

eBook

Digital Inbound Marketing

How To Create A Customer-Centric
Business Through Inbound Marketing



Introduction

Inbound marketing, or content marketing, has become an industry buzzword. It's everywhere, and it's used by everyone. Businesses are embracing it because it can increase website traffic by 850% and completely overhaul the sales funnel.

There's no denying it: inbound marketing is the way forward for a lot of businesses.

But what is it? And how can it be used to a company's advantage?

What Is Inbound Marketing?

Inbound marketing is all about helping and educating prospects first, and selling to them second. Prospects convert into customers because content is helpful and valuable. In some cases, companies don't need to directly engage with prospects at all for them to convert. If prospects need anything, they approach the company first.

It's a much softer, more subtle, way to attract leads. There's no hard sell needed.

The first step is to show an understanding of, and empathy with, the problems that prospects are trying to solve. The deeper this understanding is, the faster the (indirect) connection with them will be. They'll then read more content, which means that the more a company has, the more likely someone will be to convert.

According to Marcus Sheridan, if someone reads thirty pages or more on a website, there's an 80% chance they'll convert.

If they read fewer than thirty pages, there's only a 20% chance that they'll convert. That means the more content a company has, the sooner someone can be convinced to make a purchase.

The key to a successful inbound approach is to create content that answers prospects' common questions. While this sounds like a simple thing to do, many businesses choose their content based on what they're interested in or what they want to write about.

They also miss out on a key step, which is getting the rest of the business onboard with it.

Inbound marketing is most successful when the whole company buys into it. That includes both writing and promoting content. Content written by industry experts will always hold more weight than content written by a marketing person.

With a content-first approach, everyone makes time in their calendars to write and share content. Even if this means giving notes to someone else in the team so that they can ghost write content with the relevant keywords embedded for search engine optimisation.

Either way, the more content that's written by industry experts, the higher the search engine rankings will be, the greater the social media engagement will be, and the bigger the brand awareness.

Why Is Inbound Marketing Different To Traditional Marketing?

Traditional marketing is primarily about going out and finding an audience. Businesses need to be bold to stand out from their competition. It can be pushy and interruptive, which can put some prospects, who prefer a more subtle approach, off.

In an increasingly crowded marketplace, it's hard to stand out. This can make the desire to go for the hard sell even stronger to detract leads away from the competition. However, this can be counterproductive and push leads towards the competition instead.

Content marketing isn't about who's the loudest or the pushiest. It's about who's the most relevant and helpful. Helping customers and prospects builds trust faster than approaching cold leads.

It's so effective that 72% of marketers in 2018 said that a content marketing strategy was key to their success. For B2B companies, events still generated the most leads, but content, such as case studies, accelerated and converted those leads.

It makes sense – at events, there are a lot of people but there isn't a lot of time to talk to them in any depth. Case studies tap into our desire for stories and social proof at the same time.



Why Is Inbound Marketing Important For Modern Marketers?

Many businesses rely on Pay Per Click (PPC) advertising on search engines to attract customers to their website. However, 70-80% of people focus only on organic search results. That means building organic rankings is more important than developing a PPC strategy to generate a sale.

Organic rankings build trust because they show prospects that other people trust the content. Over time, this trust builds up to help those pages rank higher and higher for more and more keywords. Ranking higher for a range of keywords helps prospects to remember a company because they see its name so often.

It takes an average of eight touchpoints before a conversion happens. More content means touchpoints can happen sooner and more often, which means faster conversions.

According to a LinkedIn survey, only 39% of B2B marketers described themselves as 'somewhat successful' at tracking the return on investment (ROI) of their content marketing. This could be why it often gets dismissed by marketers.

However, with the right tools in place, it's possible to track which pages generate leads. This information can then inform future content ideas based on which topics and themes convert the highest.

Without effective tracking, it can make it hard to gauge if and how a content marketing strategy is successful. Implementing the right tracking tools is therefore paramount.

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Structure Of An Inbound Approach To Marketing

The key element to an inbound approach is content. It must always come first.

All content should be aligned to the buyer's journey, and there should be content to cover each stage: awareness, consideration, and decision. That way, content will cover common questions that prospects have throughout their progression down the funnel.

It's important to have a balance of content for all three stages to guide people through the funnel, especially with so many people preferring to make decisions themselves before they speak to a salesperson. Some may even prefer to convert without speaking to anyone unless they have a problem, so it's worth considering if this is an option for you depending on your product or service.

