

Video 1: What is inbound?

Hi there! I'm Jorie with HubSpot Academy.

In today's world, there's a belief that in order to do business well, you have to be ruthless and cutthroat. That in order to be successful, you have to grow, even at the expense of your customers.

The sentiment is everywhere. It's in ads we see everyday, across pop culture, and even in the behavior of some of the world's biggest companies. But, the problem with that kind of thinking, especially in a world that's driven by word of mouth, is that it leads companies to make short term decisions that sacrifice long term relationships.

Another reason that logic is flawed is because buyers today have all the power. There's been a massive shift in the relationship between businesses and buyers. Now, the buyer is more empowered and has more information about your product, industry, and competition. And if you fail to meet their needs?

94% of consumers have discontinued communications with a company because of irrelevant promotions or messages. 74% of people are likely to switch brands if they find the purchasing process too difficult. 51% of customers will never do business with that company again after one negative experience. Those numbers are telling.

On the flip side, 93% of consumers said they are more likely to be repeat customers at companies with remarkable service. 77% of consumers shared positive experiences with their friends or on social media and review sites in the last year. So clearly, there's a better way to do business.

Inbound is a business philosophy based around helping people. The inbound approach means doing business in a human way and creating meaningful 1:1 relationships with strangers, prospects, or customers. Inbound means meeting people on their own terms and interacting with them using the sites, platforms, and networks they value most.

Inbound is a better way to market, a better way to sell, and a better way to help your customers. Because when good-for-the-customer means good-for-the-business, your company can grow better over the long term.

Inbound is about sharing your knowledge with the world. This, in turn, helps you build awareness and trust with your target audience. Boiled down, it's literally knowledge monetization that focuses on empowering your prospects and customers rather than forcing them to engage with you with interruptive experiences. You need to align with the way your buyers think, research, and purchase. It's about being a business that's helpful during each experience a person has with you. It's about meeting your consumers where they are.

Here's Brian Halligan, CEO and co-founder of HubSpot on what inbound means to him...

Brian Halligan: Inbound means to me, it's kind of a state of mind, you know? The old way you went to market was outbound. It was very interruption-oriented. It's sort of extracted value out of your prospects, and it wasn't fun for the prospect and it wasn't fun for the person who was going to market with the message.

Inbound's a new way to go to market. It's a new way to go to market that is a much more lovable way to go to market for the marketer and the marketee. Inbound really strives to help people go to market in a way that matches the way humans want to be sold and marketed to in 2018. Inbound, it's almost like a state of mind to me.

So, inbound is as much a mentality as it is a business strategy.

Being an inbound business means your building relationships and having conversations with, not at, your target audience. If you want to get value out of prospects and customers, you need to give them an experience that they value. To create this value, you need to provide the right information to right person at the right time, every single time, regardless of if they are interacting with your marketing, sales, or service teams.

It's about drawing people in -- that's why it's called inbound, after all.

Here's Brian Halligan again.

Brian Halligan: The other big change that's going on is I've felt like, at least when I was growing up in my career, the best product always won. What you sold was really important. I think more and more it's about how you sell it. When they say how you sell, it's about creating that, just that end-to-end delightful experience and business model that really matches the human behavior. You don't have to look far for that type of thing.

Look at the music industry, it's been totally turned upside down by Spotify. Spotify, it's a better model of buying it, and it learns from you and it changes over time, the service is better. Amazon, they've disrupted virtually everything, it's just a better way to buy. Yes, it's cheaper, but it's more convenient, the service is better, it's fantastic. Everything.

Look at Uber. It's a car that drives you around, taxis do the same thing. It's a better business model, a better go-to-market, a better service model. I think the companies that really do well today are the ones that leverage data to create a gorgeous end- to-end experience for that customer from marketing, when they find you, through to sales, when they become a customer, through to service, and then back to marketing.

Consumers' buying behaviors are going to continue to change and evolve. Your inbound tactics and tools will also change and evolve, but the inbound philosophy will still remain true. It's a philosophy about pulling people in by being helpful. By actually caring about what the problems of your potential buyers are and how you can help solve them. That's why inbound should extend to every aspect of your business.

