



The Ins and Outs of Inbound Marketing





Introduction

As consumers ourselves, we understand what it's like to be marketed to. In the past, you may recall that the most common marketing tactics were advertisements, cold calls, and unsolicited mail from purchased lists. Yet, this “outbound” method didn't guarantee that consumers actually engaged.

Inbound marketing has flipped the script. Today, marketers have adopted a much more helpful and engaging method of reaching potential customers by surfacing the content they crave. Running a successful marketing machine is no longer about

the quantity, but the quality of leads—and inbound marketing, paired with marketing automation, is the most efficient way to get there.

In this eBook, we explore the basics of an inbound marketing strategy, the difference between the outbound tactics of long ago and the winning inbound campaigns of today, and how marketing automation makes your job easier through set-it-and-forget-it nurturing.

The Basics of Inbound Marketing

First, let's adopt a common definition of inbound marketing:

Inbound marketing—attracting new customers to your brand through [blogs](#), [SEO](#), [social media](#), and other effective forms of content marketing.

Inbound marketing brings [leads](#) straight to your website to devour your content. We define inbound marketing this way because, by aligning your content with your audience's interests, you gain inbound traffic to your website.



Outbound marketing, however, focuses on sending content or messages to prospects (versus them coming to you) through telemarketing, direct mail, email, or additional advertising campaigns. Think of it this way:

INBOUND MARKETING	OUTBOUND MARKETING
Consumer Driven	Marketer Driven
Rich in Content	Product Based
Blogging, Social Media, Assets	Broadcast, Print Media
SEO, Podcasts	Trade Shows, Cold Calls
Emails to Opt-ins	Emails to Purchased Lists

The problem is, outbound content is just one piece in a sea of noise and unsolicited ads that consumers have slowly tuned out over time. That’s why outbound marketing is less and less effective as clutter increases and tactics such as events and mailing tools cost marketers more money. Instead of wasting time and money following them around, inbound marketing allows them to come to you using creative techniques, engaging content, and strategic keywords.

To effectively embrace inbound marketing:

- **Design your website as a resource center.** Divide the content into sections based on educational pieces about your tools, industry, news, interactive pages, and downloadable assets (such as [infographics](#), worksheets, and [eBooks](#)).
- **Think solution-based.** Buyers need your services to solve their problem(s). Be upfront with your solution instead of making website visitors and leads dig for the information they want. Page one, sentence one, describe what you have to offer your customers.
- **Win on social media.** Social media has become the top channel consumers spend their time on, providing countless opportunities to engage. Plus, they provide a number of targeting options to engage customers and potential buyers with relevant ads, presenting a perfect medium to drive traffic to your website, engage with customers and potential buyers, address concerns directly, and get interested parties in the immediate hands of your sales reps.



Inbound Marketing Runs on Strong Content

Much of the potential buyer's awareness and consideration phases in the purchase lifecycle occur before they even engage with a sales rep. That's because content marketing has the power to do the talking for you. Most commonly, this is done through:

- **Blogs:** Write, research, and build on educational content that buyers in your industry need to purchase and have questions about.
- **Social media:** Broaden the scope of your blog posts and additional online material like case studies and whitepapers by promoting them on Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn.
- **Keyword optimization:** Know what potential customers are typing into search engines when researching your industry. This way, you can integrate these terms into your content so new prospects will land on your website.

Yet, for inbound marketing to be effective, your content must be genuine, educational, and thought-provoking enough to make prospects want to download it. Calls to action (CTAs) then prompt visitors to take the next step in engaging with your brand through an online lead capture form to receive emails, register for an upcoming event, or even schedule a demo. From here, you can continue the nurturing process until the inbound leads feel educated enough to take the next step in the sales cycle.



Blogging With a Purpose

Blogging has long been considered one of the most effective forms of inbound marketing, generating thought-provoking content that readers can peruse at their leisure, refer back to, and easily share with others. That's why it's important to create an ongoing blog strategy featuring relevant topics that include search terms your target personas use most.



Step 1:

Research the most popular keywords that are drawing people to other blogs in your industry.



Step 2:

Make a spreadsheet of those terms and group them together based on relevance and their ability to build off of one another in your post (e.g. pairing lead scoring with lead nurturing).



Step 3:

Incorporate these terms into your blog posts as naturally as possible. Google is now more equipped to process the natural flow of human language patterns than ever, easily spotting planted keywords and disjointed content that doesn't make sense.





Winning at Inbound Marketing Requires Strategy

Marketers of long ago didn't have nearly the amount of channels and content to compete with in capturing consumer attention as they do today. As more noise filled the space, brands had to vie for attention using the best, most engaging content. This is where inbound marketing strategy was born.

Attracting customers with “pull” tactics (e.g. interesting blog posts and educational webinars)

rather than shouting at them with “push” tactics (e.g. advertisements and cold calls) is the cornerstone of inbound marketing. This type of inbound marketing strategy is extremely common among leading marketing organizations today—and with good reason, as it not only improves upon the traditional, outbound approach, but can also add significant business value in new ways.



While the benefits of an inbound marketing strategy are numerous, here are three of the top reasons to consider taking this approach. Inbound marketing helps you:

1. Strengthen Brand Awareness

85% of Americans now say they go online at least daily. If your inbound marketing efforts continue to pop up across the relevant sites they view, you can significantly strengthen brand awareness among your target audience. Even if they don't immediately convert, generating brand familiarity can go a long way in building credibility for the future.

2. Improve your Position as a Thought Leader

People want to learn from, partner with, and buy from brands they trust, and building that trust requires proving your expertise. Things like blogging, hosting webinars, and connecting on social media can help bolster your status as a thought leader in your space.

