

A Beginner's Guide To Inbound Marketing

Everything You Need To Know

Table of Contents

- 5 Chapter 1:**
How And Why Inbound Marketing Works
- 11 Chapter 2:**
The 3 Phases Of Inbound Marketing
- 18 Chapter 3:**
Creating Your Inbound Strategy
- 24 Chapter 4:**
Converting Your Website Into A Lead-Generating Machine
- 30 Chapter 5:**
Integrating Search And Keywords Into Your Campaigns
- 36 Chapter 6:**
Using Content To Convert Visitors Into Leads
- 42 Chapter 7:**
How To Nurture Your New Leads
- 47 Chapter 8:**
Optimization Leads To Improved Performance
- 52 Chapter 9:**
Tracking And Testing Of Your Program

Learn All You Need To Know About Inbound Marketing

Whether you're new to inbound marketing or just looking to pick up a few new pointers, The Beginner's Guide To Inbound Marketing provides helpful tips, techniques and guidance on everything required to use inbound marketing to drive leads for your business.

The information in this guide is based on hundreds of successful engagements and over a thousand experiments.

What Is Inbound Marketing?

Inbound marketing is a methodology that helps you earn a prospect's attention. Instead of renting a list, or buying ads in magazines, you work to be present when your prospects are searching for your business, your services, your products or the solutions you provide. Instead of spending your precious marketing dollars trying to get the attention of people who are not looking for you, you spend all of your marketing money getting in front of prospects who are looking for you right now.

In its simplest form, inbound helps you get found, get leads and close more new business. It takes all the disparate marketing tactics, like email marketing, content marketing and social media marketing, and pulls them together so they work more efficiently and effectively as a holistic Marketing Machine to drive leads for your business.

Once you get your customers' attention, inbound helps you create a remarkable and educational experience by providing them content and nurturing them while they go through their own personal buyer's journey.

This guide is designed to help you understand all aspects of inbound. So whether you've tried inbound for the last few months and you need some helpful hints, or you're just starting out and want to learn more, our guide breaks down inbound to help you feel much more comfortable. More importantly, this guide is designed to help you use inbound to generate more leads for your business. After all, that is the ultimate goal of any marketing program.

Why Do I Need Inbound Marketing Now?

Inbound marketing helps you market to people in a way that matches their buyer behavior.

Today, people don't want to be interrupted; they want to be helped, guided and advised. Inbound gives you all the tools required to match your marketing directly to the new buyer behavior.

What If I Keep Doing What I've Been Doing?

You can, but it's likely you'll start to see the old tactics – like cold-calling, direct mail, trade shows and print advertising – become less and less effective over the next few years. The sooner you start practicing inbound, the sooner you see results and the sooner you start to move away from interruptive tactics that degrade your brand in your prospects' eyes.

Can I Do Inbound Marketing On My Own?

Of course you can, and this guide will give you some help in getting started. But, to be honest, inbound marketing is extremely complex, and if you're doing it for the first time or even the second or third time, it's likely you'll make some mistakes. Do you remember the first time you tried to ice skate? The more you do it, the better you get at it, and inbound is the same way.

How Much Of This Guide Do I Need To Read?

If you're serious about driving leads for your business and you're new to inbound marketing, we suggest you read our guide completely. We've tried to make the information simple, easy to read and even easier to understand.

Each section is vital to gaining a full understanding of inbound and creating a strategy that drives leads for your business.

How And Why Inbound Marketing Works

Chapter One



Learn Why Inbound Marketing Works And Old-School Marketing Doesn't Work Anymore

You don't have to look any further than your own buyer behavior to see why inbound marketing works so well. Do you watch TV commercials when you DVR your shows? Do you notice the print ads in your favorite magazine? Do you click on pay-per-click ads on Google? Neither does anyone else.

But it's actually getting worse. As of June 2015, 200 million¹ people were using ad-blocking software on their browsers and smartphones. So your intended prospects aren't even seeing your pay-per-click, banner ads and pop-ups.

Today marketing has evolved into a science designed to create a remarkable educational experience for your prospect. This is how you can match your marketing to your prospect's buyer journey. In this chapter we'll show you exactly why inbound marketing works so well with today's buyers.

¹ [Statista 2016](#)

Why Inbound Marketing Works

Since buyer behavior has changed so dramatically over the past few years, and the internet has empowered all of our buyers with the information they think they need to make sound purchase decisions, our marketing and sales processes must be adjusted accordingly.

No one buys anything until two conditions become satisfied. First, you have to feel that your purchase is a “safe” one, and second, you need to have acute pain.

Think about your own buyer behavior. The last time you bought something substantial (car, sofa, TV) you were 100% comfortable with your choice and you absolutely needed or wanted what you bought. You know it's true.

Now, apply what you learned in college marketing. Reach and frequency states you need to tell as many people as possible, as many times as possible, about your business, and when they need it (their pain is acute), they will remember you and buy from you.

That's fine if you're Pepsi, Coors or Acura, but not if you are any reasonable business with a limited marketing budget and a CEO who wants to know how many leads you generated this month.

If you want to get your prospects to buy, you have

to press their “buy button.” The only way to do this is to make them feel safe. In fact, the buy button is controlled by the same part of the brain that controls the fight-or-flight reflex. Again, think about your own buyer behavior. How do you feel when you're approached by a salesperson? Not great, right? You want to avoid creating that feeling for your prospects.

Educate, advise, counsel and coach your prospects instead of trying to sell to them.

This aligns perfectly with inbound marketing, [content marketing](#), email marketing and many of the digital marketing tactics that innovative inbound marketing firms deploy.

When you create compelling, helpful, creative educational content, and post it to your website, share it on social media, publish it on relevant websites and marry that content with a well-designed conversion strategy, you're marketing to your prospects in a way that perfectly matches the new buyer behavior.

The next step in pressing that buy button is to nurture those leads effectively. By continuing the educational conversation with them and providing additional helpful information, you continue to make them feel safer and safer. By keeping them close to your company in a planned out and structured way, when their pain becomes acute (by the way, we never know when that pain becomes acute), they don't search for companies like yours; rather, they slide down the sales funnel and ask to speak with you or someone on your team.

When you talk about getting people to buy, you can't leave the sales team out of the conversation. One of the major challenges associated with changing the way you market your company is changing the way you sell to your prospects. If your marketing team is guiding and your sales team is selling, you have a disconnect. This is one of the fastest ways to push your prospects away. Consider [mapping content](#) directly into your sales process, and consider revamping your sales process so that it is designed to help your prospects make safe purchase decisions.

How Does Inbound Marketing Work?

People all over the world are trying to figure out how inbound marketing works. We've already talked about *why* it works. I'm referring to actually understanding the mechanics of how it works to generate new visitors to your website and how to turn those visitors into leads for your business.

You're going to be surprised to find that this has nothing to do with the actual tactics that go into an inbound program. You don't need me to tell you how to write a compelling blog article that gets found, and you don't need me to tell you how to build a website so that your prospects have a remarkable experience with your company. These and other specific tactics are critical, but they are far from being part of the secret sauce.

It introduces a methodology allowing you to connect marketing tactics

The idea of integrated marketing isn't new. Even

traditional advertisers know that their marketing tactics need to be tied together. But those tactics can still be siloed, and those silos are broken down and removed with inbound. The thread that ties all of the inbound tactics together is inbound itself. The process is a single effort focused on optimizing a variety of tactics with real data and quantitative performance as the measure of success.

To do it right, it needs a strategy before tactics

While there might be some people who disagree, 14 years of doing inbound for clients has shown that having a well-thought-out, comprehensive marketing strategy [[link to: http://www.square2marketing.com/approach](http://www.square2marketing.com/approach)] before you start is one of the secrets to an inbound program that delivers results. Without an inbound marketing strategy and plan, running an inbound marketing program is like baking a cake without a recipe. Unless you're a master baker, the risk of your cake coming out tasting less than yummy is high.

It's data and performance based

For years, marketing was an art, but today, it's a science. Every day, we get data on the performance of all aspects of an inbound effort. We get data on blog articles, webpages, rankings for keywords, email campaigns, lead nurturing emails, conversions on specific landing pages, CTA buttons and content types. All of this information gives us unprecedented insight into what's performing and what might be underperforming. Better yet, we get this in real time.

Its mission is leads, not branding

"Get your name out there" has been the rallying cry for marketers for years. Today, the new mantra is, "Get leads!" How refreshing: Finally, there's a business-oriented measurement for marketing. Inbound is the only methodology that provides the tools to generate leads, instead of just "get your name out there and hope someone calls you." Hope is not a strategy!

