

Your Exam Study Guide

The following guide walks through key lessons from each of the eleven certification classes. Use this guide as you prepare for your Inbound Certification test.



INBOUND FUNDAMENTALS

Essentials of a Successful Inbound Strategy

I. Why inbound?

- Traditional marketing: interruptive, marketer/salesperson-centric
- Inbound marketing: be part of the conversation, buyer/human-centric
- Focus efforts on getting the right people to your site
- Empower customers
- The Inbound Methodology: attract, convert, close, delight
- Analysis is essential to a successful inbound strategy

II. Fundamentals of inbound success

- Use buyer personas:
 - Represent who you're trying to reach
 - Universally useful across all industries
 - Create based on research
 - Persona profile stories
- Use the Buyer's Journey:
 - Active research process potential customer goes through leading up to a purchase.
 - Three stages
 - Different content fits into different stages
- Create remarkable content:
 - Content + Context: both are important
 - Definition of content
 - Definition of context
- Leverage your content:
 - Delivery makes content relevant

- Content delivery enables achievement of business goals: different techniques for different goals

III. What effective inbound strategies look like

- Create content designed to attract, convert, close, and delight specific personas
- Content to attract and content to convert can both fit into two stages of the buyer's journey
- Content purpose determined by delivery mechanism
- Content to close and delight

ATTRACT

Optimizing Your Website

I. What is optimization and why you need it

- Optimization is the act, process or methodology of making something as fully perfect, functional or perfect as possible.
- Website optimization can pertain to any stage of the methodology, but fully optimized websites work in all stages.
- Website optimization in terms of the "inbound world" still refers to search engine optimization.

II. Who are you optimizing your site for

- Optimize for searchers (buyer personas).
- Optimize for search engines.
- There are over 200 different ranking factors that Google looks at when determining where to rank an indexed page.
- Focus on creating quality content for your buyer personas and great ranking will follow.

III. How to optimize your website

- Understand your buyer personas: they will dictate how you decide to optimize your website including the design and layout, language used and content available.
- Determine what type of "optimization" you're trying to do.
- Depending on a company's long-term goals or short-term goals, optimization may mean something different.
- Make your site easy to understand and crawl.
- Searchers want an easy-to-understand and relevant website to their searching needs, and search engines want to crawl websites that are easy to understand to help them index them better. These two together can help improve a website's "on-page SEO" making the experience on a website enjoyable and fluid.

The Fundamentals of Blogging

I. Blogging and inbound marketing

- Business blogs differ from personal blogs.
 - 79% of marketers with a company blog reported inbound ROI for 2013
 - 43% of companies have acquired a customer through their blog
- Great for SEO:
 - Indexed pages
 - Each page is an opportunity to rank for solutions to industry-related issues
 - Blogs convert leads and demonstrate authority, expertise and trust

II. Best practices for remarkable blog content

- Remarkable content is rewarded
 - Use blogging to get inbound links
 - Rewards also come in the form of social shares
- Blogging best practices:
 - Blog for personas, not search engines
 - Pick a great title, address one topic per post, cover content that's important to your buyer personas
 - Blog consistently and frequently, optimize following SEO best practices
 - Use formatting to draw the attention of the reader and keep them there
 - Give your readers an opportunity to convert as a lead

III. What blogging in execution looks like

- What to blog about:
 - Long-tail keywords, recent industry/relevant news, customer questions, blog comments, hot industry topics, go negative or positive, invite guest bloggers
 - Reuse and recycle your blog posts
- Ways to promote blog content:
 - Leverage your website, use social media presence, email marketing, tap into your network, PR releases, etc.
- What to analyze / does it work?
 - Number of article views, blog subscription growth, most popular articles, inbound links
 - Don't expect overnight success

Amplifying Your Content with Social Media

I. Why social media is crucial to your inbound strategy

- Millions of people use social media – there's a lot of traffic
- Can be used to attract, convert, close, or delight
- Foster connections with prospects
- Keep customers happy
- Show personality with socially shared content

II. Developing your social media strategy

- Content is king, distribution is queen.
- Considerations for a strong social strategy:
 - Ensure you're posting the right content in the right places
 - Timing and positioning of social updates
 - Social media as a listening tool
- Social media best practices:
 - Optimize profiles to attract people and aid your website
 - Personas: identify and build
 - Build reach by utilizing the cocktail party rule and other social media etiquette

- Customize content to each platform: keep in mind the different personalities of the “big 4” social networks and post accordingly.
- Analyze to refine

III. What does awesome social content look like?

- Align with all stages of the Buyer’s Journey
- Share content that fits into each stage of the Buyer’s Journey
- Tailor content to each network upon which it’s posted.

