

# CREATING AN **INBOUND MARKETING STRATEGY**

A 4-Step Guide to Attracting and  
Converting Better Leads



Inbound marketing the hottest trend in business today. No wonder – it's a great concept. Create a lot of value around your brand, and compel customers to come to you. What's not to like?

Well, nothing, except that inbound marketing is so explosive at the moment, it's hard to know where to start. What does inbound marketing really mean? What kind of results can you expect? How do you get going on it? That's what this guide will tell you.

## Inbound Marketing, Defined

“Inbound marketing” refers to activities designed to attract the attention of customers and prospects, and give them a reason to come to you. Some of the most effective inbound marketing tools include blogging, search engine optimization (SEO), social media, and publishing appealing content.

Its opposite is outbound marketing, which means communications pushed out to customers and prospects via channels such as email, mail, phone, broadcast and print advertising. Today, marketing programs are most effective when they combine elements of inbound and outbound marketing into an integrated whole.

**9 out of 10 buyers say that when they're ready to buy, they'll find you.**

– Earnest Agency



## Building Your Strategy

**F**irst, be clear about what you want to do. Generate sales leads? Build awareness? Populate your database? Stimulate referrals? Drive traffic to an event, or to your store? Retain customers? Inbound marketing can help with all of these, but you must specify clearly what your primary goal for the program is.

Once you've identified your primary goal, you may add one or two (no more than two) secondary objectives. Make the goals very specific, and include a time period when they should be met. Put your objectives in writing and share them with your team, so everyone understands the mission.

### Setting Metrics

Now you're ready to determine the metrics that will let you know whether you achieved your goals. If you created a goal statement that was specific enough, the appropriate metric should naturally emerge from your consideration of the goal.

For example, if the objective is to generate a certain number of leads, then the metric is obviously the lead count. If your objective is to improve brand awareness among a particular target audience, then the metric would be awareness levels among that audience. One way to measure this is to survey the audience before a campaign as a benchmark, and then again after a period of time, to determine the change.

### OBJECTIVES BY CUSTOMER LIFECYCLE STAGE

Lifecycle Stage	Examples of Specific Marketing Objectives
<b>Attract</b>	Attract 5,000 site visitors in six months.
<b>Capture</b>	Get 750 forms filled out on your landing pages in the fiscal year.
<b>Nurture</b>	Convert 25 percent of inbound leads to first-time buyers in the quarter.
<b>Convert</b>	Produce \$750,000 in topline revenue in 12 months.
<b>Expand</b>	Convince 15 percent of new customers to try another product within 18 months of first purchase.



## Choosing Your Tactics – Blog

Once you know where you are going, it's time to decide how to get there. Inbound marketing offers a valuable toolkit that can be applied across the lifecycle. The major tools include blogging, SEO, social media, and content marketing.

Let's look at each tool in turn.

### Blog

Blogging is a proven technique for attracting visitors to your website, where you can begin to build a relationship. A well-written, informative blog offers a variety of benefits to your marketing program, helping you:

- » Establish your company as knowledgeable and helpful, like someone a prospect would feel secure about engaging with in a business relationship.
- » Improve organic search results dramatically, especially when posts are frequent and steady.
- » Stimulate social sharing, which spreads your knowledge and puts you in front of new prospects.

But managing a blog can be a challenge. It's hard to keep up with the relentless need for fresh, high-quality material, especially if you rely on volunteers in the company to provide the articles. It's a good idea to assign job responsibility to an employee for blog strategy and content development. Use freelance writers to fill in the content holes.

**84% of marketers view blogs as an effective marketing tool.**

– MarketingSherpa

### 7 TIPS FOR BETTER BLOGGING

1. Create an editorial calendar, to help you plan your blog posts around the rest of your marketing communications, like webinars, trade shows, and product launches.
2. Include social sharing buttons prominently, to encourage readers to pass your blog content on to others.
3. Update the blog at least weekly, for optimal organic search results.
4. Blog on a regular schedule, so readers' expectations are fulfilled.
5. Use the keywords your readers would expect to find in your blog copy.
6. Make your content valuable to your reader; offer useful or educational information and skip self-promotion as much as possible.
7. Add a call to action, such as a gated content offer, to turn your blog into a lead generator.



