

# INBOUND MARKETING

Bringing B2B buyers to you

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# WHY INBOUND?

Traditional marketing, according to conventional wisdom, is bound by the law of diminishing returns. People have grown 'anti-marketing' filters and simply tune out your messages. We need a new approach. That approach has become known as Inbound Marketing.

A DemandGen report found that nine out of 10 B2B buyers say that when they are ready to purchase, they'll find you. That may send a shiver down the spine of your sales team but, for marketing, it is an opportunity to redefine the value that you can bring to your organisation.

This white paper examines why Inbound Marketing must be a core component of the marketing strategies of every B2B organisation. However, like any other marketing element, it is no panacea. The benefits of Inbound Marketing are only fully achieved when adopted as part of a 360 degree marketing strategy.

# THE GROWTH OF INBOUND MARKETING

Inbound Marketing can be defined as 'the process of helping your customers to find out about your company for themselves by ensuring that your content is readily available on the channels they use when researching a purchase - or even before they are considering the need for a purchase'.

The reasons for adopting this approach are increasingly apparent.

Do you remember the 20th century? Wasn't life much simpler back then? You ran some ad campaigns, went to trade shows, organised a few mail drops and pretended that you understood the value of PR. Life knocked along well.

You had some basic metrics and, if that failed, there was always the 'art not science' argument. In addition, you had an amicable relationship with the sales team based mostly around mutual incomprehension.

Then it all changed.

Commentators have widely blamed this change on two very different developments:

## The buyers became too damned smart

They could read an entire magazine and not register one ad placement. They could spot direct mail in an in-tray from across the room. Some of them still went to trade shows but you weren't sure that wasn't just for the all night parties. Your 'old faithfuls' were beginning not to work.

## The internet became ubiquitous

It wasn't just a media for sharing information. It was a venue to discuss and comment. The web very quickly became the place that people went to connect with others, share ideas and build relationships. And, for the 20th century marketer, these were completely new types of relationship.

Can you really be a 'friend' with someone that you have never, and most likely will never, meet and the only common ground you have appears to be your obsession with Batman? What does it mean when people would rather trust the judgement of others, whose experience on the subject is completely unknown, over experts whose job it is to analyse and write about the area?

This has been a very troubling state of affairs. As each new channel appeared - with increasing rapidity - a host of questions arose about how to properly engage and what type of communication would be acceptable to the channel users. More troubling still was the rapid evolution in the way people reached buying decisions. There was nothing Darwinian about this process. What had taken generations to develop was surpassed in a few short years - it wasn't just end consumers, B2B buyers now researched and selected their purchases in a different way.

A few random statistics can illustrate the change: Today, more than 80% of B2B buyers begin the purchase process with a web search. More and more are turning to social media with almost 65% of B2B buyers in a DemandGen report stating that they had used a blog post to research a business purchase in the previous 12 months. According to Marketingprofs, 70% of B2B buyers say they review at least four pieces of content before making a purchase - and these pieces of content mostly come from the Internet not directly from the supplier.

In this new world, the marketer has to engage with prospects and customers in a fresh way. We have to accept that buyers want almost zero contact with suppliers until they are well advanced in their purchase decision.

This leaves the key questions unanswered:

**How do we make sure people know that we're here?**

**How do we ensure they know about the products and services we offer?**

**How can we ensure they understand why we are different/better than our competition?**

**How can we ensure they are willing to talk to us when they are ready to buy?**

The solution is Inbound Marketing. As marketers, we've spent years working out who our customers are and creating messages that will appeal to them. Now, we need to give them the ability to 'pull' this information to them rather than us 'pushing' it at them. This means understanding the channels they use when researching a purchase or business decision and seeding those channels with content that really provides value to them.

The use of Inbound Marketing techniques has grown rapidly and it is easy to see why. Inbound Marketing platform supplier, Hubspot, (who, admittedly, may be a bit partisan) has shown that they deliver 54% more leads than traditional paid-for marketing and twice as many marketers report that Inbound marketing delivers lower cost leads opposed to Outbound techniques.

