

# INBOUND MARKETING 101

Build a Successful Strategy

act-on



# Table of Contents

What is Inbound Marketing .....	1
How to Use Inbound Marketing to Get New Customers .....	2
Key Challenges to Consider .....	3
How to Lay the Groundwork for an Inbound Marketing Campaign....	4-6
Content Planning, Development, and Distribution .....	7-11
B2B Small Business Content Marketing Tactic Usage.....	9
Conclusion: Keep the Tools in Your Marketing Toolkit Sharp .....	12



# What is Inbound Marketing?

About a decade ago, buyers realized they could choose their own adventure when it came time to research and discover the products and services that interested them. Rather than rely on vendors for information, buyers turned to the Internet and created their own paths to purchase.

The term “inbound marketing” sprang up to describe the strategies and tactics that marketers developed to meet and manage this new activity.

In general, inbound marketing includes any activity that earns people’s attention and attracts prospects to your offerings. So, with inbound marketing, you pull people into a relationship with your brand rather than pushing your message onto them ...

While many business use inbound marketing to build brands and improve customer retention, it’s used most deliberately (and most effectively) at the top of the sales funnel to attract new prospects and create new buyers. And generating new revenue from high quality leads is the lifeblood of every business.



# How to Use Inbound Marketing to Get New Customers

## Push or Pull?

***You have to give a little to get a little.***

You can think of inbound marketing the same way you think about dating. In the world of dating, who is the most successful? The person who is pushy, or the person who takes the time to build a relationship and lets things happen more naturally and organically?

Of course, the person who lets things happen more naturally and organically has the most success.

The same holds true in the world of marketing – the businesses that pull prospects into an engaging, friendly relationship with them generally do better than the businesses that push their messages on people.



# Key Challenges to Consider

*Before we dive into the specific steps involved in creating an inbound strategy, let's discuss some challenges that keep inbound marketing from being a success:*

## Content marketing is hard.

Inbound marketing involves managing content across multiple channels, which can be overwhelming to many small-to-medium-sized businesses (SMBs). While most businesses understand the importance and efficacy of inbound marketing, they struggle with creating successful inbound marketing campaigns. Furthermore, SMBs also struggle with clearly defining and targeting their audiences, as well as calculating the return on investment (ROI) of their campaigns.

## Content is everywhere.

This means that in order to stand out from the competition, you have to consistently create content that is high quality and valuable to your audience. As Carmen Hill, Director of Marketing at Connective DX, puts it, "Whether it's a targeted campaign or a comprehensive program, you need to plant a strong foundation of content that attracts prospects at every stage of the buyer's journey, seeding awareness and nurturing ongoing interest."

## Inbound by itself is not enough.

Businesses seem to treat inbound marketing as some sort of silver bullet. The truth is that [inbound on its own isn't enough](#). It's just one of the many tools you'll need to nurture your relationships with your prospects until they convert into customers.

## Inbound is not a quick fix.

Another challenge is that many businesses have unrealistic expectations about how long it'll take for an inbound marketing campaign to produce results. While there's no doubt that inbound marketing works, it usually takes some time to get things rolling, and more time before you have results to measure. Keep this in mind if you're just getting started or are in the middle of implementing an inbound campaign of your own.

You're not the first business to delve into creating an inbound strategy; neither will you be the last. The truth is that most businesses today see the opportunity in inbound marketing as it complements traditional, or outbound, marketing.

# How To Lay the Groundwork for an Inbound Marketing Campaign

What follows is a step-by-step guide to help you craft an inbound strategy that's perfectly suited for your goals. In it, you'll learn three key things:

1

How to set up, launch, and manage inbound marketing campaigns

2

How to set goals and objectives

3

How to use a simple math formula to calculate the ROI of your campaigns. (Don't worry – the math is simple)

Sound good? Great! Here's how to get started with your campaign.

## 1. Clearly define a goal that is specific and measurable

The first step to creating an inbound marketing strategy is to [define goals](#) that are specific and measurable. Whether your goal is to generate 50 or 500 qualified leads a month, remember – the objective has to be clear and specific.

## 2. Set a time frame that's realistic

It typically takes businesses at least six months before they see results from their inbound marketing campaigns. If you're a small business with limited resources, be sure to factor in the time it will take for you to create resources prior to getting started.