Create Clusters Of Content Around Themes And Topics

It's not about creating one post on a theme and being done with it, though. It takes a range of content on the same theme to establish a brand or person as an expert. For example, a software company could write about software, or, it could focus on the industry that their software serves, such as HR or CRM. It could narrow this down further and focus on employee engagement, recruitment, or customer retention.

Industry trends and how they've changed over time are a great starting point for content ideas. So are common problems and solutions (and if said solutions are still effective/efficient), whether they directly involve the business or not. Interviews with industry experts or influencers also help you to stand out and reach other people's audiences. You can also showcase customer success stories in case studies and testimonials. One theme can generate a lot of content ideas.

Utilising Keywords To Increase Search Engine Ranking

Most businesses focus their energy on blogs, which means that embracing other content forms is a sure-fire way to stand out.

If the company's focus is blogging and it wants to rank on search engines, it's important to do keyword research before any writing. Keywords should be phrased in a way that prospects use and included in the title, too. The title should also be written in a way that matches how customers speak.

Content that doesn't use the same language as customers and prospects won't rank as highly because it isn't what they're looking for. Even if two phrases or keywords sound similar, a small change in wording can make a big difference to search engine rankings (SERPs).

It's therefore worth taking as much time to do keyword research and come up with the right title as it is writing the content itself.

It's a lot easier to generate content ideas when you know what prospects' common problems are. Creating enough of the right content means attracting more of the right kind of buyers.

To do this, companies need to work out who their ideal buyer is. What similarities do their current customers have? Is it their industry? Company size? The problems that they're facing that the company can help them with?



Understanding Your Ideal Customer Profile

Ideal customer profiles – sometimes called ideal buyer profiles – are what, demographically, makes a good customer. It's the perfect target company for the problem your business solves.

The ideal customer profile should include things like the industry the target company is in, how many employees it has, what tech stack it uses, where it's located, even what its budget is.

The idea behind an ideal customer profile is to help everyone within the company know what kind of accounts they should be targeting based on certain qualities.

This is then narrowed down to individuals with buyer personas, sometimes called customer avatars. There could be multiple buyer personas within a business to target.

Knowing that they're part of an ideal customer profile helps generate content ideas and build a Social Selling strategy. It also helps to make sales and marketing alignment and activities easier.



Research Your Target Buyer Personas

Once you know what kind of company you need to target, you then need to decide who within the company is the best person to write for. It isn't about creating personas around titles or where they sit in the company, though. It's about the problems that they face and how the business can help to solve them.

Take Crisis Chris. He's one of our buyer personas at Tribal Impact. It's his job to monitor social media risk. For some companies he'll sit in HR. In other companies, he'll sit in communications or marketing or corporate affairs. It doesn't matter. What matters is understanding what the biggest problems he faces are, and how we're aligned to help him.

To really understand Crisis Chris, we need to understand his motivations, challenges, ambition, issues and how he is measured. What keeps him awake at night? What are his big issues?

These are the questions that help not just with content marketing, but with wider marketing and sales goals, too.

The best way to find out the answers to these questions is to talk to prospects and customers. Capture what they say in as much detail as possible. Try to get direct quotes. What motivates them? Is it a promotion, kudos, or becoming CMO?

Most B2B marketers go wrong because they don't know who they're selling to. If you've never met any of your customers, how can you write content for them?





Audit Your Existing Content

Content audits help businesses to work out what content is already in their collection, how it applies to their buyer persona, and what gaps need to be filled. Content to fill in gaps can then be added to the content schedule, and any out of date or no longer relevant content can be removed.

It's important to take this step before spending any more money or creating any more content. It will ensure that content is as relevant as possible to future prospects and that time isn't wasted on topics or themes that don't apply to them.

Start by looking at each piece of content and comparing it to the buyer journey for the customer persona(s). Does it fit into the awareness, consideration, or decision stage?

The **awareness** stage is about educating an audience about their problems and how to solve them. Demonstrating empathy here is key. There shouldn't be any mention of the company or the products it sells.

The **consideration** stage involves content that helps them to choose the company over the competition. This is things like tip sheets, comparison sheets, workbooks, benchmarking, etc. Here, content should be as helpful as possible.

The **decision** stage is all about the company, including testimonials, free trials, case studies, etc. It's the kind of content that will create confidence in your buyer, deepen trust and provide a glimpse into the buyer experience they can expect to get from you.

An effective content marketing approach has a balance of all three areas. Gaps in any of these won't guide prospects through the buyer journey as quickly or as effectively.

