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If You're Not Doing Inbound, You're Not Doing Digital Marketing



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If You're Not Doing Inbound, You're Not Doing Effective Digital Marketing

It's been said that you can catch far more bees with a teaspoon of honey than you can with a gallon of vinegar. That may be true, but who says you're looking for bees? If your product is vinegar, surely there's [a bug out there that likes it and is attracted to it](#).

That's the basic concept behind inbound marketing: there's always someone out there searching for *your* product or service.

A New Way To Look At Marketing

Inbound marketing flips previous advertising assumptions on their ear. In former days, advertisers assumed that the general public knew *nothing* about products or services until they were told about it. By that line of reasoning, the more people know about your product or service, the more people become interested enough in it to purchase (of course, the [resounding rejection of New Coke](#) in 1985 alone seems to throw cold water on that argument). So, in a way, this type of outbound marketing relies entirely upon consumers being unaware of the markets around them.



But **inbound marketing's central thesis is that consumers are continually asking questions**: *is there such a thing as X? how do I do this? what should I know about? Where can I find this? Why doesn't this work?*

Inbound marketing plays off human beings' innate sense of curiosity and their habit — their joy — for communicating.

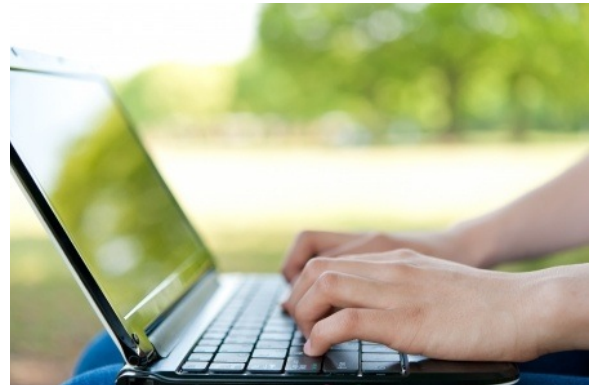
That said, inbound marketing wouldn't have been as successful in New Coke's day.

In 1985, advertisers' assumptions were wrong, but their methodology was right. Yes, consumers were seekers and communicators then, but information was more difficult to come by. Research then meant going to your [local branch of the public library](#) and searching microfiche or thumbing through a card catalog, or writing inquiry letters to companies. Now, research is instantaneous. Inbound marketing was waiting for its true medium to make its presence known: the Internet.

Think about it: when you want to know something today, how do you find out? Do you ask around? Maybe, but if you're looking for niche information, you'll get a lot of blank stares in return. So what do you do? You whip out your smartphone or your laptop and [Google it](#). The Internet has allowed consumers to realize their potential to seek and act 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 52 weeks a year. They have phenomenal power at the tips of their fingers. And they're using it.

A lot.

It is estimated that in 2014, at the time of this writing, there are almost [1.1 billion \(with a B\) websites](#) online and active (yes, of course [we Googled it](#)). The reasons for this are simple: many people want to know things and many more people want to communicate information.



To sound like a 1980's movie villain: information is power.

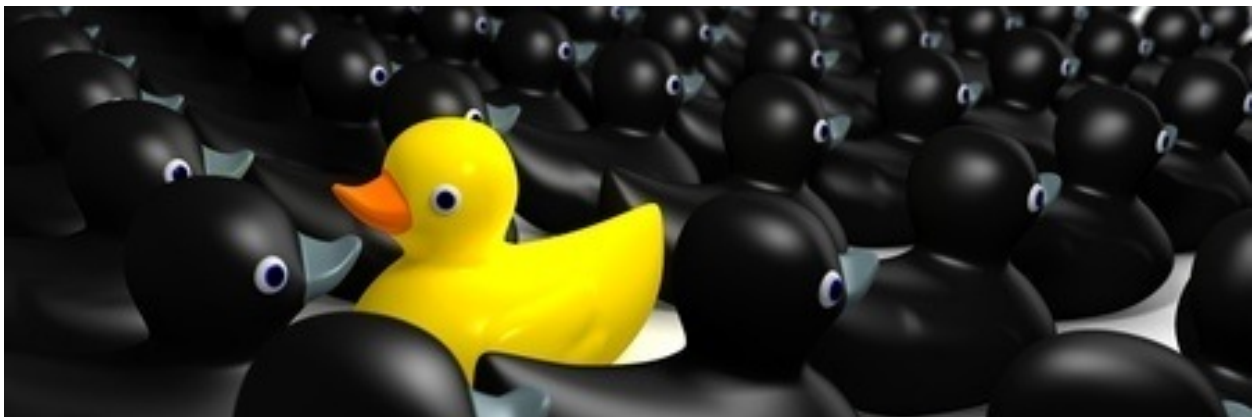
For retailers, the Internet has become *the* most important vector for communicating product and service information and sales via [e-commerce portals are thoroughly outstripping](#) those at brick-and-mortar stores — at least in most Western countries. Even when consumers intend to their purchase in-store, they often turn to the web and social media channels for product information, reviews, price comparison and store inventory status. So how do retailers, wholesalers and manufacturers ensure that consumers find *their* products, *their* services and *their* websites?

There are two ways to go about it: traditional-style digital marketing and [inbound marketing](#). They can complement each other, but they do not have the same function, and one is decidedly more powerful than the other.

What's The Difference Between Traditional Marketing And Inbound Marketing?

