



CASE STUDY

How a Tiny Company Attracts Global Customers by Combining Web Development + Inbound



HORIZON TECHNOLOGY



+



It always starts with, “We need a better-looking website.”

Manufacturers are notorious for lagging behind other industries in terms of adopting modern practices. Marketing ... sales ... replacing that 1950s Coke vending machine ... you name it. Typically, when a manufacturing CEO or marketing department head sees a competitor succeeding digitally and decides it needs to follow suit, his next step is predictable. He sees his team doesn't have the ability or capacity and starts calling up external marketing agencies, asking if they can make him “a better website.”

Tucked away in small St. Marys, Pa., a powder metallurgy company called Horizon Technology Inc. needed a way to stand out. Company leaders were struggling to figure out how a small-to-mid-sized manufacturer could **punch above its weight and compete with the big guys.**

“Our customers aren't going to cut us any slack just because we're smaller than our competitors,” says Eric Wolfe, Horizon's president since its inception in 2001.

To Horizon's credit, it recognized the weaknesses in its marketing efforts and decided to think and act more progressively than its peers. Eric and his team also knew his competitors had websites just as archaic as his, and marketing efforts just as bare-bones as his. They decided to take a leap of faith -- **not just seeking a prettier website, but also implementing a full-fledged inbound marketing campaign.**

To do that, the small staff needed an outside marketing agency that was just as forward-thinking.

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Part 1:

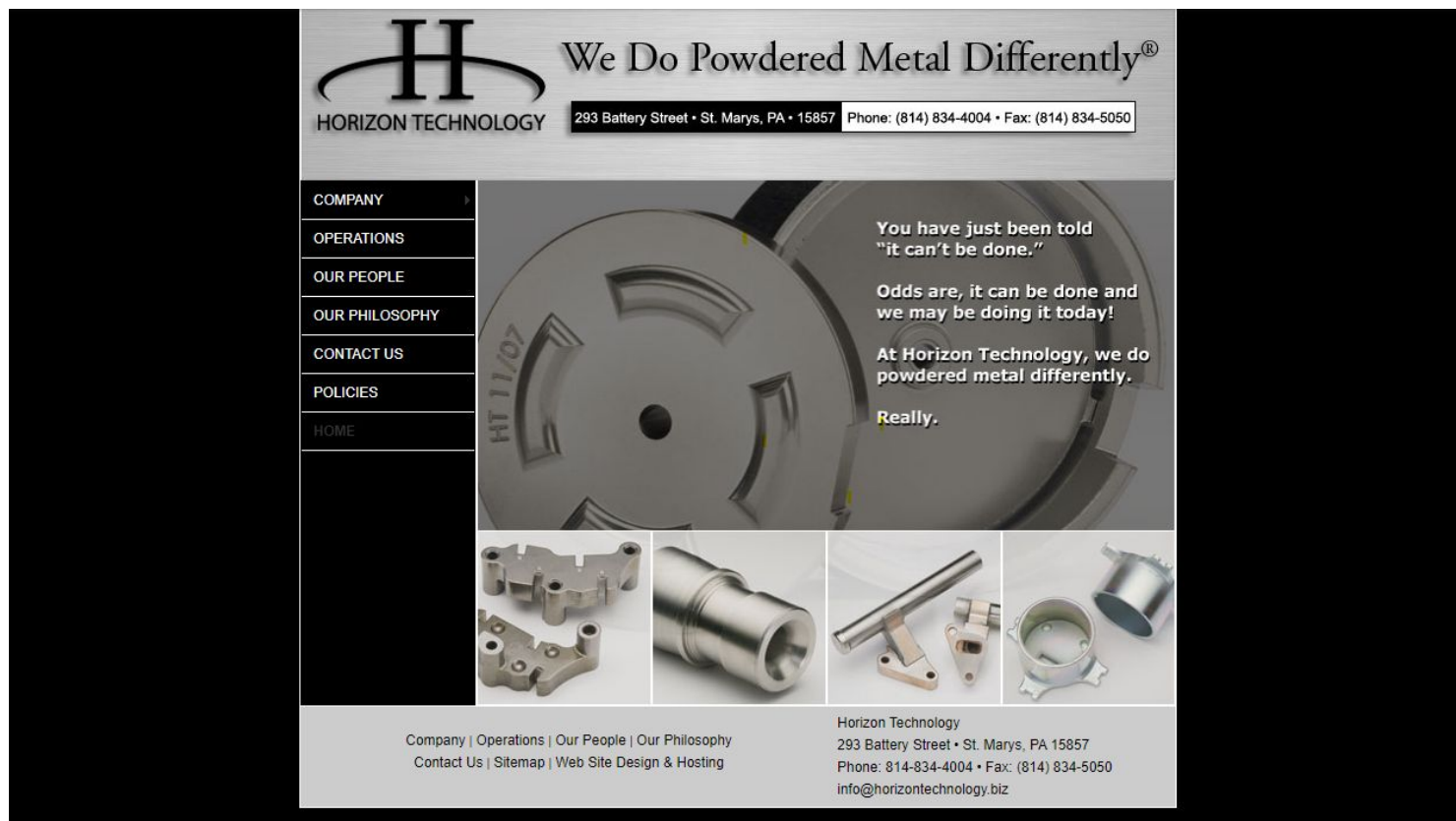
The Website

Horizon and protocol 80 agreed to a 12-month inbound marketing contract, which included a complete website overhaul.

The first and most obvious issue with Horizon's old website was the visual layout.

"Make me a better-looking website" is the top request we get from prospective customers, and there's a reason why. Manufacturers have always been lagging behind other industries in terms of digital presence, and Horizon was no different.

Just look at this square layout -- a telltale sign of a badly outdated site:



But the bigger issue was not visuals — **it was invisibility**. Much of the homepage’s copy — splashed over the main photo, as well as in the banner -- was actually in image form. In other words, the text was not actually “on” the page and therefore couldn’t contribute to SEO (search engine optimization) rankability. The page only had about 50 words on it to begin with -- 300 is the bare minimum for a page to be considered “rankable” by Google — making a bad SEO situation even worse.

That bad SEO situation included:

- Little to no optimization of page titles, headers, alt text, etc. for keyword usage.
- Very little copy on secondary pages
- Lack of clear intent or purpose

When website text doesn’t contain any Google search terms that your customers frequently use, it’s almost impossible to rank in Google’s top 10.

In **November 2017**, during the onboarding process, Horizon checked in with these website traffic numbers for the month:

- Organic traffic: 14
- Direct traffic: 15
- Referrals: 1
- **Total traffic: 30**

In even more simple terms ... **nobody could find Horizon’s website.**



Let's talk about that copy a little more. Nowhere does it say what exactly Horizon does -- does it make the powder metal itself, or does it make components out of powder metal? A visitor new to Horizon probably wouldn't be able to tell, and that omission could send them right back to Google to search for another vendor.

Other information was sorely lacking:

- What industries did the company serve?
- What capabilities, services, or equipment made it stand out from competitors?
- What other unique selling points did Horizon offer?

The website further lacked other basic tenets of a manufacturing website. There were no photos that truly showed off what Horizon could do -- just dull, gray product shots. There was no splashy video to catch visitors' attention. There was **no call-to-action** to herd browsers along to an e-book, consultation, or RFQ page. (We'll cover calls-to-action ad nauseum below.)

Another candidate for biggest "yikes" -- the Contact Us page didn't even have a form or button to allow visitors to get in touch with Horizon!

If the lack of copy was what crippled the website's chances of ranking on Google, it was the lack of "conversion opportunities" that made its few visitors turn right around and leave.

Conversion opportunities are what turn traffic into leads. For example, Horizon could have added an "Ask an Engineer" form -- a chance to consult with an engineer for free by simply providing a name, an email address, and a question.