It has an automation component

Today, marketing is exponentially more complicated than it was even two or three years ago. Yes, you can buy software to automate your recurring marketing tasks, like email and landing page development. But, if you want to really make an impact on your business, you need to be looking for an inbound automation platform. Inbound marketing is so methodical, so scalable and so repeatable that it requires automation to make it hum.

It's about them, not about you

This is more of a marketing issue than an inbound issue, but it's a common mistake we see. Whether you're doing inbound or not, you still have to talk about your prospects. Resist the urge to talk about yourself. Your prospects don't care about you; they only care about how you're going to help them.

It uses the best of today's marketing tactics

As we mentioned above, inbound takes the best of today's buyer-focused marketing tools and puts them together in a Marketing Machine. They are tightly integrated and, when coupled with a solid strategy and a methodology to optimize the effort weekly, they produce solid results month over month for years to come.

It's systematized, scaled and replicated

Inbound marketing is a process. Processes are designed to be scaled. So, once your inbound marketing or inbound sales process is set up, it can be scaled, systematized and replicated so that it runs behind the scenes with oversight instead of deep involvement. Need more leads? Turn up the process.

It's optimized day by day, week by week, month over month

Finally, you get insight into how you're doing. Not at the end of a three-month ad campaign, but rather every single day. With inbound, you literally look at your smartphone and see visitors, conversions, leads, sources of visitors, blog performance and more. Today, we adjust our program weekly so that, by the end of the month, we have overachieved.

The better you get at it, the higher your return on investment

Whether you're running an inbound marketing agency or an internal marketing department, this is one of the best reasons to be considering or even executing an inbound program. As you get good at it, it takes less time and requires fewer resources, meaning you make more money.

In addition, as your program improves, it actually gets easier to generate the leads you need to hit your goals. When you have 15,000 followers and you publish a blog article, you should expect many more new visitors to your site than when you only had 150 followers.

Inbound takes time. Here's a bonus secret: Get started today. The sooner you start, the sooner you're going to start seeing results. Apply all of these insights and before you know it, you'll have an inbound machine driving both marketing and sales at your company.

The 3 Phases Of Inbound Marketing

Chapter Two



Learn How To Plan, Build And Grow Your Inbound Marketing Program

When we see inbound marketing programs that are underperforming, something is usually missing. More often than not, what's missing is the strategy and planning behind the tactics and the process to continuously improve the program once all the assets are set up and operating.

Because of these habitually missing elements, you need to very deliberately make sure that your inbound marketing effort has the three critical phases: strategy and plan, implementation and build, and finally optimize and grow.

Skip any of these phases or take shortcuts to fast-track any elements and you run the risk of impacting program performance negatively. In other words, you'll get less leads than you expected.

Finally, it's a requirement for your inbound marketing tactics to be seamlessly integrated, or more specifically, orchestrated. This means you've leveraged your search strategy to build a website that gets found. You've created content with the buyer journey in mind so people convert into leads, and you're promoting content across a variety of tactics to apply a multiplier effect that only comes from well-planned-out and constructed inbound marketing programs.

Think like an orchestra. You have amazing musicians, but if they play their own music the total sound is horrible. Once they're organized and led by the conductor, they produce the most beautiful music. Inbound marketing needs to be orchestrated to produce amazing results.



The PLAN Phase

STRATEGY AND PLANNING

During the plan phase you're creating the target persona profiles, marketing messaging, differentiation, stories and analytics required to measure program performance against expectations. This is by far one of the most important exercises within an inbound marketing effort.

But first you need to understand why the plan phase is so critical. Think about it like a recipe for a cake. If I said to you "here are the ingredients for an amazing chocolate cake" without providing the recipe, you might make a great cake, but more than likely you'd end up with a mess.

You need a plan, and that plan needs to align perfectly with your business goals.



The BUILD Phase

CREATING AND IMPLEMENTING THE INBOUND MARKETING ASSETS

During the build phase you're creating all the assets you need to generate leads, including the website, content, email, social content, lead nurturing, search engine optimization, influencer marketing and the technology stack required to effectively manage and automate as much as possible. Now that your strategy and planning is complete, you have a schematic on exactly what needs to be built, how it needs to be built and when it needs to be built.

Here's an example: You want a new website, but you want your website to be found when people search for targeted keywords, phrases or questions. This is why you did search strategy before you started building your website. You want to make sure your website has pages, offers and content for each of your personas at each stage of a buyer journey. This is why you did persona and content strategy work prior to starting the website. You want your website to be a lead generation tool for sales. That's why you thought through how you're going to convert visitors into leads when they land on your site. Without the strategy phase, you'd be making assumptions and decisions without context to the rest of the inbound program.

The build phase of the inbound marketing program is going to be as diverse as the variety of companies and people on the planet. Every program is different. If you have aggressive lead generation goals, you're going to need a lot of active marketing and a lot of tactics to drive visitors to your site and then convert them to leads.

If you have a less aggressive requirement, then you can get away with fewer tactics and a lower level of investment. It all comes down to your goals. However, you're going to need three sets of tactics in your program. You're going to need tactics that help you get found, tactics that help you convert visitors to leads and then tactics to nurture those leads.

The BUILD Phase Tactics

GET FOUND TACTICS

Tactics in this category include:

- on-site search engine optimization
- off-site optimization
- social media
- influencer marketing
- pay-per-click

All these tactics have one common characteristic; they drive new visitors to your website by helping you be in the places that your prospects are spending their time on the web.

If you look at on-site SEO, this effort helps your website come up in searches on Google, Yahoo and Bing. On-site SEO includes website architecture, website copy, blogging and using proper search engine optimization methodology in the deployment of web-related assets. Off-site SEO includes using other websites to drive visitors to your website. For example, if you write a blog and a reader likes it, they might put a link in their blog back to your blog. That backlink drives new visitors to your site.

Social media is another source of new visitors. If you have a great presence on LinkedIn,

Facebook or Twitter, that's going to result in people wanting to learn more about your company and coming to your site for more information. All these tactics have to work seamlessly to produce the best results. The better these are planned and orchestrated, the more visitors you'll get to your site and the richer the very top of your marketing funnel.

CONVERSION TACTICS

But getting found is only the first step in a series of complicated steps. Next you have to turn that anonymous visitor into a lead, or someone who has shared their contact information with you in exchange for something of value from you. Knowing how to convert visitors is a process that takes time and experience.

First, make sure you have content offers for people at all stages of the buyer journey: awareness, consideration and decision-making (top, middle and bottom of the funnel). Make sure your offers are targeted to your personas and answer the questions we discussed in the plan phases. Take extra time to create bottom-of-the-funnel offers that deliver real value. "Contact us," "take a demo" and "get a free trial/consultation" are unremarkable and ineffective bottom-of-the-funnel offers.

The more you create new offers, the more leads you're going to generate, so look back at your plan and make sure you have enough offers planned to drive the amount of leads you need to grow your company.

LEAD NURTURING TACTICS –

Now that you have leads, those people are still probably not ready to buy. Typically, 90% of the leads are at the top or middle of the funnel, which means they need more time and more information before they're ready to buy. This means you need to nurture those leads.

Leads often get nurtured via email marketing campaigns, and an inbound marketing program usually has two types of email marketing tactics. The first is what we call educational emails that go out regularly (once or twice a month) to everyone, including prospects and maybe even clients or customers. These are helpful, educational emails that share tips, advice, industry insights or case studies about other clients.

The other type of email campaign is designed around specific actions prospects take on your website. If they download a specific whitepaper, a series of three to six emails automatically goes out to help you stay connected with that new lead. If they sign up for your blog, three to six different automated emails might go to that prospect.

Together, these different types of tactics are organized to deliver similar messages, stay close to these new prospects and create an experience that advises, guides and educates your prospects. People make purchase decisions when they feel safe. They make purchase decisions when they know, like and trust who they're going to work with, and they make purchase decisions when their pain becomes acute.

All of this is designed to help them feel safe with you and your business. These tactics are also designed to stay in front of the prospect so when their pain becomes acute, they already know you, they already trust you and they already want to do business with you. That's



The GROW Phase

OPTIMIZING INBOUND

MARKETING FOR RESULTS

how inbound marketing works.

Once that's done, you move into the grow phase, where you need a methodology to continuously test and improve performance week over week and month over month. Inbound marketing is a continuous improvement approach to marketing. Since it provides real-time data on the performance of every single tactic, it's easy to get data, make decisions, test your decisions and see the results. We call this optimization, and it's one of the secrets to great results.

In order to execute this, you need to have a scientific approach to marketing. You need to be willing to test everything and be willing to suspend opinions and assumptions in exchange for facts and data.

