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HANDBOOK

2012 Inbound Marketing

Synchronize search, social, and content to get found more often, more effectively, by more customers

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Would you rather find customers – or get found by them?

If you answered the latter, then you're ready for inbound marketing. Inbound marketing is the integration of search engine optimization (SEO), social media tactics and content creation. Each of these tactics is a proven performer when separately implemented. But, **when strategically synchronized, the result is significantly reduced costs, increased sales, and improved ROI**.

This handbook will equip you with a 10-step, research-supported process for creating a transformative, scalable inbound marketing strategy. You will learn:

- How inbound channels help customers find *and* choose you.
- How search, social and content marketing interact with each other to produce ongoing enhanced results.
- How inbound marketing powers the customer engagement cycle across awareness, consideration, inquiry, purchase and retention.

You will also get answers to important and practical questions like:

- How has the buying process changed, and why should this matter to you? (p. 7)
- What lead sources are increasing and decreasing in importance for organizations? (p. 13)
- If inbound marketing is a "no-brainer," why isn't everyone doing it? (p. 15)
- What are the components of a good strategic process for inbound marketing? (p. 18)
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Inbound Marketing Handbook

Synchronize search, social, and content to get found more often, more effectively, by more customers

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INTRODUCTION

The integration of search engine optimization (SEO), social media tactics and content creation – also known as inbound marketing – has inverted the purpose of marketing for many organizations, from "finding customers" to "getting found by customers." Each of these tactics is a proven performer when separately implemented. But, **when strategically synchronized, the result is significantly reduced costs, increased sales, and improved ROI**.

These types of results don't "just happen." To attain such favorable outcomes, **organizations must develop a scalable and repeatable process for synchronizing tactics**. Accomplishing this poses a challenge for many marketers, due to the dynamic nature of inbound marketing and its many moving parts.

The goal of the *Inbound Marketing Handbook* is to guide you through the development of **an effective process that can scale to meet the growing, ongoing need for inbound marketing across your organization.** You will learn:

- How inbound channels help customers find *and* choose you.
- How search, social and content marketing interact with each other to produce ongoing enhanced results.
- How inbound marketing powers the customer engagement cycle across awareness, consideration, inquiry, purchase and retention.

Handbook

MarketingSherpa handbooks present research-supported best practices for improving the performance of marketing programs. They also serve as curriculum for self-instructed and professional career advancement training programs. Handbooks include case studies, methodologies, best practices, worksheets and data to support recommended practices.

To support these learning objectives, this handbook will equip you with a **10-step, research-supported process for synchronizing search, social and content to create a transformative, scalable inbound marketing strategy**. Best practices, worksheets and Sherpa case studies – developed through extensive interviews with brand-side marketing VPs and directors – illustrate and reinforce these steps.

SECTION 1: PREPARE

The first section deals with preparation, both mental and operational, and covers the first three steps of the process.

STEP 1: RETHINK END-TO-END ENGAGEMENT

This first step lays the groundwork for your inbound marketing programs. Much of this foundation begins with rethinking how customers currently shop, and why a new approach to marketing is necessary to engage them. Here, you will also learn how to **articulate a vision for inbound marketing success,** including **how to develop a strategic process and plan of action for inbound marketing**.

Learning objectives include:

- How to rethink the customer buying process
- Why inbound marketing powers the customer engagement cycle
- Where to focus when developing a strategic process for the planning, execution and measurement of your inbound marketing programs

STEP 2: UNDERSTAND YOUR TARGET MARKET'S BEHAVIORS ON THE PATH TO PURCHASE

It's not just enough to segment your customer base; you have to put yourselves in your audience's shoes. Researching and profiling your customers' triggers and behaviors along the path to purchase are critical components for gaining greater understanding.

To do this, you'll first work to develop inbound buyer personas, and then consider these personas in light of the customer engagement cycle. This will provide **a practical working model to help you generate ideas for inbound marketing tactics, and craft an extensive engagement strategy**. Upon completion of this step, you'll be able to clearly see and appreciate how inbound marketing transforms all stages of the buying funnel.

Learning objectives include:

- How to develop inbound buyer personas in six steps
- How to align inbound buyer personas with the customer engagement cycle
- How to methodically think through ideas for inbound marketing tactics by considering your persona in light of the customer engagement cycle

STEP 3: ESTABLISH SMART OBJECTIVES TO ACHIEVE OPTIMUM ROI

Setting objectives is something we all do, but the best objectives are SMART. This means they are:

- **S**pecific
- **M**easurable
- **A**ctionable
- **R**ealistic
- **T**ime-bound

In this section, you will identify your inbound marketing objectives, and then use the framework of your personas to develop details. You will also learn to **select the correct set of primary and secondary metrics to drive optimum performance**.

Learning objectives include:

- How to identify and dissect your most pressing inbound marketing challenges
- How to set SMART objectives and goals
- What role your personas play in clarifying your objectives

SECTION 2: PRACTICE

Section 2 is about putting search, social and content marketing into practice. As your proficiency in these areas grows, so will your ability to connect each of these disciplines. It is here that you will see your inbound marketing architecture begin to take shape.

STEP 4: ATTRACT ATTENTION WITH RELEVANT AND TIMELY SEARCH RESULTS

SEO is about how humans behave (query, scan and click) *and* how search engines behave (crawl, index, process, calculate relevancy, and retrieve). Understanding both sets of behaviors is important for optimal effectiveness in your SEO endeavors. Here you'll learn how to **create search results that attract and pull prospects in to your company**.

Learning objectives include:

- Why tactics need to be evaluated with attention focused on popularity, effectiveness and difficulty
- How to identify key characteristics for successful SEO campaigns
- How to approach and execute common SEO tactics

STEP 5: BUILD AND ENGAGE SOCIAL NETWORKS

In traditional outbound marketing practices, you control the information your audience receives – meaning your brand "is what you say it is." With inbound marketing, the control of information received shifts to your audience. Social media – and the exchange of information – has been a major contributor to this paradigm shift.

The result? Your brand is now what *they* (your prospects, customers, influencers) say it is. **Learning how to amplify this earned media, and then leveraging what's said on your behalf for greater influence, is the secret to success with social media** – and the central point of this chapter.

Learning objectives include:

- How to engage your audience on social networks and organically increase your reach
- Which practices work best for engaging the vocal minority and pitching the social authority

STEP 6: CREATE AND SHARE ENGAGING CONTENT

Sharing content is a critical component of inbound marketing. The secret to creating contagious content is to educate, or even solve the reader's problem, without explicitly selling your product. **When you move away from focusing on just a product or service, and towards helping the consumer, you will generate better content ideas**. Original, repurposed and user-generated content all have a place in your content marketing plans.

Learning objectives include:

- Which types of content perform the best, and are worth the time and effort to create
- How to conduct a content inventory audit to uncover where you are content rich or poor
- How to pick content topics using the customer engagement cycle

Step 7: Construct an inbound marketing architecture for synchronizing channels

When all three programs operate in synchronicity, you will see powerful results. In this section, you will **learn how to purposefully construct an inbound marketing architecture that connects search results, conversations, and content to conversion points**.

Learning objectives include:

- How a "hub-and-spoke" architecture systematically directs lead capture and customer conversion
- What percentage of marketers agree with the importance of integration – rather than practice it
- How to roll out an inbound marketing architecture with a plan and purpose

Section 3: Perfect

If Section 2 is about practice, then Section 3 is about how practice makes perfect. In these final steps, you look at improving the performance of your programs, your budgets and yourself.

Step 8: Gather actionable insights and intelligence

Gathering data is not synonymous with gathering intelligence. While data collection simply involves pulling together information, **gathering intelligence on your inbound marketing programs means you measure, understand, control and improve performance** … and then repeat the entire cycle.

This step is characterized by **e**valuation and **r**eassessment, representing two elements added to SMART objectives to make them SMART**ER**. Here you set the feedback loop in motion. *Evaluating* and interpreting results within the framework of your objectives increases your understanding and shows you areas to improve. After you've implemented plans for improving performance, you then *reassess*, paying particular attention to the new or different factors you've put into play.

Learning objectives include:

- How to methodically evaluate your results and reassess your plans for action
- Which inbound marketing metrics are most revealing
- What organizations turn to for analytics and monitoring solutions

Step 9: Budget time and money wisely

On average, online marketing comprises half of total marketing budgets. Of this, **companies put almost half of online marketing dollars into SEO, social and content marketing programs**. With these types of budgets at stake, it is important to plan your programs with ROI in mind from the outset.

When you quantify the outcome you expect from your marketing investment, you can then determine exactly how you will measure the program against those goals and position yourself to achieve them.

Learning objectives include:

- How to forecast your budget, in terms of ROI
- Which expenses should be factored into your budget requests
- What to consider when deciding whether or not to outsource inbound marketing management

Step 10: Commit to ongoing improvement

Inbound marketing is a dynamic field. Though many overarching principles will remain the same, new developments, practices and applications will continue to come along. In this section, you will **learn to develop a plan for continued learning and improvement – a plan that focuses on creating connections and delivering a great experience**.

Learning objectives include:

- Why you need a growth mindset
- What approach to learning is best suited to inbound marketing
- Where to go for good resources

After reading the *2012 Inbound Marketing Handbook* you will be prepared to develop an effective, scalable process to meet the ongoing need for inbound marketing across your organization. Though the dynamic nature of inbound marketing means this won't always be an easy process, the **proper strategy can result in reduced costs, increased sales, and the dramatically improved ROI your organization wants and needs**.

SECTION ONE: PREPARE

CHAPTER 1: RETHINK END-TO-END ENGAGEMENT

Customer engagement refers to the engagement of customers with one another, with a company or a brand. It is more than just a popular term. It is a set of behavioral characteristics. It is a degree of measurement. It is a marketing practice. It is all of the above, and more.

As a set of characteristics, **engagement encompasses satisfaction, loyalty, awareness, and involvement**.

As a metric, **engagement estimates the degree and depth of visitor interaction against a clearly defined set of goals**.

As a marketing practice, customer **engagement embraces collaborative filtering, community development and participation, user generated content, marketing intelligence, and viral content**. It is here that inbound marketing comes into play.

KEY TEACHINGS IN CHAPTER 1:

- How to rethink the customer buying process
- Why inbound marketing powers the customer engagement cycle
- Where to focus to develop a strategic process for planning, execution and measurement

THE BUYING PROCESS HAS EVOLVED

Remember when Sales held all the power? Buyers found it difficult to discover alternatives, research the competition, and hear more than a handful of word-of-mouth reviews. Involvement with Sales took place early in the process, because Sales was the primary source of information. Marketing's contribution was directed to the top of the funnel, to lead generation activities. Once Sales took over, Marketing effectively exited the process.

Today, the buying process has changed, and, along with it, the respective roles of Sales and Marketing.

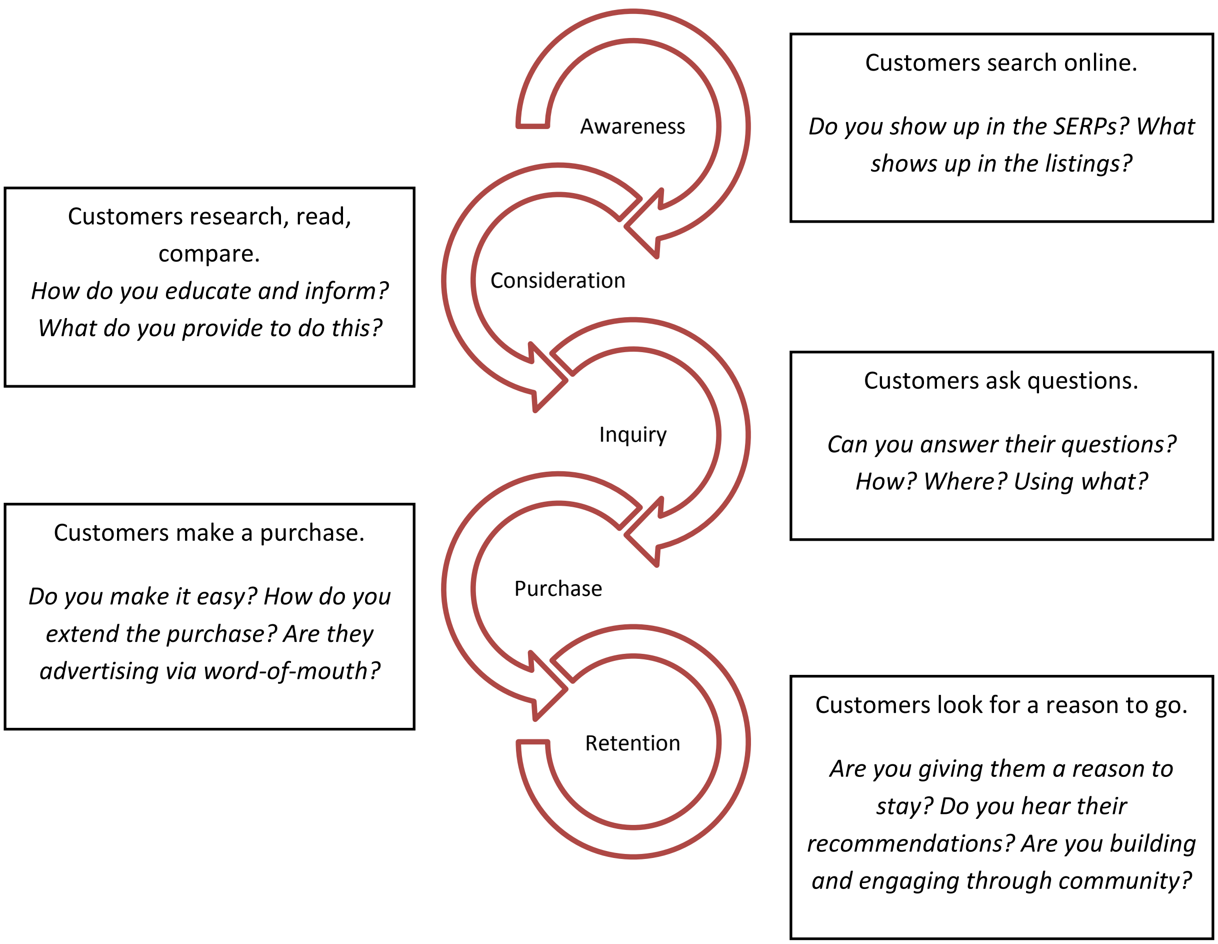
COMPARISON OF BUYING PROCESSES – "THEN" VERSUS "NOW"

Buying Process 1.0 ***How customers used to shop***	**Buying Process 2.0** ***How customers shop today***
Sales holds power	Customer holds power
Sales enters buying process early on	Sales enters buying process later on
Sales answers questions	Customers find answers to most questions before engaging Sales
Difficult for buyer to research choices	Endless research options via search and social media
Sequential movement through buying process	Fluid movement through buying process
Marketing has minor role, restricted to early awareness and consideration phases	Marketing plays pivotal role across stages with content delivery via search and social channels

Power the Customer Engagement Cycle with Inbound Marketing

Though the buying process has evolved, **many organizations still operate their marketing programs as though nothing has changed with their customers' behavior**. However, this is a poor approach, as customers expect more today. This is where inbound marketing can deliver.

Inbound marketing – search, social and content – has developed in response to changes in customer buying behavior and expectations. These practices help create the engaged behavioral outcomes that lead to profits, and repeat profits. It allows you to interact with customers through the different stages of the engagement cycle: awareness, consideration, inquiry, purchase and retention.



Customer Engagement Increases Your Long-Term Value

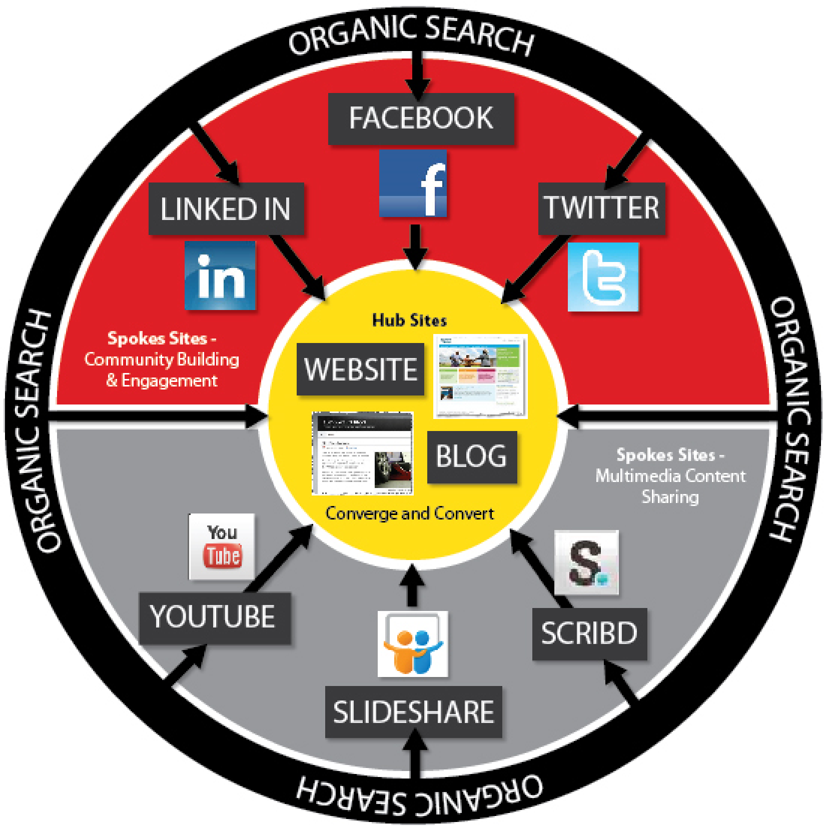
A customer's degree of engagement with a company lies in a continuum that represents the strength of his/her investment in that company. Positive experiences with the company strengthen that investment and move the customer down the line of engagement.

Customer engagement is a better indicator of current and future profits than mere satisfaction. **A customer can be satisfied today, and dissatisfied – and out the door – tomorrow**.

This is why satisfaction is the minimum requirement for customer acquisition and retention. Customer engagement, by comparison, strengthens brand loyalty and increases long-term value. These customers are more likely to engage in free (to you) and credible (to your prospects) word-of-mouth advertising, typically through social channels. They also are more likely to provide recommendations for product improvements and/or developments.

Work smarter, not harder: Synchronizing search, social and content

Paradoxically, today's customer engagement practices are both easier and more difficult than they once were. Engagement is currently easier, because inbound marketing programs create many potential touch points, using the Internet to facilitate these connections. However, it is also more difficult, because customer engagement calls for organizational effort.



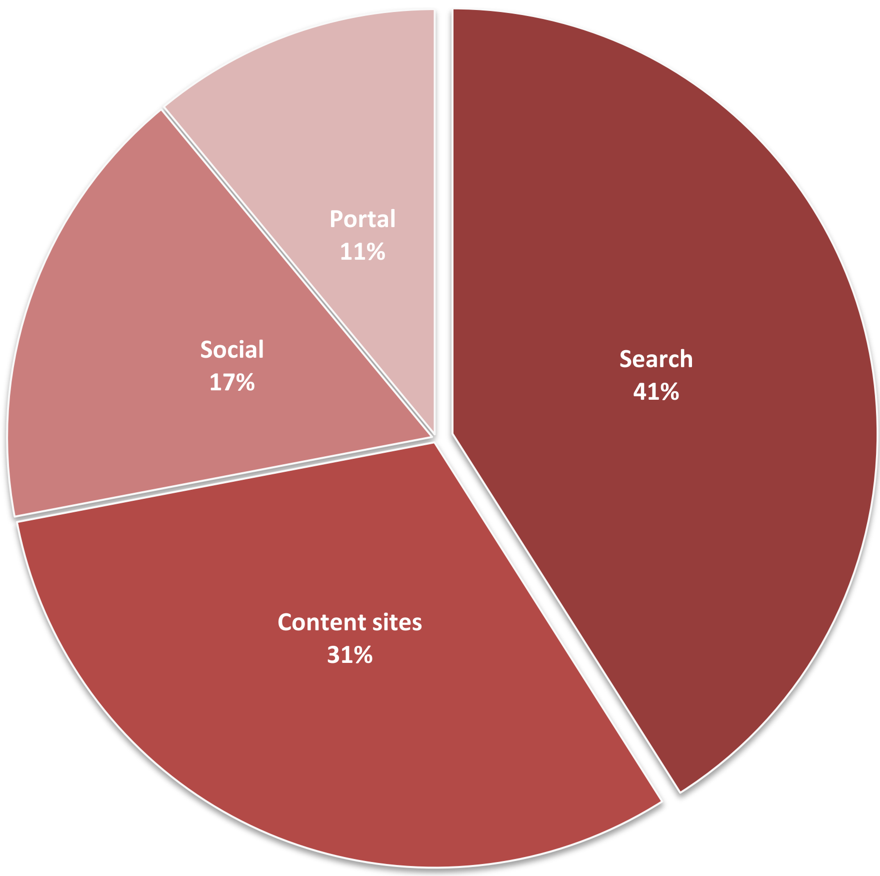
With inbound marketing, organizations can harness the power of consumer behavior and use it to work for them. Effective **inbound marketing starts with the understanding that consumers use search engines, participate in social networks, consume content in all forms, and converge and convert on hub sites**. From this basis, organizations can develop and coordinate their search, social and content marketing programs for repeatable, scalable results.

THE TRUE VALUE OF SEO

First, let us take a look at search activity. The source of most external traffic is search; on average, **search drives 41% of traffic for organizations**. This is not an insignificant amount. With so much riding on this source of traffic, SEO should not be an afterthought. In fact, SEO efforts are not just about getting listed and being highly ranked in SERPs. Ultimately, SEO is about creating content that searchers would want to find, and helping search engines find it!

Interestingly, social drives an additional 17% of traffic. Content sites, such as Wikipedia, nytimes.com and Mashable, push through another 31%. Looking at these traffic sources in concert further emphasizes the importance of synchronizing marketing efforts across search, social and content to achieve the most optimal results.

Chart: Breakdown of known external traffic sources



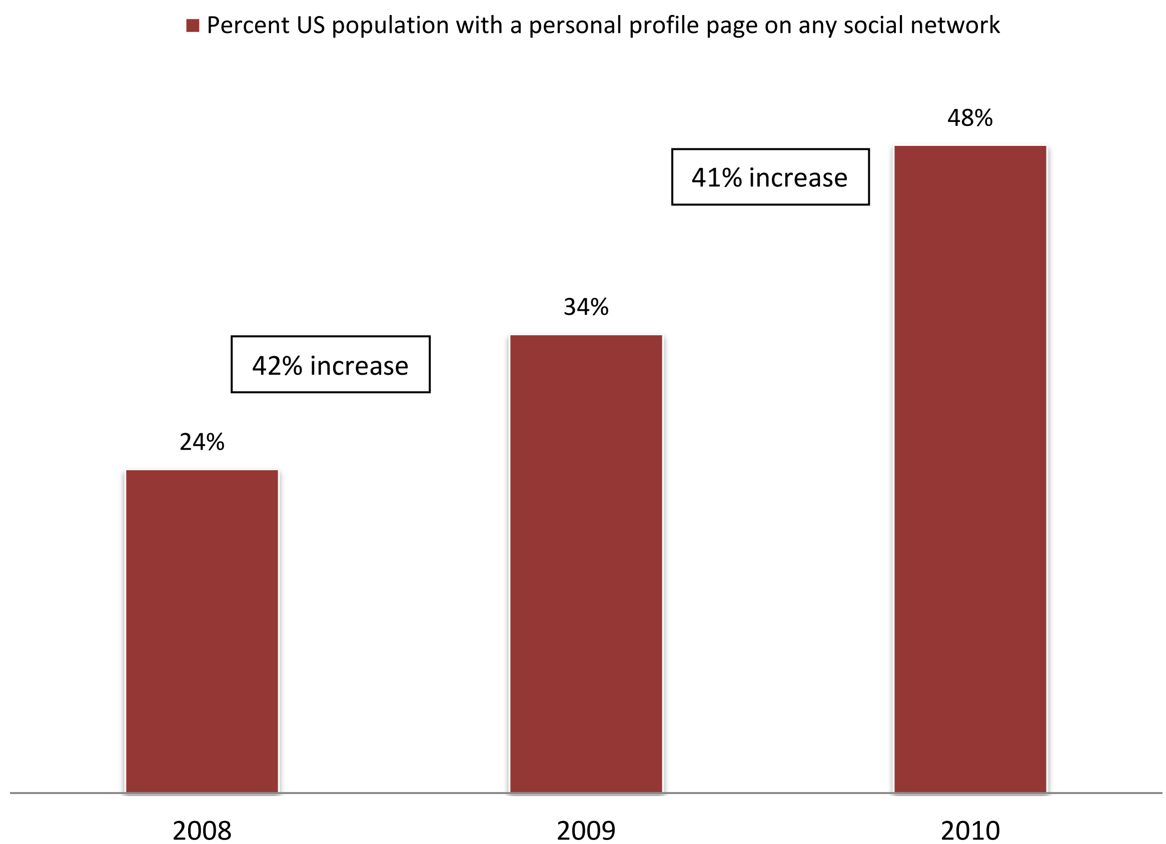
Source: Outbrain Content Discovery and Engagement Report, Q1 2011

YOUR CUSTOMERS ARE ACTIVE ON SOCIAL PLATFORMS

In addition to search activity, the use of social networks (and the frequency of this usage) is dramatically increasing. What we see is an unprecedented change in how mainstream consumers are communicating with – and influencing – each other.

Consumers rely on information they find through social media to make buying decisions. And they are likely to pass on this information, to ultimately influence others.

Chart: Rapid growth of US population that maintains a social network profile



Source: Edison Research / Arbitron Inc.
Methodology: Telephone survey February 2010 of 12+ Americans, N=1,753

"People share, read and generally engage more with any type of content when it's surfaced through friends and people they know and trust."

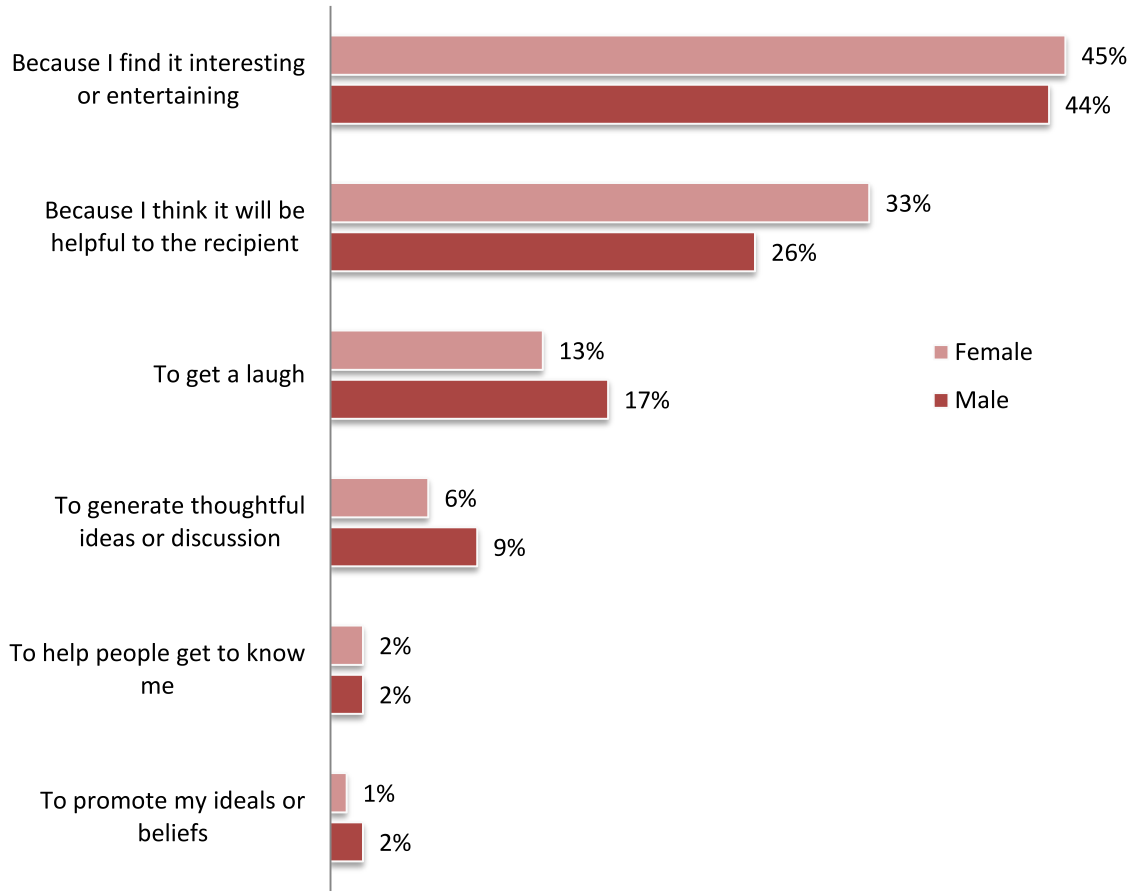
– Malorie Lucich, Facebook spokesperson

CONSUMERS ARE SHARING ONLINE CONTENT

Content is the final component of the inbound marketing architecture. Before developing a content marketing strategy for search marketing and social media, marketers should know why consumers share content. **Brands need to understand what their consumers are doing, where they can insert themselves, and what the return will be for their efforts**.

These insights also help companies in their search engine optimization efforts, as sharing content creates links that tell search engines the content is important and valuable.[1]

Chart: Why U.S. men and women say they share online content



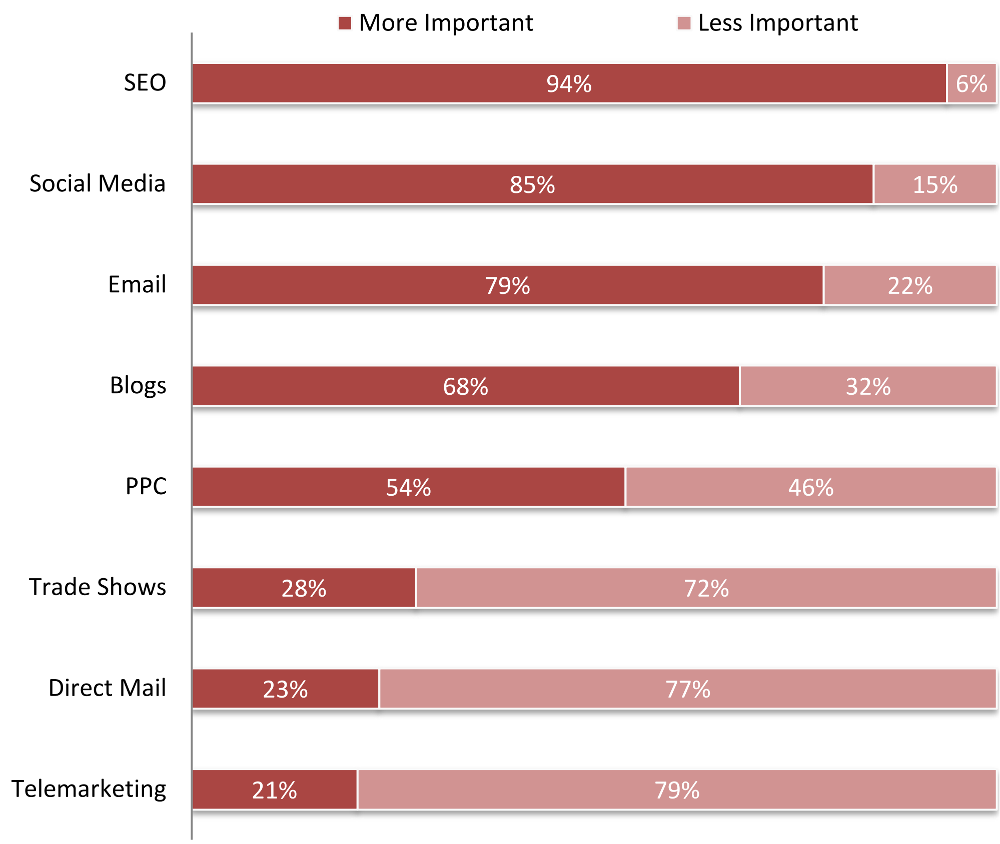
Source: Chadwick Martin Bailey, CMB Consumer Pulse 2010
Methodology: Fielded August 23, 2010, N=1,504

[1] Not all links are created equal. To maintain the credibility of a link's "vote" in favor of a piece of content, many sites use a "nofollow" tag that tells the search engine spiders not to count those links as a vote. While these don't pass on link juice, they do help associate your site with anchor text and also increase your site's overall exposure. That is a particularly important point, because if your content is truly valuable and interesting to the audience, the likelihood of it coming in front of a website administrator that can post a "dofollow" link increases as the content is shared across the social sphere.

THE VALUE OF INBOUND LEAD SOURCES

Leads obtained from inbound marketing tactics, such as SEO, social media and blogs, have increased in importance over the last 12 months, particularly when compared to leads from outbound marketing programs. Inbound marketing tactics tend to be cost-effective and offer an efficient option for generating highly qualified leads.

Chart: Lead sources increasing and decreasing in importance over last 12 months[2]



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Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

[2] See Appendix C for a description of MarketingSherpa's research methodology

Worksheet: Evaluate your lead sources

This worksheet will help you quantify the value and importance of your lead sources.

- Allocate the percentage of your total leads that each lead source represents.
- Rate the value of these lead sources in terms of their importance. Has the lead source become more important to your organization over the last 12 months? If so, give it a score of 3. If not, assign it a score of 1. If there's been no change in its importance, then give it a score of 2.
- Calculate the total score per line by multiplying the second and third columns.
- Calculate the final score by adding up all the scores in the last column. This will give you a look at the average value and importance of all your lead sources and help you identify where you might shift more money and attention. For example, if your total score is 1.7, you would know that your leads as a whole have been decreasing in importance because the score falls between 1 and 2. You could then identify individual lead sources that may be driving this decline.

	% Total Leads	**Value of Leads** 1 – less important 2- no change in importance 3- more important	**Total Score** % total leads * value of leads
Example	***20%***	***1***	***0.2***
SEO			
Social Media			
Blogs			
Email			
PPC			
Trade Shows			
Direct Mail			
Telemarketing			
White Papers / Content Downloads			
Webinars / Virtual Events			
Other			
Total	100%		

INBOUND MARKETING IS A "NO-BRAINER," BUT NOT EVERYONE IS DOING IT

Three quarters of surveyed organizations agree that integration of SEO and social is essential, yet more than 50% are either not involved in inbound marketing, or don't even know what it is.

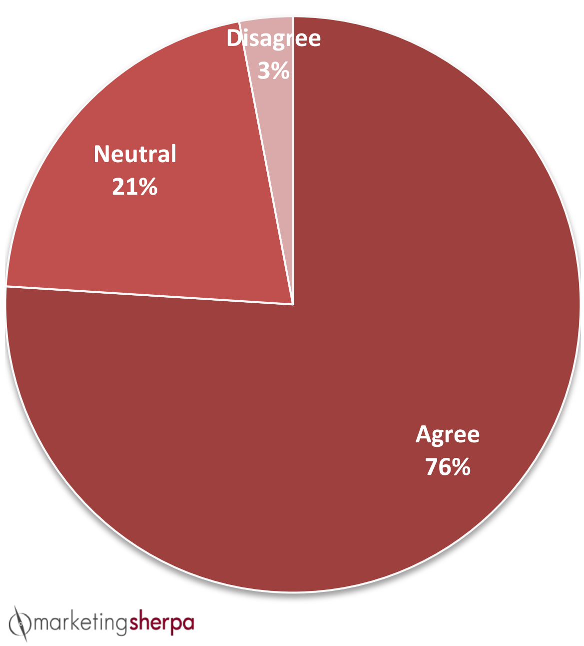
How can this be the case? The benefits of integration are considerable, as the integration of these programs empowers organizations to:

- Generate relevant content
- Increase the number of inbound links
- Create more relevant listings to show in search engine results pages
- Maintain or improve their current rankings for targeted keywords
- Make it easier for prospects and customers find the information they want
- Track inbound leads from initial engagement to conversion with standard analytics tools

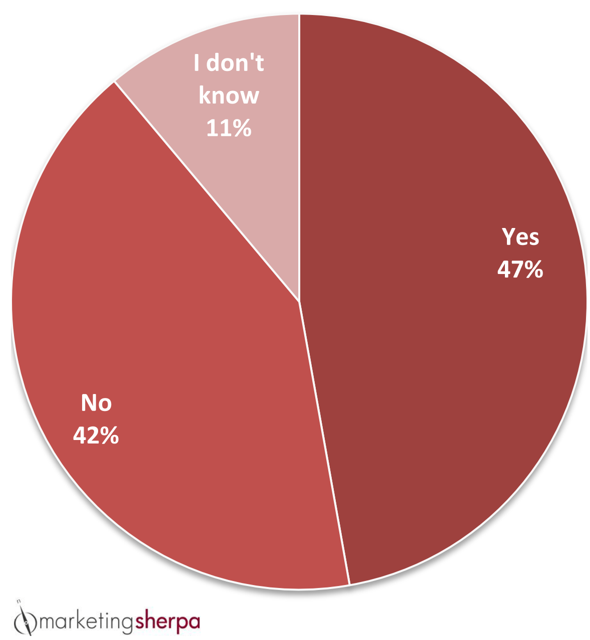
Additionally, the integration of these complementary tactics improves conversion rates. Our research showed a 59% improvement in conversion rates from organic search traffic for marketers who integrated social media and SEO, over those who did not.

Chart: Most marketers agree on importance of integration, but don't always practice it

Q. Do you agree many organic search listings today are linked to social media content so the integration of social media and SEO tactics are essential?



Q. Are you practicing the integration of social media and search engine optimization (SEO) tactics to improve inbound marketing performance?



THE DRAWBACKS OF OUTBOUND MARKETING

Despite strong evidence that supports integration and inbound marketing, many organizations still choose to operate in a traditional outbound marketing mode of email, direct mail and telemarketing campaigns. This doesn't mean that outbound marketing tactics don't have a place in your marketing mix, but consider some of these drawbacks:

- **Expense**. Take the cost of tradeshows and telemarketing, for example.
- **Segmentation**. Although list segmentation by demographics is possible, outbound marketing is limited in its ability to apply behavioral segmentation, a vital component in customer engagement.
- **Targeting**. Buyer personas are more challenging to target using outbound marketing.
- **One-way Communication**: Modern consumers expect more today.
- **Timing**: Consumers are becoming less responsive to interruption-based marketing.

Outbound marketing tactics are evolving, as organizations acknowledge that sending solitary mass messages to a diverse audience is no longer adequate. Personalization and relevance are just two characteristics of successful outbound marketing campaigns.

Despite these improvements, outbound marketing remains focused on the "pushing" of messages, rather than using content and communities to draw people in. If we are to engage today's customers, we must heed their signals on how best to accomplish this.

DON'T IGNORE THE DIFFICULTIES WITH INBOUND MARKETING EITHER

So, why don't more organizations practice inbound marketing? First, it's not easy to develop and execute inbound marketing programs if you want to do them well. Beyond ease of execution, other difficulties relating to inbound marketing include:

- **Budget:** Although there is no cost-per-click with organic search, and no charge to set up a social media platform, you still need an adequate budget to fund the time and effort involved with maintaining search and social programs. This is especially prominent in content development, a key component in holding your inbound marketing programs together.
- **Awareness:** Inbound marketing increases your website's visibility for prospects already looking for a solution. However, prospects needing (but unaware of) your solution may not be able to find you proactively. With SEO, as one example, it can take time to achieve those enviable – and most visible – top positions on SERPs.
- **ROI:** Inbound marketing tactics can improve your reputation, particularly since these tactics lend themselves well to demonstrating your thought leadership, showcasing your authority and establishing trust. But, to sell an inbound marketing plan internally, you need to go beyond the soft metrics and tie results to hard numbers – an ordeal for many.
- **Strategy:** As with all marketing programs, the lack of a plan or strategy can nullify the best of intentions and efforts. Organizations must develop a scalable and repeatable process (which we will cover later in

this book) for synchronizing inbound marketing tactics. Accomplishing this poses a challenge for many marketers, due to the dynamic nature of inbound marketing and its many moving parts.

Worksheet: Identify your biggest inbound marketing difficulties

When you think of your SEO, social and content marketing programs, what are the biggest difficulties and problems you experience? What, if anything, have you done or are you planning to do to address and compensate for these?

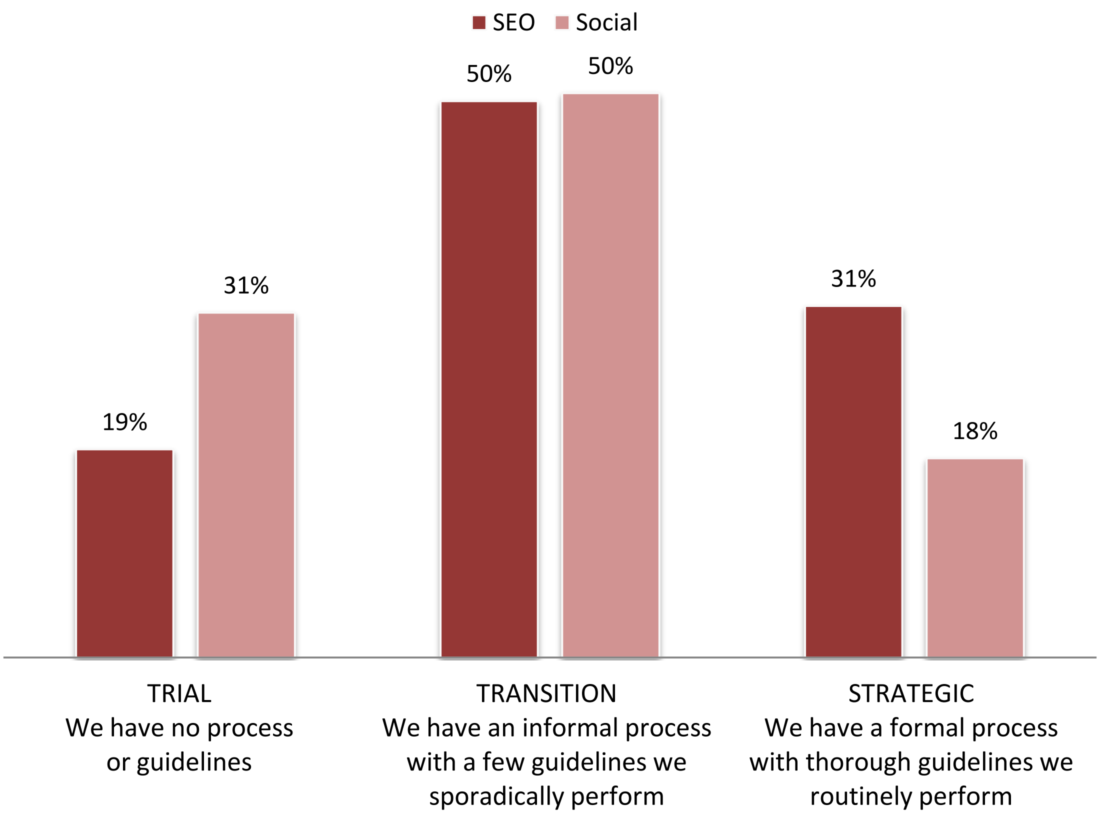
	What is your biggest difficulty, problem or gap?	**What have you already done to address this?**	**What are you planning to do to address this?**
SEO			
Social media			
Content			

DEVELOP A STRATEGIC INBOUND MARKETING PROCESS

So, how can you avoid potential inbound marketing difficulties and drawbacks? A strategic process. As W. Edwards Deming said, "If you can't describe what you are doing as a process, you don't know what you are doing."

Whether you are just getting into inbound marketing, or have been practicing it for a few years, you need a strategy. If you focus on the right strategy, you'll develop a winning inbound marketing formula. Clear strategies get great results, regardless of the tactics employed at any given moment.

Chart: Organizations practicing inbound marketing with a process for SEO and social marketing



Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

A good strategic plan and process for inbound marketing will cover these activities to help you:

- Understand the needs and behaviors of your target audience
- Align buyer personas to the customer engagement cycle
- Establish SMART – **s**pecific; **m**easurable; **a**ctionable; **r**ealistic, and **t**ime-bound - objectives
- Map goals to best-suited tactics
- Evaluate, reassess and take actionable insights on data
- Plan and justify budgets in terms of ROI
- Commit to continual learning and improvement

WORKSHEET: SCORE YOUR INBOUND MARKETING MATURITY

Circle one number in each row that corresponds with the column heading that best describes the process you use for each activity area.

For example, if your organization routinely follows a formal process that's been documented with thorough guidelines for identifying and understanding the needs and behaviors of your target audience, then circle 3 in the first row. If your organization hasn't yet formulated a standard process for this activity, then circle 1.

After circling one number in each row, sub-total each column and then combine the scores across each column for your total score. Matching this score to the phase shown in the bottom row will show you where your organization currently resides in the inbound marketing maturity lifecycle.

Inbound Marketing Maturity Process Assessment	**Trial** We have no process or guidelines	**Transition** We have an informal process with a few guidelines we sporadically perform	**Strategic** We have a formal process with thorough guidelines we routinely perform
Understand the needs and behaviors of your target audience	1	2	3
Align buyer personas to the customer engagement cycle	1	2	3
Establish SMART objectives	1	2	3
Map goals to best-suited tactics	1	2	3
Evaluate, reassess and take actionable insights on data	1	2	3
Plan and justify budgets in terms of ROI	1	2	3
Commit to continual learning and improvement	1	2	3
Sub-totals			
Total			
	Trial Phase: 7 - 9	Transition Phase: 10 - 16	Strategic Phase: 17 - 21

(Note: each of these strategic process components will be covered in the subsequent chapters.)

SUMMARY QUESTIONS

1. Name three ways in which search engines and social media have changed the buying process.

____

____

____

2. What are the five stages of customer engagement?

____

____

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3. List the top five lead sources, in order of decreasing importance, that have become more valuable to organizations over the last 12 months.

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MY ACTION STEPS TO INBOUND MARKETING SUCCESS

☐ Evaluate the importance and value of our organization’s lead sources.

☐ Identify our difficulties to date with inbound marketing – SEO, social media, content - and our plans to address these.

☐ Develop a formal process with thorough guidelines for the planning, execution, and measurement of our inbound marketing programs.

☐ ____

☐ ____

☐ ____

☐ ____

Chapter 2: Understand Your Target Market's Behaviors on the Path to Purchase

It's not just enough to segment your customer base; you must put yourselves in your customers' shoes, particularly if you hope to attain and retain them. Researching and profiling your prospect and customer triggers and behaviors, within the customer engagement cycle, are critical components in this step.

Key teachings in Chapter 2:

- How to develop inbound buyer personas in six steps
- How to align inbound buyer personas with the customer engagement cycle
- How to methodically think through ideas for inbound marketing tactics by considering your persona in light of the customer engagement cycle

An overview of persona marketing

Now that you have a better sense of the roles of search, social and content sharing in today's marketplace, and the evolution of the buying process, it's time to figure out how your particular customers behave.

Demystifying marketing – particularly social, search and content marketing – starts with deciphering customer behavior. Buyer personas are a great way to accomplish this. They help you identify the key traits of your best, most valuable customers, so you can then identify and attract more of the same. In short, understanding your current customers is what will help you sell to new customers. This is what it means to build a customer-centric business.

A buyer persona is a detailed profile representing an actual, real-life group of your target audience. This group's common interests, motivations, expectations, demographic and other behavioral characteristics all go into filling these profiles with enough depth and breadth to make them useful in marketing purposes.

Buyer personas are sometimes confused with target markets, which is a profile based on demographics, such as location, company size or annual revenues. In contrast, buyer personas are more in-depth profiles that incorporate behavioral characteristics. Put simply, it's the difference between determining "*what* group" and "*what kind* of group." For example, a target market would help you define list parameters for an email marketing campaign, whereas buyer personas would dictate what content you deliver to that particular group.

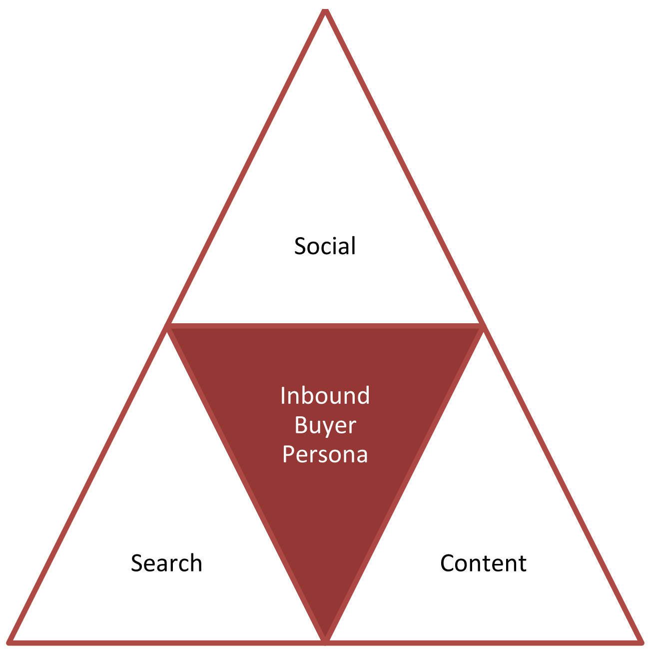
Developing a profile involves aggregating and analyzing data so you can turn it into unique profiles. You then maintain these personas with ongoing measurement and analysis.

There are an unlimited number of traits that can be considered when developing buyer personas for your brand. The key is to get inside the mindset of your audience so you can better understand its buying processes. **By identifying customer traits and behaviors, you will become well-equipped to deliver meaningful content and experiences**.

Craft an Inbound Buyer Persona

Often, there are various profiles that exist within your target audience. **The more specific you can be with your personas, the better equipped you will be to develop inbound marketing programs**.

For the purposes of this handbook, we will focus on the interplay of social marketing, search and content personas. We call this the *Inbound Buyer Persona*. This persona moves in, and across, the various three spheres. Because movement is not restricted to any one sphere, it is important to create a composite view. To that end, you will want to incorporate research questions and activities that touch on all three realms as you build out these personas.



Step 1: Identify Your Audience Segments

The first step is to identify your audience segments. Segmenting groups will help you determine content types, and topics that are most relevant to these targeted segments.

- Who are your customers?
- Who are they as individuals? What are the common denominators among them?
- What are the demographics for these audience segments?
- What are the behavioral attributes for these segments?
- What assumptions are shared by your audience?

Step 2: Define Their Needs

Identifying needs is another way of understanding the underlying pain points.

- What problems, struggles or challenges do they have?
- What tasks are they trying to accomplish?
- What do they need?
- What do they want?
- What are the trends within their industries?

- What motivates them?

Step 3: Define their online behaviors

The third step gets into their online behaviors.

Search behavior

- What does each segment search for online?
- What are the volumes for these queries and query clusters?
- What are some related queries to the keywords I've considered?

Social behavior

- Which social media sites do your prospects and customers prefer to use?
- What are they talking about on social networks?
- How are they using social media?
- When and how do they make recommendations to others?

Content behavior

- How do they discover, consume and share content?
- What are their content preferences? What content is downloaded the most? Shared the most?

Step 4: Define their interests

Internal analytics plays a part in this step. In this step, you want to figure out the tipping points for moving customers through the buying process. Do this by studying what's worked.

- What would most strongly influence this audience to accept my message, my content?
- What influences them to move ahead to the next stage in the customer engagement cycle?

Step 5: Define their turn-offs

Again, internal analytics plays a part in this step. Where are you losing them online? How are you failing to get them to respond?

- What are their five most predictable points of resistance?
- What are three major reasons my audience would not want to do what I want them to do?
- What is preventing them from moving ahead to the next stage in the customer engagement cycle?

Step 6: Create your composite inbound buyer personas

At the end of this exercise, you should have enough data to create between three and seven personas. Three is the bare minimum. If there is any less, you risk polarizing your research and making it too one-sided; any more, and you risk duplication and diminishing returns.

