as clearly interested in his subject matter as the folks who came in through the movie.

By the end of the fourth week with this new conversion page in place, he should be around 14,000-15,000 – well over twice as many new subscribers in a month as he had previously gotten in two years. And they're all targeted.

Here are the numbers for the first two complete weeks after we changed the sign-up page:

**Week One:**

| Date | Views | Subs | Conversion |
|------|-------|------|------------|
| 14-Oct | 1176 | 152 | 12.93% |
| 15-Oct | 1347 | 196 | 14.55% |
| 16-Oct | 1934 | 293 | 15.15% |
| 17-Oct | 1686 | 268 | 15.90% |
| 18-Oct | 1448 | 265 | 18.30% |
| 21-Oct | 3743 | 602 | 16.08% |
| 22-Oct | 2359 | 358 | 15.18% |

**Total Page Views:** 13,693
**Total Subscribers:** 2,134
**Average Conversion:** 15.58%

**Week Two:**

| Date | Views | Subs | Conversion |
|------|-------|------|------------|
| 23-Oct | 2431 | 358 | 14.73% |
| 24-Oct | 2251 | 322 | 14.30% |
| 25-Oct | 2272 | 333 | 14.66% |
| 26-Oct | 1387 | 248 | 17.88% |
| 27-Oct | 1462 | 239 | 16.35% |
| 28-Oct | 3766 | 555 | 14.74% |
| 29-Oct | 3835 | 612 | 15.96% |

**Total Page Views: 17,404**
**Increase over previous week: 27.1%**

**Total Subscribers: 2,667**
**Increase over previous week: 24.9%**

**Average Conversion: 15.32%**

Obviously, there's an upper limit on the spread of something like this. It can't grow at that rate forever. Or even for a year. There's really no way to predict where the curve will taper off. Two weeks is also too short a period to be sure enough of the growth rate to make anything like reliable projections. However…

If the spread of the movie continued to generate a growth rate of 25% in weekly subscribers for just 10 weeks before fizzling out, Scott would acquire over 110,000 new subscribers in that time.

It could end up being far less than that. Or far, far more.

An interesting facet of viral campaigns, especially ones with humor or motivational messages, is that they can resurface and restart themselves at unpredictable moments. Someone finds the message and sends it out to a list in response to a related post, and bang, you're back in the growth curve again.

Be prepared for this. Have plans to handle sudden traffic spikes.

# Missing Numbers

Track ALL your numbers, wherever possible. While we don't have the exact figures, Scott estimates that fully half the people who hit the movie page never see the conversion page. So, that 15% total is actually 30% of the people who do get to the conversion page.

There are a lot of potential reasons that people who go to the landing page (the movie) might not get to the conversion page. They may not have the Flash player installed. They might have seen the message before in a text email and leave in the middle. They might be on a slow connection and decide not to wait.

In this case, it would be difficult to make adjustments that could affect the number of people who see the conversion page. In many cases, especially where the traffic is sent directly to the conversion page, or where the copy preceding it can be adjusted, you may be able to get those numbers substantially higher.

Try to design your promotions with this in mind.

As part of the **List Machine** package, you have access to Tagger. You can use it to generate user ID numbers for all your list members, and code them into the messages that you send out to trigger the "sneeze." (That's virus-talk for the initial push that gets the thing moving.)

You may want to use those to keep track of which subscribers actually forward your message. Or just how many do forward it, and what the average number of actions is for those who do. Handy info to have…

# Watch What You Create:
# Frankenstein's Last Name Was Murphy!

**Viral traffic is not like other traffic**. The wider you cast your net, the more likely you are to get "run of the net," or generic, traffic. That can be a monster of a kind you do **not** want to have to face.

Imagine getting hundreds of thousands of visitors, only to find that none of them are even remotely interested in what you have to offer.

That's not a good place to be.

If you build viral systems, make sure they appeal to your specific market, and remember that you're talking about what amounts to an impulse purchase mentality. You have to make it absolutely consistent, and as simple and focused as possible. Otherwise, Frankenstein will be waiting.

Viral traffic that doesn't land in this type of situation will rarely convert well at all.

Also remember that the more niche-targeted your promotion is, the smaller the group will be that you attract, and the faster you'll hit saturation – the point at which the thing slows or stops.

That's not a bad thing. You're much better off with a small group of motivated subscribers than with a large group of freebie seekers or luke-warm prospects.