## Choosing Your Tactics – SEO

### SEO

Making your company's content the best answer when people are searching for information is the heart of SEO. These days, quality is everything. No more stuffing keywords, or other tricks intended to fool the search engines. Today, it's all about building a robust, informative website, and populating it with educational content that answers the questions and serves the needs of your target market.

But beyond publishing great content, you can take steps to improve the likelihood that prospects will find you when searching in their areas of interest. Write HTML metadata tags for each web page that tell the search engines what the page is all about. Use images and multiple media options, like audio and video, to deliver your content.



### 5 TIPS TO OPTIMIZE YOUR WEBSITE FOR SEARCH

1. **Know your audience** and the language they use. Use the words and phrases that your audience uses throughout the page as appropriate.
2. **Better written content** keeps visitors on the page longer, and search engines recognize that. Keep paragraphs short and break up your content with subheads and bullets to make the copy easier to read and more informative.
3. Write your **title tags** to indicate exactly what is on the page. Use keywords early in the title, and keep the tag between eight and 55 characters, including spaces.
4. Use **responsive design**, so your website displays well and is easy to navigate across different screen sizes and devices.
5. Set a **"canonical" URL**, for each of your pages to help reduce duplicate content issues.

Leads gained through organic searches have a 14.6% rate of close, while outbound marketing leads have a rate only of 1.7%.

– PRNews

STEP  
**2**

## Choosing Your Tactics – Social Media

### Social Media

Consumers and business people alike are using social media in droves, to connect with brands, research solutions, and solve their customer service problems. According to a [Forrester Social Technographics report](#), 100% of business decision-makers use social media for work purposes. So, an active presence on social media is mandatory for most companies today.

But where to begin? Start by identifying the networks where your customers expect to find you. If you're selling B2B, this is certainly LinkedIn, and possibly Facebook and Twitter. If you are selling to consumers, you should begin with Facebook, and consider Twitter and Pinterest. For details on how to get set up on each social network, download our informative [Essential Social Media Resource Guide](#).

Then, develop a library of compelling content. People won't pay attention to you on social media unless you have something interesting to tell them. Develop a content strategy before you begin your social media program.

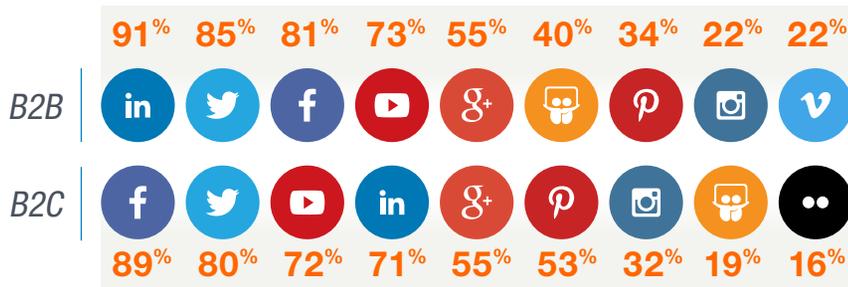
### CHECKLIST OF SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT OPTIONS

- ✓ Original content from your company: blogs, white papers, videos, and research reports
- ✓ Customer testimonials
- ✓ Quotes from executives
- ✓ Link to interesting articles in your field, with a short comment or question
- ✓ Announcements from your company, like a product launch, or a new hire
- ✓ Plans to attend a trade show or event
- ✓ Link to a guest post on another site
- ✓ Market research or survey questions
- ✓ Links to helpful resources, even those provided by your competitors.
- ✓ A thank-you or acknowledgment of something that helps your business

### 5 TIPS FOR CREATING ENGAGING SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT

1. **Develop a tone** that is familiar and comfortable to your audience, which also represents the style and culture of your company. This is a medium for engagement, so you need to be speaking the right language.
2. **Pose questions** to stimulate engagement, response, and sharing.
3. **Maintain a steady cadence** of posts – daily, weekly, or monthly. Don't go hot and cold.
4. **Use multimedia**, mixing text in with still images, video, and infographics.
5. **Push the envelope** a little. Social networks are expected to be free-wheeling environments, so try something out of the ordinary for your company, like holding a contest, or sharing a day in the life of an employee or customer.