CONVERT

Creating Content with a Purpose

I. Why inbound marketing can’t exist without content

- Content is information
- Limiting factor for marketing success is attention, not space
- 60% of the sales cycle is in the marketer’s hands
- Can influence the sales cycle with content

II. How to create remarkable content

- Content should focus on the solution. To know the solution, you have to know:
 - The problem
 - Who you’re solving the problem for
- Two keys to creating remarkable content
 - Buyer personas are who you’re creating content for
 - The Buyer’s Journey dictates what that content should be
- Different content format performs better in different stages of the Buyer’s Journey
- Develop a content creation process for sustained success
 - Plan how to reach business goals, utilize the 80/20 rule, and focus on benefits
 - Produce: focus on helpful content
 - Distribute: determine distribution methods and be consistent and delivery schedule
 - Analyze specific metrics

- Repeat

III. Content that converts

- Content quality is most important factor to increasing conversion rates
- Awareness stage content helps educate on nature of problem in general
- Consideration stage content helps educate on specifics of problem
- Decision stage content helps educate on solution strategies
- Use analysis to determine which stage of the Buyer's Journey needs refinement.

The Anatomy of a Landing Page

I. Landing pages and inbound marketing

- What are landing pages?
 - Landing pages are like digital sales reps that work 24/7
 - Gather lead intelligence through an equal exchange of information
- Landing pages are the heart of the conversion process:
 - Inbound marketers double the average site conversion rate of non-inbound marketers.
 - The number of landing pages accessible on your website plays a significant role in number of leads generate on a website.

II. How to build landing pages that convert visitors into leads

- Offers:
 - Something offered by an organization that has perceived value to website visitors other than the core products or services the organization sells
 - Landing pages and offers go together like peanut butter and jelly
 - Offers come in many different forms and are only limited by your imagination and understanding of what your personas want and need in each stage of the buyer's journey
- Buyer's Journey:
 - A large majority of purchase decisions start with a search engine
 - Providing offers relevant to website visitors in each stage of the buyer's journey

- Buyer Personas:
 - It is critical that the offers on your landing pages are relevant to your buyer personas
 - Persona Relevancy vs. Irrelevancy Factor
- Landing Page Best Practices:
 - Clear, concise, compelling headlines; explain the value & importance of the offer to your persona; use bullet points; select the appropriate number of form fields; remove navigation and links; include a relevant image or video; add testimonials when relevant; leverage industry awards/recognition.

III. What great landing pages look like and how to analyze them

- Use best practices as your guide to analyze landing pages
- Always take into consideration if the offer and landing page language aligns with a persona(s) in a specific stage of the buyer's journey
- Take the conversion process into consideration when analyzing landing pages

Perfecting the Conversion Process

I. Why the conversion process is so critical

- You need a conversion process to convert visitors into leads
 - Use CTAs, landing pages, and thank you page
 - Use these building blocks to create conversion paths

II. How to convert the right visitors into leads

- Use conversion paths to lead people through the buyer's journey
 - What to offer at each stage
 - How to use the right CTAs
- CTAs must be relevant to the content where they live
 - Align with content topic and buyer's journey stage
 - Attract the eye with a helpful offer
 - Optimize CTAs using A/B Testing

III. Building effective CTAs and thank you pages

- Follow call-to-action and thank you page best practices
 - CTAs should have action-oriented copy and live above the fold
 - Thank you pages should deliver the offer
 - Use your thank you page to bring someone to the next stage of the buyer's journey

CLOSE

Sending the Right Email to the Right Person

I. Why email marketing is (still) important

- Email has ROI of 4300%
- Marketers' use of email is growing year over year.
- Attract visitors via email by sending likeable content
- Convert leads by gaining trust
- Close leads into customers via lead nurturing and segmentation
- Continue engaging customers even after the close

II. How to send the right email to the right person

- Determine who your audience is
 - Segmentation creates context
 - Use personas and the buyer's journey
- Segment your contacts database
 - Work towards specific goals: increased deliverability, engagement, and reach
 - Maintain your email lists – they deteriorate without attention
 - Create targeted (segmented) lists based on a variety of factors
 - Let prospects spread the love and increase your reach
- Send the right content at the right time
 - Tailor email sends to buyer's journey stage
- Nurture a lead into a customer

III. What makes a world class email

- Emails should always add value
- Successful emails are optimized around goals, content, helpfulness, and design.
- Email optimization tactics:
 - Identify a specific goal
 - Personalize sender information and email copy
 - Get to the point
 - Use actionable language
 - Focus on benefits
 - Use multiple CTAs
 - Encourage sharing
 - Edit the plain text version
 - Optimize for mobile
 - Analyze results