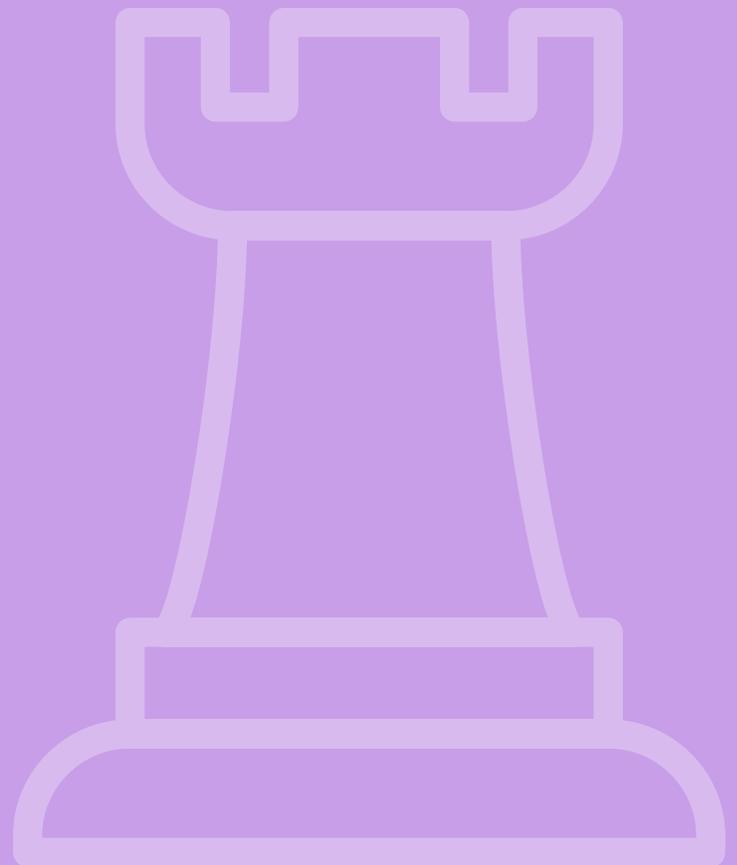
You also need methodology. At Square 2 Marketing, we use analyze, review, respond and act to collect the data, review it with the team, come up with an action plan based on the data, and then implement the changes and measure the improvements. This produces program improvements month over month.

While we don't expect to see dramatic increases month over month, we do expect to see small to moderate improvements month over month, which by the end of the year produces amazing increases.

The ability to look at data from your program, analyze that data and know how to respond with an action plan takes time. It takes expertise and it takes process. If you don't feel like your internal team has the ability to execute the grow phase, working with an agency that does this religiously for all its clients is a great option.

Inbound Marketing Strategy

Chapter Three



Creating Your Inbound Marketing Strategy

If you've never baked a three-layer chocolate cake, would you ever start without a recipe? Would you ever depart on a car trip, to a place you've never been before, without a map or GPS? Would you attempt to run a marathon without training?

The answer to all three questions is probably going to be a resounding "no." Yet every single day, people in companies big and small start doing inbound marketing without a plan, map, recipe or training. Why?

Marketing isn't baking, travel or running, so most people who have been doing marketing for a long time think they know how to do it. "How difficult could it be? It certainly sounds like what we've been doing."

But it's not the same and the string of unsuccessful inbound efforts that result in requests for help to our agency highlight the differences and the challenges traditional marketers are not prepared to face.

The core difference starts in the strategy and planning that need to be a part of every inbound marketing effort. In this chapter, we'll show you what you've been missing and how to fill in the gaps so your marketing produces leads and new customers.

The Core Elements Of An Inbound Marketing Strategy

PERSONAS

Typically, most people understand the concept of personas, and we see personas 85% of the time we're asked to assess an inbound program. Most people understand the reason they want to profile their best prospects and how they use this information in their day-to-day execution.

However, most of the personas we see are incomplete. They're missing two elements: online behavioral profiles and rich psychographic details.

The online behavioral profile includes a set of characteristics highlighting your prospects' online activities. What blogs do they read? What websites do they visit frequently? What email lists do they subscribe to? What LinkedIn Groups are they members of? What web magazines do they read? You get the idea. This online profile is critical to completing an inbound marketing persona.

Since people do business with people, using only demographics like sales volume, employee numbers, titles and industries is an incomplete persona effort. To truly identify who you want your inbound marketing to attract, you're going to also need a full set of psychographic characteristics.

Psychographic profile data includes features like personality, lifestyle and opinions. As an example, our personas include people who view marketing as an investment, not a cost. Another is people who have long-term perspectives on their marketing efforts, as opposed to those who want a quick fix. Make sure you add this type of detail into your personal profiles.

MESSAGING

Now for the hard work. You need to understand with a great degree of detail what pains, challenges and issues these people are dealing with (related to your product or service). You need to understand the questions they're asking during the awareness stage of their buyer journey, the consideration stage and the decision-making stage. These questions are going to be critical to almost every single inbound marketing tactic we discuss in the implementation and build phase.

By understanding their pains and directly relating the pains of your personas to your solutions, you'll have the raw materials for the messaging you need. The messages are critical because you'll only have 10 seconds to get your message across. That's just 10 seconds to emotionally connect with your prospect, draw them into your narrative and convince them that you might be able to help them.

These messages are the difference between success and failure, and they're missing in almost every marketing effort that we're asked to review.

DIFFERENTIATION

You're going to want to know how you solve those pains, but more importantly, how you solve those pains in a way that none of your competitors can say. We call this being remarkable. Remarkable is *not* good, very good or excellent. It's something no one else in your industry does. To be remarkable, no one else can say it. Whether it's true or not, they would never say it. Remarkable is hard to achieve, but once you're there, a sustainable competitive advantage becomes yours and yours alone.

This element of marketing strategy is also missing in almost every single instance of inbound marketing. We know; it's too hard to be remarkable. But without it, you can count on lower-than-expected results. So, it does come down to you. Do you want leads or do you want easy?

STORIES

It's not enough to have the right messaging and remarkable elements of your business. These two concepts need to be converted into stories. People (your prospects) remember stories, they share stories, they internalize stories and they understand stories. Human beings are not wired to remember features and benefits. On the other hand, stories unlock several hidden places in our brains that contribute to people wanting to do business with you.

But all stories are not created equal. Focus on creating stories that feature your prospects as the hero and stories that clearly articulate what you do, how you do it and why it's going to help your prospects. Your stories must be about your

prospects and not about you if you want your inbound marketing to work and generate leads for your business.

ORCHESTRATION

Believe it or not, you're only 50% done with your strategy work. The rest of the strategy includes carefully selecting, connecting and planning for the inbound marketing tactics required to get you to your business goals. You probably think you've done this part and you likely have done some of it. For instance, you probably have a website, and perhaps you recently revamped it. You might do blogging, create content, have an email campaign and post to social sites. You might even use a marketing automation software tool.

It's just not enough. The tactics within an inbound marketing program are fool's gold, meaning just because you have them doesn't mean they'll produce results. Inbound marketing tactics are so closely connected that if they're not planned, built and deployed properly (including a methodology to optimize that deployment over time), you'll get less-than-expected results.

Here's an example. Your search strategy needs to be perfectly aligned with your content strategy (long- and short-form), your website strategy and your conversion strategy. Each of these will fail if not properly connected to each other. You're probably blogging, but about what? What keywords, phrases or questions are the backbone to your blogging effort? What long-form content offers are your blog articles promoting?

Are they in context to the content in the article? What pages on your website are optimized for the keywords you want to be found for? What offers are on those pages? What stories do those pages tell? What phases of the buyer journey are those pages designed to support?

I could go on and on and on. Most people do not have their inbound marketing orchestrated well enough to answer all these questions and that's why they don't get leads from their inbound marketing.

BENCHMARK ANALYTICS

You're going to want to back into these tactics, based on quantitatively analyzing your revenue targets as well as your current marketing and sales funnel metrics.

As an example, if you need 1,000 leads to get you to your goals because you only close 10% of those leads, that's going to require one type of program. If you only need 100 leads because you close 75% of those leads, that math is going to produce an entirely different inbound marketing program. Every program for every business is different. There are no programmatic packages or best practices. Each inbound program needs to be customized to fit you, your business, your industry and your goals.

As part of your inbound marketing strategy, you need to know where you are today and where you want to be next month, in six months, in 12 months and in three years. It's impossible to plan, build and optimize an inbound marketing

program if you don't know where you are today and where you need that program to take you.

GOALS AND PROJECTIONS

Inbound marketing is 100% measurable, so part of the planning and strategy process has to be the setting of goals and potential projections. These projections are based on the current benchmark data and the planned rollout of the selected tactics. If you change the rollout, plan to change the projections. If you change the selection of tactics, plan to change the projections. There is a direct cause-and-effect relationship between the tactics and the numbers.