# THE STRENGTHS OF INBOUND MARKETING

To understand the role of Inbound Marketing it is worth spending a brief time considering the B2B buying cycle. We, in marketing, love our acronyms. And, we have lots and lots to describe the buying process but, perhaps, a very stripped back definition can be more illuminating for B2B buying decisions - we'll call it ACP: Awareness, Consideration, Purchase.

The amount of direct contact a customer has with you increases as they pass through the cycle. Unless you're selling paper clips, it's likely that you will be fully engaged with your customer when they purchase. As it is designed to fulfil the low - or no - touch requirements of buyers while they are researching, Inbound Marketing is most effective in the Awareness stage of the buying cycle.

Of course, the technique can play an important role in the Consideration phase where buyers' guides and case studies can give prospects a greater understanding of the solution you offer. But, by that time, you would ideally have established direct contact with them and be in a better position to control and manage the flow of information between you and them.

## AWARENESS

Awareness comes in two forms. First, your customer and prospect becomes aware of you. Secondly, they become aware they have a need that you can satisfy.

## CONSIDERATION

The customer begins to consider the alternatives available to them and evaluates the solutions that meet both their needs and budget.

## PURCHASE

The final little part of the cycle where your organisation helps the customer decide that they've got the decision right and they sign on the dotted line.

Let's start by looking at what Awareness actually means. We'll do this by updating an old truth:

**"You can have the best products or services but if no one knows you exist then you're going to fail."**

We add to that.

**"You can have the best products or services and people know you exist but if you can't position your solution to address their business issues and pain points then you're going to fail. "**

And again.

**"You can have the best products or services, people know you exist and you can position your solution to address their business issues and pain points but if you can't deliver on your promises then you're going to fail. "**

In short, simple awareness of you is no longer enough. Today, your customers want to know that you understand their business, speak their language and can help remove their problems. All without them ever having talked with you.

More than this, two almost forgotten words have re-entered the marketing lexicon - integrity and authenticity. If you say you can do something, you better be able to do it. The Internet leaves no hiding place and you will be found out. It's pretty obvious what's about to happen if your prospect has received poor peer reviews of your company

before they reach the Consideration phase. There's no chance of you making that shortlist.

The fun truly begins when you consider that most of your prospects will not be considering a purchase. Inbound Marketing is designed to deliver a depth of understanding about your brand, your products and services and how you fit into their specific business problems they face and the wider business issues within their industry. The technique achieves this by making the right content available in the channels where they are likely to spend at least some of their time.

Don't believe that senior buyers are 'too busy' to use the Internet or social media. According to DemandGen, almost 90% say they have downloaded a white paper to research a business area or business solution in the last 12 months. They are interested in content - it just has to be relevant and informative.

The purpose here is not to deliver key sales messages. It is to educate, inform and entertain. That's right. Entertain. Give people something that they enjoy reading or watching and they are far more likely to remember it. They are far more likely to share it with others. They are more likely to be warm towards the company that produced it.

Inbound Marketing is not a sprint to the finish. It is the long game. It is about slowly building relationships that may take years to come to fruition. The benefits, however, of playing this long game can be very great indeed.

## Increase brand awareness

People do still respond to advertising and direct mail but they are far more likely to get online and do the digging for themselves. When they do respond to traditional marketing, the response rates go up with the amount of positive brand recognition the company already has. The Internet makes it possible for you to quickly and easily expose your content to the entire world. But, you need to target where you place the content to ensure it has the greatest opportunity to be consumed by your customers. Prospects will gain exposure to your content - and your brand - through their social networks.

If you produce content that people are happy to share, you will increase awareness in your brand. Both sender and recipient have made a positive connection to your brand through the content and, consequently, you minimise the chance of your message being 'tuned out'. In fact, by developing content that encourages sharing, you can propagate your message into audiences you could only dream about using traditional marketing.