- For instance, a lack of awareness content makes it harder to connect with prospects who are unfamiliar with the company.
- Lack of consideration-stage content means it's harder to differentiate companies from their competition.
- A lack of decision-stage content means the prospect has less understanding of what they'll get from making the purchase.

All forms of content should be included in the content audit: blogs, eBooks, webinars, videos, podcasts, infographics, SlideShares, etc. Anything and everything that can help educate prospects to guide them further down the funnel. Don't forget guest content for other publications too.

The next step is to think about what existing content can be re-purposed. Re-purposing old content is much faster than creating content from scratch. Would an old blog make a good SlideShare? What about turning a webinar into a whitepaper? One topic doesn't have to be tied to one medium, so be creative. Everyone consumes content in different ways, which means the more formats you experiment with, the more people that can be reached.

During a content audit, it's also worth looking at common themes. Themes are broad, top-level content ideas. Things like employee advocacy or social selling. Make a note alongside the buyer persona(s) each theme matches to help gauge where each piece of current content fits into the strategy.

Building A Content Strategy

After conducting a content audit, it's time to build the content strategy. This is the time to home in on what the target audience needs from you and how you're best positioned to help them without going in for the hard sell.

Scheduling is important here. People get used to seeing content published at certain intervals, so before deciding on anything else, choose when and where to publish. It should be realistic for everyone involved and include all formats. That way, there's plenty of time to prepare regardless of what the content type is.





Keyword Research

It can be worth doing keyword research at this point, too. This saves time in the future. Tools like Keywords Everywhere, Moz, and Google's Keyword Planner are helpful when looking for the best way to phrase a keyword.

The clickthrough rate for long-tail keywords (3 or more words) is 3-5% higher than on shorter, more generic keywords, so it's better to focus on those than short-tail keywords (one or two words). People looking to solve problems are more likely to type a long-tail keyword into a search engine than a short-tail one.

They may even phrase it as a question, such as 'what is content marketing?' or 'how to use content marketing in B2B'. Because of the way Google's algorithm works, pages that use long-tail keywords will rank for words and phrases within the keyword too, such as 'content marketing' and 'content marketing in B2B'. Getting clicks for long-tail keywords helps with rankings for shorter, more competitive ones too.

But use keywords sparingly. Using a keyword too often in a post or on a page is called 'keyword stuffing'. This practice used to be common, but search engine algorithms can now pick up on websites that try to do this and will penalise them for it.

The best way to avoid this is to only use keywords where they would fall naturally into a conversation. If a keyword is forced into a post or page for the sake of adding it into the text, it's keyword stuffing.

Another thing to avoid is 'keyword cannibalisation'. This is when multiple posts or pages on a website target the same keyword. Search engines don't consciously penalise anyone for this, but it will have an impact on where the pages using the same keyword rank on a search engine results page (SERP).

If a website has three pages that use the same keyword and three different people search for that keyword, then each click on a different result to the same website, the individual pages won't get as much of a traffic boost. This means those pages will rank lower in SERPs.

If all three people click on the same page, the page will rank higher because it's seen as more popular. This is an indication to search engine algorithms of a page's quality. There are over 200 criteria that Google alone uses as indicators for where a page should rank in SERPs, but click through rate is a significant one.

Generating Topic Ideas

When it comes to deciding what to write about, one of the fastest ways to figure it out is to talk to sales and customer support. What common problems or queries are people coming to them with? How does the company help them solve those issues?

Talk to prospects, too. What's driving them mad? What has their boss asked them to do that they need help with? How are you best aligned to help them?

Another option is talking to customers. This helps to come up with content ideas and to build a relationship with them. This relationship can be invaluable and lead to them promoting content, taking part in case studies, and referring future business.

Industry blogs are another source of content ideas, as are competitors' websites. These help with identifying common trends in an industry and what's been written about so much that people are getting bored of it.

Once the list is compiled, it's time to decide which format(s) each topic is best suited to.

To further save time, content can be re-purposed for multiple formats. For instance, one video can also lead to a podcast, a blog, a webinar, a tip sheet, and an ebook. More formats means more people, so be creative. Every new piece of content boosts a company's reach and reputation.

The final step of a content strategy is to place everything into an editorial calendar. This should be planned at least once per quarter, ideally every six to twelve months.

Content marketing can take weeks, months, or sometimes even years to see results, which is why planning in advance is important. That's also why consistency and knowing your buyer persona matters. This information will help with tracking the success of the content strategy over the period in question.