To verify that you have, in fact, created composite inbound buyer personas, you should be able to complete (in detail) these sentences below for each of your personas:

- My persona's name is:
- Her age bracket is:
- Her level of education is:

- Her title is:
- She wants to address these problems or accomplish these tasks:
- Her motivations are:
- Her biggest areas of resistance are:
- The words she uses to describe her pain points are:
- In terms of social media usage, she:
- She prefers this type of content:
- Other decision makers involved in her buying process are:

CHOOSE THE RIGHT TOOLS FOR THE JOB

It isn't easy to work through these persona questions. But doing so becomes more manageable if you know where to obtain the information. Here are some examples of free and paid tools to collect, aggregate and analyze this information.[3]

Web analytics tools

- Google Analytics, Yahoo! Web Analytics
- Google Webmaster Tools, Bing Webmaster Tools
- Alexa

Search and keyword research tools

- Google Insights, Google AdWords Keyword Tool
- SEMRush, Keyword Discovery, Wordtracker, Wordstream, Keyword Discovery, TrafficEstimate.com

Demographic tools

- Quantcast
- Compete
- Facebook Ads

One-to-one interviews[4]

- Customer service reps
- Sales people
- Customers (phone interviews) – mix of old and new, best and worst, satisfied and dissatisfied
- Prospects

Social media tools

- Klout, SocialMention, Kontagent, Kissmetrics, Mixpanel, PeerIndex, CrowdBooster, Twitalyzer, RapLeaf, Simplify360, Social CRM

[3] These are not recommendations, per se; rather, these are merely examples of the types of tools available.
[4] For sample interview questions, see Appendix A.

Worksheet: Align personas to the customer engagement cycle

Remember, the purpose of these personas is to aid you in crafting engagement strategies for your SEO and social media programs, including content creation efforts for webpages, blogs and social media.

Therefore, once you've developed your personas, you need to determine how you could use inbound marketing to interact with these personas during each stage of the customer engagement cycle. At this point, you may have just a few ideas, but be sure to document them. Here's a partial example to spark some ideas.

Persona: Becky Beginner					
Task objective/problem to address: "I want to take piano lessons. This is a first for me."					
	Awareness	**Consideration**	**Inquiry**	**Purchase**	**Retention**
What she'll do	Conduct search queries Ask Facebook friends if they know any local piano teachers	Look at Yelp: "piano lessons, piano teacher, music school" and read testimonials Notice friend activity in Facebook news feed (likes and comments made on Pages	Look for price page Look for class schedule Figure out teaching philosophy Figure out personality and fit	Compare offerings and pros and cons of various teachers Determine whether value outweighs costs Avoid buyer remorse	Look at Facebook page for special promotions and sense of community with other adult students
What we'll do (at present and in future)	Develop educational content (multiple formats) to answer questions "behind" searches Optimize for keywords, including social profiles Fill out local search listing	Post or link to customer reviews Post engaging content on social networks to encourage sharing and interactions	Blog posts, based on FAQ Show personality through various content forms and social conversations	Blog posts, based on unspoken questions and concerns	Provide ability to track practice through online journal and share with wider circle via social app Encourage UGC

Persona:					
Task objective/problem to address:					
	Awareness	**Consideration**	**Inquiry**	**Purchase**	**Retention**
What she'll do					
What we'll do (at present and in future)					

Summary Questions

1. What is the difference between a target audience and a buyer persona?

____

____

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2. List the six steps for crafting an inbound buyer persona.

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____

____

3. How many personas should you create and why?

____

____

____

My Action Steps to Inbound Marketing Success

☐ Craft between three and seven inbound buyer personas for our organization

☐ Align these personas to the customer engagement cycle, jotting down ideas by stage on what the persona will do to address his problem/objective and what we'll do in response

☐ ____

☐ ____

☐ ____

☐ ____

☐ ____

CHAPTER 3: ESTABLISH SMART OBJECTIVES TO ACHIEVE OPTIMUM ROI

Now that you have built clear pictures of your customers and their needs and behaviors, it is time to set goals and "SMARTER" objectives for your inbound marketing programs. When you have something you want to accomplish, it is important to set both goals and objectives. **Goals without objectives can never be accomplished, while objectives without goals will never get you to where you want to be**.

KEY TEACHINGS IN CHAPTER 3:

- How to identify and dissect your most pressing inbound marketing challenges
- How to set SMART objectives
- What role personas play in clarifying your objectives

DEVELOP SMARTER OBJECTIVES

Goals are long-term, less-structured aims that you want to accomplish. Objectives, by comparison, are concrete attainments that can be achieved by following a series of steps. The acronym "SMART" has been used to describe objectives that are **s**pecific; **m**easurable; **a**ctionable; **r**ealistic, and **t**ime-bound. It is a well-known methodology because it works.

Less common, perhaps, are the last two letters, "ER," which refer to the steps of evaluation and reassessment. To achieve optimum ROI, it is important to incorporate this feedback loop, represented by these last two letters. (You will initiate this feedback loop when you measure and analyze your results, covered in *Chapter 8 – Gather Actionable Insights and Intelligence*.)

IDENTIFY THE MOST PRESSING INBOUND MARKETING CHALLENGES

Before you can even define *smart* objectives, you need to identify which are the most pertinent and frustrating challenges standing in the way of inbound marketing success.

In this next table, you can see the challenges facing marketers in their search and social marketing programs. The top combined challenges (based on survey results) are:

- Developing an effective and methodical strategy
- Increasing traffic, leads and ROI

On the most basic level, when you address these two problems, other challenges will diminish. As we covered in the beginning of the handbook, an effective and methodical strategy involves outlining detailed guidelines, and establishing formal procedures for every element of your inbound marketing campaigns. This sets you up for success and better equips you to handle all challenges.

But, to quote Winston Churchill, "However beautiful the strategy, you should occasionally look at the results." If you're not increasing traffic, leads and ROI, then something is amiss with your strategy, signaling a need to fix it. Ignore these signs, and none of the remaining challenges will get any easier.

Table: Ranking of challenges, by marketers surveyed, for search and social marketing programs

(9 = most frustrating, 1 = least frustrating)	Search	Social	**Total**
Developing an effective and methodical strategy	7	9	**16**
Increasing website traffic	9	5	**14**
Increasing lead generation	8	6	**14**
Achieving or increasing measurable ROI	6	8	**14**
Increasing online sales revenue/converting followers to customers	3	7	**10**
Improving awareness or reputation	4	4	**8**
Integrating social media to improve SERPs	5	1	**6**
Integrating analytics into a single dashboard	2	2	**4**
Integrating data with CRM and other marketing systems	1	3	**4**

Sources: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Social and Search Marketing Benchmark Surveys
Methodology: Fielded February and April 2011, N=3,342 and 1,530

WORKSHEET: EVALUATE YOUR INBOUND MARKETING CHALLENGES

Rank your search and social marketing program challenges in order of decreasing significance.

	Search	Social	**Total**
Developing an effective and methodical strategy			
Increasing website traffic			
Increasing lead generation			
Achieving or increasing measurable ROI			
Increasing online sales revenue/converting followers to customers			
Improving awareness or reputation			
Integrating data with CRM and other marketing systems			
Integrating analytics into a single dashboard			
Integrating social media to improve SERPs			
Other:			

WORKSHEET: DISSECT YOUR INBOUND MARKETING CHALLENGES

It is one thing to identify your challenges from a list, but you won't have breakthrough thinking and problem-solving – let alone effective goal and objective setting – until you can describe *why*. For this reason, you need to spend some time in reflection. For each of your challenges, work through the following list of questions:

WHAT ARE THE FACTS RELATED TO THIS CHALLENGE?

Peter Drucker put it best when he said, "Once the facts are clear, the decisions jump out at you."

WHY DOES THIS CHALLENGE EXIST?

This question helps you uncover what caused or is causing this problem or challenge. For example, if you have low website traffic, is it because you are ranked on page 2 or 3 for some of your keywords? If you are not converting website traffic to leads, do you have a high bounce rate? If your brand reputation is low, evidenced by low sentiment scores, what is the nature of the negative mentions?

WHAT ARE THE THREE GREATEST RESOURCES YOU CAN BRING TO BEAR ON THIS CHALLENGE?

Colleagues, outside experts, tools, training, time, money … the list of possible resources is long. Decide what resources you could put onto this particular problem.

WHAT ARE YOUR TOP INBOUND MARKETING GOALS?

Now that you've analyzed the most frustrating and pressing challenges, you're at the stage where you can begin to define your goals for your inbound marketing program. The following table sets forth search and social marketing goals ranked by marketers in order of importance. The top combined goals are:

- Increasing website traffic
- Improving awareness or reputation
- Increasing measurable ROI

You'll notice that increasing leads and developing a methodical strategy score high as individual components. However, the combined scores are lower because more search marketers want to increase leads, whereas more social marketers look to develop a strategy. By focusing on increasing ROI for inbound marketing programs as a whole, marketers can also satisfy these secondary goals. **In other words, you won't have a good ROI without leads, and you won't have leads without a methodical strategy and process**.

Table: Ranking of goals, by marketers surveyed, for search and social marketing programs

(9 = most important, 1 = least important)	Search	Social	**Total**
Increasing website traffic	9	9	**18**
Improving awareness or reputation	7	7	**14**
Achieving or increasing measurable ROI	6	6	**12**
Increasing lead generation	8	4	**12**
Developing an effective and methodical strategy	3	8	**11**
Increasing online sales revenue/converting followers to customers	5	5	**10**
Integrating social media to improve SERPs	4	3	**7**
Integrating data with CRM and other marketing systems	2	2	**4**
Integrating analytics into a single dashboard	1	1	**2**

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Sources: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Social and Search Marketing Benchmark Surveys
Methodology: Fielded February and April 2011, N=3,342 and 1,530

WORKSHEET: EVALUATE YOUR INBOUND MARKETING GOALS

Rank your search and social marketing program goals in order of decreasing importance.

	Search	Social	**Total**
Developing an effective and methodical strategy			
Increasing website traffic			
Increasing lead generation			
Achieving or increasing measurable ROI			
Increasing online sales revenue/converting followers to customers			
Improving awareness or reputation			
Integrating data with CRM and other marketing systems			
Integrating analytics into a single dashboard			
Integrating social media to improve SERPs			
Other:			

FROM GENERAL GOALS TO SMART OBJECTIVES

Thus far, the goals we've outlined are general in nature. These provide insight into the areas about which you and your peers are most concerned and focused upon with inbound marketing programs. But, naming these is only a starting point. Your next step is to translate these general goals into *SMART* objectives, objectives that are:

- **S**pecific,
- **M**easurable,
- **A**ctionable,
- **R**ealistic, and
- **T**ime-bound.

EXAMPLE: TRANSLATING A GENERAL GOAL INTO A SMART OBJECTIVE

General Goal Increase website traffic		
SMART Objective		
Specific	*Is it specific, clear, detailed?*	Increase website traffic 25% in 6 months
Measurable	*How will you measure, using both primary and secondary metrics?*	# unique visitors # traffic sources # referring URLs # backlinks
Actionable	*What actions will you take?*	New blog post every week, or 24 total External link building, or 50 total
Realistic	*Can you really see this happening based on where you are now? Do you have resources to put on this?*	Team blog approach, with 12 members across Marketing, Sales and Customer Service each writing 2 posts in 6 months 1 staff person devoting 2 hours a week, or 48 hours total, to build links
Time-bound	*How long to achieve this?*	6 months

MEASURE WHAT MATTERS MOST

You have likely noticed that one of the key components of SMART[5] objectives is “measurable.” **Making sure your objectives are measurable is the only way to know whether you are making progress, so it is important to choose – and properly use – the appropriate metrics**.

In the chart below, there is a sample of metrics used by organizations to track or quantify the impact of their social media marketing programs. Marketers measure traditional metrics like website traffic, search engine rankings and inbound links. But they also use metrics that are more specific to social media and content – like fans, followers and subscribers.

Chart: What organizations monitor or track to quantify the impact of social media marketing

Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Social Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded February 2011, N=3,342

The key is to monitor and track the metrics that will have the most impact on achieving your inbound marketing objectives – search, social and content. With that in mind, consider the following checklist.[6] (We will cover these in more detail in *Chapter 8 – Gather Actionable Insights and Intelligence*.)

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[5] SMART objectives are **s**pecific; **m**easurable; **a**ctionable; **r**ealistic, and **t**ime-bound.
[6] Appendix B: Inbound Marketing Metrics contains a more exhaustive list of suitable metrics for social media, organic search and content marketing programs.

CHECKLIST: INBOUND MARKETING METRICS

SEO Metrics	
Branded vs. unbranded traffic	*The percentage of your organic search traffic that comes from brand-related keywords versus generic, industry-related, unbranded keywords*
Inbound links and referring URLs	*A measure of the number of links back to your site from other sites (domain and pages)*
Keyword performance and rankings	*How well your site and webpages rank in search engine results for your target keywords and key phrases*
Unique search terms driving traffic	*The full list of search phrases that visitors are using to find your site*
Social Media Metrics	
Social reach and growth	*A measure of the total number of people engaging with your brand in social media channels (e.g. Twitter followers, Facebook "likes," LinkedIn group members, blog subscribers, YouTube channel subscribers)*
Social media engagement	*A measure of the total number of interactions generated in social media channels*
Visibility and brand perception	*A measure of the mentions and attitudes toward your brand in social media channels*
Share of voice	*Estimated share of brand mentions for a keyword set compared to that of its select competitors*
Content Metrics	
Content Downloads	An indicator of subject matter interest, engagement and relevancy
Content Sharing	*How often content is being shared is another key indicator of subject matter interest, engagement and relevancy*
Comments	*An indicator of engaging and relevant content.*

Website Metrics	
Unique visitors	*The number of single visitors to a website determined by the number of unique IP addresses that hit the site during a specified time period*
New vs. repeat visitors	*A percentage comparison of first-time visitors against those who visit your site more than once*
Bounce rate	*The percentage of visitors who leave after a single page visit*
Most/least popular pages	*A comparison of the most- and least-viewed pages of your website*
Traffic sources	*The percentage of your total traffic coming from organic search, referrals and social media*
Conversion Metrics	
Conversion rate by channel	*The percentage of visitors by channel that completed a conversion action*
Conversion rate by URL	*The percentage of visitors by URL that completed a desired conversion action*

WORKSHEET: SET GOALS AND SMART OBJECTIVES

Now that you have a sense of how to establish inbound marketing objectives and goals, supported by the appropriate metrics, spend some time working out a few of these for your organization using the template below.

General Goal		
SMART Objective		
Specific	*Is it specific, clear and detailed?*	
Measurable	*How will you measure, using both primary and secondary metrics?*	
Actionable	*What actions will you take?*	
Realistic	*Can you really see this happening based on where you are now? Do you have resources to put into this?*	
Time-bound	*How long will it take to achieve this?*	

Worksheet: Tie objectives to personas

After you have scoped out some detailed objectives, filter these through your personas, paying particular attention to the persona's task objective or problem. (Alternatively, you may prefer to work through this step first.)

Working through the objective in light of your inbound buyer personas often sparks specific actions you need to take and resources you need to assign. More importantly, taking this step acts as a safety measure, guarding you against insufficient consideration and planning.

Persona: Becky Beginner	
Becky's objective	I want to take piano lessons
Her objective framed as a question	Where can I take piano lessons in Boston?
Our objective	Increase traffic by 25% in 6 months
What we need Becky to do	Find us in SERPs Click through to us from a link
Sample search queries she'll use	Piano lessons near Boston Where to take piano lessons in Boston Need piano teacher in Boston
Why she'll do it	Our meta description is clear, compelling and keyword-rich. When she reads this snippet in search results, her underlying question is answered. This compels her to click through on our search listing. Our webpage is optimized (title tag, code components) with the keywords she uses in her search queries. Moreover, we have been adding new content every week via blog posts that address her secondary questions and concerns. Our webpage has been linked by quite a few authoritative domains, which has increased the importance of this page on search engines.
Success metrics	# of unique visitors Keyword performance and ranking Unique search terms driving traffic

Persona:	
Persona's objective	
Persona's objective framed as a question	
Our objective	
What we need the persona to do	
Sample search queries persona will use	
Why persona will do it	
Success metrics	

SUMMARY QUESTIONS

1. What is the top combined challenge for search and social marketing programs?

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2. What are the attributes of SMART objectives?

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____

____

3. What are two benefits of working through your objectives in light of your personas?

____

____

____

MY ACTION STEPS TO INBOUND MARKETING SUCCESS

☐ Evaluate the most frustrating challenges with respect to your organization's inbound marketing effectiveness and reflect on why these challenges exist.

☐ Identify your top inbound marketing goals and translate each of these to SMART objectives.

☐ Work through each objective in light of your personas to identify specific actions you need to take and resources you need to assign.

☐ ____

☐ ____

☐ ____

☐ ____

☐ ____

SECTION TWO: PRACTICE

CHAPTER 4: ATTRACT ATTENTION WITH RELEVANT AND TIMELY SEARCH RESULTS

Were you ever told, “The last thing you want to do is attract attention to yourself.” This is sound advice when you want to fit in; poor advice when you want stand out. And, when it comes to inbound marketing, and specifically the search landscape, it’s all about raising your profile and your rankings.

KEY TEACHINGS IN CHAPTER 4:

- Why tactics need to be evaluated with an eye to popularity, effectiveness and difficulty
- What the key characteristics are for successful SEO campaigns
- How to approach and execute common SEO tactics

A DEFINITION OF SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION

Search engine optimization (SEO) has been around since the mid-1990s. **Although search algorithms have changed and evolved, causing various SEO tactics to rise and fall in favor, one thing has remained constant: the purpose of search engine optimization**.

The purpose of SEO is to help search engines, in response to a search query, find and rank your Web content higher than competing sites. It works as a process and set of techniques for boosting a website’s ranking on Google and other big search engines in natural (i.e., organic or unpaid) search results.

Referring to this basic purpose and definition of SEO is helpful because it reminds us that SEO shows how humans behave (query, scan and click) *and* how search engines behave (crawl, index, process, calculate relevancy and retrieve). Understanding both is important for optimal effectiveness in your SEO endeavors.

BEFORE YOU START, HAVE A STRATEGIC, METHODICAL PROCESS IN PLACE

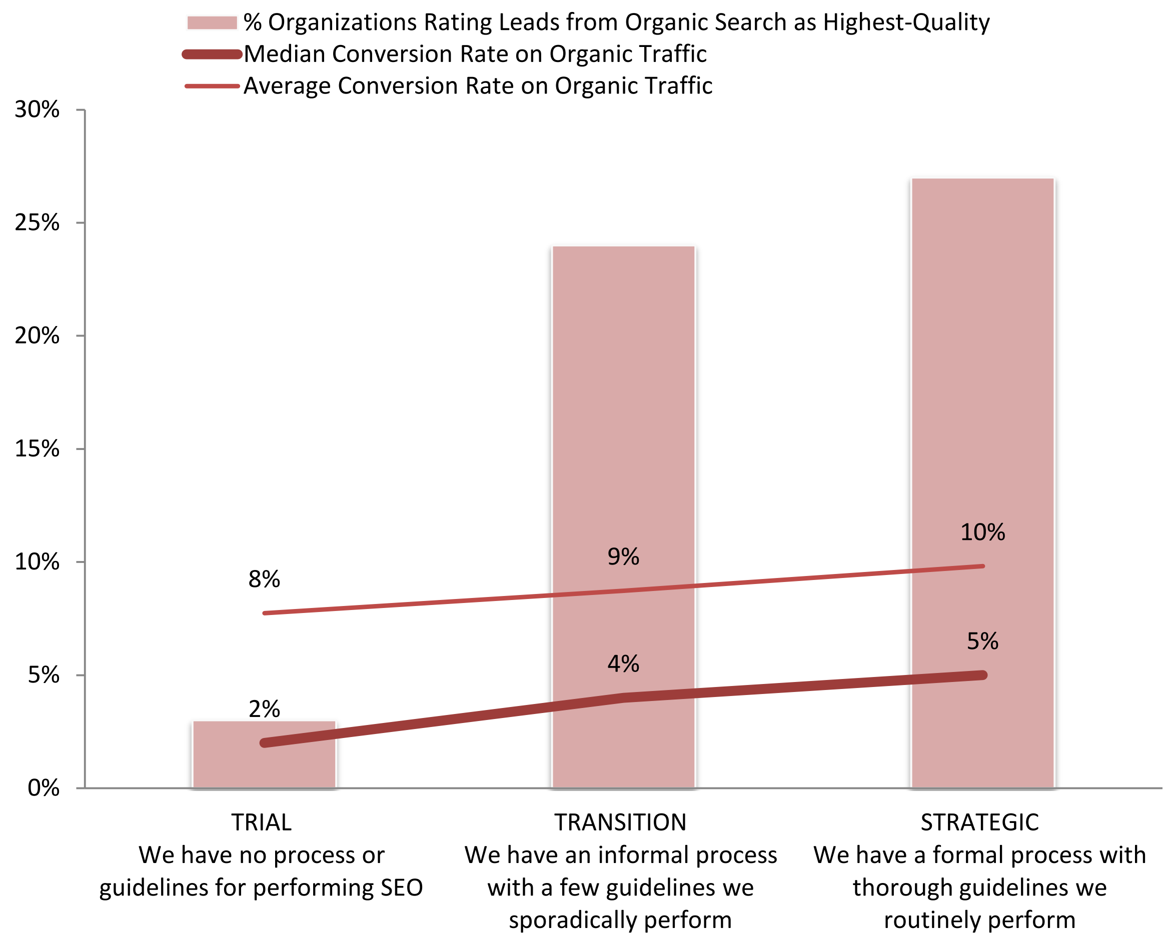
Most organizations intuitively know that following a process will yield better results. But do you actually know how much better? Knowing the answer takes this from a hypothetical mental exercise to a real-life problem. (Or an opportunity, depending on where you land!)

Organizations that routinely follow a formal process and thorough guidelines for their SEO practices and programs reap the biggest benefits in traffic conversion rates and lead quality. When looking at median conversion rates, Strategic organizations tend to convert 150% more Web traffic than Trial organizations, and 25% more traffic than Transition organizations – those with merely informal processes and guidelines.

Not only do the efforts of strategically minded organizations pay off through better traffic conversion rates, but their SEO leads are better, as well. **One of every four organizations with a formal process rated their organic search traffic leads as being of the highest quality, compared to just one of every 33 Trial phase organizations**.

Additionally, organizations in the Trial or Transition phases for SEO performance management each had a percentage of natural search leads deemed “low-quality.” In contrast, organizations in the Strategic phase found all leads from natural search traffic to be either of the highest quality or of mixed quality; none were rated as low-quality.

Chart: Organic traffic lead quality and conversion rates, by SEO maturity phase



Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

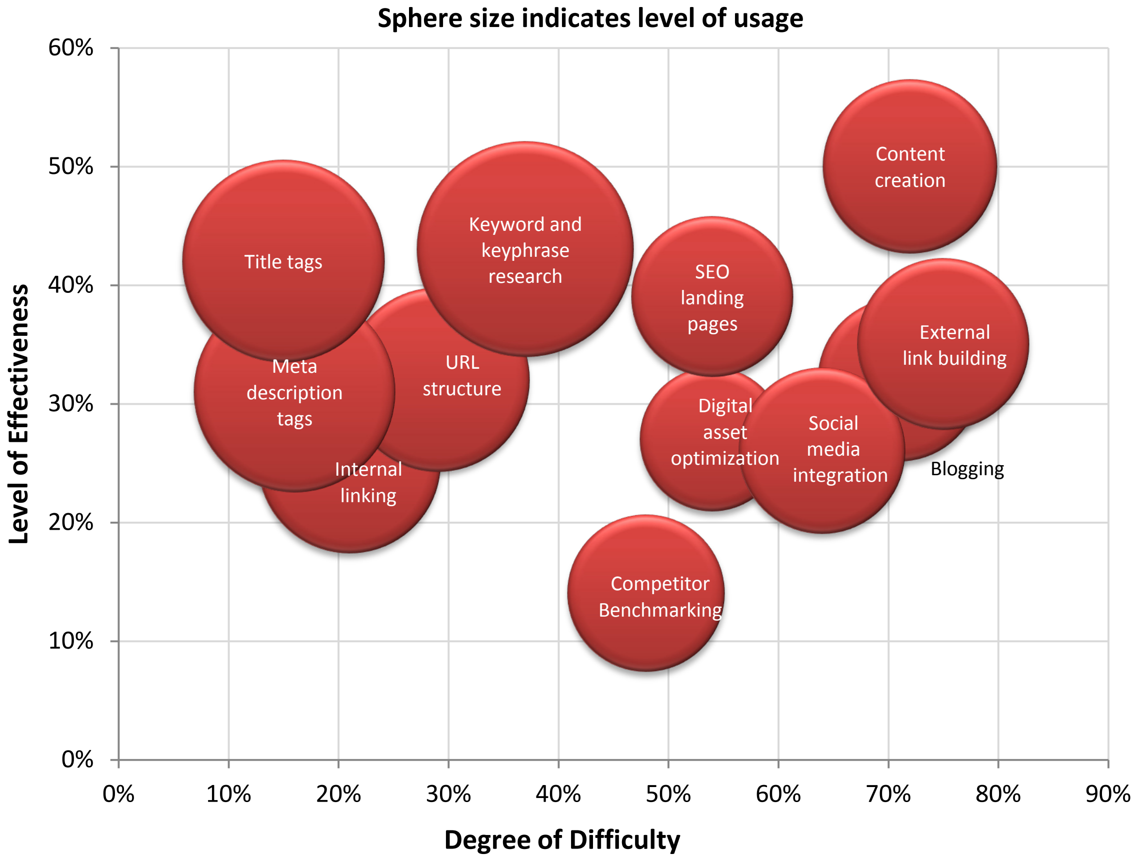
These research findings strongly underscore the importance of developing a process. (For a refresher on how to do this, refer to *Chapter 1: Rethink End-to-End Engagement*.)

SELECTING THE RIGHT SEO TACTICS IS A BALANCING ACT

Organizations need to be mindful when selecting their SEO tactics, identifying those that will best help them achieve their objectives. As we just saw, adopting a process is helpful with this. Laying that groundwork is instrumental in not only figuring out what to do – but in maximizing returns to the fullest.

Selecting the right mix of SEO tactics often is a balancing act – and even trade-off – between popularity, effectiveness and difficulty. Trade-offs are a way of life, and this is where the aforementioned process comes into play. You need something to guide you in making these decisions, something more than just an understanding of which tactics are most popular, effective and difficult.

Chart: Three-dimensional view of SEO tactics (usage, effectiveness, difficulty)



Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

Let's look at why making tactical decisions based on usage, effectiveness or difficulty is not enough.

The most widely used tactics are not necessarily the most effective

As the chart above indicates, the most widely used SEO tactics (indicated by sphere size) are not always the most effective. You could potentially handicap SEO campaigns by ignoring tactics that others also ignore. For this reason, **an SEO tactic's popularity among your marketing peers should not be the sole basis for your decisions**.

Dimensions of difficulty and effectiveness raise practical questions

Considering the dimensions of difficulty and effectiveness raises some important practical questions: do you go for ease or effectiveness?

Let's say you opt for effectiveness. After looking at this research data chart, you know which SEO tactics are perceived as the most fruitful, the most productive. You've got resources – both time and money – to apply to these, so difficulty does not have to be a road block for you.

But what happens if this isn't your situation? Perhaps you're in a smaller organization, and resources are tight. When you look at the data on this chart, what options are open to you? Do you take the easier path, so you're at least making *some* impact? Maybe you work through the tactics on the lower left corner – those that take less time, money and energy – so you can focus on quantity instead of quality? Maybe you even put everything you have into one or two of the most effective tactics?

You can see how these questions can lead you down rabbit holes. To keep you from losing your way before you get started, go back to the first steps of the inbound marketing process, namely:

- Build your inbound buyer personas, identifying your target audience segments, defining their needs, behaviors, interests and turn-offs, and aligning these with the customer engagement cycle.
- Set SMART[7] objectives, tying these to the personas
- Then – *and only then* – select and prioritize tactics based on your buyer personas and objectives

LESS EFFECTIVE TACTICS CAN STILL PLAY A KEY ROLE

Be forewarned – as you look at this chart, do not immediately focus on those tactics that sit high up the effectiveness scale. Just because something is rated as less effective doesn't mean it shouldn't be part of your SEO strategies.

Competitor benchmarking is a good example. This tactic is rated lowest in terms of its effectiveness. Nevertheless, think of what you can gather and gain from competitive research, when done well. **Good competitive research is about determining what makes the competition different and notable**. It goes beyond comparing title tags and the number of backlinks by also looking at product offerings, features and even social visibility.

In short, valuable competitive research helps organizations determine what comprises a competitor rank and why people like them, link to them and share their content. This tactic easily could – and should – fit into an inbound marketer's playbook and search marketing strategy. Again, go back to your process, and let it guide your selection of tactics.

[7] SMART objectives are **s**pecific; **m**easurable; **a**ctionable; **r**ealistic, and **t**ime-bound

Worksheet: What tactics have you executed? How effective? How difficult?

Take an inventory of the SEO tactics you regularly practice. How would you rate their effectiveness in helping you reach your marketing objectives? What about their degree of difficulty? How much time, money and effort are required for each?

After you evaluate your tactics, take a look what is revealed.

- Where have you been most effective? What factors have led to the success?
- Could you apply some of your institutionalized best practices to other tactics?
- Which tactics require the most time, effort and money? Why? Is this getting better over time?
- Are there opportunities to streamline the execution of some of these tactics? Leverage other resources? Establish new processes?

	Do you use this SEO tactic?	**Level of effectiveness**			**Degree of difficulty (time, effort, expense)**		
		Very	Somewhat	Not	Very	Somewhat	Not
Content creation							
Keyword research							
Title tags							
SEO landing pages							
External link building							
Meta description tags							
URL structure							
Digital asset optimization							
Internal linking							
Social media integration							
Competitive research							
Total # of checkmarks							

Define key characteristics of successful SEO campaigns

Successful SEO campaigns have the following areas in common:

- Formal process
- Keyword research
- On- and off-page optimization
- Social media integration

Process-centric

Organizations with a formal process in place for planning, executing and measuring the performance of their SEO campaigns are markedly more successful than those with either an informal or no process.

These "strategic" organizations establish thorough guidelines, which they routinely follow. This systematic approach to SEO returns better results on the time, money and effort invested, as we saw in the first chart of this chapter.

Research-driven

The performance of various targeted keywords can change quickly, and there will always be new trending topics and opportunities on which you can capitalize. By continually conducting keyword research, you can optimize and rank for new trending terms before the competition does the same.

Optimization-oriented

On-page optimization practices offer some of the easiest solutions for improving SEO efforts. This is because you can directly control these on-page optimization factors by modifying your pages, and the content within them.

The most labor-intensive tactic for on-page optimization is new content development, yet many organizations still execute this tactic because of its importance and effectiveness. Search engines need to see an adequate amount of content on your pages in order to determine a page's relevance to various search queries and terms.

Other on-page optimization tactics include optimizing code components of your webpages, such as title tags (i.e. page titles), meta-descriptions, and digital asset optimization, namely the all-inclusive optimization of your online content – from videos and images to regular text and PDFs.

You primarily establish relevance with on-page optimization tactics, but *off-page optimization* plays a role, as well, particularly when considering the other factor considered in ranking algorithms – importance. Importance shows search engines how connected your site is to the rest of the Web. Put another way, it measures how many other sites link – or point –to your site as an authority on a particular subject.

One effective way to increase your site's importance to search engines is to build inbound links to your site. With every link, you garner votes or references for your site.

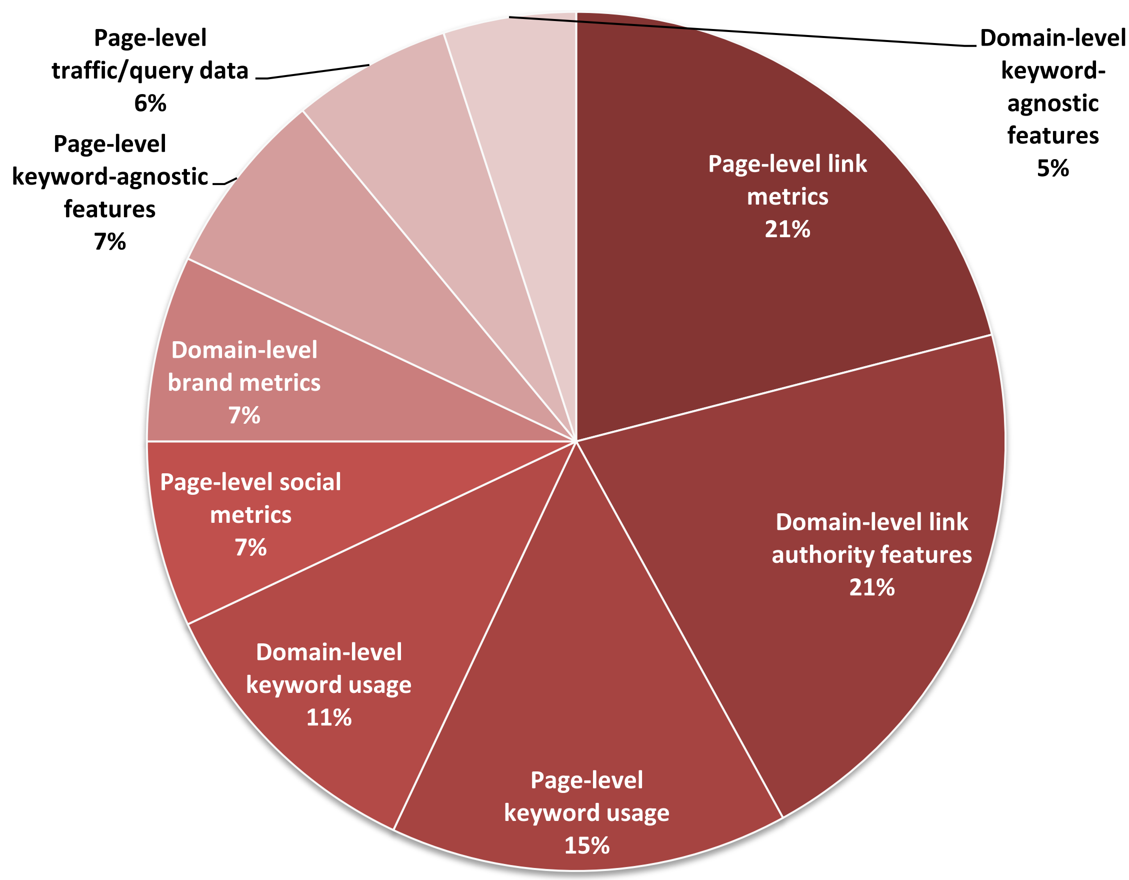
Socially-connected

Social media integration involves syncing your social media profiles and platforms and aligning their functionality with your organization's marketing programs. When it comes to SEO, this means using social media to support search marketing plans – an overt reminder of how inbound marketing joins these disciplines. **Developing content and building links are two of the most difficult and important tactics in SEO**. By integrating social media into your plan, you facilitate both of these tactics. Consider blogs, for example, which act as keyword-rich content generators and "link bait."

Main search engine ranking factors

Discerning the primary driver(s) of your SEO rankings is not always easy. But there are areas that stand out. Certain factors weigh in more heavily than others, so you should look at these first when you're trying to figure out why your rankings are lower than desired. Understanding these factors can also guide your tactical decisions.

Chart: Search engine ranking factors



Source: SEOMoz | 2011 Search Engine Ranking Factors

Ranking factor definitions[8]	
Page-level link metrics	*Link metrics, such as the number of inbound links, associated with the individual ranking page.*
Domain-level link authority features	*Link metrics associated with the root domain hosting the page, not just the page.*
Page-level keyword usage	*How well keywords are incorporated into particular parts of your page's HTML code, such as title tag, heading tags, and alt attributes.*
Domain-level keyword usage	*How keywords are used in the root or subdomain name.*
Page-level social metrics	*Third-party metrics from social media sources for the ranking page.*
Domain-level brand metrics	*Elements of the root domain indicating branding qualities and brand metrics*
Page-level keyword-agnostic features	*Non-keyword usage elements and non-link metrics of individual pages, such as page length and load speed.*
Domain-level keyword-agnostic features	*Features relating to the entire root domain that don't directly describe link or keyword-based elements, such as domain name length, number of error pages on site, and relative uniqueness of content.*
Page-level traffic/query data	*Elements describing user and usage data about the ranking page.*

What SEO tactics should you select?

At its best, SEO is about creating content and information that users would want to find and helping search engines deliver great search results. As you select your SEO tactics, keep that point in mind – while also identifying the tactics that will best help you deliver against your stated objectives.

This selection process is easier when you understand how these work and the benefits they deliver, so we're going to walk through each of these in turn:

- Keyword research
- Content creation
- Title tags
- SEO landing pages
- External links
- Social media integration

[8] Source: SEOMoz | 2011 Search Engine Ranking Factors

- Meta description tags
- URL structure
- Competitor benchmarking
- Internal linking

KEYWORD RESEARCH

Keywords act as the primary driver in generating targeted Web traffic through search engine optimization. SEO will not work if you do not use keywords in page titles, meta-descriptions, ALT text, and content. When individuals search online, they rely on keywords. Keywords convey intent. **When you know the intent behind searches, it becomes more possible – albeit not necessarily easier – to meet expectations**.

When properly done, keyword research delivers results, and creates a competitive advantage, explaining popular levels of usage. In fact, keyword research is the most commonly used tactic by search marketers, and also makes the list of the top three most effective tactics (with content creation claiming the top spot).

THE EQUALIZING FORCES OF RELEVANCE, VOLUME AND DIFFICULTY

Keyword research should take three dimensions into account: relevance, volume and difficulty.

First, consider the relevance of keywords to both your organization, and to your prospects and customers. In other words, what are they actually typing into the search box? **Those first words, well before those search queries are ever modified, will help you understand how to better address their information needs**.

Second, look at search volumes for your keywords. Achieving a top spot in the SERPs will not push traffic to your Web site if no one is searching on that keyword.

Finally, consider difficulty. Determine how difficult it will be to rank for a keyword based on the level of competition for that keyword, alongside your own site's authority.[9]

As you go through this process, you'll likely develop different words for different groups – your unique buyer personas. Knowing what interests your customers, and how those behaviors manifest as search keywords, will direct your keyword research.

ACTIONS TO TAKE IN YOUR KEYWORD RESEARCH

- **Analyze** keyword data from search engines, as well as search behavior on your own site.
- **Look** for opportunities, such as a high number of searches for relevant content that you do not currently provide.
- **Identify** topics, using this information, on which you could provide more information to attract and satisfy more visitors.
- **Pick and choose** which categories to go after, especially when your keyword research is at a large scale.

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[9] Authority: The ability of a page or domain to rank well in search engines. Five large factors associated with site and page authority are link equity, site age, traffic trends, site history, and publishing unique original quality content. Search engines constantly tweak their algorithms to try to balance relevancy algorithms based on topical authority and overall authority across the entire web. Sites may be considered topical authorities or general authorities. For example, Wikipedia and DMOZ are considered broad general authority sites. Other sites are topical authorities on a subject, but not a broad general authority. (Source: seobook.com/glossary)

- **Create** content focusing on the keywords.
- **Add** this content to your site's blog, product/service pages, and other areas.
- **Stay abreast** of the latest trends, consumer interests, and products in the news to anticipate hot topics and build content around them.

Use PPC to test elements

Nothing is worse than spending time doing search engine optimization only to see that you've poorly optimized. This is where PPC can help. You can use PPC to run tests on keywords, page copy, headlines and more, and then integrate the findings into your search engine optimization efforts. It is much quicker to run A/B tests for these types of elements than to wait for SEO results.

Keyword tiers and the customer engagement cycle

As you compile your keyword research, think about the various stages of the customer engagement cycle and how keywords change accordingly.

Keyword Tier	**Keywords and key phrases**	**Phase of Customer Engagement Cycle**
1st-tier keywords	TV	*Category awareness*
2nd tier keywords	Samsung TV Samsung LED TV	*Brand awareness*
3rd-tier keywords	Samsung LED TV review Samsung LED TV 46 inch	*Brand consideration*
	Samsung LED TV model comparison	*Brand inquiry*
	Samsung LED TV 46 inch deals online	*Purchase intent*
	Samsung LED TV screen repair Samsung LED TV manual Samsung LED TV warranty	*Retention*

Tactics in Action: How to lift long-tail search traffic

Article ID: HOW31613
Location: MarketingSherpa library

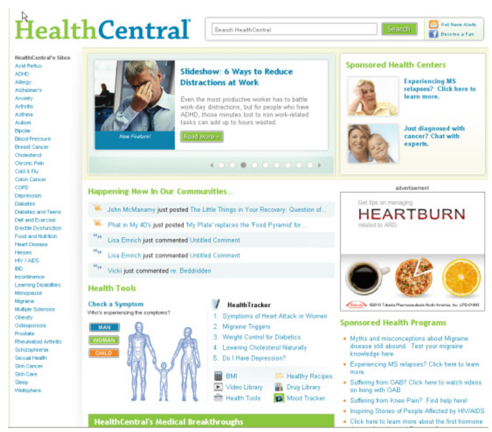
Long-tail search phrases[10] can reveal a lot about what your visitors want – and creating content to fill those needs can get more visitors to your site. See how the team at a personal health website finds and tests topics to capture more natural long-tail search traffic.

Introduction

Ted Smith, EVP, Audience Knowledge, HealthCentral, and his team strive to convey health information to consumers in their natural language. Not only is this natural-language approach better for visitors who come looking for information around specific health conditions – it's better for their search marketing efforts.

The majority of HealthCentral's site traffic comes from natural search, thanks to the team's strategy for identifying long-tail search opportunities and turning them into greater site traffic.

For example, the team focused on developing long-tail opportunities around "chronic pain." While maintaining their placements for primary terms such as "pain medication," they also targeted long-tail, multi-word searches such as "neck, head and shoulder pain from fibromyalgia."



One quarter later, natural search traffic to their chronic pain pages surged 40%. "We saw a monster spike in the number of different pages receiving traffic, and the number of different search strings that land someone on our site," Smith says.

So, how do they do it? Here are six tactics Smith's team uses to identify and measure long-tail search opportunities, and then make sure they're delivering the right information.

Tactic #1. Create strong content in your visitors' language

Satisfying their site's visitors is the team's primary concern, Smith says – not capturing the traffic from search engines. "Our strategy as a company is not to get found by search engines. Our strategy is to help people [who are] managing and living with disease."

The team hosts professional content on conditions and treatments, but their main focus is on personal information from people Smith calls "advocates" who discuss how conditions impact their lives. "They don't speak in clinical language. They speak in natural, human language about their journeys and the kinds of issues and coping strategies," Smith says. "The more conversational, natural language that is in the environment that's supporting consumers, the more likely that you're going to be indexed and found in long-tail searches."

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[10] Long-tail keywords are longer (at least 2 or 3 words) and more descriptive than head terms. For example, "headache" is a head term, while "tension headache relief" is a long tail keyword.

Tactic #2. Analyze referring phrases by number of words

Using their website analytics, the team watches the search phrases that bring visitors to their site. They often use a distribution graph showing the traffic volume of search phrases by the number of words in the phrases. The team looks to the center of this distribution graph – between the head and the long-tail – to find opportunities. They read the phrases to get a better sense of what consumers want, such as:

- Information on a condition's side effects
- Effective management
- Means of support

"There are a lot of dimensions to what you can see, especially when you're given four-plus-word phrases," Smith says.

Looking at the queries and inferring consumers' needs helps the team understand:

- How their site meets these needs
- Which areas could be improved
- Which areas they're missing entirely

For example, they noticed they were receiving more traffic to the Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) portion of their website from phrases such as:

- "child acting up in class"
- "trouble in school"

"That isn't necessarily an explicit mention of a diagnosis, and it's not an explicit mention of some sort of therapy," Smith says. "What we learned is we're not at all visible with those kinds of searches."

Tactic #3. Evaluate the traffic potential of topics

Once the team identifies an area for potential long-tail traffic, they research whether building content around the topic is worth the effort. First, they use a proprietary tool to generate words that have similar meanings to those they've identified. (There are many free and paid tools you can use to do keyword research.) In the ADHD example, they entered "acting up" and found words such as "misbehavior."

These tools will also report the potential search volume keywords. Some tools only provide relative data, so here are some steps to get a better idea of what the numbers might mean for your site:

1. Identify a set of keywords for which your site is well-optimized
2. Use the tool to estimate the search volume of those keywords
3. Create a ratio between the actual traffic you received from the words, and the tool's reported search volume. This ratio will help you gauge how closely the tool's estimates match your actual site volume.
4. Use the tool to estimate the search volume of your potential keyword list
5. Use the ratio you created to estimate traffic to your site

This rough traffic estimate will help you decide whether a topic is worth pursuing.

Smith's team also reaches out to their advertising agency partners and clients in the pharmaceutical industry. These clients are generally experts with deep knowledge of specific health conditions, so when the team is considering a new topic they'll often ask the companies:

- How does your team see these conditions?
- Are the concerns we've identified common for these conditions?
- What are typical scenarios in which people with this condition find themselves?

Tactic #4. Create content that targets the topic, not its keywords

Once the team decides a topic is worth pursuing, they do not focus on keywords and developing content to target them. That's too much like "gaming" the search engines, Smith says, and it's not a viable long-term strategy. Instead, they set out to add more general content on the topic.

Rather than trying to generate all the content themselves, the team looks for people already generating topical content in natural, non-clinical language. They search in relevant blogs, and tap their network of more than 3,000 bloggers at Wellsphere, an online health community that HealthCentral acquired. They then ask writers to contribute content to their site, sometimes regularly, and to simply write about the topic for which they've shown interest. The team hosts the content on a page that's designed to be indexed by search engines.

The team does not steer the content too specifically, and they do not provide bloggers with keyword lists. They strive to broadly cover a topic and avoid focusing on keywords or phrases, Smith says. This ensures that the team will fully cover the topic, helping them to take advantage of the areas they've identified in their research, as well as other scenarios and sub-topics they might not have identified. These additional areas are especially valuable for capturing long-tail search traffic.

Tactic #5. Gauge visitor satisfaction

Satisfying visitors is more important than increasing website traffic. That's why the team focuses on adding rich, relevant content on newly identified topics, and not simply repurposing content they already have and optimizing it for certain keywords. Then, the team gauges their audience's response to new content in two ways:

<u>Bounce rates</u>. Measuring the percentage of visitors who land on new content through natural search and immediately leave the page, or who do not click to view additional pages, can help you judge its effectiveness. Smith's team often uses their site's three-month bounce rate average as a benchmark. A webpage with a bounce rate of 10% or greater than the benchmark is reviewed.

<u>Satisfaction surveys</u>. The team also samples their audience and runs onsite surveys to ask visitors whether their needs have been met.

Tactic #6. Gain more value from search term data

Smith considers long-tail research a form of audience measurement and analysis – not just a way to identify new phrases to target. The data offers new insights about the type of information visitors want.

The team also uses this search data when discussing their audience with potential advertising partners (the team's revenue model is advertising-based). For example, looking at traffic referrals from multiple-word search queries can demonstrate visits from patients who have been through multiple levels of therapy for a particular condition. Sharing this data is a good way to attract advertisers who wish to target such an audience.

CONTENT CREATION

Content creation stands apart from the cluster of SEO tactics, due to its difficulty and effectiveness. Good content, for the purposes of search, is relevant, timely and compelling. **Marketers who commit to the effort required to create quality content can improve their SEO positions**. This top-rated effectiveness comes at a cost; namely the degree of time, effort and expense called for.

We have devoted Chapter 6 to content, specifically how to create and share engaging content. For now we will look at tips for writing SEO-friendly content.

WRITE FOR PEOPLE, NOT SEARCH ENGINES

Content creation for SEO works best when you start with an understanding of your target audience, and its behaviors and preferences for information discovery, retrieval, consumption and sharing. Make it easy for people to find, consume and share your content by identifying with their needs, and then addressing those in your topics and keywords.

Remember to write for humans, not machines. When you write for your readers, they will appreciate it by sharing it, which will naturally boost your rankings.

USE CUSTOMER VERNACULAR

The words organizations use to refer to their products and services may differ from what their target audiences use. As an example, consider cell phones. Cell phones are also called wireless phones and mobile phones; nevertheless, when it comes to search volumes, the dominant keyword choice is still "cell phone," as indicated in these keyword tool results:

Search terms (3)

Keyword	Competition	Global Monthly Searches
wireless phone plans	High	135,000
cell phone plans	High	550,000
mobile phone plans	High	165,000

The impact of customer language on search volumes is even greater after adding the qualifier "best."

Search terms (3)

Keyword	Competition	Global Monthly Searches
best wireless phone plans	High	9,900
best cell phone plans	High	90,500
best mobile phone plans	High	22,200

DEVELOP AN EDITORIAL PLAN

"Content marketing optimization" is a term that describes the marriage of content strategy and SEO expertise, as in the knowledge of how search engines crawl and index websites.

SEO, in light of a content strategy, involves more than just the optimization of webpages with keywords. In fact, **a page that is "too optimized" can become one that is awkward to read**. Avoid taking such a heavy-handed approach by developing an editorial plan that outlines content types, topics and the keywords for which you're optimizing.

Try these steps:

1. Gauge the content demand by keyword area
2. Examine social conversations to define the context of the content demand
3. Outline content topics and keywords for which you're optimizing
4. Create content themes by month
5. Inventory your existing content
6. Compare existing content sources against required content
7. Evaluate the quality of existing content
8. Develop a gap-closure plan
9. Create new or edit existing content
10. Measure the impact on rankings and search traffic

Write relevant and compelling content

Relevance speaks to the likelihood that a given webpage will be interesting or useful to a search engine user for a keyword search. **Relevant content, in the eyes of the user or consumer, is content that answers questions, deepens understanding, and expands knowledge**.

Compelling content goes beyond this. It's content that one "just feels compelled to share!" This type of content is relevant not just to the user at hand, but also to those in the user's social network.

Focus on both quality and quantity

Conventional wisdom dictates that quality trumps quantity. While this may hold true in other spheres of life, in SEO you need both. **Consistently publishing content that is both frequent and of high quality can lead search engines to rank your page and site as an authority on the subject**.

Search engines need fresh content and require regular updates. Depending on the size of your site, adding new content daily should suffice, though the actual frequency of your updates depends on your site's purpose. Whatever your case may be, establish a pattern for content updates to set expectations and reward regular visitors. Although there are no hard and fast rules about article length, aim for a minimum of at least 300 words. Doing less puts you at risk of looking like you're only after title and heading tags.

Length also signals quality, at least on one level. The quality of the content on your page is one of the most important factors in SEO. **Quality writing means content that is not only optimized for keywords but also well-researched, well-written, and well-received**.

Many marketers place too much focus on keyword density, while disregarding the quality of the writing. Search engines may rely on keywords to identify your website content, but **quality articles also make your site more trustworthy and authoritative**, other factors for attracting more traffic to your page. Search engines have become more capable of recognizing valuable, quality content over content that is hastily produced. Don't try to outsmart the system.

STRUCTURE CONTENT APPROPRIATELY

Striking the right balance between SEO effectiveness and readability can be tricky. But with the right layout, you can make your content both search engine- and reader-friendly.

Keyword placement

- Create an attention-grabbing title, using the keyword in the title.
- Use sub-headings (H2 and H3 tags) that include relevant keywords.
- Position your keywords towards the top of your article, as in the first line or paragraph of your content.
- Introduce synonyms for your keyword phrase in the second or third paragraphs.
- Repeat your keyword phrase throughout the text. (But, in the spirit of natural writing, don't force this.)
- Use the keyword in links and the image ALT text and captions.

Consider the following layout[11]:

Readability

- Break up blocks of text into subcategories.
- Restrict paragraphs to five lines.
- Use bullets, numbering and lists.
- Use short sentences.
- Leave plenty of negative (white) space.
- Make your links part of your copy, especially if links feature your keyword phrases.
- Use (and tag) images effectively.

[11] Source: SEOMoz – The Beginners Guide to SEO

Case Study - Leads Tripled, Conversions Doubled with Revamped Web Content

Case Study ID: CS31765
Location: MarketingSherpa Member Library

Summary

See how a subscription-based software company revamped itself as a premier Web destination by using SEO tactics and online registration forms. The team tripled leads through a free trial program and saw traffic jump 200%.

