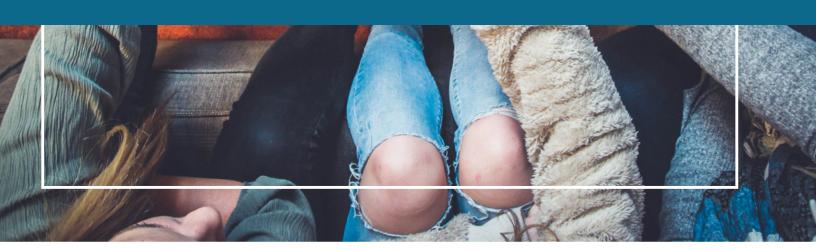# 7 Core Principles of Effective Inbound Marketing

Revv Partners
Inbound Marketing for Business

The Seven Principles of Effective Inbound Marketing & Sales

If you're new to the world of inbound marketing, you may still be trying to figure out exactly what it is and how it works. What is it that sets it apart from traditional marketing and advertising? And why are brands and marketers abandoning traditional marketing strategies and tactics and investing more in inbound marketing methods?

Well, first consider how technology has dramatically transformed how consumers research and buy goods and services. (Think how your own buying habits have changed over the last ten years or so.) Unlike years past, today's buyers are in control. They tune out impersonal and interruptive traditional marketing tactics, including commercials, screen calls and unwanted communications. They research and evaluate purchasing options online. In fact, some reports estimate that 67% of the buying decision is done online. Consequently, many traditional marketing strategies and tactics are no longer effective.

Inbound marketing has adjusted to evolving consumer habits and trends. It takes a traditional marketing-centric approach and reshapes it for the digital economy. Hubspot describes it as: "Instead of driving their message into a crowd over and over again like a sledgehammer, businesses today can attract highly qualified customers to their products or services like a magnet."

Inbound marketing is customer-centric and focuses on creating relevant, useful, and value-added content about your product or service. Its primary objectives are to:

Drive more traffic to your website through blogging, SEO, videos, eBooks, infographics, and more.

Capture new leads to continuously fill your sales pipeline.

Nurture captured leads through highly targeted personalized campaigns.

Generate enough leads each month to achieve defined marketing goals.

If your company is having a difficult time promoting its business and generating quality sales leads, inbound marketing can be the solution that helps you attract qualified prospects and build trust and credibility among your customers.

What follows are 7 core principles we at Revv Partners believe essential to any effective inbound marketing effort.

01

Define Buyer Personas

Before you get started on any marketing or sales effort, it's important to understand your customers. With the array of customization and targeting options available with digital publishing, it's even more important to define and clarify profiles of your ideal customers.

In short, buyer personas are mock biographies of your ideal or niche customers. Crafting accurate buyer personas helps you create a marketing blueprint for targeting the people you want to attract. When creating each persona, include customer demographics, behavior patterns, motivations, and goals. The more details you include, the better.

There's no hard rule for how many personas you need to create. Three to five is typical and most of them contain the same basic information:

- The "person's" name, job title, where they work, and details about their company role.

- Demographics including age, gender, salary, geographical location, education and family.

- Personal goals and challenges.

- Values, fears, and common objections during the sales process.

Most personas include additional information that is specific to the industry they are created for. For example, a tech firm requires personas different from those for a medical supply company. Other traits might include hobbies, actual quotes from customer interviews or surveys, computer literacy level, where they get their news, blogs they read, social medial accounts they use, and so on.

At their most basic, buyer personas allow for better content creation and personalized marketing. When combined with a lead's lifecycle stage (where she or he is in your sales cycle), they let you map out and create highly targeted content. Nothing gives your company better insight into a customer's needs than well-structured buyer's personas. When you get them right, your marketing efforts will be better positioned to attract the most valuable visitors, leads, and customers to your brand.

Once your target personas are set, you now need to focus on the "path" they likely will take in purchasing your product or service. Although specific steps may vary depending on the product or service offered, essentially there are three stages that make up a buyer's journey: awareness, consideration, and decision. Understanding the questions and concerns of a potential buyer during each stage, and identifying the information and resources that would be helpful in their purchasing decisions, can provide the framework to create targeted content, messaging and materials to nurture a prospect through the buying journey. For example:

- The **awareness stage** is where a buyer realizes he or she has a particular problem that requires a product or a solution to solve. What people are looking for at this stage is information. They may understand they have a problem, but they're not yet sure who or what will fix it. This is the stage where you offer them information that piques their interest. This can be delivered as white papers, blog posts, eBooks, webinars, checklists, infographics and videos.

