

# Do You Market Like Led Zeppelin or The Grateful Dead?

By David Meerman Scott

You and I are incredibly lucky.

We're living in a time when we can reach the world directly by publishing great information online, content like YouTube videos, ebooks, blogs, photos, and data that people *want* to consume and that they are *eager to share* with their friends, family, and colleagues.

One of the coolest phenomena on the Web is that when an idea takes off, it can propel a brand or company to seemingly instant fame and fortune. Creating a *World Wide Rave* in which other people help to tell your story for you is a way to drive action. One person sends it to another, then that person sends it to yet another, and on and on. Each link in the chain exposes your story to someone new, someone *you* never had to contact yourself! It's like when you're at a sporting event or concert in a large stadium and somebody starts "the wave." Isn't it amazing that *just one person* with an idea can convince a group of 50,000 people to join in? Well, you can start a similar wave of interest online, a *World Wide Rave*. You can create the triggers that get millions of people to tell your stories and spread your ideas.

On the speaking circuit and in comments on my blog I get push-back on these ideas, particularly from those in large organizations. Executives at companies large and small as well as marketing and PR people tend to push back on the ideas of a *World Wide Rave* because they want to apply old rules of ROI (return on investment) measurement to the new

world of spreading ideas online. For decades, we measured "leads"—how many business cards we collected, how many people called the toll-free number, how many people stopped at the tradeshow booth, and how many people filled out a form on our Web site, providing their e-mail address and other personal information.

While applying these forms of measurement might be appropriate offline, using them to track your success on the Web just isn't relevant; they don't capture the way ideas travel. Worse, the very act of tracking leads hampers the spread of ideas. People know from experience that if they supply their personal information to an organization, they're likely to receive unwanted phone calls from salespeople or to find themselves on e-mail marketing lists. Most won't bother.

There's a fascinating parallel to learn from in the music industry. For decades, selling music has been about *exerting control* over music copyright. Before the Web came along, it was fairly difficult to find illegal copies of music because you needed the physical record or tape. You had to either ask friends to make a copy or go to a dodgy part of town to find a cassette-tape or CD seller on a street corner. When the Internet made possible the easy dissemination of music, the geniuses in the music industry clamped down in control mode—the only way they knew how to market and sell.

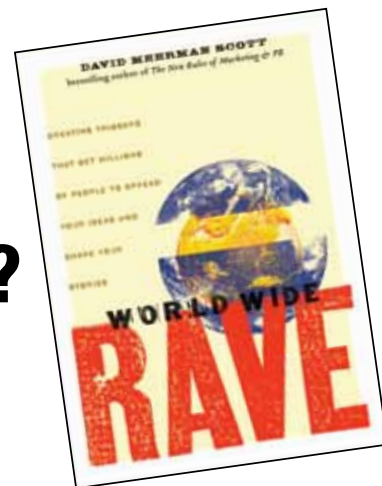
But if you step back and look at the ways musicians make money besides the recordings—concerts, endorsement deals, merchandise (such as \$35 t-shirts), and "souvenir" packaging of

the music (booklets included in a CD case, for example), not to mention royalties for the use of music in television, movies, and advertising—you start to suspect that clamping down with rigid controls may not be the best strategy. Think about that: The music industry is trying to prevent the spread of its product!

If I was a music executive (or musician), I'd make much of my music available for free online, and I'd encourage people to share it. I would have the confidence that providing music for free would drive sales of my other products. Many unsigned bands are prospering with this strategy through their own MySpace pages or Web sites, and some are finding absolutely tremendous success.

This idea of offering free access to music to promote artists is not new. Starting in the 1960s, the Grateful Dead encouraged concertgoers to record their live shows, establishing "taper sections" where fans' equipment could be set up for the best sound quality. The band was happy to have Deadheads trade tapes and make copies for friends. The cult of the Grateful Dead concert became a pre-Internet *World Wide Rave*, driving millions of fans to the band's live shows for over thirty years and generating hundreds of millions of dollars in revenue.

Contrast the Grateful Dead and their open attitude to that of Led Zeppelin and their current label, Warner Music Group. The BBC reports that



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20 million people wanted to purchase tickets to the historic Led Zeppelin reunion show held at the O2 Arena on December 10, 2007. Needless to say, the single show (rather than a multi-night engagement or entire tour) left many disappointed fans unable to witness the band's first stage performance in 19 years.

Immediately after the show, grainy, low-fidelity clips appeared on YouTube and were eagerly watched by fans. I was one—hoping to see how the band had changed since I'd seen them as a teenager in June 1977, at New York City's Madison Square Garden. Alas, Warner pulled down the clips within hours, claiming copyright infringement.

These music executives actively tried to stop a World Wide Rave!

In my opinion, they completely underestimated a fan base's power to help sell legal recordings and drive interest in a band. I am absolutely confident that the buzz generated by the concerts sold millions of dollars'

worth of Led Zeppelin recordings in the weeks after the concert. The availability of YouTube clips would have enhanced sales. All because we've been briefly re-exposed to the power of this band, which we may have ignored for several decades, via fleeting images of a concert we would have traveled halfway around the world to see if tickets had been available.

Of course, the music world serves as just one example. For another, consider MailerMailer, a company selling an online tool that makes it easy to create, send, and track e-mail campaigns. This small company offers its free *Email Marketing Metrics Report*, which was first released October 2004. Initially, they required e-mail address registration to get the report. But when they opened it up and made the report available totally free, they found that twenty times the number of people downloaded it.

Wow, stop and think about that. Many companies put registration requirements on their most valuable information. But here is real evidence that, if you do, only a frac-

tion of potential readers or viewers will request it.

Here are some questions that *can* help you learn to measure a World Wide Rave:

1. How many people are getting exposed to your ideas?
2. How many people are downloading your stuff?
3. How often are bloggers writing about you and your ideas?
4. (And what are those bloggers saying?)
5. Where are you appearing in search results for important phrases?
6. How many people are engaging with you and choosing to speak to you about your offerings?

Free information can be worth millions of dollars, and if you insist on maintaining control, you're missing a tremendous opportunity to harness that power. To create a World Wide Rave, forget about sales leads. Instead, focus on spreading your ideas. Make your information totally free, with no registration required. ❖



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