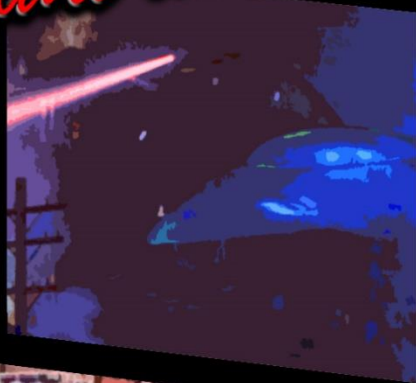




MARKET LIKE A ROCKSTAR:

*How to make a Billion
Dollars in Three Days*



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MARKET LIKE A ROCKSTAR: HOW TO MAKE A BILLION DOLLARS IN THREE DAYS

1. INTRODUCTION

Marketing is the process of communicating, or selling a product, person, idea or service to customers. It provides a commercial link between the material wants and needs of a society, and satisfies these with adverts and eventually a monetary exchange. Marketing can also be used to develop a relationship between customers and business, and in some cases, increase the value of the company's shares. In short, the sole purpose of marketing is to persuade a target market to buy the product, to make money.

Different countries and regions have different consumer needs and have developed with different economies: Harmut Berghoff mentions in his book *The Rise of Marketing and Market Research* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) that "The periodization of marketing history is fiercely contested. There is no consensus on where to start chronologically. Some authors claim that the history of modern marketing began in the Middle Ages or the early modern period." He also mentions that the sketchy starting point is because of close interaction with technological change, for example not only advertising as a marketing strategy – but methods of transport, production and communication. Louis Boone writes in his book *Contemporary Marketing* (Cengage Learning, 2013) that the history of modern marketing can be broken down in to five eras each with a common ideal, beginning prior to the 1920s:

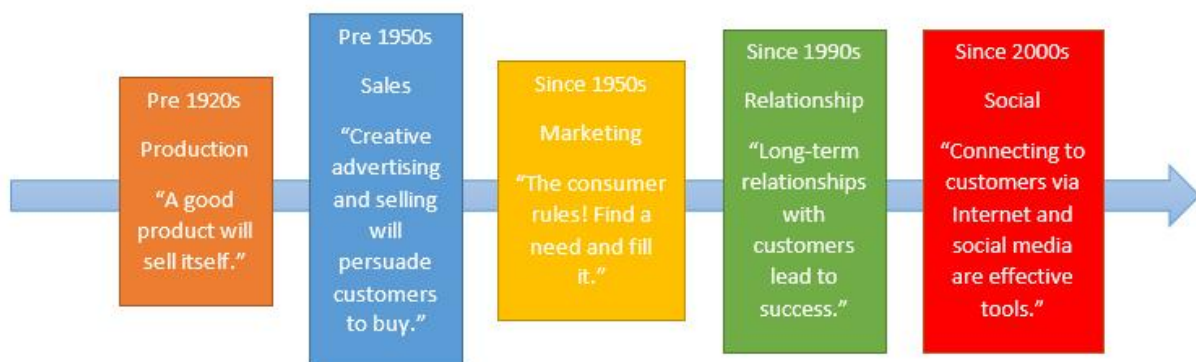


Figure 1- Contemporary Marketing, L. Boone, 2013

We are living in the last block – the era of social marketing.

2. GAME INTRODUCTION

In 2013, down a small street in Edinburgh, Rockstar North re-wrote the record books when it released *Grand Theft Auto V*. The game gained the titles of highest grossing video game of all time, fastest-selling video game of all time and most expensive video game of all time. *Grand Theft Auto V* cost a record setting £170/\$265m to develop and market, topping blockbusters such as *Avatar's* (20th Century Fox, 2009) \$237 million, and *Star Wars: The Old Republic's* (Bioware, 2011) ~\$200 million. \$150 million of the budget went to marketing, which was done in a variety of different ways, from billboards to websites, competitions to phone-ins and pre-commissioned graffiti. The game follows the story of three protagonists: Michael Townley, a 'retired' bank robber, Franklin Clinton, a young repo man and gang and Trevor Philips, an unhinged and volatile man living in a trailer park – who used to be part of Michael's heist crew.