Tracking A Strategy's Success

No strategy is worth creating unless you track its success. Work out what your KPIs are before starting so that you know what you're aiming for. Is it brand awareness? Is it an increase in leads or conversions? More newsletter sign ups? What about cross-selling and up-selling current clients?

The list is almost endless, but don't water down the strategy by trying to make everything a KPI. Focus on the ones that will help to generate the most business.

Then decide how they're going to be tracked. For leads or conversions, it could be a percentage increase over the previous quarter. For brand awareness, it could be mentions in industry publications or a boost in searches for branded keywords in search engines.

Set up the right tools to track success before starting. HubSpot is useful for tracking the pages people visit and how they found the site. Google alerts help to track mentions in publications. Google Analytics helps to look for trends in traffic to the site. Most email service providers also have in-depth tracking available on their paid plans.



Customer Nurturing

Content helps to nurture prospects with or without the involvement of a sales team. It's a non-intrusive way of assisting them at every stage of the funnel.

Sales teams can use content to provide prospects with additional information to help with a conversion or answer any questions they're asked. Anyone who doesn't speak to a salesperson can still get the information they need through searching the content.

Different types of content can be used based on someone's stage in the funnel. Those at the awareness stage of the funnel will be most interested in ungated content such as blogs, podcasts, or videos, for example.

People who are in the consideration stage will be more willing to sign up to a newsletter, or download a workbook or a whitepaper. Those who are at the decision-making stage will benefit the most from testimonials and case studies, whether they're on the website, emailed, or downloaded.

Content should have a sense of progression.

- How does it help them to build their awareness?
- How does it help them to consider your business?
- How does it help them to make the final decision?

The more questions that are answered before they get to the decision-making stage, the more likely they'll be to pick you over a competitor.



Tracking Lead Scores

Set the lead scores you want prospects to reach for certain things to happen. Consider what steps they need to take to hit those milestones. For instance, view three blogs, download one white paper, visit a product page etc.

Lead scoring is a great way to track the digital behaviour of a target prospect, to understand just how interested in your company they are.

When someone hits a milestone, for instance a score of 70, sales can be notified and start the Social Selling process. If there's a good sign of digital intent, this prospect could be worth nurturing directly via inside sales or digital demand generation agents.

This is a more subtle way of reaching out to prospects than a cold email. It gets you on their radar in a non-intrusive way. Sales can then share relevant content and engage with the prospect's content to show that they understand their pain points.

Sales And Marketing Alignment

Inbound isn't the role of marketing: it's the role of the whole organisation. When a company activates its experts and gets them to create content, it's powerful. It shows prospects that its employees really know what they're talking about and they're happy to share that knowledge.

Every person within an organisation is an expert in something. Supporting them to write content and building their brand helps to build the company reputation as one that employs thought leaders in its industry. It builds the crucial know, like, and trust factor much faster than if the same content were written by the marketing organisation. This, in turn, leads to increased leads and conversions.

Many businesses think that their sales and marketing teams align, but they don't. So much so that 52% of marketers believe that they provide sales with the best leads, while sales ranks marketing leads as last. This disconnect demonstrates the importance of sales and marketing working towards a common goal right from the start.

38% of salespeople find prospecting the most difficult part of the sales process.

It's also the part of the sales process that's become more difficult.

The more MQLs marketing can find for them, the less prospecting work salespeople must do. But this isn't about MQLs and SQLs. It isn't about passing leads over the wall. It's about aligning not to each other, but around the customer.

Nurturing prospects earlier in the sales funnel – and doing so subtly, using content and Social Selling – keeps a company top of their mind without being pushy throughout the buyer's journey.

If you take a buyer-centric view to alignment you'll quickly realise that the buyer will flit from your website to a salesperson's LinkedIn profile, to a piece of video content and then maybe to an event.