## Build brand trust

Often when organisations are developing their ideal 'buyer personas', they will stumble across phrases such as 'they are good people to deal with' or 'they just get us' or 'they kind of fit with the way we do business'. In there lies a key truth. We all like good payers but the long term relationships - that underpin many B2B contracts - are based on something else: mutual trust and understanding. Inbound Marketing can help establish both without there ever being direct contact.

The depth and tone of content provides more than information. It allows the prospect to gauge the knowledge and expertise within your organisation. It allows them to gain an understanding about your philosophies and approaches to business. Award-winning business writer, Simon Sinek, says: "People don't buy what you do or how you do it. They buy why you do it". Well-designed Inbound Marketing can develop strong, positive brand perceptions with your target customers before they have a clear understanding of what you can actually deliver.

*"People don't buy what you do or how you do it. They buy why you do it"*

## Lower the cost per lead

Traditional marketing techniques - such as advertising or direct mail - relied on interrupting the target. We talked about stopping them on the page. As the target gets more sophisticated at tuning out the noise, the media gets less effective. If you double your investment in your advertising campaign, you are unlikely to see twice the return. In contrast, Inbound Marketing is cumulative. It builds over time. Great content pays off over the period and this multiplies the more and more content you create. This means that the cost of delivering leads is dramatically reduced. There is an important caveat and it should be quite plain. If you need leads quickly, Inbound Marketing will struggle to deliver and that's why it must form part of a sensible marketing mix (we'll deal with this subject later in the white paper).

## Test, measure and improve

We can now measure everything. Inbound Marketing campaigns should be designed to

maximise the opportunities for prospective customers to engage with you and provide details and intelligence as they consume and share your content. We can monitor and measure what content works best, which channels are most effective and what type of content is most often and most widely shared. We can test the messages within the content. Direct mail has already established the effectiveness of A/B testing. Inbound Marketing allows you to A/B test almost everything.

As very little - if any - content is being physically created, it is fast and cost-effective to amend. Your Inbound Marketing campaigns have a flexibility that is simply not possible with traditional marketing. You can establish a process of continuous improvement where everything is measured and analysed to ensure it is still relevant. Content whose return is diminishing can be quickly removed or replaced.



# THE KEY TOOLS TO USE

There are a number of key skills that you'll need to employ when creating your Inbound Marketing strategy.

These include:

## Buyer Persona

The starting point for most marketing campaigns should be the creation of a series of buyer personas. A buyer persona is a detailed profile that represents an actual, real life group of target buyers. It is sometimes confused with the established idea of a target market. The difference is that while defining a target market concentrates solely on demographics - such as location, turnover, company size - a buyer persona covers demographics and then layers over 'soft' elements - such as common interests, motivations and expectations of the specific buyer.

The good news is that you already have the knowledge to create highly accurate buyer

personas. They are your customers. By examining the relationships you already have you will gain insight into what makes an ideal - or disastrous - customer for you. Armed with your buyer personas - you are likely to have a handful - you can begin to examine the channels they use and how and when they like direct engagement with you.

## Search Engine Optimisation (SEO)

SEO has been around for almost as long as search engines. As a goal of Inbound Marketing is increased visibility, SEO is a foundation to ensuring your prospects know that you exist and what you do is relevant to them. This is not simply about your website on the first page of Google. It's about seeding the web with your content.

The higher your content and site ranks in search results, the more likely people are to click on your link. An added bonus is that once your content is established, all future content will benefit from its ranking and be increasingly visible. And, the more content you create, the more established you'll be within search engine ranking.

The results can be dramatic. One US company found a 67% revenue increase from generic search terms as the result of a 12 month campaign.

A word of caution: It is often said that SEO is like painting the Forth Road Bridge - once you get to the end, you need to start all over again. There is a difference as no one keeps changing the Bridge. By comparison, the rules of SEO evolve in response to search engine 'improvements'.

## Content Marketing

There is sometimes confusion about the difference between Inbound Marketing and Content Marketing. The easiest way to view it is that Content Marketing is a core component of Inbound Marketing. Great content is the fuel that drives every Inbound Marketing strategy.

