

Inbound Marketing Basics



A publication of:



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Introduction

Marketing tactics such as cold calls, direct mail and traditional, disruptive advertising are rapidly becoming things of the past. However, even though the approach is changing, marketers' central goal remains the same: attract and retain customers.

The big question is: What are today's best practices for getting in front of potential customers?

Enter inbound marketing.

Inbound marketing has steadily become one of the most important tools in the business development toolbox. Similar to any marketing program, fundamentals and best practices are needed to ensure your investment of time and resources pays off. That's exactly why we've published this eBook.

Vehr Communications is a HubSpot Certified Agency. We use HubSpot, an inbound marketing platform, as a part of our agency's inbound strategy. Our [Inbound Marketing Team](#) (pictured below) is certified on inbound methodology and campaign creation. Thus, throughout this eBook you will encounter terminology and content derived from HubSpot materials.



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Chapter 1:Inbound Marketing Basics

A. Defining Inbound Marketing

What exactly is inbound marketing? Inbound marketing is a holistic, data-driven approach to marketing that attracts individuals to your brand and converts them into lasting customers ([Source](#)).

Simply put, inbound marketing is the process of creating relevant content with the goal of gaining customers' attention and drawing them to your website.

B. Comparing Outbound and Inbound Marketing

Outbound and inbound marketing may seem similar, but are actually entirely different approaches.

Outbound marketing relies on messages pushed **out** to the consumer and are often sales-oriented. Think paid advertising such as billboards, television, radio, magazine and newspaper advertisements and direct mail campaigns. The intent of this type of marketing is to disrupt your attention and draw you into “the pitch” with beautiful, often interesting and sometimes shocking images, sounds, etc.

Consumer behavior is changing and often times these outbound marketing tactics fall flat.

Outbound marketing is often one-directional – once the content is put out, there's little more to do than sit and hope for a return!

Conversely, inbound marketing utilizes informative content such as blogs, photos, infographics, videos, podcasts and eBooks (just to name a few) to draw consumers **in** with the hopes of informing and enlightening them. Ideally, by offering a piece of relevant content, the consumer should never feel as if they've received a “marketing” message.

C. Elements of Inbound Marketing

Unfortunately, inbound marketing isn't quite as simple as publishing a blog post and hoping for the phone to ring. It takes time and a targeted approach. However, by creating content specifically designed for your customers, inbound marketing will attract qualified prospects to your business.

HubSpot, an inbound marketing platform, says "by publishing the right content in the right place at the right time, your marketing becomes relevant and helpful to your customers, not interruptive." ([Source](#)).

Inbound marketing isn't a linear process. As previously mentioned, inbound marketing is a two-way process, and in fact, it's helpful to envision the inbound marketing process as a funnel.



Image courtesy of HubSpot

Potential new customers enter the sales “funnel” at the top when they encounter your content offers (i.e. blogs, infographics, social media posts, eBooks, white papers, etc.). Ideally, encountering such content brings prospects back to your website, blog, social media channels or anything interactive that allows for engagement, at which point you can convert prospects into customers.

The goal of inbound marketing is to create a flow of content and engagement with your audience that is beneficial to both parties. So, for example, your current and potential customers receive quality content and in turn you establish brand enthusiasts - people who talk about you to others. You create a sense of community which helps establish your organization as an industry leader and a resource.

Chapter 2:Developing an Inbound Marketing Program

A. Defining Goals

The first step to creating a successful inbound marketing campaign, as it is with any marketing campaign, is to clearly define your goals. What specifically do you want to do? Inbound marketing goals might focus heavily on attracting new customers, but don't neglect your existing ones. By also focusing on keeping existing customers informed on what you're doing, you'll create brand enthusiasts who will tell others just how great you are.

It's helpful to create specific and measurable goals so you know that your campaign is working. Is your goal to get more visitors to your website? More customers or leads? Existing customers to share your content? If so, how many visits or new customers or shares are you trying to get? And in what time frame? Your goals should be measurable and easily trackable.

B. Defining Audience

Now that you've outlined your inbound marketing goals, spend time developing your target audience. Specifically, who do you want to reach and what do you want them to do?