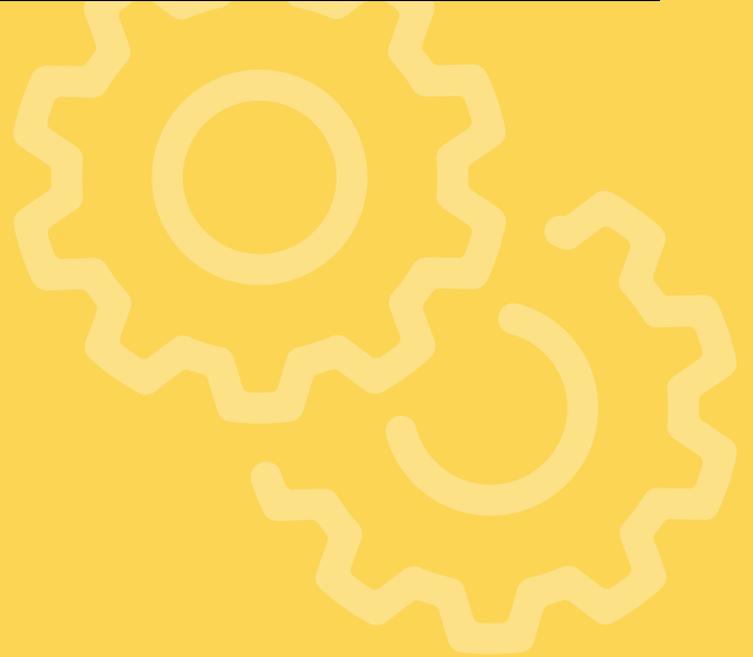
You should go into inbound marketing with a complete understanding of the interconnected relationship between the strategy, plan and optimization effort to the performance metrics. For example, if you delay your website from launching by two weeks, expect to drop the lead numbers. If you change your overall company strategy six months into the program, expect to redo all the metrics projections. If you decide pay-per-click is not in the budget after all, plan to drop the website visitor projections. If you make another set of revisions to your e-book and delay the publication date, you'll need to lower the lead goals projected to come from the publication and promotion of that e-book.

If you make enough negative decisions and not enough positive decisions, you might be looking at delaying major lead numbers by four or five months, and that could impact your year in a dramatic way. The bottom line is your decisions impact your results, so treat those decisions carefully, trust your advisors and lean on the people who have deep experience planning, executing and growing inbound programs.

In the upcoming chapters, we'll look at the tactics in a much deeper manner, starting with the next chapter when we'll dig into how you turn your website from an electronic brochure into a lead-generating machine.

Converting Your Website Into A Lead Generation Machine

Chapter Four



How To Start Getting Leads From Your Website

You're reading this because you know something's "just not right" with your marketing. You might not know what, but you know something's off. You might not be getting enough or any leads from your website, your old-school tactics might not be doing what they used to do or you might be getting pressure from the higher ups to do something different.

Good news! This chapter is going to help. First, you need a shift in mindset. Your website is NOT an online brochure about your company; it's an online resource center to help your prospects make a safe and smart purchase decision. Once you change your thinking and start managing your website as if it's a resource center, you'll start seeing many, many more leads.

We also want you to think about your website like Disney thinks about its rides. Disney creates an experience, and you need to do that too. The moment your visitors arrive on your website, they need to be saying WOW! They need to be educated, advised, coached and consulted along the way. Every page should be strategically designed to answer their questions and provide them with more information. The better you do this, the more leads you'll get from your marketing effort.

Here's how to go about doing what we're talking about.

Upon Arrival –

The Welcome Message

Your website has a simple agenda: to get someone you don't know and have never met to give you their contact information. That's it! It's the same agenda as when you go to a party and you meet someone new. You want their contact information. If you stand there and talk about yourself all night, you won't get their number. If you appear to care about them, if you ask them a lot of smart questions and if you take a legitimate interest in them, you might just get their number.

But first, you have to get their attention. The same is true for your website. If I arrive on your site and it looks like all the other sites in your industry, I'm going to be bored and hit the back button. If I arrive on your site and I can't tell what you do, can't easily view the site on my phone or find the site looks poorly designed, I'm hitting the back button. Here's more bad news: Both Google and Microsoft Research have independently reported that you have 10 seconds to get someone's attention on your site. If you don't get their attention, they hit the back button. Face it; the cards are stacked against you.

This is why your home page is the most important marketing asset in the history of your company.

You have 10 seconds to tell me you understand me and my challenges, how you solve my challenges, what makes you different, why I should consider looking around and that you've helped other people just like me. Plus, you have to do it in an interesting, creative and digital way. Does this sound like an easy task? If it does, you don't understand the task. This is the hardest marketing task you'll ever work on. This is the reason we work so hard with our clients to get this part of their marketing right. It's so important.

People don't want to change, so you have to disrupt their status quo and grab their attention.

People make purchase decisions emotionally, so you should connect with them emotionally on your site. People want to make the right, safe purchase decision, so you must educate them and help them feel like you actually want to help them with their decision. Your website has to do all of this and it has to do it better than all of your competitors.

Strategically Crafting

The Experience

It's so easy to leave your site, so the better the experience you provide visitors, the more leads you'll get. Upon arrival, you have to give them the messages they need to feel like they're in the right place. They have to start to know, like and trust your company.

Your site has to be easy to navigate on all devices. People are quick to give up when challenged or frustrated. Your site must be written in a way that is not too technical. People get nervous when they don't understand everything in front of them. Your site needs to have a variety of media options. Some people like to read, but many others prefer to watch a video. If you have both, you're going to be delivering an improved experience. However, resist the urge to make the site everything for everyone. Too many products, too many pages, too many offers and too many options contribute to an underperforming site.

Remember, the site's only mission in life is to generate leads.

Be sure to deliver a simple message that disrupts, emotionally connects and clearly articulates what you do. On our site, you learn that 90% of C-level execs do not respond to cold marketing. You see that we help people whose marketing is no longer working like it used to work. You see we're an inbound agency that specializes in generating leads for our clients and you see some of the people we've helped. We have e-books, blog articles, whitepapers and other content that visitors can easily download. Finally, we have a few pages for people who want more information about inbound marketing, our team and our services. That's it for our website.

Applying The Trio Of Offers

If 100 people come to your site today, most (usually around 90% of the people) are not ready to talk to you. One of the most frequent website mistakes people make is offering something that appeals to 10% of the people while ignoring the other 90%. People aren't dumb; they know that "contact us," "speak with a sales rep" and "request a consultation" are just sales calls in disguise. Plus, 90% of people are not ready to speak with anyone; they just want information as they're still learning and researching.

I know you want sales-ready leads, but you can clearly see that only a small percentage of visitors are ever going to be sales-ready leads. You need something for all the other people who took the time to find you, look around your site or follow up on a friend's referral.

The trio of offers helps ensure you have information for people at the top of the funnel (awareness stage), people in the middle of the funnel (consideration stage) and people in the bottom of the funnel (decision-making stage).

THE NO-RISK OFFER

This is perfect for people who are just beginning their buyer journey. They're in the awareness stage, so they need information that helps them start to understand what you do and how you do it. What should they be thinking about as they learn about your industry? Typically, these offers are highly educational, like whitepapers, e-books, tip sheets and guides. In exchange for the content, you get their email address, plus maybe their name or their company's name.

That's it. It's too early to ask for more; you're still getting to know each other, so they don't trust you yet. The more you ask for here, the fewer leads you'll generate.

THE LOW-RISK OFFER

This is perfect for people in the consideration stage. They've been active in their buyer journey for a little longer and they're looking at their options. They've bought into the concept and now they're comparing providers. Typically, these offers require a greater time investment from the visitor. Webinars are a great middle-of-the-funnel offer. Other offers for the consideration stage might include online quizzes, polls, assessments or calculators. Because they're considering you, the prospect/visitor is willing to give you more information. You can capture their company's name, annual revenue, phone number, etc. They aren't ready to talk to you, but they're willing to put aside an hour to attend your webinar with the hope that you'll continue to teach them something more.

THE DIRECT BUSINESS OFFER

Is this where we ask them to contact us? No, but you're close. People in the decision-making stage are ready to talk to a sales rep, but they don't want to be sold, so you have to do something for them. You have to offer them something of value to get them to put aside the time and schedule a call. In our case, we'll grade their website and their ability to get found on search engines, and then provide a list of steps they can take to improve their score. We'll also help them figure out how many leads they need to

hit their revenue goals and offer some steps for improving their lead generation efforts.

If you want people to request to talk to you, then you should be willing to do something for them. Offering a free demo, a free trial or something along those lines isn't enough. You need to be much more creative.

Continuously Improving The Experience

Your website is no longer a one-and-done project that you work on every three years. If you ever go through a major website rebuild again, you're doing it wrong. Your website needs to be a living, breathing organism that gets constant attention every month. No more than a few weeks should go by without you testing out a theory on the site or making some type of upgrade, update, adjustment or improvement.