Here's Dharmesh Shah, HubSpot's CTO and co-founder on this fundamental shift...

Dharmesh Shah: So, marketing sales and service have all been changing, and are continuing to change. And they're all changing in similar ways, but at different rates. So, marketing is changing earlier and faster than we saw over the last 10 years. So, a change in marketing, essentially was as people, we got tools that allowed us to block out marketing messages, to block out outbound.

And so, as a result of those tools, we didn't have to get inundated with marketing messages anymore. For sales, we got access to information. So, no longer did we have to rely on a sales rep to tell us things about pricing, or

customer reviews. We could just find that information on the internet. So, that's the kind of fundamental shift that started to happen. In the world of customer service, what's changed is now we have choices. So, back 10, 20 years ago, you could only choose between three providers. And so you had to deal with whatever service they gave you. And now, customers have a choice. So, that's radically changing how we approach customer service.

You've probably come across some of your favorite brands actively practicing inbound. It's that problem-solving blog post that shows on your Facebook feed. It's the product review that you found after doing a quick search in Google. The sales representative that you worked with you to help solve your problem at the appropriate time. Or that question you had about your subscription that got easily answered by a customer service representative on the company's website. The experiences that felt personalized. Experiences that felt relevant. Experiences that felt helpful.

If you fully embrace inbound, it will transform your business. You want to create experience that makes your prospects feel valued. Every individual is unique and they want to be treated that way. And when all of your vectors are aligned around an inbound approach, you can provide a holistic experience for anyone that interacts with your business no matter where they are in their buying journey.

It's time for you to support your prospect's buying process. It's time for you to join in and empower buyers and customers to make the right decisions for themselves.

Video 2: What is the inbound methodology?

How do you actually do inbound? Well, the best way to start is by understanding the inbound methodology.

First, here's Mark Kilens, VP of HubSpot Academy, on why the inbound methodology is so important.

Mark Kilens: The inbound methodology is going to help change your business, transform your business so it is more human. It is more helpful and it's going to teach you the things that everyone at your business needs to do to provide more value and build real relationships and trust with everyone you're trying to do business with.

Alignment is more important than ever these days. The inbound methodology is going to help you align your business so that everyone at the business understands your prospects and customers better, so they can deliver that real value and build real trust with the people you are here to serve.

And at the end of the day, the inbound methodology is going to help everyone at your business and all of your customers grow better. It's going to help you grow better by providing a framework.

So, what does this inbound methodology look like? It illustrates the three stages each of your marketing, sales, and services team will use to create and maintain relationships with people. These stages are attract, engage, and delight.

All of these phases apply to everyone in your company. You see, attracting isn't just the role of marketers. Engaging isn't just the role of sales. You can probably see where this is going. Delight isn't just the role of services! In order to create relationships that last and customers that stay, every customer facing team needs to

focus on how they can contextually attract, engage, and delight your prospects and customers and continue to build trust in your brand.

So let's see what the inbound methodology looks like in action. During the attract stage of the inbound methodology, an inbound business focuses on attracting prospects and customers through relevant and helpful content - immediately adding value during their buying journey.

Helpful content is contextual content, meaning that it relates directly to the question being asked, outcome being sought, or an aspirational goal. It should not only provide an opportunity to learn, but start to showcase that your level of insight and advice should be trusted. That shows why you're a thought leader. And to provide the easiest path to the desired solution, and expert-level insight into how to get there.

For a marketer, this could mean creating helpful content and experiences that demonstrate your knowledge. Sales reps, on the other hand, you need to make customers want to engage in conversation and see you as a resource, so you could attract prospects and customers by making yourself available for meetings, calls, or live chat in areas they're likely to have the most product questions. And services? Knowledge docs and chatbots make information easy to find for people who are looking for it.

Every business is an expert. Every role a knowledge broker. Attracting people is about using that expertise to create content and conversations that help people overcome their obstacles and reach their goals. To provide answers to questions, solutions for problems, and, perhaps, entertain along the way.

The engage stage begins the moment a person takes the desired action- to read that article, to book that meeting, to chat with that bot. It's about starting a relationship and becoming that trusted advisor.