Here are a few suggestions to help you determine your key audience, or key audiences. Try answering these questions and developing a few "buyer personas," or ideal prospects for your content. Having a specific persona in mind will help you tailor your content to whom you're trying to reach.

- Demographic information (age, gender, etc.)
- Job title/level of experience
- What problems can you help them solve?
- What do they value most?
- What are their goals?
- How do they consume information?
- What kind of experience are they looking for when seeking out your products or services?
- What are their most common objections to your product or service?

C. Categorizing Inbound Marketing Content

The heart of inbound marketing is content. Your ability to create relevant, shareable and timely content for your audience will directly correlate to your inbound marketing success.

Good content is relevant, shareable, generates conversation, informative, often visual and provides your own unique perspective. It engages and educates your audience. Here are just a few examples of content that can be offered to potential customers:

- Industry-specific articles: updates within your industry or area of expertise
- Blog posts that feed off those articles and offer new info
- Infographics
- Listicles (i.e. Top 5 Ways to ...)
- White papers
- eNewsletters
- eBlasts
- eBooks



D. Calling Readers to Action

As previously mentioned, the goal of inbound marketing is to draw potential consumers in, so simply pushing out content is not enough. What do you want your readers to do? A vital function of inbound marketing is the call-to-action (CTA). A call-to-action is an image or text that prompts a visitor to take action such as subscribe to a newsletter, download an eBook or request a product or service demonstration ([Source](#)). CTAs should direct visitors to landing pages, where more information can be collected in exchange for a valuable marketing offer (more on this to follow).


Here are a few examples of CTAs:

On the Vehr Communications webpage, a button urges visitors to subscribe to our monthly e-newsletter, *March Forth*.

march forth newsletter

March Forth is intended to be a resource for professionals, like yourself, interested in strategic communications. We're not trying to answer big questions. We want to connect you to informed ideas and opinions so we can learn together.

Vehr Communications, LLC will never sell or distribute your information to anyone. You are able to unsubscribe at any time.



Subscribe to March Forth

First Name *

Last Name *

Email Address *

Company Name *

Job Title *

In our monthly eBlast offer, a hyperlink and image button both direct readers to download a new eBook.



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Dear Friend of Vehr Communications,

The slower summer months are the perfect time for taking a beat and recharging your batteries. Why not also reexamine your social media marketing strategy? Is your brand making the most of social media channels? Take a look at our social media eBooks and use this month's down time to hit refresh on your social presence.

[How to Build Your Brand Using Facebook](#)
[How to Build Your Brand Using Twitter](#)
[How to Build Your Brand Using LinkedIn](#)
[How to Build Your Brand Using Pinterest](#)

Thanks,
 Vehr Communications

How to Build Your Brand Using Pinterest
 How to Build Your Brand Using LinkedIn
 How to Build Your Brand Using Twitter
 How to Build Your Brand Using Facebook

Downloads

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A social media post urges followers to click to our blog, Vr3:



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Our round-up of content creation sites will have you creating killer content efficiently in no time: <http://www.vehrcommunications.com/vc-tip-sheet-18-content-.../>

TIP SHEET:
 >>>>> CONTENT <<<<<<
 CREATION SITES

Like Comment Share

Ideally, CTAs will be found throughout your social media channels, website and even in your digital content. The more CTAs you have on your website homepage, in blog posts, white papers, case studies, social media channels and e-newsletters, the more opportunities your potential customers will find to engage with content and your expertise, and the more opportunities you'll have to collect consumer data.

E. Collecting Consumer Data

Inbound marketing campaigns are circuitous and on-going. The more you know and learn about your potential and existing customers, the more you can continuously fine-tune your efforts to connect with them, thereby gaining new customers and solidifying brand enthusiasts. Thus, getting to know your audience and their preferences and habits is key.



As mentioned above, CTAs, placed throughout your website, should direct visitors to landing pages set up to gather essential pieces of information that identify and segment your audience.

One way to capture information is to use a form that visitors complete in order to get your free content offer, thus exchanging your content offer for captured information (such as email addresses, names, organizations and titles, etc.). This can be as simple as having visitors provide an email address while subscribing to a regular e-newsletter.

