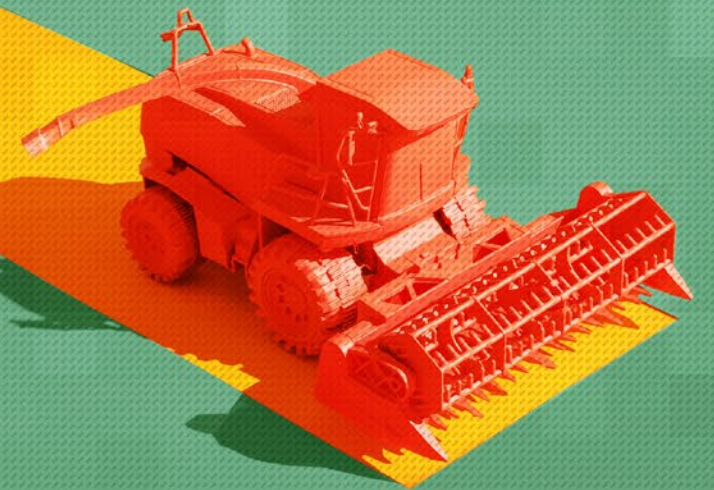THINK.SHIFT™

GROWING DIGITAL

7 PILLARS OF DIGITAL MARKETING
FOR AGRIBUSINESS IN 2018

This eBook is for senior agrimarketers who want to become more digital in 2018. In our work, we often speak with agrimarketers who struggle to prioritize those items that are most important on the road to digital success. In this eBook, we cut through today's buzzwords (personas, content marketing, inbound, programmatic, etc.) and false digital promises (e.g. The Recipe for SEO Success, Big Data for Big Rewards, Conquering Social Media, etc.) to provide a simple and prioritized set of steps to holistically improve your digital marketing success in 2018.

What's more, we bring our vast experience in agriculture to frame this discussion in a context relevant to agrimarketers.

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Digital Evolution: Why Your Potential ROI is Already Decreasing

Agriculture's late embrace of digital marketing is like a bumper crop we are only now beginning to harvest. Because so few have done so little thus far — especially in comparison to consumer brands, who have been digitally–targeting our farmer customers for years — the opportunities for agrimarketers to stand out and succeed abound.

That said, the adoption of digital marketing in agriculture (or agri–digital, as we call it) is susceptible to the same trend curve as any other technology or innovation. According to Geoffrey Moore's theory of technological adoption, as discussed in *Crossing the Chasm*, **the longer you wait to take advantage, the fewer the rewards (ROI) will be.**

While some may argue with this statement, it is our belief that when it comes to mainstream consumer technology, we are currently experiencing Late Majority Adoption amongst farmers. Essentially, most have come to expect a certain level of digital sophistication from the companies they engage with. As such, the days of agrimarketers standing out or greatly benefiting from having mobile–friendly websites or audience–centric content are fading fast.
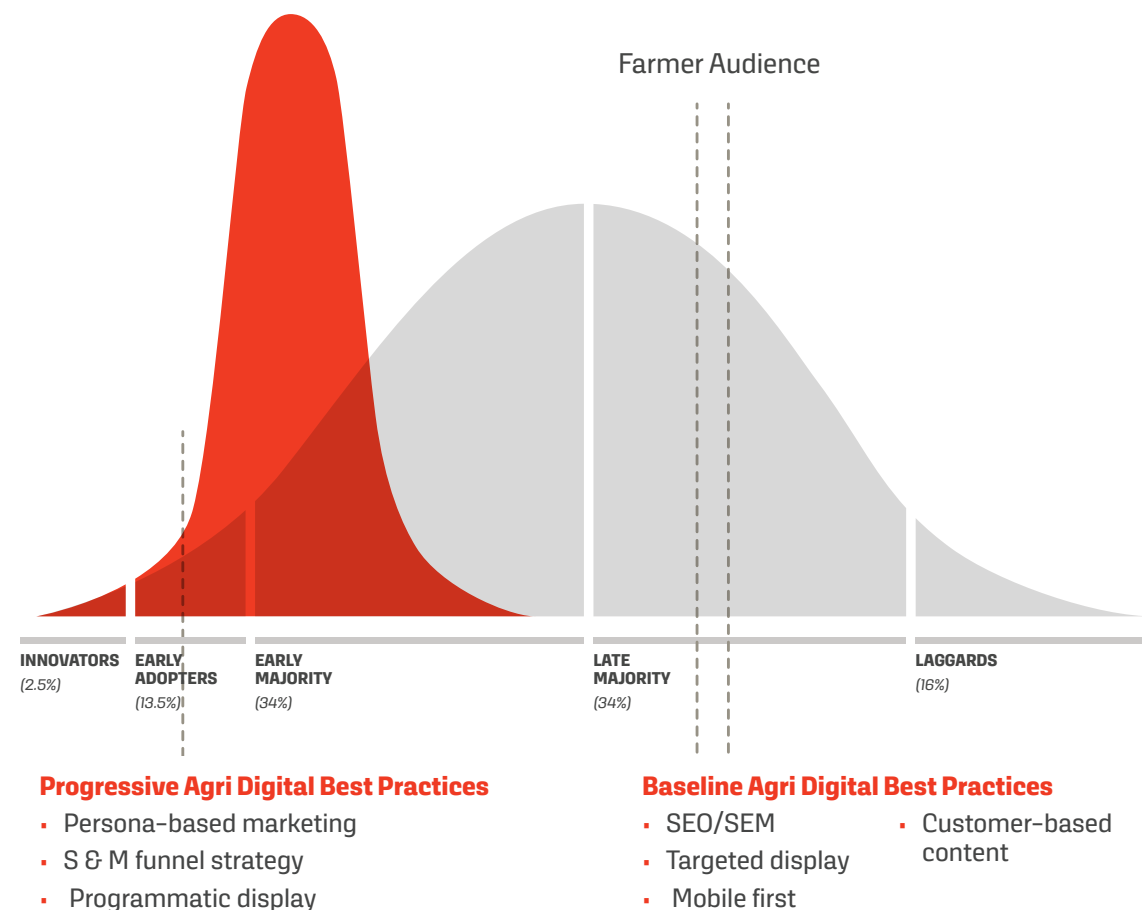
So if you are still far behind, the investments you make in those more basic areas of digital will likely generate little-to-no net positive return.

However, when it comes to adoption of the more sophisticated digital marketing practices in agriculture (e.g. inbound marketing, marketing automation, CRM integration) we are still seeing a slow adoption rate, providing an immense opportunity for those who choose to take the plunge. And for those who do so quickly, a significant opportunity to achieve marketing ROI is at hand.

This brings us to the first important take-away of this eBook:
As an agrimarketer in the digital world, the basics of being digitally competent are no longer enough. To generate the ROI you and your organization desire, you must keep a finger on the pulse of innovative marketing trends so you can seek out what others are not yet doing.

Contraction of Agri Digital Technology Adoption Curve

Farmer Audience

INNOVATORS
(2.5%)

EARLY ADOPTERS
(13.5%)

EARLY MAJORITY
(34%)

LATE MAJORITY
(34%)

LAGGARDS
(16%)

Progressive Agri Digital Best Practices
- Persona–based marketing
- S & M funnel strategy
- Programmatic display

Baseline Agri Digital Best Practices
- SEO/SEM
- Targeted display
- Mobile first
- Customer–based content

Adapted from Geoffrey Moore, Crossing the Chasm

You must also understand and embrace the fact that speed and agility will soon be the defining attributes of marketing success.

Meaning, not only will these agri–digital innovations present themselves more quickly and consistently but, as research would indicate, the adoption curves for each (and therefore the time available to generate significant positive ROI) will perpetually contract and shorten.

In other words: if you wish to make the most of your ROI when it comes to adopting new digital marketing technologies, **time is of the essence**.

The shift to digital marketing has significantly altered the way people research and purchase products (both B2B and B2C). As such, taking advantage of the digital customer requires more than a mobile-optimized website or library of useful, original content. It's an entirely different way of approaching the market, one that uses real data to inform agile strategies, make optimized use of budgets, develop relevant tactics and assess ROI in real time.

And in an industry that is collectively lagging behind, the earlier you shift your approach, the greater the rewards.

