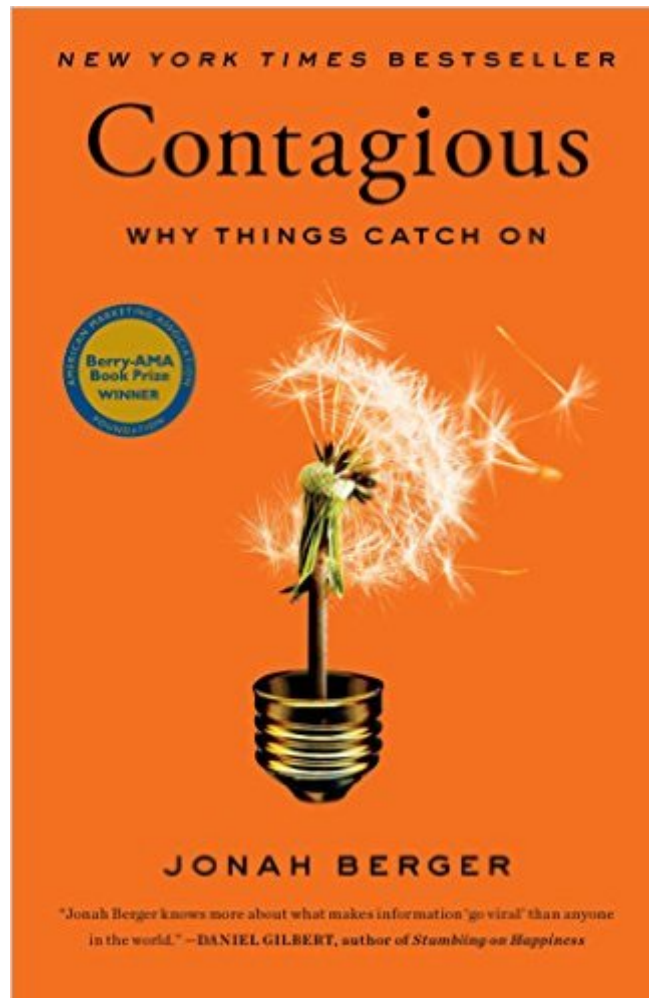


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# Contagious: Why Things Catch On



## Synopsis

New York Times bestseller and named Best Marketing Book of 2014 by the American Marketing Association. What makes things popular? Why do people talk about certain products and ideas more than others? Why are some stories and rumors more infectious? And what makes online content go viral? If you said advertising, think again. People don't listen to advertisements, they listen to their peers. But why do people talk about certain products and ideas more than others? Why are some stories and rumors more infectious? And what makes online content go viral? Wharton marketing professor Jonah Berger has spent the last decade answering these questions. He's studied why New York Times articles make the paper's own Most E-mailed List, why products get word of mouth, and how social influence shapes everything from the cars we buy to the clothes we wear to the names we give our children. In this book, Berger reveals the secret science behind word-of-mouth and social transmission. Discover how six basic principles drive all sorts of things to become contagious, from consumer products and policy initiatives to workplace rumors and YouTube videos. Contagious combines groundbreaking research with powerful stories. Learn how a luxury steakhouse found popularity through the lowly cheese-steak, why anti-drug commercials might have actually increased drug use, and why more than 200 million consumers shared a video about one of the seemingly most boring products there is: a blender. If you've wondered why certain stories get shared, e-mails get forwarded, or videos go viral, Contagious explains why, and shows how to leverage these concepts to craft contagious content. This book provides a set of specific, actionable techniques for helping information spread—for designing messages, advertisements, and information that people will share. Whether you're a manager at a big company, a small business owner trying to boost awareness, a politician running for office, or a health official trying to get the word out, Contagious will show you how to make your product or idea catch on.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Jonah Berger's *Contagious* is a fascinating read. Not only is the book packed with entertaining examples of viral campaigns, but each is backed with painstaking analysis into the science of social transmission. What you end up with is a veritable blueprint for creating ideas, campaigns and messages that spread like wildfire. There are six essential factors that contribute to contagious ideas, shows Jonah, and a quick look at some of the most successful viral campaigns reveals each of them at work: Social currency. We share things that make us look good or help us compare favorably to others. Exclusive restaurants utilize social currency all the time to create demand. Triggers. Ideas that are top of mind spread. Like parasites, viral ideas attach themselves to top of mind stories, occurrences or environments. For example, Mars bar sales spiked when in 1997 when NASA's Pathfinder mission explored the red planet. Emotion. When we care, we share. Jonah analyzed over six months of data from the New York Times most emailed list to discover that certain high arousal emotions can dramatically increase our need to share ideas - like the outrage triggered by Dave Carroll's "United Breaks Guitars" video. Public. People tend to follow others, but only when they can see what those others are doing. There is a reason why baristas put money in their own tip jar at the beginning of a shift. Ideas need to be public to be copied. Practical. Humans crave the opportunity to give advice and offer tips (one reason why advocate marketing works - your best customers love to help out), but especially if they offer practical value. It's why we 'pay it forward' and help others. Sharing is caring.

I'm not sure where or when I first discovered Jonah's research, but my career hasn't been the same since. In my opinion, there isn't anybody on the planet who knows more about what makes information spread. On a personal note, his New York Times study featured prominently in *Contagious* was the final piece of the puzzle behind the theory in my second book. Jonah goes back to the results in this mammoth study a number of times throughout this book to give you a full understanding of the fascinating results. In full disclosure, I obtained an early copy of *Contagious*. As a blogger and Internet marketer my livelihood depends on being the first to understand the newest

social contagion theories. Because of that, I requested an early copy from Jonah and he was nice enough to oblige. First, what I disliked about Contagious, and there were three things: 1. Much of Contagious is an explanation of his work in a more organized, concise, and interesting manner. Because of that, not a lot of the material is new if you've already read his studies. 2. The book is based on 6 principles: social currency, triggers, emotion, public, practical value, and stories. Each principle is described in detail and are the major sections of the book. I was disappointed with the practical value section as I felt that it was a rather superficial overview of what's now become known as behavioral economics. Jonah describes "prospect theory" originally put forth by Daniel Kahneman and uses it to explain how irrationally we behave in our purchasing habits. In particular, he discusses how we value goods and services relative to a precedent and how that precedent isn't necessarily an accurate portrayal of the actual value of the product in question.

If this material is enough to cover an entire Wharton MBA course, then I'm not sure what that says about Wharton's program. There is just not that much information in this book far beyond common sense most people already intuitively know. I had been looking forward to this book release as the topic is interesting and even possesses its own themed six characteristics, conveniently ascribed the acronym STEPPS, which the author Jonah Berger explains contributes to why products or ideas become contagious. Mr. Berger argues that if we want our product or idea to catch on and spread like wildfire, we must try to build into it as many of these six STEPPS as we can. STEPPS stands for: Social currency Triggers Emotion Public Practical Value Stories. If discussing something makes you look interesting or cool or special, then that something provides you with "Social currency". If there is built into a product or idea easy cues that can trigger it to come to mind, then it has a strong "Trigger". If the brand/concept can evoke emotions of anger or good will/ happiness (but note NOT sadness - since we don't want our friends/family to be sad and therefore are not inclined to share something likely to invoke sadness), then it has "Emotion". If your product or cause can be broadcast to others, it is "Public". If it provides "Practical value", it is more likely to be shared. Lastly, if a memorable story can be spun around it, then it has the added benefit of having a "Story". Now, let's apply STEPPS to the book itself: 1) Clearly, the answer the book claims to explain (Why do certain products and ideas go viral?)

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