## 3. Identify audiences and visualize the sales funnel

It's now time to identify your target audiences and to visualize the sales funnel. To get a clearer idea of your customers, their specific needs, and how they'll navigate the [sales funnel](#), you'll want to create buyer personas.

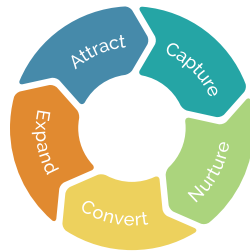
Buyer personas are archetypes of your most desirable customers, based on market research and/or your current customers. They're especially helpful for identifying pain points and how ideal customers will make their buying decisions. (Get a quick master class on persona creation with this [Creating Buyer Personas Toolkit](#).)

# How To Lay the Groundwork for an Inbound Marketing Campaign (continued)

## 4. Map the customer journey

Once you've identified your audiences, the next step is to [map their journey](#) from the point of awareness to advocacy. Here are the typical steps a customer goes through in the buying process:

1. Attract
2. Capture
3. Nurture
4. Convert
5. Expand



Having these steps clearly delineated is critical to the success of any inbound marketing program. When you've marked each stage in the customer journey, you can then assign the appropriate resources and content to advance them through each stage.

## 5. Audit your existing content

Once you've defined your goals, identified your audience, and mapped the customer journey, it's time to audit your current content. A content audit involves taking a closer look at all the content on your website (and any content on file that has been shared via other channels). As you're doing your audit, keep a list of the strengths and weaknesses of each piece. You'll also want to ask yourself:

- Where in the customer journey should it be used?
- Is it still necessary and useful?
- If it's necessary but not current, can it be updated?
- Should it be retired?
- How should it be used moving forward?

Ultimately, the goal of your audit is to identify any holes or gaps in your content; to see what content has performed the best in the past; to determine which content appeals to audiences at what stage; and to generate ideas for future content.

# How To Lay the Groundwork for an Inbound Marketing Campaign (continued)

## 6. Audit competitors' content

Now it's time to conduct a competitive content audit. This is one way to ensure that your content is better than your competitors' content.

Begin by creating a list of your primary competitors. See whose website comes up when you type in search terms related to your content. If you're not entirely sure what keywords to use, start by using the organic keywords that drive traffic to your own website.

Once you've made a list of your top four or five competitors, review their websites for the topics they cover and how they store their content on their website. When searching for "content," here's what you should be looking for:

- **Blog posts**
- **White papers**
- **eBooks**
- **Videos**
- **Webinars**
- **Podcasts**
- **SlideShare decks**
- **Infographics**
- **Press releases**
- **Case studies**

### HOW TO FIND KEYWORDS.

While Google no longer passes referrer information, it still captures and shares aggregate query data in Google Search Console (formerly Google Webmaster Tools). If the website has Search Console integrated with Google Analytics, you will see query data in both places.

Now classify their content into categories (for example by topic) and see which content they're putting out most often. It's here that you also evaluate the quality of their content, which includes how accurate the content is, its length, tone, and readability.

You can also review their SEO strategy by examining their link structure, their H1 tags, and their links to their own content. Finally, look for social share buttons and also the content that receives the highest number of shares.

**Does all this make sense? Great. Now let's cover content planning, creation, and distribution.**



# Content Planning, Development, and Distribution

It's hard to imagine an outbound marketing program being successful without proper targeting. Targeting is crucial to the success of inbound marketing, too. The only difference is that with inbound marketing, you're trying to attract people to your messages instead of pushing the message on them. This requires defining different buyer personas to which specific content topics can be directed.

## 1 SEGMENT AUDIENCES AND SELECT TOPICS

Earlier, we discussed buyer personas, which will help you establish the segments that cater to your audience's needs and desires. Once you've established your buyer personas, consider where they are in your sales funnel.

For example, let's say you're an accounting firm, or a car dealership, or a real estate agent. In a basic sense, regardless of the type of business, each of these entities is going to have similar buyer personas, which might look like this:

- **Tire Kicker:** Someone who is just getting information about the product or service
- **Question Asker:** Someone who is asking about pricing information, terms of engagement, etc.
- **Order Maker:** Someone who is ready to buy and wants to know when the product or service will be delivered or executed

Each of these personas is at a different stage of the sales funnel. The Tire Kicker is at the very top, the Question Asker is in the middle, and the Order Maker is at the bottom.