Evolution of digital marketing

STAGE **1**

STAGE **2**

STAGE **3**

STAGE **4**

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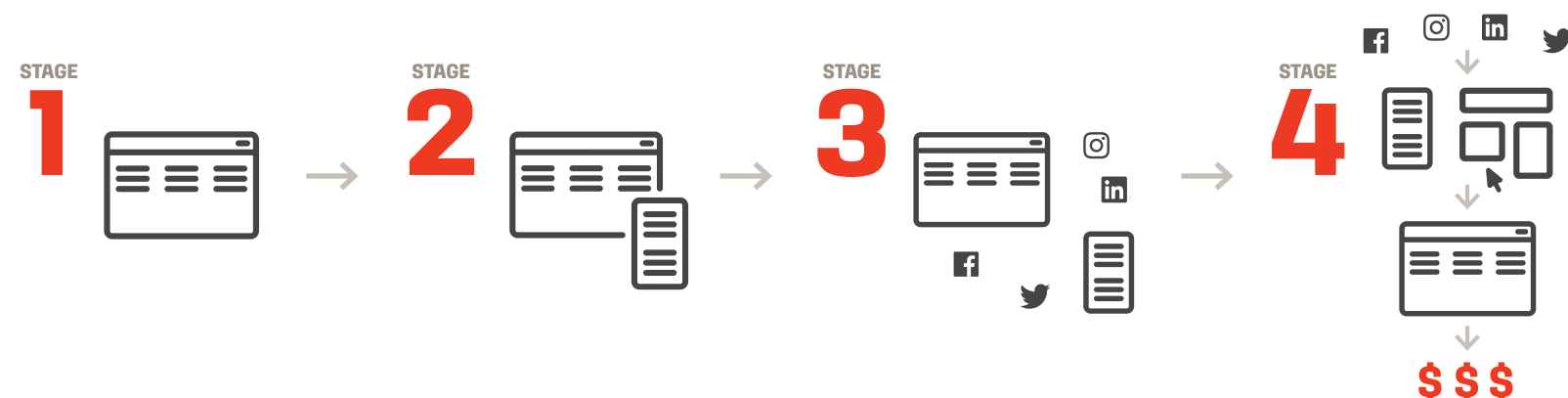
PERSONAS

Personas: Understanding Your Audience

All farmers are not equal. Each individual and operation has their own approach, unique challenges, specific behaviors and distinctive qualities. For instance, how corporate-minded farming enterprises run a large soybean farm can be vastly different from how a similarly-sized, family-owned soybean farmer runs theirs. Yet, by using long-standing market segmentation practices, agrimarketers have been more than guilty of lumping these farmers together into a single target audience.

Generic Pesticide Company: *Helping American Farmers Feed the World.*

In 2016, there were an estimated 2.06 million farms in the U.S. and 193,492 farms in Canada. The producers that own and operate these farms are an incredibly diverse group that's changing year after year.

For example, although still the minority, the number of women and people under 35 that identify as farm operators is increasing steadily. And though they all describe themselves as farmers, about 44% of growers in Canada also do off-farm work to supplement their income.

Within this broad, evolving group of individuals that tend to be lumped together in quantitative market segments, do you truly know who your customers are? Do you understand what makes each one of them tick — what their challenges, pain points and opportunities are?

Grouping all farmers into broad segments is a disservice to both your customers and your business. After all, you have a unique value proposition that you believe differentiates your brand, products or services from your competitors, and the way you communicate that value to, say, a 25-year-old female grower will be substantially different than the way you market to her father.

To deliver marketing tactics and messaging that connect, you must crystallize the unique understanding you have of your customers as customer personas. Personas are semi–fictional representations of your ideal customer, based on market research, real data and the occasional assumption.

This can include details like customer demographics and location, as well as behavioral and psychographic information like goals, challenges, objectives and pain points. In short, they're a holistic picture of who your customers truly are.

Once you have them, personas personalize your marketing by helping you target your efforts solely on those who will find your brand or offer-ings truly helpful. And that focus pays off: studies have shown that be-haviorally–targeted ads are twice as effective as non–targeted ads, and personalized emails can improve conversion rates by 10% (HubSpot).

Personas will change the way you market your business, by helping you:

Direct your segmentation and targeting.

With actual research into who your customers are and where they are looking for information, you will know where to place your marketing messages to best connect with them.

Inform your sales team.

Your sales reps will have a better idea of who they are talking to, and will be able to address your customers' unique challenges and pain points before they have the chance to express them.

Drive your content creation.

Your content will be much easier to produce because you can plan and write it to target the questions your personas are already asking.

Unite your organization around a shared customer–centric purpose.

With a clear picture of who your customers are, your organization will have more focus and direction.

How to Create a Persona, Step by Step

In this process, you'll want to look for your ideal customers — both past, current and potential — then use a combination of data mining and client/staff interviews to create a comprehensive profile. Remember that although personas are fictional representations of an ideal client, their profile should be based on data.

STEP ONE **IDENTIFY YOUR BEST CLIENTS**

It might go without saying, but it's best to do this in conjunction with sales and client-facing teams in your organization. To help you narrow down your list, ask questions like:

- Which clients have been with you the longest?
- Which accounts are most profitable?
- Do you enjoy working together?
- Do you get positive feedback from the client?

In addition to help from your team, you'll want to lean on data to help flesh out your list.

If you're already using Google Analytics, a CRM (customer relationship management) platform, social media tools like Hootsuite or Sprout Social, etc., take advantage of the data you already have to help increase your understanding of your customers. Are certain clients downloading all of your podcasts and watching your webinars? Those who are highly engaged with your digital assets clearly find use in your content, meaning that their needs are directly aligned with the products and services you offer.

Already, you may start to see trends begin to reveal themselves. For instance, three of your top ten clients might be growers in family-owned farms in the Midwestern U.S., while the users most engaged on your social media pages and blog are predominately soybean growers ages 25–40. Start grouping them together in your head — it'll be useful in the next step.

STEP TWO **SCHEDULE YOUR INTERVIEWS**

Plan to talk to a range of people for each persona trend you're seeing, including good customers, "bad" customers, prospects/leads and referrals or third-party networks. This will give you a more well-rounded view of which customers are ideal, what makes them unique and how you might engage with new customers in the future (i.e. if you're looking to expand into new markets).

Questions should include demographics, as well as behavioral and psychographic information.

Here's a few sample topics to get you started:

- Background information about the customer's role, company, education and career
- Demographic information (e.g. gender, age, income and location)
- Personal identifiers, such as mannerisms and habits
- Goals and challenges, both personal and professional
- How your organization helps your persona meet their goals/overcome their challenges
- Common objections raised during the sales process

STEP THREE **CONSOLIDATE AND CREATE YOUR PERSONAS**

After your research, you should be armed with enough information to create detailed profiles for each persona (most organizations have between three and five). You'll want to have two types of profiles for each persona: one highly detailed profile to give context to your sales, marketing and customer–facing teams, and one succinct one to use for quick reference.

In this profile, you'll want to include demographic information (age, family, education, role, location), their goals, their challenges, and how your company can help them succeed. You may also want to include additional information, like shopping habits and interests. If you're stuck, consider using a persona template ([here's HubSpot's](#)) to build each persona's story.

STEP FOUR **PUT YOUR PERSONAS TO WORK**

Now that you have three to five distinct buyer personas, you can begin to personalize everything from your content offerings to your automated marketing campaigns. As you go through the remaining chapters in this eBook, keep in mind how these personas can help you build a more effective digital strategy.

STEP FIVE **RINSE AND REPEAT**

To ensure they are still an accurate portrait of your best customers, you will want to revisit your personas periodically. When it comes time, simply follow the steps above. Happy researching!

Though agrimarketers operate in the same industry, we're a pretty diverse group. And it's important to remember that farmers are pretty diverse, as well. If you start treating them as such, [they'll take notice](#).

By taking the time to do our research and develop personas that represent our ideal customers, we can begin to identify and connect with only those who value our brand and offerings most. In turn, that personalization will help tighten up our digital marketing strategy, helping us to spend our budget more efficiently and improve our ROI overall.

? **WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SEGMENTATION AND PERSONAS?**

Segmentation is a marketing tool

The purpose of market segmentation is to identify different groups of customers within a market so that it is possible to target them with particular products, services or messages. Once identified, these groups are referred to as **segments**.

Developing market segments involves large–scale quantitative research. Emphasis is placed upon understanding large numbers of people at a relatively high level and grouping them together based on shared characteristics such as demographics or behavioral patterns.

Example: 10k+ acre farms that are family owned & operated

Segmentation is a powerful research output, but it does not delve into personal stories, goals or motivations. It does not provide rich insight into user experiences, journeys and pain points along the way.