### SOCIAL MEDIA SITES USED TO DISTRIBUTE CONTENT



Source: (Content Marketing Institute, 2014 Trends reports for B2B and B2C.)

## Choosing Your Tactics – Content Marketing

### Content Marketing

Customer education has long been an effective sales and marketing approach. Today it is more important than ever, as buyers research products and solutions online well in advance of directly engaging with sellers. Marketers must provide plenty of helpful information, online and off, to inform buyers, gain their trust, and be top of mind when they're ready to buy.

Content comes in an infinite variety of forms, including such common formats as documents, videos, images, emails, books, magazines, direct mail, and web pages. The key characteristic of content marketing is that it serves some business purpose through education and information, versus persuasion. Content should not be “sales-y.”

To build a library of content marketing material, follow these steps:

1. **Analyze your customer's buying process.** Lay it out by stages.
2. **Segment your audience.** If there are multiple parties involved in the purchase, identify them by buying role. In consumer environments, this may be household members. In B2B, it may be technical or line-of-business buyers.
3. **Determine the type of content that will be most useful to the customer at each stage.** Early in their process, they may need an overview of the problem. Later, a case study or vendor comparison might be helpful.
4. **Develop modular content assets** to serve each customer type, at each stage of their buying journeys.

### CONTENT FORMAT CHECKLIST

- ✓ Archived webinars
- ✓ Articles
- ✓ Blog entries
- ✓ Case studies
- ✓ Data sheets
- ✓ eBooks
- ✓ Executive interviews
- ✓ Infographics
- ✓ Newsletters
- ✓ Presentations
- ✓ Press releases
- ✓ Podcasts
- ✓ Research reports
- ✓ Tweets
- ✓ Videos
- ✓ Whitepapers

**78% of business buyers are hungry for information around their business challenge.**

– Earnest Agency

## The All-Important Landing Page

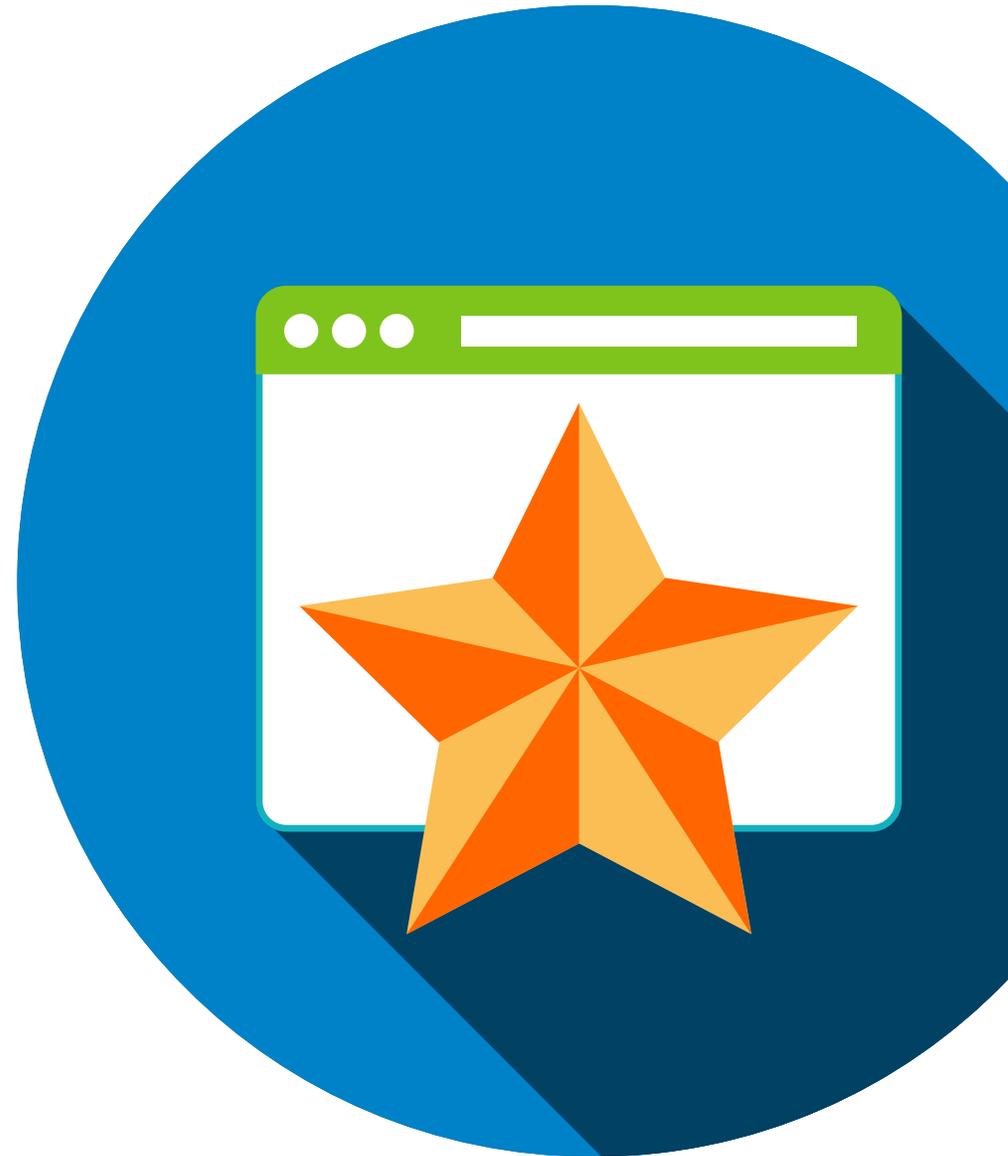
The landing page is where your inbound marketing really pays off. As you plan your inbound marketing tactics, be sure to give plenty of time and attention to landing page copy, design, and strategy.