This means you need to be budgeting money to complete these upgrades every single month. Pages need to be added, messaging must be tested or adjusted to improve performance, offers should be tested for conversion and navigation needs to be adjusted to deliver a better experience. The work is never done.

By looking at your website in this way, you'll also start looking at your website as a company asset with very specific performance metrics. Each month the site needs to deliver more visitors and more leads through an increased site-wide conversion rate. Just like your best salesperson, if the site

is not improving month over month, you're doing something wrong and it needs to be corrected.

Once you get into the rhythm of tracking your site monthly and monitoring it for performance, you'll start to make improvements to impact those results. This continuous improvement approach is a big part of inbound marketing and one of the secrets to getting results from inbound.

You should also consider applying technology to deliver a better experience. Did you know that with some of the marketing automation tools you can change what different people see on your site? With smart content, I can show different personas different messages, different pictures and different offers to deliver a more personalized experience.

Using Data To Drive More Leads

Inbound marketing is a data-driven, results-oriented marketing methodology – the only one on the planet. This means there is a ton of data that can be used to make improvements to your site almost every single day. You don't have to argue with your boss about where the picture should go or what picture to use. Just pick one and let it run for a week. Then, swap it out for the other picture and let that run for a week. After two weeks, compare the results. "Let's test it" should be your mantra. Opinions, attitudes and past experiences mean nothing. Today, it's all about the data.

If the page with your picture got more clicks, produced more leads and saw more visitors over the seven days it ran compared to your boss's picture,

then you were right and your picture stays. Now, you work to outperform the control. Whatever improvements you apply that increase performance become the new normal, the new baseline or the new benchmark, and everything else should outperform those metrics.

As you look at your company's website, here's what you need to do today to get leads tomorrow:

1. Create a compelling message on the home page that disrupts status quo, communicates what you do and explains how you do it differently than anyone else in your field.
2. Make sure that you're delivering an experience on your website that works on all devices and emotionally connects with your visitors.
3. Use offers on your website to convert visitors into leads. The offers need to be perfectly tailored for people in the awareness, consideration and decision-making stages of their buyer journey.
4. Make sure the site is about your prospects and not about you. Make sure it's full of educational resources so your visitors get to know, like and trust you right from your site.
5. Start setting performance expectations for the site and keep track of these metrics daily. Then, work every single week to make small improvements to the site so that you never have to rebuild the site again.

These simple five steps will ensure you create a website that turns visitors into leads and then leads into new customers for your company. Get started today!

Integrating Search And Keywords To Generate Leads

Chapter Five



Looking For Leads From Inbound Marketing? Get Found On Search Engines

If you've been paying attention to the world around you, then you've realized it's much more difficult to grab people's attention today than it was 10 years ago. You might have also noticed that consumers have taken back much of the control when it comes to their buyer journey.

Back in the day, salespeople controlled 75% of the buyer journey, doling out information as they saw fit and supporting their prospects in the way that worked best for them and their companies. Today, prospects are in control of the sales process, relying on marketing for the first 75% of the buyer journey and only engaging with salespeople for the final 25% of the journey.

All this means is that as business leaders, CEOs, VPs of marketing or VPs of sales, you need to focus your precious marketing budgets on those people who are actively looking for you, as opposed to trying to find people who might be looking or trying to interrupt people who aren't looking yet.

To do that, you have to get found on the search engines and in other places where your best prospects might be looking for you.

Getting Found On Search Engines Starts With Strategically Selecting Keywords

It's easy to get off on the wrong foot when it comes to selecting keywords. The mistake most people make is selecting keywords they want to be found for instead of looking at the keywords and keyword phrases people are actually using. This disconnect is common.

To prevent this misstep, start with an audit of how you're currently ranking for keywords. This will identify highly searched keywords that you're already ranking well for. You'll want to make sure you maintain these rankings, but it will also identify new highly searched and relevant keywords, keyword phrases and questions (yes, questions — more on this later) that can bring many more new visitors to your website.

You're also going to want to know which keywords have high difficulty (will take longer to rank for because more companies are competing for these keywords) and which keywords are easier to rank for. Once the big list of potential keywords, phrases and questions is complete, you'll want to create a collection of prioritized keywords.

For example, we identify between 900 and 1,000 targeted keywords for our clients. While we track all these keywords, it's impossible to work on this many keywords simultaneously. To focus your efforts, select a portfolio of eight to 10 prioritized keywords that you want to move the needle on immediately. Some of these keywords should have

low difficulty for ranking, while others that are strategic to your marketing efforts may have high difficulty.

To keep tabs on these prioritized keywords, track them weekly. Don't expect to move from page 10 to page one in a couple of days, and for keywords with high difficulty, it might take months instead of weeks. Now that you've selected this strategic direction for your get found strategy, you're ready to work on a few of the connected tactics, like your website and your content marketing strategy.

You're going to want to make sure those keywords and keyword phrases are used in your website architecture and URL naming conventions, in your blog articles, in the copy on your website pages and in educational content you create, like whitepapers and e-books. This connection between search, web and content is one of the secrets to driving results for clients.

Don't Underestimate The Importance Of Your Website

As mentioned above, your website is going to have a huge impact on how well you rank on search engines. While Google doesn't rank websites, it does rank website pages. No one knows exactly what the Google ranking algorithm includes, but some strong signals indicate that the search engines are looking at your website pages for several indicators.

Here are some of the more important website page components that you'll want to make sure fit perfectly with your search engine optimization work.

PAGE URL

What you name your pages has a big impact on how the search engines view your pages. If you call your most important page ".com/services," the search engines might view this page as a sales page and not rank it highly. If you change the name of that page to ".com/what-is-in-bound-marketing," the search engines will view the page as an educational page. The resulting change in ranking for a strategic keyword like "inbound marketing" was 10 pages in our case.

HEADLINE

Headlines on your pages absolutely need to include your keywords or phrases. The search engines are looking at headlines as a leading indicator of what the content on the site might include. Keep in mind that your headline has to work for Google and for your visitors. Don't create headlines with keywords that don't make sense or don't tell a compelling story to your actual human visitors.

SUB-HEADLINE

A lot of website pages have both headlines and sub-headlines. The search engines are also looking at this text for keywords. This is a great opportunity to get secondary keywords or complementary keywords on the page.

WEBSITE COPY

This is one of the more common places people look to use keywords. As mentioned above,

make sure you're using keywords naturally and not stuffing keywords. The search engines are looking for pages with excessive keywords and then negating their rankings. This is a great place to use a variety of keywords instead of one keyword multiple times.

IMAGE TAGS

You're going to have images on your pages. Make sure they have the right tags. These are called image tags or alt tags. These tags should include your keywords too. Google does a lot of image ranking and people are searching for images, which means your images might outrank your pages, and images can drive visitors back to your website pages if they rank properly.

META DESCRIPTION

This used to be part of the Google search algorithm and recently it appears to be less important (if at all important). However, we include it here because the meta description for your pages is critical to getting people to click on the rank listing. This is important. The ranking is not the end game; it's the click, the visit and then the conversion you should be looking for. The meta description helps to encourage searchers who find your ranked listing to click on the link.

CONVERSION RATE

Just like the meta description, the conversion rate on your site is also important when looking at the big picture. If you can't convert visitors on your site, Google is going to view this as a less valuable listing to searchers and drop your ranking. The inbound marketing endgame is not

listings or rankings, it's leads. So, make sure your website pages all have high-value, educational offers that get visitors to convert. This is going to help you rank more highly for difficult search terms.

BLOG

Google is looking for fresh content. It's challenging to add new website pages to your site on a weekly basis, but it's easy to add new blog articles to your blog on a weekly basis. This signals to Google and the other search engines that you are publishing fresh and helpful content. Make sure your blog is set up properly as a subdomain of your main website URL, such as "www.square2marketing.com/blog."

BLOG ARTICLES

Treat all your blog articles like individual website pages. The headline, sub-headline, website copy, page URL, meta description, image tag and the offers on the page all need to follow the guidelines identified here.

Embrace The Future Of Search And Make Sure You Answer Questions

Almost everyone is aware of the new category of devices impacting our lives. Amazon's Echo Dot, Google's Home and a host of competitive products are all gaining a lot of momentum. If you've taken the time to notice how they work, it's not about pages and pages of search results, but rather just one simple result.

This is the future of search and it's going to have a major impact on how your business gets found in the not-so-distant future. To start planning for this and to get ahead of your competition, you need to start ranking for the questions your prospects are asking.