Now that you've identified multiple segments consisting of different buyer personas at different stages of the buying process, you can select which content will most appeal to them.

Once that's done, you can plan ahead and compile a list of topics that you'll want to write about.

# Content Planning, Development, and Distribution (continued)

## 2 CREATE A CONTENT CALENDAR

For ongoing content creation, such as blogging and social media posts, it's ideal to create a content or editorial calendar to make sure that you cover all planned topics and are pushing out content on a regular basis. Content calendars can be matched up with any theme for a given month or with upcoming product launches.

## 3 CHOOSE DISTRIBUTION CHANNELS

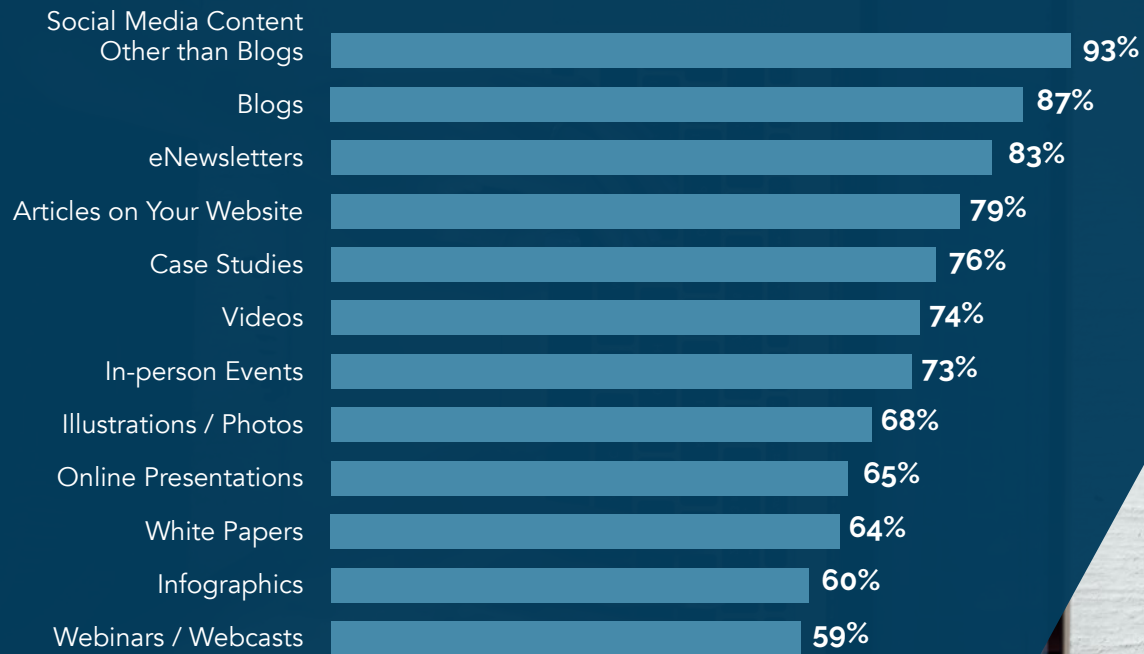
As with traditional marketing, there are many inbound marketing channels to select from. Part of creating an effective inbound strategy is identifying the channels that will make your content discoverable and bring prospects in most efficiently.

While you'll select channels based on your particular goals and audiences, here are a few that should be a part of any solid inbound marketing program:

- **Blogs:** One way to build SEO is to continuously publish blog posts about topics of interest to your target customers. Search engines like fresh, targeted, quality content.
- **eBooks, whitepapers, infographics, and so on:** Once you've attracted visitors to your website, you have to give them an incentive to opt into your database. Offering something that's useful to them – such as an eBook, whitepaper, or infographic – will encourage them to give you their email address in exchange for valuable content.
- **Social media:** While the value of social media as a [lead generation](#) tool can sometimes be overstated, it can be a good relationship-building and customer retention tool.

In a 2017 study by the [Content Marketing Institute](#), the top two factors that contributed to marketer's success are: doing a better job with content creation (85%) and developing or adjusting their content marketing strategy (72%).