Challenge

Arthur Gehring, Director, Marketing, Makana Solutions, faced two hurdles in marketing his company's subscription-based software that helps organizations perform sales compensation planning. First, their online service was a new category for most prospects, which set sales compensation goals and plan for those expenses using manual processes. Second, their target market was organizations with 50 or fewer sales reps.

Reaching these smaller businesses with traditional outbound marketing, such as email and advertising, was difficult and expensive. Instead, Gehring wanted a strategy that helped frustrated sales executives find Makana on the Internet. But since few prospects knew the software-as-a-service solution was available, they weren't actively looking for it.

"What they're out looking for is best practice information and advice about what to do with sales compensation planning," says Gehring.

Gehring and his team needed a strategy that would attract those Web users looking for sales compensation planning information and enter them into a marketing funnel that pushed them this way: Capture their contact information for qualification; move them into a free software trial for eventual conversion to a paying subscription.

Campaign steps

Gehring's team revamped their website as an online destination for sales compensation planning best practices and practical advice. They created content, such as sample plans and webinars, and used SEO tactics to make sure those resources would be found by prospects searching for advice online.

By capturing leads through online registration forms and using targeted email follow-ups, they moved those prospects into free trials that could be monitored by the sales team for possible subscription conversion.

Here are the seven steps they used to create and manage the strategy:

Step #1. Create content for planning best practices

To attract traffic, the team created content that helped prospects answer questions about their sales compensation planning challenges. They created several resources that offered valuable information that wasn't directly promoting the company's software.

"When we offer best practice content, it's not a veil to give them a product demonstration," says Gehring. "We offer real content."

Resources included:

- Survey results from a third-party research firm outlining common industry practices in sales compensation plan design and implementation.

- A sales compensation planning glossary.

- Sample sales compensation plan.

This document provided an example of a well-organized plan that clearly laid out goals for a sales team and demonstrated how they would be compensated.

- Educational webinars.

These online presentations offered general tips and best practices for sales compensation planning, such as "Common Pitfalls in Sales Compensation Planning." Other programs focused on particular industry verticals with unique sales compensation planning challenges, such as software companies moving from a packaged sale to a software-as-a-service model.

The team recruited expert speakers for its webinars, such as consultants whose services might be too expensive for their typical small-business prospect.

Step #2. Optimize website around high-value search terms

With the content in place, Gehring and his team optimized their website pages around key terms that prospects would be using to search for sales compensation planning advice.

Using keyword research, they identified broad, general terms, such as:

- Sales compensation planning
- Sales comp planning
- Commission sales agreement

They identified longer-tail key terms that reflected more targeted searches or specific industry verticals, such as:

- Sample sales compensation plan
- Sales compensation planning SAAS
- Auto dealer sales compensation planning

With a list of 600 keywords identified, they began optimizing specific pages of their site around two or three relevant terms per page.

The homepage was optimized for broad terms, such as "sales compensation planning." Internal pages, such as the "Best Practices" resource page, were optimized around more specific terms, such as "Sample sales compensation plan," or terms related to the particular industry targeted in a webinar.

Working through their content management tool, which also provided keyword analysis features, Gehring optimized those pages by using key terms in:

- File names

- Page descriptions
- Keyword metatags
- Page text

Any time the team created a new page, they first analyzed their existing keyword list to find terms for which the site wasn't already highly ranked. They could then optimize that page around gaps in their search rankings.

Step #3. Boost inbound links to improve search rankings

While optimizing their own site pages, the team looked for opportunities to add inbound links from highly ranked external sites. These additional links would, in turn, boost their own site's relevance for search engines.

First, they used their marketing optimization and content management platform to analyze inbound links to major competitors' websites.

After identifying links to competitors' sites with a high page rank in Google, they sought out sites from which they could also get a link for their own website. Sites they targeted included:

- Online directories
- Information sites about sales compensation planning or sales business best practices
- News sites to target for their press release distribution list

Step #4. Paid search advertising to supplement SEO efforts

SEO tactics often take time to make an impact on search rankings. So, the team employed pay-per-click advertising to drive traffic around specific events or campaigns.

For example, they used paid search advertising to promote their monthly webinars. Ads pointed visitors to the appropriate registration page for the event.

Step #5. Follow up on Web leads

Visitors who landed on the company's website had to fill out a registration form to receive a piece of educational material, such as a sample sales compensation plan. The online registration form included the following fields:

- First and last name
- Job title
- Company name
- Corporate email
- Phone number
- Number of sales people on a compensation plan
- Top compensation plan issue, such as "Alignment of plans with corporate strategy," or "Lack of modeling functionality"
- Blank field to provide additional information
- A "how did you find us?" list of options, such as "Internet search"

Visitors who filled out a registration form were considered a lead – which the team could then target for additional marketing to move them into a free software trial.

All visitors who filled out a registration form received an automatic email that thanked them for their interest in the company's best practices materials and outlined the ways Makana's software can help them with their planning process. Those emails included a link to start a free trial of the software.

Registrants could also be included in outbound promotions for future marketing collateral, such as invitations to webinars.

Step #6. Add lead information to CRM system for sales calls

Prospects that filled out registration forms or signed up for free trials were automatically added to the company's CRM system. From there, sales people examined leads to find the best prospects for follow-up calls.

For example, prospects that started a free trial would be monitored by a member of the sales team. Follow-up included phone calls to free-trial members to encourage them to make use of the system. If a prospect wasn't using their free trial very often, a sales rep could call to ask how they liked the software, and if they had taken advantage of any of the free, online training tools to help members get acquainted with the system.

The sales team monitored free trials and began calling prospects at the end of the 14-day trial period to ask if they were ready to upgrade to a paid subscription or needed any questions answered.

Because it was sometimes difficult to get trial members on the phone immediately, the team did not shut off free trials immediately. Instead, they kept the trial account live until a sales representative had made contact with the prospect to discuss an upgrade to a paid subscription.

Step #7. Continually monitor keyword and outbound campaign results

Gehring monitored campaign results weekly so the team could determine which keywords, inbound links or outbound marketing efforts were delivering the most traffic, leads, or free-trial starts. Their goal was to highlight the best performing tactics so they could repeat them.

"Repeatability is the key," says Gehring. "As a young company, we have to keep growing our traffic and leads."

Results

Gehring's team has succeeded in becoming a top destination for advice about sales compensation planning, and leads and conversions have jumped along with the traffic. Three months after adopting the strategy:

- Website traffic increased 200%
- Lead generation rate tripled
- Lead conversion rate doubled

"I'm really pleased," says Gehring. "And the thing to keep in mind is, we're a small team. I don't spend every day on this stuff."

SEO efforts have been a major reason for the boost, and have helped the team dial back on expensive paid search efforts. Paid search has dropped to 30% of traffic from 75%.

The company's website ranks on the first page of Google search results for key industry search terms, such as:

- Sales compensation plan

- Sales comp plan
- Sample commission plan

What’s more, the team’s outbound marketing is now more efficient because they’re working off a qualified list of prospects.

For example, a webinar invitation sent in June to a list of visitors who had registered for company information achieved:

- 14% open rate
- 4% clickthrough rate

“We’re very happy with our success, but I’ll be honest and say we haven’t even touched the potential.” Gehring says. “The potential is tremendous to be even more successful with the realm of content we can develop for various verticals. The possibilities just go on and on.”

TITLE TAGS

The title is one of the most important aspects of optimizing a page for search. It is imperative to create unique page titles. Do not use the same title for every page of a site.

Second, be descriptive. **Use your page titles to convey the most important ideas of the pages**. One option for doing that is to write literal titles that align with search queries. Alternatively, you may find it's more beneficial to create titles that are more compelling than literally descriptive. These types of titles, often associated with human emotions or controversy, encourage linking and thereby help ideas spread faster and wider. The end result is that your pages and site will still rank for many relevant queries even though you're not using keywords in the title tags.

A descriptive page title also lends itself to descriptive anchor text. Many people use a page title as the link anchor text. **By providing a good description, you compel people to click through**.

Finally, limit the length. Typically, page titles should be kept to 10 words or less, with some of the most important keywords occurring near the beginning of the page title.

SEO LANDING PAGES

Landing page optimization and search engine optimization are two completely different entities. While optimizing to convince a human to take an action – such as buy, or fill out a lead form – can clearly increase your conversions, it may have an adverse effect on your SERP ranking. To address this problem, keep three principles in mind.

First, the primary objective of any SEO campaign is to maximize profit. Remember that profit is your goal, not traffic or rankings. **Don't boast of high search engine rankings if you have a poorly functioning landing page and a poor conversion rate**.

Secondly, in order to maximize profit on an SEO landing page, optimize for conversion while minimizing the risk of damaging your organic ranking.

Finally, to minimize the risk of damaging your organic ranking on a particular page, follow three basic steps:

1. Know the basics. Understand how search engines rank pages so you can discern the primary drivers of your SEO rankings.

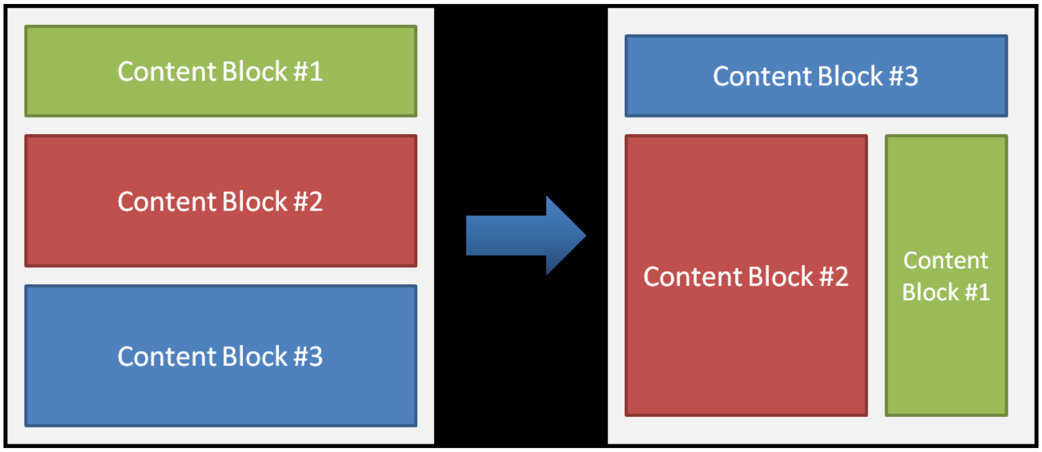
2. Assess the risk. What key elements drive the SEO rankings? And what's the potential gain from optimizing for conversions?

3. Minimize the impact. You can do this in one of three ways.

    - *Segmentation*, the process of directing non-organic traffic channels to dedicated landing pages.

    - *Extension*, a process of using an SEO landing page as a continuation of the channel. In other words, the purpose of the highly optimized SEO landing page is to get a high search ranking. You then use the links within that page to drive people to a page that is not as focused on SEO, and is designed solely to convert.

    - *Emphasis*, the process of emphasizing or de-emphasizing content on a page in an effort to minimize SEO-related content changes while still maximizing for conversion. For example:



External link building

Links are a powerful influence on the Web. Linking to the right sites can channel a wealth of high-quality traffic in your direction, ensuring first-page search results for your site. A link from an authoritative site lends you credibility. A link from a popular site sends you traffic. Both can boost your search results.

Without these links your site might live in obscurity. For this reason, links are too valuable to ignore. But, as with most search engine optimization efforts, **link-building is not a quick win, but rather an ongoing process that pays off with time**.

Additionally, not every link-building tactic is safe, and some could earn you a dismal search ranking. You need to know which steps to avoid, and which steps to take to garner more powerful links.[12]

Have great content

People need a reason to link to you – and it should be great content, which can come in many forms:

- Editorial
- Research
- Multimedia – videos, podcasts, music, etc.
- Infographics
- Software
- Any valuable resource, like tools or calculators

Within these forms of content, you have "link bait," or content designed to attract links. This is content that is intended to encourage sharing. **Any relevant and valuable resource, like research or a tool, could be considered link bait**. Other examples include:

- Contests
- Humor – video, image, audio or text
- Controversial opinions
- Breaking news

[12] Source material: MarketingSherpa Special Report – Missing Links? 7 Traffic Building Tips to Boost SEO

- Free items or services

Research your market

Valuable links come from relevant sources – the websites in your market.

- Compile a list of websites from which you want a link.
- Peruse the sites and see how, why and where they link.
- Target pages on those sites that have relevant content and not too many competing links.

Many of these sites may be linking to your competition. Once you've compiled a list of websites, dig through the list to find sites that might link back to you. **Ask yourself how your competitor obtained the high-value links, and build a strategy to do the same**.

Here are a number of free and paid tools[13] used to uncover details of websites that link to competitors:

- Open Site Explorer
- Linkdiagnosis.com
- Backlink Watch
- SEOattack
- SEOquake browser extension
- Web SEO Analytics
- Searchmetrics
- SEOBook toolbar and their SEO for Firefox browser plugin
- Link Research Tools
- AdGooroo
- Linkdex
- Majestic SEO
- Ahrefs Site Explorer
- Who Links to Me (wholinkstome.com)
- SEOMoz's worksheet at bit.ly/serpanalysis

Select good targets

Target websites that provide valuable links. A website's link value is determined by:

- Content on the page
- Topic of the site
- Number of outbound and inbound links
- Amount of advertising
- Reputation with search engines
- Website age

Strive for links from respected, well-established websites that feature relevant topics. The best have few outbound links, no advertising and a significant amount of content. Below are some universally good targets:

[13] Note: these are not recommendations, merely examples.

Directories

Website directories compile and organize high-value links to sites throughout the Web. But, note that not every directory is trustworthy. Some directories are prone to spam, or have been created solely for SEO purposes, which results in search engines applying less value to them. To tell if a directory is trustworthy, check for rigorous editorial standards, and submissions reviewed by humans.

Partners

Typically, your partners will link to your site. If partners do not share your level of SEO expertise, send them a short document with some guidelines. Make some suggestions for the best types of pages from which to link, what content should be on the page, and where the link should target. **Be careful to not be overly specific or demanding, and be aware that having too many identical links can bring severe search engine penalties**.

Clients, industry friends and contacts

Almost anyone with a credible website and relevant content can provide a good link. Consider asking for a link from numerous sources, such as from webpages that mention your site, the website of a conference at which you're speaking, or journalists interviewing your company.

Typically, inbound links do not come from one specific source, but many. Blogs, industry trade group postings, articles about you, your own releases that are picked up by newswires, and more are all potential link sources.

Social media sites

Not all links are created equal, and nowhere is this more apparent than on social media sites. To maintain the credibility of "votes," many social media sites use a "nofollow" tag that tells search engine spiders to not count some links. Though a social media site might use a "nofollow" tag, distributing your links on that site isn't an effort in futility when it comes to your linkbuilding. As your link gets shared across the social sphere, your link and content will come in front of more website administrators. **If your content is truly interesting, relevant and valuable, the likelihood for generating new inbound links that count in your favor increases**.

University, nonprofit and government websites

These non-commerce sites usually have deep content and no advertising. Their links provide good value, but getting linked to one can be difficult – especially government sites. You must be a valuable resource for their audiences.

Blogs

Linking is ingrained in the blogosphere, as almost every blog post links to another website. High-profile blogs provide the highest value links, but their authors are often inundated with requests, making it difficult to break through.

Most high-profile bloggers will scoff at a direct link request. **It's better to approach them casually with personal email (no templates) and forward a great piece of content you think would *interest their audience***. Relevancy and honesty are keys to reaching bloggers, and participating in the blog's forums will also build rapport.

Search engines tend to quickly pick up blog links. If you need a quicker-than-usual boost in ranking, linking from blogs can be very useful.

Obtain well-built links

Links are more valuable when they're well-made. Make sure you're getting links that help your search rankings.

Write good anchor text

The words used in your links' anchor text (the text users click) will affect your search rankings. **The more links you have with the anchor text, the more likely you will have good search results**. As such, you want your target search keywords prominently featured in your link's anchor text.

Getting desired anchor text is not always easy. You often don't have control, and a webmaster or blogger will often use your company's name. Where appropriate, use target keywords in your company's title and domain name to help build better links.

Vary your anchor text

Do not ask every person linking to your site to use the same anchor text. **Search engines penalize sites that have too many inbound links featuring the same text, as it skews their results.** The argument is that "naturally" created links would have more variance.

Link to deeper pages

Getting links to your homepage is important, but there is more real estate on your website. Have websites link to deeper content to help boost those pages' rankings. It can be more beneficial for people to go to a product page, particularly if that's what they're searching for.

Have a wide age range

Have a mix of old, fresh and new links. **Search engines are likely to give better rankings to pages that attract links over time, rather than only recently or well in the past**. This is another reason why link building needs to be an ongoing practice.

Write numerous press releases

Press releases describe your business and are relevant content. Always include links to your site in releases. Any coverage generated by a press release opens link opportunities. And the releases themselves, when disseminated through wire services, become webpages that link to your site.

The better your releases are written, the more coverage and Web traffic they'll attract. Consider providing your content writers special training on writing optimized press releases to capture the attention of journalists and search engines.

Organize and develop a strategy

After conducting some research and making a list of targets, create a spreadsheet to track:

- Whom you've contacted and how you contacted them
- Which sources provided a link and which did not
- Placement, target and anchor text of granted links
- Links providing the most traffic and SEO benefits

Monitoring your efforts will help refine your contact strategy. You'll quickly realize how best to contact a nonprofit as opposed to a blogger. You'll notice which sources are easy to work with, and which are difficult. You'll know which links provide the most value and whom to later target.

Integrating online tactics is also important to keep in mind. Link building is not a marketing tactic unto itself. It ties into:

- Keyword research – using keywords in your anchor text
- Content creation – creating content that attracts links
- Social networking – spreading content that attracts links
- Website design – organizing your online resources to making linking easier
- Media solicitation – putting links in every press release and asking for links in write-ups
- Partnerships – linking in a reciprocal manner

Link building needs to permeate your online strategy. One-time efforts, such as a link bait video, are helpful, but a long-term integrated effort will achieve better results.

Follow the Rules

The consequences for breaking the search engines' linking rules can be disastrous. Rankings are the lifeblood of many marketers, and being penalized to a low-ranked position could literally kill revenue.

There are plenty of "black hat" (in violation of the rules) and "gray hat" (*likely* in violation of the rules) tactics that can send your website into obscurity. By employing black hat SEO, you may find great success, and remain undetected for months or even years, but being discovered or reported by a competitor could cost you your job or your business. **It's much safer to consistently create content to which people will link**.

With this in mind, here are three practices to avoid:

Link buying

Buying links to influence page rank is against Google's Webmaster Guidelines. If search engines discover this relationship, a marketer's website will be almost impossible to find via search.

Excessive reciprocal links

Trading links with your partners and friends is acceptable, but keep these trades within reason. If the number of traded links grows too high, you're risking a rule violation.

Link spamming, or linking on spam-laden sites

There are places and websites where it is effortless to post a link. These places are spam havens and should be avoided. **A link on an irrelevant, link-filled site is more likely to hurt your ranking than to help it**. This link sends a clear signal that you're trying to bend the rules.

Most places that attracted hoards of link spammers in the past have been rendered useless by SEO. For example, most online forums will only allow links with "nofollow" tags, which was not always the case.

If you have any questions about practices to avoid, consider these words of warning regarding link schemes straight from Google[14]:

> *"Your site's ranking in Google search results is partly based on analysis of those sites that link to you. The quantity, quality, and relevance of links count towards your rating. The sites that link to you can provide context about the subject matter of your site, and can indicate its quality and popularity. However, some webmasters engage in link exchange schemes and build partner pages exclusively for the sake of cross-linking, disregarding the quality of the links, the sources, and the long-term impact it will have on their sites. This is in violation of Google's Webmaster Guidelines and can negatively impact your site's ranking in search results. Examples of link schemes can include:*
>
> - *Links intended to manipulate PageRank*
> - *Links to Web spammers or bad neighborhoods on the web*
> - *Excessive reciprocal links or excessive link exchanging ("Link to me and I'll link to you.")*
> - *Buying or selling links that pass PageRank*
>
> *The best way to get other sites to create relevant links to yours is to create unique, relevant content that can quickly gain popularity in the Internet community. The more useful content you have, the greater the chances someone else will find that content valuable to their readers and link to it. Before making any single decision, you should ask yourself the question:* ***Is this going to be beneficial for my page's visitors?***
>
> *It is not only the number of links you have pointing to your site that matters, but also the quality and relevance of those links. Creating good content pays off: Links are usually editorial votes given by choice, and the buzzing blogger community can be an excellent place to generate interest."*

[14] http://support.google.com/webmasters/bin/answer.py?hl=en&answer=66356

WORKSHEET: LINK ANALYSIS

You probably have an idea of sites from which you'd like to get links; perhaps sites with a high PageRank, well-known sites in your industry, or sites from which your competitors receive links. Before you can develop a strategy for securing these links, study their current composition of links.

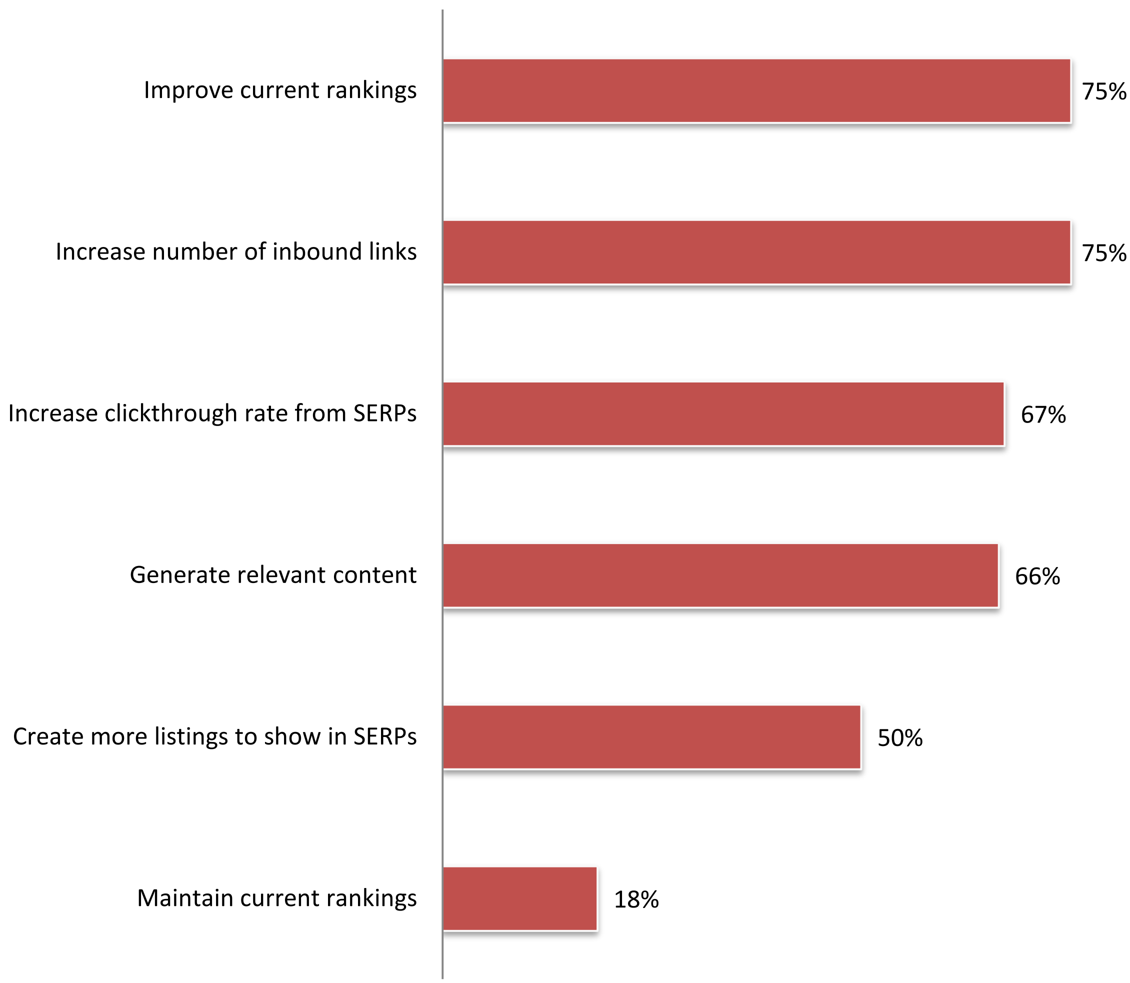
Site you want link from	How they link	Why they link	Where they link

SOCIAL MEDIA INTEGRATION

Search engines are now indexing social content to shape results pages, and marketers are taking advantage. There are specific ways in which marketers generate SEO benefits from their social media activities, with **improving rankings and increasing links being the top goals for social integration**.

Case in point – 75% of organizations that integrate social media into their SEO plans do so in an effort to improve current rankings and increase the number of inbound links. By comparison, only 18% of organizations practicing integration state that they use social media to maintain current search rankings. In other words, organizations believe that social media has the power to amplify SEO efforts.

Chart: Top goals for integrating social media with SEO



Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

Clearly, leveraging SEO best practices to create quality, keyword-optimized social media content that will be shared across your social network offers an additional means of increasing organic rankings and online visibility, traffic and opportunities.

Before engaging in any social marketing tactics, remember that SEO goals must take a back seat to your audience's experience. **Your primary concern when engaging with social media must be addressing customer needs, interacting with your audience and providing good content**. Within these parameters, however, there are many opportunities to use social media to distribute keyword-rich content and attract links that can boost your natural search rankings.

Optimize social media profiles

Your team does not have control over the design of Facebook fan pages or Twitter feeds. You can, however, control the content on these pages. Make sure all of your social media profiles:

- Describe your company using brand keywords
- Link to your website

Search engines index this content and list brands' social media profiles in search results. The links placed in Facebook and Twitter profiles aren't "nofollow" links – meaning they provide link value. Optimizing the content on these profiles can help you get more first page search results for your brand.

Also, use your brand name for your account name whenever possible. **When you have a one-to-one match for your brand name and Twitter name, you'll appear more often in search results**.

Use keywords in status updates

Your primary concern when writing status updates should be to address your audience and improve their experience. Your secondary concern should be to use keywords that will be indexed by search engines' real-time search features, so you can build keyword relevance around your social presences. **Any time you post to social media, try to include targeted SEO keywords**. Also, link back to your website as much as possible, which is a good way to tie together your website and social profiles.

You can get a glimpse into which topics are hot on the Web through tools such as Google Trends, and the "trending topics" list on Twitter Search. Use this trend research to target hot real-time search keywords. Regularly scan these resources to identify relevant topics, and quickly generate content to help attract searchers.

Closely coordinate your search and social teams

Search and social data are complementary. Teams in charge of search and social marketing can benefit from the other's data and analysis, so be sure the lines of communication remain open between the two teams. There may be times when you suggest that social media activities focus around specific keywords, such as putting at least one of your target keywords in Facebook updates, if it applies to the message.

Also, make sure your search team is aware of keyword trends identified by your social team's Web monitoring, as this can aid in search keyword list development.

Distribute content via social media to build links

Social media marketing is a great way to generate inbound links. Some link building tactics that have proven successful include syndicating content, on-site social sharing tools, and internal linking.

Marketers who work at publications, or other companies that regularly generate content, can use social networks to distribute this content to a broad audience and entice followers to share and publish links. Syndicating links also helps build your audience and expand your reputation. **Reputation establishes a sense of authority in your market, which then translates to natural links coming back to your site**.

In terms of on-site social sharing tools, many websites feature on-site tools for sharing content through social networks, email and blogs. Adding these buttons to your pages makes it easier for visitors to share your content with their networks.

Finally, on-site social media, such as blogs or forums, can help improve your site's internal linking strategy. Encourage your community reps to include links to relevant portions of your own website during online discussions. Also, link your website to your off-site social media presences, and vice versa. Consider putting together a "social page" for your website that collects links to your social media accounts.

Target social news and bookmarking sites

News aggregators and social bookmarking sites, such as Digg and reddit, can generate a rush of traffic and new links for content that receive prominent placement. These sites allow the community to "vote" on submitted content, with the number of votes dictating the link's prominence on the site.

Review your content to see what could be repurposed for social news sites. Although those links may infrequently make it to the front page of these sites, such a strategy pays off when they do.

Protect your online reputation

Reputation management is a search and social issue. Your customers talk about your brand in social media, and potential customers find this information through searches. These searches might be conducted in a traditional search engine, or they might be done on a social site. Reputation monitoring should be a central piece of their social media strategies.

To that end, make sure you're monitoring online press, conversations and review sites for negative commentary about your brand. **When appropriate, reach out to address the complaints and try to resolve the issue on the same page hosting the complaint**. That way, visitors who discover a complaint or negative review through search will also see your response.

Encourage social networking on your website

Your team can add a wealth of relevant, indexable content to your sites by hosting social features and fostering an online community. It takes time to build a rich community that regularly posts to forums and message boards, but you can start small and grow your efforts over time.

Start with creating a company blog – or re-commit to an existing (and possibly stagnating) effort. **Regularly publishing and responding to valuable content provides activity around which an on-site community can form**. Be sure to allow comments, ratings and reviews, as adding these features to a site can foster community interaction and generate relevant content.

Your blog and forum content should be clearly visible to search spiders. Not all platforms are designed to be easily indexed by search engines, so consult your vendors and search experts.

Be sure to regularly monitor your website's social features for spam, and make sure all external links are "nofollow," so they provide no search engine value, rendering them less attractive to link spammers.

META DESCRIPTION TAGS

Meta description tags are snippets of information that appear below a page title in search results. These are typically nothing more than a sentence that describes the page content.

Although these do not directly affect search engine rankings, you can still **increase your organic search traffic for a specific keyword by crafting a well-optimized and compelling description**. When you're outranked by stronger sites for certain keywords, this tactic is a great way to make your site's listing stand out and engage.

A good meta description tag should:

- Be relevant and unique to the page
- Support and reinforce the page title, and
- Include offers and secondary keywords to help add context to the page title.

URL STRUCTURE

A site's URL structure should be as simple as possible. Consider arranging Web content so the construction of the URLs is both logical and comprehensible. In other words, use readable words rather than long session ID numbers.

For example, if you want to be found for the keyword phrase "enterprise resource planning," a URL like http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enterprise_resource_planning is far more effective at conveying meaning than http://www.example.com/index.php?id_sezione=210&sid=4b6dfg867f32npp6f739f730f2.

The right type of punctuation also benefits your URLs. Google recommends you use hyphens (-) instead of underscores (_) in your URLs. The URL http://www.example.com/green-dress.html is much more useful to search engines than http://www.example.com/green_dress.html.

Google also advises that overly complex URLs, such as those containing multiple parameters, can cause problems for crawlers by creating unnecessarily high numbers of URLs that point to identical or similar content on your site. As a result, Googlebot may consume much more bandwidth than necessary, or may be unable to completely index all the content on your site.

COMPETITOR BENCHMARKING

Gathering competitive intelligence on your marketplace can help you in areas ranging from product development to pricing decisions, and looking at your competitors' SEO activities should be no exception. **At its core, useful competitor benchmarking for SEO purposes helps you figure out what makes a competitor rank across multiple search engine ranking factors**. A number of free and paid tools exist that provide this comparative information. (See the list in the earlier section on *External Link Building - Research your market*)

INTERNAL LINKING

Internal linking simply means linking from one page on a site to another page on the same site. Use descriptive internal linking with consistent navigational anchor text to show the relationship between your webpages. Doing this helps both search engines and users better understand your site.

TACTICS IN ACTION: HOW TO TARGET INTERNAL SITE LINKS FOR IMPROVED SEO

Article ID: HOW31389
Location: MarketingSherpa library

Summary

SEO programs often focus on adding inbound links. But don't forget that your website contains hundreds of internal links that affect search engine rankings.

We spoke with one of the search industry's top linking experts to learn how to use internal links to improve SEO. His advice includes seven tactics, such as areas to test and assumptions to avoid.

Introduction

When it comes to improving your website's organic search rankings, inbound links from outside sources are important. But they are not the only links that matter. Your internal links – the links that point visitors to different parts of your site – can be modified to improve your natural search results.

To learn more about the value of on-site links, we spoke to linking expert and SEO authority Eric Ward, President, EricWard.com. Below are the seven tactics he recommends for making the most of a site's internal links.

These tactics are most likely to help a website that has five or 10 years of history, decent rankings, and no previous focus on on-site optimization. New sites without many inbound links and credibility are less likely to benefit.

Tactic #1. Establish benchmarks and start testing

For all the tactics listed below, it is best to establish baselines for your site's performance and start testing changes.

For example, if you're planning to change your site's navigation, set a baseline average for:

- Number of clicks on each link
- Traffic to each linked-to page
- Conversions on each page
- Search rankings of each page

Once you make a change – such as adjusting a link's anchor text, or adding links to pages – use these benchmarks to monitor performance.

Remember that the goal is to increase the number of conversions on your website. Higher rankings can help conversions, but there is no guarantee.

"The quicksand here is that you forget testing about the user and only test for Google," Ward says.

Avoid absolutes. Testing is vitally important because every website and industry is unique. There are no absolute rules that apply to all situations. Without testing, it is impossible to know how many internal links a page should have, or whether it's risky to have more than 50% of its links with identical anchor text.

Tactic #2. Tweak links' anchor text

The hyperlinked text of a link – its anchor text – helps signal to search engines what type of content is on the destination page. Using your target keywords in the anchor text of on-site links can boost the pages' performance in searches for those keywords.

For example, say you ran a link analysis on your website and realized that the product page for a popular product has 30 inbound links on your site. If only 10% of those links are using a target keyword in the anchor text, you might increase that percentage by re-writing the links.

How much should you increase it? Again, it's impossible to know without testing.

Tactic #3. Unearth interior content

Internal links from popular pages can increase visibility – and visits – to areas of your site that are lagging.

"Probably one of the most overlooked tactics is using the power of your most visited pages, especially your homepage, as a way to expose the interior content that otherwise might not be as widely known," says Ward.

For example, Ward suggests adding a 'featured content this month' section of links to a homepage, and pointing it to rotating areas of the site. Site owners could repurpose or repackage older content to use for this strategy to cut down on costs.

"It's almost like 'What does Macy's put in the window?'"

Tactic #4. Test no-follow links

Some marketers believe that internal links from high-traffic pages need to be rationed, so that the power of that traffic benefits pages they want to rank higher. The rationing is sometimes done with no-follow tags.

For example, links from a homepage to an 'About Us' or a privacy policy page might have no-follow tags to avoid using up some of the homepage's value. Links to more important pages, such as a product category page, are not given the tags.

Ward does not advocate using this strategy, because he believes the concern over diffusing a page's ranking power is overblown. This is another area that could be tested to improve a site's performance.

Tactic #5. Test navigation links

Some sites have navigation sections that feature dozens of links to different pages. These blocks of text links can be less than user friendly, but many site owners believe the huge list of navigation links improves a site's natural search performance.

However, Ward suggests testing using fewer links, or perhaps rotating through your entire list of navigation options. This technique can improve the user experience, which often has a way of improving your natural search results.

"If you let the user experience drive your choices, it gets easier. But you still run into the same challenge, which is 'What do we show versus what do we not show?'" Ward says.

Tactic #6. Analyze "orphaned" pages

While analyzing your website's internal links, you might notice that some pages have been orphaned. They have one or no links pointing to and/or from them.

- Sometimes this orphaned content can be valuable. It can be updated or repurposed, and linked to other portions of your website.

- Other times the content has little value, such as a five-year-old press release on a new hire that has since left the company.

Look for these orphans and decide whether they should have less or more link exposure on your site.

Tactic #7. Watch for new keywords

Search habits change, and you may see an increase or decrease in traffic being sent to your site from certain keywords.

Keep an eye on these keyword trends and watch for any upstarts that might be worth testing as new anchor text in relevant on-site links.

Your site's internal search tool is also a good place to look for new phrases, Ward says.

SUMMARY QUESTIONS

1. What are the four characteristics of a successful SEO campaign?

____

____

____

2. In keyword research, you must balance which three forces?

____

____

____

3. True or false: You should write for search engines, not people.

____

4. What are marketers' top goals for integrating social media with SEO?.

____

____

____

MY ACTION STEPS TO INBOUND MARKETING SUCCESS

☐ Inventory the SEO tactics your organization regularly practices. Rate the effectiveness of each in achieving your marketing objectives. Assess the level of difficulty for each in terms of time, money and effort required.

☐ Study the list of SEO tactics covered in this chapter. Think about how you could incorporate new tactics into your mix, or improve the current execution of these.

☐ ____

☐ ____

☐ ____

☐ ____

CHAPTER 5: BUILD AND ENGAGE SOCIAL NETWORKS

When you build a community and promote engagement, you amplify this earned media and leverage what's said on your behalf for greater influence. This is the power of social media.

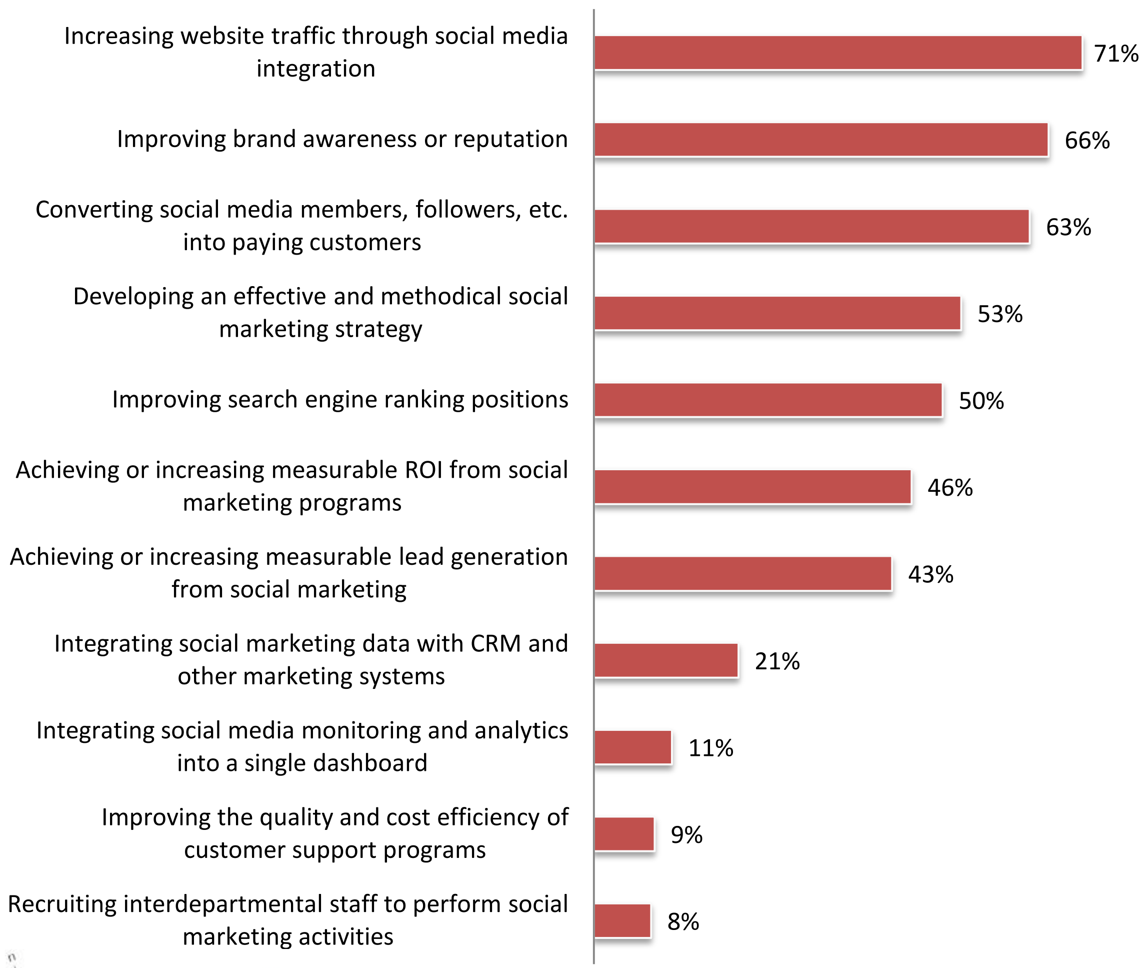
KEY TEACHINGS IN CHAPTER 5:

- How to engage your audience on social networks and increase your reach organically
- What practices work best for engaging the vocal minority and pitching the social authority

SOCIAL MEDIA'S ROLE IN THE INBOUND MARKETING MIX

In the practice of traditional outbound marketing, you control the information your audience receives, and your brand is what you say it is. With inbound marketing, the control of information received shifts to your audience. Social media – and the exchange of information – has been a major contributor to this paradigm shift. The result: your brand is now what your prospects, customers and influencers say it is.

Chart: CMOs' top strategic priorities for social media marketing



marketingsherpa

Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Social Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded February 2011, N=3,342

Branding is not the only reason marketers use social media. The top strategic priority CMOs have for social media is increasing traffic to their website, with the goal of converting this traffic into leads and paying customers.

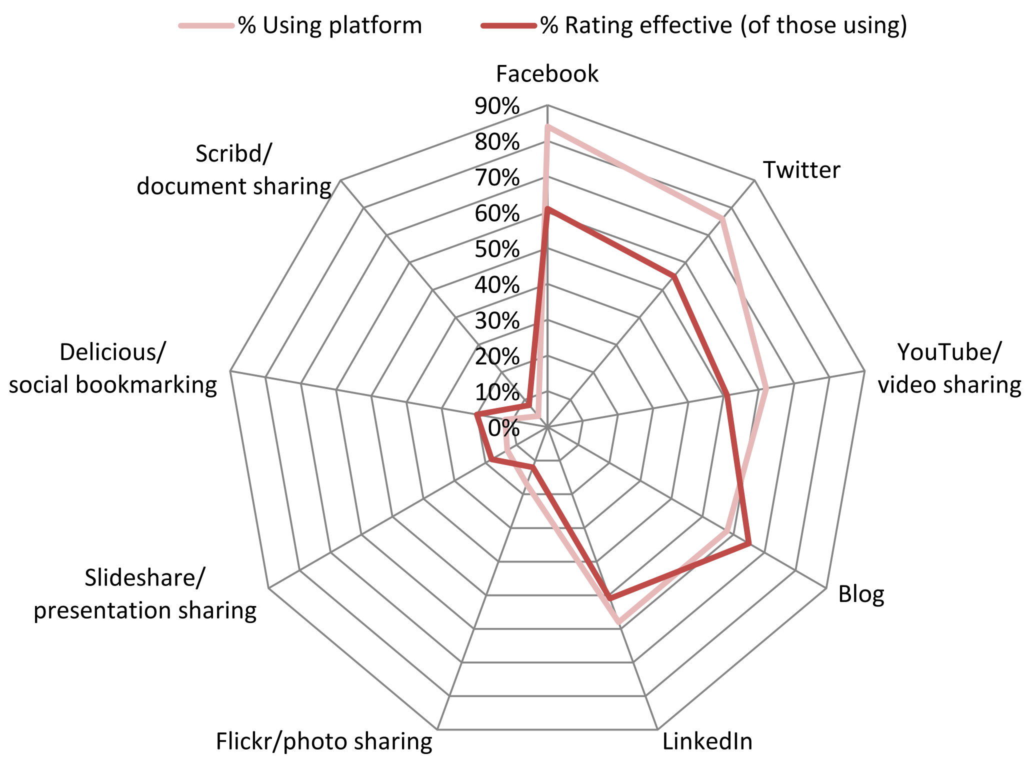
DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SOCIAL NETWORKS AND OTHER SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

There are many categories of social media platforms. For inbound marketing purposes, we will simplify the social media platform categories into four major groups: blogs, social networks, multimedia content, and "other" (bookmarking, virtual worlds, etc.). **Social networks offer a great opportunity to join the conversation, build relationships, and influence opinion during the purchase decision-making process**.

Social networks provide a place for like-minded people to congregate, engage in conversation, disseminate information and, most importantly, share opinions. **These opinions have a significant influence on buying decisions, in both business and consumer channels, because they are the opinions of trusted friends and peers**.

Within the category of social networks, there are also a number of different platforms, each offering a unique motivation for people to join. The most popular brands of social networks today include Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and, now, Google+. However, the list of less prevalent social networks is expansive, and includes location-based networks, niche social networks, user forums, etc. As the following chart shows, social networks are generally the preferred – and most effective – social media platform used for marketing purposes.

Chart: Usage and effectiveness of social media platforms for marketing purposes



Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Social Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded February 2011, N=3,342

ENGAGE YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE ON SOCIAL NETWORKS

One of the biggest challenges to engaging target audiences on social networks is changing the thought processes of marketers who have long been accustomed to one-way messaging. Here are a few guiding principles to consider for interacting more effectively on social networks:

1. **It's transparent – be who you are**. This means not using pseudonyms, and writing original, genuine content. Show a little personality. Being genuine will increase your believability, give you credibility, and allow you to deal with the important issues.

> *"Bring the best of your authentic self to every opportunity."*
>
> – John Jantsch, Author, *Duct Tape Marketing*

2. **It's personal – focus on the individual**. Social media is not a place for mass communication. Participation in social networks, communities and other social sites is for the individual, by the individual. It is okay to have branded sites, but not to author posts in the name of "The Company."

> *"Institutions that once had to go through media to deliver information are now themselves media."*
>
> – Andrew Nachison, Founder, We Media

3. **It's a conversation – join it**. Social media means your brand is not what you say it is; it's what "they" say it is. "They" refers to your prospects, customers, and influencers who are talking about your brand, products and competition during the purchase process. Only by joining in these conversations can you hope to influence the outcome.

> *"…the Internet has turned what used to be a controlled one-way message into a real-time dialogue with millions."*
>
> – Danielle Sacks, Writer, *Fast Company*

4. **It's viral – for better or worse**. One of the key attractions of using social media for marketing purposes is the viral effect. We create social campaigns in the hopes it will "go viral," reaching throngs of users at little or no additional cost. But be judicious – the viral effect can spread the good, as well as the bad and the ugly.

> *"The attention economy is not growing, which means we have to grab the attention that someone else has today."*
>
> – Brent Leary, Co-founder, CRM Essentials

Interaction and engagement on social networks are just starting points. Ultimately, you want to see a return on your investment of time and energy. Our next case study addresses this by demonstrating how one company encouraged – and then connected – social network engagement to increase sales conversions.

CASE STUDY: CONNECTING SOCIAL NETWORK ENGAGEMENT TO SALES CONVERSIONS

Case Study ID: CS32050
Location: MarketingSherpa library

Summary

Many consumer marketers focus on engagement metrics when trying to measure the success of social media marketing efforts. This case study looks at how one marketer ties Facebook e-demos to sales conversion to gauge the success of its efforts.

Read on to learn how the e-demo was promoted, how the marketer garnered more than 30,000 views on its Facebook page video tab, how the page was used for lead capture, and what they learned from an e-demo that performed worse than a successful long-standing physical demo.

Challenge

Even when existing marketing campaigns are successful, it is important to try new strategies and tap into new channels such as mobile and social media. Doing this allows you to find new and different efforts that hopefully your target audience will respond to.

Centerpointe Research Institute sells a meditation audio technology, primarily through sending a physical product demo in the form of a short paperback book and audio CD to prospective customers. This process remains successful for the company; however, it has a fairly high up-front cost with the demo material and postage. The conversion rate for the physical demo is at an acceptable level, but the number has dropped during the difficult recent economy.

Centerpointe decided to create an electronic version of its demo to reduce these costs, and create a company Facebook page to drive downloads of the e-book. Bill Harris, founder and CEO, Centerpointe, said, “I wasn’t [personally] on Facebook and didn’t know a lot about it, and I had been thinking for quite a while how can I monetize this? I didn’t think it was worth the trouble to have a Facebook presence just to be popular or something. I wanted it to result in sales.”

In this case study, find out how Centerpointe drove traffic to its company Facebook page, how it captured new leads, and how the e-book demo compared to the physical demo in driving sales.

Campaign steps

The Facebook effort had two main goals:

- Provide a distribution point for the e-book product demo and capture new leads
- Provide Centerpointe customers and prospects a venue to interact with each other and the company

“We have a very large customer base (with an email list of about 420,000), so if we can get the customers that we currently have to go to the fan page and engage there in some way and then ‘like’ it, then all their friends on Facebook are going to see what they ‘liked,’” said Harris. “We wanted to tap into the viral nature of the whole thing.”

Because Centerpointe had no Facebook presence, the very first element of the effort was to create a page for the company.

Step #1. Use drip email effort to drive existing list to new Facebook page

Centerpointe's extensive email list consisted of existing customers and prospects who became part of the list by taking free courses offered by Centerpointe, but were not yet paying customers.

This list was sent a series of emails on the Facebook launch. The first four went out pre-launch, teasing the upcoming Facebook page. The fifth email actually included a link to the new page, and several more emails followed after the page went live to draw more of the list to it.

The drip effort served two purposes:

First, it let those already engaged with the company know about the new social media channel where they could interact with the company and each other.

Second, the email send served as a re-marketing effort to drive sales. Harris knew that 80-90% of physical demo recipients were not converting, and the video and e-book demo was another way to reach those prospects who had already shown interest in Centerpointe's product.

Additionally, the drip email effort resulted in Centerpointe's customers using word-of-mouth to promote the new page.

"We didn't take any Facebook ads out to do this. We didn't do any other kind of advertising," explained Harris. "We didn't do a launch where we had other people sending people there."

Step #2. Create content for the Facebook page

Because Harris was interested in using the social media channel to drive sales, the main content piece was a promotional video created specifically for the Facebook page.

The animated video runs a little more than five minutes, includes a live action introduction from Harris, and explains the meditation audio technology that Centerpointe sells. The end of the video features a call-to-action to download the free e-book demo.

The video is streamed from YouTube on Centerpointe's Facebook page, and it has its own tab on the page. The video page also features a call-to-action button, "Download eBook."

Step #3. Create the electronic product demo

Since Centerpointe was only sending out physical product demos by mail, it had to create the downloadable electronic version for the Facebook effort. The result was an e-book.

"A part of this was my attempt to see if this e-book would convert anywhere near as well as the actual physical demo," explained Harris.

When the economy was stronger, the physical demo had a 20% conversion rate, where Centerpointe was sending out five demos to gain each customer. More recently, that number is down and the company is sending about 12 physical demos for each customer, more than doubling those costs.

Harris liked the idea of the downloadable e-book, but had concerns that the physical demo had more appeal and created more incentive for the recipient to actually go through the product demonstration.

He said, “When you download something on your computer, it is sort of hidden in computer somewhere and unless you engage with it right away, you are probably not going to look at it.”

Step #4. Use an online survey to capture lead information

Once a visitor reaches the video page and clicks the “Download eBook” button (visitors are not required to watch the video to download the e-book), they are presented with two radio buttons:

- “I am an existing Holosync customer (I have purchased Awakening Prologue)”
- “I am not a Holosync customer (I have not purchased Awakening Prologue)”

A “Continue” call-to-action button is below the two options. Existing customers are presented with a three-field form that asks for first and last names and email address, and are immediately able to download the e-book.

New prospects are presented with the same form with the addition of four multiple choice survey questions that are required to download the e-book.The survey questions are used to customize autoresponse emails to address the benefits sought and objections those prospects indicate in their answers.

“We separate those customers from the non-customers because I didn’t want to make the customers have to fill out the survey,” said Harris. “It is sort of like a squeeze page in the sense that we are saying, ‘Okay, if you want this (e-book), we want this information from you first.”

For Centerpointe customers, the form allows the company to keep track of who among its customer base and email list is downloading the electronic demo. For non-customers, the form serves as a lead capture.

Step #5. Pay attention to campaign details to guide the visitor experience

Harris said every element of the Facebook effort was designed from the page visitor’s perspective to guide their experience.

“We are getting into the head of the person going to the Facebook fan page with the underlying assumption that unless something says to them, right away, ‘This will give you something you want or need,’ they will leave,” stated Harris.

He added, every decision –

- Whether to open an email
- Actually read the email
- Read the next line in the email
- Make the next click
- Provide a name, email address or other information
- Other potential actions

– is a place where the prospect might say, “This isn’t for me,” or “This isn’t worth the time, money, effort, etc.”