Rockstar has kept up with the technological advances of the last few years, producing adverts that are appropriate of the times. The internet had no real marketing value in the 1990s, which saw the release of *Grand Theft Auto* on PC. In 1997, the very first instalment in the series was met with a mixed reception – critics loved it, and the public hated it because of its violent content, including the ability to kill innocent pedestrians. The series has since invested billions of dollars’ worth of marketing allowance to make sure that its success is unrivalled. Rockstar studios have kept well up to date with technology and marketing strategies. It focuses and relies heavily on one more modern form of marketing in particular: *guerrilla*.



Figure 2 - *Grand Theft Auto*, Rockstar North, 1997

3. GUERRILLA MARKETING

The term ‘guerrilla marketing’ was first coined in 1984 by Jay Conrad Levinson, a business writer. He has released 4 books on the subject and describes it as “...‘unconventional’ marketing tools used in cases when financial or other resources are limited or non-existent.” (Levinson, 1984) Guerrilla marketing is an advertising tactic that employs unconventional methods of low-cost advertising, to promote, convey or sell a product or idea. Companies often employ this in either large scale attacks to spread a global message, or in localised areas to spread a more targeted message in harder to reach areas. The ultimate goal of guerrilla marketing is for the message, idea or product to go viral, thus generating a large crowd of followers that eventually become consumers. The term ‘guerrilla’ is easily traceable to ‘guerrilla warfare’, which employs unconventional battle techniques to achieve a goal in a competitive atmosphere, or to



Figure 3- A painting on the side of a building in NYC prior to *GTAIV*'s release

overcome a particularly hostile environment or situation.

Rockstar began their own viral and guerrilla campaign on October 25th, 2011 by utilising the social media. Using Twitter, Rockstar posted a hashtag that sent the games world in to chaos: “#GTAV rockstargames.com”. Then there was the 8 day silence. Then came the trailer on November 2nd, detailing the fictional town of Los Santos as the game’s setting. The long almost 2 year wait between these trailers and the release of the game provided just the right length of time to confirm 2.5 million preorder sales. Rockstar also used a guerrilla tactic that they had employed from previous years – the commission of graffiti artists to create finished (or half-finished) graffiti on the side of buildings located in strategic advertising areas.