- Next is the **consideration stage** where the buyer more clearly defines their needs and begins to research solutions. Here, you'll want to offer more specific and focused content about your brand, product or service. Content to consider can include product comparisons, case studies, and testimonials.

- Finally, in the **decision stage** the buyer chooses a solution – and hopefully, yours. Fully-armed with pertinent data, they are well-informed and ready to talk with someone or click on an offer and make a purchase. Free samples and trials, or a complementary consultation, are most effective in the decision stage and help alleviate doubt the customer may have about whether they're making the best choice.

Remember, today the prospect/customer has the advantage with a multitude of options and resources to choose from. Inbound marketing allows businesses to leverage the customer/prospect-buying journey by providing timely content and information they need to make a decision. Understanding their buying journey is critical in developing effective inbound marketing campaigns to generate leads and grow your sales pipeline.

03

Align your Pipeline

The sales pipeline provides salespeople with a visual representation of where prospects are in the sales process. And it allows sales reps and managers to forecast revenue by looking at the stages the opportunities are in and predicting how many will close as deals during a given timeframe.
Here are the basic steps to building a sales pipeline:

1. Define the stages of your sales cycle.
2. Identify how many opportunities typically continue to the next stage.
3. Work backward to calculate the number of opportunities you need at every stage to hit your revenue goals.
4. Pinpoint the common characteristics of opportunities that convert for every stage -- both actions the rep takes (like sending a follow-up email) and prospect responses (agreeing to a demo).
5. Create a sales process or adapt your existing one around these actions and numbers.

The **stages of the pipeline** must match your prospect's buying journey to effectively help you track progress and predict revenue.

With that in mind, your sales pipeline stages might be:

- **Connect:** The buyer engages with your company, whether they open an email from a salesperson, attend a webinar, or download a piece of content

- **Appointment set:** The buyer agrees to a meeting to learn more about how you can help them.

- **Appointment completed:** They showed up to the meeting, and you confirmed the next steps.

- **Solution proposed:** The buyer is interested in using your product to solve their pain point or capitalize on their opportunity.

- **Proposal sent:** The buyer reviews your proposal or contract.

The more complex your product, the longer your sales cycle will take -- and the more stages there may be.

Understanding and tracking activity through the marketing/sales pipeline provides the data to evaluate your marketing and sales process, identify problem areas and roadblocks, and focus attention and resources to fix problem areas. Clearly defining and tracking your pipeline is the essence of data-driven marketing. It can provide invaluable insight to your marketing efforts, and quantify a return on your marketing and sales efforts.

If your brand has a website, blog, or social media presence, or simply disseminates digital content, you are a publisher. It's time to think like one! Relevant and valuable content gives brands the voice they need to educate and motivate prospects at every stage down the funnel.

What does it really mean to "think like a publisher?" You have to generate a strategy and plan that enables you to create and publish on a consistent basis across multiple channels including social media, blogs, website content and search. You can't simply put a foundation in place and walk away.

Traditional publishers have always known that the quickest and most sustainable way to build a vibrant community is to dependably release high-quality content to their audiences.

Research shows that brands who blog 20 or more times per month generate five times the traffic than those that only release four or fewer per month. Stay focused on the best ways to reach, serve, and connect with your audiences, and use the lessons you learn to improve your next campaign.

05

Capture and Qualify Leads

Traffic to your website is nice, but good leads that turn into paying customers is the goal. Offers are the foundation of lead generation, so creating sound lead capture opportunities is essential. Smart, personalized messaging that respects the reader and offers various choices, emphasizes the benefits of sharing personal information, and is genuinely helpful is what you want to aim for. Also, you need to:

- **Create landing pages** that describe promotional offers readers can get in return for their contact information. Good landing pages target a particular audience, such as traffic from an email campaign or visitors who click on a website link. Unique landing pages should be built for each of the offers you create. Whether it's to download an eBook or sign up for a free trial, creating distinct landing pages lets you target the lead who is looking for what you offer.