“We look at each action we want them (prospects) to take from the point of view of the potential customer who is not eagerly waiting to take these actions – because they aren’t,” said Harris. “They are looking for a reason to leave and go do something else.”

He said part of the entire marketing effort was to go through the entire process and evaluate each potential situation to avoid triggering reasons to end the engagement, and make the process easy and smooth.

Harris continued, “We help them keep in mind the benefit to them (in) taking the next action. And the next, and the next, and the next, while making it all as easy as possible until they get to the point where they buy.”

For example, there was an internal discussion about the “Download eBook” button on the video page. The options were to have the button available at all times so the visitor could click without watching the video, or to have the button appear during the video to force visitors to watch at least a portion of the video.

The decision was to facilitate the main goal – driving e-book downloads – by having the call-to-action button visible on the page at all times.

Results

The results for this effort are broken into two groups: fan interaction with the Facebook page, and success of the e-book product demo.

Facebook page engagement

- Increased reach to 4,000 fans in first four days, and currently has 6,199 “likes.”
- Over the first eight weeks of the effort, the main page logged 9,422 visits.

Electronic product demo

- Video tab on Facebook page had 32,922 views
- The video was viewed 7,670 times
- The e-book demo was downloaded 2,420 times
- The e-book resulted in 42 product purchases

ORGANICALLY INCREASE THE REACH OF YOUR SOCIAL NETWORKS

Whether your objective for social marketing is to boost website traffic, lead generation or ROI, the most critical obstacle to achieving these goals is the "reach" of your social networks.

The metric for reach will vary depending on the social network used. Reach may refer to the number of "Likes" on Facebook, "Followers" on Twitter, "+1s" on Google+, "Connections" on LinkedIn, etc. Collectively, your social networks reach this population. **The more Likes, Followers, +1s and Connections your social networks have, the greater your reach and potential to achieve your objectives**.

"If a tree falls in the forest and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound?" With this age-old question in mind, one of your top priorities must be to increase the reach of your social networks to a critical mass, or your marketing efforts on social networks will not make a (proverbial) sound.

The following are some top tactics for increasing the reach of your social networks – and doing it organically for inbound marketing purposes.

1. **Gather intelligence on your target audience.** The purpose of monitoring your target audience is to learn who they are, what interests them, and where they are within social media. Intelligence gathering can also help you separate the Silent Majority from the Vocal Minority segments in your target market, and identify the Social Authority segment that can help you exponentially increase your reach.

2. **Interact with your target audience wherever they are.** This means joining third-party social networks, discussion groups, and other forums where like-minded people congregate. Your intelligence gathering led you to them; now use the guiding principles to interact on this neutral ground and lead them back to your social networks.

3. **Use your existing Web presence to promote your social networks.** Integrate and promote access to your social networks throughout your website, on your blog and multimedia content sharing sites. Your organization has control of these channels so use them to promote your social network presence wherever and whenever possible.

4. **Content is king on social media – so treat it like royalty.** Intelligence gathering also told you what interests your target audience. Focus on those interests to make the content you share on your social networks of value to your target audience, and worth sharing with their peers.

5. **Entice your target audience with compelling offers.** Everyone wants to feel special so offering exclusive discounts, contests and other incentives on your social networks is a great way to attract, engage and retain your target audience.

6. **Make social sharing a mandatory part of email campaigns.** Your subscribers opt-in to outbound email marketing lists because they want more interaction with your organization. Use social media to strengthen relationships with subscribers. Lead these prime prospects to your social networks by adding social sharing buttons to your email campaigns.

7. **Mobilize and localize your social networks.** Mobile social networking apps provide the means to reach your target audience at any time, in any place. Mobile makes things local, and local makes things more personal. Whether you are a local business leveraging your presence on Foursquare, or an international organization managing multilingual social networks, think locally.

8. **Test and optimize your social networks for continuous improvement.** Like SEO, social optimization is the practice of making it easier for your target audience to find you. Start by making sure your company descriptions, brand profiles, executive bios, contact information, logos, website URLs and other essential material is complete and up-to-date on your social networks. Search engines now reference and favorably rank updates, so use keyword-rich text in your posts and linked content. Test and optimize posts to identify practices that increase reach and engagement.

WORKSHEET: INCREASE YOUR SOCIAL REACH

For each tactic, please briefly describe what your organization is currently doing, and what it plans to do in the coming year, to increase the reach of your social networks organically for inbound marketing purposes.

What we are currently doing	**What we plan to do**
Interact with your target audience wherever they are.	
Use your existing Web presence to promote your social networks.	
Content is king on social media too – so treat it like royalty.	
Entice your target audience with compelling offers.	
Make social sharing a mandatory part of email campaigns.	
Mobilize and localize your social networks.	
Test and optimize your social networks for continuous improvement.	

Engage the Vocal Minority (and Pitch the Social Authority)

Engaging the Vocal Minority

As opposed to the Silent Majority target audience segment, the Vocal Minority segment is extremely active in social media communities, frequently commenting on posts and discussions, and sharing content with others. This gives them a high level of influence on friends and peers in their networks.

When developing social marketing campaigns, **it is important to think about the topics and content of interest to this segment because their active sharing behavior will have an impact on the viral acceleration of your campaigns**.

Pitching the Social Authority

Pitching the Social Authority is similar to traditional press relations as it pertains to intent, but the execution must conform to the culture and practices of the social media community. A campaign to pitch the social authority begins with a company or agency deciding to reach and forge relationships with prominent bloggers, microbloggers, and other highly active social influencers that cover specific verticals.

There are some cultural differences between traditional journalism and pitching the social authority. For example, a traditional journalist reviewing a product may frown upon an offer to keep the item of value. However, a blogger may accept the item of value but be ethically obligated to disclose the gift in the corresponding post.

While property policies may vary, the need for disclosure and transparency principles exist in both fields, as demonstrated by the following blogger relations checklist from the Social Media Business Council.

Checklist: Blogger Relations Best Practices

When communicating with external blogs or bloggers on behalf of my company, I will:

- Disclose who I am, who I work for and any other relevant affiliations from the very first encounter.
- Proactively ask bloggers to be transparent about their relationship and communications with me.
- Always be truthful.
- Never ask someone else to deceive bloggers for me.
- Never ask bloggers to write a fake endorsement or something they do not believe.
- Never use off-topic comment for self-promotional intent.
- Never take action contrary to the specific boundaries, terms and conditions, and community guidelines set by each blog.
- Not use services or technologies for mass-posting comments.
- Use extreme care when communicating with minors or blogs intended to be read by minors.
- Comply with all laws and regulations regarding disclosure of identity.
- Make it clear to our employees and agencies that these rules apply to them.

CASE STUDY: HOW THE CLEVELAND INDIANS ARE PITCHING THE SOCIAL AUTHORITY

Case Study ID: CS32066
Location: MarketingSherpa Member Library

Summary

Finding your "social authority" and nurturing them into brand ambassadors is more than a "wouldn't that be nice" kind of theory. This marketing team stepped up to the plate and worked with influencers to increase its social media audience and revenue more than 170%.

This is how the Cleveland Indians knocked it out of the park by catering to bloggers, Tweeters, and other influential fans. This case study describes how the team created and monetized the program, and it is a great example of how to cater to the social authority in your target audience.

Challenge

In Fall 2009, the Cleveland Indians Major League Baseball team was finishing the second of two consecutive losing seasons, and the economy was in a slump, as well. The Indians' marketing team needed to rally fans and thought social media marketing could help.

"We needed to make an impact," says Curtis Danburg, Senior Director, Communications, Cleveland Indians. "We understood and saw that our fans were active in [social media], and we felt we needed to be part of that conversation and kind of be aggressive in that area."

The team wanted to do more than launch a Facebook profile and send Tweets. The marketers wanted to find fans and empower them to spread the word about the Indians. "What we were trying to do is create brand ambassadors who want to be part of that conversation," Danburg says.

Campaign

The Cleveland Indians launched a program to invite the social authority segment of their target audience to every home game of the upcoming season. The team gave the attendees Internet access and exclusive content, and encouraged them to talk online about the experience. The marketers hoped to foster more conversation about the Indians, build an audience, and give more impact to their online promotions.

Whether you sell industrial lighting or blankets with sleeves, there are key influencers in your online market. The Indian's example shows how you can achieve exceptional results by identifying these power users, focusing on their needs, and going above-and-beyond to win their favor.

Here are the steps the marketers followed:

Step #1. Invite the social authority to the games

The Indians launched a first version of the program in 2010 called Tribe Social Deck. A 10-seat section in left field was reserved for active bloggers and social networkers to attend a free game with complimentary wireless Internet access.

- Free and fresh content

The invited attendees received access to a trove of fresh content that was previously available only to the press. This included post-game interviews, press releases, news updates and images that could fill-out updates and blog posts.

This was a great way to support the attendee's social activity without generating additional costs (since the content was already being created). One key difference between these attendees and the traditional press is the attendees were not given access to players or managers for interviews.

- Bring a friend

Invited attendees were given two tickets and asked to bring a friend. This helped keep the experience enjoyable, Danburg says, and had a side benefit. “We find that most people bring people that are interested in social media as well,” he added

For major games, such as Opening Day, the team gave these attendees only one ticket. The idea was to maximize the number of strong influencers at important events to make a big splash.

Step #2. Launch a simple application process

Anyone wishing to attend had to fill out the team's online application. The form requested:

- Basic contact information
- Links to social media profiles
- Descriptions of social media use
- General interests

The team used this information to identify the most active and relevant social authority to invite and to determine which games they should attend. For example, the strongest online influencers were invited to Opening Day, as the team wanted to start the season strong. Some applicants with pets or children were invited to relevantly themed games at the ballpark.

“We have an intern. One of their main responsibilities is overseeing the [communication] process. So it does involve a lot of communication and emails sent for the invite, coordinating the game, and then sending out all the information on how to access [the seats] and where their tickets are,” Danburg says.

- Don't wait for applications

The team expected to eventually have a trove of applications to choose from, but the program was not widely known before launch. For Opening Day, the team identified a handful of influencers and invited them to be the first to visit the Tribe Social Deck.

The traditional press caught wind of the program in its first week, Danburg says. Since it was the first of its kind in professional baseball, attention came from organizations as large as ESPN. The team soon had hundreds of applications to choose from and filled the seats for every game.

Step #3. Evaluate after one year

The team saw encouraging results during 2010. It increased its social media audience throughout the year and inspired blog posts, updates and tweets. Attendees occupied every seat in the Social Deck for most games, and the program had effectively created brand ambassadors.

"These people were out there talking about their experience first-hand, and it was like a third-party endorsement," Danburg says. "There was a stronger connection than us coming and saying 'hey, what a great experience it is coming to these games.'"

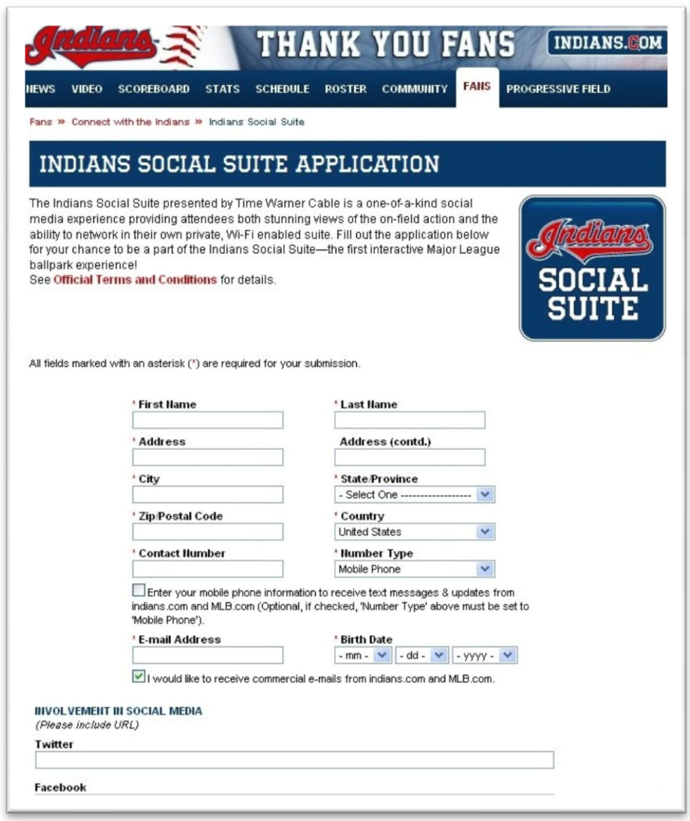
Two more observations:

- Exposure to the elements

The reserved seats were under an open sky, which was great during a sunny Spring day. However, when rain or the Summer sun made reading on a screen impossible, it was not always fun watch the game with a laptop or smartphone.

- Personal relationships

The world of Indians baseball is only so large, even online. Attendees who had only met online were able to meet in person at the games and develop a closer relationship. The team wanted to encourage more of this.



Step #4. Update for the next year

Happy with the initial results, the team enhanced the program for the 2011 season and renamed it the Indians Social Suite. Here are the key changes:

- Safety from weather

The exposed seats in left field were upgraded to an enclosed suite where attendees could enjoy a game from a private balcony or retreat behind glass if the weather turned. The suite included a living room space with an open atmosphere, which encouraged more mingling among attendees than a strip of bleacher seats.

- Tell the press

The enhancements amounted to a redoubling of the team's commitment to social media, and this fact was not lost on the press. The team made sure to publicize the launch of the Social Suite in its social networks, website, email newsletter and press releases. The media picked up the story and again brought attention that drove hundreds of applications.

Step #5. Develop a full social strategy

The Social Suite program is one of several efforts the team launched to foster more online conversation about the Indians. Here are two others:

- In-house participation

For 2011, the team focused on getting more players and staff to establish social profiles and engage the audience.

“We have our president, our manager, our players, front office and even our mascot on Twitter,” Danburg says. “It's an integrated, strategic approach that we took a whole year to develop and launched this year.”

- Discounts for followers

The team wanted to add “an ROI element” to its social marketing in 2011, Danburg says, and ran campaigns to offer fans discounted tickets. Offers included $4 off a ticket for following the team in Facebook or Twitter. Fans could increase some discounts by posting about them on their social profiles and encouraging friends to share.

Results

“We have seen that fan sentiments are higher. We know that we have created relationships in the community based off the social suite and social deck, and there is no question there has been a high return in value for what minimal costs have been in place,” Danburg says.

The Cleveland Indians dramatically increased its audience and influence in social networks since launch, which translated to big increases in site traffic from the channel:

- 214% increase in Facebook fans
- 403% increase in site traffic from Facebook
- 699% increase in Twitter followers
- 112% increase in site traffic from Twitter
- Social media is now 5th largest referrer to Indians.com

Furthermore, the team also saw “huge traction” for its discount offers in social networks, selling more than 1,000 tickets for some games, Danburg says. Results include:

- 174% increase in revenue from social media efforts
- 45% of social media revenue generated by the discount ticket sales

- Awarding full press credentials

The Social Suite has proven to be an effective minor league system for finding and nurturing strong media contacts with the social authority.

“We've found that it is kind of a trial system where we find people that have executed well and delivered well in their content who we have been able to graduate to getting credentials and actually getting clubhouse access,” Danburg says.

ACHIEVE SUCCESS WITH A BRANDED SOCIAL NETWORK

There are myriad benefits of building your social presence on the leading network platforms like Facebook, Google+ and LinkedIn. However, there are detriments, as well, such as loss of control. **These platforms can modify features, discontinue apps, and make other critical changes at will that may adversely affect your social network**.

Some organizations view the use of these popular platforms as building their business on property they don't own. Thinking outside the box, they take on the many challenges – like content requirements – of building their own social networks. But what does it take to do that well? What key components must an organization include?

To answer these questions, consider the experiences and successes of National Peace Corps Association (NPCA). This organization launched its own branded social network that grew to 25,000 registered users. To maintain the network, NPCA relies entirely on repurposed and user-generated content – no small feat.

TACTICS IN ACTION: HOW TO SUCCEED WITH A BRANDED SOCIAL NETWORK

Article ID: HOW31988
Location: MarketingSherpa library

Introduction

National Peace Corps Association (NPCA) maintains a branded social network where members can start groups, share photos, blog, chat, and interact on a forum. Hosting the community is one way in which the nonprofit organization helps connect people who have returned from volunteering overseas.

The site is powered primarily by user-generated content and takes about 10% to 15% of a single person's time to maintain. That person is Molly Mattessich, Manager of Online Initiatives at NPCA. (Note: NPCA is not affiliated with the Peace Corps agency of the U.S. government.)

"It's serving as a great way to get content from our audience, and to use that content to give back to our audience to further engagement there. That attracts more people to the organization in general," Mattessich says.

Highlights of the site's results include:

- 23,000 registered users (membership is free), compared to the association's 11,000 Facebook fans
- The most registered users of any site that focuses on alumni of the Peace Corps
- 4th most-popular source of traffic to the NPCA's main website
- The visitors who come from the site to NPCA's main website spend an average of 4 minutes and 30 seconds of time there.

Below, we touch on the challenges NPCA encountered by having its own social network, as well as the key features and tactics it used to grow and maintain the site on a limited budget.

Tactic #1. Provide ample tools to interact

The NPCA's social site is more than an online forum or a blog. It is a branded social network that offers members a variety of tools and provides an online environment for Peace Corps alumni to connect, interact, and share stories.

Key features include:

- Profiles and sharing

Members are given a profile to hold their basic information, such as name, location, and groups to which the member belongs. Each profile lists a member's most recent activity, such as comments written or photo and videos uploaded.

"Posting pictures is far and away the most popular activity that people like to do. Peace Corps volunteers like to show where they have been and what they have done, and photos are one of the best ways to do that," Mattessich says.

- Community homepage

The social network's homepage features content selected by Mattessich's team to highlight, such as information on up-coming events or videos of the team's content. The homepage also features thumbnail samples of the site's groups and members, and provides select updates on members' activity and recent uploads.

The entire site is branded with the NPCA's imagery and messaging. To maintain control of the messaging, Mattessich's team keeps the majority of the site's content accessible only to members, and all of the site's content is able to be moderated.

- Groups, forums, chat

Members can also form groups, such as Friends of Afghanistan, and interact in public or group-specific forums and chat sessions.

Tactic #2. Focus on user-generated content

Maintaining a profile in a social network such as Facebook or Twitter typically demands steady stream of content to engage the audience. One might assume that maintaining an entire social network would require tremendous volumes of content from the marketing team, but Mattessich says the audience provides ample content on its own.

"The beauty of it is that a lot of the energy on the website is created by the users ... We are lucky where our Peace Corps community does want to tell everyone where they have been and what they have done and share that experience."

The site has also benefited from the natural tendency of Peace Corps members to want to connect with people they either have met or will meet while volunteering overseas, Mattessich says.

"It has been very organic and I haven't had to do a lot of begging and pleading for people to post on here. The groups are finding it very useful for their own needs and are posting messages in their different groups to plan events and network. It hasn't been super difficult."

Instead of focusing on content creation, Mattessich repurposes the NPCA's content and highlights content from the site's audience. This can be an effective way to cut a workload and increase efficiency.

"A lot of the [social site's] homepage content comes from our other websites. We highlight some of the blogs or the news pieces from our main website ... In terms of timeline, it is pretty ad hoc and it just happens. We change it to be whatever our latest campaign or event is, and it is extremely easy," Mattessich says.

Tactic #3. Encourage users to contribute

New members are encouraged to upload content and help grow the network immediately after signing up. For example, the team's welcome email lists four actions new users can take to get started:

1. Invite friends to join – links to a tool to send invitations to the members' contacts via Hotmail, Gmail, Yahoo! Mail or AOL Mail. This helps the team add more members (who can then add more content).
2. Add content – links to an overlay on the member's profile, which contains links to tools to upload photos and videos, start a blog, join a discussion, and more.
3. Add a profile photo
4. Tell your Twitter followers – links to a page where Twitter members can log in and tweet this preloaded message: "Just joined http ://community.peacecorpsconnect.org"

Each new member profile also includes a large banner listing "a few things you do right now" and provides links to invite friends, add a profile photo, and add content. This banner can be removed by clicking an "x" in its upper right-hand corner.

Members can also link their profiles to their Facebook or Twitter accounts to automatically send updates of their activity on the NPCA's network to those channels. This feature can help the organization call more attention to its network on these popular social sites.

Tactic #4. Combat spammers by moderating

Online comments and forums are havens for spammers, and the NPCA's network is no different. The site received a flood of phony members soon after launch. Mattessich's team could not afford to allow the site to become a headache for its audience or negatively impact the brand.

Two steps the team has taken include moderating registrations and controlling the homepage.

First, the team switched from an open-membership policy to a multi-step, moderated process. Here's the process new members follow:

- Fill out a form with email address and birth date
- Click a link in an automated email to verify email address
- Fill out a longer registration form
- Wait for membership approval

Mattessich's team reviews each registration and approves or denies them individually. The process might seem laborious, but it has gone a long way in building a network the audience feels safe using. “That has actually helped our community be much more spam-free and more trustworthy to our members.”

Second, the network's homepage is one of the few areas that can be seen by people who are not registered with the site. Since the page is public-facing, it's important that its content is the “cream-of-the-crop,” and not embarrassing.

By manually controlling the page's content, Mattessich's team can be sure that messages from spammers or other malicious users will not be seen by the public at large. This degree of control would not be available if the homepage's content was selected by automated tools from the audience.

Tactic #5. Clearly explain the site's features

Any feature on your website will generate questions from your audience. Once you multiply the number of features on your site, you can expect the number of questions to multiply as well. To avoid frustrating its audience or overwhelming its team with questions, the NPCA strives to explain its social site in the following areas:

- FAQ and tutorials

The site offers a page of frequently asked questions and a list of tutorial articles to answer many of the questions members have for the site's features. Tutorials cover topics such as how to start a group and creating a photo album.

- Forums

The site has forum topics that are intended to receive questions from the audience, such as the “Site Feedback” topic. NPCA's team members check these pages for usability issues and to answer questions directly.

- Lead by example

Mattessich and several other NPCA team members maintain profiles on the site and regularly interact in groups and forums. This has the dual benefit of enabling the team to answer member questions as they arise, and to show off capabilities of the site through uploading videos, writing blog posts, etc.

Tactic #6. Encourage subscriptions to your emails

One of the NPCA's challenges in maintaining the network is to convert its members to paid supporters of the organization. “One of our branding challenges is for people to realize that when they become a member of the free social network, that does not mean they are a full-fledged member of the National Peace Corps Association. That membership requires a different signup process and generally a fee,” Mattessich says.

To combat this challenge, Mattessich's team now includes an opt-in request for the team's newsletters on the registration form for the social network. The goal is to send emails to members of the network to remind them of the additional benefits of being a member of the organization and to solicit donations.

“It has definitely helped us grow our email lists.”

Summary Questions

1. True or false: Increasing the reach of your social networks to a critical mass is necessary or your marketing efforts on social networks will not have an impact.

____

2. What three opportunities do social networks present to marketers during the purchase decision-making process?

____

____

____

3. What are the four guiding principles for engaging your target audience on social networks?

____

____

____

4. How does the execution of pitching the Social Authority differ from traditional press relations?

____

____

____

My Action Steps to Inbound Marketing Success

☐ Describe what your organization is currently doing, and what it plans to do in the coming year, to increase the reach of your social networks organically for inbound marketing purposes.

☐ Identify topics and content of interest to your organization's vocal minority segment.

☐ Develop a campaign to pitch the social authority segment and other highly active social influencers.

☐ ____

☐ ____

☐ ____

CHAPTER 6: CREATE AND SHARE ENGAGING CONTENT

To achieve the best organic rankings, and ensure that prospects and customers find their products and services, **organizations need to mindfully approach the creation and optimization of their content products**.

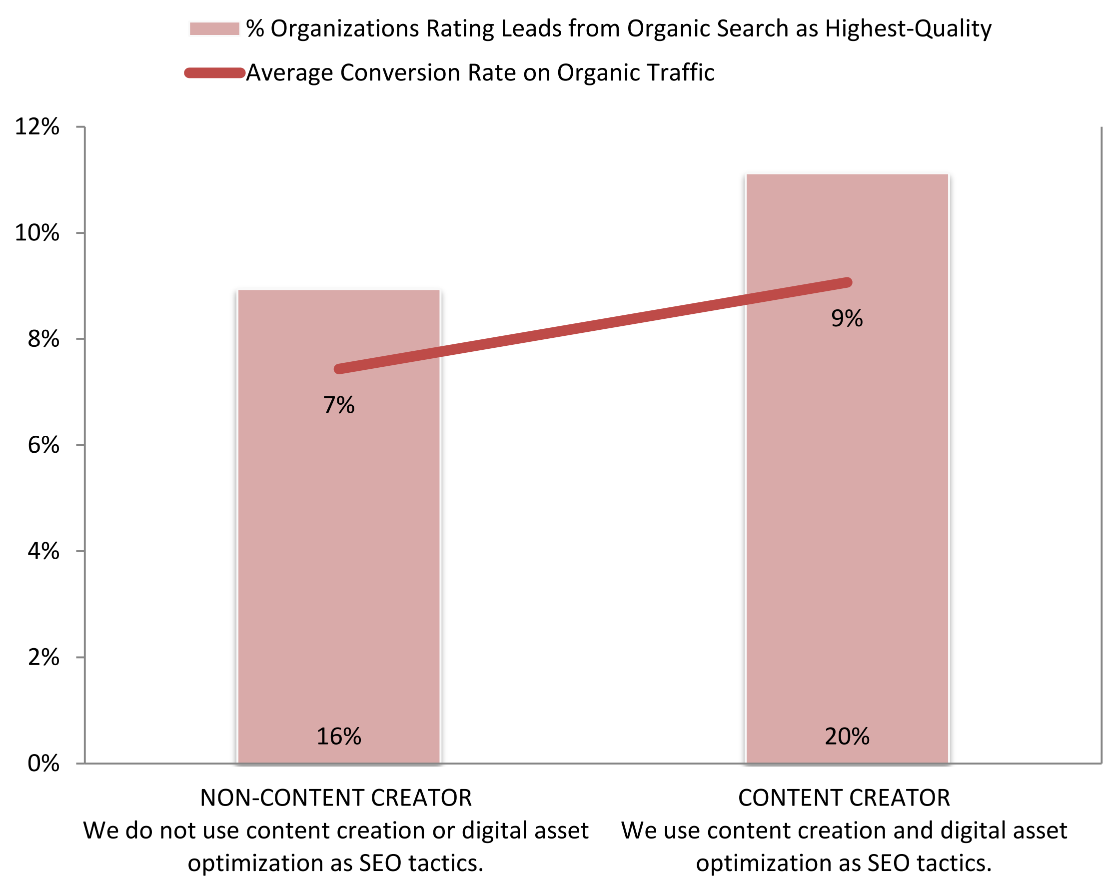
KEY TEACHINGS IN CHAPTER 6:

- Which types of content perform the best and are worth the time and effort to create
- How to conduct a content inventory audit to uncover where you are content rich or poor
- How to set content goals and pick topics using the customer engagement cycle

HOW DOES ENGAGING CONTENT ACCELERATE INBOUND LEAD QUALITY AND CONVERSIONS?

Content can be both a digital asset and a liability. It depends on the content used, and how organizations put it to use. As this chart shows, content creators (organizations that create and optimize content) produce higher-quality leads that are more likely to convert than organizations that do not.

Chart: The effect of content creation on lead quality and conversion rates

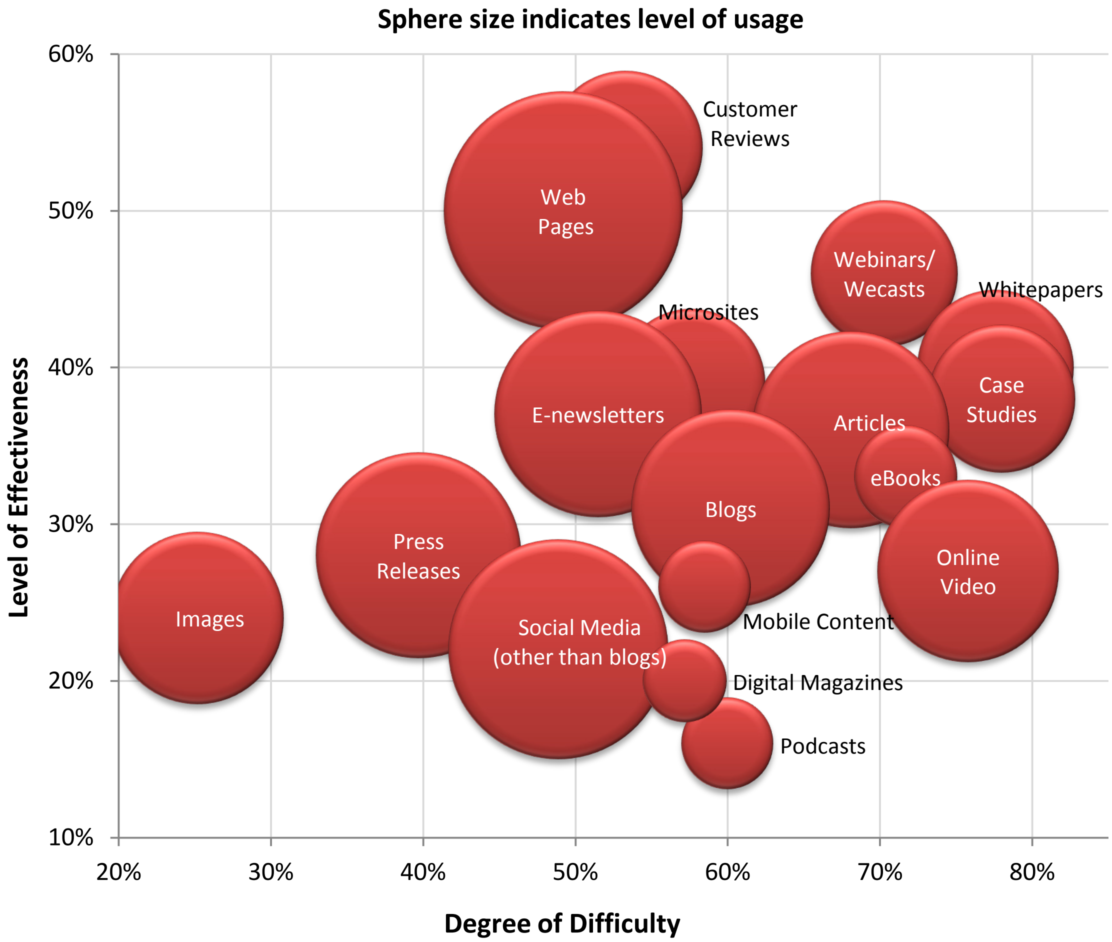


Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

Content Creation Is Worth Your Time and Effort

Major search engines index social media content, from Twitter feeds to Facebook updates and blog posts. Marketers realize they can harness the power of social and real-time content to engage target audiences and drive inbound leads. But which types of content perform the best and are practical to use?

Chart: Three-dimensional view of content effectiveness, difficulty and usage



Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

From the perspective of surveyed marketers, webpages ranked highly, with approximately 50% of marketers stating that webpages are very effective in helping them achieve their marketing objectives. Many webpages also act as SEO landing pages, if they serve as an entry point from search results. **When pages have strong customer-oriented language, good layouts and clear calls-to-action, there is a greater likelihood of "clickthrough" than "click back."** Webinars and whitepapers were other leading examples of good content, with 46% and 40% of marketers, respectively, rating these as very effective content products.

Fulfill the need for content

Sharing content is a critical component of inbound marketing. The more relevant your content, the better chance your chance of connecting with customers and improving your results. Creating original content is a time-consuming and expensive proposition. The pressure on marketers to produce original articles, posts, videos and other content for inbound marketing purposes can be daunting. However, the need for entirely original content is not the only strategy to consider.

Your organization has likely already created many types of relevant content, including whitepapers, PowerPoint presentations, articles, webinars and more. Most of this existing content has reached only a small share of your intended audience. **Not repurposing existing content for inbound marketing is a missed opportunity**.

Conducting a content inventory audit

The first step is an audit of any existing content with the potential for inbound marketing purposes. Start with your website, blogs, sales collateral and publicity. Look deeper into the research, presentations, interviews and community outreach you have recently conducted. Again, **the more departments you include in your audit, the more content you will uncover**.

Next to each piece of existing content, list the ways you can repurpose it. By repurposing, we mean updating existing content or modifying content from one format to another in an efficient way that is current and relevant to the target audience.

Example: Auditing existing content for repurposing

Existing content	**Repurpose existing content as**
News releases	▪ Rewrite in conversational tone and post on blog
Video of CEO annual meeting speech	▪ Post video on YouTube ▪ Convert audio to MP3 for downloadable podcast ▪ Transcribe speech and post on blog
Customer case studies	▪ Create PowerPoint and post on SlideShare ▪ Record PowerPoint with voiceover as video and post on YouTube ▪ Post video (YouTube embed code) on blog
PowerPoint presentations	▪ Record with voiceover as video and post on YouTube ▪ Convert audio to MP3 for downloadable podcast ▪ Rewrite in conversational tone and post on blog
Self-published articles	▪ Rewrite in conversational tone and post as a blog series ▪ Record audio to MP3 for downloadable podcast
Outdated blog posts	▪ Rewrite with updated titles, references, etc. and post on blog

REPURPOSE EXISTING CONTENT

The information found on your website, data sheets and publicity, highlights from analyst reports, quotes from executive interviews with the press, and interesting product attributes can all be of value to your customers when repurposed for inbound marketing.

Round out your existing content with supplemental information. For instance, a popular e-book provides an opportunity for the author to be interviewed and reveal their top takeaways. The interview may be recorded as an audio podcast or YouTube video and then shared through your email communications.

Ultimately, the art of repurposing lies in the editor's ability to modify existing content in a relevant way to the reader. **Strive to share your company's thought leadership and teach your readers something new**.

WORKSHEET: REPURPOSING EXISTING CONTENT

Existing content	**Repurpose existing content as**

User-generated content (UGC)

If your brand is in the hands of the consumer, why not use these words, pictures, and thoughts in your inbound marketing campaigns. The explosion of social media provides a wealth of comments, testimonials, reviews and ratings for you to incorporate into messages. These sources provide additional feedback, alongside comments you may collect from your customer service department and website.

Taking advantage of these unsolicited testimonials adds a human touch to your messages. Placing UGC center-stage allows your supporters to connect in a way they might not have otherwise. When consumers share common interests, they build trustworthy communities and help you promote your products. As you control the content, you can shape the story and have the UGC reinforce or emphasize your key messaging points. Do not be afraid to use a well-written negative comment. **Including a less-than-stellar comment will give your reviews more credibility and differentiate your product in situations in which it is not a good fit**.

Today's consumer relies more on fellow consumers' opinions than the brand's claims when making their purchasing decisions. Begin by incorporating testimonials for your product or service, and then turn them into "read customer review" links to see if they outperform other links embedded in your email.

Copyright is always a concern in the digital age. Work with your legal department to create and include your firm's Terms and Conditions on your website, blogs and any UGC contests you implement. If your company is not comfortable delving into this area of publication, you may suggest collaborating with influential bloggers or outspoken customers to co-create content with you.

Original content

Having exhausted your repurposed and user-generated content, the next step is to create original, relevant content. The audit of existing content inventory will help expose areas where you are content-rich or in need of substance. With this insight, you can quickly determine which areas you need to focus on for original content. **Creating original content can be a time- and resource-consuming task, so you will need to prioritize and find the most efficient production route**.

Original content gives you the most control of your content keyword strategy. Developing original content based on strategic keyword use allows prospects and customers to find the information most relevant to their needs.

Starting from scratch gives you the opportunity to produce content that your readers can digest with great enthusiasm and possibly share.

The secret to creating contagious content is either educating or solving the reader's problem without explicitly selling your product. When you move away from focusing on just the product or service and towards helping the consumer, you will generate new ideas.

WORKSHEET: ORIGINAL CONTENT DEVELOPMENT PLANNING

Format and description of content required	Keyword use	Date required	Assigned to

TACTICS IN ACTION: HOW TO USE VIDEO CONTENT TO DRIVE DIRECT SALES

Article: HOW31864
Location: MarketingSherpa library

Summary

YouTube can do a lot more than host your videos. A well-designed video content strategy can drive direct sales and get more of your audience to interact – if you create the content.

Check out the video strategy that's powering more than 80% of this company's marketing and pulling in millions of YouTube viewers. Find out how its marketers turned viewers into customers right from their profile.

Introduction

Dr. Robert Wagstaff spent years trying to market his invention through traditional channels. He tried offering Orabrush, a breath-freshening tongue cleaner, through retailers, infomercials and other outlets without success.

Looking for ideas, he approached a marketing class in 2009 at a local university. The students told him that 92% of Orabrush's potential customers were unlikely to buy the product online and that he should avoid internet marketing.

But one of the students, Jeffrey Harmon, noted that the remaining 8% of the audience represented millions of people who might buy an Orabrush. Wagstaff liked Harmon's perspective. He connected with him outside of class and eventually hired him to market Orabrush part-time.

“Once I knew that 90% of bad breath came from your tongue and that using the tongue scraper could get this gunk off, I thought this was a really cool idea,” Harmon says.

While testing marketing ideas, Harmon found a YouTube video titled “How to tell if you have bad breath.” He received permission from the video's publisher to add it to an Orabrush landing page and test the response. “That video boosted our conversion rate by three times,” Harmon says.

Excited by the results, he recruited a small team to create Orabrush's own “bad breath test video.” That video has since received more than 13 million views on YouTube, and 19% of those viewers have visited Orabrush's website.

Harmon is now CMO at Orabrush. His team has spent two years building the company's YouTube page into a full-blown inbound marketing hub. YouTube is Orabrush's primary marketing channel and represents 80% of its marketing, he says.

Since the launch of that first video, businesses from more than 40 countries have inquired about becoming Orabrush distributors. Other results include:

- More than 35 million YouTube channel views
- More than 116,000 YouTube subscribers (second only to OldSpice among YouTube sponsor channels)
- Up to 10x increase in landing page conversion rates by adding Orabrush videos to landing pages
- More than 271,000 Facebook fans (driven mostly from YouTube)
- Orabrush’s sales volume in stores is comparable to premium toothbrush sales

Orabrush grew its YouTube strategy from scratch through experimentation, hard work and innovative marketing. Below, we outline the key tactics that the team used to build its inbound strategy.

Tactic #1. Create an effective YouTube page

Standard YouTube channel-pages have a basic template with videos, comments and profile information. Orabrush's page has a customized look that includes:

- Image-based background
- Image-based navigation buttons to video categories
- A second video player below the primary player
- A "try it now" button to order a free Orabrush
- Twitter sharing button

Harmon painstakingly researched successful YouTube channels and tested their tactics. The resulting page is a combination of the best tactics he and his team have uncovered.

The middle of Orabrush's YouTube page features a second video player and a large "try it now" button. When clicked, the button reveals a widget that encourages visitors to follow the brand in social networks and visit Orabrush's site for a free trial.

Since the team can code links to automatically scroll to this section when visitors arrive, this section doubles as a landing page. It also includes a Twitter-sharing button that generates a link to the landing page in the following tweet:

"Bad Breath Test: http: //t.co/NKvCczU via @orabrush"

Standard YouTube channels cannot add linkable header images, buttons in videos, or buttons on their channel-pages. Orabrush has greater flexibility over its page because it is a high-level YouTube sponsor and buys a good amount of advertising on the network, Harmon says.

Tactic #2. Create more than one type of video

Orabrush's channel features three types of videos, each with a specific purpose.

Conversion videos

As the name suggests, these videos are designed to encourage conversions. The team includes them on landing pages, and they can dramatically increase conversion rates, Harmon says.

Harmon calls the videos "edu-tainment." Each entertains and teaches viewers about Orabrush and topics such as bad breath. They include calls-to-action, typically as a button embedded in the video or as text. Types of calls-to-action include:

- Visit team's site to purchase or request a free brush
- Locate a nearby store with Orabrush
- Watch another of the team's videos
- Download the team's iPhone app
- Share the video on Facebook or Twitter
- Connect with Orabrush on Facebook or Twitter

Some videos end with multiple buttons that combine up to four calls-to-action (see creative samples).

Engagement videos

A YouTube audience must be engaged. The team fills this requirement, in part, by consistently uploading enjoyable videos.

The videos are funny. Many feature Orabrush's human-tongue mascot joking with people about the product. These 'engagement' videos often end with buttons to view more videos or subscribe to Orabrush's YouTube channel.

Customer reviews

Customer testimonials are powerful. Orabrush hosts more than two-dozen of them on YouTube, but Harmon's team did not create them or plan to, he says.

Instead, the reviews were a fluke. Harmon gave an Orabrush to a friend and in exchange for a written review (several customers had written mini-reviews on Orabrush's Facebook page). Harmon's friend, a film buff, created a video review instead and Harmon uploaded it to YouTube

"After that, these reviews just started pouring in," Harmon says. "Tons and tons of video reviews came from people all over the world who had tried the product and wanted to tell people about it."

(Note: Be sure to check with your legal department about the Federal Trade Commission's guidelines on testimonials in advertising)

Tactic #3. Commit to consistency

Harmon thoroughly researched how successful YouTube channels operated. He found that video length, quality and subject matter were only loosely related to success. The big factor, he says, was consistency.

“I realized that they constantly engaged their fans.”

Again and again, he saw that publishers who created content that interested their audiences on a weekly basis had huge followings. The challenge, though, was creating enough content to maintain a weekly schedule.

- Work in advance

Orabrush sets its publishing calendar several months in advance, Harmon says. He works with a tight-knit group of writers and video experts to publish at least one video per week – every week.

“I have talked to a lot of 'YouTubers' who took a break for a couple of months. Going back, it takes them forever to get back to where they were,” he says.

- Ad algorithm favors weekly video

Similar to Google, YouTube's ads are matched to search results and their placement is based on an algorithm. Harmon has noticed that videos over one week old are not promoted as often as newer videos, he says.

- The costs can kill you

Video production can be expensive and a weekly schedule can drive costs to the moon. Be sure to set a strict budget or you'll risk running out of resources to keep up.

Orabrush avoids overspending on sets, props or special effects. The team also recruits low-cost, high-value talent from the nearby Brigham Young University film program. That said, the team did invest in a good camera, lens and lights to give the videos a professional feel.

Tactic #4. Content has to interest the audience

Let's face it – no one is going to subscribe to a YouTube channel that has boring videos, no matter how often they're published.

The key to making good videos is to make them interesting to your audience. Videos do not have to be of the highest quality and their finer points, such as length, are not as important as their appeal, Harmon says.

Each Orabrush video is entertaining and explains a product that most consumers have never heard of. These factors, combined with the team's persuasive calls-to-action, encourage viewers to subscribe and share with friends.

The team boosted its performance by purchasing ads in YouTube's Promoted Videos program.

The ads were “crucial” to attracting visitors, Harmon says. Once they arrived, it was up to the team's content to convince viewers to subscribe and share with friends.

“The real key is making sure you have enough 'virality' and enough engagement and interest that you can stretch those clicks,” Harmon says.

Tactic #5. Engage fans and peers

YouTube is a social network that includes profiles, comments and updates. The network's users expect interaction. Here are three ways Orabrush connects with its audience:

- Responding and moderating

Although the team gets far too many comments to respond to them all, Orabrush makes it a point to reply to as many as possible.

Also, Harmon notes that YouTube has many "haters" who troll the network looking for nasty things to say. "I moderate comments for about the first half of the day. Then once you get the haters weeded out of the first few hundred comments, then no more come usually."

- Use ideas and give "shout-outs"

Orabrush will sometimes ask fans questions, such as to which family members viewers would give an Orabrush and why. The team also mines viewer comments for content ideas.

"When we first made the Orabrush video, everybody was saying they didn't know exactly how to use [the product]. So we made a how-to Orabrush video."

A key part of using fans' ideas, Harmon says, is to give credit to them in the videos they inspire. This shows your fans that you're paying attention to them, you value them, and you think they're smart.

- Interact with fellow publishers

There are hundreds of YouTube channels with large followings and Orabrush makes it a point to make friends and interact with peers.

For example, when the team started receiving unsolicited video user reviews, it sent several free Orabrushes to Juicystar07, a beauty-focused YouTube publisher with a large following. She loved the product and posted a video review. Afterward, even more user-generated reviews poured in.

SELECTING CONTENT TOPICS

Creating good content is difficult work, but it's not wise to hastily do so for the sake of moving forward. Repurposed, user-generated and original content are all options for fulfilling your content needs. But knowing where you'll get the content is only half of the equation; you need to also pick your topics. In this step, be careful not to rush your planning. Otherwise, you could miss the mark and have to start anew once more.

SET A GOAL BEFOREHAND

Many companies have a checklist of content-types they need to produce, thinking, "We have this product, so we definitely need a whitepaper, a brochure, a case study and maybe a webinar." **Instead of shooting in the dark with this approach, consider why you should create a piece of content and what purpose it is going to serve**. Focus on aligning content with your goals, audience and opportunities – and then let that drive the design and topic.

A simple approach for doing this is to target your content to a specific stage in the customer engagement cycle. Ask yourself, "For our next piece of content, what do we want it to support?" **Setting even basic, high-level goals will provide a compass to keep you on track when you're planning and publishing**.

<table>
<tr><td>Awareness</td><td>Raise general awareness of your brand

Increase website traffic</td></tr>
<tr><td>Consideration</td><td rowspan="2">Encourage consideration of and active interest in your products and services</td></tr>
<tr><td>Inquiry</td></tr>
<tr><td>Purchase</td><td>Get prospects to choose you over competitors</td></tr>
<tr><td>Retention</td><td>Retain customers</td></tr>
</table>

EDUCATE – DON'T SELL – NEW PROSPECTS

There is a time for promoting your products and services; it's not when you are trying to attract visitors to your website. At this point it is still too early for a prospect to even *consider* the specifics of your solution. Instead, **focus on educating people to pull them into your funnel**. Provide valuable content that helps the reader learn about the issue at hand. Characteristics of this type of content include:

- Providing useful information
- Focusing on educating visitors
- Avoiding direct promotion of the company
- Attracting organic search traffic

CHOOSE CONTENT FORMATS MINDFULLY, NOT BY DEFAULT

Instead of mimicking what is offered in your industry, choose content formats that best suit your needs.

For example, you may discover that your prospects have neither the time nor inclination to read 15-page whitepapers but eagerly soak up e-books that are rich with graphics and call-out quotes. Need to explain dense technical information? Videos may be a good alternative to whitepapers for communicating information in this vein.

Write to your ideal customer

Once you pick a goal for your content, you need to pick a topic. One strategy is to **put yourself in the mind of your ideal prospect – the best person you could possibly reach – and list the information that person needs**. Then, for every point in the customer engagement cycle, consider what questions that person would ask.

Stage of Customer Engagement Cycle	Questions Asked
Awareness	How can I find the best deals on footwear?
Consideration	What do I need to consider when purchasing women's running shoes?
Inquiry	What types of running shoes does this company offer?
Purchase	Why is it better to purchase from this company over another?
Retention	What would make me purchase from this company again?

Your content should strive to answer questions along the spectrum from generic to specific. From a practical standpoint, this means that once you understand the needs of your ideal prospect, you can then work to address the needs of a specific type (or segment) of prospects. **Targeting a segment will add specificity to the questions you need to answer**.

For instance, in the retail footwear example mentioned above, is the prospect a runner? Male or female? A female runner might be looking for something more specific than "the best deals on footwear." Her question might be, "How can I find the best deals on women's running shoes?"

Find more opportunities through search data

People often use search engines to answer a question or solve a problem. By looking at search data, you can detect problems that your prospects are trying to solve in your industry and create content to help them. Using a keyword tool, enter keywords related to your business to bring up additional keywords and related search volumes.

Many tools also report the relative competition for bidding on paid search ads for each keyword. Every market has top-level keywords that generate strong search traffic, and for which there is heavy competition for rankings. Sometimes focusing on areas with less competition can yield greater opportunities. Consider side-stepping highly competitive keywords and targeting topics with these three attributes:

- Relevant to prospects' needs
- Somewhat lower search volume
- Significantly less competition for rankings

CASE STUDY: BUILDING CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT THROUGH CONTENT MARKETING

Article ID: HOW31938
Location: MarketingSherpa library

Introduction

Content is king. How many times have you heard this statement? It may not be a universal marketing truth, but content is absolutely the cornerstone from which almost any marketing effort is built. Because you become your own publisher with content marketing, it is a great way to build your brand without spending additional money on media buys.

Eloqua, a marketing automation software company, has an comprehensive content marketing department headed by Joe Chernov, VP of Content Marketing.

This successful marketing effort hasn't always been the case at Eloqua. "We had a pain," said Chernov. Eloqua was among the first companies in the marketing automation industry. And as that business area continued to grow, the company found itself with more competition. He continued, "This competition took on a shape that was unfamiliar to Eloqua."

One competitor specifically posed a challenge for Eloqua. Chernov said, "It was a really socially savvy company; a Web 2.0/marketing 2.0 company really active in content creation with a vibrant blog and everything that goes hand-in-hand with the social marketing phenomenon."

Chernov described Eloqua as being caught "flat-footed" and how, from the C-level on down, the company knew it needed marketing 2.0 in its overall marketing mix. Chernov defines "Web 2.0" as the shift from the transactional Web to the conversational or social Web. Marketing 2.0 reflects this shift making the entire marketing process more collaborative than in the past.

The result of the marketing 2.0 push at Eloqua was the creation a totally independent, comprehensive content marketing department that didn't draw any resources from its demand generation or other ongoing marketing programs.

The content marketing department was created in April 2010, and its first piece of content -- an infographic -- went out in June.

The department has three overarching goals:

- To fill the top of the sales funnel through awareness, completed Web forms and driving traffic to the website
- Create customer attention and customer satisfaction -- make the people who like Eloqua like the company even more, and people who aren't familiar with the company begin liking it
- Create content to improve SEO

Eloqua is now committed to content marketing. Read on to learn about four tactics Eloqua employs in its content marketing efforts.

Tactic #1. Differentiate yourself from the competition

Once the decision was made to make content marketing a focus, the challenge was finding a voice for that content. The entire strategy was prompted by the efforts of competition that Chernov described as "noisy" (in a positive sense). He said Eloqua had asked internally, "Do we want to out-noise them?" and ultimately determined it would be a mistake.

Eloqua's answer was to create brand identity based more on a design "voice" through highly visual content and social marketing communications.

A big part of this brand identity is the frequent use of infographics as content marketing pieces. This also means everything from whitepapers to live presentations are given a heavier touch of design and graphics than might be expected.

For example, Eloqua's social media playbook was created for internal use and also published for anyone to download. This content piece was 42 pages long and profiled ten social media platforms. What set this content piece apart was that the entire work was filled with what Chernov described as, "beautiful, and actually funny, illustrations."

He added the overall feel had a, "comedy to it all ... a playfulness." This "lighter" approach purposely took on some of the informality of the social media and Web 2.0 mentality.

Because Eloqua is in an enterprise B2B environment, the playful feel is, "startlingly unexpected, and it absolutely without question triggers conversation because people just aren't used to seeing a playful side of a B2B brand," Chernov said.

Chernov stated the focus on design helps Eloqua's content get noticed, and more importantly promotes sharing of its content. He said that SEO value comes more from sharing content than creating keyword-rich content, such as a whitepaper, that doesn't get distributed or republished by the audience.

"For me the SEO value isn't what is embedded in the content we create," he explained. "The value is derived when other people host, distribute or talk about our content."

Tactic #2. Brand your content

Your content should be used to complement, enhance or promote your branding efforts.

Chernov said Eloqua had a business goal of creating a new category called "revenue performance management." He knew this effort was in place when the content marketing program was started so he worked to create a groundswell of association between Eloqua and the term "revenue." With this in mind:

- The Twitter feed is called the "revenue stream" to mimic the idea of the Twitter stream
- The online slide hosting service SlideShare is the hub of Eloqua's content, called the "revenue hub"
- The blog is referred to as the "revenue blog," and is titled, "It's All About Revenue"

An animated video, created to explain and promote the idea of revenue performance management, was distributed through SlideShare.