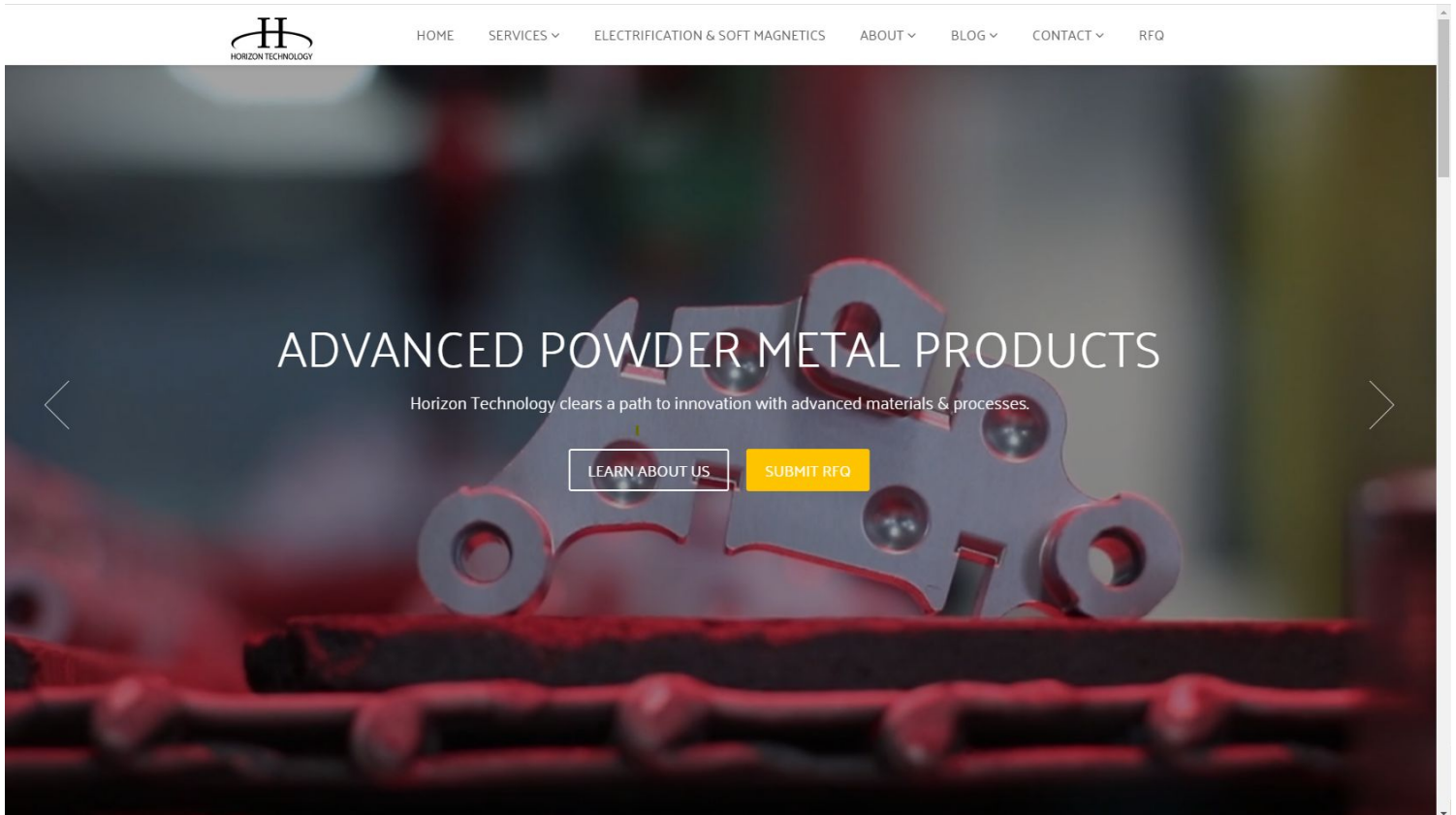
See what we did there? All of a sudden we could've had a highly relevant lead to follow up on.

But yeah. Horizon had none of that.

The Solution:

Layout & Design

One of the first steps to improving the website's traffic was adding relevant, informational pages, and, yes, making things prettier. A vibrant new template was chosen -- and it filled up the whole screen!



A resource page on magnetic materials helped pull all of Horizon's helpful info on that highly relevant topic into a single place. (There are also super-technical SEO benefits to doing this that we'll spare you for now.)

Horizon's new inbound marketing team made several trips to the factory to take **high-quality photos**. Beautiful finished components, flashy manufacturing processes, and hard-at-work employees were captured for use on the website.

Copywriting

protocol 80's efforts really kicked into gear with a massive project to reimagine the website's copy. No page was left behind.

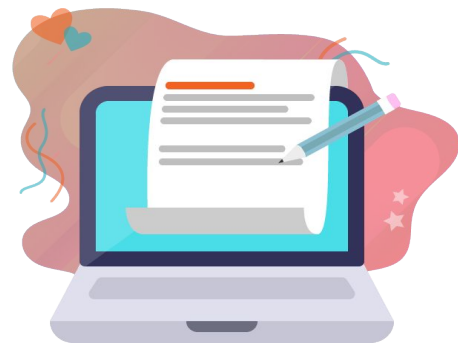
A separate RFQ page was added to the site for the first time. A Services page was also added so it was clear to visitors what Horizon did, and why Horizon should be the top choice for powder metallurgy. The page listed what materials and processes it used, what machinery was available, and what Horizon could do for the customer.