Of course, not all content is created equal. Let's not spend any time on the reasons you should avoid mediocre content, it should be a bit self-evident. Instead, we'll look at the role that content plays in your Inbound Marketing campaign. To do that, we need to go back to our ACP buying cycle. As a buyer moves through the cycle, they move from research and education to considering the

options available to them to evaluating specific solutions and making the final decision. The type of content they need is different at each different stage and providing the wrong content inappropriately will reduce the effectiveness of your campaign. (See chart opposite)

It should be clear that Inbound Marketing is best suited to delivering content for the research and educational aspects of the buying cycle but can have a role to play at the consideration stage. However, you would ideally have provided content at the awareness stage that would allow you to establish a direct relationship with the prospect as they pass through the consideration stage.

## Customer Advocacy

Customer advocacy is becoming an increasingly important tool. The Internet has brought a new power to peer reviews. People will look to others like them when considering purchases.

Customer advocacy is a formalised strategy to encourage your customers to speak out in support of you and your products or services. Of course, this isn't entirely new. We used to call it 'word of mouth marketing'. Although 'Customer Advocacy' does sound a bit more snappy.

There is good reason for putting some marketing investment into this area. On average, a happy customer will tell between four and six people about their positive experience. Forrester Research reports that eight out of 10 IT decision-makers state that word of mouth recommendations



Figure 1: Mapping content type to stages of the buying cycle.

are the most important source of information when making buying decisions. It's time to be really good to your customers and help them find ways to tell others.

## The Landing Page

The landing page is where you begin to convert prospects into leads. The page acts as a 'gatekeeper' between the prospect and high quality content. All the prospect has to do is supply some details. The landing page provides the opportunity for a range of conversion elements:

**Lead capture forms**

**Social sharing buttons**

**On-page content promotions**

**A/B testing**

It is worth considering how you can use auto-fill and dynamic lead capture forms. Ideally, you'd like to drive leads to more than one landing page - especially as part of a lead nurturing programme (see below) - so you don't want your prospect to continually have to enter their details. A dynamic element to the form will allow you to ask the

prospect different questions each time they visit - allowing you to further qualify their lead status.

## The Blog

Ok, we're not going to explain what a blog is. Suffice to say that, after the first blossoming of blogs a decade or so ago, the strength of the blog is once more growing. In fact, DemandGen found 63% of B2B buyers have used blogs to research business issues and solutions in the last 12 months. There are two caveats when considering a blog:

**1) Frequency of posts** There is very little worse than a moribund blog. If you haven't visited it for months, why should your customers? Worse, as you're positioning yourself as a thought leader, what does it say when you have nothing to say?

**2) Quality of posts** Standard Inbound Marketing rules apply. Rubbish content is rubbish content - only it's worse on your blog as this is where you are demonstrating your understanding of an area and business issues involved. It is better to post less frequently with good quality content.

# 5 COMMON PITFALLS TO AVOID

Inbound Marketing is a highly effective technique. Although it may be more cost-effective than traditional marketing techniques, it still requires a major investment in time and resources. We've listed five of the pitfalls that commonly occur to an Inbound Marketing campaign.



## **Plan, plan and plan again**

You have the content, right? And, you're already using all the communications channels. What's stopping you jumping straight in? The answer is the need to make the best use of your marketing budget. Too many organisations go directly to the tactics without working out the strategy. Are you looking to raise brand awareness or generate leads? Like any other marketing discipline, you should start by setting in place your goals and the metrics that will let you know you're achieving them. We recommend that you:

**Create a content team and appoint content owners for different content types.**

**Audit existing content and identify your gaps in information.**

**Map content types to your campaign goals.**

**Create an editorial schedule and content delivery roadmap.**

**Create mini-promotional campaigns for major pieces of new content.**

**Monitor and test all content performance against your goals.**

## Trying to do everything often achieves nothing

Unless you are a huge organisation with a ton of resource to throw at your Inbound Marketing campaign and the content generation you need, it is better to focus on a few things that you can do really well. Joe Pulizzi, Founder of the Content Marketing Institute, says the key is to avoid publishing too many types of content and instead "do an awesome blog or the best eBook program that's ever been run; focus on what you can do... better than anyone in your industry".