Personas are a design tool

Personas also represent groups of real users or customers, but we use them quite differently. Though they're based on robust research with real people, personas are fictional characters designed to represent a group of people with similar values around the use of a product or service. Their purpose is to encourage design (of products, campaigns, strategies and content) for real people with real needs. Detailed character stories in the form of personas ensure that a realistic view of end users is always kept in mind.

Example: Susie Second–In–Command [predominately female producers who are between 25 and 35 years of age, anticipating one day inheriting a family–run operation]

Where segmentation seeks to identify and measure the size of different groups at a high level, personas are devised to provide a rich understanding of the user's context, needs, motivations, behaviors, challenges and opportunities.

CRM

CRM: Why Data, Not Handshakes, is your Sales Team's Most Important Asset

Traditionally, customer relationship management in the agri-business world has consisted of face-to-face interactions sealed with a handshake and measured by a transaction. But as it becomes more common to have clients (and colleagues) hundreds — even thousands — of miles away, we've come to realize: we can't be everywhere at once, and neither can our paper spreadsheets.

Of course, this limits both the quality and quantity of our customer-facing interactions. This can be a problem because in our digital-centric world — where you can tweet at a fast food brand and expect a response within minutes — customers expect one-to-one relationships with the brands they're loyal to. Luckily, this also means that there are always new opportunities to better and more consistently engage with our customers digitally.

While we are by no means advocating against face-to-face interactions, we are saying our in-person meetings must be complemented by digital interactions. Why? Because they enable you to stay connected while capturing enhanced data on customer interests and preferences.

Not only does this help create more high-quality interactions today, but it ensures the integrity of your information tomorrow. After all, insights gathered during face-to-face interactions should always be stored somewhere other than in the heads and notebooks of your salespeople. When a member of your salesforce leaves the organization, you should only lose the person – not the knowledge you have of your customers.

So, to continue to have high-quality interactions in this digital age, you need a better way to manage and own your organizational data assets.

Why Manage Your Data?

Managing data makes good business sense. Here are the facts: <u>CRM adoption can increase sales by 29%</u> and <u>revenue by 41%</u>. The average <u>ROI for a CRM system is 560%</u> and <u>43% of organizations are more likely to hit sales targets</u> when using a mobile-friendly CRM.

HERE ARE A FEW BENEFITS OF MANAGING YOUR DATA WITH A MODERN CRM:

1. **A centralized place for storing vital data**

   CRMs provide a single home for all organizational and customer data assets. This means you can add to and access customer information in real time, whether you're capturing leads at a trade show, conversing with a grower on the farm, or sitting at your desk in the home office. And having up-to-date information in a centralized hub means your team can provide clients with a consistent experience, regardless of who they interact with.

2. **Improved customer service**

   By gathering all data in one location, you'll have a well-rounded view of your leads and customers based on the interactions you have had with them over time. This provides customer-specific insights that arm you for your next interaction, as well as aggregate data to help you understand your ideal customer (i.e. your buyer personas). Armed with that knowledge, you can better shape the customer experience, and in the process, <u>increase consumer confidence in your brand</u>.

3. **Improved communication across your organization**

   CRMs gather and report data in real time, meaning your entire company will have access to the same information at the same time. There will be no lag between customer interaction and when the information is updated for managers to review and pull reports. And more efficient workflows mean that your salespeople and marketing managers have more time to do what they do best.

4. **Effective sales and marketing**

   With well-organized customer data at your fingertips (and well-crafted personas in hand) you will be positioned for a whole new level of sales and marketing success. Marketing campaigns can be built to address real customer pain points and sales touchpoints re-thought to align with actual customer insights.

Which CRM is Right for You?

There are many CRMs to choose from, and it's important that you align your organizational needs with the size and type of CRM you purchase.

HERE ARE THE KEY FEATURES EVERY ORGANIZATION'S CRM SHOULD HAVE:

1. **A strong, yet easy to use management system**

   It might be tempting to chase after a CRM with all the latest bells and whistles, but if the CRM you choose is too complex, how likely will you be to actually use it? You want a system that handles the complexity of your business in a simple manner.

2. **Highly customizable**

   Your needs are different than your competitor's, which is why your CRM needs to be as unique as your business. You must to be able to customize it to retain the data you need and the processes that you use.

3. **Mobile access**

   More often than not, your sales team has their most crucial customer interactions out of office (i.e. at a tradeshow or on the farm, not at a computer). So having immediate access to your information database, wherever you are, is absolutely crucial for success. After all, being able to provide customers with the information they need in the moment will keep them engaged and more likely to purchase with you. That's why a CRM with mobile access is a must-have. At the very least, look for one that includes a strong mobile app.

4. **Effective sales and marketing**

   Having your information all in one place is great, but it's not the real benefit of a CRM. Data is just data until you make something of it. Once collected, you need to analyze, research and manage your data to ensure that you are getting the full value of your CRM. Look for a CRM with strong yet simple reporting functions.

Use Your Customers' Data to Serve Them Better

Traditionally, the customer data our teams captured was quantitative and largely based on transactions (e.g. Joe Soy purchased x bags of seed in 2016; Martha Bugsby used to purchase y mL of pesticide but stopped using our products last year). Our paper spreadsheets had nowhere to store the qualitative data — customer wants, needs, goals — except in the brains of our sales and customer service teams.

This is a problem, because we're missing out on insights that can help us make real changes in the way we run our businesses.

For instance, it's one thing to know which customers lapsed on seed bag purchases — it's another to know that they lapsed because they could get a better price at your competitor, or because they just don't like one of your sales reps. This information gives us actionable means of improving business, whether it's finding a way to make our pricing more competitive, or better training our customer-facing teams.

With a good CRM, you finally have the ability to record and store everything. And this is an important way to ensure we remain flexible in tailoring our strategies to the wants and needs of the consumer.

After all, we've been in the age of the customer for many years now. Today, customers have digital access to prices, information and the ability to buy from a global marketplace. They have also come to appreciate deeply personalized engagement: 3 out of 4 consumers say they spent more money with a company because of a positive customer experience.

Luckily for you, CRMs can help make this happen: IT service provider Agloworks found that 47% of CRM users said customer satisfaction was impacted by their CRM. And the reason is simple: CRMs allow you to take an inside-out approach when interacting with your customers. You can analyze, leverage and quantify your data to take a metrics-based approach. This means you will be able to adapt to any given customer's needs before they even realize they have it!

In short, CRMs capture your information today to support your marketing efforts tomorrow. From marketing campaigns that deliver a unique message to every customer based on their individual preferences and buying patterns, to identifying trends as they happen (therefore allowing you to capitalize on them), a CRM-based, customer-centric approach will allow you to increase consumer confidence in your brand and products.

YOUR DIGITAL ECOSYSTEM

Your Digital Ecosystem: How Digital Touchpoints Turn Prospects into Buyers

How do you view the collection of your owned digital properties? Are your website, content, mobile apps and social media handles working together to create value for your organization, or do you see these as annual, individual expenses that take away from your marketing budget?

How do growers use social?

42%
of farmers who use Facebook & Twitter use it every day

Farmers are most likely to be found on social media in the early morning or the evening

40%
of U.S. farmers use Facebook

56%
of U.S. farmers 35 years and younger use Facebook

14%
of U.S. farmers use Twitter

28%
of U.S. farmers 35 years and younger use Twitter

17%
of U.S. farmers use LinkedIn

5%
of U.S. farmers use Instagram

The critical first step is to recognize that the purpose of your digital ecosystem is to attract qualified leads, engage them with relevant content and convert them into customers.

Let's unpack that statement a bit.

Your digital ecosystem is just a fancy way of referring to your digital touchpoints. This can encompass your website, your social media sites, any apps you've developed or content you've created, and so on. We call it an ecosystem because individual touchpoints are linked together. For instance: clicking a social media post about the importance of pre–harvest intervals (PHI) will lead a reader to a PHI cheat sheet on your company blog, which has a CTA that asks viewers to download an app you developed that helps growers track spray timing for each crop in their field.

This interconnectedness is great for business: it keeps people engaged with the entirety of your digital offerings, attracting new prospects and driving leads down the sales funnel.

Businesses should view their digital properties as investments, rather than expenses. This requires a bit of a shift, since the traditional approach to marketing leans more towards spending most of your budget on paid media and campaigns. Today, marketers invest money into developing digital assets that can actually drive business. For example, by investing in content and improved SEO on your website, you develop blog posts, videos, whitepapers and other valuable pieces of content that can attract new visitors and engage potential customers beyond a single Google AdWords or Facebook campaign.