Future plans call for several more pages to be added, one for each industry Horizon serves.

Skeptical about an inbound agency's **ability to write about complex manufacturing processes**? Eric Wolfe certainly was -- one of his biggest sticking points in hiring an inbound agency was his fear that p80 wouldn't be able to successfully write about the uber-technical world of powder metal.

Totally understandable. And maybe we cringed a little at first. But remember two things:

1. Our strategists and writers work with manufacturers every day. We're used to it by now.
2. We continue to revamp website copy, add new graphics, etc. based on new things we learn about the client. Website work never ends — **but that's a good thing!**



Conversion Optimization

CTAs — calls-to-action — move prospects along the marketing funnel. A call-to-action is a linked asset (i.e. a snazzy-looking graphic) that urges your viewers to take some sort of action. The action you want people to take can be just about anything. Most often, marketers use CTAs to entice a reader to:

- Request a consultation or contact point
- Download a case study
- Request a quote
- Request more information about a product or service



Before p80 even started writing content, we added an email subscription pop-up from to grow Horizon’s email base (more on this later). The new RFQ page became a conversion opportunity. So did the revamped Contact Us page -- yes, you can now actually contact Horizon through its Contact Us page!

Opportunities were added elsewhere:

- An “Ask an Engineer” button on the homepage
- A newsletter subscription form on the homepage and elsewhere
- An RFQ form on the homepage and a new Services page
- A chance to ask a world-class materials expert a design question on the soft magnetic materials resources page
- Other RFQ and email subscription opportunities on the sidebar of certain pages

Video

Horizon’s dedicated protocol 80 team recommended production of multiple videos to **modernize the company’s reputation.**

First the team recorded the manufacturing process in action. Horizon’s impressive machines were captured in a way that made a \$9 million company look like a \$900 million company to its potential suitors. Later protocol 80 shot an “About Us” video in which Wolfe and Human Resources Manager Doug Bauer talk about how the company started and how they collaborate with customers to innovate. This video — bloopers reel included — introduced Horizon as a devoted manufacturing partner and more than just a faceless assembly line.

THE OUTCOME

The results were obvious. The p80 squad's efforts didn't even get into full swing until early spring 2018, yet the increase in traffic from 2017 was massive:

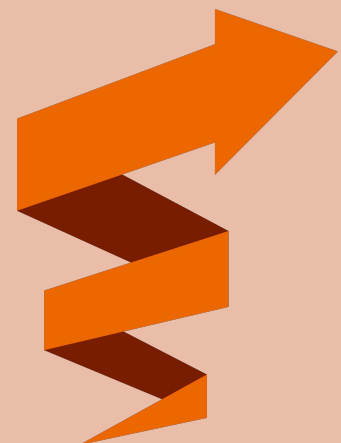
2017 → 2018 Year Over Year

- 979% increase in organic traffic
- 1,013% increase in total traffic

To break it down further, one year after p80's initial website audit, the monthly numbers looked like this for **November 2018**:

- Organic traffic: 151
- Direct traffic: 101
- Referrals: 10
- Traffic from emails: 8
- Traffic from social media: 64
- **Total traffic: 334**

Inbound marketing and growth-driven website design are meant to be marathons, not sprints. The rate of growth from Month 8 to Month 9 will be greater than the change from Month 2 to Month 3. And the growth from Year 1 to Year 2 will be exponentially higher than it is in that first year.



THE OUTCOME

Check out the numbers for November 2019:

- Organic: 1,538
- Direct: 247
- Referrals: 54
- Traffic from email: 64
- Traffic from social: 113
- Other campaigns: 3
- **Total traffic: 2,019**

2018 → 2019 Year Over Year

- 918% increase in organic traffic
- 504% increase in total traffic

We've left a huge component of the pie out of this story so far. You may have noticed "traffic from email" and "traffic from social" up there. Digital marketing is about more than just a pretty site; it's about **providing useful and relevant content to your audience.**

"But what the hell would I post on social media or email to potential customers?" you may have just asked. Well, all those website visits Horizon is getting today don't just come from its homepage, Contact Us, etc. A big chunk of them come from blog writing.

Part 2:

Content Marketing

One of Horizon's core values, and what separates it from many others in the powder metallurgy industry, is innovation.

It shows in the company's marketing mindset. Rather than just requesting a new website, the team contracted with protocol 80 as a full [inbound marketing](#) retainer.