- **Create forms** to embed on your website and use them to collect your visitor's information. Forms for "Top of the Funnel" content offers might only ask for an email address to get the process started. Forms for "middle of the funnel" content offers can ask for more detailed info as the prospect is likely further down the buying journey, and looking for more more detailed and/or customized solutions. Asking for additional info like company size, pain points and/or challenges, current products/services used, timing, etc can provide rich data for future sales followup.

According to Marketo, on average, <u>50% of your leads are not yet ready to buy</u>. Although there will always be a few leads who jump right in and purchase your product or service, most don't convert so easily. Most people have more questions and need more information before they feel confident enough in your brand to invest.

Nurturing leads ties back to the work you did regarding personas and the buying cycle. Prospects will have questions, require more information and need to feel comfortable with your product and service as they evaluate options. Offering additional information, tools, or promotional offers in a thoughtful and respectful way builds trust, and helps move them through the funnel.

Here are some things to keep in mind:

- **Develop campaigns and offers:** Email drip campaigns, are a great way to move leads down the funnel. Consider different campaigns depending on where leads are in the sales funnel. For example, those who have shown initial interest should receive a general welcome and introduction message; others who are further along are probably more interested in more in-depth content like white papers and testimonials.

- **Always offer value:** Create content around a prospective lead's pain points and make sure it's highly targeted to their specific needs. Leads nurtured with targeted content produce better results in the end and lead to more sales opportunities

- **Stay in touch:** Follow ups should be timely, and can be more easily facilitated with automation tools and workflows.

07

Know the Numbers

One of the most important differences between inbound marketing and traditional marketing, is that the bulk of your inbound digital efforts can be measured and tracked. Unlike traditional marketing and advertising methods (tv, radio, print), inbound marketers can get a clear picture of the reach and visibility of their marketing efforts, and also track visitors and prospects as they move through the buyer's journey. That said, it is critical for inbound marketers to track, measure and regularly monitor performance metrics.

Setting Up Inbound Metrics

Inbound marketing analytics tell a valuable story about how your marketing strategies are working (or not). There are plenty of resources out there and knowing where to focus your attention can be a bit intimidating. Google Analytics is a powerful analytics platform that can provide tremendous insights and data on how your inbound marketing strategy is performing. Supplemental tools (SEO tracking, email platforms, paid search platforms, CRMs, etc.) also provide additional metrics to track performance.

Marketing automation platforms such as Hubspot, Marketo, InfusionSoft, and others consolidate many of the inbound/digital marketing functions into one central interface. Most integrate with Google Analytics and can be ideal solutions for most SMBs. There is no shortage of data points. The challenge is sorting through the wealth of data and defining the key performance indicators (KPIs) for your particular situation

Which Inbound Marketing Metrics to Track

Selecting the right KPIs depends on your industry and which part of your business you're looking to track. Some metrics can demonstrate how effectively your brand is achieving key business objectives. Individual departments can use different KPI types to measure success based on specific goals and targets. Or KPIs can be used to monitor specific functions within the marketing effort.

In theory, managing the right metrics can have a transformative effect for an organization and it's marketing and sales efforts. In reality, it is estimated that 92% of companies do a bad job with KPIs. But, once you define, track, measure and monitor the best kpis for your particular situation, and how they all fit together, you'll have built a successful inbound marketing machine!

FINAL THOUGHTS

- Inbound marketing can be one of the most efficient and effective ways to build a business. Savvy companies are realizing this trend and increasingly adjusting budgets accordingly toward more inbound marketing tactics. Is it time to rethink how you are marketing your business?

- Successful inbound marketers know that it takes a wide range of skills, tools, and technology to market effectively including research and planning, Web design and development, content, SEO, social media, email marketing, analytics and much more. What are your current marketing skills and resources? Is it time to invest more in inbound marketing strategies and tactics?

- Inbound marketing is constantly evolving with new technologies and changing marketplaces. You must be willing to experiment, try new things, and learn from your mistakes. If you don't keep pace with the rapidly changing marketing landscape, there's a good chance you'll get left behind. The ability to adapt can be key in building your business.

- Finally, no inbound marketing strategy delivers overnight success. It takes time to develop quality content to please the search engines, it takes time for the content to get notice, and it takes time to guide your prospective leads through the funnel. But anything worth having requires work and dedication, so set long-term goals for your inbound marketing efforts. Inbound marketing works best when you're in it for the long haul.

Revv Partners
Inbound Marketing for Business