Additionally, marketers need to understand that those digital assets create real value for your business, by driving leads and converting sales. For instance, you might tweet about a blog you just posted, which offers tips on controlling perennial weeds. Farmers who click on the link in your tweet will read your blog and gain some valuable information, which may boost your company's credibility in their eyes. On the sidebar, they'll see a link to an upcoming webinar about resistant weeds and management tips. Intrigued, they'll click to the webinar signup page and, when prompted, give you their email address and opt in to receiving future communications. This information can then be used to target these farmers in future campaigns and even qualify them as sales leads.

Many websites today are static properties with a focus on products and company information. Instead, we can transform our websites into powerful lead–generation machines by leveraging new digital tools.
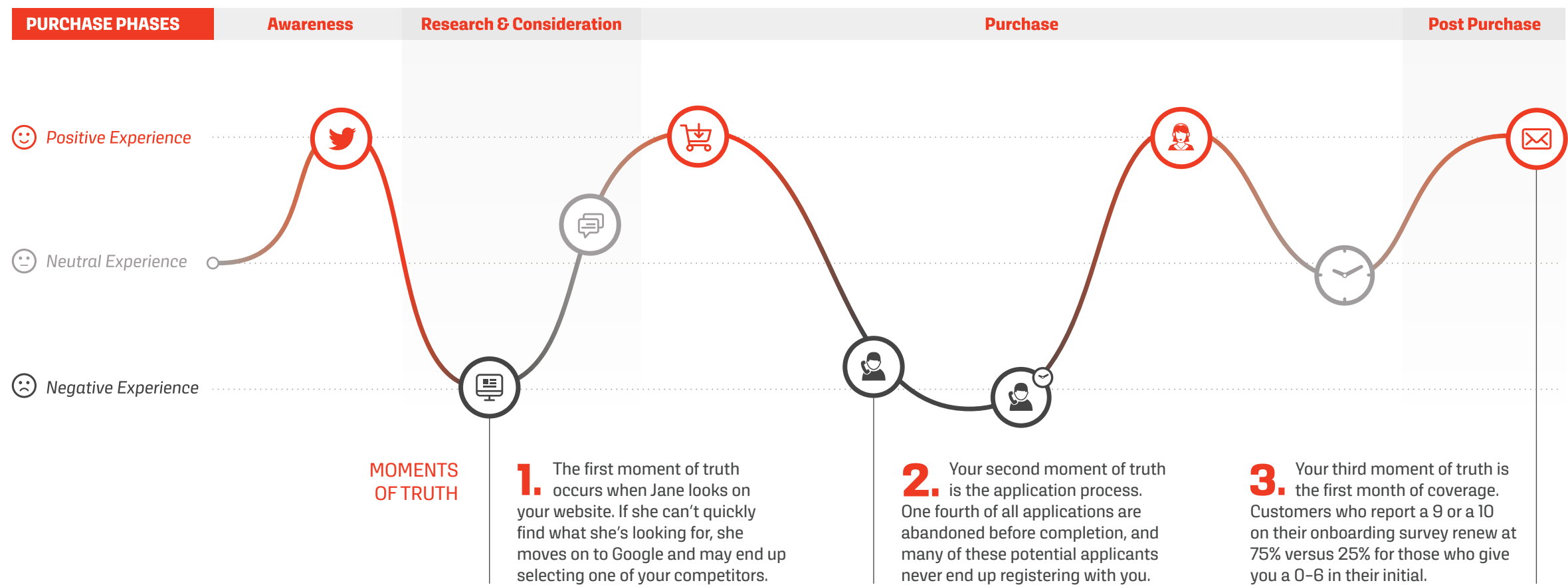
Marketers need to understand that websites can be an important part of the sales process, rather than just an interactive brochure.

Ready to take the plunge?

The next step in transforming your website is to take a bird's eye view of the digital ecosystem you currently have in place.

Look at how the individual pieces work together. Do the different properties support each other, or are they operated in silos? What are the key touchpoints for your customers as they are making a purchase decision? **This may require a digital audit, where you look at how each piece is performing, whether they're relevant to your customer, whether they capture leads, and more.**

A customer–experience–mapping exercise can help identify all touchpoints that a potential customer might have with your digital properties on the way to a purchase. By examining these touchpoints, you can assess if your digital ecosystem is aligned to support the actual process customers go through when interacting with your brand.

| PURCHASE PHASES | Awareness | Research & Consideration | Purchase | Post Purchase |

Positive Experience

Neutral Experience

Negative Experience

MOMENTS OF TRUTH

1. The first moment of truth occurs when Jane looks on your website. If she can't quickly find what she's looking for, she moves on to Google and may end up selecting one of your competitors.

2. Your second moment of truth is the application process. One fourth of all applications are abandoned before completion, and many of these potential applicants never end up registering with you.

3. Your third moment of truth is the first month of coverage. Customers who report a 9 or a 10 on their onboarding survey renew at 75% versus 25% for those who give you a 0–6 in their initial.

With a complete picture of your collective digital properties, we can now critically examine how each contributes to the customer's journey. Once you've completed this exercise, you'll have a better understanding of areas that you need to improve today, and where you should focus your marketing efforts for a more efficient tomorrow.
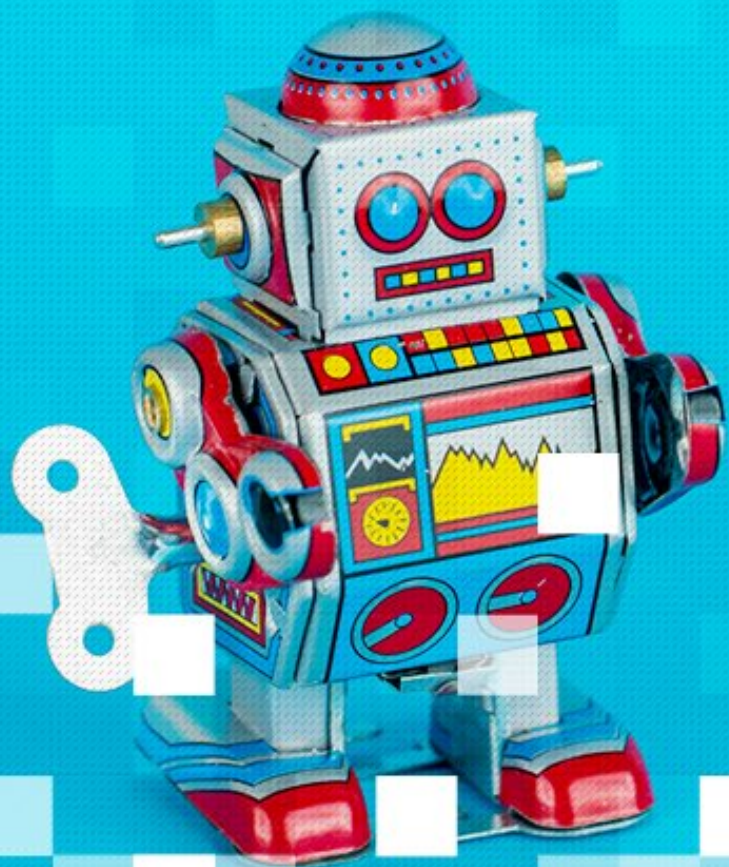
MARKETING AUTOMATION

Marketing Automation: Why You Want a Robot Running Your Marketing

Let's say you just got back from the World Ag Expo in California. Your pockets are stuffed with business cards, your arms are a little sore from so many handshakes and you had countless conversations with current and potential customers about the new product or service your company just released.

On the plane home, you developed a big post-tradeshow game plan: you're going to send e-blasts and do some targeted ads on Twitter. Then, when you get to the office, your phone rings. And then you have a meeting. Pretty soon, a month has passed and you never got a chance to follow up with the tradeshow attendees the way you wanted to.

Face it — we've all been there. We're only human, and life gets in the way. And that's why it's smart to let a robot (i.e. marketing automation) lend a hand.

Automation is, fundamentally, the process of removing humans from the equation. Marketing automation is no exception, helping you send emails (or SMS messages, tweets, etc.) to customers and leads based on the digital interactions they have with your organization.

Worried you haven't heard from a customer in a while? Set up an email workflow to drop them a line after they've been away from your site for 90 days. Have customers that speak different languages? Display content in the appropriate language, based on the Preferred Language field.