If you're not familiar with inbound marketing, the key is in that first word -- inbound. The philosophy is to **attract customers TO you**, rather than pestering them with unwanted touchpoints.

“ Inbound marketing is a business methodology that attracts customers by creating valuable content and experiences tailored to them. While outbound marketing interrupts your audience with content they don't want, inbound marketing forms connections they're looking for and solves problems they already have.

-HubSpot

Sound familiar? That's because any decent website development agency applies inbound marketing tactics, as we saw in Part 1. But that was only a small slice of the full inbound experience.

Never do inbound marketing without a huge helping of [content marketing](#). Content marketing is the creation and distribution of valuable information that educates its audience far more than a thinly veiled sales pitch ever would. With traditional tactics becoming less effective by the day, content marketing has become the best way to **get in front of a highly relevant audience** of prospects.

The star of content marketing is blogging, so let's focus on that for now.

“ (Inbound marketing) works particularly well for complex industries like manufacturing where industrial buyers have a longer sales cycle and purchases are highly considered ...

-Weidert



It's true we can't recite by heart the equation for ... (checks notes) ... hysteresis and eddy current loss in soft magnetic composites. But inbound marketing writers are trained in researching the web and "interviewing" experts on your staff. They're experienced in translating the hard stuff into something your potential buyers will not only understand, but also *enjoy* reading.

The Solution:

The protocol 80 team started blogging **once per week** for Horizon in April 2018.

We interviewed several members of Horizon's teams to understand their own challenges and their buyer's challenges. Questions included, but were not limited to:

- What industries would you like to target?
- What services/products do you provide that your competitors don't?
- What are buyers' biggest concerns about potentially working with you?

Then we turned around and did the same with 5-10 of their "ideal" current customers -- the ones they'd love to clone, if their sintering furnace could perform such magic.

Questions included:

- What other solutions did you consider before deciding on Horizon?
- What information would have been helpful for you to have known during the buying process?
- Is there anything Horizon doesn't offer that you wish it did?

These workshops influenced Horizon's website development but were especially crucial to mapping its content strategy. With the responses in mind, p80 crafted a calendar of topics and got to work.



But What's the Point?

There are three primary goals in content marketing:

1. Be more visible in Google searches
2. Gain a reputation as an authority and a thought leader in the industry
3. Capture leads with calls-to-action

Number 1 on that list was easy to achieve by simply **increasing the quantity and quality** of Horizon's online content. The more pages a website has indexed on Google, the more legit it seems in the eyes of Google's search ranking algorithms.

Publishing highly useful content also took care of #2. Horizon now receives inquiries from engineers, researchers, and even universities looking for additional information on powder metal materials and manufacturing processes. By the time those engineers and researchers have to help make a purchase decision, they're already familiar with the Horizon brand.

Ignoring #3 is probably the biggest mistake manufacturing websites make -- having no clear path for potential leads to take after they find the manufacturer's website. Over the next 2 years, protocol 80 developed several opportunities for Horizon to collect valuable contact information from leads.

The action you want people to take after reading a blog post can be just about anything. In Horizon's case, it offered:

- Subscription to its monthly newsletter
- 2 e-books about one of its unique selling points, soft magnetic powders
- An "Ask an Engineer" form
- An opportunity to pose a question to Horizon's senior materials expert
- An e-book that objectively compares powder metallurgy to competing manufacturing processes
- A handbook guide to its capabilities and services

Unless you've been skipping ahead, this probably sounds familiar. Most of these **should** exist on your other website pages too. In blog posts, the CTAs are usually found at the bottom. They also can appear in the middle of an especially long article, or even in pop-up form when users scroll to a certain point in the page or move their cursor to the browser tab to exit.

The goal? Keep Horizon's ideal prospects on its website longer. The e-books became the primary lead generation opportunity on Horizon's site -- not the RFQ button, or "Contact Us," or anything else overtly "me"-focused.

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CAPABILITIES & SERVICES HANDBOOK

- Product/Process Design
- Material Selection
- And More...