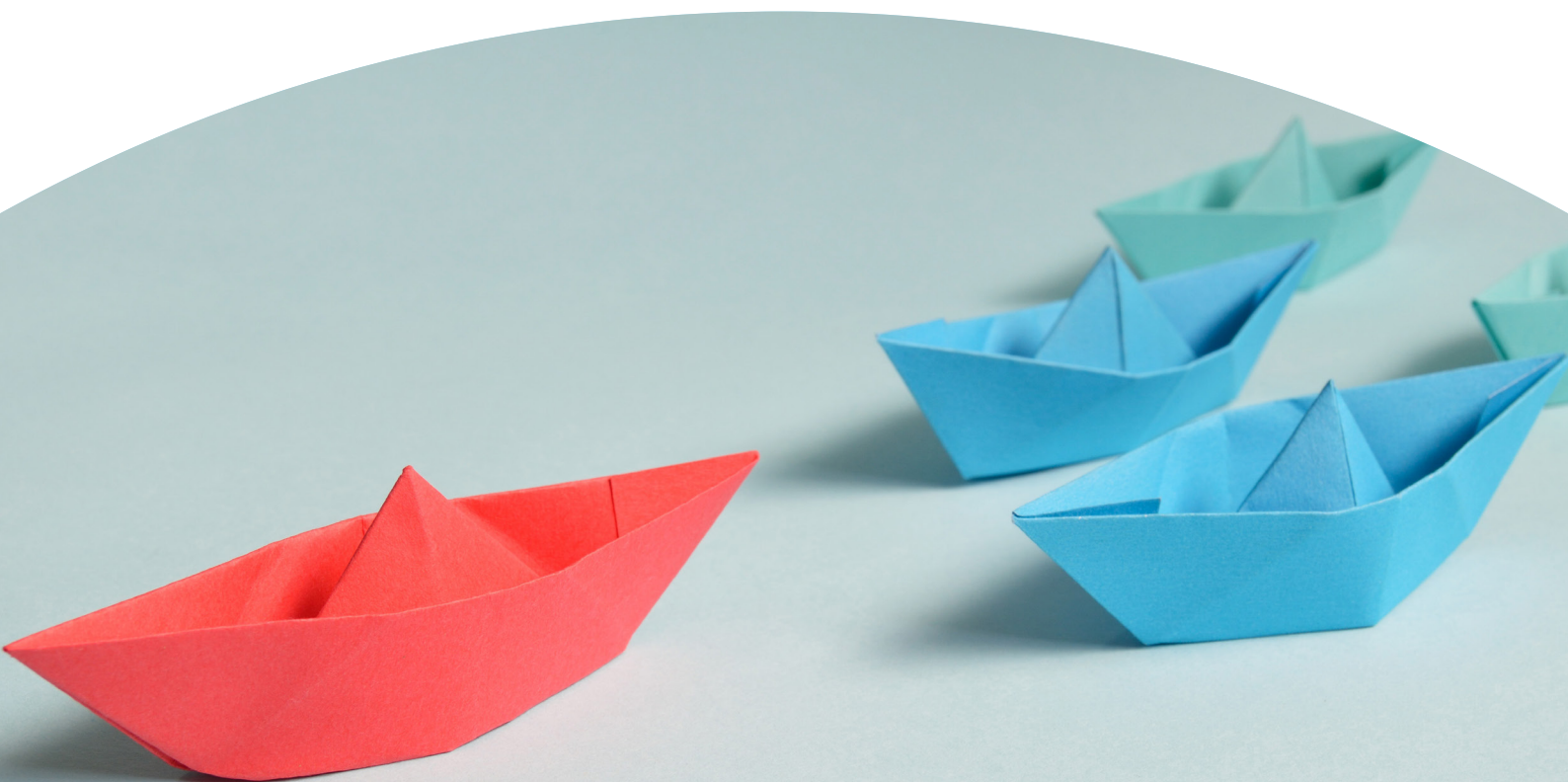
The point is that buyers will not take a linear journey but one that ping pongs between sales and marketing.

When company leaders are the image of a brand on social, it further builds trust as it humanises the business. This is further reinforced by employees amplifying content on social media.

When employees are engaged with your content marketing strategy from the start, it's easier to get them to write or share it on social media. Employee advocacy goes a long way –

Employees are 2x more trustworthy than CEOs when they talk about your business.

All these factors combined turns a company into not just an inbound marketing or Social Selling business, but a connected one. And forming connections with prospects from the start is exactly what content marketing is about. It's a reciprocal relationship that no modern digital business should be without.



Conclusion

Taking a digital inbound approach to marketing is one step towards creating a hollistic inbound business - but it shouldn't stop at marketing. Sales must also adopt an inbound approach through Social Selling, the organisation as a whole must embrace Employee Advocacy and encourage employees to use social media, not shy away from it through.

Perhaps most importantly, this message of being a social business must come from the top - leadership needs to embrace social and inbound business. Once this happens, all departments start to align around the customer.

Contact Us For More Information

We specialise in B2B social media advocacy driving higher lead conversion and faster revenue growth by mobilising your most credible and trusted brand voice on social media. Employees.

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