The good news is it's not hard to identify the questions and then integrate those questions into your overall marketing strategy, starting with search. For example, we have a page that is ranked for the keyword "inbound marketing," and the page is titled "What Is Inbound Marketing?" This approach to search has us ranking at the bottom of page one and top of page two for a keyword that has a 98 difficulty rating.

Once you have the questions identified, you can add pages, blog articles, headlines and page copy to answer these questions. There is more good news. When you use questions as a basis for your website page and blog article copy, you can promote additional long-form content as educational offers on these pages. This technique is going to improve your conversion rate, drive more leads and help you rank higher for your keywords.

Driving Visitors To Your Website Means Focusing On A Variety Of Sources

Let's take a step back and look at the big picture here. People can get focused on the trees and miss the forest right in front of their eyes. Your goal should be to drive more visitors to your website month over month. Ranking on the search engines is just one of many ways to do that. You'll want to focus just as much of your energy, budget and time to driving new visitors with social media sites, referring websites, email marketing and potentially pay-per-click campaigns.

Getting people to visit your website from other websites comes with some big advantages. This is typically referred to as backlinks or inbound links. People who are linking to pages on other websites build in links to your website because they found your pages valuable. Google and other search engines put a high value on these backlinks. The more high-quality inbound links you have, the higher you'll rank overall.

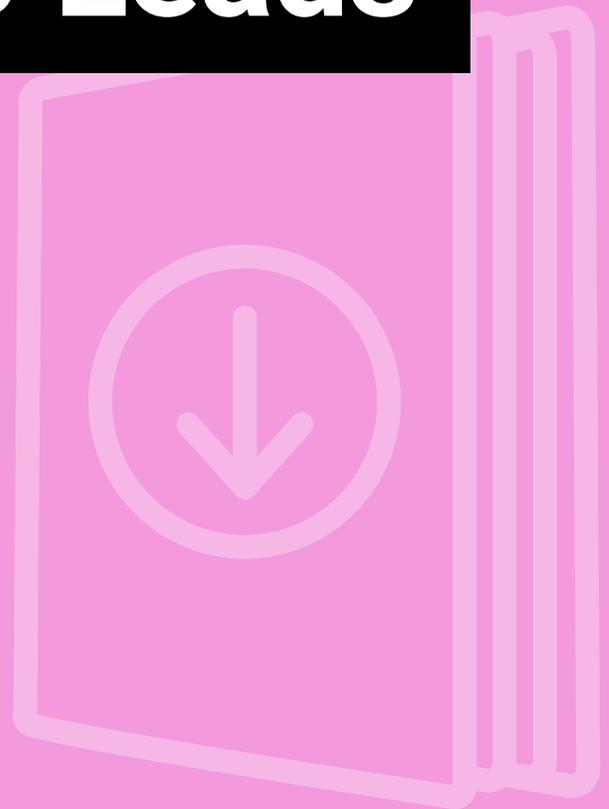
Finally, I think it's important to give you good guidance on overall search engine optimization strategy. That includes focusing more on the overall results, the number of visitors from organic search and the improvement in that number month over month.

While your individual rankings for specific keywords, keyword phrases or questions are important, it's more important that you see overall numbers moving up and to the right month over month.

These simple steps will ensure you're driving the right visitors to your website. This is an important first step and one that could make or break your opportunity to turn these visitors into leads and then into new customers. Get started today!

Using Content To Convert Website Visitors Into Leads

Chapter Six



How To Orchestrate Strategy And Content To Generate Leads For Your Sales Team

You're reading this guide because you know your website should be producing more leads than it is currently. The question, then, is how do you turn your website into the lead generation machine it ought to be? The answer includes several marketing tactics that you might have thought were unrelated to getting leads from your website.

We've mentioned before that [inbound marketing](#), while highly effective and very efficient, is much more complex than the marketing you might have done in the past or the marketing you might currently be doing for your company. Every single tactic needs to be perfectly connected for inbound marketing to produce the results you're expecting.

Let's jump right in. Before you start designing pages, writing copy, coding HTML or even searching for a website firm, you need to have your strategy locked down.

The Secret To Lead Generation Is A Comprehensive Website Strategy

Having been doing this for over 13 years, if there is one rallying cry above all others, it's "strategy before tactics." I've seen so many projects go bad because the strategy wasn't locked down before the project started. You don't want to make that mistake. When it comes to websites, you have to know your strategy before you start designing a single page.

ARCHITECTURE

Building a site that actually generates leads requires strategic thinking that starts all the way back at site architecture, just like an architect designs a house before the builder starts. Everyone provides input, the designs are created, they're approved and then the designs are turned over to the builder. The same approach should be taken with your website.

Site architecture comes into play in several areas, but the place to start is usually the arch map and navigation. You need to determine what pages are needed on the site and how the pages will be connected to each other, presented to the visitors and organized to allow the visitors to easily flow through them.

The easiest way to think about this planning phase of website design is to think about an org chart. There's a leader at the top, certain people report to the leader, others report to the people below the leader and so on. You end up with a hierarchy for the organization, and you can

create a similar picture for your website.

You have the home page at the top, all the secondary pages link up to the home page and those secondary pages link to additional pages. It all gets mapped out here. If you're planning on a utility navigation (those extra links at the top of the page, like our "Learn Inbound – A Guide," "Blog" and "Resources") just put those in as connected to the home page but off to the side.

This picture of your full site shows every single page and link, providing the basis for the navigation. Having this done up front makes all the rest of the steps much easier.

VISITOR FLOW

It's easy to build a website that is difficult to navigate. You keep adding pages, you keep adding drop-downs, you keep adding products or services and before you know it, you have a collection of pages that provide little or no support for the visitor.

While you're doing your planning, and in particular when you do your architecture map, keep visitor flow in mind and make it strategic.

- What pages do you want your visitors to go to first?
- What pages do you want them to visit next?
- What pages do you want them to end up on?
- What pages give them a chance to act?

More on this in a later section.

By going through this exercise, it's more likely that your site will be simple, easy to navigate and make it easy for your visitors to find what they're looking for.

PAGE BLUEPRINT

Think about your pages like the rooms in the house you're building. Again, the architect has to help you know where to put the closet, where the toilet needs to be to support the plumbing and where the electrical outlets should go. All of those details need to be planned before a single nail gets hammered in. You need this for your site, too.

By this point you have all the pages identified and it's time to drill into each page.

- Who is this page for?
- What persona?
- What stage of the buyer journey?

You'll need pages for people in the awareness stage, in the consideration stage and in the decision-making stage. You might need pages for specific vertical markets or specific role-based pages.

On each page you'll need headlines, sub-headlines, copy, images and a full complement of search engine optimization content to help the page rank on Google. You'll need to know what offers to include and what forms to deploy. You want all of this done before you start a single line of code.

You Should Consider Agile Development Or Growth-Driven Design

Building a website with the inbound marketing components and the strategic approach we recommend here doesn't have to take six months unless you want it to. Today, websites are deployed in pieces and worked on monthly. If you have a site architecture and plan that includes 25 pages, instead of waiting for all 25 pages to be done and ready to go, prioritize the site pages.

What pages are absolutely necessary to go live? What are the minimum requirements for the site to go live? Start with that scope of work. It might be five pages and the site can go live in 30 days, with pages getting added to the site over the next few months. It might be 15 pages and the site takes 10 weeks to go live, with the rest coming online over time post-launch. Do yourself a favor and don't wait for the site to be completely done. Don't wait for it to be perfect. Instead, get pages live, get visitor usage data and make adjustments to your plan around the pages still in planning.

Doing it this way with an Agile development methodology guarantees you see results faster, produce a better-performing site and generate more leads in less time.

Turning Visitors Into Leads Has Everything To Do With Content Strategy

Just like we talked about Agile website development, consider deploying content using an Agile approach. Your website blueprint might call for 15 pieces of content to drive conversions, but if you only have three offers to start, don't wait on the other 12. Instead, get started with what you have and learn from your visitors' interactions with those available offers.

PERSONA PRIORITIZATION

One way to decide which offers are most important is to prioritize your personas. Most companies have several personas they want to target with their marketing. Don't attempt to go after them all simultaneously. Force your team to prioritize based on company strategy, opportunity, competition, profitability or size of the market.

It might even make sense to borrow Geoffrey Moore's market segmentation approach, which suggests a bowling pin model. Focus on the lead pin first, then identify target personas two and three. If you're successful in knocking down the lead persona, getting the second and third persona to fall will be easier. This model allows you to plan up to 10 personas or market segments. That should be plenty for any organization.

CONTENT IN CONTEXT

For content to excel at converting visitors into leads, it has to be delivered in context. Here is an example. If in a blog article I talk about SEO and then provide you an offer to download an e-book on email marketing, I've given you content out of context. If in that same article I give you an offer for a whitepaper on improving the search engine optimization rankings for your website, it makes more sense to the reader or visitor and your conversion rates will increase.