In this stage, you begin to collect information about the individual you're working with. This could mean their personal information, if that's exchanged, or simply tracking the actions they choose to take moving forward. They may have landed on your website or started to interact through a preferred channel or app.

No matter how they are interacting with you, your focus is building trust. Answer questions. Provide solutions for the challenges your prospects and customers face and strategies to accomplish the goals they set. Maybe even to provide insight for the questions they didn't know they had. It's during the engage phase that you're able to start to build that one-to-one relationship and deliver solutions that solve problems with context, clarity, and creativity.

By focusing on what motivates your audience and having the expertise to solve for their needs, you become a resource. You sell your brand by solving for your prospects, rather than through telling them what sets you apart.

Of course, how you go about the engage stage will, again, depends on your role. For example, a marketer may use ad retargeting or blog posts to speak to different segments of their audience. A sales rep could use personalized follow up or having a series of phone conversations to determine the unique needs of a buyer. A services rep could focus on an inbound channel and use a support ticketing to organize and respond to each new inbound inquiry. The manner you build trust with your prospects and customers will depend on the unique needs of your business.

Finally, you arrive at the delight stage of the inbound methodology. Delight revolves around providing an outstanding experience every time a prospect or customer interacts with your company. To exceed their

expectations so much that they'll want to tell their friends and family about how you went the extra step to ensure they accomplished what they set out to do.

Delight is about more than just great customer service, although customer service will play a part. Anyone interacting with you has the potential to become the loudest voice across social media. You have the opportunity to ensure that you're actively creating advocates, rather than detractors of your brand.

To be an inbound business, you need to have a system in place to help delight those prospects or customers so that they become promoters and start to influence those strangers. Your promoters are what will help you have a continuous motion with the inbound methodology, after all. Think of it this way: at first, your marketing team is the loudest amplifier of your company, but hopefully soon, your customer base becomes even louder.

This means aligning your marketing, sales, and services teams around providing outstanding service in their content, conversations, and interactions. Make it as easy as humanly possible for people to find the answers they need. Ensure that you understand what motivates your prospects and customers. Find opportunities to provide additional insight or information.

Every prospect is a potential customer. As for any existing customers? Well, a customer isn't truly a customer until they've had the chance to leave you and chose not to.

Everyone at your company has the opportunity to delight someone. For marketers, this could mean creating a library of entertaining, but educational resources that can be recommended and evangelized to others.

Does this sound familiar? Maybe a little like the video you're watching? It should! The HubSpot Academy Learning Center is a great example of HubSpot marketing using educational content to delight its users.

For sale reps, this could mean using sales automation to remind yourself to check in with people post-sale to make sure they're getting everything they were looking for. For services reps, this could mean using feedback surveys help you improve over time and truly delight your customers.

So there you have it: attract, engage, and delight. The flywheel that can help you build relationships with anyone interacting with your company. It'll take some time and effort on your part. But the result? You achieve sustainable growth by paying attention to what makes your happiest customers tick.

Video 3: What are the fundamentals of an inbound business?

Before practicing inbound, it's important to understand the fundamentals of inbound strategy. Consumers don't want to be sold to, they want to be educated, and inbound tactics can deliver the kind of information your prospects and customers need to help them make smart, well-informed decisions and, ultimately, help them grow.

To do inbound, you need to be inbound. This means using a specific set of strategies along the way. You'll need to understand the following: the inbound principles, your company's purpose, how your business goals align, your buyer personas, and your buyer's journey. In addition, you'll need the correct toolbox, a growth platform, to ensure you can execute each one of your initiatives with excellence.

Let's start with the inbound principles. Think of the inbound principles as the guidelines for every interaction your teams have with prospects or customers. When implemented correctly, they can ensure you're being helpful, human, and holistic with your inbound strategy. The principles are as follows:

1. Standardize for consistency

Consistency in messaging and information is core to building trust. If a prospect or customer asks three different people at your company the same question, try to ensure they are getting the same answer all three times. This helps build confidence in your brand whenever a question or challenge arises.

2. Contextualize for relevance

A prospect or customer is in a continual conversation with your brand. Contextualizing means using the information from all previous interactions to provide the most relevant information as quickly as possible. This prevents repetitive conversations and time spent solving for problems or answering questions that are no longer an issue.