Traditional marketing doesn't tap into the consumer's habit for using search engines and social media inquiries to ask and find answers to specific questions. Instead, it relies on the older model of marketing theory — that the more people are told that a product or service is out there, the more will purchase it. Traditional marketing relies on placing advertisements, flyers and logos in plain view on heavily-trafficked areas in an attempt to increase visibility. It's akin to throwing billboards and [Burma-Shave signs](#) up along a highway, then hoping traffic will divert to your outlet.

Those tactics have their place, but they are a bit more passive than you might think. Even though the idea is to confront the consumer with the product or service, you are relying on the consumer to thereafter take action. The problem is that you often expend a lot of energy, time and capital, [but garner very little reward](#): you're leading the horse to water, so to speak. Instead, you need to stand out.



Direct mail marketing can be somewhat more effective than web banners and click ads, but they run the risk of being automatically filtered out and “round filed” — recycled or thrown in the trash immediately, unless there’s a coupon or offer.

Why do people throw out direct mail? And even some digital marketing techniques fall flat when they’re applied incorrectly — why do they tune out “click here” banner ads that aren’t relevant to them?

They do so for the same reason that people stopped paying attention to television commercials and billboards — they're sick of them. They're annoying. And consumers view outbound advertising in general as an obtrusive, disingenuous form of communication. Consumers today want to connect *on their own terms*. They want information *that is relevant to them at the present moment*.

The Inbound Difference

Inbound marketing is everything that digital outbound marketing is not. It's smart. It's unobtrusive. It gives the consumer some credit for being able to formulate and ask relevant questions. And it seeks to provide answers for those questions in a relevant way.



Inbound marketing hinges upon useful content found and delivered at the moment of a potential customer's need. In order to deliver the most useful content, you need a framework for solid SEO strategy — [search engine optimization](#). Over the years, SEO has become more than a list of keywords that are “relevant” to your industry. It's now a way to understand how your customers use the internet and how to best answer their questions.

If you are casting your sales net by relying on already-curious consumers propensity to find you, you need to make sure that they *can*. You need your company's website or e-commerce portal to come up early, if not first, in the consumer's search engine hits.

That takes skill. Psychology and sales experience are involved. There's also a lot of market research. Effective inbound marketers are continually trying and testing their markets to ensure that they are meeting consumers where consumers want to be met.

Lastly, it takes creativity. There's no substitute for savvy design and cogent, concise copywriting in the digital commercial world. One canned-sounding pitch or slow-loading site can break your campaign. by contrast, a well-conceived piece can go viral and bring undreamed-of results.

Inbound Is Fresh. Always Fresh.

Like a garden, your inbound efforts must be continually monitored and maintained. You need to [nurture your campaign](#). You also need to tailor it to your consumers' desires.

Customized media is another pillar of effective inbound marketing. Whereas digital outbound typically does not rely on segmentation as heavily and often relies on a one-size-fits-all approach, inbound marketers try to personalize and segment as much as possible. And that seems to be what the market wants.

According to a [2011 study](#) conducted by GfK Roper Public Affairs & Corporate Communications, a leading multinational consumer research firm, **8 out of 10 consumers report that they have noticed custom media** in their day-to-day lives — in digital magazines, on blogs, in podcasts and other new media.

More telling is that **inbound custom media presentations drive sales and customer retention**. Two-thirds of respondents reported that information they gather from custom media helps them to make informed purchases, and over half report they are willing to purchase again from a company that provides them with custom media. 6 of 10 consumers reported their **perception of a company's image is strengthened** by its use of custom media in advertising.

But perhaps the most important finding in the GfK Roper study is that **70% of respondents said they prefer to learn about a company through a collection of articles rather than an ad**. That's solid data in favor of the inbound approach.



Going To An Inbound Model Isn't Difficult. It Just Takes *Smarketing*.

A sound inbound campaign starts with content. If you can continually develop and deploy fresh content in-house — engaging blog articles, social media polls, customer engagement pieces — you're one step ahead. But it may take more expertise than many sales departments or traditional marketing teams can handle — it takes a change in understanding what marketing can be. Ideally, your sales team would not handle the inbound campaign; rather it should come from the marketing side, and your inbound marketing team [should be closely coordinating its strategy with your sales department](#).

You Should Be Smarketing.

Marketing and sales have been traditionally wary allies at best. Sometimes they're locked in an all-out, counterproductive war. In a siloed environment, they argue over turf. Are these leads *good* leads? Do the creatives have any clue about the market conditions we're dealing with on the ground? Why is the sales team dictating our messaging?



Well, an inbound marketing model can alleviate that tension. If you have aligned your sales and marketing teams around the same inbound goals — if you're smarketing — the two teams could end up being the [best of friends](#). That's because the leads you generate through an inbound model are *ready* to be engaged by the sales team. And those leads are already showing curiosity about the sales team's end goal, because the marketing side developed customized content *around* that goal.

See how easy? Instead of [broadcasting your message](#) and hoping against hope that the right kind of people will hear it and act upon it, you are creating content that plays to consumers' own seeking behaviors. This allows sales to know that the customer

wants to be approached and is actively seeking information about *your* company and products.

Once you have those leads in the door, proven smarketing tactics would also suggest that you provide your new customers with an enhanced ability to communicate their findings back to their peer group — **delight them, and they'll become your brand's evangelists.**



Once you get them talking, you'll see good leads flocking in. It will become organic and self-sustaining. Your company will take that next leap forward.

Armed with inbound marketing techniques and smarketing tactics, you really can catch more flies with honey.

Or bugs with vinegar — whatever works for your customers.