Whether you need to send reminders to contacts about an upcoming event or nurture prospects with a drip campaign after they download a whitepaper, marketing automation puts the follow-up actions in the hands of a robot, rather than a marketing person.

Basically, marketing automation does all the stuff you intend to do after collecting names at a trade show, but never quite get around to.

Can a Robot Be a People-Person?

According to 2016 research from [Statista](), the open rate for emails with a personalized message was 18.8%, as compared to 13.1% without any personalization. Given the importance of personal relationships within the agricultural industry, the regional nature of ag audiences and the crop-specific nature of many products, personalization is one of the most direct ways marketing automation can impact an agrimarketer.

Personalization can be as simple as including prospect names in email subject lines, or as complicated as sending a single email that dynamically changes content based on the location of the recipient and crop types they have expressed interest in. No matter how you use personalization, you'll actually be letting a robot make your marketing a little more human.

So, how does an automation program know who to email and what to say? That all comes back to the data you've collected on your contacts (and hopefully captured in a CRM). When creating emails or setting up drip campaigns, you select fields from your database and insert tokens or triggers to display or send relevant content.

A Failure to Plan is a Plan to Fail

Beyond personalization, there are a host of ways automation can improve your marketing efficiency — by automatically scoring leads based on behavior or allowing you to apply branching logic to email campaigns, for example. But it all requires planning and data.

HERE ARE THE THREE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS YOU'LL NEED TO GET STARTED:

1. **High-quality contact lists**

   Automation relies on data. Regardless of the automation platform you choose to use, the first step will always be loading in your existing contacts. Those contacts should come with as much information as possible (full names, email addresses, consent and segmentation info), even if that means manually filling in some blanks. *Remember, the information you don't collect today will limit your options tomorrow.*

2. **A list of all potential contact sources**

   Once you've added your contacts, the biggest challenge will be keeping that list accurate and up-to-date. If you don't fully understand where all your contacts are coming from (website forms, trade show lists, sales prospecting, integrations, etc.) you will inevitably end up with data you can't rely on.

3. **Content to support your offers**

   Automation makes it simple to deliver content to your customers and leads, but you need to have content first. If you don't have a content plan and/or a catalog of blogs, whitepapers, videos or some other type of material to draw from, you'll struggle to take full advantage of marketing automation.

Marketing automation relies heavily on the quality of your data and the strength of your internal marketing processes, which means it can be daunting for agrimarketers. On the other hand, it's a scalable, responsive way for small marketing departments to drive leads and demonstrate ROI. After all, why build a robot if it can't make your life easier?
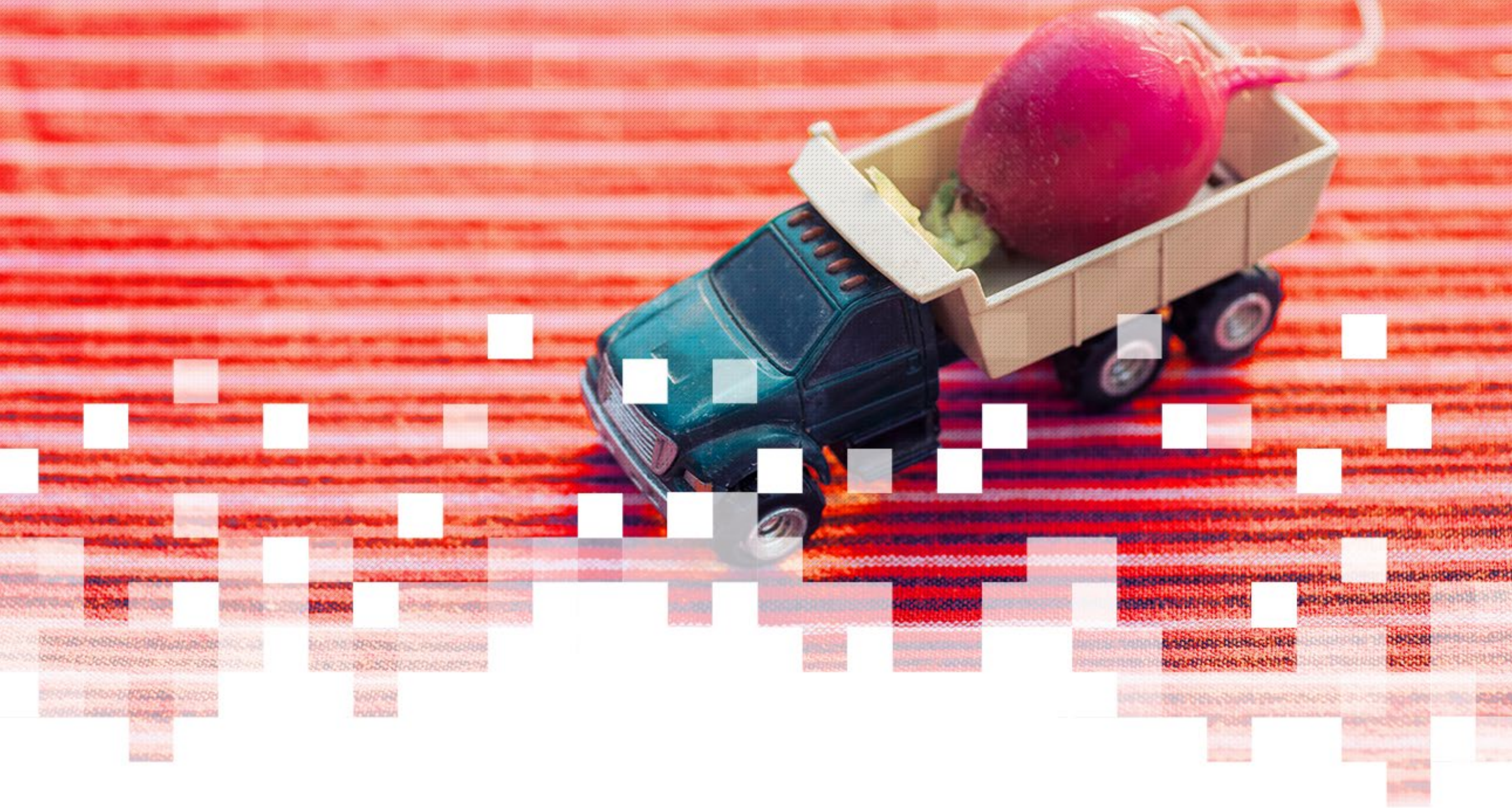
CHAPTER 5

CONTENT MARKETING

Content Marketing: Best Practices and Common Pitfalls

"Content is King." That's what Bill Gates declared in 1995 — though even he could not have anticipated the 2.8 million Google results that phrase would return more than 20 years later.

Now, our customers have a wealth of information at their fingertips. No longer do they rely on us, the experts, to answer their questions or relay the latest industry trends. Why would they, when all the knowledge in the world is just a Google search away? In fact, the average B2B buyer is 57% through the sales process before they even talk to a sales rep, according to researchers at the Corporate Executive Board.

This means that if we want to communicate with our producer audiences, we need to meet them where they are — online. But, when a Google search with a fairly specific phrase like "gps tractors precision farming" yields 267,000 results, and your company is nowhere to be found on page 10, let alone page one, it begs the question:

How can my business stand out online?

We'll give you a hint — it has nothing to do with posting product information and self-promotional content on your blog and social media.

The Inbound Process

At its heart, <u>inbound marketing</u> is about combining content with context. It's about meeting your customer on their terms, and establishing a relationship by providing them with useful, educational content. As customers engage with it, they'll progress further down the buyer's journey, which will help you nurture and generate new leads:

BUYER'S JOURNEY
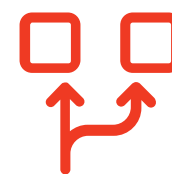
Awareness Stage

Prospect is experiencing a challenge but cannot yet name it.

- Blog posts
- Podcasts
- Video interviews/vlogs
- Infographics

Consideration Stage

Prospect understands and can name their challenge, and is researching solutions.

- Toolkits
- eBooks
- Comparison eBooks/whitepapers
- How-to videos

Decision Stage

Prospect understands solutions available and is choosing the best one.

- Webinars
- Case studies
- (Free) trials
- Product demos

Armed with your buyer personas (and an understanding of marketing automation, CRMs and the importance of a digital ecosystem), you have everything you need to create content that resonates with the pain points your customers are facing.