3. Optimize for clarity

Be conscious of the strengths and weaknesses of each communication channel. This can help you determine the best types of marketing, sales, and services interactions to deliver across each one.

4. Personalize for impact

Use the shared knowledge inside your contact database to tailor each conversation you have to the person you're having it with. Rather than canned responses or content, adapt your messaging to speak directly to the person you're interacting with.

5. Empathize for perspective

Inbound is about being human and that means having empathy and being adaptable. Acknowledge that your prospects and customers are people, with valid emotions. As a result, you want to ensure you're speaking to their emotional state at the same time that you are providing guidance and information.

Together, these can help shape the way your brand communicates. But oftentimes, it's not just about what your brand is actually saying. It's about the reasoning behind those words. That brings us to your company's purpose.

Inbound is all about making your company easy to find for the people who need your help. But before you can do that, you need to understand the job your company was founded to do.

According to the Harvard Business Review, "To inspire your staff to do good work for you, find a way to express the organization's impact on the lives of customers, clients, students, patients – whomever you're trying to serve. Make them feel it."

This is your company's purpose. It's not just your company's vision or mission, although those elements will definitely play a part in your strategy. Your purpose is why your company exists. It's about what you're doing for other people that's truly making a difference. Having a clearly identified purpose helps your marketing, sales, and services teams really step into the shoes of your prospects and customers and remain connected to the people they're serving, rather than just the numbers they're working to move.

Speaking of numbers, let's take a moment to talk about goals. What comes to mind when you hear the word "goal"? Maybe you think of the destination – the benefit of learning about the best ways to reach and align with

your prospects or customers. Maybe you think of the journey – how every interaction gradually builds momentum until you’ve built a relationship on a foundation of trust and transparency. Maybe you just think of the now – the checklist for today and what you want to accomplish over your morning coffee.

Now think about the marketing team, the sales team, and the services team within your organization: their checklists and their journeys to get there. If you’re not all ending in the same designation, that’s a lot of energy wasted when you could be working toward the same goals. Having a defined framework for aligning your teams and their goals can help ensure that everyone, from every executive to every individual contributor, is spending their time and effort working toward the same end.

That, of course, all falls apart, if you don’t have a unified sense of who you’re trying to attract, engage, and delight with your company. And that’s where buyer personas come in. Buyer personas are semi-fictional representations of an ideal customer, based on real data and some educated speculation about demographics, behaviors, motivations, and goals.

Personas are created through research, analysis, and taking a close look at who’s already buying from you. They can help you get into the mindset of your potential buyers and create the right content.

They’re the glue that holds every aspect of inbound (marketing, sales, and customer service) together.

That’s a really powerful thing if you can get your entire company talking about your ideal customers in the same way. This will help marketers know the best marketing channels to use and the right content to create to attract the right people. This can help a salesperson know the right questions to ask during a sales presentation. Or make sure you’re evolving your product to better service your customers.

That brings us to the buyer’s journey. Every interaction your persona has with your organization should be tailored to where they are in the buyer’s journey.

The buyer’s journey is the active research process someone goes through leading up to a purchase. Knowing the buyer’s journey for your persona will be key to creating the best content possible.

Instead of moving someone through the funnel, the buyer’s journey is tailored to your buyer and the stages. The three stages are the awareness stage, the consideration stage, and the decision stage that portray the experiences your potential customers go through.

Marketers can use the buyer’s journey to create different content at every stage. You’ll want to have content offers that answer your buyer personas problems, their needed solutions, and content on your product or service. You can also use the buyer’s journey to segment and better nurture your leads to help making the best purchasing decision.

For sales, you can use the buyer’s journey to better understand how to sell to your prospects and help guide them through the buyer’s journey. If you know someone’s at the awareness stage, you’ll have a very different conversation with someone that’s at the decision stage and has already recognized possible solutions to their problem.

And for services, think of your customers as having their own type of buyer's journey. When you're looking to upsell, resell, or cross sell, you don't want to send your customer back through an entire buyer's journey. Use this as a way to understand what your customer journey looks like.

Once you understand your buyer personas and their buying journey, it's time to start using tools that help you be inbound.