The video itself was three and a half minutes long and done in the style of the old "Schoolhouse Rock" cartoons. So instead of a corporate talking head lecturing on this new business category, viewers saw a quirky cartoon that walked through milestones in business management from W. Edwards Deming and Total Quality Management to supply-chain management at Wal-Mart, culminating in revenue performance management. The video itself was very lightly branded, with the word Eloqua appearing visually and in the audio only once.

This animated video effectively combined the playfulness of Eloqua's brand identity with the concept branding of revenue performance management.

Tactic #3. Don't let the whitepaper hold back your creativity

The traditional whitepaper is maybe the content marketing piece for B2B marketing. Your customers expect whitepapers, and they offer an opportunity to provide information about your industry, your expertise and your products. Often, the whitepaper comes in a fairly predictable package -- a lot of text, some graphics, and maybe a little too much content in today's short-attention span online reading world.

Chernov said Eloqua tried to take the whitepaper concept and inject creative design into it. Part of this was splintering large whitepapers into individual, easy-to-read guides. Eloqua came up with what it calls its Grande (think 16 ounces of coffee) Guides. The promise is it takes about 15 minutes to drink that coffee and the same amount of time to read the entire guide.

The playful design brand identity is in full-force with the guides. The layout of the guide looks like a well-worn moleskin notebook with what appears to be wet pages and coffee mug rings where someone might have "left" their mug on the page at some point in time, continuing the coffee theme. Eloqua's guides cover a variety of topics both related to its core business and also broader issues of interest to marketers.

Chernov stated, "These are unequivocally our most important form of content marketing." The reason for this is the guides sit on the line between top-of-the-funnel work of the content marketing department, and the more funnel progression and conversion activities of the demand generation team.

The larger goal of each guide is to generate and nurture leads.

These database sends go out a few days before Eloqua releases the guide to the public, and at first the company resisted allowing recipients to share the guide before the official release by not providing, or even deactivating, links to the content. It became quickly obvious this was applying a Web 1.0 mindset to a Web 2.0 practice.

Now Eloqua provides links and gives its early recipients an opportunity to be "taste-makers" by being the first to distribute links to the guide.

"It just felt unnatural to send something to somebody and to prevent them from sharing it," Chernov said. "This is a culture of sharers now and your status is earned by the quality of what you share. We asked, '...what is the worst that is going to happen? A bunch of people see our great content?' That is a pretty good thing."

Tactic #4. Hire a brand journalist

A brand, or corporate, journalist is someone you hire to provide content, ideally independent from marketing control. This team member will typically write blog posts, cover industry trends and write about things that are of interest to your customers.

One thing a brand journalist is not is a typical public relations or marketing communications writer. Often a brand journalist has a career, or at least education, in journalism rather than business writing.

Eloqua hired a corporate journalist last year who previously covered business for the Boston Herald and the Boston Business Journal. When the decision to hire a brand journalist first came up, Chernov and Eloqua's CMO discussed the type of writer they were looking for. The initial idea was to find someone proficient in B2B marketing.

Chernov estimates Eloqua's industry is only around 10% penetrated. He argued to find someone who could speak to that 90% of the market that remained untapped. The result was hiring a general business writer.

He added there was no expectation for the corporate journalist to be a PR person. Chernov said, "His writing would be funky, it wouldn't be natural for him and I think the public would smell a rat. I once referred to him as a PR person and he barked at me. That is good."

Eloqua's brand journalist engages in everything from regularly contributing to the blog to interviewing customers on video. The job title of corporate reporter helps open doors that a public relations manager might find closed.

When the corporate journalist calls clients for an interview, he typically gets a positive response. And because many media outlets are shrinking their staff, but still have events to cover, Chernov offers his corporate journalist where he can write about topics that have nothing to do with Eloqua for other venues and Eloqua gets a valuable inbound link from these media outlets in their corporate reporter's bio.

Results

The key result of Eloqua's content marketing department is it drives lead creation at the top of the sales funnel.

Even though the company doesn't have benchmarks to meet with lead generation -- because so much of the content is ungated, it's not possible to track the number of leads each content piece creates -- the company does measure the total number of leads created each quarter, measures the net promoter score of all its clients through surveys, and daily tracks its performance in search. Chernov is held accountable for the success of all three numbers.

- Through four Grande Guides published in the second half of 2010, the company generated $2.5 million in annual contract value in closed business from customers who first downloaded one of the guides. Another $3.2 million is currently in the contract stage from prospects who first downloaded one of the guides.
- Once Eloqua developed a corporate blog, it reached the “Ad Age Power 150” within the first year.
- The most highly desirable lead activity for Eloqua is viewing a product demo. People who discover the Eloqua website through content pieces such as guides, infographics, playbooks, etc., are 21% more likely to view a demo
- For one particular infographic, The Blog Tree, viewers of that content piece were 32% more likely to fill out a form at the website, putting that person into Eloqua's database
- On average 17% of visitors to Eloqua.com have the title of VP or higher, while 25% of the visitors who find the site via content pieces are VP or higher.
- Customers who engage with Eloqua through social channels, such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn are 450% more likely to be brand promoters than the company's average customer, as found by net promoter scoring

SUMMARY QUESTIONS

1. What are the three categories of content you should consider to fulfill the need for content?

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2. True or false: the art of repurposing lies in the editor's ability to modify existing content in a relevant way to the reader.

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3. What is a benefit of using a well-written negative comment or review?

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4. Which content category affords you the most control over your content keyword strategy?

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MY ACTION STEPS TO INBOUND MARKETING SUCCESS

☐ Audit your organization's existing content and list the ways you can repurpose it.

☐ Identify how you could use user-generated content in your inbound marketing campaigns.

☐ Ask yourself, "For our next piece of content, what do we want it to support?"

☐ ____

☐ ____

☐ ____

☐ ____

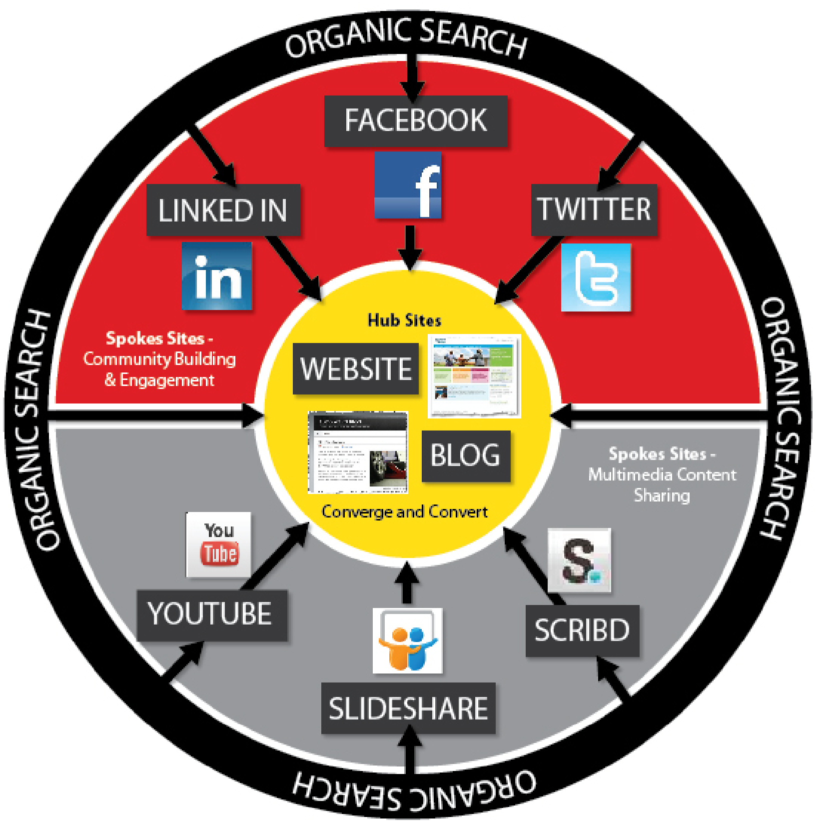
Chapter 7: Construct an Inbound Marketing Architecture for Synchronizing Channels

The previous three chapters defined the roles and tactics for search engine optimization, social media, and content marketing channels. In this chapter, we focus on synchronizing these channels into a logical architecture for scalable inbound marketing success.

Key teachings in Chapter 7:

- How a hub-and-spoke architecture systematically directs lead capture and customer conversion
- What percentage of marketers agree with the importance of integration – rather than practice it
- How to roll out an inbound marketing architecture with a plan and purpose

With a hub-and-spoke architecture, leads converge on a conversion point



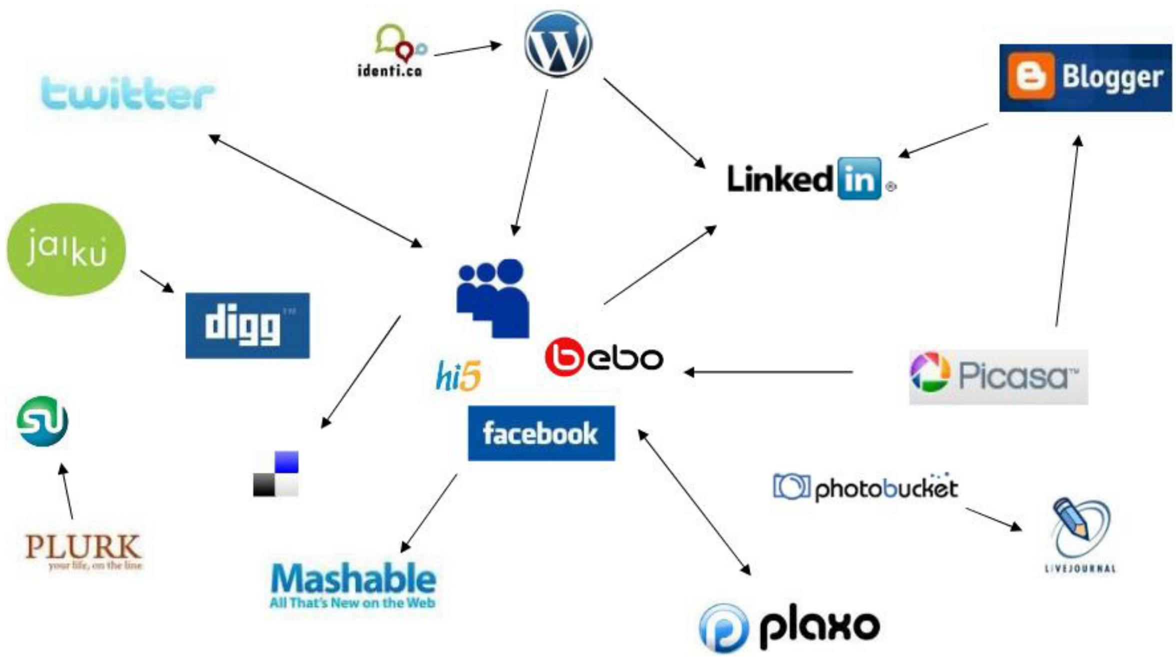
The objective of the inbound marketing architecture is to systematically direct the flow of online interactions from search inquires and social media engagement to lead capture and customer conversion.

The most effective framework for accomplishing this objective is a hub-and-spoke architecture built on three levels.

- The foundation of the architecture – organic search.
- The social media spoke sites for community building, engagement and content sharing.
- The hub sites for the convergence and conversion of inbound traffic.

An architecture design that synchronizes search, social and content is a primary success factor for scalable inbound marketing.

WITHOUT AN ARCHITECTURE, LEADS ARE LOST BEFORE REACHING A CONVERSION POINT



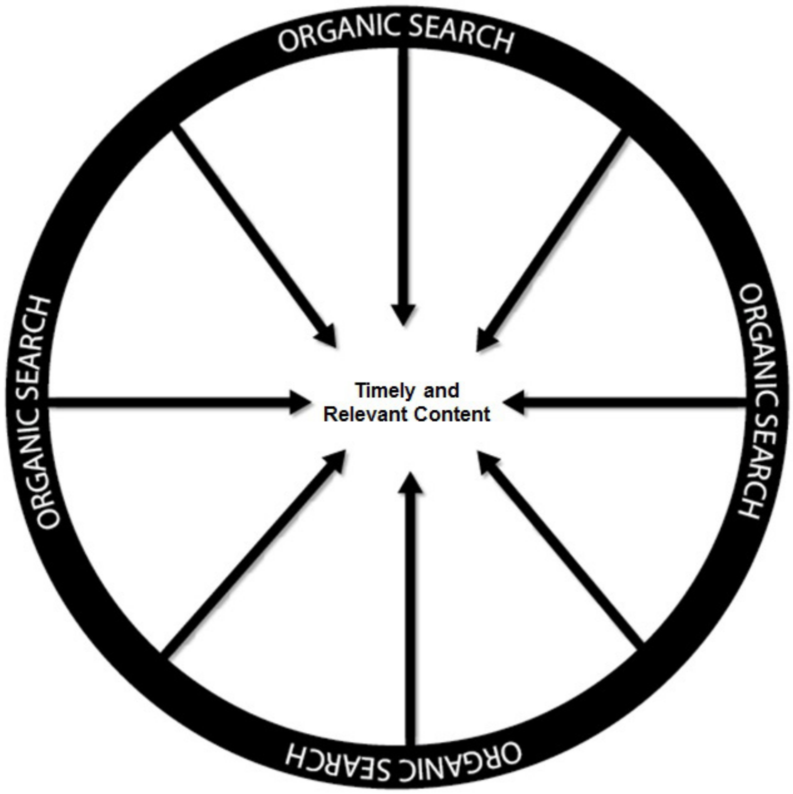
Captivated by the hype and ease of implementing social media sites, many organizations began their social marketing initiatives by creating blogs, Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and other accounts without an architecture built to synchronize each.

A lack of architecture creates a maze in which visitors, prospects and customers aimlessly wander from site to site, until they simply give up before reaching a point of conversion.

The following sections will systematically take you through the design of an inbound marketing architecture that synchronizes search, social media and content, and drives online interactions to a point of conversion.

ORGANIC SEARCH: THE SOLID FOUNDATION BENEATH THE ARCHITECTURE

Today, "everything begins with a search." With this reality in mind, you want to lay a foundation for the inbound marketing architecture with organic search.



Organic search results often provide potential prospects with their first look at a company and its products, services and capabilities.

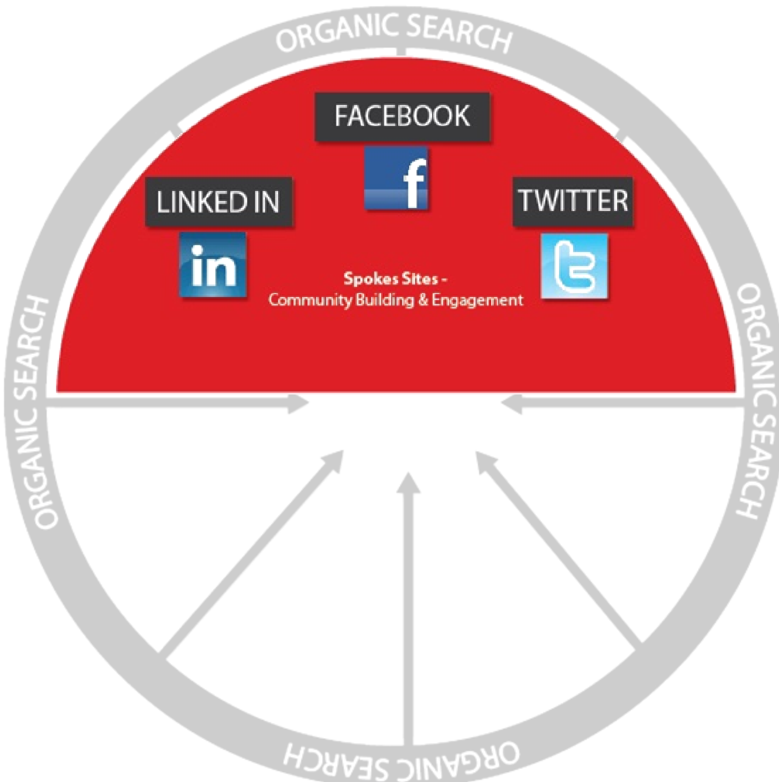
It is good to think about what search can do for your business, but it is better to think about search from the customer's point of view, discovering why they search and what they want to find. **Search results help prospects determine whether your company can answer their questions, identify with their pain points, and gauge their motivations**. You pass this test when you provide timely and relevant content, which increases the chance that you will appear in search listings and move up in the rankings.

Organic search is the foundation of the inbound marketing architecture and the primary driver of inbound lead traffic to the hub-and-spoke sites via timely and relevant content. Timeliness is an inherent characteristic of social media engagement and conversations, while relevancy is the result of keyword-rich, search-optimized content that permeates the hub-and-spoke sites.

With this understanding in mind, let's look at the spoke sites.

Spoke Sites: Social networks for community building and engagement

Social networks inspire more passion and interaction than other Web destinations. **Social constituents want to share their opinions with friends and peers, and seek advice from the social authorities or subject matter experts**. Social networks are the ideal environment for engaging these constituents. Providing a platform for building and engaging social network communities is the next step in constructing the inbound marketing architecture.



The number of social network spoke sites in your architecture is not important. What *is* important is to have a plan and purpose for each social network you create. **There are many types of social networks but their primary purpose is the same: to build and engage a community of constituents with a common interest**.

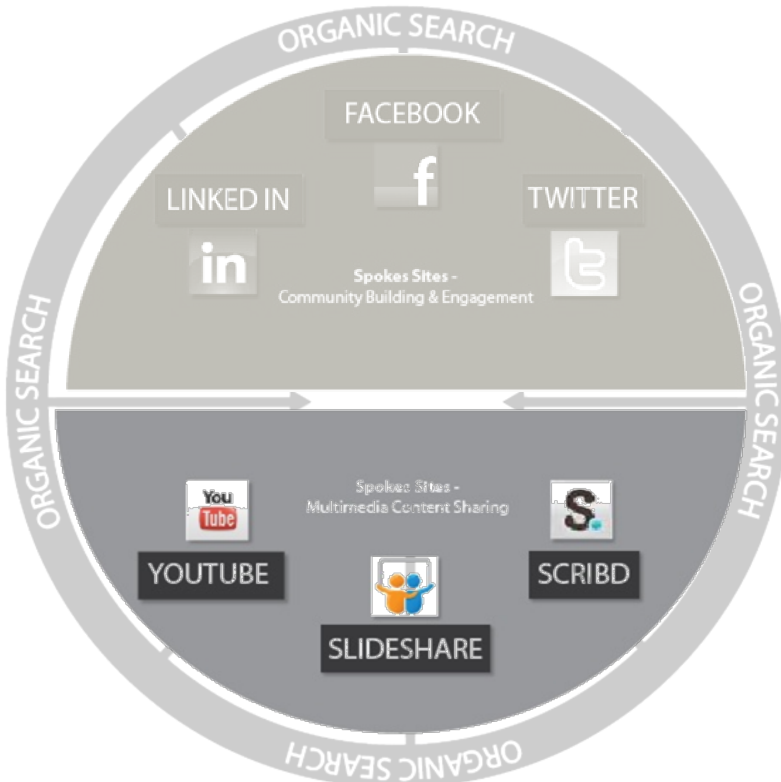
For example, a financial services organization that serves businesses and consumers may create social networks for a number of market segments, such as:

- A Facebook Brand Page for engaging and educating consumers about their services
- A LinkedIn Group for networking and building authority with partners and business influencers
- A Twitter Business Account to provide follower-supported customer service

Creating posts that link these constituents to timely and relevant content on blogs and websites is the secondary purpose of social networks. The architecture must enable this traffic to flow toward the appropriate hub site content and conversion points.

SPOKE SITES: MULTIMEDIA SITES FOR CONTENT AGGREGATION AND SHARING

The desire to create, aggregate and share content in a variety of forms for personal enjoyment and commercial enterprise has driven the popularity and adoption of social media. Multimedia content sites enable this aspiration, and complement social networks in their ability to integrate with search tactics.



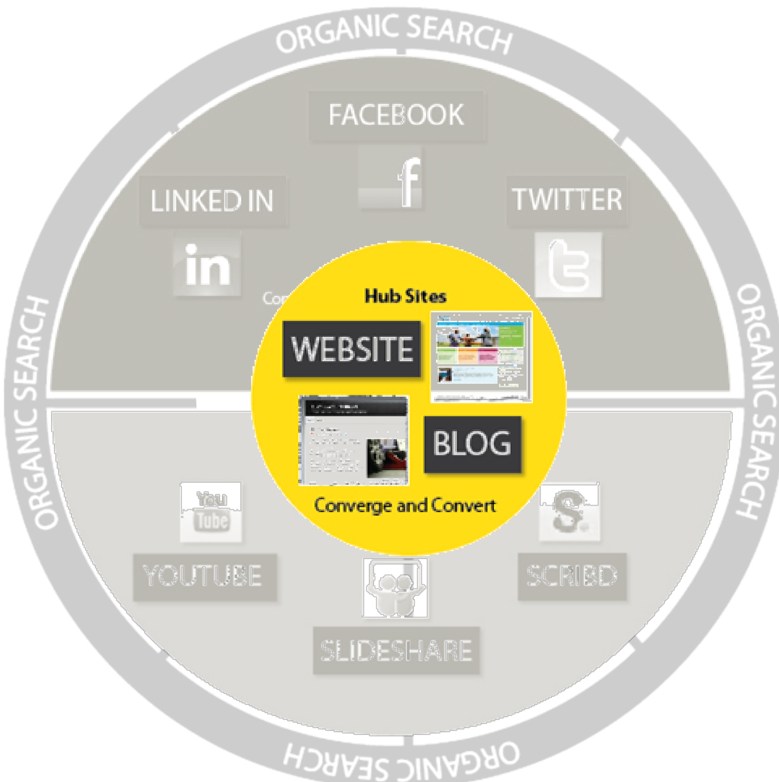
If content is king, multimedia sites are his castles. From videos and photos, to documents and presentations, **multimedia content is a valuable asset when created, shared and strategically aggregated**.

With text and objects carefully optimized, multimedia content on spoke sites receives highly favorable rankings on search engines. Moreover, when this content is linked to – or embedded on – websites and blogs, search crawlers travel through the multimedia spoke sites to linked hub sites, attracting additional search traffic to blog and website conversion points.

When you consider the power of timely, relevant and engaging multimedia content to attract inbound traffic, it is no surprise that the websites of many brands are developing the look and feel of media outlets. However, accomplishing this is no small task. **It requires a sound content strategy to assure that the multimedia content displayed on blogs and websites and shared on social networks is reaching the right audience at the right time**.

HUB SITES: BLOGS AND WEBSITES FOR INBOUND TRAFFIC CONVERGENCE AND CONVERSION

At the hub of the marketing architecture lie blogs and websites. Together, they provide destinations for inbound traffic to converge and convert.



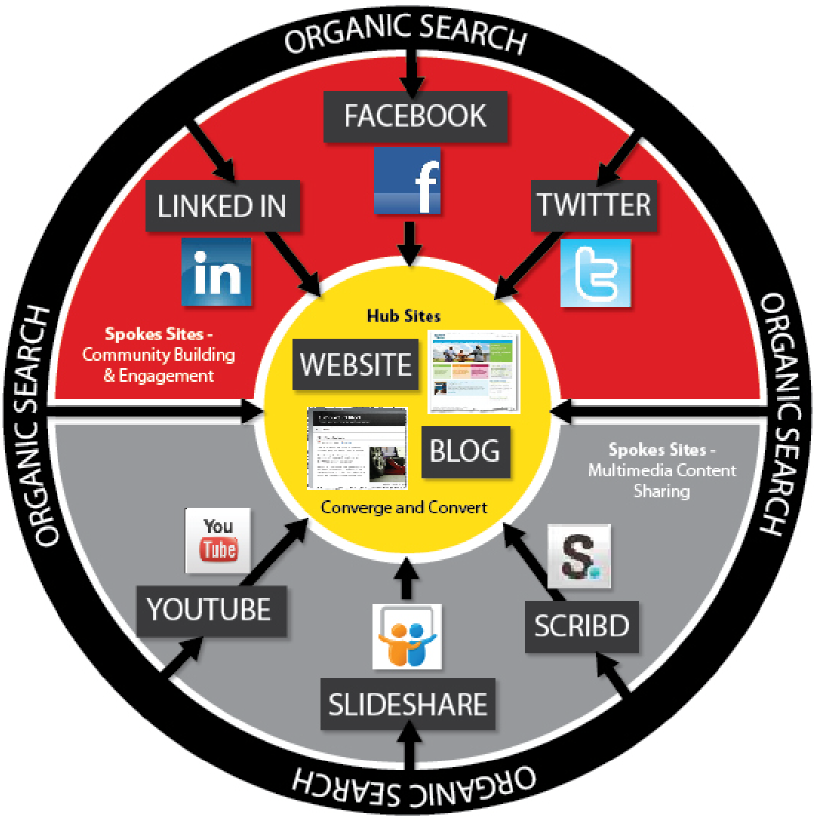
For most organizations, websites have become the hub the overall marketing strategy. The company website is where inbound and outbound marketing programs direct leads, customers and influencers for purchase consideration and decision-making information. For inbound marketing purposes, the website has a powerful partner site at this critical point of traffic convergence – the blog.

If a website is the hub of the overall marketing strategy, a blog is the hub of the organic search, social media and content marketing strategy. Synchronizing the power of a blog to attract search traffic and link social media posts to content, with the power of a website to convert traffic to leads and sales, creates a tipping point toward scalable inbound marketing ROI.

Because all roads lead to the hub, it is important to test and optimize website landing pages for continuous conversion improvement. Incremental increases in the conversion rate of inbound traffic to hub pages will have the greatest impact on a program's financial performance.

LAUNCHING AN INBOUND MARKETING ARCHITECTURE WITH A PLAN AND A PURPOSE

The number of hub-and-spoke sites in your inbound marketing architecture is not important. What is important is to have a specific plan and purpose for each site in the architecture. Additionally, it is important that your organization becomes proficient in the use of each site for marketing purposes *before* adding the next site to the architecture. Launching the sites in a logical and timely sequence is the final phase.



Please use the following worksheet to define a plan and a purpose for each hub-and-spoke site proposed for your inbound marketing architecture, alongside a logical and timely sequence for rolling out each of these sites.

It will be helpful to start with the purpose of this architecture in mind. Ask yourself:

- What are your traffic convergence and conversion goals for the hub sites? How will a blog and website help you achieve these goals?
- Next, what are your community-building, engagement and content sharing goals for the spoke sites? How will the social networks and multimedia content sites help you achieve these goals?
- Finally, what are your search engine optimization goals for inbound marketing? What timely and relevant content is required to lay a solid foundation for your architecture?

WORKSHEET: DEFINE A PLAN AND PURPOSE FOR SITES IN THE ARCHITECTURE

Hub Sites	**Purpose of Hub Sites**	**Roll-Out Sequence**
Website		
Blog		
Spoke Sites	**Purpose of Social Network Spoke Sites**	**Roll-Out Sequence**
Social network		
Social network		
Social network		
Social network		
Spoke Sites	**Purpose of Multimedia Content Spoke Sites**	**Roll-Out Sequence**
Multimedia site		
Multimedia site		
Multimedia site		
Multimedia site		

CASE STUDY: INBOUND STRATEGY DRAWS 70% MORE LEADS AND 25% MORE REVENUE

Case Study ID: CS31911
Location: MarketingSherpa library

Summary

Content marketing can increase the volume and quality of your site traffic, and doesn't require a huge budget. As this company shows, you can build a strategy from the ground up using mostly free tools and resources on hand.

Check out the small-budget inbound strategy this company used to pull in 70% more leads and increase average annual account revenue by nearly 100%. See the key parts of the strategy and the steps they took to build it.

Challenge

When Carissa Newton joined Delivra about two years ago, most of the email service provider's sales leads came from paid third-party sources. Newton wanted to pull in more qualified leads, but her budget was tight.

Spending more on advertising and other outbound strategies was not an option. Instead, she needed more prospects to discover and reach out to Delivra. She knew from past experiences that such leads could be valuable.

“My job was to build marketing efforts where we could get inbound leads to start flowing in,” Newton says. “In my past experiences, that's where we found the highest-quality leads.”

“If you want better leads and you want higher dollar sales, then you need to have these people raising their hands and telling you that they want to hear more about your products or services, rather than just pushing your messages out.”

Newton needed to establish an inbound marketing strategy to pull in high-quality leads – but the company did not have the architecture. Her team needed to build it from scratch.

Campaign steps

Newton set her sights on building marketing assets on a low budget and without the help of agencies or vendors. She wanted these assets to efficiently attract more qualified leads and to be easily measurable.

Here are the steps her team followed:

Step #1. Create guidelines for messaging

Newton planned to generate a ton of content for the strategy. For it to be effective, she needed the strategy to accurately describe Delivra's brand, products and philosophy.

Delivra did not have a messaging strategy before this effort. Newton's team had to create one. Over a period of three weeks, the marketers shaped Delivra's tone and style through meetings with management and employees, as well as through research on Delivra's position in the market.

They created documents outlining Delivra's branding and messaging guidelines. The documents explained topics such as how employees should describe Delivra's services and how the company differs from other email service providers.

"Brand design, logos, fonts and colors – those are all pretty easy to identify and make sure you are consistent with," Newton says. "But being able to nail down a message and to get the entire company saying that same message and reiterating that in all of your marketing – that is an amazing feat."

The messaging platform took less than a month to create, Newton says. But applying it to every part of Delivra took nine months. Throughout that time, Delivra's marketers worked to ensure consistent messaging through Delivra's website, customer service team, sales reps – everywhere.

They did this by ensuring every employee had access to the messaging documents and by having many meetings to explain the guidelines and their goals.

"Everyone in the company adopted it so quickly. I was really shocked by that," Newton says. "I've been through the exercise of building messaging and branding statements in the past, but I have never seen a company get behind the messaging and brand as quickly as they did here."

Step #2. Set up and monitor architecture

Newton planned to create and disseminate content that would attract people researching topics on email marketing – which directly relates to Delivra's target audience. The content would point to Delivra's website where people could find more information about email marketing and the company.

"We want to create a conversation with that audience to the point where they become interested, they go to our website, they fill out a form, or they call us. Sometimes it takes multiple interactions," Newton says.

Here are the channels the team focused on:

<u>Blog</u>

Delivra launched a blog, called mailchatr, and published daily posts. The blog served as an email marketing resource and provided a face for Delivra's brand and content, Newton says. Today, blogs are written by Delivra's staff, such as the CEO, Director of Operations, and members of the marketing team.

"Our CEO embraced it immediately...He insisted that we post five days a week, every week...We sometimes are able to sprinkle in an additional posting."

<u>Social media</u>

Immediately after a post is published, Delivra shares a link to it through social media channels. The team maintains active profiles on:

- Facebook
- Twitter
- LinkedIn
- Smaller Indiana - a local social network (see useful links below)

Delivra's marketers also interact with audiences on these channels and employ other social media marketing tactics. Their Facebook profile page, for example, has several pages including:

- A welcome page with a video
- Newsletter sign up form
- Contact us form
- And others

<u>PR</u>

Scoring mentions in industry press has been essential to building Delivra's credibility, Newton says. The articles were published by trusted organizations and listed in search results next to Delivra's own content, which lent the company more credibility.

“That [credibility] has really helped us in leaps and bounds with larger scale clients, the clients that we would really like to have because they're more profitable and we can work with them longer term.”

Step #3. Add more high-value content to the website

Newton's team first established the blog, website, and social profiles, and offered a few case studies and whitepapers from its site. After several months, Newton showed results to her superiors that proved the strategy was working and gained support to continue.

The team moved onto “phase two,” Newton says, and added more detailed how-to articles to its website. These articles were open access. They helped establish Delivra's expertise and were intended to appeal to search engines and people researching email marketing.

The goal was to have highly relevant prospects (those shopping for email services) find Delivra's site, enjoy the content, and reach out via telephone or contact form to learn more about its services.

To encourage more prospects to fill out a form, the team also added more case studies and whitepapers to the site and placed them behind lead-generation forms. Visitors who supplied basic contact information could download the reports and would be entered into Delivra's customer relationship management (CRM) system.

Step #4. Leverage automated marketing and respond quickly

Newton's team found that a different approach was needed to nurture leads arriving from unpaid, inbound sources than leads from paid sources.

For example, leads from a paid lead-generator would be called to schedule an appointment with a Delivra salesperson. Leads from inbound channels, however, were automatically assigned to a relevant salesperson and contacted via telephone within 24 hours.

“If we acted on them quickly, we've found that those [leads] convert much more quickly than any other kind of sources of purchased leads or cold calling,” Newton says. “And having that automated and flowing into our CRM system has really created an army out of two people in the marketing department.”

Delivra's leads from inbound channels receive confirmation emails after filling out a form. Newton is careful not to send them too much additional information, she says.

For example, leads from paid sources generally have not had prior contact with Delivra. Some are entered into a five-part email series to familiarize them with the company. Leads from inbound sources, however, have interacted with the company and expressed interest, so Newton's team does not enter them into the five-part series.

“Typically, they've already done a little bit of research...They've already seen a bit of that information in a couple of different areas, and so I don't want to be too redundant and I also don't want to scare them away.”

Step #5. Measure, adjust and prioritize

Newton's team does a lot of analysis on leads. For Delivra's inbound leads, Newton monitors every source individually and tracks:

- Number of leads captured
- Ratio of leads to sales
- Average value of sales
- Average return-on-investment.

This information helps her determine which of Delivra's inbound channels are performing best and which should be tweaked. “I am looking so I can make adjustments to links and calls-to-action in real time, but I'm also looking at it from a marketing planning perspective,” she says. “For example, if I had $10,000 to spend next year and I had to make a call to invest in the blog or the website, I would look at those two lead sources and see which one produced the highest level of revenue and I would focus on that.”

Results

Delivra's inbound strategy successfully attracted leads of a higher quality than the company's paid sources, Newton says, and helped increase sales.

“Inbound leads typically cost a bit more from a time and money perspective,” Newton says. “However, when you see the return is almost double, that most certainly makes it worth it. Again, it is all about results and ROI. [Our salespeople] are not taking five rounds of calls with every lead. They can close the sale a lot quicker and they are also leading to much higher revenue deals.”

The inbound strategy has been in full swing since early 2010. The team has since achieved:

- 25% to 40% increase in revenue each quarter
- Nearly double average annual revenue per account
- 70% increase in inbound leads
- 20% increase in website traffic
- 3-4x more site traffic on the blog than Delivra's website

SUMMARY QUESTIONS

1. Name the three levels of the inbound marketing architecture.

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2. Why is organic search the foundation of the inbound marketing architecture?

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3. True or false: the number of spoke sites you have in your inbound marketing architecture is important.

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4. If the website is the hub of the overall marketing strategy, the blog is the hub of ________.

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MY ACTION STEPS TO INBOUND MARKETING SUCCESS

☐ Identify your traffic convergence and conversion goals for the hub sites. Describe how a blog and website help you achieve these goals.

☐ Identify your community-building, engagement and content sharing goals for the spoke sites. Show how social networks and multimedia content sites help you achieve these goals.

☐ Identify your search engine optimization goals for inbound marketing. Pinpoint what timely and relevant content is required to lay a solid foundation for your architecture.

☐ ____

☐ ____

☐ ____

SECTION THREE: PERFECT

CHAPTER 8: GATHER ACTIONABLE INSIGHTS AND INTELLIGENCE

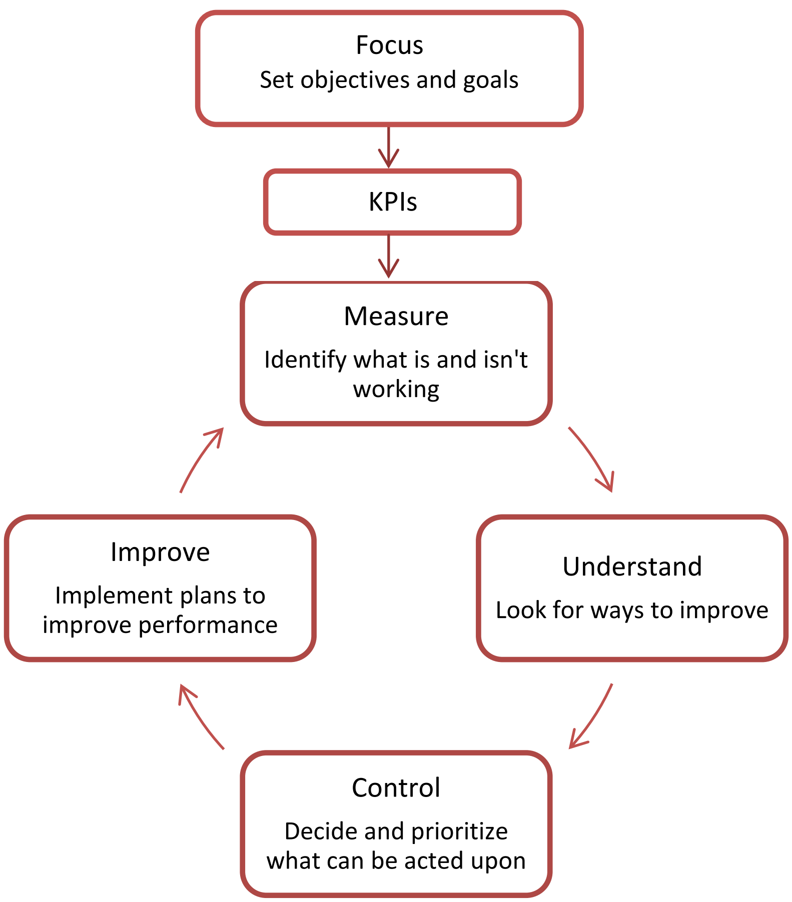
"Measurement is the first step that leads to control and eventually to improvement. If you can't measure something, you can't understand it. If you can't understand it, you can't control it. If you can't control it, you can't improve it." – H. James Harrington

KEY TEACHINGS IN CHAPTER 8:

- How to methodically evaluate your results and reassess your plans for action
- Which inbound marketing metrics are most revealing
- What organizations turn to for analytics and monitoring solutions

Analytics often strike fear in the heart of marketers. For some, vigorous measurement and analysis threaten to bring to light less-than-defensible results. For others, the process of selecting the right metrics – and then reporting on them – can prove daunting.

But, as the quote above so eloquently states, **you can only improve what you can measure, understand and control.** Keeping those verbs in mind will help you capture and take actionable insights on your inbound marketing data.



Focus: Set goals and objectives

You must clearly define your goals and objectives for your search, social and content marketing programs before you can measure results. **If you do not clearly define your objectives, you cannot clearly identify your metrics – and you can end up chasing irrelevant data**. (To set goals and objectives, see *Chapter 3: Establish SMART Objectives to Achieve Optimum ROI*.)

Be sure to choose goals and objectives that are well-suited for, and specific to, your audience. For example, are you more likely to increase awareness on Facebook, or are you more likely improve the relationships with customers you already have? Are you more likely to engage customers with video or whitepapers?

KPIs: Build a bridge between objectives and metrics

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) are the measurements that provide you with the most important information regarding the performance of your inbound marketing programs. Best practices organizations clearly understand what indicators are required for learning and improvement, and focus on those.

The definition of a KPI is important in understanding how to select and use these:

- Key: A "make it or break it" component in the success or failure of the program.
- Performance-related: Able to be measured, quantified and easily influenced by the organization
- Indicator: Provides leading information on future performance

KPIs act as a bridge between objectives and metrics. By linking these back to the strategic goals and objectives you first set, these help you better frame a full set of metrics for monitoring the execution of your strategies. **Remember, metrics are important, but these only serve to help you uncover the impact of your efforts on the key revenue-driving metrics of your site**.

Measure: Identify what is (and isn't) working

Once you have concrete objectives and KPIs in place, you need to select metrics to track progress. Only measure what matters. Commit to a set of metrics for which you'll be accountable, and stick with them. This is a far more pragmatic approach, and one that does not require needless amounts of data.

Focusing on a smaller number of metrics may not paint the whole picture; however, trending data over time can be highly valuable in reflecting the effectiveness of your inbound marketing efforts. **With fewer numbers to crunch and metrics to track, marketers can calibrate marketing efforts against this data to build actionable KPIs**.

"*You get what you measure. Measure the wrong thing and you get the wrong behaviors*." – John H. Lingle

It also makes economic sense to focus on a smaller number of data points, particularly when you take into account the time, effort, and talent required in processing more data.

You should pick out metrics for each program. Inbound marketing may synchronize search, social and content for optimum results, but you still need to individually measure each of these programs before applying holistic analysis.

Let us first look at SEO metrics.

METRICS THAT DEMONSTRATE THE PERFORMANCE OF YOUR SEO PROGRAMS

Measuring the impact of your investment in search engine optimization can be tricky. You can monitor rankings or traffic from search engines – but this usually is not enough to gain full understanding of your performance. **You need to uncover whether SEO has affected your bottom line, and then determine whether a lift in performance is due to your SEO, or the result of another marketing campaign.**

You can get a good handle on the performance of your SEO programs by reviewing the following metrics:

- Branded vs. non-branded search traffic
- Inbound links and referring URLs
- Keyword performance and rankings
- Total traffic from organic search
- Unique search terms that drive traffic

BRANDED VS. NON-BRANDED SEARCH TRAFFIC

Definition: The percentage of your organic search traffic that comes from brand-related keywords – such as your company or product name – versus generic, industry-related, unbranded keywords

When someone searches for your product or company by name, you likely reached them previously through another marketing channel. Whether they saw it on television, heard it on the radio, or saw it in an online display ad, the searcher got your brand name from somewhere.

A good natural search strategy will ensure that those searching for your brand will find you easily. However, the return from SEO is more heavily based on the number people who find you while searching for general, relevant keywords.

To best judge the impact of your natural search strategy, separate your branded and non-branded keywords in your analysis. For example:

- If a teapot retailer named TeapotPlanet captured a sale from the keyword “red teapot” through organic search, then that sale should be attributed to SEO efforts.
- If the keyword was “red teapot TeapotPlanet,” then another marketing effort or a previous sale likely drove the search.

Match the timing of your natural search data to other marketing campaigns too. The campaigns will likely drive searches for your brand or product name. **Watching your branded keyword performance immediately following a campaign’s launch can give you a fuller picture of the campaign’s impact**.

INBOUND LINKS AND REFERRING URLS

Definition: A measure of the number of links back to your site from other sites (domain and pages)

Monitoring the links that point to your website will not help you understand how much revenue your natural search strategy is generating. However, it will help you determine if you need to tweak your outreach strategy – a vital portion of strong SEO.

Some analytics packages come equipped with link information. You can also use external tools provided by search engines to help you measure every link that a search engine has indexed as pointing to your site. In your data queries, select “except from this domain” to exclude internal links on your site, and select “entire site” to include links to every page on your site.

Disseminating press releases, reaching out to bloggers, and engaging online communities are effective ways to build inbound links to your site, which can help boost rankings and traffic. If you want to know how much these efforts are helping, start by seeing how many links they’re earning you.

Keyword performance and rankings

Definition: How well your site and webpages rank in search engine results for your target keywords and key phrases

Your keyword research should have netted you a list of keywords for which you’ve been actively optimizing. You can evaluate the outcome of your efforts by checking how your website ranks for these terms, and then measuring the volume of traffic these terms generate for your site.

You should look at your natural search data on a week-by-week or a month-by-month basis to uncover seasonal trends. Also, match the data to a calendar of changes to your website, such as when you:

- Add significant content
- Reorganize content
- Change technology or architecture
- Employ SEO best practices

Matching natural search traffic trends to site changes will help uncover which changes are having the greatest impact. Changes to your website can take approximately two to four weeks to be indexed by search engines. And it will take another few weeks for those changes to translate into traffic behavior.

If certain keywords were involved in your changes, make sure to specifically watch the performance of those terms.

Traffic from organic search

Definition: The percentage of your total traffic coming from natural search results

Organic search traffic should account for 40-50% of your site’s total traffic. Anything less, and you’ll want to work to improve the relevancy of content for your targeted keywords.

Unique search terms driving traffic

Definition: The full list of search phrases that visitors are using to find your site

Once you’ve determine the total traffic levels coming from organic search, drill down into specifics, such as:

- Total number of phrases that generate traffic for your site
- Total number of visits by search term
- Percentage of total organic traffic by search term

METRICS THAT DEMONSTRATE THE PERFORMANCE OF YOUR SOCIAL MARKETING EFFORTS

When it comes to measuring the impact of social media, marketers now have the ability to capture rich behavioral activity, using metrics like:

- Social reach and growth
- Social media engagement
- Visibility and brand sentiment analysis
- Share of voice
- Traffic from social media

Many social monitoring tools will pull these metrics together into one dashboard. They'll count the mentions of your brand, conduct a sentiment analysis, and also rank the keywords, hashtags, sources, and top users around them.

SOCIAL REACH AND GROWTH

Definition: A measure of the total number of people engaging with your brand in social media channels (e.g. Twitter followers, Facebook "likes," LinkedIn group members, blog subscribers, YouTube channel subscribers)

Social reach is just a means to an end, whether this means further expanding your reach through active content sharing, or connecting someone to a conversion touch point on your website.

SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT

Definition: The number of interactions generated and measured in each social media channel

Social media is a channel for sharing relevant, informative and entertaining content as a way to promote engagement with your prospects and customers. Measure the degree of interest in what you're sharing with metrics such as:

- Facebook "likes" and comments
- Re-Tweets and @replies on Twitter
- Blog comments
- Content downloads and embeds
- YouTube or Vimeo video views and comments
- Flickr views, favorites, and comments
- Slideshare views, comments, favorites, embeds, downloads
- Shared links on social bookmarking sites such as digg and StumbleUpon

These individual components help you identify content, offers and tactics you can continue to use to increase overall engagement.

<u>Engagement with Facebook Page(s)</u>

Facebook provides detailed metrics on interactions with your profile though its Insights platform. This free service details traffic, "likes," comments, sharing activity, and other data. It will even segment data by age, sex and region.

Engagement with Twitter Account(s)

People don't normally go to a Twitter profile to read updates. Rather, they see them in feeds or a tool. They really engage with your content (the Tweets) by clicking your links, replying, re-Tweeting, etc.

You can monitor clicks and mentions of your links with bit.ly, the free URL shortening service. Just add "+" to the end of any bit.ly URL to see a dashboard (e.g. https://bitly.com/szahlt+). Also, the site twitrratr.com provides free sentiment analysis, and Hashtags.org will chart the mentions of your campaign #hashtags over time.

Engagement with LinkedIn Account(s)

LinkedIn reports the unique views and visits to your company profile and will segment the traffic by industry, job title and company. You can get similar stats on the audience in your LinkedIn group, as well as metrics on your audience growth and activity. To do this, just click the Group Statistics banner ad in the lower right of any group page.

Visibility and brand sentiment analysis

Definition: A measure of the mentions and attitudes toward your brand in social media channels

Social media channels provide a vantage point for seeing how many people are talking about your brand, and where they are having these conversations. Be sure to count all mentions of company or products, especially after certain events, like the launch of a marketing campaign, or product release.

Social media channels are also good listening posts to hear what people say about your company, whether positive, negative or neutral. **If you're not listening, then you'll have no idea of what they're saying and how they perceive your brand**. Organize these comments by category, such as customer service, provisioning or price.

Share of voice

Definition: Estimated share of brand mentions for a select keyword set compared to that of its select competitors

With social media, people are free to talk about your brand anywhere they choose. This represents the amount of weight your brand has in the marketplace, and measures the direct mentions of your brand compared to the competition or industry.

Traffic from social media

Definition: The percentage of your total traffic coming from social media channels

As your social reach spreads, traffic levels to your website should rise. If your traffic levels have stagnated, ensure that you're including links to get more information or take an action.

Segmenting incoming traffic by source will reveal which visitors come from social networks, blogs and forums. You can measure traffic in aggregate, or segment it by referring site. Google Analytics is the most popular site analytics tool and is completely free.

METRICS THAT DEMONSTRATE THE PERFORMANCE OF YOUR CONTENT MARKETING

The more relevant content you have, the better your results. To gauge the popularity and applicability of your content, look at the following content metrics. All of these are **key indicators of subject matter interest, engagement and relevancy.**

- Content downloads
- Content shares
- Comments

METRICS THAT DEMONSTRATE THE PERFORMANCE OF YOUR WEBSITE ACTIVITY

Your website is the hub of your marketing activity, so be sure you look at what happens on its pages:

- Unique visitors
- New vs. repeat visitors
- Bounce rate
- Most/least popular pages

UNIQUE VISITORS

Definition: The number of single visitors to a website determined by the number of unique IP addresses that hit the site during a specified time period

Your unique visitor count lets you know whether the content you create is drawing visitors through search and social channels.

NEW VS. REPEAT VISITORS

Definition: A percentage comparison of first-time visitors against those who visit your site more than once

Your new visitor count signals that your marketing activities are generating traffic. But repeat traffic indicates "stickiness" – that is, Web content deemed valuable enough to make them want to return for more.

BOUNCE RATE

Definition: The percentage of visitors who leave after a single page visit, or leave after a short time period.

Web analytics expert Avinash Kaushik describes bounce rates as, "I came. I puked. I left." Colorful words aside, bounce rates are one of the best indicators of compelling, relevant and useful content. **High bounce rates also raise questions about the effectiveness of a page's call-to-action and layout**.

MOST/LEAST POPULAR PAGES

Definition: A comparison of the most- and least-viewed pages of your website

Finding out which pages on your website are popular clues you into content areas your visitors find most interesting. With significant traffic visiting these pages, you also have an opportunity to build your database by adding registration forms for a content download or email newsletter.

METRICS THAT DEMONSTRATE CONVERSION SUCCESS

At face value, many metrics don't mean anything. And CEOs don't care about 99% of the metrics that marketers track. **They don't need to know that non-branded search traffic is up, or that you netted 40,000 Facebook followers this year. What they care about is revenue**.

You associate the metrics you're tracking with money, by connecting them to conversion or transactional data. For example, you may use social metrics to help increase your audience and engagement on LinkedIn and Facebook — but how did the growth help your company? Is referral traffic up from LinkedIn to your site? Do visitors from Facebook produce higher conversion rates? Do they share your content and offers, and increase your reach? How is that translating into revenue and ROI? This data is available if you are willing to connect the dots.

This is where conversion metrics come in. These are some of your best KPIs, because they show how your organization is benefiting from visitors coming to your site. There are a number of conversion metrics you can track, but here are two to start with:

- Conversion rate by channel
- Conversion rate by referring URL

CONVERSION RATE BY CHANNEL

Definition: The percentage of visitors by channel (natural search and social media) that completed a desired conversion action

A Web conversion can be defined by creating a lead or selling a product. **Whatever the definition for your organization, you need to know how well your organic and social media traffic converts**. Depending on the length and width of your sales cycles and funnels, one or all of the following variations may suit your purposes:

- Visitor-to-lead conversion rate
- Lead-to-customer conversion rate
- Visitor-to-customer conversion rate

To help you accurately evaluate the ability of your organic search and social media channels to generate leads and increase revenue, be sure to set benchmarks for your other marketing channels. Establish average lead-gen and average revenue benchmarks over a set period or investment level. You can then compare those against the performance of your inbound marketing channels.

Conversions on natural search traffic

When you're looking at natural search traffic, look at top-level numbers, such as conversions on total traffic. But also check out conversion rates by keyword. For marketers who generate sales leads through natural search, it is important that the performance of these leads is monitored and tracked on a keyword basis. The number of leads generated by each keyword is easy to monitor. But it's more difficult – and more important – to know the ultimate conversion rate of those keywords. **You can only judge a keyword's true performance by knowing its conversion rate**.

With this said, avoid focusing on the details of individual keywords to the point that it blinds you to overall trends. However, if there are keywords that you think should be performing better, drill down to the metrics specifically associated with those keywords.

Conversions on social media traffic

Social media helps you build trust. As a result, you might discover that your website conversions are higher than in other channels because of these early interactions. Alternatively, the conversion rates on your social media traffic may not be as high if your primary goal has been to raise brand awareness and improve your reputation.