3. Increase Lead and Opportunity Generation

Inbound marketing can also significantly increase lead and opportunity generation. In fact, companies with blogs produce 67% more leads per month than those without a blog. Combined with clear calls to action, this type of content has the power to move new prospects through the funnel to become higher quality leads and opportunities.



Developing a Content Calendar

The brands and content producers with the greatest followings are those that post regularly, not sporadically. Thus, creating a content calendar that maps out ideas and helps draw your target market in with provocative topics allows for more quality audience building.

Take the time to collaborate with sales, customer support, and the product team to plan thoughtful content that will resonate with your audience. Setting a monthly or quarterly calendar allows for the most planning time.

Once your content is created, be sure to publish across multiple channels for the greatest exposure. Inbound marketing statistics show readers consume content across a variety of channels:

- 94% of Facebook's advertising revenue is now generated via mobile. ([Statista](#))
- LinkedIn is the second-most popular social media platform used by B2B marketers, ranking only behind Facebook. ([Statista](#))
- 94% of people say watching explainer videos helped them learn more about a product, with 84% being swayed to make a purchase. ([Wyzowl](#))

Create an Engagement Plan

Create an engagement plan that considers:

- 1.** How often am I going to blog? How will I choose my topics?
- 2.** How many emails am I going to send every week? How will my workflow be set up?
- 3.** What social media accounts am I going to use to promote my content? How will I react to favorites, likes, retweets, or direct messages?
- 4.** At what point during engagement will sales step in?

Creating Target Personas

It's also important to expand your reach through email marketing and [social media](#) promotion. You can become an inbound marketing strategist by first defining your brand's most common audience personas.

A persona is a complete fictional profile based on the needs, wants and challenges of your perfect customer.

Personas help you tailor your content down to exactly what your leads are looking for, just as segmented lists tailor your email campaigns to the desires of your subscribers. It's important to recognize your website visitors, leads, and customers as independent entities, each with their own needs, wants, and challenges. While this may seem like it only works for small business inbound marketing, even large multi-product corporations can achieve individual attention through the creation of personas.

To build the ideal customer persona:

1. Get as granular as possible, writing down both the professional and personal characteristics of the customer that needs your company's products and services. Consider every detail, including:
 - Company size
 - Annual revenue
 - Local, national, or global brand presence
 - Industry
 - Team responsibilities
 - Number of technical tools used daily
 - Key performance metrics
 - Goals
 - Barriers to success
 - Job title
 - Role in the company
 - Level of influence
 - Supervisor or contributor status
2. Collaborate with every department—especially sales, as they interact with buyers and potential buyers and have heard every thought, opinion, and objection in the book.



Navigating the Sales Cycle

Once your persona is created, it's time to map out how each persona will engage with your company and filter through the sales funnel. Brand new prospects that have only been to your website a couple times aren't ready to discuss payment plans, just as **nurtured** and highly qualified leads don't want to sit through your homepage's introductory video. Having a predetermined sales cycle will ensure you're getting the right information to the right people at the right time.

Remember, the main goal of your inbound marketing search and strategy is to educate buyers. This way, they will consider you an authority in your industry and begin seeking you out for additional information and education.

However, search engine optimization (SEO) helps your content rank and gain visibility on Google. Find logical places to incorporate keywords and search terms into your content, while keeping content genuine and informative.

Generating Quality Leads

While trade shows and other outbound lead generation systems like cold calling may still hold prominent placement on your calendar, buyers now have control of their own sales cycle and start the process days (even weeks) before sales know they exist.

The best lead generation websites have a heavy focus on inbound marketing because it increases demand, establishes qualified sales opportunities, and drives traffic back to other pages of the site like products or case studies.

However, there are still plenty of challenges that can happen when content quantity is prioritized over quality. Be sure to avoid:

- Spending money on inbound marketing tools that don't increase ROI
- Focusing on increasing brand awareness over educating prospects and leads
- Failing to include explicit calls to action so readers are left without a next step
- Relying solely on one promotional channel like LinkedIn or Twitter

Seeing the Big Picture of Your Inbound Marketing Machine

In inbound marketing, you must anticipate what your customers and potential buyers want and deliver the information before they even ask for it. But you also need a strong marketing automation platform behind it to streamline your inbound marketing

cycle. Analyzing your content's performance over time can help you more accurately predict the future, while marketing automation can help you make the most of the campaigns you run.



Use Analytics to Drive Engagement

Analytics are the crystal ball of the marketing department, allowing you to assess past campaign statistics, engagement, and inbound lead generation. You can then use that information by applying the same strategies that proved successful in the past, staying far away from those that failed.

The most effective way to track your content's analytics is in your [marketing automation software](#). This compiles information from multiple channels, including email campaigns, landing pages, website pages, and blog posts. Then, you can review which channels are producing the most leads and which are the highest quality.

Adding Marketing Automation to Your Inbound Strategy

Your buyers look at your content online. But unless they decide to complete a form on your site, your sales funnel will become overfilled with increasingly stale leads that don't have a clear next step in front of them.

Marketing automation refers to any software that automates and regulates marketing tasks. The ultimate goal is for you to sell more efficiently and deliver more revenue.

With marketing automation and inbound working together, your system will capture and store their information, then automatically transfer new leads into a nurture program until they're sales-qualified.



Making the Most of Your Inbound Marketing Efforts

Each brand's content, target personas, posting schedule, preferred channels, and results will be different. That's why it's important to develop and continually iterate on an inbound strategy to find a cadence and flow that works for you. At the same time, having a marketing automation platform you can count on will make your job much easier, directing the flow of traffic toward the next phase of the customer lifecycle.

When done right, inbound marketing can create new, powerful opportunities to build stronger relationships with your target audience and ultimately turn those relationships into sales.



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