# B2B Small Business Content Marketing Tactic Usage



## Keep search engine optimization (SEO) in mind.

Online searches are often the first step in the buyer's journey. So, you need to ensure that you're visible in their search results. Having well-planned SEO will help accomplish that. (Want more information? Get the white paper: [SEO 101 – the Basics and Beyond.](#))

# Content Planning, Development, and Distribution (continued)

## 4 USE LANDING PAGES TO START THE LEAD NURTURING PROCESS

Driving people to your website isn't enough; you have to give them a reason (and the opportunity) to engage with you on an ongoing basis. To do so, ensure that your landing pages are optimized for conversions. Since you have less control over what pages website visitors access organically, make sure you place forms so that they can easily opt-in to your email database from any page.

Once visitors have given you permission to contact them, send them progressive emails that provide helpful, actionable information. By doing so, you nurture a relationship with them and, in the long run, it's likely that you will convert a certain percentage from prospects to customers.

## 5 MEASURE YOUR RESULTS

Many businesses tend to think of inbound as "free" marketing. Sure, you don't pay for impressions or clicks to drive leads to your website, but anyone who's implemented an inbound marketing campaign knows that it requires just as many resources as traditional marketing.

One of the best ways to see whether your inbound marketing campaign is paying for itself is to calculate the ROI of a representative campaign. At the end of the day calculating your marketing ROI is the only way you can truly gauge the efficacy of marketing campaigns and overall strategy. This makes calculating ROI just as important as the other steps outlined above.



# Content Planning, Development, and Distribution (continued)

## ⑥ HERE'S A BASIC WAY TO CALCULATE THE ROI OF YOUR INBOUND MARKETING PROGRAMS:

There are many complex ways to calculate the ROI of your marketing, but there are some simple ways, too. The first step is to calculate your [customer lifetime value](#) (CLV), which, in its most basic form, is the amount of money a customer typically spends during the course of their relationship with you.

So, for example, if you're an Internet service provider and you know your average customer spends \$100 with you each month and stays with you for four years, their CLV is \$4,800 ( $\$100 \times 12 \text{ months} \times 4 \text{ years}$ ).

If it costs you \$480 in marketing to acquire a customer, and your CLV is \$4,800, then you're in pretty good shape. Of course, you're always trying to do better, so if it costs you \$240 in marketing expenditure for every customer you acquire, you're in better shape than when it cost you \$480. You get the idea ... spending 5% or 10% of your CLV to acquire a customer is a pretty good investment.

Of course, the formula outlined above is a very straightforward version of some more complex calculations, but it's an easy way to get started on the road to calculating the ROI of your marketing campaigns.

# CONCLUSION: Keep the Tools in Your Marketing Toolkit Sharp

Inbound marketing provides you the opportunity to pull prospects into a relationship with your brand – instead of pushing unwanted messages upon them.

By using this pull strategy, you're able to find leads who are inherently interested in what you offer, nurture prospects through the sales funnel, and ultimately convert them into customers.

## Test, and test again

When you understand the math behind this process – in other words, when you understand how to calculate your CLV and your ROI – you can run tests to optimize your campaign. And when you run tests, your results will invariably improve.

In the end, you'll have an inbound marketing program in place that helps you build relationships and ultimately get new customers. And that is one of the most important jobs in business.

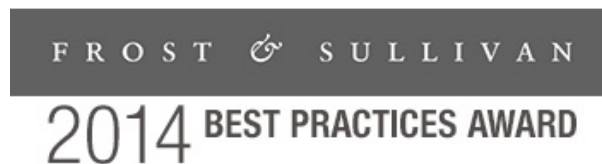


### About the Author:

Jamie Turner is the co-author of *How to Make Money with Social Media* and *Go Mobile*. He is also a regular guest on CNN on the subjects of social media, mobile marketing, and branding. In addition, he runs the 60 Second Marketer, which is a marketing community for businesspeople around the globe.



# Acclaim for Act-On



See all of Act-On's  
awards & accolades...



## About Act-On Software

Act-On Software is a marketing automation company delivering innovation that empowers marketers to do the best work of their careers. Act-On is the only integrated workspace to address the needs of the customer experience, from brand awareness and demand generation, to retention and loyalty. With Act-On, marketers can drive better business outcomes and see higher customer lifetime value. The Act-On platform provides marketers with power they can actually use, without the need for a dedicated IT resource.

Connect with us to learn more

[www.act-on.com](http://www.act-on.com) | [@ActOnSoftware](https://twitter.com/ActOnSoftware) | [#ActOnSW](https://twitter.com/ActOnSoftware)