You need to apply the same thinking across your entire website. What this typically uncovers is gaps in your available content. This should function as a map for the content you need to complete in the future.

You also need to think about your website in relation to the questions your prospects typically ask during the sales process. We've found (and research supports) that prospects have much different questions at the awareness stage than they do at the consideration and decision-making stages of the buyer journey. You should already have been thinking about pages for each stage and the copy on those pages should help with those questions, but content and offers help you go deeper and provide even more information.

Again, do this well and you'll see dramatic improvements in conversion rates and a stream of leads flowing in at all stages of the sales funnel and buyer journey.

Conversion Strategy Is A Weekly Activity If You Want To Pump Up The Volume On Leads

The days of doing your website and then thinking you won't have to worry about the site for three or four years are over. Your website must be a corporate asset that is nurtured every single week. You need to budget for weekly optimization and plan on allocating smart, web savvy resources to be constantly upgrading, updating and optimizing your site so it produces better results month over month.

GOAL SETTING

Since we're talking about results, let's set some goals. What gets measured gets done. Start by establishing some quantitative metrics for your website.

- How many visitors do you need every month?
- What is the desired site-wide conversion rate?
- How many leads do you need?
- How many top-of-the-funnel leads, middle-of-the-funnel leads and bottom-of-the-funnel leads do you need?

What should your bounce rate be? So you have a guide, most sites have around a 50% bounce rate, and most site-wide conversion rates are between 1% and 3% across all the pages on the site. You're going to want to set goals for specific landing pages, for offers, for forms and for your calls-to-action buttons. The site is filled with elements that need to perform. Set those expectations up front and then work diligently to hit or even exceed those goals.

By focusing on the metrics, your site will produce better results every single week, and in no time the leads will be a source of pride and business performance.

It's easy to build a website. It's hard to build a website that drives leads into your sales funnel. This is one reason why your website shouldn't cost \$5,000. It's also a reason why your nephew or the local two-person shop down the street shouldn't do your site.

If you want a website that generates leads, this is the only way to get it. Your website needs to be aligned with your overall company goals and strategic direction. Get started today!

How To Nurture Your Inbound Leads

Chapter Seven



Get Your Prospects To Know, Like And Trust You

Lead nurturing has one goal: keep the conversation going with leads at all stages of the buyer journey. If you can deliver solid guidance, educational information and advice in perfect context to their journey and their challenges, you can position your company as the one they want to do business with.

Now when their pain becomes acute, they don't start their search, they just reach out to you — falling beautifully out the bottom of your sales funnel and right into your sales organization's hands.

Plan Your Lead Nurturing To Match The Sales Cycle

You want to match your lead nurturing workflow timing to match your sales cycle. If your sales cycle is 30 days, then your lead nurturing should be no more than a series of three emails sent every three days. If those convert in the 40% to 60% range for open rate and between 30% and 40% for click-through rate, you're killing it. Anything less is going to require some testing and adjustments over time, but I'd recommend you keep the timing the same.

If you have a 12-month sales cycle, then you're going to need a longer nurture time frame. I would suggest you stick with the three-email, three-day sequence, but then bring those back every six weeks or so to remind your new prospect how your company is obsessed with being a trusted advisor.

Also, these emails can't be "salesy." They have to be 100% advisory and educational. If you stick to this mantra, you can never go wrong.

Remember, you also have regular educational emails going out to these same people. Your general email marketing is a supplement to these lead nurturing campaigns. This allows you to take a breath and let the prospect breath. Make sure you orchestrate these two email programs perfectly, so

the messages are complementary and there are no mixed messages.

Make Your Communication Remarkable, Which Will Equal Memorable

What you say is more important than how you say it or how often you say it. These touch points are critical to establishing your brand, your message, your stories, your disruption of the prospect's status quo and, ultimately, your ability to turn these opportunities into new customers.

These emails need to be remarkable. They need to be written elegantly. They can't be too long, or else they won't get read, so you need to keep them short and choose your words carefully. They need to differentiate your company, your brand and your product or service from your competitors. These same prospects might be getting emails from your competitors. If your emails are better, sharper and more interesting, you're going to out-market your competition. This would be "mission accomplished" in my book.

Personalize The Nurture Campaign To Be Contextual To Their Challenges

We want this resource to be helpful to people at all stages of their inbound marketing adventure. Basic personalization means using the prospect's name in the email. If you want to go further, then you can include company names, roles or industry information in the body of the email.

Advanced personalization means creating custom content offers and building out lead nurtures that are based on the specific challenges facing your specific prospect. For example, you can run a complete reporting email sequence if reporting is a big challenge to your prospect. You can run a complete sequence based on data quality if that is their hot button or pain point.

You might also want to consider running branch campaigns based on their behavior within the lead nurture workflow. But before you go crazy, keep in mind that you might end up with a huge mess of complicated branch campaigns that never pay off. Build these more complicated nurtures based on performance data. If it works, keep doing it. If it doesn't, stop. This should prevent you from getting too big, too fast and needing help unwinding everything to figure out what's working and what's not.

Track Campaign Metrics And Set Campaign Expectations

It's all about the numbers. In most cases, those are funnel metrics. Yes, you want to track open rates, click-through rates, opt-out rates, forward rates and the conversion on specific offers within pages that the emails are directing people to visit. These are the metrics everyone is keen to watch.

But if you really want to see how these are impacting your business results, you need to look at the conversion points across your sales process and at each stage of the funnel.

How many MQLs (marketing-qualified leads) are turning into SQLs (sales-qualified leads)? This is an indicator that your lead nurturing is moving those awareness folks down into consideration. What percentage of SQLs are actually sales opportunities? This could be an indication as to the quality of your leads, but it might also indicate whether your lead nurturing is helping prospects to feel safe and if it's contributing to them understanding pain.

Sales opportunities are synonymous with people who express interest in buying something. They've emerged at the bottom of the funnel and are asking decision-making questions (in other words, asking for a proposal, recommendations or your agreement). If these conversion metrics are increasing, your lead nurturing campaigns are probably contributing.

Setting expectations at the start of your lead nurturing work is important. If you think lead nurturing is the difference between success and failure this year, you're going to be disappointed. Lead nurturing is simply one of the many tactics that need to be executed as part of your orchestrated inbound marketing program. It won't work without it, nor will lead nurturing work without the other components.

You need great content to highlight in the nurturing. You need a great website to drive prospects back to. You need compelling, emotional stories and messaging to include in the emails. You need the sequencing to be correct, which means testing and experiments. You need the technology to automate the creation, distribution and tracking of all these tactics. Your expectations should be that the metrics we talked about above and the business results associated with the effort are improving slowly, month over month.

If you can improve the numbers a little bit month over month, you'll be moving in the right direction.

Lead nurturing is one of those tactics that everyone knows they should be doing, but most people do it incorrectly. The definition of correct is not mine, it's yours. Lead nurturing either works because it's done right, or it doesn't work because you're doing it wrong. The measure of right is simply based on open rate, click-through rate and flow through the funnel, which means top-of-the-funnel leads are converting on middle- or bottom-of-the-funnel offers in your nurture campaigns. People in your nurtures are becoming customers. That's it.

Optimization Leads To Improved Program Performance

Chapter Eight



You Need A Program Optimization Methodology

If you're on this page, then you might not be getting everything you expected from your inbound marketing engagement. It's not surprising. After a lack of marketing strategy (messaging, differentiation and stories), not being able to optimize the slew of complex tactics within an inbound marketing program is the biggest reason for lack of results.

This is because you or your [inbound agency](#) is missing an inbound marketing program optimization methodology. Yes, believe it or not, there is a method to our madness. We've created and feel strongly that you need to practice a specific methodology when it comes to using inbound to produce real business results.

ANALYZE PHASE

The ongoing optimization starts with the analyze phase. In this phase, we're looking at data from almost every aspect of the program: keyword data, website data, visitor source data, email marketing data, conversion data, content data and more. We're poring through data on a daily, weekly and monthly basis. By constantly reviewing real-time performance data, we start to see trends, set performance goals and more quickly identify when programs are working well, not working as expected and not working at all.

REVIEW PHASE

This helps us move to the review phase. In this phase, we're comparing data and looking for patterns. We're huddling internally to discuss the data and see if there are any obvious answers. Think about this like doctors collaborating with colleagues to come up with the correct diagnosis. We're looking at the data across similar clients in similar industries to see if we can apply similar solutions. Our goal is to get as much input and as many potential recommendations as possible. This helps us get ready to respond and produce improvements in the program's performance.