The same is true about selecting the channels that you're going to use. For example, if the buyers that you wish to engage with prefer LinkedIn, it may be better to deploy your resources to getting involved in their groups and joining those conversation rather than maintaining a blog that very few people are accessing.

## This is about leads as well as content...

Once your Inbound Marketing campaign is up and running, it becomes increasingly easy to efficiently create and distribute content. And, that content may be very good indeed. But it has to be there for a reason - to generate leads. That means ensuring that you are getting to the right people. In some ways, you can think of Inbound Marketing like traditional advertising. In the first instance, it is there to raise awareness across an extremely wide audience. You need to be able to narrow down your target buyers and begin the process of establishing a direct relationship with them. We recommend that you:

**Map channel usage with your buyer personas.**

**Ensure a progression from educational to product-focused content.**

**Drive prospects to your corporate site or promotional landing pages.**

**Provide high quality content that will allow you to begin capturing lead details.**

### ...But you won't be instantly drowning in hot leads

Like every new trend, there are those who will tell you it is the answer to every marketing problem. However, it should be clear that Inbound Marketing has two key dynamics:



**1)** It allows you to gain exposure to a wide audience at an acceptable cost. It allows you to build positive brand perceptions with potential buyers before they make direct contact with your organisation.

**2)** It builds consistently over time. Properly segmenting your targets, creating the right content and seeding it through the most appropriate social channels doesn't happen overnight. But, it's cumulative. The more you do, the further you reach, the more exposure you gain, the more potential leads will find you. In the long term, it will ensure a healthy, growing and profitable lead pipeline but if you need good leads tomorrow then you should look elsewhere.

### This is about leads as well as content...

Inbound Marketing should be seen as part of your marketing mix, not a replacement of what has gone before. By now, we hope that you can see how Inbound Marketing will increase your reach dramatically and help bring B2B buyers to you - but these leads are unlikely to be 'sales ready'. By sales ready, we mean in a state where they can be passed to your sales team to initiate direct content. Let's call the leads warm. They know who you are and what you do but they aren't convinced that what you offer is right for them.



Leads from Inbound Marketing are very likely to need nurturing. Lead nurturing will involve using content - including the content you created as part of your Inbound Marketing campaign - to establish and maintain a direct relationship with each new prospect. The key is to personalise the content to the needs and problems of the individual prospect and develop each lead to the point where it is 'sales ready'.

# IN THE END...

Today, research shows that Inbound Marketing can deliver twice as many leads to your organisation. Better still, it does this at a fraction of the cost of traditional 'push' based marketing techniques. That's a great reason to ensure it's part of your marketing mix. But, you need to know that you will be making a significant investment - in time and resources. You need to understand your buyer. You need to create content that will appeal to them and that helps them move through their buying cycle. You'll need to know which

communication channels they prefer - blog, social media, email - and know how and when to engage.

Get it right and Inbound Marketing rewards you by becoming more effective over time. Your brand will gain widespread exposure and you will develop positive brand perceptions based on the quality of your content and your understanding of your buyer's business issues. The result? Your B2B buyers will come and find you when they're ready.

## About The Garret

The Garret is a creative B2B marketing consultancy that helps organisations build a positive understanding between them and the people who matter to them. We are content specialists. We create polished and persuasive content to address each step in your customer journey.

[thegarret.uk](http://thegarret.uk)

## About Marketing Insider

Marketing Insider is a series of white papers and positioning articles covering the latest marketing trends and techniques. It is designed to help you understand how these developments can benefit your B2B marketing campaigns. **To find out about other white papers in the Marketing Insider series, visit [thegarret.uk/stuff](http://thegarret.uk/stuff)**

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