Conversion rate by referring URL

Definition: The percentage of visitors by URL that completed a desired conversion action

This metric helps you identify the exact pages that generate the best and most qualified traffic to your site.

Understand: Look for ways to improve

Measurement helps you identify what's been working and not working with your inbound marketing programs. In this step, you now seek understanding. The insights will often jump out at you, simply because numbers do not lie. Other times, however, you may have to make some educated guesses and then test these hypotheses.

Let the metrics and objectives you set guide you towards the decisions you need to make to improve growth and profitability. For example, let's say one of your top objectives was to increase website traffic. In addition to evaluating primary and secondary metrics associated with determining this (e.g. unique visitors, social reach, traffic from organic search and social media), you need to also review the activities you undertook to meet these objectives. Why? Because *smart* objectives are more than **s**pecific and **m**easurable; they also are **a**ctionable, **r**ealistic and **t**ime-bound. This means you need to study the actions you took, and figure out if they will get you to your goal on time.

It's also important to never look at one metric in isolation. To avoid incomplete or misguided conclusions, analyze at least two or three in concert. Seeing that your share of voice was high compared to your competitors might seem positive, until you measure the sentiment and see that most of these brand mentions are negative. In that same period, you might see that one of your top-visited pages is the Contact Us page. You also see that branded search traffic has spiked, with your company name appended to words like "not working" or "service problems."

Taking in all of those metrics together tells you that something is amiss. **Just like a detective gathers different accounts of an incident to piece together the full story, so should you look at different metrics to complete the picture of your marketing situation**.

WORKSHEET: IDENTIFY RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN METRICS

Identify the relationships between metrics by connecting a metric in the left column with one or more metrics in the right column. Think about what these combinations might reveal.

		What does this relationship tell you?
Organic search traffic	Organic search traffic	*Example: Organic search traffic + Bounce rate + Conversion rate* *Generating traffic is important, but what is happening with that traffic? Are visitors leaving as soon as they land on the site? Are you missing conversion opportunities?*
Inbound links	Inbound links	
Referring URLs	Referring URLs	
Keyword rankings	Keyword rankings	
Unique search terms driving traffic	Unique search terms driving traffic	
Social reach	Social reach	
Social media engagement	Social media engagement	
Social visibility	Social visibility	
Brand sentiment analysis	Brand sentiment analysis	
Share of voice	Share of voice	
Traffic from social media	Traffic from social media	
Unique visitors	Unique visitors	
Bounce rate	Bounce rate	
Repeat visitors	Repeat visitors	
Most popular pages	Most popular pages	
Conversion rate	Conversion rate	

Control: Decide and prioritize what can be acted upon

This is an important step. You've just evaluated your performance, and your analysis has likely resulted in a series of possible actions for building on current successes, or addressing shortcomings. Now **you need to control these choices and decide where to put your limited time and resources**.

A way to do this is to pick one actionable idea to start immediately moving forward. Ask your analyst for weekly reports centered on action items that Web development and marketing teams can take immediately use. Concentrate on what would make the most difference. Once you know you've been able to increase your impact by making a change, you can then move on to the next item.

You can also use a criteria-based matrix if you have a number of action items and are struggling with deciding which to pursue first. A criteria-based matrix shows you which actions have the highest scores, and thus which should be the top priority.

To complete the matrix, first identify criteria for prioritizing your action steps. Typically, this involves identifying practical constraints, such as ease of implementation, and also benefits, costs and risks, like potential revenue, competitive advantage, and estimated cost. Second, allocate a weighting number to each criterion on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being least important and 5 being most important to the operation of the business. Third, rate each action in terms of its impact on each criterion, with 1 having the least positive impact and 5 having the most positive impact on that particular criterion.

Finally, multiply each weight by the rating of each criterion to get the score for each project for each criterion, and then add up the weighted scores for each project.

Example: Criteria-based matrix

Criteria	**Scoring**	**Link building**	**On-page optimization**	**Blogging daily**
Ease of implementing	Weight	3	3	3
	Rating	1	3	2
	Score	**3**	**9**	**6**
Potential revenue	Weight	5	5	5
	Rating	4	3	3
	Score	**20**	**15**	**15**
Competitive advantage	Weight	4	4	4
	Rating	4	5	5
	Score	**16**	**20**	**20**
Total score		**39**	**44**	**41**

WORKSHEET: DEVELOP A CRITERIA-BASED MATRIX FOR PRIORITIZING ACTIONS

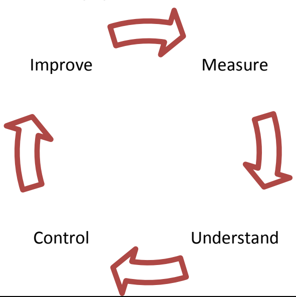
Criteria	**Scoring**	**Action 1**	**Action 2**	**Action 3**	**Action 4**	**Action 5**
	Weight					
	Rating					
	Score					
	Weight					
	Rating					
	Score					
	Weight					
	Rating					
	Score					
	Weight					
	Rating					
	Score					
	Weight					
	Rating					
	Score					
Total score						

IMPROVE: IMPLEMENT PLANS TO IMPROVE PERFORMANCE

In this step, you implement your plans to improve performance. But it doesn't stop there. **In analytics, you measure, understand, control and improve – and then start the whole cycle over again**.

To best illustrate this, let's review our example SMART objective. It's now time to add in the "E" and "R" steps – **e**valuate and **r**eassess – to make this a *smarter* objective. By evaluating each component of your objective you will increase your understanding and reveal areas to improve. Then, after you've implemented your plans to improve performance, you can reassess, paying particular attention to new or different factors put into play.

<table>
<tr><td colspan="3">Goal: Increase website traffic

Objective: Increase website traffic 25% in 6 months</td><td colspan="2">(E)valuate (R)eassess

</td></tr>
<tr><td>(S)pecific</td><td>Is it clear?</td><td>Increase website traffic 25% in 6 months</td><td>Where do you stand?</td><td rowspan="5">Reassess your decisions and actions to date.

Do you need to alter course?

What are you going to do now to meet the objective?

More of the same? Something different?

How will you prioritize these activities?</td></tr>
<tr><td>(M)easurable</td><td>What metrics will you use to measure?</td><td>Primary – unique visitors

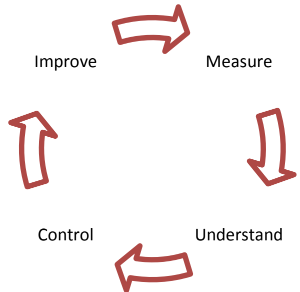
Secondary – social reach, inbound links</td><td>What are these telling you?</td></tr>
<tr><td>(A)ctionable</td><td>What actions will you take?</td><td>New blog post every week, or 24 total

External link building, or 50 total</td><td>Did you actually do these things? Other things? Run other campaigns?</td></tr>
<tr><td>(R)ealistic</td><td>Do you have resources to put on this?</td><td>Team blog approach, with each writing 2 posts in 6 months

1 staff person devoting 2 hours a week to build links</td><td>Did these resources stay assigned to these tasks?</td></tr>
<tr><td>(T)ime-bound</td><td>How long to achieve this?</td><td>6 months</td><td>Are you on track and trending?</td></tr>
</table>

Worksheet: Making a SMART objective SMARTER

<table>
<tr>
<td colspan="3">Goal:

Objective:</td>
<td colspan="2">(E)valuate (R)eassess

</td>
</tr>
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<td>(T)ime-bound</td>
<td>How long to achieve this?</td>
<td></td>
<td>Are you on track and trending?</td>
</tr>
</table>

Select the right analytics and monitoring solutions

Without data, you cannot be sure campaigns are working, how they could be improved, or whether you're generating a positive ROI. For this reason, **a reliable, well-installed and well-managed analytics package is a vital first step for monitoring the SEO and social marketing components of your inbound marketing programs**.

Getting started is critical. For example, reading blog posts will not give you a concrete sense of social media measurement; you need to obtain your own monitoring tool.

In terms of what to select, remember that an appropriate suite of solutions should support both a quantitative and qualitative analysis of your objectives, namely the cycle of measurement, understanding, control and improvement. Aim to get a solution that helps you answer all types of analytical questions, such as:

- What happened?
- Why did this happen?
- How much has this metric changed?
- What else am I not seeing?

Practically speaking, it is best to first get the most out of what you currently have. Once you start appreciating elements that your current solution lacks, you can then think about investing in those specific features. The idea is to **get the most out of what you have, in a short period of time, and in the process learn what else you might require**. And "require" is the operative word. Often, an 80% solution works just fine.

When you *do* need to add or upgrade, look to eliminate redundancy between your tools by selecting an analytics package that is equipped to measure and report on what you're tracking. For example, some traditional analytics packages have little or no support for social media measurement. Conversely, some social media management tools lack Web analytics components, or do not connect with conversion data – effectively leaving you shortchanged on ROI inputs.

Consequently, **be certain that you select tools which are equipped to measure and report on all facets of your inbound marketing**. ROI metrics (e.g. leads generated, conversion rates) and non-ROI metrics (e.g. sentiment, social reach) are both necessary to comprehensively measure your inbound marketing efforts, and uncover insights upon which you can act. However, some metrics are more difficult to monitor and measure, calling for tracking and reporting features not always found (or not always easy or quick to use) in free or basic monitoring solutions.

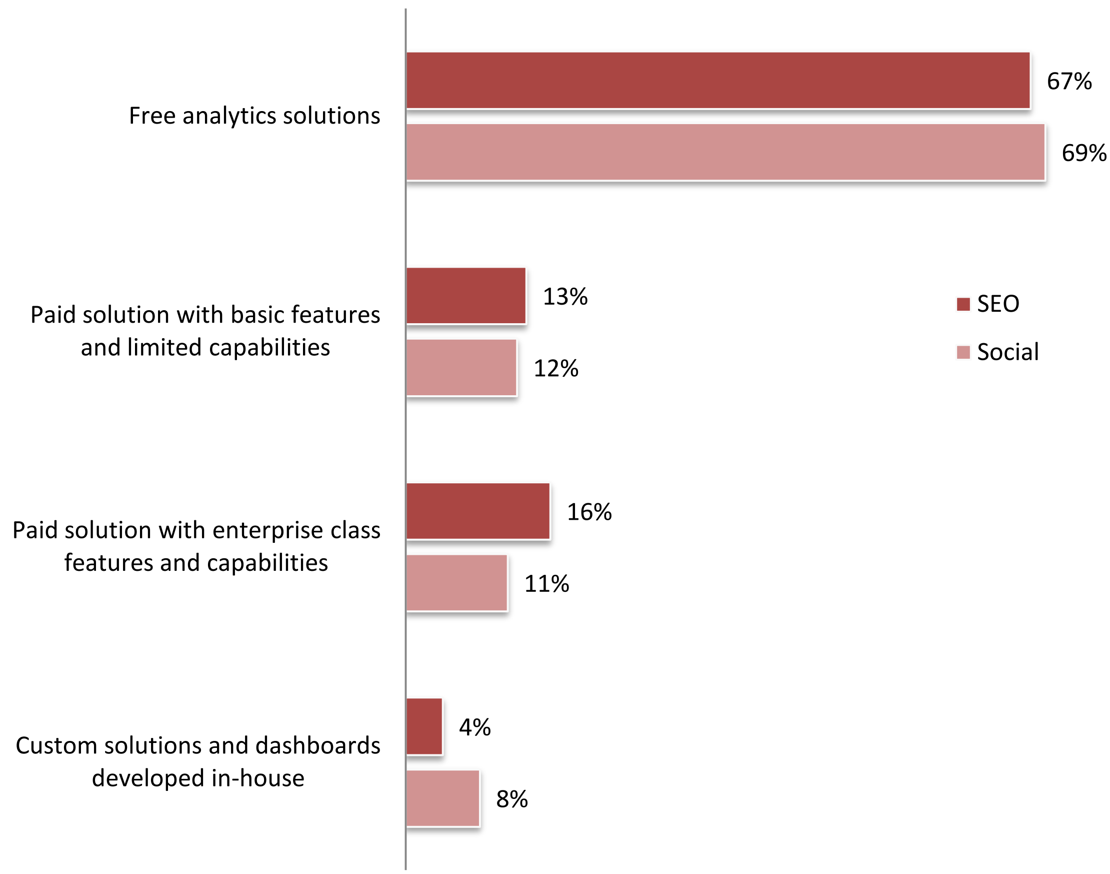
Your marketing team and the IT department should be good buddies, and reports should be easy to create and review. If you can't get reports in a timely manner, does it really matter that you have the ability to produce sophisticated ones?

Finally, don't neglect your "human" tools either, as they are just as important. **No matter how good your analytics package may be, it takes a human being to decide what to do with the information**. For example, if blog traffic is lower than expected, or if organic search traffic drops unexpectedly, *someone* needs to figure out why. Even if your organization is small, it is important to consider a full-time analytics staffer. Consider choosing someone with not only an analytics background, but also solid direct marketing experience.

ANALYTICS AND MONITORING SOLUTIONS

Free analytics solutions are the most popular choice for tracking and monitoring SEO and social marketing metrics. Marketers are three times as likely to use a free solution as a paid solution when it comes to social marketing. Similarly, free analytics solutions are more than twice as popular as paid solutions for measuring the impact of organic search programs.

Chart: Analytics solutions used by marketers for tracking SEO and social marketing metrics



marketingsherpa
Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Social and Search Marketing Benchmark Surveys
Methodology: Fielded February and April 2011, N=3,342 and 1,530

Clearly, **for a majority of organizations, the information provided by free solutions is sufficient.** Many free solutions today are feature-rich, and provide the easily accessible data marketers require.

So, who's using the full-featured and enterprise-level solutions? Larger organizations, for one. They use these offerings to track more difficult metrics like downstream fans and followers, share of conversation, etc. But, organizational size is not the only driver; marketing maturity is also relevant. Organizations that routinely follow thorough guidelines and formal processes for SEO and social marketing programs also use paid solutions at a higher degree.[15]

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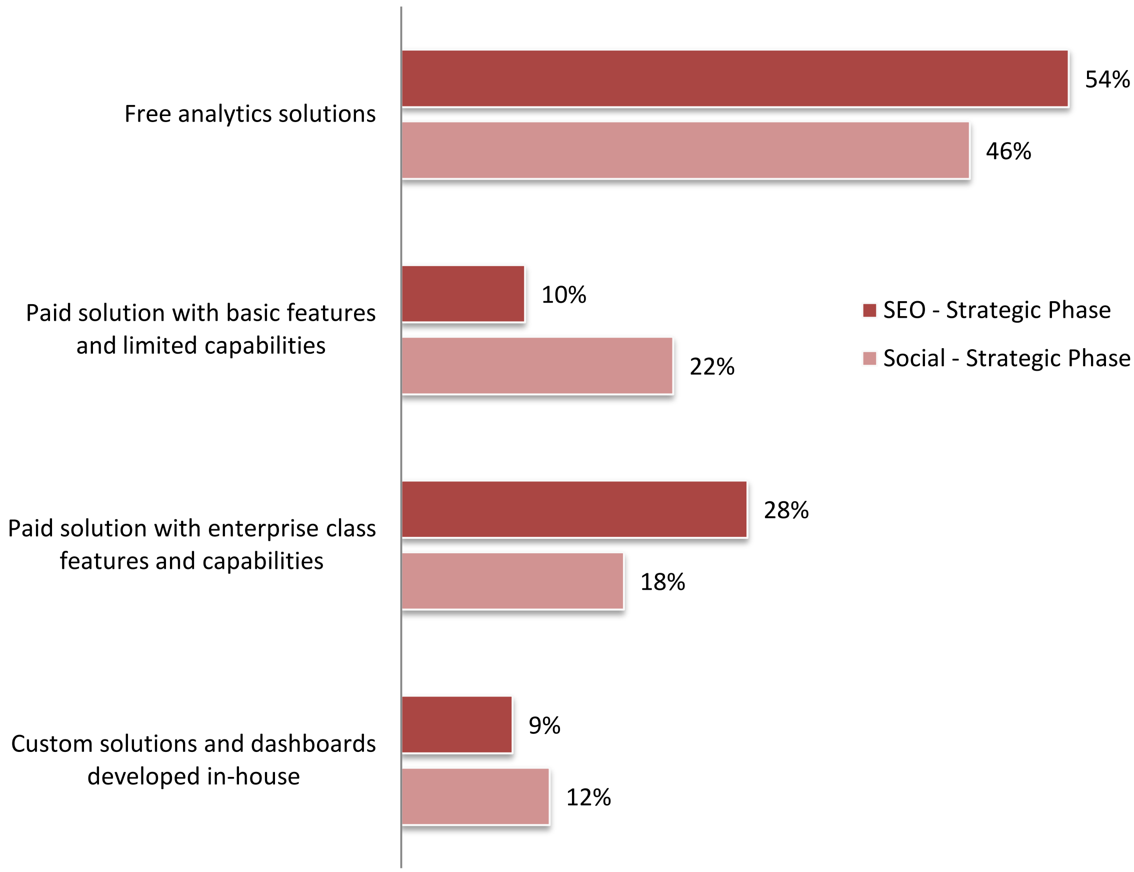
[15] Source: 2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey

Chart: Analytics and monitoring solutions used by Strategic organizations tracking SEO and social marketing metrics



marketingsherpa Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

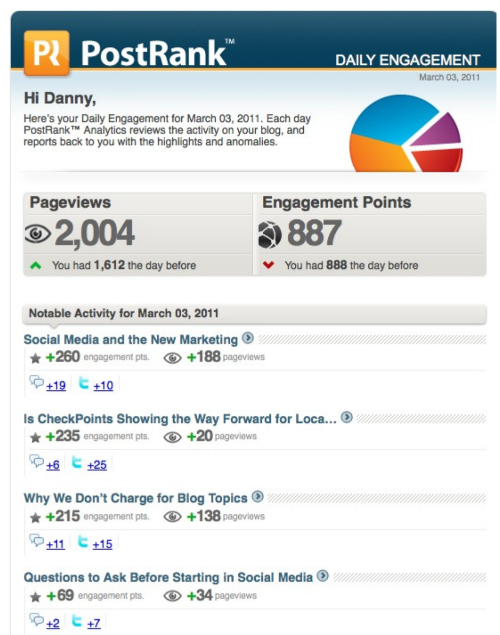
CASE STUDY - ANALYTICS DRIVE 26,000 NEW MONTHLY VISITS TO BLOG

Case Study ID: CS31868
Location: MarketingSherpa Member Library

Summary
Experienced marketers know that relevant content delivers results. But how do you determine what is relevant? Find out how one B2B marketer used analytics to increase readership across his entire content marketing strategy, and helped integrate an effort that included a corporate website, a personal blog, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, and content on corporate partner websites.

Challenge
Content is a major part of any marketing effort. At one point in time, that content was probably a whitepaper, press release or trade magazine article. Today, content starts at the website and entails email, social media, webinars and more. Any analytics that help you understand the people reading and engaging with your content can make the entire content marketing strategy much more effective.

Danny Brown, CEO, Bonsai Interactive Marketing, an Ontario, Canada-based agency offering B2B social media and mobile marketing, found out how powerful adding analytics to a comprehensive content marketing campaign can be. He found that data – specifically learning what his readers were searching for, where they were coming from and where they were going after visiting part of his network – dramatically improved his visits, shares and engagement.



Tactic #1. Integrate the entire network

Brown's content network includes:

- Company website
- His personal blog
- Twitter
- Facebook
- YouTube
- Bonsai Interactive partner's websites

This community was grown organically and he utilizes the entire network to crowdsource ideas for new blog posts and other content. Integrating, and tracking, all these different content areas allows Brown to increase awareness and visibility for Bonsai Interactive, and its partners.

An important aspect of integrating the entire content network is determining what content should appear in different places – for example the content that is best placed on his personal blog might not be a good fit for partner websites.

Brown uses analytics to help determine his overall content strategy. He explained it is important to understand your audience and if you are able to use analytics to grab "deep down traffic information," your content can match what people are looking for, and asking about.

He added people love to get honest information, so if your content is providing answers to the questions your readers are asking, you will become the person they seek out, and return to, for content, wherever that content resides across the entire network of websites, blogs and social media.

Tactic #2. Let your audience tell you what they want by their actions

Brown said, “I think one of the biggest mistakes I probably made when I first started the blog was I wasn't really making strong use of analytics and so I was basically putting up really willy-nilly blog topics.”

Once he began using analytics he was able to understand what his audience was doing at the blog and website – what they were searching for, and how long they were on the site. These numbers give Brown an overview of his audience and their behavior. He knew if traffic was coming from Facebook, or Twitter, and what country his visitors were based.

For example, he noticed he was getting a large amount of traffic from Malaysia, so in response he found a guest blogger from that country to write a blog post about blogging and social media for the Malaysian market.

Tactic #3. Turn data into visits

Content without readers is not doing anything for you. Just looking at blogs, Brown estimates there are around 200 million blogs registered with Technorati, and that doesn't even account for the Chinese market which is not registered or most of the rest of the Asian market. “You are competing with a lot of people to get the eyeballs to your blog,” he states.

You can tailor future content, or even adapt existing content to bring in new traffic, if you understand:

- What is being searched for
- Where it's being searched from
- The keywords, the trends you can pick up on

Having and using this data can be a very powerful part of content marketing. “If you can understand SEO and understand analytics,” explained Brown, “You can go up against the big guys. You can be a small independent blogger and go up against the likes of Mashable and Huffington Post.”

Another advantage for the independent or smaller marketer is if you know what your audience is searching for, you can quickly get a post live for that particular trend and topic, where larger companies might face more rigorous editorial hurdles that slow the process down.

Last year Brown wrote a popular blog post on marketing loyalty programs tied to mobile apps. With tablet computers and smartphone usage on the rise, his search analytic tool is seeing more searches around mobile loyalty programs.

In response he is planning on either updating the post from last year and putting it back on the front page of his personal blog, or possibly writing a new blog post on the topic to react to the search activity his analytics show him.

Tactic #4. Understand your reader

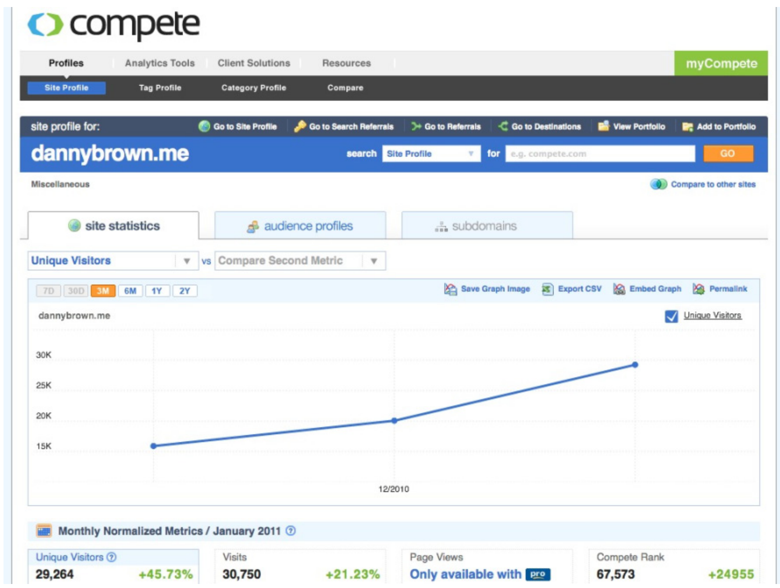
Brown combines two analytics tools to really drill down into how his readers are engaging his content marketing strategy. One tool offers data on searches made both at Brown's websites and away from his content network. The second tool used in conjunction with the search tool is an analytics platform that provides Brown with demographic information on his readers.

The most important aspect of bringing analytics into the content marketing strategy is it allows you to better understand your reader. Brown uses this data to craft blog posts that he knows his readers want to see.

Brown sees his personal blog as an “idea generation place” where he takes cues from his community's involvement, like with comments on his posts, or questions posed to him on Facebook or Twitter. He combines this information with search and demographic analytics to create his overall content strategy.

Using the website search analytic tool, Brown realized “social media hub” was a popular search last year where people were trying to understand how to create a social hub using external platforms like Facebook, Tumblr, Twitter, etc., and also try and create a social hub internally on a website or a blog.

In response, Brown began a series titled, “How to Turn Your Blog into a Social Media Hub,” that explained how to integrate and engage with social networks and still keep traffic on a website or blog. He said that series got a lot of traffic, a lot of shares and a lot of inquiries from clients looking create social media hubs of their own.



“(Analytics) really allows me to understand where (readers) are disappearing to once they have left my site, which is key to helping me decide whether I need to do something different to keep them on my site, or if I can transfer a lot of stuff over to the external sites where they are going,” he said.

Tactic #5. The blog as a content marketing strategy

“It's like soft sales,” Brown stated about the content marketing strategy of his blog. His approach includes:

- Providing information for the searches people are looking for
- Providing information for topics being discussed on social media such as Facebook and Twitter

Brown said offering his point of view on topics his analytic tools uncover as popular or trending works as soft sell, “because I then get email inquiries as a follow-up to that information (provided in the blog post).”

He said he uses his blog content to lead into workshops and education seminars. To return to the blogger outreach example, he offers a workshop on blogger outreach 101.

The analytics also come into play here where he gathers information on what companies are visiting his website and blog, and tracks comments and uses that information to follow-up and pitch those interested parties. Brown said the follow-up would be a fairly low-key along the lines of, “Hey, thanks for the interest in this particular blog post. Did you know we do this and that might be of interest to you, and we'd love to chat sometime.”

Tactic #6. The personal touch

Brown has a quite comprehensive content marketing strategy that includes a company website, a personal website, multiple social media pieces and even content on partner websites. All of this is tracked through analytic tools that uncover search terms, demographics and other metrics that help drive the type, and location, of his content efforts.

One thing he's found, particularly with his personal blog, is that his readers respond best to a mix of personal and business content. He's careful to leave his children out of the mix, and anytime his blog posts trend toward the personal he makes certain to tie it back into some business aspect.

For example, if he feels he made some sort of business mistake with his team, he shared the mistake with his blog audience to explain what he did wrong and what he learned from the error. He's found his readers respond to this type of content, and he always makes sure his personal insights are transferable to business and offer some business-related takeaway for the reader.

Results

Before using analytics to drive content, Brown had around 4,000 unique views per month at his personal blog, with about 500 subscribers.

Post analytics, the traffic has risen to around 30,000 unique views each month, and he now has 5,200 subscribers. His blog posts get 40 comments each, on average. His top post had 223 comments. One post, “52 Cool Facts About Social Media” created in response to search analytics, received 153 comments, 2,200 re-Tweets, 895 Facebook shares and 28 StumbleUpon shares

SUMMARY QUESTIONS

1. What is a good rule-of-thumb for the target percentage of traffic attributed to organic search?

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2. What can social media engagement metrics help you identify?

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3. What metric is one of the best indicators of compelling, relevant and useful content?

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4. To help you accurately evaluate the ability of your organic search and social media channels to generate leads and increase revenue, what must you first do?

____

____

____

MY ACTION STEPS TO INBOUND MARKETING SUCCESS

☐ Evaluate and reassess your SMART objectives to make them SMARTER.

☐ ____

☐ ____

☐ ____

☐ ____

CHAPTER 9: BUDGET TIME AND MONEY WISELY

Do you know what kind of return you get on your marketing budgets? This might sound like an analytics question, but at its core it's more focused on budgeting. If you want to justify and secure your inbound marketing budget, you must demonstrate the impact of your inbound marketing dollars on revenue and ROI.

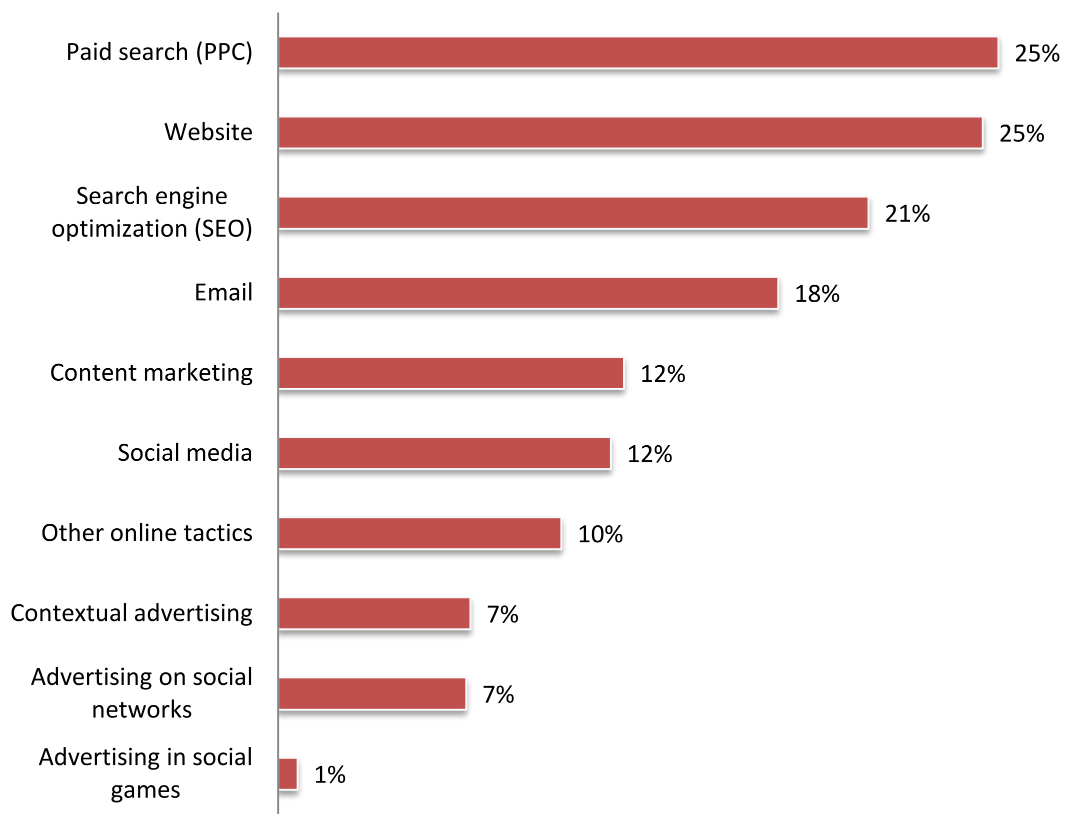
KEY TEACHINGS IN CHAPTER 9:

- How to forecast your budget in terms of ROI
- What expenses should be factored into your budget requests
- What to consider when deciding whether to outsource inbound marketing management

REQUIRED BUDGET FOR INBOUND EFFORTS

Organizations, on average, allocate 45% of their online marketing budgets to inbound marketing tactics – SEO, content marketing and social media. The website accounts for an additional quarter of these budgets. Even the best marketing efforts will suffer if the website is not optimized (in terms of performance and design) to communicate the offer and trigger a response.

Chart: Allocation of online marketing dollars *(representing 51% of total budgets on average)*



Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

Understanding how your peers earmark their budget dollars gives you a benchmark for your own budgeting exercises. But these industry averages also clue you into the priorities of your peers. When you know priorities, you can start to map out your plans.

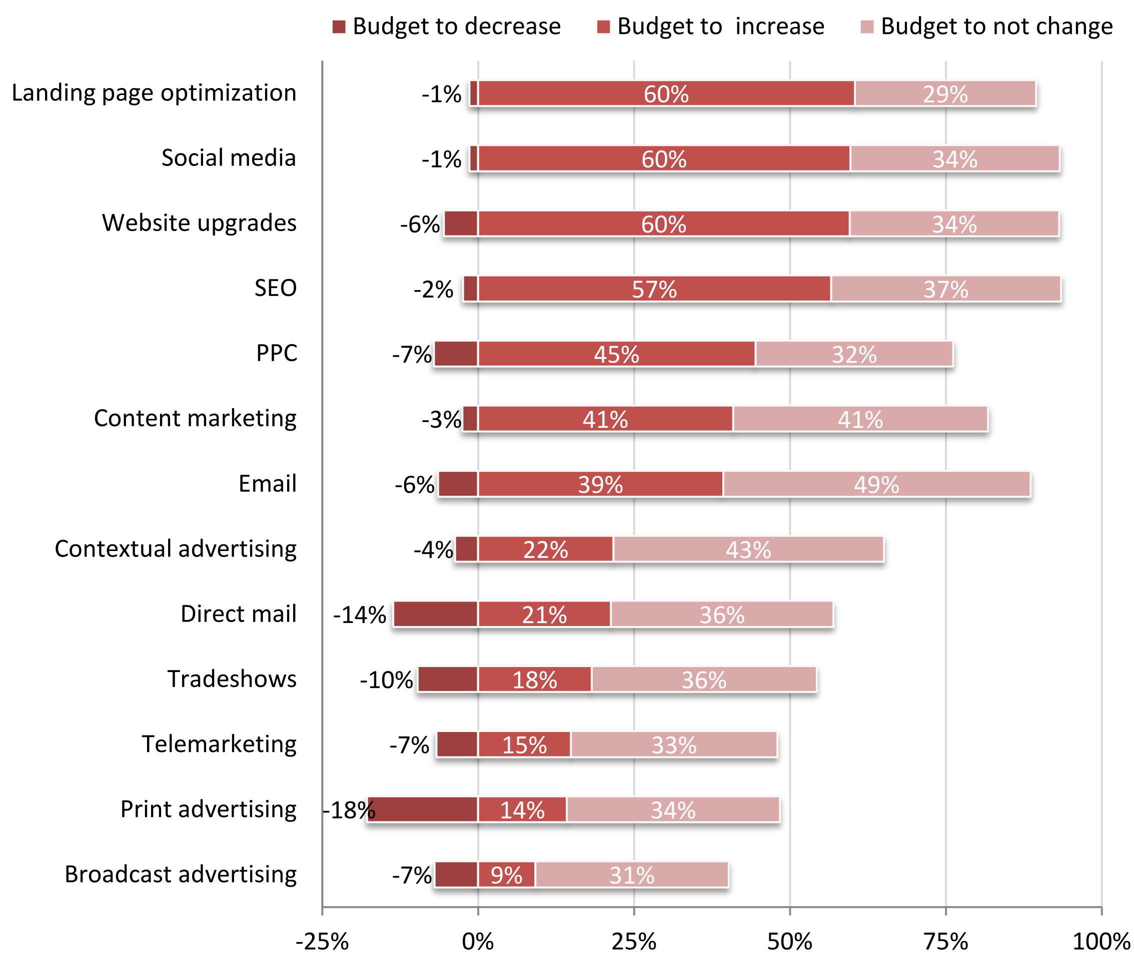
Where should you allocate your biggest budget increases?

Inbound marketing complements the way customers shop, namely, by starting online. Most organizations expect to increase marketing budgets for inbound marketing tactics, as they increasingly consider these tactics to be cost-effective for connecting with prospects and customers.

Sixty percent of organizations intend to increase their social media marketing budgets. Budget increases in SEO and content marketing are also expected for 57% and 41% of organizations, respectively.

Chart: Expected marketing budget changes over 12 months

Q. How will budgets for the following marketing line items change in the next 12 months?

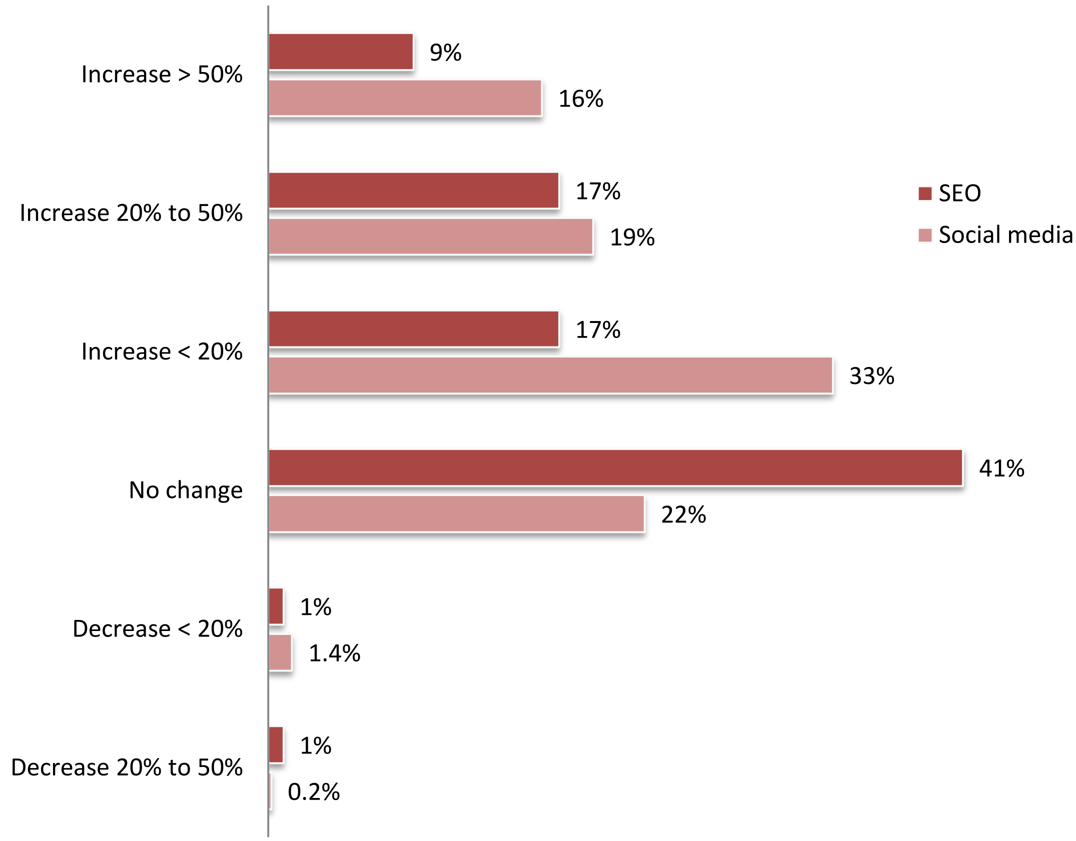


marketingsherpa

Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

Not only do organizations expect to increase their inbound marketing budgets, but the extent of these increases also says something about their intentions. One-quarter of organizations plan to increase their SEO budgets by at least 20% – and one-third of organizations plan to increase their spending in social media by at least 20% also.

Chart: Expected 12-month changes in SEO and social marketing budgets



marketingsherpa Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

While an insignificant percentage plan to decrease their budgets in these areas, a fair share make no changes from last year. Chief among the concerns voiced for not increasing these budgets include:

- Determining from where the budget should come
- Inability to track the success of social media
- Questions about how to reallocate the required human resources
- Uncertainty about the return on investment

ROI, in particular, is a big concern. We devote much of this chapter to directly addressing this concern.

WORKSHEET: ALLOCATE YOUR ONLINE MARKETING BUDGET

How does your allocated budget for inbound marketing tactics compare to industry averages? Why are you making these budget increases or decreases? Do any of your reasons include the ability or inability to quantify ROI and justify budget dollars?

	Percentage allocation (industry average)[16]	**Percentage allocation (your organization)**	**Expected to increase or decrease in 12 months?**	**Why?**
SEO	21%			
Social media	12%			
Content marketing	12%			

[16] Source: MarketingSherpa 2012 Search Marketing Benchmark Report

Quantify the Impact of Budget Increases and Decreases

As budgets increase, so do expectations for the performance of those dollars. Some organizations still struggle against the perception of marketing as a cost center, rather than a growth engine. Demonstrating how you spend this money with future profits in mind can help alter this perception.

One way to do this is to quantify the impact of your budget dollars. In other words, put these increases and decreases in the context of incremental revenue and profit. Show the outcome of a 20% increase to your inbound marketing budget, and demonstrate the negative effect of a 20% decrease.

This latter point becomes particularly important when you've been successful at driving down the cost-per-lead. This metric, while important, keeps the focus on costs. **When you keep the discussion on costs, you can inadvertently express that you're able to achieve the same results with less money**.

Protect yourself against this outcome by framing budgets in terms of investments, not costs. Demonstrate how effective you are at converting marketing investment into revenue, profit and value. Metrics such as these speak to the CFO's primary areas of concern. Use these, and you'll be better able to defend and justify your budgets.

Forecast Your Budget in Terms of ROI

It's important to plan inbound marketing programs with ROI in mind**. When you quantify the outcome you expect from your marketing investment, you can then determine exactly how you will measure the program against those goals, and position yourself to achieve them**.

Like most online channels, organizations use different types of values to calculate the financial return on their search and social media marketing efforts. Most are estimated values as it is often difficult, if not impossible, to track a transaction backwards and logically attribute it to single point of origin in a multichannel, multi-touch marketing strategy.

However, not all financial values used to calculate ROI are estimates. **The most frequently included value in ROI calculations is the actual value of sales generated by social and search marketing programs**. Sales revenue is a solid base on which to build a forecast; a good forecast is an important component in making a business case for marketing investment.

Begin by estimating what you expect your organic search, social media and content marketing programs to deliver, and then figure out what it will take in money, time, effort and tools to deliver the forecasted results. Your estimates should go beyond typical SEO, social media and content marketing metrics such as links, followers or downloads. Instead, **express your forecasted results in terms of leads, opportunities and sales**.

In short, don't plan programs or commit budgets without first establishing a solid set of expectations for the performance of the programs. This point cannot be stressed enough. Remember *Chapter 3 – Establish SMART Objectives to Achieve Optimum ROI*? The first component in setting *smart* objectives is to make them **s**pecific. Specificity covers the full range of metrics. In other words, don't omit the conversion metrics.

Saying that you are going to increase traffic by 25% is a start, but you also need to translate that traffic increase into financial returns. You do this by forecasting conversions based on historical performance, or your best conversion estimates of these metrics:

- Conversion rate by channel (organic search and social media)

- Visitor-to-lead conversion rate, by channel
- Lead-to-customer conversion rate, by channel
- Visitor-to-customer conversion rate, by channel

With these estimates in hand, you can then forecast the marketing impact of your budget in terms of ROI.

Basic ROI model

Here's a basic ROI calculation to use. For the sake of illustration, all the figures are entered, but you could set a target for ROI, and then back into the required marketing investment.

SEO expenses	**Annual**
Staff and staff-related expenses	150,000
Agency and outsourced services	50,000
Analytics and monitoring tools	10,000
Other expenses	5,000
Total SEO marketing investment	**215,000**
SEO marketing impact	
Visitors	750,000
Visitors-to-lead conversion rate	8%
Incremental leads	60,000
Leads-to-opportunity conversion rate	10%
Incremental opportunities	6,000
Opportunities-to-sale conversion rate	20%
Incremental sales	1,200
Value per new sale	$600
Incremental revenue	$720,000
Average gross margin percentage	35%
Gross profit	$252,000
Net profit	$37,000
ROI	17%

ROI MODEL FOR BLOG

You can adapt this ROI model by detailing your expenses across all programs, or focusing on certain elements of your inbound marketing. For example, if you wanted to quantify the ROI of your blog, you could modify this ROI model for blog development, traffic and conversions.

Blog expenses	**Annual**
Staff and staff-related expenses (15 hours per week)	$39,000
Analytics and monitoring tools[17]	$3,750
Other expenses[11a]	$1,875
Total blog marketing investment	**$44,625**
Blog marketing impact	
Visitors	250,000
Visitors-to-lead conversion rate	8%
Incremental leads	20,000
Leads-to-opportunity conversion rate	10%
Incremental opportunities	2,000
Opportunities-to-sale conversion rate	20%
Incremental sales	400
Value per new sale	$600
Incremental revenue	$240,000
Average gross margin percentage	35%
Gross profit	$84,000
Net profit	$39,375
ROI	88%

[17, 11a] The other categories of expenses should be adjusted accordingly for the time spent on this program.

Basic forecasting model

Once you've measured the ROI of your programs, you begin to collect historical performance data and insights that you can now apply to forecasting.

Following is a very simple model to illustrate how you can forecast the future impact of the marketing investment.

Program	**Blog**
Investment	$40,000
Traffic (est.)	100,000
Leads (est.)	800
Opportunities (est.)	80
Sales (est.)	16
Pipeline (est.)	$48,000
Revenue (est.)	$9,600

Point to remember: Using ROI measurement and forecasting as a budget approach is the difference between backwards-looking measurement and forwards-looking decision-focused management.

Factoring in the right expenses

When you tally your marketing expenses, be sure to incorporate all pertinent expenses. Often, marketing ROI models show excessively high returns because these models don't factor in all relevant variable and semi-variable costs.

Take social media, for example. The biggest misnomer in social marketing is that it is free**. Setting up a social media channel is free, but the time you spend building and engaging an audience generates real costs, as does the content you feature and any coding you do to improve your page**. The same goes for search engine optimization. There may be no cost-per-click, but there is a cost in terms of time and effort to create relevancy and establish authority with the search engines.

As you think about your inbound marketing costs, consider these major categories first:

- Staff and staff-related costs
- Agency and consultancy fees (hourly, contracted, retainer)
- Paid marketing, monitoring and analytics solutions
- Advertising expenses on social media sites
- Other directly-related expenses

Within those categories, plan out the specific expenses you might need to cover, such as:

<u>SEO</u>

- Pay for traffic or rankings arrangements
- Site review with consulting
- Hands-on editing of pages/code
- Manual link building campaign
- Keyword research package
- Monthly retainer for ongoing SEO
- Outsourcing of content creation

<u>Social</u>

- Implementation and/or licensing of social media applications
- Viral content development and marketing
- Launch of a social media platform or presence
- Community manager
- Ongoing moderation and measurement
- Outsourcing of content creation and community interactions
- Micro-site build (if not using existing platforms)
- Mobile application development (to support the growth of social Web browsing via mobile devices)

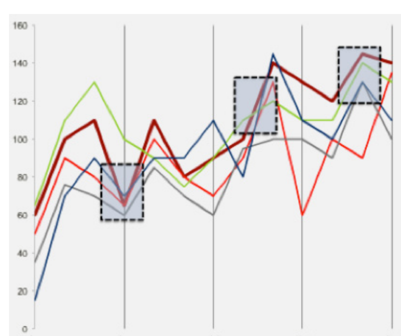
<u>Other</u>

- Strategy development or audit
- On-site training or workshops
- The cost of Sales' time spent following up on inbound marketing leads
- Allocation of non-marketing staff and other internal transfer costs
- Any other third-party costs
- Cost of time, waiting, delay, plus any opportunity costs associated with these programs.

SHOW CORRELATIONS WHEN YOU CAN'T CALCULATE THE ACTUAL VALUE OF IMPACT

Quantitative metrics, like actual conversion rates and sales, provide the most accurate basis for ROI calculations. However, don't neglect the qualitative metrics. A good way to do this is to show correlations. Plot what has been happening with:

- Email sign-ups,
- Form registrations,
- New accounts,
- Customer service calls,
- Customer acquisition costs,
- And more.

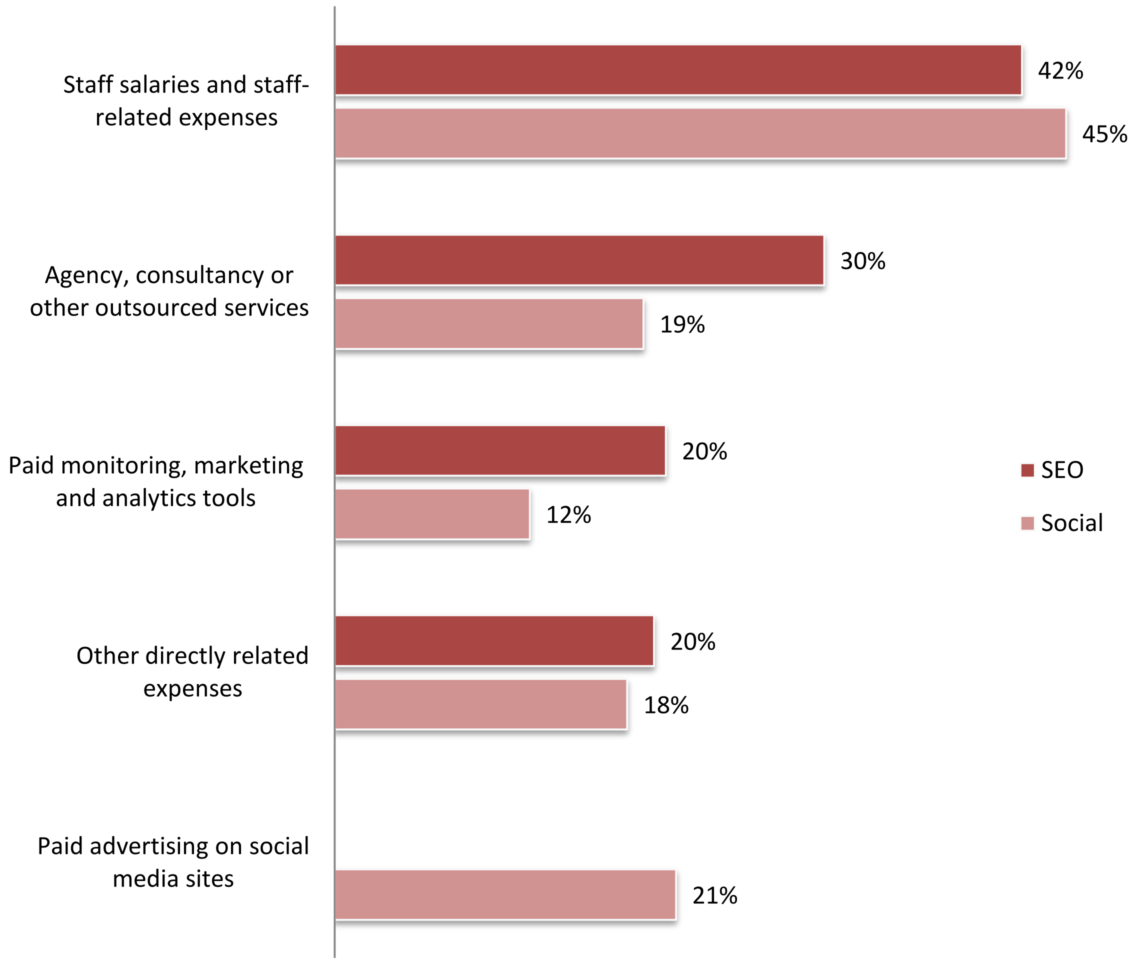


Where you see spikes or dips correspond to targeted inbound marketing efforts, make note of those.

WHAT IS YOUR DIVISION OF TIME AND MONEY?

How do you apportion your SEO and social media budgets? For organizations as a whole, staff salaries and staff-related expenses clearly command the lion's share of these budgets. But the cost of personnel extends beyond internal staff. **Successfully executing inbound marketing programs often calls for significant time commitments from not only Marketing, but also agencies and consultants**.