RESPOND PHASE

Now we're ready for the respond phase. In this phase, we're getting our tests together. We've created a series of experiments we want to deploy to help validate our hypothesis on how to improve results. We've prioritized the tests based on the ones that will have the biggest potential impact and take the least amount of

effort. This ensures we get as many results-driving tests up and running over the next 30 days as possible. Think about this stage like a rapid response team or a SWAT team. How do we drive results in the shortest amount of time? That's our goal.

ACT PHASE

Next, we move to the act phase. Now the teams have the tests and they're deploying them. Some tests might get installed quickly, such as in a day or two. Others might require that assets be adjusted, created or modified, and it might take a week or so to get those tests up and running. The act phase is an important part of the engagement because in addition to these tests, we're also working on all the other aspect of a client's inbound marketing engagement. This is feathered into everything else we're already working on.

And then we start the cycle over again, analyzing the data, reviewing it to see how it played out, creating new responses and putting those into action. This is how we produce results for our clients month over month and this is how you'll produce results for your company.

The Faster You Cycle, The Faster You Get Results

If you're looking at the data quarterly, you're only able to respond four times a year. If you're looking at the data monthly, you're responding 12 times a year. If you're looking at the data weekly, you're responding 52 times a year. You get the idea. The faster you cycle, the faster you get results and the more significant the results.

You should be looking at and responding to some numbers daily, some numbers weekly and some numbers monthly. Anything beyond 30 days is too long for an inbound engagement. The data that you're looking at daily might not require action, but it does require an analysis, a review and, potentially, you may need to respond and act. In most cases, it's more of an in-progress check on the action plan already in play.

If every day you're doing something to optimize results, you're going to see better results than if you're doing that work weekly. If you're working to optimize results weekly, that's going to produce better results than if you're only doing it monthly. You should start to see a pattern here.

Inbound marketing is an activity-based marketing methodology, not a campaign or publication methodology. You don't post, publish or distribute your assets and then sit back waiting for the leads to pour in. Instead, you constantly monitor, adjust and optimize the performance of all your assets based on data. This is the difference between success and failure.

Prioritize Based On Impact Of Results From Inbound Marketing

The last challenge we need to discuss is this: With so many potential upgrades to work on, how do you decide which ones to work on and when? Do you start looking at new keywords for optimization? Do you increase the frequency of guest blogging? Do you rework landing pages? Which ones do you start with? Do your CTA buttons need an upgrade? Which ones? Does the home page need new messaging or better stories? What to work on when can be very complicated if you don't have a way to prioritize all these good ideas.

The way we recommend you prioritize your own optimization efforts is based on impact and effort. In other words, which tasks are going to have the biggest impact for the least amount of effort? For example, optimizing a landing page might take only a couple of hours but produce double the leads. Big impact, small effort. Work on getting these tasks, projects and tactics into your plan first and then work in the bigger projects later. This approach ensures you'll see bigger improvements in less time than perhaps you've been seeing when you tackle big, time-consuming projects that take a while to wrap up and impact results.

Being able to optimize the results from your inbound marketing program is one of the biggest barriers to sustained success with inbound.

It's also one of the hardest aspects of an inbound engagement because it requires people to understand the data, look through the data and find the opportunities, structure the tests to help prioritize the opportunities and finally create the action plan to drive the results from the insights uncovered in the numbers. You can't learn this from a video, a class or even HubSpot. The only way to get good at this is to practice it over and over again.

The next chapter goes into detail on how to track, test and create a more sustainable and predictable set of results from inbound marketing initiatives.

Tracking And Testing Your Inbound Marketing Program

Chapter Nine



Consistently Running Experiments Is Key To Producing Results

One of the secrets to getting your inbound marketing to produce results is ongoing optimization. But simply put, optimization should take on some form for it to be productive. Making disconnected adjustments over time with no rhyme or reason is not going to produce results. You're going to be frustrated and your CEO is going to be frustrated. It's going to look like inbound marketing doesn't work, when in reality it's your execution of inbound marketing that isn't working, not inbound itself.

Think Like An Inbound Marketing Scientist

The best way to mitigate ineffective optimization is to [think like a scientist](#). Start by asking questions. Scientists ask a lot of questions. Why aren't we getting more visitors to our site from social media? Why isn't this landing page converting at a higher rate? Why are people not downloading this piece of content?

Next, do some research. What information is already available that might answer your question? What information might inform additional questions? It's possible that through your research, you'll find your answer. For example, when it comes to landing pages, one way to improve the conversion rate is to remove the general site navigation from the page. This might be something to test, but it might also be something new that you didn't know. Gaining knowledge around your questions is a key part of being scientific.

Now you're ready to answer your questions with a hypothesis. Going back to our landing page example, your hypothesis might be, "if we remove the site navigation, our landing page conversion rate will go up by 10%." You might want to create a series of hypotheses. The collection of theories or hypotheses is important because that's where your tests or experiments come into play.

It's now time to design your experiment. Sticking with our example, it would be a new landing page or an A/B testing protocol for both pages. You'll run the experiment until you have enough data points

to be sure of your findings. Then you'll know if your hypothesis was correct or not.

Make sure you don't change more than one variable per experiment. If you change the navigation and the headline, and conversions improve, you won't know if it was the navigation change or the headline change that led to the improvement.

Once you have a successful experiment, you might want to try and replicate the results by running a similar experiment on another page. If the results are in line with the first test, you're probably onto something worth sharing.

Create A Backlog Of Inbound Marketing Experiments

Inbound marketing is a little different than most scientific experiments in that you have a goal to produce improved results and quickly. Most scientists are trying to prove theories or ideas. Because you're on the clock, your approach requires a slightly more business-oriented approach.

Create a collection or backlog of potential experiments. You have your tactics and the quantitative performance of each tactic. Go through those and look for areas that could be performing better. Create your hypothesis as to why they're

underperforming or not performing to expectations, and then create the backlog of experiments to prove or uncover the underlying issues.

Now you can pull from that backlog based on priorities, timing and results. For example, if new client signings are down, you might want to look at the very last step in your sales process. What's preventing people from signing the paperwork? You could run a test with shorter contracts, change the name of the document from "contract" to "agreement," or remove all the legalese from the agreement and see if you can reduce the time from paperwork submitted to signed agreement from two weeks to two days.

If you could crack that nut, you'd be a revenue superstar at your company and quickly you'd be the most promotable associate on the block.

Work Through A Testing Methodology

Running experiments is a bit more complicated than perhaps we've alluded to so far. Let's dig into the process of doing experiments a little more so you have more details to run them yourself. We went into greater detail on this in Chapter 8, [so click here to get the full insight](#), but here is a high-level overview of a testing methodology that might work for you.

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Now we're ready for the "respond" phase. This is where we're getting our tests together. We've created a series of experiments we want to deploy to help validate our hypothesis on how to improve results. We've prioritized the tests based on the ones that will have the biggest potential impact and take the least amount of effort.

ACT

Finally, we're on to the "act" phase. The teams have the tests and they're deploying them. Some might get installed quickly, such as in a day or two. Others might require assets to be adjusted, created or modified, and it might take a week or so to get those tests up and running.

Then we start the cycle over again, analyzing the data, reviewing it to see how it played out, creating new responses and putting those into action.

Share Your Findings (Successes And Failures)

Once you've uncovered something, you should share it, regardless of whether the insights are positive or negative. Sometimes the biggest insights are the result of a failed experiment, so don't feel bad if most of your experiments don't produce positive results. Learning what not to do is sometimes even more important than learning what to do.

One creative and fun way to share the results of experiments is to run science fairs monthly or quarterly across the company, across departments and across cross-functional teams. This gives you a chance to talk to team members about your experiment, your hypothesis and the results you produced.

It also gives you a chance to get key knowledge out across the organization. If you're having challenges with landing page conversion rates, other people might be having similar challenges. By sharing your results, you could potentially help other people move their projects forward.

Test Everything

One of the major benefits of a scientific approach to sales and marketing is the elimination of attitudes, opinions, assumptions and guesswork from an area that has been using guesswork to make decisions for years. Your CEO wants the website button to be blue because he thinks blue will work better. Great, let's test it. Your VP of marketing wants the landing page to have four form fields instead of three. Great, let's test it.

"Let's test it" should be the answer to almost anything.

In the final chapter, we'll look at how to set expectations for meeting and exceeding your goals around website visitors, site-wide conversion rate, lead generation and individual tactical performance areas like email open rates, landing page conversion rate and blog subscribers. You're almost done; just one more chapter to go and you'll be an inbound marketing master.

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Schedule My Assessment



Square 2 is a full-service revenue growth agency designed to produce results for clients. We help businesses understand the changing buyer journey and how revenue is directly related to marketing, sales and customer service execution.

We help our clients with strategy, tactics, analytics and technology to build revenue generation machines that produce month-over-month revenue growth in a scalable, predictable and repeatable way.

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