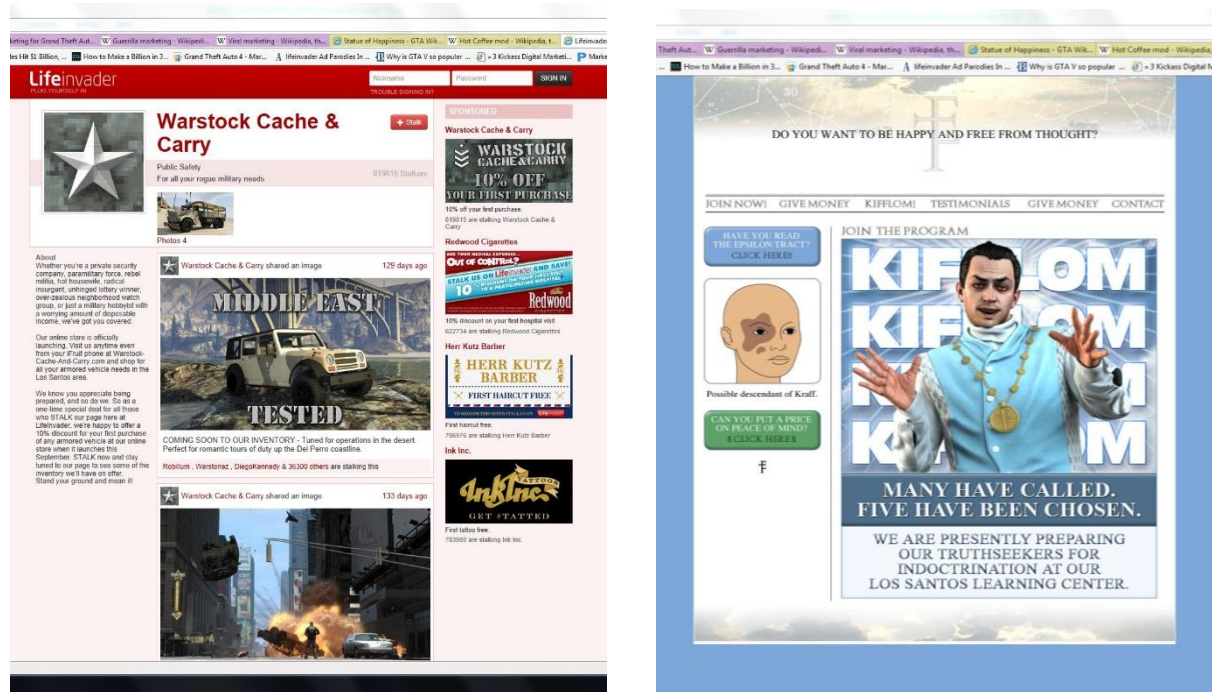


Figure 4- Lifeinvader.com and epsilonprogram.com

Rockstar also published a number of real websites featured in the game before its release. The heavily satirised sites were remakes and parodies of Facebook (aptly named ‘Lifeinvader’) and the Church of Scientology, the cult page ‘The Epsilon Program’. On the fake ‘Lifeinvader’ website, users can create an account, make friends and ‘like’ posts from the games notable characters. It can be accessed in game and in real life, and can be interacted with, like Facebook itself. The ‘Lifeinvader’ ads advertise all the exciting activities that can be done in GTA 5. There is, of course, Rockstar’s famous controversial humour to engage users and encourage sharing. The most epic guerrilla advert that Rockstar did was through the ‘Epsilon Program’ page, where upon creating an account to join the cult and uploading a photo, the player learned that they had answered a casting call by Rockstar to become in-game characters. Five lucky fans were chosen and became featured in the cult’s side mission, both in character and voice. The Epsilon Program also has its own Twitter feed that again, uses satirical and controversial humour to encourage sharing amongst players.

4. TRANSMEDIAL DEVICES IN GUERRILLA MARKETING

With the improvement and expansion of technology since the release of GTAIV in 2008, Rockstar was able to expand the way they market virally, and add a next generation level of gameplay. The development and release of the ‘iFruit’ app (which is a rebrand of Apple’s iPhone, and also featured in-game) allowed users to



Figure 5- Los Santos Customs, iFruit App

play GTAV outside of their console. Players can train the game's furry friend 'Chop' (a Rottweiler belonging to the character Lamar) through a series of mini-games and gestures. Players can also stay connected on the fictional 'Lifeinvader', create custom vehicles in the 'Los Santos Customs' store and have them delivered to your house in-game, and players can also keep up with the latest Rockstar news and releases. All this can be accessed by downloading a free app to your real-life smartphone and linking your accounts via the website.

Current guerrilla marketing tactics have much in common with significant media events, and an early example of this (which was far, far ahead of its time) was performed as a Halloween episode of the series on October 30, 1938, and aired over the Columbia Broadcasting System radio network. Directed and narrated by actor and future filmmaker Orson Welles, the episode was an adaptation of H. G. Wells' novel *The War of the Worlds* (1898, William Heinemann). The hour-long broadcast was based on a radio show of music being played from a theatre in New York city, but being constantly interrupted by news of strange anomalies occurring on the planet Mars, and eventually of an alien invasion in the state of New Jersey. Many radio listeners were at the time listening to a broadcast on another channel, but after that ended, the dial was turned to see what else was on. Those tuning in late missed the introduction that stated the broadcast was a

theatrical performance – and thus panic ensued, with many people actually fleeing the state. Welles was later forced to apologise for the widespread panic, stating that "...*The War of the Worlds* has no further significance than as the holiday offering it was intended to be; The Mercury Theatre's own radio version of dressing up in a sheet and jumping out of a bush and saying 'Boo!'"