First, make sure that a dedicated landing page is prepared for every call to action you use in inbound marketing. That means your search advertising, offers you make in your blog, or on social media – anywhere you request a click or a visit to a particular web page.

Conduct ongoing testing and continuous improvement of your landing pages. To start, you'll need a tool that creates a trackable, unique URL to connect your content to the page. Then, set up A/B split tests to identify the optimal headlines, body copy, layout, images, and calls to action.

**Pro Tip: Don't forget to test your forms** – how many data elements to ask for, the optimal form layout, and the design. Continuous testing will get you the intelligence you need to optimize performance – at no extra expense.

The secret to inbound and outbound integration is planning across the customer experience.



## Integrate With Outbound

Inbound marketing is very powerful, but it works best when it's part of an integrated program that uses both inbound and outbound marketing methods, each put to its best use across the customer lifecycle. Inbound is most effective at the top of the sales funnel, to acquire first-time prospects, and then nurture and deepen that relationship. Outbound communications, like email, telemarketing, and postal mail, are great tools for continuing the relationship in a highly personal, relevant way – and, of course, for closing the business.

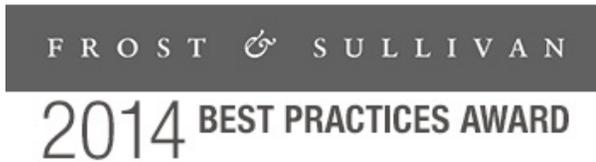
The secret to inbound and outbound integration is planning across the customer experience. Build bridges across media and functional silos, and construct your marketing program as a whole, considering how best to move the customer along his or her buying process. Ensure that your key messages are being delivered consistently across all channels. And be sure to bring your corporate communications, PR, and sales teams into marketing planning, so that the customer experience is considered across the entire customer lifecycle, from prospect, to buyer, to advocate.



### 5 TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL INTEGRATION OF INBOUND AND OUTBOUND MARKETING

1. **Develop a cohesive messaging strategy** that can be applied through all channels at each stage of the customer journey.
2. **Track key metrics across the customer lifecycle.** Consider metrics like cost per lead and lead-to-sales conversion rate as tools to connect marketing and sales performance.
3. **Plan your content** for use everywhere across the marketing and sales spectrum. Content assets make a compelling offer to stimulate response in outbound media. Sales people need content for all stages of the sales cycle, from qualification, to appointment setting, to leave-behinds at sales meetings, to follow-up after a demo.
4. **Use great care in making outbound contact to inbound leads.** A white paper download isn't necessarily a signal that the prospect is ready for a phone call to schedule a sales meeting.
5. **Develop an integrated mindset.** There are no walls between inbound and outbound marketing. They are all part of the opportunity to attract, convert, and expand customer relationships.

# Acclaim for Act-On



## 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