You should also be careful of how your new friends pass along the promotion.

Scott has no "tell-a-friend" pages. Every person who sends the URL along does so from within their own email program. That makes spam accusations a minimal concern at worst. And since there's such a benevolent tone to the entire thing, the incidence of someone forging an email address into the subscribe page maliciously is equally small.

If your viral campaign is a "gotcha," one of those things like the "Web Camera" that claimed to take your picture and then showed you an image of a gorilla, you want to make sure that any subscription requires confirmation. And say so on the form. This will discourage pranksters from entering addresses that aren't their own.

If your campaign involves a service, you MUST be ready for rapid expansion. Even if you're not sure it will go viral, be ready. Too much success with a viral project can kill it faster than too little.

Most importantly, be aware that free offers are likely to attract only (or mostly) people who want free offers. You need to keep the quality of the traffic in mind.

Get one of your freebies posted to a freebie site or newsgroup and you can get a LOT of people hitting the site with no real interest in anything but grabbing the goodies and leaving.

*Those people are more likely to accuse you of spamming than you can imagine.*

If you do offer a free download as a subscription bonus, make sure that they know they'll get the download info via email. This seriously reduces the odds of them entering a bogus address, expecting to find the download link on the Thank You page.

Keep these things in mind. Look for the speedbumps. Plan ways around them, rather than getting nailed by your own success.

# Start Spreadin' The News

Once you get a good viral promotion going, make sure you have ways to keep it going.

What we did to help further encourage people to pass along the URL is to send them a second email, a day or so after they get the welcome message, that reminds them of the URL and gently encourages them to share it with friends that might find the message inspiring or motivating.

You can add it to your signature file for emails or discussion board posts.

Anything that keeps fresh streams of people coming in will increase the growth rate.

That helps to make the thing self-sustaining. If it slows down, you just restart it in new areas or with new groups of people.

If at all possible, you want to offload some of the bandwidth. In this case, the next step for Scott is to see if there's a way to include the subscription form with the movie. If there is, the trick is to let people pass the whole thing around or give it away at their sites.

That encourages further spread without the bandwidth problems.

And, of course, we'll be working on the language to increase the spread of the thing and to get those thousands of new subscribers buying his stuff.

*That is the ultimate goal, isn't it?*

Keep that in mind when designing any promotion. Big numbers don't matter unless they translate to big results.

# What Worked

Scott was simply brilliant in how he got the whole thing going. He took something that was already a proven viral message and played it up in a very professional and inspiring manner. A manner that was consistent with the message of his self-improvement newsletter.

By getting his existing subscribers involved, he actually increased their loyalty, and the likelihood that those same people will support him in the future as well.

It's also very likely that folks who signed up and forwarded the link to the movie will also forward other viral messages he creates.

He's developing an army of people willing to promote his stuff for him, at no cost to him at all.

That's powerful.

He got the traffic going, and when he ran into a problem (his conversion rate), he asked for help. And then he did something with the help that was offered.

He got that copy I sent him posted within minutes of the time we got off the phone. By the next morning he was tracking the numbers to see if the test had worked.

He took intelligent action, adjusted, got more information, and took further action. He's testing different language in the follow-up messages, and is pushing the thing with specific products in mind to offer the new subscribers.

The way he's marketing this is a perfect example of what Scot calls "Un-Marketing"… coincidentally, the subject of another newsletter of his. It's available at http://www.un-marketing.com

This allows him to demonstrate his ideas and cross-promote his viral offer to the Un-Marketing subscribers, and his Un-Marketing newsletter to his Work Your Life subscribers.

By getting a lot of other people involved, and posting the results back to the board where he originally asked for help, he helps other people learn more about getting results, and he gets further exposure for both.

Notice the internal consistency of his actions.

Every action supports every other action, and adds to its effectiveness.

That's the essence of good marketing.

A lot of lessons to be learned here. I hope you find them useful. And very profitable.


Paul

PS: If you'd like to learn more of these kinds of ideas for building a large list of targeted subscribers, or getting a lot more leads and sales, get a copy of my book on the subject - "The Amazing List Machine."

It covers the strategic stuff that you should consider when developing any subscriber or lead generation system, and then skips the traditional advice (which can often get you in trouble), going straight to a number of more advanced techniques.

Check it out. http://www.talkbiz.com/results