It's important that the level of information requested match the value of the offer. For example, if you're offering a free webinar featuring industry leaders, it makes sense that your form would ask for information from visitors such as name, email address, agency, title, and company information. However, a form with 10+ fields might be too lengthy for a short infographic. Find balance in your form length.

Once this information is captured, visitors are no longer anonymous and their activity on your channels can be tracked and scored – assisting you in tailoring your inbound marketing efforts.

F. Keeping Content Fresh

Remember, it's essential to not only target potential customers, but also continue to engage your current customers. Therefore, repurposing existing content becomes a must. For example, let's say you recently published a white paper targeting new customers and introducing them to basic concepts in your industry. How can you repurpose this white paper for existing customers? Here are a few ways:

- Turn the white paper into a series of blog posts delving deeper into the concepts introduced
- Format compelling topical statistics into an infographic
- Share an interesting fact from the white paper via social media
- Send an e-newsletter with additional industry links of interest
- Create a webinar

G. Managing Inbound Marketing Content

Having original content, well-placed CTAs and effective landing pages amounts to very little if you're disorganized. Utilizing each type of content and organizing with a monthly editorial calendar will help you keep your plan structured and strike a balance.

Content calendars are tools for keeping content on track. A good calendar outlines general topics months ahead, plans a week or two in advance, and highlights mandatory content themes to promote such as product or service launches, brand promotions, company events and more. In addition to keeping your content organized, a calendar will reflect the days when you need to create additional content or find content from sources outside the company.

When creating your calendar, also think about how one piece of content can be used to promote other content. For example, if you push out a new eBook, a week or so later an infographic highlighting statistics in the eBook could push visitors, who have mined the original offer, back to the original landing page.

Chapter 3:Measuring Inbound Success

A. Track Overall Engagement

Ongoing measurement is vital to any inbound marketing plan. Because potential and existing customers will enter in and out of the funnel repeatedly, it's important to measure each step along the way and continue to track engagement.

Are potential customers visiting and/or downloading your content? Are your brand enthusiasts sharing with friends via social media? Use your editorial calendars and content sharing to your advantage. Which subjects are in high demand?

B. Track Leads

A large number of leads doesn't necessarily mean success, especially if that's the only metric you are analyzing, but it can demonstrate that your content is attracting attention.

In addition, make sure you're tracking individual target customers to see how often they are visiting, clicking and downloading. As potential customers move along the inbound marketing funnel, you'll be able to offer more customized content and eventually may have a new business opportunity waiting for you.

C. Keep Consumers Delighted

Inbound marketing, in its most successful form, engages potential customers, moves them along the inbound funnel, closes them as leads and turns them into brand enthusiasts. These brand enthusiasts, ideally, keep coming back for more and promote your brand to new potential customers, and so the cycle continues.

It's imperative to focus on creating content for your customers specifically intended for them based on past preferences. Do your metrics show that infographics resonate with your audience better than webinars? Are visitors more likely to click on CTAs for blog posts than eBooks? Did a particular white paper fare far better than others? Figure out what works and continue to do more of it. Taking the time to keep your current customers happy only results in better business for you!

About Vehr Communications

Vehr Communications, LLC seeks to be a strategic partner with its clients to help them manage their reputations, build valued relationships and deliver meaningful results.

We offer our clients:

Refreshing Attitude: We partner, we listen, we challenge. We learn. We work hard. We make a difference. And we have fun in the process.

Resourceful Approach: We approach each client opportunity with creativity, energy and discipline to build relationships that matter.

Global Reach: We're an IPREX partner ... 75 strategic communications agencies with 1,500 staff and 100 offices from 33 countries working as one to support global communications programs for our clients.



To learn more about who we are, what we do and how we think, visit us at www.vehrcommunications.com. While you're there, sign up for our monthly e-newsletter, visit our blog or download any of our publications designed to help you make the most of your strategic communications activities.

Connect with us :



www.vehrcommunications.com

Vehr Communications, LLC

700 Walnut Street, Suite 450

Cincinnati, OH 45202

513.381.8347

www.vehrcommunications.com