Chart: How the average SEO and social marketing budgets are allocated

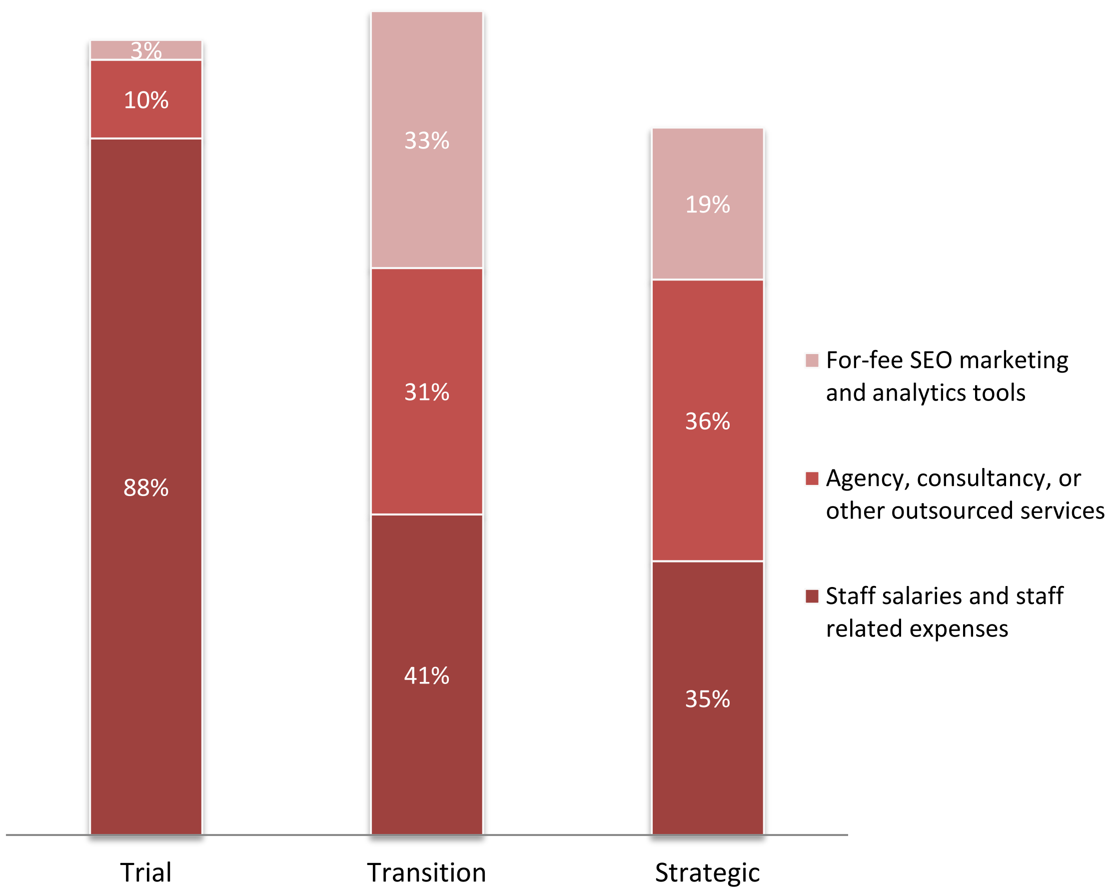


Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

This investment into other resources becomes most apparent when looking at the change in budget allocation for organizations moving from the Trial to Strategic phase of maturity with their SEO programs;[18] spending on staff expenses declines as these funds shift to outsourced services and paid tools.

These shifts signal a move to diversify SEO investments, with the expectation of yielding a greater return. In effect, these **organizations understand that leveraging outside sources and additional tools for building, monitoring, and measuring SEO programs can be a way to extend a budget**.

Chart: SEO budget allocation, by SEO maturity phase



Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

[18] By comparison, the budget allocation for these categories remains constant across the social maturity phases. Source: 2011 MarketingSherpa Social Benchmark Report

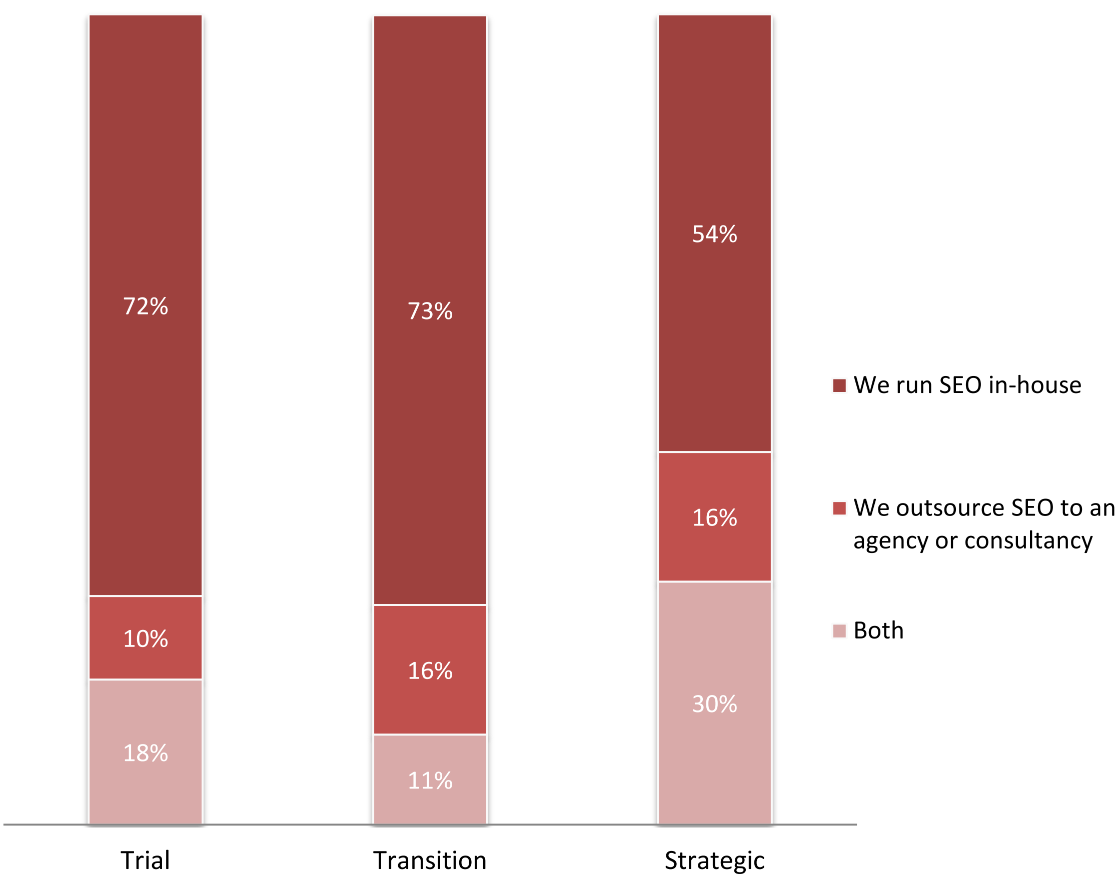
OUTSOURCING INBOUND MARKETING MANAGEMENT

Should you outsource your SEO and social media? And, do you completely offload these responsibilities, or maintain some involvement and control? These are important questions, particularly with financial returns riding on these programs.

Many businesses underperform – or even fail – when it comes to inbound marketing because they lack the proper knowledge and how-to of specialists. This is an important point, especially when you consider that **nearly half of organizations with a formal process for SEO tend to not manage their programs in-house**. Instead, they turn to outside help in whole or in part. As we've repeatedly seen, Strategic organizations tend to perform better across the board.

Strategic organizations more readily understand they need to use the services of an agency when they have exhausted internal SEO resources. Instead of settling for a plateau, these organizations enlist the help of external experts to take their campaigns to the next level.

Chart: SEO campaign management, by SEO maturity



Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

If you are contemplating whether to outsource the management of your inbound marketing programs, take into account your time, knowledge, program scope, and preferences. To help you think through these facets, consider the scenarios below. If you relate to any of these, it may be in your best interest to hand over your programs to professionals with more experience.

Time

You're not a professional, at least when it comes to search or social marketing. Granted, you have familiarity with these areas, because they fall within your responsibility. But you are not as efficient and well-practiced as those who do these tasks full-time. It has become clear that it's more time-consuming to execute these programs yourself.

Take search as an example. You simply don't have the time to worry about optimizing your website for search, at least to the extent that success requires. And managing your online communities? You never fully appreciated that, while there are many ways to find efficiencies in your social media efforts, effective social media takes time. You know you need to quickly respond to fan queries, and thank people for their re-Tweets and posts. You need to monitor your social media channels for complaints and immediately attend to them.

These are just the basics — actually engaging, growing and monetizing your fan base seems to call for several hours or more, per day. And then there's the relative value of your time to consider…

In short, you are starting to sense that you can get considerably more leverage on your time by focusing on what you can't outsource, and working with a trusted partner in areas where they can be just as effective.

Know-how

Sometimes, despite your best efforts and countless hours of reading how-to articles, you still don't know what to do. You've tried tackling these programs yourself, yet nothing you do seems to work and frustration is mounting.

Maybe you find that your lack of knowledge has "paralyzed" you. Keeping up with search engine algorithm changes, new social media applications and best-practices is disorienting, and you're lost with what to do next. You're concerned that these changes may affect your rankings or traffic, but you don't know what to do to keep that from happening, so you do nothing.

Scope

SEO involves both on-page and off-page optimization tactics, and you've been struggling to keep up with keyword research, content optimization, link building and more. Perhaps your website is well-established, and you're faced with a wealth of pages in need of attention.

When it comes to social media, you've established a presence on many social media platforms, but now you feel like you're pulled in too many directions to interact and engage in a quality manner.

Preferences

Undoubtedly, there are aspects of our jobs that we like doing more than others. You simply may prefer doing some things yourself, while offloading other duties and responsibilities.

Cons

Clearly, there are some notable benefits for outsourcing some of your inbound marketing activities. Good SEO and social media professionals are equipped with experience in developing strategies that will work within the goals of your company. Their experience comes from countless hours of managing programs deep into and across companies and verticals. These professionals have likely worked extensively with many of the available tools that can help you better manage your organic search and social media programs.

Before you ink a deal, though, make sure you also consider the negatives, such as cost. You should be able to quantify the additional gains provided by these professionals in order to justify the ROI.

Subject matter expertise is another negative, particularly if you are in a specialized field. Though many outfits are more than capable of producing high-quality content, you need to ensure outsourced content doesn't inadvertently undermine your thought leadership or reputation.

WORKSHEET: ASSESS WHETHER OUTSOURCING IS RIGHT FOR YOU

Circle one number under each column heading to score how you feel about your time, know-how, scope of work, and preferences for each area of inbound marketing. For example, if you feel like you have enough time to run SEO well, circle 3 for SEO under Time. If you're struggling to know how to proceed with content, circle 1 for Content under Know-how.

After circling one number in each column, sub-total each column. Then combine the scores across noncontiguous columns for each component (SEO, Social, Content) for your total scores. Matching these scores to the scale in the bottom row will show you whether outsourcing might be the right option for you.

	Time			**Know-how**			**Scope**			**Preferences**		
	SEO	Social	Content	SEO	Social	Content	SEO	Social	Content	SEO	Social	Content
More than sufficient	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Adequate	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Less than ideal	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Sub-totals												
Totals	Total SEO			Total Social			Total Content			Total All		

Total Individual Components (SEO, Social, Content) Look seriously at outsourcing: 4 – 6 Consider outsourcing for certain elements: 7-10 Stay with what you're doing: 11 - 12	Total All Look seriously at outsourcing: 12 – 18 Consider outsourcing for certain elements: 19-30 Stay with what you're doing: 31 - 36

SUMMARY QUESTIONS

1. Using ROI measurement and forecasting as a budget approach is the difference between __________ and ______________.

____

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____

2. True or false: Marketing ROI models often show excessively high returns because these don't factor in all relevant variable and semi-variable costs.

____

3. If you're thinking about outsourcing the management of your inbound marketing programs, what should you take into account?

____

____

____

MY ACTION STEPS TO INBOUND MARKETING SUCCESS

☐ Quantify the impact of increases or decreases to your inbound marketing budget in terms of incremental revenue and profit.

☐ ____

☐ ____

☐ ____

☐ ____

CHAPTER 10: COMMIT TO ONGOING IMPROVEMENT

You've reached the end of this handbook, but your work is nowhere near done. If anything, it's just beginning. Putting what you've learned into practice begins now.

KEY TEACHINGS IN CHAPTER 10:

- Why you need a growth mindset
- What approach to learning is best suited to inbound marketing
- Where to go for good resources

As you move into action with your inbound marketing programs, there will be successes, and moments of validation and encouragement. But there will also be setbacks, leaving you with questions about what you did and doubts about what to do next. If this wasn't enough, you also have to contend with the dynamic nature of this field. Although many overarching principles will remain the same, new developments, practices and applications will continue to come along and compete for your time and attention.

So, how should you respond? By committing to ongoing improvement. Not just for your programs, but for yourself. Develop a plan for continual growth and learning – one that focuses on creating connections and delivering a great experience.

GET IN A GROWTH MINDSET

If you're going to improve, you need to believe you can improve. Adopting a growth mindset means believing you can cultivate your skills and abilities.

Thinking this way is important for many reasons. First, this type of mindset orients you towards learning. Second, it makes you trust and value effort. Third, it helps you embrace mistakes and setbacks, seeing them as inevitable and a natural part of learning.

"It's about a commitment to learning – taking informed risks and learning from the results, surrounding yourself with people who will challenge you to grow, looking frankly at your deficiencies and seeking to remedy them. " – Carol Dweck, Professor of Psychology at Stanford University and author of *Mindset, The New Psychology of Success*

This type of thinking is at the heart of inquiry-based learning. Inquiry learning is a form of active learning whereby progress is assessed by the development of experimental and analytical skills rather than solely the accumulation and possession or knowledge. This approach to learning is well suited to inbound marketing. You won't master inbound marketing because you can recite a list of facts. Rather, you master inbound marketing because you demonstrate a growing ability to question, experiment, and analyze.

FAIL FAST AND FAIL FORWARD

"It's not the lift, it's the learning." Have you ever heard this? It's a hard statement to agree with, especially when budget dollars and revenue streams are at stake. But there's some truth to it: you shouldn't be afraid to fail because you've tried something new. When it comes to inbound marketing – this dynamically changing mix of tools, platforms and behaviors – adopting an "attitude of failure" may be just what you need to succeed.

Let's be clear. Failure is not repeating the same mistake again and again. Rather, failure is identifying and learning what did not work and then making adjustments. That's how you *fail fast* and *fail forward* in inbound marketing.

FILL YOUR MIND WITH POSITIVE THOUGHTS

You can read all you want about inbound marketing, but until you actually start acting on those recommended practices, your marketing results aren't going to improve in the least.

Now, this is not to say that you shouldn't read. Quite the contrary. You will learn and grow from your questions, experiments and analyses, but your knowledge will help your frame and guide your approaches. As you knowledge expands, so do your approaches.

There is no shortage of great material out there. Here's an abridged list of resources for ongoing education.

Inbound Marketing

- MarketingSherpa inbound marketing newsletter (marketingsherpa.com/newsletters)
- HubSpot inbound marketing blog (blog.hubspot.com)
- Online Marketing Blog (TopRank.com)

SEO

- aimClear (aimclearblog.com)
- Blogstorm (blogstorm.co.uk)
- Bruce Clay Blog (bruceclay.com/blog)
- David Naylor (davidnaylor.co.uk)
- Eric Ward (ericward.com/bestpractices)
- High Rankings Forum (highrankings.com/forum)
- John Andrews (johnon.com)
- Matt Cutts (mattcutts.com/blog)
- Michael Gray (wolf-howl.com)
- Mikkel deMib Svendsen (blog.demib.com)
- Nine By Blue (ninebyblue.com/blog)
- Outspoken Media (outspokenmedia.com/blog)
- Search Cowboys (searchcowboys.com)
- Search Engine Guide (searchengineguide.com)
- Search Engine Journal (searchenginejournal.com)
- Search Engine Land (searchengineland.com)
- Search Engine Watch (searchenginewatch.com)
- Sebastian's Pamphlets (sebastians-pamphlets.com)
- SEOmoz (seomoz.org/blog)
- SEO By The Sea (seobythesea.com)
- SEO Book (seobook.com/blog)
- SEO Copywriting (seocopywriting.com/blog)
- SEO Gadget (seogadget.co.uk)
- Stone Temple (stonetemple.com/blog)
- The Link Spiel (linkspiel.com)
- WebProNews (webpronews.com)
- WebmasterWorld (webmasterworld.com)

Content Marketing

- Big star content (bigstarcontent.co.uk/blog)
- IdeaLaunch (idealaunch.com)
- Joe Pulizzi's Blog (blog.junta42.com)
- Marketing Interactions (marketinginteractions.typepad.com)
- Post Advertising (postadvertising.com)
- Rexblog (rexblog.com)
- SparkSheet (sparksheet.com)
- Straight Talk with Nigel Hollis (mb-blog.com)
- The Sales Lion (thesaleslion.com)
- Web Ink Now (webinknow.com)
- Writing on the Web (writingontheweb.com)

Social Marketing

- Brian Solis (briansolis.com)
- Bundle Post (bundlepost.wordpress.com)
- Chris Brogan's Blog (chrisbrogan.com)
- Convince and Convert (convinceandconvert.com)
- Digital Brand Marketing Education (digitalbrandmarketing.com)
- DreamGrow Social Media (dreamgrow.com)
- FastForward Blog (fastforwardblog.com)
- Heidi Cohen (heidicohen.com)
- Hubze (blog.hubze.com)
- inBlurbs (inblurbs.com/blog)
- Inbound Marketing Spot (trustemedia.com/blog/the-inbound-marketing-spot)
- Jeff Korhan (jeffkorhan.com)
- Jeff Bullas (jeffbullas.com)
- Kuno Creative Blog (kunocreative.com/blog)
- Likeable Media (likeable.com)
- Marketing Tech Blog (marketingtechblog.com)
- Media First (mediafirst.net/blog)
- Media Tapper (mediatapper.com)
- My Social Agency (mysocialagency.com/our-social-blog)
- Pushing Social (pushingsocial.com)
- Social Mouths (socialmouths.com)
- Social Strand Media (socialstrand.com)
- Social Media Examiner (socialmediaexaminer.com)
- Social Media Explorer (socialmediaexplorer.com)
- Social Media Marketing Blog (scottmonty.com)
- Splash Media (http://www.splashmedia.com/blogs)
- TippingPoint Labs (blog.tippingpointlabs.com/blog)
- The Relationship Economy (relationship-economy.com)
- ViralBlog (viralblog.com)
- Web Strategy by Jeremiah (web-strategist.com/blog)

Worksheet: Identify your skills and knowledge gaps

Identifying your inbound marketing development needs can be tricky. Often, we look first at what training courses are available, and then decide which of those might be most helpful. In fact, it is better to try and identify your need – be that skills, knowledge or mindset – and then work out ways of meeting that need. It might be a training course. It might be self-education. It might even be a mentor.

Skill/Knowledge Area	**Analysis**			
	Current State	**Desired State**	**Gap**	**Plan to address**
Understand the needs and behaviors of your target audience				
Align buyer personas to the customer engagement cycle				
Establish SMART objectives				
Map goals to best-suited tactics				
Execute SEO, social, and content marketing tactics				
Evaluate, reassess and take actionable insights on data				
Plan and justify budgets in terms of ROI				
Commit to continual learning and improvement				

Summary Questions

1. When you adopt a growth mindset, how do you view mistakes and setbacks?

____

____

____

My Action Steps to Inbound Marketing Success

☐ Subscribe to some blogs – and commit to reading these.

☐ Analyze my inbound marketing needs (skills and knowledge) and develop a plan to close the gaps.

☐ ____

☐ ____

☐ ____

☐ ____

☐ ____

APPENDIX A: SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Use these questions to guide your conversations with various stakeholders when developing your inbound buyer personas (Chapter 2). Inventory the perceptions of your key customer-facing employees and also your direct prospects and customers.

Interview with Sales

1. What have you found to be the top reasons why prospects seek our products/services?
2. What barriers exist in their decision-making process?
3. What objections do you commonly have to overcome?
4. What are their most important job responsibilities and challenges?
5. How do they measure success?
6. Who are our best and worst customers? Why? (Be sure to get names and contact information.)
7. What are the common traits shared by the best customers? By the worst customers?
8. Is there anything else I should have asked?

Interview with Customer Service

1. Describe the most common expectations of new and existing customers.
2. What problems do our customers commonly encounter with our products/services?
3. What primary concerns do they most frequently voice?
4. What are their most important job responsibilities and challenges?
5. Who are our best and worst customers? Why? (Be sure to get names and contact information.)
6. What are the common traits shared by the best customers? By the worst customers?
7. Is there anything else I should have asked?

Interview with Customers (Best and Worst)

1. What are your most important job responsibilities and challenges?
2. How do you measure success?
3. What originally motivated you to look at our service or solution?
4. What causes delays in your purchasing decisions, if anything?
5. What are your typical key concerns during the decision-making process?
6. Why did you choose us over another company?
7. Is there anything else I should have asked?

Interview with Prospect

1. What are your most important job responsibilities and challenges?
2. How do you measure success?
3. What has motivated you to consider our service or solution?
4. What (if anything) has prevented your from purchasing our product in the past?
5. What are your key concerns for your purchase decision?
6. What are your expectations for our product/service?
7. Is there anything else I should have asked?

APPENDIX B: INBOUND MARKETING METRICS

The following table is a compilation of suitable metrics for social media, organic search and content marketing programs. This is a more exhaustive list than the metrics featured in *Chapter 8 – Gather Actionable Insights and Intelligence.*

SOCIAL MARKETING METRICS	
Social Strength	Determines the likelihood that your brand or search phrase is being discussed in social media.
Digital Share of Voice	Estimated share of brand mentions for a select keyword set compared to that of its select competitors.
Digital Conversations	Number of all mentions of your selected keywords across publicly open digital sites, such as social networks, blogs, forums and mainstream media.
Brand Sentiment	Determines the amount of positive, neutral and negative commentary about your brand or search phrase, or the ratio of positive to negative mentions.
Passion	A measure of fewer individuals mentioning your brand or search phrase more frequently as opposed to more individuals mentioning your brand or search phrase less frequently.
Unique Authors	Number of unique individuals mentioning your brand or search phrase.
Social Reach	A measure of unique authors divided by the total number of mentions.
Top Users	Identification and ranking of authors most frequently mentioning your brand or search phrase.
Reviews and Recommendations	The level of positive, negative or neutral reviews about your brand, products or services is a strong indicator of individual opinion as well as an identifier of potential brand ambassadors.
Visitors Referred to Website	Number of unique visitors referred to your website through social media channels.
Subscribers	Number of subscribers to your page content or blog.

SEO METRICS	
Top Keywords	Ranking of specific keywords in search results – split by brand and non-brand - used most frequently in searches linking to your brand or search phrase mentions.
Keywords Triggering Search Results	Number of keywords triggering listings in the search results.
Ranking of Keywords Clicked	Ranking of specific keywords clicked
Keyword Clicks	Number of clicks from keywords to your site
Keyword Movement	Tracks the progress of your target keywords on a monthly basis
Keyword Benchmarking	Tracks how you compare to your competitors for target keywords
Non-branded Keywords Driving Traffic	Identifies the keywords/phrases that drive traffic and which convert higher, helping you to improve the relevance of specific pages.
Inbound Links	Determines the quality and the quantity of links to your webpages or website (and to those of your competitors).
Linking Domains	Number of unique sites linking back to your page or website.
Ranking of Linking Domains	Measures the authority of the domain sending the inbound links to a webpage.
Top Referrers	Indicates top websites driving traffic to your website over a period of time and provides a source of links for which the anchor text could potentially be improved.
Link Building Report	A record of every link created, with the date, URL where it is hosted, the anchor text and destination URL.
Site Grade	Overall grade of your SEO marketing effectiveness, measured by HubSpot
MozRank	SEOmoz's logarithmic 10-point measure of a webpage's global link authority or popularity. Pages earn MozRank by the number and quality of other pages that link to them.
Unique Visits/Visitors	Number of unique visits or visitors, as tracked by cookies, to a website in the time frame specified.
Bounce Rate	Measures the percentage of single-page visits in which the visitor left your site from the entrance (landing) page. Good indicator of compelling, relevant and quality content.

Top internal search queries	An indicator of visitor intent.
Landing Page Report	Identifies which pages receive the most brand and non-brand traffic. Also provides a basis for determining how much of your website is actually indexed within the SERPs.
Non-brand Traffic vs. Organic Traffic	A measure of your organic traffic split and movement over time.
Non-brand Traffic vs. Total Traffic	A measure of how non-brand visits contribute to your overall Web traffic.
Exit Rate	A measure of the number of visitors leaving your website from a certain page. To get a better handle on leakage, compare against bounce rate.
Top Entry Pages	Top entry or landing pages from organic search traffic
Top Viewed Pages	Pages with the most views from organic search traffic

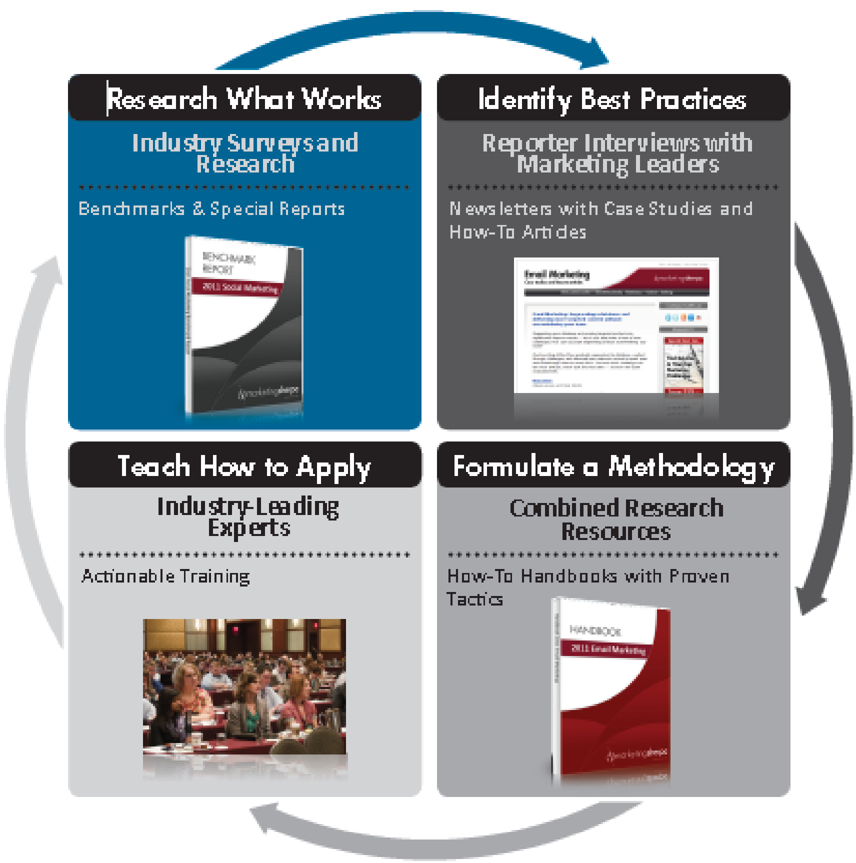
CONTENT METRICS	
Content Downloads	An indicator of subject matter interest, engagement and relevancy
Content Sharing	How often content is being shared is another key indicator of subject matter interest, engagement and relevancy.
Comments	An indicator of engaging and relevant content
Social Bookmarks	A measure of how many content referrals come from a social bookmarking site.

APPENDIX C: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH-BASED PUBLISHING AND TRAINING CYCLE

MarketingSherpa helps marketers improve the performance of their marketing programs by providing them with the most up-to-date tactics and insights. To this end, we research, write and speak about what works – and doesn't work – in marketing today. Our annual research-based publishing and training cycle fuels and guides these activities – and falls into four stages:

- Research what works
- Identify what works
- Formulate a methodology
- Teach how to apply



STAGE ONE: RESEARCH WHAT WORKS

We survey thousands of marketing, advertising and PR professionals across multiple industries to find out their top objectives, challenges and approaches for their particular marketing programs (e.g. email, social, search, B2B). This survey data becomes the foundation of our Benchmark and Special Reports.

Stage Two: Identify best practices

We capture the experiences and insights of the marketing community. Our team of reporters interviews marketing leaders and then develops a series of newsletters featuring case studies and how-to articles.

Stage Three: Formulate a methodology

We combine the research and best practices into how-to handbooks featuring tested, proven tactics.

Stage Four: Teach how to apply

We convert the research and handbook material into actionable training. Webinars, workshops, on-site training sessions, and large vendor-agnostic Summits are all forums for us to transfer this acquired knowledge back to the marketing community.

Description of research content

Research-driven content is at the heart of our three main publications: Benchmark Reports, Special Reports and Handbooks.

Benchmark Reports guide strategic planning and tactical optimization by arming marketing practitioners with comprehensive research data and insights for comparing an organization's practices and performance against industry benchmarks.

Special Reports support the strategic planning and decision-making of senior marketing executives by providing them with concise research, insights and actionable advice specific to unique market segments contained in our research results.

Handbooks present research-supported best practices for improving the performance of marketing programs. The content also serves as curriculum for self-instructed and professional career advancement training programs. Handbooks include case studies, methodologies, best practices, worksheets, and data to support the recommended practices.

MECLABS MARKETING OPTIMIZATION GLOSSARY

1st-party Cookie: A piece of code placed on the user's browser by the website they are currently visiting that tracks visitor behavior. Also **First-Party Cookie**.

2nd-tier Search Engine: Vague grouping of search engines/properties that can be simply any search property but Google, Yahoo!, MSN and AOL.

3rd-party Cookie: A piece of code used to track user behavior, placed on the user's browser by someone other than the website the user is currently visiting. Third-party cookies are used in Web analytics and ad serving, among other areas. Also **Third-Party Cookie**.

4PC: In print advertising, the abbreviation for "four-page, full-color" — a standard unit on most print media price lists.

A/B Split: Refers to a test situation where two randomized groups of users are sent different content to test performance of specific campaign elements. The A/B split method can only test one variable at a time.

Abandonment: As in call or site abandonment, measured when people leave a site, telephone call, etc.

Abandonment Rate: It is the number of users who abandon divided by the total number of unique visitors for a given period, measuring the efficiency of the marketing tool.

Above the Fold: The part of a webpage that is visible without scrolling. Material in this area is considered more valuable because the reader sees it first. It refers to a newspaper term for the top half that's above the fold but, unlike a newspaper, email and webpage fold locations aren't predictable. Your fold may be affected by the users' preview pane, monitor size, monitor resolution and any headers placed by email programs.

Access: The ability to see what you are trying to view, e.g., accessing a friend's photo but not their profile.

Acquisition Cost: The cost to generate one lead, newsletter subscriber or customer in an individual email campaign; typically, the total campaign expense divided by the number of leads, subscribers or customers it produced.

Acquisition List: A rented list of prospects to which email can be sent. Prospects on a legitimate acquisition list are supposed to have opted in to the list and possess a certain set of characteristics. Example: dog owners who shop online.

Ad Swap: An exchange between two publishers who agree to run each other's comparably valued ad at no charge. Value is determined by rate card, placement, size of list, quality of list, name brand fame, etc.

Address Book Whitelisting: When a consumer adds a company's email address or domain name to their email address book. This prevents inadvertent "false positive" filtering out of content that the consumer wants to receive.

Adsense: Google's pay-per-click, context-relevant program available to blog and Web publishers as a way to create revenue.

Advertising Network: Sells ads across multiple publishers to optimize ad delivery based on the user rather than context, e.g., Adknowledge, RockYou, Social Cash, DoubleClick.

Adwords: The advertiser program that populates the Adsense program. The advertiser pays Google on a per-click basis.

Affiliate Marketing: A partnership between a website owner (affiliate) and a retailer (affiliate merchant) where the website owner advertises the retailer on their site and receives a fee for every lead or sale generated.

Affiliate Network: Cost-per-action (CPA) ads for multiple retailers across multiple publishers, e.g., Affiliate Window, TradeDoubler.

Aggregator: A Web-based tool or desktop application that collects syndicated content.

Affiliate: A marketing partner that promotes your products or services under a payment-for-results agreement. The affiliate relationship ranges from simply carrying a button on a webpage to full-blown email campaigns by the affiliate.

Affirmative Consent: An active request made by a reader or subscriber to receive advertising or promotional information, newsletters, etc. Generally, affirmative consent does not include the following: failing to uncheck a pre-checked box on a Web form, entering a business relationship with an organization without being asked for separate permission to be sent specific types of email or opt-out.

Agent Name Delivery: The attempt to feed search engine spiders different content from what is delivered to “human” website visitors in an attempt to optimize for page ranking. This tactic has fallen out of use as search engine spiders generally appear to be standard browsers. Also **Bait-and-Switch** and **IP Delivery**.

AJAX: An acronym for Asynchronous Java Script and XML that represents a way to create real-time Web applications.

Akismet: Comment spam filter that is popular with WordPress blogs.

Alerts: Tool to get a search engine to tell you whenever a new page is published on the Web, which includes your specific keyword. This can include email messages that notify subscribers of an event or special price.

Algorithm: A set of mathematical rules that describe or determine a circumstance or action. In the case of search engines, unique algorithms determine the ranking of websites returned within search queries. Although some of the qualities used to determine ranking (number of referring sites, metatags, etc.) are known, the precise functioning of search engine algorithms is a closely kept secret to prevent the manipulation of the system

A-List Bloggers: The blogging elite with heaps of daily blog posts and many links to their blogs.

Anonoblog: A blog site authored by a person or persons who do not publish their name(s).

App: A program that performs a specific function on your computer or handheld device.

Applet: Small programs (usually written in Java) or another Web-friendly language that run within a Web browser. Some applets may be negatively viewed by search engine spiders, affecting indexing and page rank

Application Program Interface (API): How a program (application) accesses another to exchange data. A client may have an API connection to automatically load database information to an email vendor and receive data back from the email.

Application Service Provider (ASP): A company that provides a Web-based service. Clients don't have to install software on their own computers; all tasks are performed, or hosted, on the ASP's servers.

Archives: Most often an index page, often organizing posts or entries by either category or date.

AstroTurfing: A fake grassroots push to generate buzz or interest in a product, service or idea. This movement is often motivated by a fee or gift to the writer of a post or comment, or may be written under a pseudonym. Atom: A popular feed format used for syndicating content.

Attachment: A text, video, graphic, PDF or audio file that accompanies an email message but is not included in the message itself. Attachments are not a good way to send email newsletters because many ISPs, email clients and individual email recipients do not allow attachments since hackers use them to deliver viruses and other malicious code.

Authentication: A digital automated process that verifies an email sender's identity.

Authentication: Digital method of proof to authorize online activities.

Authorization: Permission to perform a desired action.

Auto Responder: Automated email message-sending capability, such as a welcome message sent to all-new subscribers the minute they join a list. Triggers can include users joining, unsubscribing or email arriving at a particular mailbox. Auto responders may be used for more than a single message and can be a series of date or event-triggered emails.

Avatar: A graphical image or likeness that replaces an author's photo on a blog.

Average Adopter: Those who want to take advantage of new technologies but have lengthy processes in place to protect them from adverse reactions. They'll often wait for a big-name company to offer a solution in an area spearheaded by smaller, faster-moving companies.

Average deal size: The average amount of all purchases made during a specified time period.

Awareness: The first phase of the product marketing cycle, during which prospects gain awareness of the product/service.

B2B: Business-to-business. Also B-2-B , BtoB and B-to-B.

B2C: Business-to-consumer. Also B-2-C, BtoC and B-to-C.

Back Channel: Communications such as private emails or other messages sent by the facilitator or between individuals during public conferencing.

Backlink: (or inbound links) A link pointing to a particular webpage.

Badge: An image usually squared and displayed on a blog, which signifies the blogger's participation in an event, contest or social movement.

Bait-and-Switch: The attempt to feed search engine spiders different content from what is delivered to "human" website visitors in an attempt to optimize for page ranking. This tactic has fallen out of use as search engine spiders generally appear to be standard browsers. Also **Agent Name Delivery** and **IP Delivery**.

BANT: An acronym for the basic pieces of lead development information: budget, authority, need and timeframe.

Bayesian Filter: An anti-spam program that evaluates header and content of incoming email messages to determine the probability that it is spam. Bayesian filters assign point values to items that appear frequently in spam, such as the words "money-back guarantee" or "free." A message that accumulated too many points is either rejected as probable spam or delivered to a junk mail folder. Also **Content-Based Filter**.

Biz Blogs: Blogs that companies and organizations write to communicate with customers, partners and employees.

Black Hat: Involves techniques that aim to deceptively or unethically show relevance or importance of a website per a specific key term. Search engines frown upon black hat techniques. If found out, websites utilizing black hat techniques are generally blacklisted by the search engines. Also known as search engine spamming in PPC.

Blacklist: A list developed by anyone receiving email — or processing email on its way to the recipient, or interested third parties — that includes domains or IP addresses of any emailers suspected of sending spam. Many companies use blacklists to filter inbound email, either at the server level or before it reaches the recipient's inbox. Also Blocklist and Blackhole List.

Blast: In postal mail or email, and also referred to as solo blasts, a reference to promotional campaigns done on a one-time basis. Blasts are distinct from ongoing communications, such as email newsletters.

Bliki: A blog that readers or an agreed group of collaborators can edit; like a combination of a blog and a wiki.

Block: A refusal made by an ISP or mail server to forward your email message to the recipient. Many ISPs block email from IP addresses or domains that have been reported to send spam or viruses, or have content that violates email policy or spam filters.

Blog (weblog): A style of Internet publishing using content management software that allows for quick posting of journals, news and articles, e.g., WordPress, Blogger, MovableType.

Blog Digest: A regularly-updated summary of related blogs.

Blog Post/Entry: Content published on a blog. Entries may include pictures, embedded videos and URLs for online sources.

Blog Storm: In hopes of garnering mainstream media attention, bloggers write thousands of posts about a subject. Sometimes known as a "blog swarm."

Blogging: The act of writing and/or posting content to a blog.

Blogosphere: The term used to describe the totality of blogs on the Internet, and the conversations taking place within that sphere.

Blogroll: A list of recommended blogs.

Boardreader: An aggregator of message boards and forum discussions.

Bonded Sender: A private email-registration service, owned by email vendor IronPort, that allows bulk emailers who agree to follow stringent email practices and to post a monetary bond to bypass email filters of Bonded Sender clients. The program debits the bond for spam or other complaints from recipients.

Bookmarking: An online tool that saves the address of a website or item of content, either in your browser, or on a social bookmarking site such as del.icio.us.

Bookmarklet: A “faux” bookmark containing scripting code, usually written in JavaScript, that allows the user to perform a function.

Bounce: [Website-related] When website visitors leave after a single page visit, or leave after a short time period. [Email Marketing] A bounce is when a message is undeliverable. Emails can bounce for dozens of reasons: incorrect email address, closed email address, full mailbox, downed mail server, or spam or offensive content detected by the system. See **Hard Bounce** and **Soft Bounce**.

Bounce Handling: The process of dealing with the email that has bounced. Bounce handling is important for list maintenance, list integrity and delivery. Given the lack of consistency in bounce messaging formats, it is an inexact science at best.

Bounce Message: Message sent back to an email sender that reports the message could not be delivered and why. Note that not all bounced emails result in returned message to the sender, and not all bounce messages clearly or accurately relay the reason the email bounced.

Bounce Rate: Regarding a website, it refers to the percentage of website vistors that bounce. For Email Marketing, it is the number of hard/soft bounces divided by the number of emails sent. This is an inexact number because some systems do not clearly or accurately report back to the sender. Also **Return Rate**.

Broadcast: The process of sending the same email message to multiple recipients.

Bulk Folder: Where many email clients send messages that appear to be from spammers, contain spam, or are from any sender who is not in the recipient’s address book or contact list. Some clients allow the recipient to override the system’s settings and direct that mail from a suspect sender to be sent directly to the inbox, e.g., Yahoo! Mail gives recipients a button marked “Not spam” on every message in the bulk folder. Also **Junk Folder**.

Bulletin Boards: A place where users connect with a central computer to post and read email-like messages. These early vehicles for online collaboration are the equivalent of public notice boards.

Buyer persona: A detailed profile that represents an actual, real-life group of a target audience. It includes common interests, motivations and expectations, as well as demographic and other behavioral characteristics. By establishing buyer personas, organizations are enabled to deliver unique content that will attract and nurture new and existing leads. Although buyer personas are profiles developed for marketing purposes, they should be based on sound qualitative and quantitative research.

Buzz: The cumulative coverage of an issue, event, company, etc. in all media outlets and the population at large. Companies that measure buzz examine the volume and tone of coverage in both individual-generated media — blogs, message board postings, discussion lists — and mass media outlets.

Call-to-action: The link or body copy that tells the recipient what action to take in marketing messages, Web ads, emails, etc.

Campaign: A set of coordinated marketing messages delivered at intervals with a specific goal, such as raising funds for a cause or candidate or increasing sales of a product.

CAN-SPAM: Popular name for the U.S. law regulating commercial email. Full name: Controlling the Assault of Non-Solicited Pornography and Marketing Act of 2003.

Canvas: The screen area an application can use to serve content and features within a social network.

Categories: Pre-specified ways to organize content, such as a set of keywords that you can use, but not add to, when posting on a site.

Catch-all: An email server function that forwards all questionable email to a single mailbox. The catch-all should be monitored regularly to find misdirected questions, unsubscribes or other genuine live email.

Cause Marketing: A business relationship in which a for-profit and a nonprofit form a partnership that results in increased business for the for-profit and a financial return for the nonprofit.

Cell: A list segment in which a different treatment is sent specifically to see how it responds versus the control (normal treatment). Also Test Cell or Version.

Challenge-Response System: An anti-spam program that requires a human being on the sender's end to respond to an emailed challenge message before their messages can be delivered to recipients. Senders who successfully answer the challenge are added to an authorization list. Bulk emailers can work with challenge-response if they designate an employee to watch the sending address's mailbox and to reply to each challenge by hand.

Champions: A group of enthusiasts willing and confident to get things moving by posting messages, responding and helping others.

Chat: Interaction on a website with a number of people adding text items one after the other into the same space, most often in real-time.

Churn: The percentage of customers who decide not to continue doing business with an organization over a certain length of time. In email marketing, churn is the percentage of subscribers leave a mailing list (or how many email addresses go bad) over a certain length of time, usually expressed as a percentage of the whole list.

Circulation: Total distribution of individual copies of a publication. Distinct from the total readership, which refers to the total copies printed, multiplied by the average number of pass-along readers, which is different for each publication.

Civic Media: Any form of communication that strengthens the social bonds within a community or creates a strong sense of civic engagement among its residents.

C-Level Executive: Any chief officer of a company, including CIO, CEO, CFO, COO, CMO and more. CXO can refer to any C-level executive.

Clickthrough: When a hotlink is included in an email, search ad or online ad, a clickthrough occurs when a recipient clicks on the link.

Clickthrough Rate: Total number of clicks on email link(s), search ads, etc. divided by the number of emails sent, impressions,page views, etc. Also **CTR**.

Clickthrough Tracking: Refers to the data collected about each clickthrough link, such as how many people clicked it or how many clicks resulted in desired actions such as sales, forwards or subscriptions.

Click-to-Open Ratio: An email metric that looks at the quality of content by comparing the number of people who opened the email with those who clicked. Several factors can have a dramatic impact on CTO ratio, including filtering of images that suppresses open rate and newsletters that include only snippets of content in an email, elevating click numbers. Also **CTO**.

Client: The user's computer, browser or application that requests information from another online application. Most client applications request information from a server-side application.

Closing rate: The percentage of leads closed out of the total lead volume. ((Number of closed deals / total lead volume) *100).

Cloud Computing ("the cloud"): A growing phenomenon of users who can access their data from anywhere rather than being tied to a particular machine.

Cluster: Content grouped with similar tags, e.g., Flickr Clusters

Cold calling: Involves contacting prospects with a phone call to generate leads See also**Telemarketing**.

Collaboration: Ability to discuss and work with people across boundaries of organization, time and space. Activities like commenting, social bookmarking, chatting and blogging help develop the trust necessary for collaboration.

Collaborative Filtering: Using the experience of previous searchers to return results that are more relevant. Also **Social Filtering**.

Commercial Email: Email whose purpose, as a whole or in part, is to sell or advertise a product or service, or to persuade users to perform an act, such as to purchase a product or click to a website with content designed to sell, advertise or promote.

Common Gateway Interface (CGI): The specification for transferring information between the Web and a Web server, such as processing email subscription or contact forms.

Communities: Groups of people who mainly communicate through the Internet. They may simply have a shared interest to talk about or more formally learn from each other and find solutions. Online communities may use email lists or forums, where content is centralized. Communities may also emerge from conversations around or between bloggers.

Community Building: The process of recruiting potential community or network participants, helping them to find shared interests and goals, use the technology, and develop useful conversations.

Comparison Shopping Site: Similar to search engines, comparison shopping sites or engines allow users to compare products from a variety of sources (websites). Merchants feed product data to the comparison sites and pay for leads or sales generated.

Compete: Provides Web analytics (i.e., unique monthly visitors to the site) and enables people to compare and contrast up to five different sites at a time.

Complex sale: Refers to B2B sales cycles with a number of lead stages, generally with sales cycles of several months or more.

Conditional Content: Use of a database to allow or block content based on user behavior. This is done with “if” and “then” statements.

Confirmation: An acknowledgment of a subscription or information request. It can be either a company statement that the email address was successfully placed on a list or a subscriber’s agreement that the subscribe request was genuine and not faked or automatically generated by a third party.

Confirmed Opt-in: May refer to double opt-in subscription processes or may refer to email addresses that do not hard bounce back a welcome message. Ask anyone using this term to define it more clearly.

Connect (Facebook Connect / Friend Connect): The ability to bring friends to existing sites. Also, the ability for existing websites to allow users to log in with their Facebook or Google accounts.

Consideration: The second phase of the buying cycle, when consumers familiarize themselves with products, features, prices and benefits. Consideration is the phase during which relationship marketing using email, telemarketing, etc., is commonly used to warm the lead, or move the lead from consideration to the sales funnel. Also **Consideration Phase**.

Consumer Generated Media: Any of the many kinds of online content that are generated at the user level. Personal Webpages, such as MySpace profiles, are rudimentary examples. Blogs and podcasts are more evolved forms.

Content Management Systems (CMS): Software suites offering the ability to create static webpages, document stores, blog, wikis and other tools.

Content Rich: Refers to a webpage that contains relevant content to the topic at hand, usually used to refer to the need to repeat keyword phrases within the body copy of a website. Search engine algorithms give higher ranking to a site that contains the keyword phrases that a user is searching for.

Content: All of the material on a webpage, including all words, images and links.

Content-Based Filters: A type of filtration that sorts messages based on strings or keywords located within the message. Filtering can take place based on a score assigned to some words or phrases, or based on binary if/then statements. Example: Block if “free” in subject field.

Context Ads: Advertisements placed directly inside or next to relevant content or features.

Conversion nurturing: Lead nurturing campaigns that target prospects that are further along in the sales cycle. The goal of these campaigns is to drive prospects to make a purchase. Examples of conversion nurturing content include buyer’s guides, case studies, etc.

Conversion Rate: The percentage of visitors/users who “convert” on the action of a webpage or campaign. For example, actions may be purchasing, submitting a form, downloading content, calling a telephone number, or making an extended site visit.

Conversion: The point at which a recipient of a marketing message performs a desired action. A conversion could be a monetary transaction, such as a purchase made after clicking a link. It could also include a voluntary act such as registering at a website, downloading a whitepaper, signing up for a webinar, or opting in to an email newsletter.

Co-registration: Arrangement in which companies collecting registration information from users (email sign-up forms, shopping checkout process, etc.) include a separate box for users to check if they would also like to be added to a specific third-party list.

Cost-Per-Lead (CPL): The price of each lead generated from a marketing channel or campaign. (Total investment / total lead volume).

Cost-Per-Thousand: The advertiser pays for a set number of page impressions, paying for each 1000 impressions the ad receives. See also **Cost-Per-Mile**.

Cost-Per-Acquisition (CPA): A method of paying for advertising where payment is based on the number of times users complete a given action, such as visiting a website, purchasing a product, or signing up for a newsletter that takes place as a result of the marketing effort. Essentially, it’s the price of each new customer. (Total investment / number of closed deals). See also **Cost-Per-Action**.

Cost-Per-Action (CPA): A method of paying for advertising where payment is based on the number of times users complete a given action, such as visiting a website, purchasing a product, or signing up for a newsletter that takes place as a result of the marketing effort. See also **Cost-Per-Acquisition**.

Cost-Per-Click (CPC): A method of paying for advertising where payment is based on the number of clicks on a link, such as in Google Adwords. Different from CPA because all you pay for is the click, regardless of what that click does when it gets to your site or landing page.

Cost-Per-Install (CPI): A specific type of cost-per-action where the required action is the installation of a social application. See **Cost-Per-Action**.

Cost-Per-Mille (CPM): “Mille” means thousand in Latin. The advertiser pays for a set number of page impressions, paying for each 1000 impressions the ad receives. See also **Cost-Per-Thousand**.

Crawler: A small program that surfs the Web to index information for a search engine. See also **Spider**.

Creative Commons: A nonprofit organization and licensing system that offers creators the ability to fine-tune their copyright, spelling out the ways others may use their works.

Creative: An email message’s copy and any graphics.

Cross-Campaign Profiling: A method used to understand how email respondents behave over multiple campaigns.

Cross-Post: To send the same email message to at least two different mailing lists or discussion groups.

Crowdsourcing: The act of sourcing tasks traditionally performed by specific individuals to a group of people or community (crowd) through an open call..

C-suite: The group of officers within an organization with the word “Chief” in their title and represents the highest level of management.

Clickthrough Rate (CTR): Slightly inexact because some clicks get lost between the click and your server. Be sure to ask if the CTR is unique, meaning that each individual user is only counted once, no matter how many times they click on a link.

Customer Lifetime Value (CLV): A measure of the total amount the customer is going to spend with a merchant during their tenure. Usually calculated by their spending per year multiplied by the average number of years they are likely to be a customer.

Customer Relationship Management (CRM): The software and processes of tracking the information that defines a prospect or customer relationship. CRM systems typically store contact and interaction data, such as number and dates of touches, products considered.

Cyberspace: A once widely used, general term for the Internet or World Wide Web.

Dashboard: The administration area on blog software that allows users to post, check traffic, upload files, manage comments, etc.

Date-based Archives: The archives of a blog, organized by timestamp. Nearly all blogs have some form of timestamp. Some list in weekly, but most on a month-by-month basis

Daypart/Weekpart: Division of the month and day into sections for the purposes of targeting marketing. For example, a radio buyer might target “drive time” while a restaurant might target weekends versus weekdays.

Dedicated Server: An email server used by only one sender. A dedicated server often costs more to use because the expense is not spread among multiple users, but it performs better than a shared server. Email usually goes out faster, the server is more secure, and it eliminates the possibility that another sender could get the server blacklisted for spamming.

Dedupe: Identifying and consolidating duplicate names, usually done in a merge/purge operation.

Deduplication (also Deduping): The process of removing identical entries from two or more data sets such as mailing lists. Also Merge/Purge.

Deep Linking: Links that direct the person clicking on the link to a page beneath the homepage of a website. Sometimes used to mean linking to a deep page on someone else’s website, which has different legal issues than simply directing someone to a homepage.

Deferred Conversion: Sales that take place after visiting a website. With many online marketing tactics, it is not always possible to discern whether a sale took place as the result of some past interaction. See also **Latent Conversion**.

Delicious: A social bookmarking site that allows users to quickly store, organize (by tags) and share favorite webpages. Users may also subscribe to RSS feeds of other users and specifically share a page with another user.

Deliverability: The degree to which emails are successfully delivered, or not. Also refers to the general issues surrounding this question.

Delivered Email: Number of emails sent minus the number of bounces and filtered messages. A highly inexact number because not all receiving ISPs accurately report which emails don’t go through and why.

Delivery Tracking: The process of measuring delivery rates by format, ISP or other factors and delivery failures (bounces, invalid address, server and other errors).

Deploy: To send a marketing campaign into the field.

DHTML: The technology on which floating online ads are built. DHTML can be made to sit on top of the page, incorporating movement and sound. DHTML is not typically blocked by pop-up/pop-under blocking software.

Digest: A shortened version of an email newsletter that replaces full-length articles with clickable links to the full article at a website, often with a brief summary of the contents.

Digg: A popular social news site that lets people discover and share content from anywhere on the Web. Users submit links and stories, and the community votes them up or down and comments on them.

Digital Inclusion: An effort to help people who are not online gain access with affordable hardware, software, tech support/information and broadband Internet service.

Digital Story: A short personal nonfiction narrative that is composed on a computer, often for publishing online or publishing to a DVD.

Discussion Group: An email service in which individual members post messages for all group members to read ("many to many"). In contrast, a newsletter is a "one-to-many" broadcast, where comments by members or subscribers go to only the message sender. Also known by the trademarked name Listserv.

Do-good Networks: Online communities aimed at societal improvement.

Domain Name System (DNS): How computer networks locate Internet domain names and translate them into IP addresses. See also **Reverse DNS**.

Domain Name: The actual name for an IP address or range of IP addresses, e.g., MarketingSherpa.com. The identifying name of a website.

DomainKeys: An anti-spam software application, developed by Yahoo!, using a combination of public and private "keys" to authenticate the sender's domain and reduce the chance that a spammer or hacker will fake the domain sending address.