HERE'S A QUICK LOOK AT WHAT THE INBOUND PROCESS LOOKS LIKE WHEN IT COMES TO CONTENT CREATION:

1 **Write content** to suit the needs and interests of your personas.

2 **Write a big gated piece** (like an eBook, resource kit, template or webinar) that solves your target audience's biggest challenges using your unique expertise. Provide value, be honest and don't be promotional.

3 **Develop secondary content** (blogs, videos, infographics, etc.) from repurposed sections of your eBook and map that content against the buyer's journey.

4 **Build to a gated webinar** (decision-level) that allows you to identify more likely buyers.

5 **Make sure your website can collect** contact information when and where you want it.

6 **Use digital promotion and focused CTAs** to acquire leads and pull them through the marketing–sales funnel.

7 **Coordinate with sales** to follow up on marketing qualified leads within 24 hours.

8 **Measure, test, improve, repeat.**

But although content marketing is the hook, it shouldn't appear to be a sales tactic. Instead, think of content marketing as an honest, selfless conversation directed at helping your audience with a specific problem. That conversation happens on your blog, newsletter, social channels, influencers and earned media; it's published regularly and promoted. That's it.

Unfortunately, only 41% of organizations have a clear understanding of what successful and effective content looks like, according to a 2017 survey by the Content Marketing Institute. Think you're guilty of a few strategic transgressions?

Here's What Successful Content Isn't:

Big blocks of text nobody reads

People read differently online. We skim, our eyes dart around the page, we scroll and make judgements about the value of a page very quickly. We avoid text blocks like the plague. Smart use of headlines, fonts, bullets, images and whitespace are essential to ease readability.

Published infrequently

When a new post goes live, Google sends its crawlers over to your page to evaluate your content. The more frequently you post, the more often crawlers will see your page, and thus, the more chances you have to boost your SEO ranking for your chosen keywords. And who doesn't want to be on the first page of a Google search result?

Lacking in (or overloaded with) keywords

A keyword strategy is an essential part of understanding and leveraging the way users find your content. We could fill an entire blog post (or two) on keyword strategy alone, so we'll keep it simple: you want to figure out what users are searching for to find your content, then use those keywords to guide your web copy and content strategy. But don't use them too frequently — a black hat SEO technique called keyword stuffing can actually hurt your ranking, since it makes your content spammy and unreadable.

Unhelpful

Your blog could do everything right, but if the information isn't valuable to your audience, if it doesn't solve a real problem, forget about it. Likewise, the internet has enough garbage in it, and it's going to have more. Don't contribute to the problem by posting content for the sake of posting content. Your readers will know better.

Self-promotional

Overly "salesy" content will be passed over in a heartbeat by your audience, and may even damage your credibility. A 2014 survey of U.S. residents by Kentico Software found, "[e]ven signing off an otherwise objective blog post or newsletter with a product pitch will bring the content's credibility level down by 29%." If the internet has taught us one thing, it's to recognize self-serving propositions. (And if you don't believe us, there's a Nigerian Prince we'd like you to meet...)

Unfortunately, that last transgression is the one agrimarketers seem to commit the most.

Content should, at its core, be useful and relevant to your customers. To better illustrate what good content marketing looks like, let's take a look at how agrimarketers at the (fictional) Agri-Tech Seed Company (ATSC) developed their content strategy.

A Fictional Case Study in Content Marketing

(i) Background

ATSC is a leading seed company based in Minneapolis, Minnesota, with markets that extend across the U.S. Northern plains, the Midwest and Western Canada. They offer a full range of products, from canola to soy to specialty seed. Originally founded by former growers, ATSC has always prided itself on having their finger on the pulse of their grower customers.

(!) Problem

The ATSC marketing team started to question the direction of their initial foray into content marketing. After a year of regular blog posts — a mishmash of product news, staff hires and industry developments — page visits are low, newsletter open rates are abysmal and there are no leads to speak of. Instead of driving revenue, ATSC's blog became a money and time sink.

(✓) Solution

After conducting an audit of all ATSC's posts, the marketing team realized their content focused on what they wanted growers to know about them, not what growers actually needed. The team radically revised their content strategy around the needs of their audience — creating content that solves the problems of their audiences and delivers it according to their preferred consumption methods.

Here are the Steps They Took:

1 **Persona revision**

ATSC spent time talking with their best customers and developed two new personas: Jim Farmer, a married, 41-year-old corn and soy grower from the Midwest U.S., and Terry, an ag retailer also based in the Midwest.

2 **Strategic content development**

The marketing team focused efforts on developing two gated pieces — one eBook and one product webinar — for each quarter of the fiscal year. The eBook was slated to come out first, and squarely addressed Jim's and Terry's most pressing challenges by offering solutions that align with ATSC's differentiators. For the rest of the quarter, the team developed frequent, ungated blog posts by repurposing sections of the eBook. These posts would feature CTAs that funneled readers to the eBook, which then directed readers to sign up for the product webinar, to help move more likely buyers further down the marketing/sales funnel. Those who complete the webinar are probably ready for follow up from a sales rep.

3 **Promotion**

The marketing team approached the eBook like a product launch, using a robust media mix to reach their audience and drive eBook downloads (therefore increasing customer data captured). They then shifted focus to the webinar to promote registration starting about 3 weeks prior to the event. After the webinar, the team continued to promote the eBook for the rest of the quarter.

4 **Handing off leads to sales**

After pumping the marketing funnel full of new prospects and nurturing those leads to the point of webinar participation, the ATSC marketing team has developed fresh Marketing Qualified Leads for the sales team to qualify and convert. Inside Sales Reps were chomping at the bit to contact webinar participants within 24 hours to start generating new business.

5 **Measuring results**

Digital marketing opens the door to a plethora of metrics to measure success. The team at ATSC decided on relatively basic KPIs to assess whether their content was effectively pulling leads through the marketing-sales funnel, including unique visits (UVs), bounce rate/time on page, page views, conversion rate, webinar registration and number of SQLs.

A successful content marketing strategy is rooted in what your target audience needs to know, not what you want to tell them. While there are thousands of best practices for optimizing inbound marketing and accelerating leads through the funnel, none of them matter if the core of your content fails to serve your target audience.
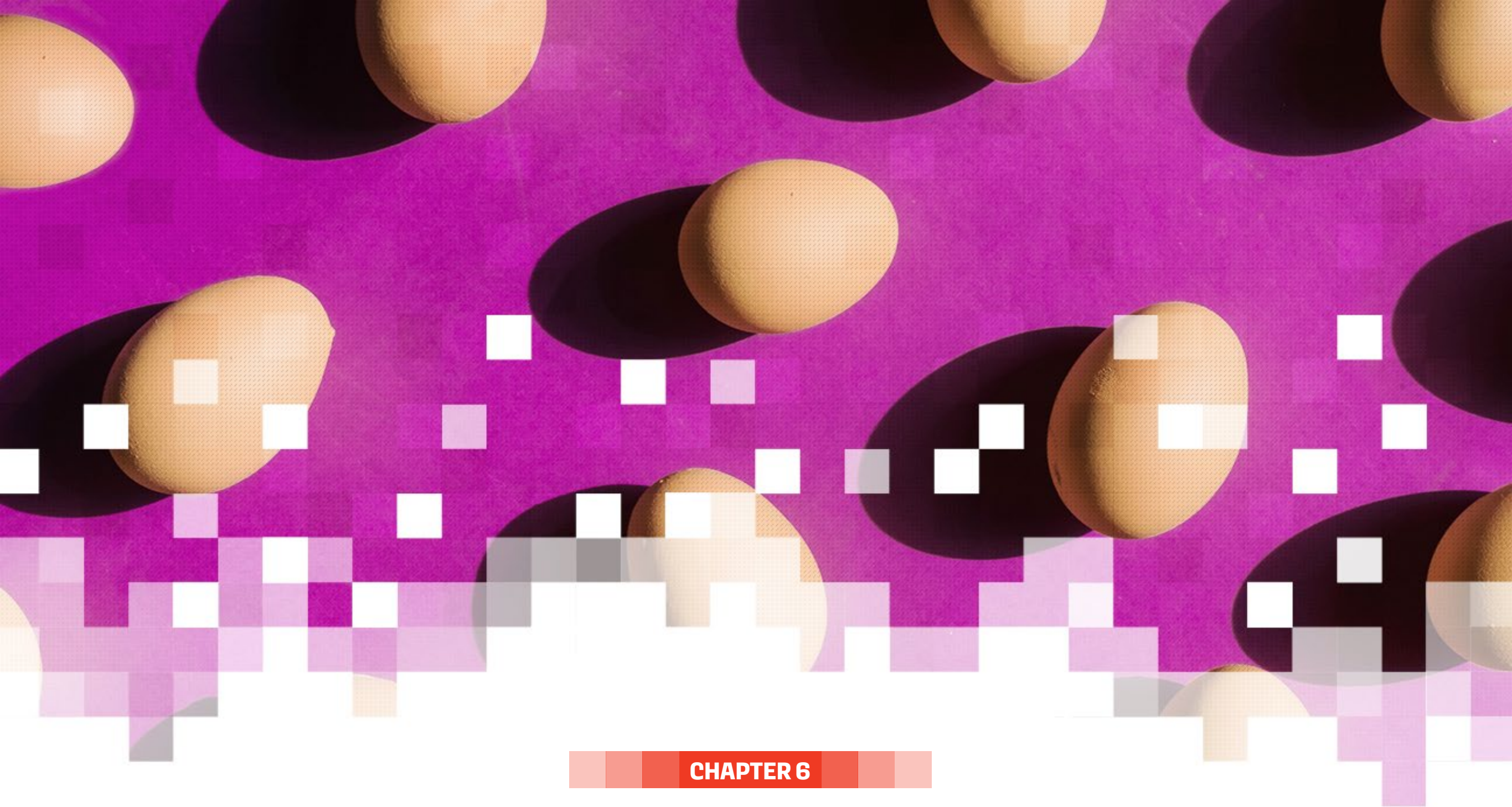
SALES & MARKETING ALIGNMENT