DOWNLOAD

POWDER METALLURGY VS. COMPETING METHODS

DOWNLOAD

Once p80 established a firm base of blog content, it started to focus on other content types so Horizon had more variety to offer. These included:

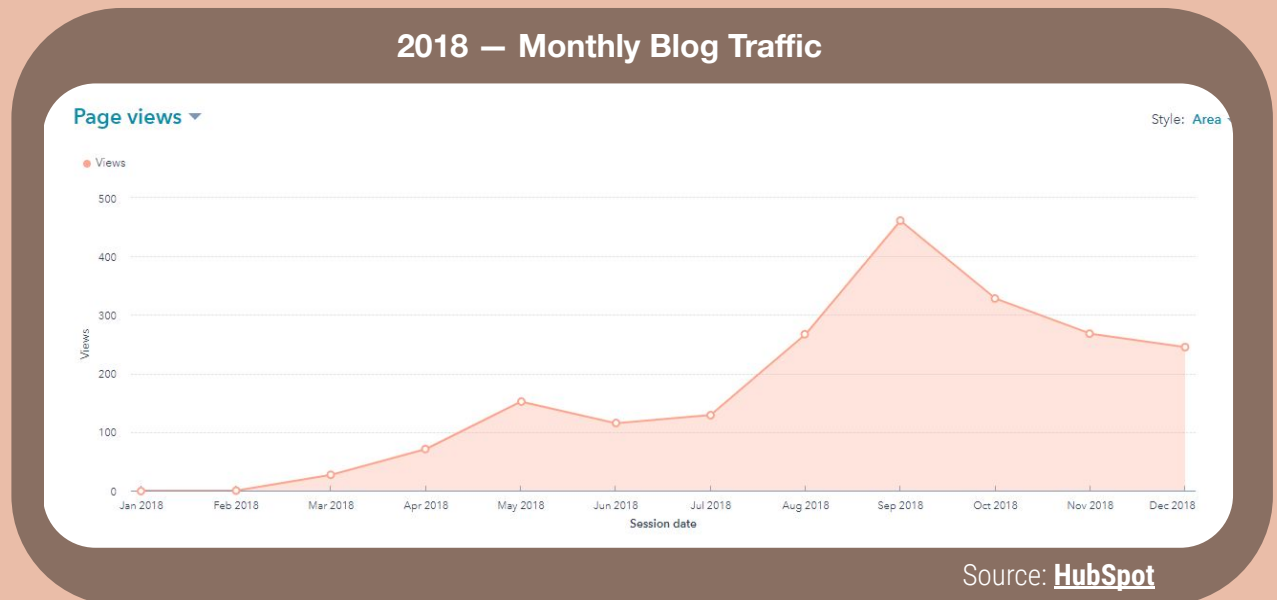
- Charts/infographics
- Additional videos
- A case study

DOs	DON'Ts
DO Optimize for 'Net-Shape' Forming	DON'T Ignore Compaction Ratios
DO Let a PM Vendor Show You the Key to Long Life	DON'T Create a Brittle Risk
DO Take a Big-Picture Approach to Tooling	DON'T Be Afraid of New Materials
DO Consider Alternatives for Edging	DON'T Be Short-Sighted

Additional questions? Get in touch with Horizon Technology at horizontechnology.biz/contact

THE OUTCOME

Typical of inbound marketing, the blog traffic numbers started off slow for Horizon. Blog traffic by month in 2018:



- January: 0
- February: 0
- March: 27
- April: 71
- May: 152
- June: 115
- July: 129
- August: 267
- September: 461
- October: 328
- November: 268
- December: 245

But companies who stick with consistent content production -- once per week for at least 12 months — always see a reward down the line.

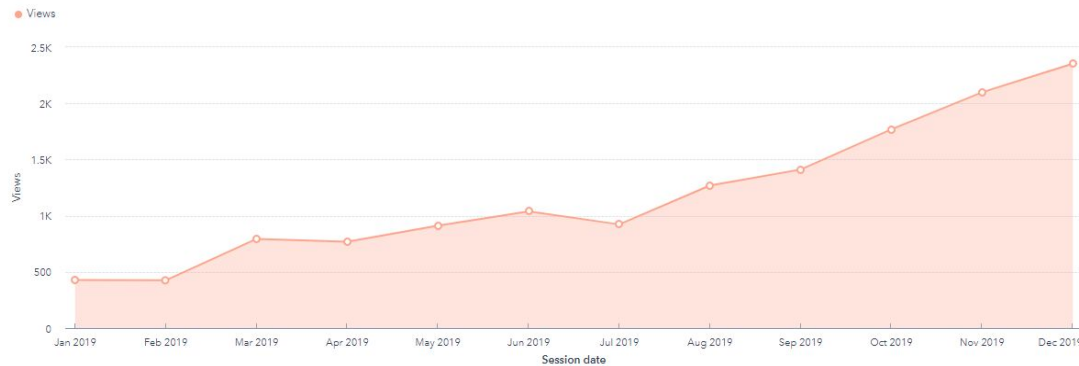
THE OUTCOME

Inbound marketing **almost always takes 6 months to start seeing results**, and 12 months before they *really* start rolling. Things really started looking up for Horizon in 2019, as you can see in these blog traffic numbers:

2019 — Monthly Blog Traffic

Page views ▾

Style: Area ▾



Source: [HubSpot](#)

- January: 428
- February: 425
- March: 794
- April: 768
- May: 912
- June: 1,039
- July: 923
- August: 1,269
- September: 1,411
- October: 1,768
- November: 2,098
- December: 2,353

Year over year, Horizon's **blog traffic increased 683%** from November 2018 to November 2019.

The blog quickly became the main driver of online leads. The majority of leads were not coming from folks who visited the main website first. They were actually converting on blog posts, which they found through Google search, monthly newsletters, LinkedIn posts, and so on.

We keep spoiling the plot here. Let's finally dive deep into what truly made Horizon's and p80's strategy work.

Part 3:

Combining Website + Blogging for the Total Package

A website development project is impotent if it doesn't provide conversion opportunities. A great blog isn't any good if nobody can find it.

Content marketing isn't restricted to blogging. Much like blogging ties into conversion-driven website design, other marketing avenues tie into blogging:

- Email marketing
- Social media marketing
- SEO
- Trade show marketing

Like "The Lion King," digital marketing success is all about the circle of life. Just look at all the ways Horizon's success in one avenue helped build the brand in another, and vice versa.

Social Media

The p80 team shared Horizon's educational blog content as well as informative third-party content on multiple social media platforms, including LinkedIn. Posts occasionally promoted e-books and Horizon website pages, too. But in any given month, **at least 50% of the content was third-party.**

This is what we call playing the long game. Those third-party posts didn't immediately bring brand awareness or leads to Horizon, but they established the company as a go-to for reliable information on metallurgy, electric vehicles, and other topics relevant to its audience. Once readers trusted Horizon, they became more likely to click on first-party articles and e-books.

Shared blog posts written by Horizon and p80 often prompt interactions and clicks from LinkedIn users. The top post earned 354 clicks and 53 interactions ("likes," etc.). For a small manufacturer whose peers are lucky to see multiple "likes" on any post they publish, this was pretty exciting.



Consider this series of events that really compacts inbound marketing into a single circle of awesome:

- p80 wrote a blog post for Horizon about the value of using a cloud ERP (enterprise resource planning) system called Plex.
- We tagged Plex in the social media posts we wrote for the article, helping the post get huge exposure when Plex saw it, loved it, and shared it too.
- The p80 team later approached Plex about creating a Horizon/Plex joint blog post. Plex loved the idea of collaborating so much that it instead wanted to do a case study about Horizon's success with Plex!
- [Plex shared the case study](#) on its highly trafficked website (almost 14,000 visits per month to the homepage alone). Shortly after, Industry Week (almost 44,000 monthly visits to its homepage) decided to [run it as sponsored content!](#)
- Plex continues to share the article on its social channels (as does Horizon), helping further the cause long after initial publication.

A single piece of successful content turned into thousands of people in the manufacturing industry learning about Horizon's brand.

Email

The addition of a newsletter subscription CTA on various website pages and blog posts allowed Horizon to grow its contact base and start offering a monthly newsletter, among other emails. Website CTAs alone added 150 subscribers to Horizon's contact database from September 2018 to mid-January 2020.

The newsletter was an immediate and lasting success. Horizon's metrics were and continue to be above industry averages:

	Email Open Rate	Click-Through Rate (% of openers who clicked a link)
Avg. Manufacturing, Contracting, or Construction Company	18.74%	2.80%
HORIZON	29.92%	7.73%

Source: [Campaign Monitor](#)



If you've been following our general theme, you can probably guess why Horizon's emails exceed other manufacturers' performance-wise. Instead of being a self-congratulating waste of space, Horizon's newsletter offered genuinely interesting, relevant, and helpful content.

Most months, Horizon only sends one email to its contact list. One! While that may result in fewer total opened emails, it makes that monthly email **much more impactful**.

Best of all, the newsletter is mutually beneficial. Horizon presents itself as the solution to customers' problems while also getting valuable insight on which content topics gather the most reader interest.

To supplement the monthly blast, the p80 team created automated follow-up emails for those who download e-books and other "premium" offers. These series of three or so emails take on a slightly more direct, personal tone and provide additional resources and support to the prospect.