Another great example of guerrilla and viral marketing was in May of 2007, where 42 Entertainment began a viral marketing campaign prior to the release of "The Dark Knight". It had crowds of witty kids drawn in to an alternative reality game, set in real time to a virtual Gotham City. It began with the publishing of bank notes, posters, adverts defaced by the iconic face of the Joker. It then progressed to jets writing a phone number in the sky, armies of newly initiated Joker henchmen and even an opposition party under the title "I Support Harvey Dent." Each checkpoint sent out new clues as to what would occur, and on its climax



Figure 5 – The Dark Knight viral campaign

of July 8th, at 10pm sharp, a trailer defaced by the Joker was played on a skyscraper in New York City. "Why So Serious", the name for the alternative reality game, was a social experiment that not only gave away the release of a new chapter in the Dark Knight's story, but had over 10 million participants in over 75 countries

worldwide, and was played on a variety of platforms and devices, including web, phone, real-time events and unique collectables. The game aimed to interest fans by having them try to earn what they wanted to see.

5. THE POWER OF TRADITIONAL MARKETING

During the release of GTAV, billboards and other typical marketing tools were also used alongside the more outlandish viral websites and apps, which added to the dramatic sales. The main audience of the viral marketing is undoubtedly a younger one - a generation that has smartphones, is tech savvy, and has been bought up with the original series of GTA games. Despite this, Rockstar still used traditional advertising techniques – such as trailers, billboards and press coverage – for most of their marketing campaign. This highlights the importance of never solely relying on guerrilla marketing and appreciating that your entire target market often can't be reached through one marketing method. If the original target market is active on the internet and willing to engage with Rockstar online, they are exposed to the viral marketing and will enjoy browsing the parody websites and using the 'iFruit' app. Such a market is likely to be gamers in their teenage years or twenties. This requires a promotional message that is convincing and requires the target market to think more – hence the use and success of viral guerrilla marketing.



Figure 7- Paintings on the side of the Hotel Figueroa in LA

Josh Blatchford, author of online journal *Manifested Marketing* poses the question “But what about the older gamer or the Mum/Mom and wife looking for a gift? They are all potential customers of GTAV.” He is correct in what he says and follows by stating that the generation that is not quite so motivated to engage with the online content needs to be addressed directly, through exciting and attractive physical advertisements. Rockstar’s enormous \$150 million marketing budget mainly was spent on this, and YouTube games critic Ben Crowshaw (known as Yahtzee) records in one of his tongue-in-cheek videos: “I couldn’t keep away from this game any longer, at least you can’t in the city I live in – the entire place is practically gift wrapped in adverts and posters.” (Crowshaw, 2013)

6. PREDICTION

With the unrivalled success of the *Grand Theft Auto* series and GTAV in particular, Rockstar will continue to spend large amounts of money to reach the broadest possible audience. Marketing requires the company to be technologically up to date, and Rockstar will utilise all the available platforms for marketing both virally and traditionally to ensure all potential customers are aware of the product. Rockstar could do well by taking a leaf from 42 Entertainment’s book and consider the use of a transmedial campaign to further make the target market think about the release and engage with the online content. Aside from this, Rockstar should continue to advertise the next game in much the same way, as the previous figures show great turnover. With the

success of GTAV's marketing campaign, other games companies may spend more on their marketing and possibly use similar techniques to Rockstar to boost the sales of their games. GTAV's success and figures give the impression that many would not doubt the next instalment to make over a billion dollars in its first day of sales.



Figure 8- Grand Theft Auto V, Rockstar North, 2013

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Illustrations

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Figure 5- <http://i.ytimg.com/vi/VpuC7HhCPWA/0.jpg>

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