The Power of Smarketing

I. What Smarketing is and why it's critical

- The sales and marketing relationship is often a negative one
- Smarketing's goal should be to get sales and marketing on the same team and focused on revenue

II. Smarketing = alignment

- Alignment around goals: establishing related goals as well as transparent communication
- Alignment around personas: knowledge sharing to solve for target personas
- How to scale alignment for any size organization: collaboration

III. Five steps to integrate Smarketing into your organization

- Speak the same language
 - Create a metrics-based goal for marketing tied to the sales goal
 - Define the stages of the sales and marketing funnel
 - Establish the definition of a sales-ready lead
 - Define the handoff process between marketing and sales
 - Define your buyer persona(s)

- Set up closed-loop reporting
 - Signs that you don't have closed-loop reporting
 - Benefits of closed-loop reporting for marketing and sales
 - Example reports based on closed-loop data
- Implement a service level agreement
 - Definition of an SLA: agreement between sales and marketing
- Maintain open communication
 - Types of meetings and topics for each
 - Types of emails and content for each
 - How to maintain open communication outside meetings and emails
- Rely on data
 - Dashboards are effective because they provide frequent, public, and transparent communication around progress towards goals
 - Example marketing dashboards and reports
 - Example sales dashboards and reports
 - The role of data in issue resolution and problem solving

Taking Your Sales Process Inbound

I. Why transforming the way you sell is so important

- Buying habits have changed
 - Your sales process has to change in order to support the buying process
- Buyers have so much information available to them that they typically have already made 60% of their purchase decision before even talking to a sales rep

II. What is inbound sales?

- Give the buyer a relevant, personal, “delightful” experience that is driven by their needs and happens on their timeline
- Inbound sales approach:
 - Attract visitors to website with relevant content
 - Be an open book and share your content
 - Leverage the buyer’s context
 - Buyer now has all of the power

III. How to transform the way you sell

- Transform the way you target accounts:
 - Make sure you are targeting the right people - stay focused on your buyer personas.
 - Only the people who are experiencing the pain you solve should enter the top of the funnel.
- Transform the way you prospect accounts:
 - Research your lead thoroughly
 - Company information
 - Read about their industry
 - Check social media
 - Lead intelligence
 - Determine the goal of the call before picking up the phone
- Transform the way you connect with accounts:
 - Build rapport
 - Know your audience
 - Speak the prospect's language
 - Be helpful
- Transform the way your prospects perceive you as a salesperson:
 - Be a sales educator
 - Make your sales organization human
 - Become trusted advisors

DELIGHT

Cultivating Happy Customers

I. Why customer delight is so important

- Customer delight is a competitive advantage.
- The more trust you build with people the more promoters you will create
 - Your promoters will attract more strangers to your business
- Building trust is core to customer delight
 - Trust is what will create lasting relationships with people

II. How to delight your customers

- Your number one priority should be to serve people

- Customer delight is not just a post-sale activity. It should be a priority both pre- and post-sale and wherever customers are in the Buyer's Journey
- The three pillars of customer delight are innovation, communication, and education

III. **Seven customer delight guidelines**

- Customers and employees are a business's greatest assets. Delight your employees & they will delight your customers
- Every small interaction makes a difference because they create the larger experience
- Develop team principles that your employees live by
- Everyone at the business should be able to identify a customer by persona
- Educate and empower employees with the customer delight checklist
- The businesses that are the best educators will be the most successful
- It's not what you say, but how you make them feel that creates a lasting relationship
- Developing & establishing trust is critical to creating an inbound experience

Sample Exam Questions

Why is a business blog beneficial for SEO?

- a. It creates more pages on your website for search engines to index.
- b. It helps you to get found for the keywords your target audience is searching for.
- c. It enables you to increase your search rankings.
- d. All of the above.

Which social network listed below is BEST for visual content?

- a. Facebook
- b. Twitter
- c. LinkedIn
- d. Quora

You work for a pet supply store. Which of the following calls-to-action would be best for a blog article called "10 Ways Pet Owners are Dressing Up their Pets."

- a. "Refer a Friend to our Store"
- b. "Complimentary Guide: 8 Ways to Raise Your New Dog"
- c. "Download a Free Dog Outfit Coupon"
- d. All of the above are strong calls-to-action for the above article

Even though mail marketing is one of the most expensive inbound strategies, it offers one of the best return-on-investments.

- a. True
- b. False

Answers: D,A,C,B