Double Opt-in: A process that requires new list joiners to take an action (such as clicking on an emailed link to a personal confirmation page) to confirm they do want to be on the list. Some email broadcast vendors incorrectly interpret it as a new subscriber who does not opt-out of or bounce a welcome message. See also **Verified Opt-in**.

Drupal: A free, open source platform and content management system written in PHP. It is often used as a "back-end" system that powers community features on many different types of sites, ranging from personal blogs to large corporate and political sites.

Dynamic Content: Email newsletter content that changes from one recipient to the next according to a set of predetermined rules or variables, usually according to preferences the user sets when opting in to messages from a sender. Dynamic content can reflect past purchases, current interests or where the recipient lives. *[Email Marketing Usage]*

Dynamic Content: Webpage information that changes according to rules set by the client or server and can adapt to instructions. For example, a dynamic content system makes it possible for unique homepages to be delivered to millions of Yahoo! users whose personal preferences have been set. *[Website Usage]*

Early Adopters: The first to experiment and benefit from new technologies. They are often beta testers and tech companies themselves.

e-Book: An electronic version of a traditional printed book that can be downloaded from the Internet and read on your computer or handheld device.

Email Change of Address (ECOA): A service that tracks email address changes and updates.

Ecosystem: A community and an environment functioning as a whole. The blogosphere can be viewed as an ecosystem.

Ecto: A standalone publishing application, allowing users to compose posts offline.

Edublog: A blog site focused on education, be it teacher, administrator, consultant or student.

Effective Rate: Metric that measures how many of those who opened an email message clicked on a link, usually measured as unique responders divided by unique opens.

Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF): The leading civil liberties group defending users' rights in the digital world.

Email Address: The combination of a unique username and a sender domain (JohnDoe@anywhere.com). The email address requires both the username and the domain name.

Email Append: Service that matches email addresses to a database of personal names and postal addresses. Appending may require an "OK to add my name" reply from the subscriber before you can add the name to the list.

Email Client: The software recipients use to read email, such as Outlook Express or Lotus Notes.

Email Domain: The portion of the email address to the right of the @ sign. Useful as an email address hygiene tool, e.g., identify all records where the consumer entered "name@aol" as their email address and correct it to "name@aol.com."

Email Filter: A software tool that categorizes, sorts or blocks incoming email, based on the sender, email header or message content. Filters may be applied at the recipient level, the email client, the ISP or in combination.

Email Friendly Name: The portion of the email address that is displayed in most, though not all, email readers in place of, or in addition to, the email address. Also **Display Name** or **From Name**.

Email Harvesting: An automated process in which a robot program searches webpages or other Internet destinations for email addresses. The program collects the address into a database, which is frequently resold to spammers or unethical bulk mailers. Many U.S. state laws forbid harvesting. CAN-SPAM does not outlaw it by name but allows triple damages against violators who compiled their mailing lists with harvested names.

Email Newsletter: Content distributed to subscribers by email on a regular schedule. Content viewed as valued editorial in and of itself, rather than primarily a commercial message with a sales offer. See also **Ezine**.

Email Prefix: The portion of the email address to the left of the @ symbol.

Email Vendor: Another name for an email broadcast service provider, a company that sends bulk (volume) email on behalf of its clients. See also **Email Service Provider** (ESP).

Embedding: The act of adding code to a website so a video or photo can be displayed while it's being hosted at another site. Many users now watch embedded YouTube videos or see Flickr photos on blogs rather than on the original site.

Engagement Ad: A display ad that includes interactivity specific to the particular social network.

Engagement Nurturing: Lead nurturing campaigns that targete prospects that are early in the sales cycle. The goal is to build stronger relationships with new prospects to increase interest. Engagement nurturing can also be used to re-engage dormant sales opportunities. Examples of engagement nurturing include content specific to prospect needs, such as webinars, articles, whitepapers, etc.

Enhanced Whitelist: A super whitelist maintained by AOL for bulk emailers who meet strict delivery standards, including fewer than one spam complaint for every 1,000 email messages. Emailers on the enhanced whitelist can bypass AOL 9.0's automatic suppression of images and links.

Entry: An individual post or article published on a blog. These entries, while appearing in an index, are also webpages unto themselves.

Event Blog: A blog specifically launched as a companion to an event.

Event-Triggered Email: Preprogrammed messages sent automatically based on an event such as a date or anniversary.

Expression Engine: A robust content management system (CMS).

Eye Tracking: A type of webpage testing that follows the eye movements of participants to gauge how they interact with the page.

Ezine: Another name for email newsletter, adapted from "electronic 'zine" or "electronic magazine."

Facebook: The most popular social networking site in the western world, with more than 800 million active users worldwide. Users' homepage streams can now be seen in a wide range of applications and devices.

Fair Use: A doctrine in U.S. law that permits limited use of copyrighted material without obtaining the permission of the copyright holder.

False Positive: A legitimate message mistakenly rejected or filtered as spam, either by an ISP or a recipient's anti-spam program. The more stringent an anti-spam program, the higher the false-positive rate.

Frequently Asked Question (FAQ): Listed questions and answers, all supposed to be commonly asked in some context, and pertaining to a particular topic.

Fast Follower: Someone who stays informed about new technologies as they appear and move to integrate them as soon as they are proven effective. The sales process can be a long one with fast followers because they want information long before they are ready to buy.

Feed: Online content served at regular intervals.

Feed Reader: An aggregator of content, subscribed to by the user so specific content or search results arrives in their "reader."

FeedBlitz: An RSS service that makes it easy for avid email users.

FeedBurner: A Google tool allowing websites, blogs and podcasts to gather content into a simple way for readers to subscribe.

Filter: See **Email Filter**.

Findability: Refers to being locatable. Has become a popular term in creating a findable, locatable and navigable presence on and across the Web and social networks.

Firewall: A program or set of programs designed to keep unauthorized users or messages from accessing a private network. The firewall usually has rules or protocols that authorize or prohibit outside users or messages.

Flash Mob: A group of individuals who gather and disperse with little notice for a specific purpose through text messages, social media or viral emails.

Flickr: A leading photo sharing and hosting site. Its members have uploaded more than 5 billion photos.

Folksonomy: Categorization taxonomy determined by democracy rather than by authority.

Footer: An area at the end of an email message or newsletter that contains information that doesn't change from one edition to the next, such as contact information, the company's postal address or the email address the recipient used to subscribe to mailings. Some software programs can be set to automatically place this information.

Forums: Discussion areas on websites, where people can post messages or comment on existing messages independently of time or place.

Forward: The process in which email recipients send an email to people they know, either because they think their friends will be interested in the message or because of incentives to forward messages. See also **Forward to a Friend** and **Viral Marketing**.

Frequency: The number of times someone is exposed to an advertisement or marketing message.

Friend (noun): A person with whom you have a mutually agreed connection.

Friend (verb): The act of adding a person to your social graph on a particular social network.

Friend List: A user's personal sub-categorization of friends on a social network.

From: Whatever appears in the email recipient's inbox as the visible "From" name. The sender chooses it, and may be a personal name, a brand name, an email address, a blank space or alphanumeric gobbledygook. **Note**: This is not the actual "From" contained in the header and may be different from the email reply address. Also **Email Friendly Name**.

Full-Service Provider: An email vendor that also provides strategic consulting and creative support, in addition to sending messages.

Gateway Page: A page submitted to a search engine that is designed to give the spider what it's looking for (fitting the algorithm for that particular search engine) and increasing the relevance of the site. Most, if not all, search engines seek to discover and eliminate the use of these pages, because it is another form of "gaming," or trying to fool, the algorithms.

Geolocation: Serving targeted/different content to users based on their location. See also **IP Delivery**.

Geotagging: The process of adding location-based metadata to media such as photos, video or online maps. Geotagging can help users find a wide variety of businesses and services based on location.

Gmail: A free email service from Google that gives users more than 7GB of storage space, email search, instant messaging and conversation threading. Gmail also uses technology that adds advertisements next to messages containing keywords that match those advertisers in its AdWords program.

Goodbye Message: An email message sent automatically to a list member who unsubscribes, acknowledging the request.

Groundswell: A social trend in which people use technologies to get the things they need from each other, rather than from traditional institutions like corporations.

Groups: Collections of individuals with some sense of unity through their activities, interests or values.

Haloscan: A free commenting, ratings and trackback service for blogs and websites, allowing visitors to leave instant feedback.

Hard Bounce: An undeliverable message returned to the sender due to an invalid, closed or nonexistent email account.

Hashtag: A community-driven convention for adding additional context and metadata to your Tweets. Similar to tags on Flickr, Twitter users often use a hashtag like #followfriday to aggregate, organize and discover relevant posts.

Hat Tip: A public acknowledgment to someone (or a website) for bringing something to the blogger's attention.

Header: Routing and program data at the start of an email message, including the sender's name and email address, originating email server IP address, recipient IP address and any transfers in the process.

Heatmap: A map of a webpage that displays where consumers are most likely to direct their eyesight on a webpage.

Hero Shot: A shot of a product or brand from its best position to make it look as good as possible.

Heuristic Filters: Heuristic filters attempt to identify UCE using reiterative guesswork and past experience, to establish filtering rules. The longer a heuristic filter system is in place and its experience grows, the more accurate it becomes.

Hidden Text: A black hat technique in which text is invisible to readers (same color as background, an HTML comment, etc.) but is visible to spiders. Most search engines can detect this practice, and pages suffer the consequences in rank.

Hits: A measurement used in Web analytics, often defined as any request for a file from a Web server.

Honeypotting: Occurs when planted email addresses find their way into permission email marketers' lists. ISPs and spam-fighters place these addresses on the Web, waiting for a spammer or unreputable list creator to harvest them. If an emailer sends to a list containing a honeypot, all mail going to the ISP using the honeypot is blocked, even if some or most list recipients did opt-in.

House List: List of email addresses an organization develops on its own.

HyperText Markup Language (HTML): The most common of the programming languages used to create webpages.

HTML Message: Email message that contains any type of formatting other than text. This may be as simple as programming that sets the text in a specific font and font treatment (bold, italics, Courier 10 point, etc.). It also includes any graphic images, logos and colors.

HTML Sniffer: Technology embedded in email software that determines if users' email clients can receive HTML content.

HyperText Transfer Protocol (HTTP): The (main) protocol used to communicate between Web servers and Web browsers (clients).

Hub: Refers to an organization's corporate website.

Humanizing the Brand: Portraying human traits of a corporate entity. By humanizing brands, organizations are able to build trust, manage their reputations, and generate leads that meet ideal customer profiles for their organization. Social marketing can be an effective tactic in humanizing brands.

Hygiene: The process of cleaning a database to correct incorrect or outdated values. See also **List Hygiene**.

Hyperlink: A navigational reference to another document or page on the Web.

Hyper-local Community: A group of people from a specific location who interact in online communities and use social media tools.

Ideal Customer Profile: A buyer persona that identifies common interests, motivations and expectations, as well as demographic and other behavioral characteristics of an organization's ideal customer. The ideal customer may be the most profitable customers, or the customers that are the most ideal fit for a solution, for example.

Identity: The general term for ensuring the correct representation of a particular individual on a Web application.

Impression: A single view of one page by a single user, used to calculate advertising rates.

Inactivity: When a list member or registered user has been inactive for some period of time. There are no industry standards, as inactivity depends on the nature of the relationship and frequency of communication. For example, a list member who is mailed quarterly wouldn't be considered inactive as quickly as one who is mailed weekly.

Inbound Marketing: Marketing strategies and tactics that increase the visibility of a company's website to prospects that are researching and shopping for a solution. Inbound marketing tactics include search engine optimization, social media and content.

Index: Provides a comparison against the average. Typically, 100 is the average in an index.

Influencer: A person specialized in a specific subject matter and highly recognized in an online community that has the ability to sway others' thoughts

Instant Messaging (IM): A chat in real-time between two people using a tool such as AOL Instant Messenger, Microsoft Live Messenger or Yahoo! Messenger.

Internet Message Access Protocol (IMAP): A standard protocol for accessing email from a server.

Internet Newsroom: An area of a corporate website that communicates corporate messages and makes content available to the news media and public.

Internet Protocol Address (IP Address): A unique number assigned to each device connected to the Internet. An IP address can be dynamic, meaning it changes each time an email message or campaign goes out, or it can be static, meaning it does not change. Static IP addresses are best because dynamic IP addresses often trigger spam filters.

Internet Protocol Delivery (IP Delivery): Serving targeted/different content to users based on their IP address, often because the IP address provides geographic information. See also **Geolocation**.

Internet Service Provider (ISP): A company that provides access to the Internet Examples: AOL, EarthLink, MSN, RoadRunner, etc.

Joe Job: A spam-industry term for a forged email, in which a spammer or hacker fakes a genuine email address to hide his identity.

Keyword Density: The percentage of a page's text a single keyword makes up. For example, if a 500-word press release has the keyword "security" in it ten times, it has a two percent keyword density.

Keyword Phrase: A phrase that forms all or part of a search engine query.

Keyword: A word that forms all or part of a search engine query.

Laggards: A group defined by their attitudes toward change and innovation. Laggards depend on tried-and-true technology and are more concerned with stability and security than cutting-edge ideas.

Local Area Networks (LAN): Technologies and industries that create and maintain data communications networks that are geographically small and allow interconnection of terminals, microprocessors and computers within nearby buildings.

Landing Page: The destination webpage for people responding to an advertisement, designed specifically for that campaign and audience. The campaign might be in any medium, but is typically search or online-ad driven and email. The key difference between a homepage and landing page is that the former must be all things to all visitors, while the latter should be very narrowly designed for the campaign and, perhaps, for a segment of the audience responding to it.

Latency: Regarding search marketing and conversion, the likelihood of a conversion to take place after an initial visit. Estimates say, in some categories, 85% of conversions are latent.

Lead Development: The process of moving a qualified lead toward becoming a prospect (someone in the sales funnel).

Lead Nurturing: A process of building and nurturing relationships with ongoing, valuable communications, whether or not the prospect buys from you.

Lead Scoring: The process of adding or subtracting points because of various lead attributes and behaviors that identify sales-ready leads.

Lifecasting: An around-the-clock broadcast of events in a person's life through digital media.

Lifestage: In marketing, the division of life into stages based on age and family status, from "young singles" to "empty nesters."

Lifestreaming: The practice of collecting an online user's disjointed online presence in one central location or site. Lifestreaming services bring photos, videos, bookmarks, microblog posts and blog posts from a single user into one place.

Limbo Leads: Leads for which Marketing and Sales are mutually responsible. This usually includes sales-ready leads that have been passed to Sales, and enrolled in a conversion nurturing campaign.

Link Bait: Useful, interesting or entertaining website content that encourages other websites to link to it.

Linkrot: Term describing the process of links going bad over time, because either a website has shut down, or a site has stopped supporting a unique landing page provided in an email promotion.

Links: The highlighted text or images that, when clicked, bring users from one webpage or item of content to another.

List: The list of email addresses to which you send your message. Can be either your house list or a third-party list that sends your message on your behalf.

List Fatigue: A condition producing diminishing returns from a mailing list whose members are sent too many offers, or too many of the same offers, in too short a period of time.

List Host: See **Email Vendor**.

List Hygiene: The act of maintaining a list so hard bounces and unsubscribed names are removed from mailings. Some list owners also use an email change-of-address service to update old or abandoned email addresses (hopefully with a permission step baked in) as part of this process. See also **Hygiene**.

List Management: How a mailing list is set up, administered and maintained. The list manager has daily responsibility over list operation, including processing subscribes and unsubscribes, bounce management, list hygiene, etc. While the list manager can be the same as the database manager, the manager is not always the same person as the list owner. See **List Owner**.

List Owner: The organization or individual who has gathered a list of email addresses. Ownership does not necessarily imply "with permission."

List Rental: The process in which a publisher or advertiser pays a list owner to send its messages to that list. Usually involves the list owner sending the messages on the advertiser's behalf. (If someone hands over their list to you, beware).

List Sale: The actual purchase of a mailing list along with the rights to directly mail it. Permission can only be "sold" if the subsequent mailings continue to match the frequency, brand name, content and "from" of the past owner's mailings — and even then this is a somewhat shaky procedure on the spam front. You are, in effect, buying a publication and not just a list.

Listening: In the blogosphere, the act of skimming feeds to see what topics are discussed, and when an organization is mentioned.

Live Chat: A website alternative to customer service using real-time chat. Typically more inexpensive than toll-free numbers, but not as widely used or accepted.

Log File Analysis: Combing through website log files to study Web visitor behavior.

Long-Tail: Refers to keywords usually with three or more words and lower search volumes. These terms target a niche audience and tend to convert at a high rate.

Loyalty Program: A program initiated by a company to create or maintain customer loyalty by offering benefits for continued use of the brand.

Lurker: Someone who reads social media content but rarely contributes. The usual ratio is 1% creator, 10% commenter and 89% lurker.

Mail Bomb: An orchestrated attempt to shut down a mail server by sending more messages than it can handle in a short period of time.

Mail Loop: A communication error between two email servers, usually happens when a badly configured email triggers an automated response from the recipient server.

Mailing List: A list of email addresses that receive mailings or discussion group messages.

Mailto: A code to make an email address in either a text or HTML email immediately clickable (mailto:JohnDoe@anywhere.com). When the link is clicked, it usually opens the user's email client and inserts the email address in the "To:" link of a blank message.

Mail Transfer Agent (MTA): A computer that forwards email from senders to recipients (or to relay sites) and stores incoming email.

Mail User Agent (MUA): See also **Email Client**.

Marketing Automation: Software solutions that support marketing processes like lead scoring, nurturing and management in execution and measurement.

Mashup: Combining two or more Web services to create something new, such as combining Twitter posts with Google maps to create TwitterVision.

Mentions: Number of times your brand is mentioned in any publicly communicated capacity. Mentions consist of press release pickups, news article coverage and financial message board postings. This is used as a barometer of PR share of voice.

Message Boards: An online discussion site where people look to discuss particular issues or needing support post threads (a message) on the forum or message board in hopes to gain more information or start a conversation.

Meta Search: A search that aggregates the results from a variety of search engines by submitting the query to them and consolidating the results.

Meta Tags: HTML components that can include page titles, descriptions and keywords. These components are visible to search engine spiders but do not affect the appearance of the webpage.

Metadata: Information — including titles, descriptions, tags and captions — that describes a media item such as a video, photo or blog post.

Microblogging: Is the act of broadcasting short messages to other subscribers of a Web service. On Twitter, entries are limited to 140 characters, and applications like Plurk and Jaiku take a similar approach with sharing bite-size media.

Micro-philanthropy: Donations made in small amounts ($1, $5, $10, $20).

Microsite: A cross between a landing page and a regular website. These sites often have their own domain names and even separate brands from the organization's core brand. Marketers use them to offer a user an extended experience for branding or educational purposes. In fact, the visitor might even return to a microsite as a destination.

Mobile Search: Conducting a search query from a handheld device with wireless Internet connection, such as a smartphone or blackberry.

Moblogging: Posting to a blog via mobile phone.

Modality: Generally used as a synonym for "category." For example, "Direct mail is among the oldest modalities of offline marketing."

Monetisation: The approach to making money from an online property, usually by display advertising, subscription, affiliate links or context advertising.

Movable Type: A publishing platform created by SixApart.

Multichannel Marketing: Marketing efforts that use multiple mediums to target unique prospects. For example, sending direct postal mail and email with complementary messaging and offers to the same people with coordinated timing.

Multichannel: A differentiator of merchants that employ multiple sales channels, as opposed to being strictly one (brick-and-mortar) or the other (Web-only or "pureplay").

Multimedia: Media and content in different forms such as videos, pictures, etc. Examples include YouTube and Flickr.

Multi-Part MIME: Message format that includes both an HTML and a text-only version in the same message. Most, but not all, email clients receiving messages in this format will automatically display the version the user's system is set to show. Systems that can't show HTML should show the text version, but this doesn't always work — in particular for many Lotus Notes users. See also **Email Sniffer**.

Multivariate Testing: Using a statistical model to allow the simultaneous testing of multiple variables. Contrast with A/B testing, which examines only one variable at a time. Also known as the Taguchi Method.

MyBlogLog: A Yahoo!-owned community and social networking site that tracks traffic and visits to member sites.

MySpace: An online social network. MySpace caters to artists and bands that enjoy the flexibility of creating an individual "look" for their page. MySpace allows users to "friend" each other and create groups.

Natural Results: See **Organic Listing**.

Navigation (Nav): A menu of links or buttons allowing users to move from one webpage to another within a site.

NetNewsWire: A free RSS news aggregator for the Mac platform.

Network: A Facebook term for a broader social grouping, such as a city, large company or university.

New Customer Nurturing: Nurturing programs that provide educational "how-to" information to new customers to propel customer satisfaction.

News Aggregator: A Web-based tool or desktop application that collects syndicated content.

News Feed: Throttled, filtered amalgamation of friend-generated stories.

News Reader: Gathers the news from multiple blogs or news sites via RSS feeds, allowing users to access all their news from a single site or program. See also **Feed Reader**, **RSS** or **News Aggregator**.

NewsGator: An RSS company that offers its own Web-based feed reader and powers the feeds in Microsoft Outlook.

Newsvine: An open source, community news service that lets members customize news viewed by "seeding" articles or posting for others to view and rate.

NoFollow: An HTML attribute instructing search engine spiders that a URL should not be considered in ranking algorithms. Nofollow tags exist to maintain credibility of a "vote" that is represented when one site naturally links to another.

Notification: A low-importance message generated either automatically or because of a friend's action.

Nth Name: The act of segmenting a list for a test in which names are pulled from the main list for the test cell by number, such as every fifth name on the list. See also **A/B Split**.

Offline Conversion: Sales or other conversion events that take place in the real world, typically in a brick-and-mortar store.

Ongoing Nurturing: Consistent communications intended to keep brands on prospects' minds. Examples include regular company newsletters.

Online Advertising: One or a combination of CPA, CPC, CPM or Tenancy. Search is a form of CPC but is so large (Google Adwords) that it usually referred to separately.

Online Community: A group of people using social media tools and sites on the Internet.

Open Media: Video, audio, text and other media that can be freely shared.

Open Rate: The number of HTML message recipients who opened your email, usually as a percentage of the total number of emails sent. The open rate is considered a key metric for judging an email campaign's success, but it has several problems. The rate indicates only the number of emails opened from the total number sent, not just those that were actually delivered. Opens can't be calculated on text emails. Also, some email clients allow users to scan message content without actually opening the message, which is falsely calculated as an open.

Open Relay: An SMTP email server that allows outsiders to relay email messages that are neither for nor from local users. Often exploited by spammers and hackers.

Open Video: A movement to promote free expression and innovation in online video. With the release of HTML5, publishers will be able to publish video that can be viewed directly in Web browsers rather than through a proprietary player.

OpenID: A single sign-on system that allows Internet users to log on to many different sites using a single digital identity, eliminating the need for a different username and password for each site.

Openness: A measure of a user's tendency to share and collaborate – something aided by social media.

OpenSocial: A technology for deploying the same application across multiple platforms (MySpace, Friendster, Hi5 but not Facebook or LinkedIn).

Opt-in: A specific, proactive request by an individual email recipient to have an email address placed on a specific mailing list. Many list renters and buyers now require list owners to provide proof of opt-in, including the email or IP address date and time the request was received.

Opt-out: A specific request to remove an email address from a specific list or from all lists operated by a single owner. Also, the process of adding an email addresses to lists without the name's pre-approval, forcing names who don't want to be on your list to actively unsubscribe.

Organic Listing: Search page result that is provided free and based on the search algorithms of the search engine. A site might have a high "organic" ranking without paying the search engine anything at all. Conversely, a high spending advertiser in a keyword category might not appear anywhere near the top organic results. See also **Natural Listings**.

Outbound Marketing: Demand and lead generation marketing activities that involve the delivery of a message from the company to a targeted audience. Outbound marketing tactics have existed a lot longer than inbound marketing tactics, and are viewed as more traditional marketing practices. Outbound marketing tactics include direct mail, email marketing, outbound calls, print advertising, etc.

Outreach Nurturing: Lead nurturing campaigns that aim to capture new leads, or permission from new leads to have a salesperson reach out to them. Outreach campaigns can also collect additional data from a lead. When marketers ask for more from their prospects in an outreach nurturing campaign, they should expect to provide something of value.

Paid Placement: Ad model in which search engines return paid advertising when appropriate queries are used. For example, if someone searches for “new cars,” a paid ad from a major auto manufacturer may appear. Advertisers bid on specific keywords that are contained in search queries and attach specific text ads to them. Google, Yahoo! and Bing are the largest paid placement search engines. See also **Pay-Per-Click**.

Paid Search Marketing: The placement of paid ads for a business or service on a search engine results page. An advertiser pays the search engine if the visitor clicks on the ad. See also **Pay-Per-Click**.

Pass-Along: An email recipient who received a marketing message that was forwarded from a subscriber. Some emails offer “forward to a friend” in the creative, but the vast majority of pass-alongs happen using email clients. Pass-alongs can affect the formatting of the email, often stripping off HTML.

Passed Parameters: The act of including known subscriber information in a redirect URL. This allows you to provide Web applications that can pre-populate form values requiring the subscriber to do less typing.

Pay-Per-Click (PPC): Regarding search engine marketing, refers to search engine advertisements based cost-per-click payment model. Advertisers place a bid on various keywords, and pay when their ads receive a click. The ranking position and number of impressions an advertiser receives is calculated by their bid, any other bids on that keyword, their daily budget and their quality score. See also **Sponsored Search**.

Penetration: In search, the percentage of the total potential search engine users who conduct a search on a given engine or site.

Percentage of Qualified Leads: The number of sales-ready leads in relationship to total leads generated. ((Qualified lead volume / total lead volume) *100).

Permalinks: The permanent URLs to individual blog posts, as well as categories and other lists of blog postings.

Permission: The explicit approval given when a person actively requests to have their email address added to a list.

Persona-based Design: Personas are virtual customers — useful templates based on common customer types that can guide site design, offer testing, etc.

Personal Media: User-created material; typically grassroots works such as video, audio and text.

Personalization: A targeting method in which a webpage or email message appears to have been created only for a single recipient. Personalization techniques include adding the recipient’s name in the subject line or message body, or an offer reflecting purchasing, link clicking or transaction history.

Personalized Search: Search engine feature that determines a search engine user’s results based on that user’s search history.

Pretty Good Privacy (PGP): Software used to encrypt and protect email as it moves from one computer to another. Can be used to verify a sender’s identity.

Phase I: Trial: For the purpose of this report, survey respondents who indicated that they had no repeatable process.

Phase II: Transition: For the purpose of this report, survey respondents who indicated that they had an informal process.

Phase III: Strategic: For the purpose of this report, survey respondents who indicated that they had a formal process that was routinely performed.

Phishing: A form of identity theft in which a scammer uses an authentic looking email to trick recipients into giving out sensitive personal information, such as credit card or bank account numbers, Social Security numbers and other data.

Phone-Ready Leads: Rules-validated leads that meet certain criteria agreed upon by Sales and Marketing teams as a lead that is ready for Sales follow-up.

Phone-Validated Leads: Phone-ready leads that have been validated by Sales and confirmed to meet agreed-upon criteria.

Plain Text: Text in an email message that includes no formatting code. See **HTML**.

Platform: The ability for third parties to serve additional applications to users, such as Facebook.

Podcast: A downloadable radio show designed to be listened to on a portable media device.

Podcast: A way to publish audio content to the Internet for multimedia players to download.

Podsafe: A term created in the podcasting community to refer to any work that allows the legal use of the work in podcasting, regardless of restrictions the same work might have in other realms, such as radio or television use.

Poke: Smallest unit of communication on a social network.

Post Office Protocol (POP): Used by email clients to send to or receive messages from an email server. Not to be confused with Point of Presence, an access point for the Internet.

Postmaster: The person to contact at a website, ISP or other site to request information, get help with delivery, or register complaints.

Preference Center: In email or website registration, the practice of asking the registrant questions that tell the marketer more about them. Typical preference centers will ask about interests and preferences for HTML vs. text emails. They can, however, be more sophisticated and guide frequency and segmentation.

Preferences: Options a user can set to determine how they want to receive your messages, how they want to be addressed, to which email address messages should go, and which messages they want to receive from you.

Preview Pane: The window in an email client that allows the user to scan message content without actually clicking on the message. See also **Open Rate**.

Privacy Policy: A clear description of how your company uses the email addresses and other information it gathers via opt-in requests for newsletters, company information or third-party offers or other functions. If you rent, sell or exchange your list to anyone outside your company, or if you add email addresses to opt-out messages, you should state so in the privacy policy. State laws may also compel you to explain your privacy policy, where to put the policy statement so people will see it, and even in the form the policy should be displayed.

Privacy Policy: A clear description of how your company uses the information it gathers about visitors, users and/or customers. Links to privacy policies are generally included on landing pages, email registrations, lead forms, etc. as a best practice.

Privacy Settings: The ability to limit social content by network or friend lists.

Profile: The online representation of an individual's identity.

Property: A generic term for a page, application, widget or website.

Prospect: A lead that has progressed from the qualified lead stage into the sales funnel. However, the term is often heard used as a synonym for qualified lead.

Public Domain: A work that becomes available for public use when donated by its creator or when a previous copyright expires. A work in the public domain can be freely used in any way, including for commercial purposes.

Public Media: Any form of media that increases civic engagement and enhances the public good.

Purchase Phase: The final stage of the buying process, when consumers commit to purchasing a product.

Qualified Closing Rate: The percentage of qualified leads that closed out of the total qualified lead volume. ((Number of qualified leads that closed / qualified lead volume) *100).

Qualified Lead Volume: The total number of sales-ready leads collected from lead generation campaigns that meet the universal lead definition.

Qualified Lead: While the definition varies from marketer to marketer, a qualified lead is generally the next step up from inquiry — the lead fits some criteria to warrant lead development. It may be as simple as "anyone who searched for this term is qualified" to "they only corresponded to three of five criteria from our registration form, they're not qualified."

Quality Score: A measurement of the relevance of a pay-per-click advertiser or ad to a search query that considers a number of factors including an advertiser's historic performance in clickthrough rate. In general, high-quality scores lead to higher ranking positions in sponsored search at a lower cost-per-click.

Quantcast: Tool used to measure the amount of traffic a URL receives, as well as data about the readership (demographics, psychographics, etc.).

Query: A word, phrase or string of words used to define the response from a search engine or database.

Queue: Where an email message goes after you send it but before the list owner approves it or before the list server gets around to sending it. Some list software allows you to queue a message and then set a time to automatically send it, either during a quiet period on the server or at a time when human approval isn't available.

Ranking: A webpage's position in search engine results for a particular keyword/search phrase. Higher rankings typically indicate better PPC and SEO, as well as high volume and quality traffic.

Read Email: There is no real measure of "read" email, although the term is sometimes used as a synonym for opened email. Only opens and clicks are measurable. You can never know if a recipient read your message.

Readability: The degree to which an email client correctly renders an HTML email.

Readership: Circulation multiplied by average readers per copy. Equals the total reach of a publication.

Readiness: A check on whether a user (or organization) is prepared to engage with social media.

Real Time Search: A search engine's ability to index Web content and index it in real time without delay. Content commonly displayed in real time includes social media content.

Recency: A measure of how recent information was produced. Usually refers to the age of contacts on a rented or third-party list.

Record: A file in a marketer's database. It may contain anything from an anonymous code with preferred site characteristics to an extensive profile of a customer or prospect.

Recreational Shopper: Someone who is part of the approximate 40% of the population who say they like to shop and consider shopping a hobby or fun activity.

Referrer: The address of the webpage from which a visitor arrived.

Registered Leads: Includes all inquiries that respond to a marketing campaign by calling in, sending a direct response card, submitting a form on an organization's website, or responding in some other form.

Registration: The process of providing a username, password and other details when seeking to access a website that has otherwise restricted content.

Registration: The process where someone not only opts in to your email program, website membership program, etc., but provides some additional information, such as name, address, demographic data or other relevant information, usually by using a Web form.

Relationship Email: An email message that refers to a commercial action — a purchase, complaint or customer-support request — based on a business relationship between the sender and recipient. Generally, are not covered by CAN-SPAM requirements.

Remix: Any work that takes elements from two or more media files and combines them to create a new piece of media.

Reply-To: The email address that receives messages sent from users who click "reply" in their email clients. Can differ from the "From" address, which can be an automated or unmonitored email address used only to send messages to a distribution list. "Reply-to" should always be a monitored address.

Research Phase: The initial stage of the buying process, when consumers begin to understand a product and its role in the market.

Retention Loop: The application dynamic that encourages users to return regularly to an application.

Return Rate: The percentage of total sales (by item, category or all sales) that is ultimately returned by customers.

Reverse Domain Name System Lookup (Reverse DNS): When an IP address is matched correctly to a domain name, instead of a domain name being matched to an IP address. Reverse DNS is a popular method for catching spammers who use invalid IP addresses. If a spam filter or program can't match the IP address to the domain name, it can reject the email.

Rich Media Ad: A display ad that includes video or interactive elements.

Robots.txt: A website command in HTML that tells search engine spiders to stop indexing a site or page.

ROI (Return on Investment): Either mathematical or anecdotal analysis of payback for a project. Mathematical calculation for ROI equals ((Return – investment) / (investment) x 100).

Really Simple Syndication (RSS): XML-based content distribution method that powers many blogs and other types of content websites. RSS gathers "feeds" of content from user-designated sources — blog entries, news stories, headlines, images, video. The "feeds" include clickable headlines and blurbs about full pieces of content. RSS is seen as an alternative to some types of email communication, but has yet to become an established marketing medium.

Rules-validated Leads: Registered leads that pass the criteria as valid leads and appear to be in the organization's target market.

Sales Cycle: All lead stages between first direct contact (may simply be a registration on a website) and ultimate sale. Sales cycle is a measure of efficiency of the sales organization. Also known as Sales Funnel.

Sales Outcome: Determined when the sale is won, lost or indefinitely postponed.

Sales-forecasted Opportunities: Meet the criteria defined by sales management for forecasting future deals.

Sales-ready Opportunities: Phone-validated leads who are willing to begin the sales process with a salesperson and often meet another set of criteria agreed upon by Marketing and Sales.

Sales-validated Opportunities: Sales-ready opportunities that have been validated by Sales to meet agreed upon criteria.

Scheduled Nurturing Message: A nurturing message developed and deployed at a pre-determined time.

Scraping: The process of obtaining keywords from competitors' websites.

Search Engine Marketing (SEM): All of the tactics and versions of search engine advertising, including search engine optimization (SEO) and pay-per-click marketing (PPC).

Search Engine Optimization (SEO): Includes a set of processes to increase the visibility of an organization's website, webpage or multimedia content so search engines will index them in the natural, organic results. While there is no cost-per-click for organic listings, the cost of these programs typically includes the use of in-house resources or agency time.

Searchjacking: Optimizing a page for highly sought after search terms, even though the page has nothing to do with the subject matter. Used to generate large volumes of (highly irrelevant) traffic.

Seed Emails: Email addresses placed on a list (sometimes secretly) to determine what messages are sent to the list and/or to track delivery rate and/or visible appearance of delivered messages. Seeds may also be placed on websites and elsewhere on the Internet to track spammers' harvesting activities. Also known as Seed Addresses.

Segment: The ability to slice a list into specific pieces determined by various attributes, such as open history or name source.

Segmenting Log File: A process that goes beyond simply correlating keywords by frequency with later conversion. Often keywords that occur infrequently can be top converters. The inverse is also true.

Select: A segment of a list determined by any number of attributes, such as source of name, job title, purchasing history, etc. CPM list renters pay an additional fee per thousand names for each select on top of the base list price.

Selections: Information about people, households, companies, etc. that is used to target direct marketing. Demographic selectors may include age, income, gender, hobbies, holding a credit card, etc. B2B selectors include role, title, purchasing history, etc.

Selective Unsubscribe: An unsubscribe mechanism that allows a consumer to determine which email newsletters they wish to continue receiving while stopping the sending of others.

Sender ID: The informal name for a new anti-spam program combining two existing protocols: Sender Policy Framework and Caller ID. Sender ID authenticates email senders and blocks email forgeries and faked addresses.

Sent Emails: Number of email names transmitted in a single broadcast. Does not reflect how many were delivered or viewed by recipients.

Search Engine Results Page(s) (SERP(s)): the listing of webpages returned by a search engine keyword query.

Server: A host computer that fulfills requests from other computers such as information, data, webpages, emails, images, etc. Can store and distribute email from one mailbox to another, or relays email from one server to another in a network.

Share of Wallet: A measure of how much business in a given category is owned by a merchant. For example, of everything that someone might be expected to spend on product X this year, how much are they spending with merchant Y?

Shopping Search Engine: See Comparison Shopping Site.

Stock Keeping Unit (SKU): Any product, part or accessory that is numbered. Often used to refer to the number of products sold by a merchant.

Short Message Service (SMS): A feature of mobile phones that allows the transmission of short text messages from one device to another.

Simple Mail Transfer Protocol (SMTP): The most common protocol for sending email messages between email servers.

Social Marketing: The planning, execution and measurement of marketing tactics deployed through social media sites and involving the voluntary actions of prospects and consumers.

Social Media Integration: The use of social media to support search marketing plans. For organic search, content development and link building tasks are facilitated. For pay-per-click, clickthrough and conversion rates are improved.

Social Media: Applications and websites that allow for the publishing and sharing of user generated content and discussions. Examples of social media include social networks, blogs, microblogs, multimedia sharing sites and games.

Social Sharing: Tools and tactics that enable email recipients to share email content on popular social networks and other social media sites.

Soft Bounce: Email sent to an active (live) email address but is turned away before being delivered. Often, the problem is temporary — the server is down or the recipient's mailbox is over quota. The email might be held at the recipient's server and delivered later, or the sender's email program may attempt to deliver it again. Soft-bounce reports are not always accurate because they don't report all soft bounces or the actual reason for the bounce.

Solo Mailing: A one-time broadcast to an email list, separate from regular newsletters or promotions, and often includes a message from an outside advertiser or a special promotion from the list owner.

Spam: The popular name for unsolicited commercial email. However, some email recipients define spam as any email they no longer want to receive, even if it comes from a mailing list they voluntarily joined.

Spamcop: A blacklist and IP-address database, formerly privately owned but now part of the email vendor, IronPort. Many ISPs check the IP addresses of incoming email against spamcop's records to determine whether the address has been blacklisted because of spam complaints.

Spamdexing: Any technique designed to fool search engine spiders, and increase or artificially change a search ranking or result.

Specifier: Someone whose role in the technical purchase process is to identify specific needs, features, etc., needed from a product.

Sender Policy Framework (SPF): A protocol used to eliminate email forgeries. A line of code called an SPF record is placed in a sender's Domain Name Server information. The incoming server can verify a sender by SPF record before allowing a message through.

Spider: A small program that surfs the Web to index information for a search engine. See also **Crawler**.

Spidering: The process of surfing the Web, storing URLs and indexing keywords, links and text. Because there is far too much information available to index it all, every search engine has unique (and highly proprietary) ways in which it saves time and space.

Sponsored Search: A method of search engine marketing based on a cost-per-click model. See also **Pay-Per-Click**.

Spoofing: The practice of changing the sender's name in an email message so it looks as if it came from another address.

Status: Short character description of what a user is doing at a specific moment, e.g., "Sergio is writing a glossary of social media terms."

Stemming: An advanced search quality of some search engines that allows the engine to return results containing the same word stem as the keyword. Example: A “stemming” return for “marketing” might return results for “marketer.”

Stop Word: Words that are so common they don’t affect search results, such as “a,” “an,” “the,” etc.

Streaming Media: Video or audio that can be watched or listened to online but not permanently stored.

Style or Style Sheet: CSS that determines the look/feel of a site.

Subject Line: Copy that identifies the topic of an email message, often designed to entice the recipient into opening the message. The subject line appears first in the recipient’s inbox, often next to the sender’s name or email address. It is repeated in the email message’s header information inside the message.

Subscribe: The process of joining a mailing list, either through an email command, by filling out a Web form, or offline by filling out a form or requesting to be added verbally. (If you accept verbal subscriptions, you should safeguard yourself by recording it and storing recordings along with time and date, in a retrievable format).

Subscriber: The person who has specifically requested to join a mailing list.

Subscribing: The process of adding an RSS feed to an aggregator or newsreader.

Suppression File: A list of email addresses you have removed from your regular mailing lists, either because they have opted out of your lists or because they have notified other mailers that they do not want to receive mailings from your company. Required by CAN-SPAM.

Syndication: Allows blog content to be distributed online.

Tag Cloud: A visual representation of the popularity of the tags or descriptions that people use on a blog or website. Popular tags are often shown in a large type and less popular tags in smaller type.

Tagging: The act of allocating particular keywords to content, such as in Flickr photos.

Tags: Keywords added to a blog post, photo or video to help users find related topics or media, through either browsing on the site or as a term to make your entry more relevant to search engines.

Target Market: A profile that an organization selects to target with marketing materials. Target markets are typically based on demographics, such as location, company size, annual revenue, etc. They differ from buyer personas, which are more in-depth profiles that include behavioral characteristics.

Technorati Authority: Used to determine the number of times a keyword or URL are mentioned and linked in blogs.

Teleconferencing: A meeting held without being in the same place, using a network connection and tools like Voice over IP, instant messaging, video and whiteboards.

Telemarketing: Involves contacting prospects with a phone call to generate leads See also **Cold Calling**.

Tenancy: An ad displayed for a set period of time. See also **Sponsored Search**.

Terms of Service (TOS): The legal basis upon which you agree to use a website, video hosting site or other place for creating or sharing content.

Test: A necessary step before sending an email campaign or newsletter. Many email clients permit you to send a test email before sending a regular email newsletter or solo mailing, in which you would send one copy of the message to an in-house email address and then review it for formatting, copy errors or improperly formatted links. Email marketers should also send a test campaign to a list of email addresses not in the deployment database to determine likely response rates and how well different elements in the message perform.

Text Newsletter: Plain newsletter with words only — no colors, graphics, fonts or pictures. Anyone with email can receive it.

Thank-You Page: Webpage that appears after a user has submitted an order or a form online. Is often a receipt.

Threads: Strands of conversation. On an email list or Web forum, they will be defined by messages that use the use the same subject. On blogs, they are less clearly defined, but emerge through comments and trackbacks.

Throttling: The practice of regulating how many email messages a broadcaster sends to one ISP or mail server at a time. Some ISPs bounce email if it receives too many messages from one sending address at a time.

Time to Close: The average number of days it took for deals to close during a specified time period.

Tool: Software applications on your computer, and also for applications that are Web-based.

Top 2 (or Top 3): Scoring method in which only the top two responses are used in calculation. Top two responses are usually expressing favorability toward the selection and usually include "very" and "somewhat" as the two responses.

Total Investment: Includes the total financial investment made for a marketing channel or campaign. Can also include employee salaries or sales commission.

Total Lead Volume: The total number of leads collected from lead generation campaigns. Includes sales-ready leads and non-sales-ready leads.

Total Revenue: The total revenue gained for a marketing channel or campaign.

Trackback: A facility for bloggers to leave a calling card, instead of commenting.

Transactional Email: An email that is part of a transaction, usually a receipt. Has been used to refer to rich-media emails with transactional capability embedded in the email itself. However, this term has largely fallen out of use as filtering of email has limited the utilization of rich media elements. Also known as Transactive Email.

Transparency: Enhancing searching, sharing, self-publish and commenting across networks makes it easier to find out what's going on in any situation where there is online activity.

Triggered Nurturing Message: A lead nurturing message sent in response to an action that a lead has taken.

Troll: Someone who posts controversial, inflammatory, irrelevant or off-topic messages in an online community, such as an online discussion forum or chat room, with the primary intent of provoking other users into an emotional response or to generally disrupt normal on-topic discussion.

Tweet: A post on Twitter, a real-time social messaging system.

Tweetup: An organized or impromptu gathering of people who use Twitter. Users often include a hashtag, such as #Tweetup or #sfTweetup, when publicizing a local Tweetup.

Twitter: A popular social network, unveiled to the public in July 2006, that lets members post updates of no more than 140 characters. People often use Twitter to point to news stories, to raise funds for charity or other unexpected uses. See also **Microblogging**.

Twitterverse: Akin to blogs and the blogosphere, the Twitterverse is the community of people who use Twitter and the conversations taking place within that sphere.

Unsolicited Commercial Email (UCE): See also **Spam**.

Unconference: A collaborative learning event organized and created for its participants, by its participants.

Unique Reference Number: A unique number assigned to a list member, usually by the email broadcast software, and used to track member behavior (clicks, subscribes, unsubscribes) or to identify the member to track email delivery.

Unique Visitor: A single visitor to a website determined by the number of unique IP addresses that hit the site.

Universal Lead Definition: A lead that has been determined to fit the profile of the ideal customer, has been qualified as sales-ready, and spells out the responsibilities and accountabilities of the participants in the program, Sales and Marketing (Brian Carroll, Executive Director of Applied Research of MECLABS, CEO of InTouch).

Universal Search: A search engine's ability to deliver multimedia content in search results pages, including images, videos, news, local information, social media sites and books.

Universe: The total membership of a defined group. The universe of influencers on technology purchases, for example, includes technical staff, IT management, Line of Business managers and executives at the VP and C-level.

Unsubscribe: To remove oneself from an email list, either via an emailed command to the list server or by filling in a Web form.

Update: A newsletter sent to fans of a specific social media page.

Upload: Transfer a file or other content from your computer to an Internet site.

Uniform Resource Locator (URL): The Web address for a page, always beginning with http:// (or https:// for a secure page) and followed by "www." (or variations, although some URLs are set up to not include this information) and the domain name, e.g., http://www.marketingsherpa.com.

Usability: The study of how people interact with their environment. In online marketing, a specialized form that focuses on webpage design.

User-Generated Content (UGC): An industry term that refers to all forms of user-created materials such as blog posts, reviews, podcasts, videos, comments and more.

Value Proposition: A clear and concise statement that defines the key reason why an organization becomes the best chose their ideal customer. It should clearly communicate both what the company does and its unique benefits over the competition.

Vendor: Any company that provides a service. See **Email Vendor**.

Verification: A program that determines an email came from the sender listed in the return path or Internet headers; designed to stop email from forged senders.

Video Email: An email message that includes a video file, either inserted into the message body, accessible through a hotlink to a website or accompanying it in an attachment (least desirable because many ISPs block executable attachments to avoid viruses).

Video Search: A search engine's ability to "crawl" the Web for video content and index it on a search results page.

Videoblog (or vlog): A blog that contains video entries. Often called video podcasting, vodcasting or vlogging.

Viral Loop: The dynamic that encourages one to share a property with friends.

Viralocity: The number of new users gained for each user. A viralocity of one means for each user, one new user is gained.

Virtual Event: Much like a webinar but intended to include a large number of participants, and is often marketed as an online conference or summit. See also **Webinar**.

Virtual World: An online computer-simulated space such as Second Life that mixes aspects of real life with fantasy elements.

Voice Over Internet Protocol (VOIP) Service: Enables you to use a computer or other Internet device for phone calls without additional charge, including conference calls, e.g., Skype.

Wall: Shared discussion board specifically about an individual and displayed on the individual's profile.

Warm Traffic: Sending users to your website who have already been engaged via a social page or app – e.g., "warmed-up" users who are more likely to convert to customers.

Web 2.0: Refers to the second generation of the Web, which enables people with no specialized technical knowledge to create their own websites to self-publish, create and upload audio and video files, share photos and information, and complete a variety of other tasks.

Web Analytics: The measurement, collection, analysis and reporting of Internet data for the purpose of understanding who your visitors are and optimizing your website.

Web Bug: A one-pixel x one-pixel image tag added to an HTML message and used to track open rates by email addresses. Opening the message, either in the preview pane or by clicking on it, activates the bug and sends a signal to the website, where special software tracks and records the signal as an open.

Web Conferencing: Used to conduct live meetings or presentations over the Internet.

Web Feed: Allows you to read, listen or watch new content on a blog or a website without having to revisit that site. See also **RSS**.

Web-based Tools: Google, Yahoo! and a host of other commercial organizations provide an increasing range of free or low-cost tools including email, calendars, word processing and spreadsheets that can be used on the Web rather than a desktop.

Webcasting: Refers to the ability to use the Web to deliver live or delayed versions of audio or video broadcasts.

Webinar: Short for Web-based seminar, a webinar is a presentation, lecture, workshop, meeting or seminar that is transmitted over the Internet through a Web conferencing tool.

Webmail: Any of several Web-based email clients where clients have to go to a website to access or download email instead of using a desktop application. Some examples are Gmail, Yahoo! Mail and Hotmail.

Welcome Message: Message automatically sent to new list members as soon as their email addresses join a list.

White Hat: In PPC, this refers to ethical and acceptable methods of optimizing a website to achieve higher search engine rankings and increased traffic.

Whitelist: Advance-authorized list of email addresses, held by an ISP, subscriber or other email service provider, which allows email messages to be delivered regardless of spam filters. See also **Enhanced Whitelist**.

Widget: A small block of content, typically displayed in a small box, with a specific purpose, such as providing weather forecasts or news that is constantly updating itself (typically via RSS). Widgets make it easy to add dynamic content to your site or blog. **Sometimes called a gadget, badge or applet.**

Wiki: A technology designed to allow many different people to edit a webpage by providing an easily reversible audit trail of edits and changes. The best example of this in practice is the Wikipedia project.

Wish Lists: A merchandising technique that allows registered website users to store a list of products they would like. Like a digital version of a wedding registry.

Word-of-mouth (WOM) Marketing: An emerging area in marketing that attempts to measure and/or harness the power of personal recommendations. With the explosion of blog readership, WOM has become a hot topic in virtually every industry.

WordPress: A popular open source blog publishing application.

XML (Extensible Markup Language): A new language that promises more efficient data delivery over the Web. XML does nothing itself. It must be implemented using “parser” software or XSL.

Extensible Markup Language (XML): An advanced language developed by the World Wide Web consortium (W3C) to complement HTML. HTML is about displaying information, while XML is about describing information. XML does nothing itself. It must be implemented using “parser” software or XSL.

XML Feeds: A method of feeding page information to search engines using XML. Some feeds are paid by the user on a CPC or subscription basis.

YouTube: A video sharing website where users can upload, view, share and comment on clips from TV, film and amateur videos.

About MarketingSherpa LLC

MarketingSherpa is a primary research facility, wholly-owned by MECLABS, dedicated to determining **what works in marketing** via exclusive case studies, surveys, and results data analysis. Then we publish what we learn so our community of marketers and weekly readers can improve their results and train their teams.

Praised by *The Economist*, Harvard Business School's Working Knowledge Site and Entrepreneur.com, MarketingSherpa is distinguished by offering **practical, results-based marketing** information researched and written by a staff of in-house reporters.

MarketingSherpa features:

- **Best Practices:** 1,000+ brand-side marketer case studies and 3,500+ Creative Samples
- **Research:** 2,000+ marketing and research abstracts
- **Instruction:** 800+ how-to articles
- **Newsletters:** 230,000+ marketers read weekly case studies on topics such as email, search, social, lead generation, lead nurturing, optimization and content marketing
- **Training:** 100+ live, hands-on training sessions providing practical and proven solutions
- **Summits:** 3 annual vendor-neutral, research-based marketing events

About MECLABS

MECLABS is a science lab that uses real-world research and training to **help business leaders get better use out of sales and marketing technology and resources**, including Internet marketing, website optimization, and lead management. We have been involved in direct research partnerships with companies throughout Europe and North America since 2001.

MECLABS deploys a rigorous methodology to conduct research. This research is compiled from:

- More than **10 years** of research partnership with our clients
- **1,300** experiments
- Over **1 billion** emails
- **10,000** landing pages tested
- **5 million** telephone call
- **500,000** decision maker conversations

MECLABS has consulted with companies like Cisco, Johnson & Johnson, *The New York Times*, 1-800-Flowers, and NetSuite to optimize sales and marketing processes and achieve triple-digit ROI gains.

Register for Summits and Workshops at MECLABS.com/training or contact:
Customer Service (available M-F, 9:00am-5:00pm ET)
service@marketingsherpa.com
1-877-895-1717 (outside the U.S. call 401-383-3131)

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