Sales & Marketing Alignment: How Uniting Your Teams Leads to Better Sales Conversions

It's no secret: sales and marketing have a notoriously rocky relationship. In agribusiness, as well as most other industries, marketing and sales teams work in silos. Rather than act as one united, complementary unit, they act separately, as their own distinct departments, because, well, that's how it's always been.

*We're here to tell you, there's a better way — through **technology**.*
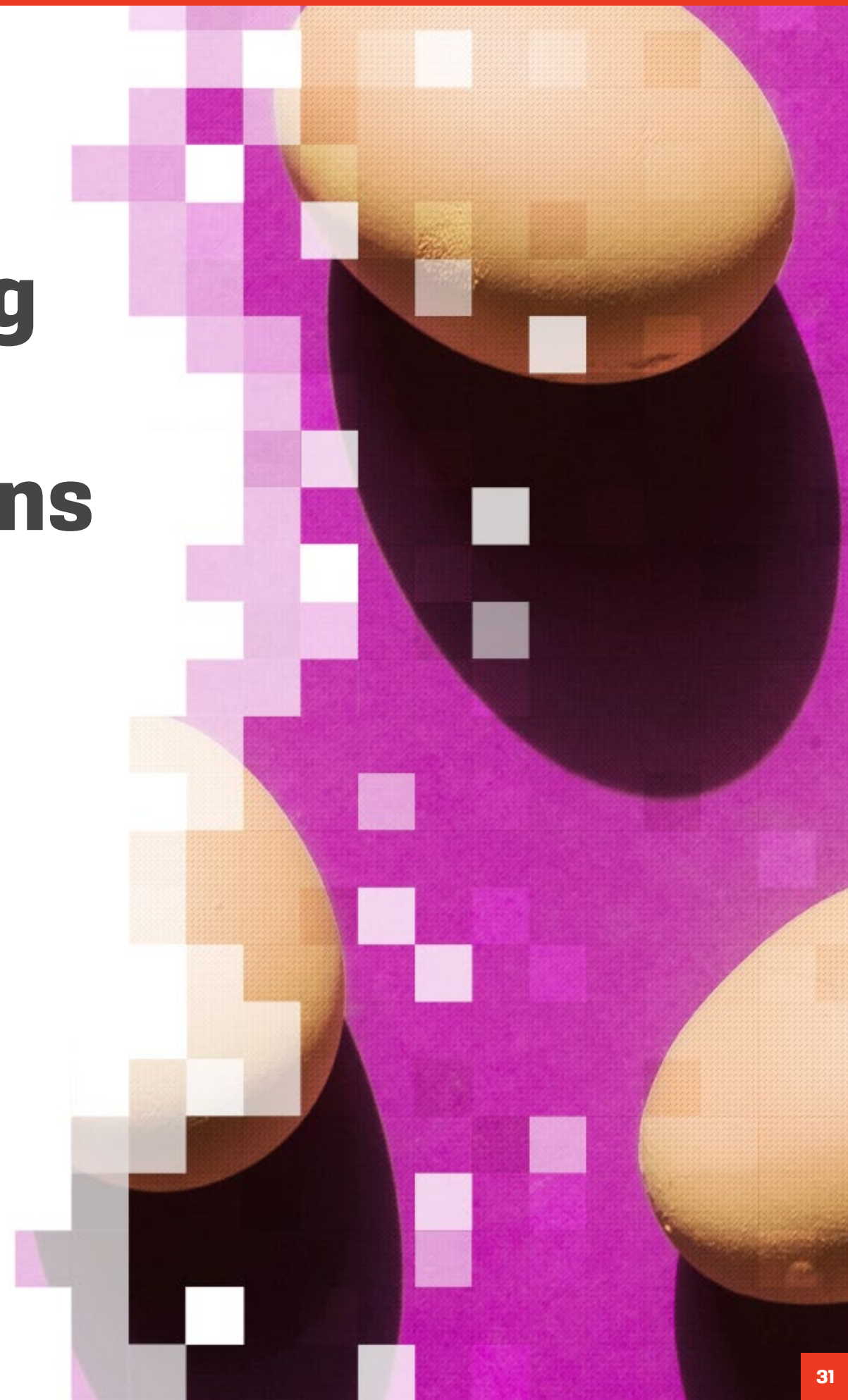
Marketing vs. Sales; Sales vs. Marketing

The tension between marketing and sales isn't just at your company alone: it's also borne out in the data. A particularly well-referenced survey from researchers at the Corporate Executive Board found that the vast majority of terms sales and marketing teams used to describe each other (87% to be exact) were overwhelmingly negative. Not surprisingly, marketers were considered "academic pencil-pushers" by salespeople, while they were called "incompetent cowboys" by marketers.

Underlying the colorful language is a reality that marketing and sales approach the same problem from different — albeit complementary — perspectives:

- Marketing takes a high-level view of demand generation, relying on data and creative campaigns to develop leads.
- Sales is in the trenches, building relationships with growers and closing deals that keep the precious life-blood of new revenue flowing into company coffers.

What should be a match made in heaven quickly devolves into dysfunction when the urgency of meeting quotas is pitted against questionable leads, finite resources and product limitations.