Your inbound growth platform should consist of different tools that you can align your entire organization. It's not just customer service that will be using email. And it's not just helpful to sales to have a CRM. And it's not just marketing that needs reporting and data.

The foundation that you'll need is a CRM. Remember, a CRM stands for customer relationship management. A lot of people think of a CRM being a sales tool. It is, but it isn't just relevant to sales.

Here's Brian Halligan, CEO and co-founder of HubSpot:

Brian Halligan: CRM's a confusing word. A lot of people think it's software for sales people, but it's customer relationship management. I think it's really a platform that you use to manage the entire customer journey, and that entire customer loop from marketing into sales, into service, from happy customers into prospects. How do you get that self-reinforcing loop cranking in your business? It's hard to do that if you've got one system for selling and one system for marketing and one system for service that don't talk to each other, that don't give context.

What makes a CRM so powerful is because it's a contacts database. A contacts database is central to every piece of your inbound business. You'll use it to keep track of all the different people who have a relationship with your business, to personalize every interaction you have with them, and to attract more contacts like them. Your contacts truly are the heart for every piece of your marketing, sales, and services strategy.

Contacts are not just names and email addresses inside of a database, but individuals who you're creating relationships with. A constant reminder of why inbound is and should always be customer-centric. A contact is anybody your company markets, sells, partners, engages with or employs. When involving both marketing, sales, and services in your contacts strategy and having them use the same contacts database, you're creating alignment and consistency with all parts of your inbound strategy that your contacts are interacting with. You'll also want to use different types of tools that best support the inbound methodology. Tools that will help you attract, engage, and delight.

But if buying behaviors continuously evolve, so will the tactics and tools that you'll use to reach them. That's why HubSpot's products are constantly evolving. It's to always solve for the way people want to buy.

Here's HubSpot's Senior VP of Product on how he thinks of inbound and technology:

Christopher O'Donnell: We've always stated that Inbound is fundamentally about being human and helpful. The technological landscape is adapting to exponentially increase company's helpfulness through artificial intelligence and machine learning. It's not something to fear but rather something to embrace as both a customer and as a business. As a customer you're able to surface the help and information you need faster and at your convenience and as a business you can automate the tedious details and have more meaningful conversations with your customers

how and when they want. All of this allows you to have more time to do the things you love. It's a win-win.

If you're going to do inbound, you need to get comfortable with change and be ready to adapt to the experience people are looking for when they're trying to make a purchase.

As consumers, we're now looking for convenience more than we ever have before. We're looking for the most enjoyable experience.

That's why you've seen so many changes in technology. Take chatbots for instance. HubSpot's co-founder, Dharmesh said chatbots are the most important technology over the last two decades. Here's Dharmesh on how this technology ties into this inbound philosophy....

Dharmesh Shah: Yeah, the reason chat bots are interesting is because of the technology they use, which is called conversational user interfaces. And the reason they're exciting, is if you think about ever since the dawn of software, for the most part, humans have been molding themselves to their software. It's like, oh, I have to learn how Photoshop works, or how this particular application works. And what conversational user interfaces allow us to do, is essentially talk to our software, whether it's through a messaging interface, or through a voice interface. So, for the first time now, software will adapt itself to how humans want to work with software, versus the other way around. And this is the first time as an industry, we actually have the technology to allow us to do that, where people can say, "I want to get my traffic data for the last week, or so." Or, "Tell me how many customers we signed up last month."

And instead of saying, "Oh, I go to click here, and click there," and trying to get that answer out of the software, you simply ask the software, like a normal human would. And now, software's getting increasingly intelligent. It has the ability to respond to those kinds of questions. Very exciting.

New tools and platforms have changed how organizations prospect and retain a customer. Today, your entire company needs to be part of delivering this great experience. Once a company puts Inbound ideas into practice, everyone in the company from your CEO to product development, to marketing and sales and services, every single person in the company will be aligned around this inbound philosophy, your company culture, and strategies required to deliver value to customers. All of those interactions need to match to the buyer's journey and what your buyer personas are looking for.

The inbound movement is just getting started. The move toward the future requires forward-thinking ideas to be embraced, experimentation to figure out which channels work best for your business, and an openness to try new technologies and tools to foster better relationships with your customers.