Email marketing can target all stages of the [buyer's journey](#). There are even opportunities to **engage current customers** with email. Your monthly email blast may spark an idea or renew a dormant relationship. Loyal customers on average are worth 10x their initial purchase, [according to one marketing blog](#) (and a million other places we've heard this awesome stat). The same idea rings true for social media.



SEO To Bring It All Together

The value of combining SEO and content marketing is undeniable.



Your company can have a great writer already on staff. You can pump out all the blog posts, emails, and social posts your marketing team can muster. But **by far the easiest way to increase website traffic** is with a professional SEO team optimizing each and every page on your website.

Sometimes, this is where inbound marketing agencies and their clients butt heads. It takes time to trust an external team to drive the content strategy to where it needs to be.

During a quarterly content planning session in 2018, Wolfe shot down one of p80's proposed topics, "Advantages of Powder Metallurgy Vs. Die Casting." He didn't see the benefit of writing about higher-level topics instead of ultra in-depth pieces about complex materials and processes.

Ever persistent (or stubborn), p80 broached the subject again later. Wolfe thought about it, relented, and gave the green light. Today, "Advantages of Powder Metallurgy Vs. Die Casting" is **Horizon's second-most-viewed blog post ever** (as of Jan. 7, 2020) and has brought in "at least 3 of our most ideal targets," Wolfe says.

Visitors spend an average of 5 minutes on the die casting post page, which proves they find it useful and don't immediately hit "back" on their browser window. This is true of all of Horizon's other top blog posts, too:

BLOG POST	VIEWS 	TIME PER PAGEVIEW 
What Is Soft Magnetic Composite?	1,912	4 minutes
Advantages of Powder Metallurgy Vs. Die Casting	1,350	5 minutes
Powder Metal 101: 5 Things to Know About Powder Met...	870	3 minutes
Powder Metal Vs. Forged Parts: Advantages & Disadvant...	687	6 minutes
Powder Metallurgy Design Considerations: 8 Tooling Do...	684	5 minutes



Now, to bring this all back to SEO ... p80 had identified “powder metallurgy vs. die casting” and “advantages of powder metallurgy” as high-opportunity keywords for Horizon. To translate: We knew Horizon could rank highly on Google for those terms and show the world its expertise.

The keyword research p80 does informs the content strategy and vice versa -- much more effective than just choosing topics out of thin air because they sound interesting to you. A cohesive strategy **optimizes both your time and your agency’s time.**

SEO best practices involve the use of sophisticated digital tools operated by well-trained professionals. In other words, as smart as you may be, **it’s very uncommon for manufacturers to have the in-house expertise to effectively execute content marketing.**

Trade Show Marketing & More

But you **are** a master of the traditional trade show circuit, right!? Or at least you *were*. Maybe things have dried up lately, and you’re questioning whether trade shows are even worth it anymore.

A full-service inbound marketing company shouldn’t stop and say, “Mission accomplished!” after it’s cleaned up your website a bit. It should be looking at every possible way to improve your marketing and sales approach.

Horizon had a great story and a great message, **but nothing physical or digital to back it up** when it took its show on the road.

Once Horizon started seeing sustained success with protocol 80, it began asking periodically for help with trade show marketing and other presentations to prospective customers. The talented graphics folks at p80 took existing Horizon PowerPoints and gave them a more impactful design.

When trying to explain powder metallurgy and its potential customer benefit, Horizon also uses the educational e-books and articles p80 had already made for online lead generation. Hey, there’s that circle of life again.

Whatever Horizon needs for future trade shows, protocol 80 will be there, whether it’s creating industry-specific landing pages or writing email sequence templates to send to the contacts Horizon collects at shows.





INBOUND FOREVER



Horizon has positioned itself as a thought leader in the powder metallurgy community. Its online visibility is exponentially greater, and once visitors arrive they see a beautiful website packed with resources and conversion opportunities.

Horizon has huge plans for this year, pursuing several iconic automakers (that we sadly can't mention by name) and continuing to share its R&D efforts and industry insights via the blog. As more pages are added to the website, Horizon will continue to rank for more keywords that its niche audience uses to research its problems. And Horizon will be right in front of them, ready to solve those problems.

None of this digital success would be possible without a partnership that combines conversion-focused web design, a full inbound marketing campaign, and professional SEO services.



NEED HELP
EVALUATING YOUR DATA?

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