Sales ignores 50% of marketing generated leads, yet wastes an equal proportion of time with unproductive prospecting. *So wouldn't it be great if marketing could deliver higher quality leads that sales can actually follow up with?*
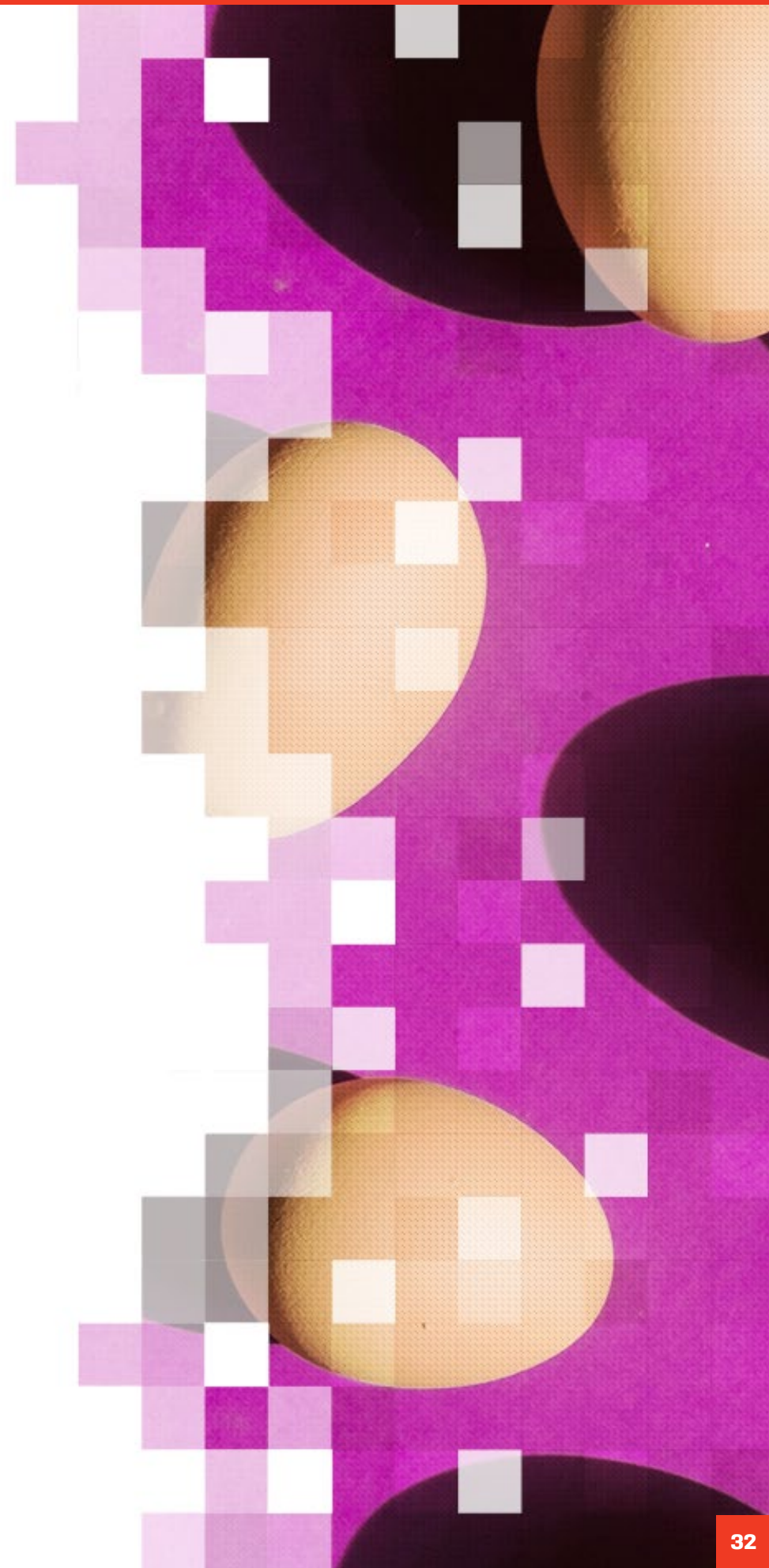
A Better Way: Marketing–Sales Integration

*Modern digital marketing has made it possible to bridge the gap between marketing and sales teams with — surprise! — **data**. Targeted prospects can be attracted, nurtured and closed with near–scientific precision using an array of inbound and outbound strategies. What was once the marketer's supposition and the salesperson's intuition is now knowable through interoperable marketing automation and CRM platforms.*

If you have HubSpot and Salesforce — or any other alternative platforms — then all you need is a little bit of process improvement to realize significant results. In fact, sales and marketing teams that have learned to collaborate through technology have generated 208% more revenue from marketing efforts, achieved 38% higher sales win rates and 36% higher customer retention (Source: Hubspot).

Here's how you do it:

4 SIMPLE STEPS TO INTEGRATION

#1: Unify your process

Fill a room with 30 marketers or salespeople, and you'll get 30 different definitions for a qualified lead. That's a problem. To realize the potential of marketing–sales integration, you'll first need common definitions for a shared funnel. We're particularly fond of HubSpot's stages, though there are plenty of alternatives that may be more appropriate for the complexity of your business. However, any process roughly resembles the following:

Prospect/Visitor

Lead

MQL

SQL

Opportunity

Customer
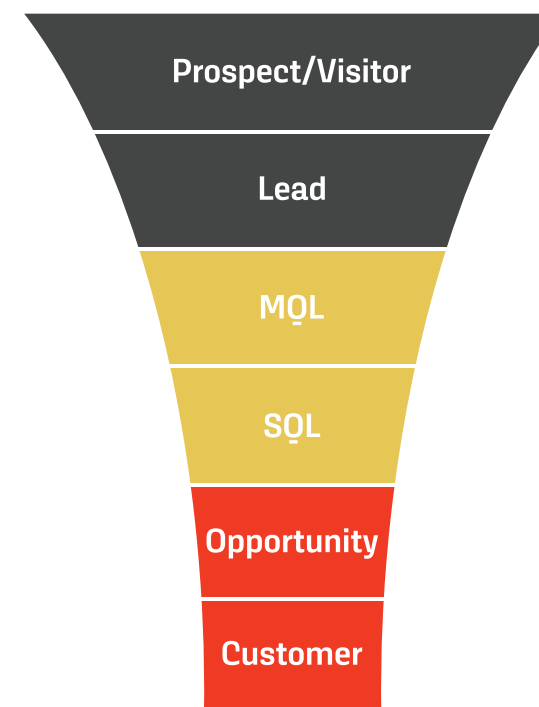
Prospect: someone who has visited your website or signed up for your newsletter. Minimal data only.

Lead: someone who has submitted a form in exchange for content (eBook, whitepaper, webinar, etc.).

Marketing Qualified Lead (MQL): a lead who is deeply engaged (via online behavior) and matches your buyer profile. They're probably ready for a sales conversation.

Sales Qualified Lead (SQL): Same as MQL, but your sales team has agreed they're ready for outreach.

Opportunity: Sales has confirmed this person is a likely customer (i.e., they have the budget, authority and timeline to buy).

Customer: Great job. Now it's up to you to keep new customers delighted for renewal and upselling.

In terms of ownership, marketing is responsible for the top of the funnel (prospect and lead), while sales owns the bottom (opportunity and customer). The middle of the funnel — who constitutes a qualified lead — requires a continuous dialogue between the teams to hone criteria and ensure timely outreach.

When to follow up with a lead?

In a perfect world, where you know the behavior and profile of prospective customers, you need only set criteria for an SQL and notifications for your sales team. Your lead nurturing/ management system will do the work of drawing prospects through the top of the funnel and ready them for outreach.

But this data isn't available right away. In fact, it takes significant trial and error to clarify operational definitions. When starting out, you'll want to take a triage approach to lead outreach. Let sales determine who best to follow up with and, as experience is logged in your CRM, you'll be able to gradually refine your MQL/SQL definitions. **But no matter what, always follow up within 24 hours. According to HBR, sales teams who follow up within that timeframe are 60 times more likely to qualify a lead than those who wait.**

#2: Collaboratively set goals

Your sales team has a revenue goal. You know how to generate leads. Together, you'll have to project how many prospects need to be converted at each stage of the funnel in order to meet sales goals. Commitments from marketing and sales to respective goals must be clear and accepted by all.

When you're just starting out, you'll have to make some educated guesses. What matters most, though, is diligently logging each sales interaction to define and refine the funnel. It's a continuous process.

#3: Ensure data integrity

With a clear marketing and sales process mapped out in your marketing automation and CRM platforms, you'll need to set unambiguous standards for data entry: what information does your sales team record, where do they record it and when? How are they held accountable? These are vital questions that require a process accepted by both teams.

#4: Communicate

Now that you have a unified marketing–sales funnel, shared goals and accepted processes and standards for data entry, it's up to you to communicate progress. This goes beyond issuing a monthly marketing–sales report. Rather, it requires regular dialogue between teams to understand how marketing efforts translate in the field, and how they're received by leads.

Technology has the power to unite marketing and sales around a measurable process that results in more effective conversion. While there are technical challenges to establishing these systems, the greatest hurdle to realizing the promise of integration lies with your people. Get clarity and buy–in on process from the organization. Figure out how to hold everyone accountable. With those key items in place, your marketing and sales teams will get along like peas in a pod.

ROI

ROI: How to Maximize Returns from Your Digital Strategy

Agrimarketers are uniquely positioned for digital success. Think about it — in an industry as rural as this one, producers are hard-pressed to find physical locations to catch up with their fellow growers or ranchers. Instead, they rely on social media, building online communities full of like-minded individuals seeking advice, updates, support and camaraderie.

Our audience is already online, and they're ready and willing to listen. But communicating with them in ways that drive leads and close sales is just the first step.

The true power of digital marketing lies in the data available at your fingertips.

Take, for instance, the fact that digital allows you to collect and store data about customers, prospects and leads. This knowledge can, in turn, improve campaign targeting, customer-employee interactions and more.

So while we often think of financial ROI as the biggest indicator of digital success, it's important to remember that it isn't the only one. Digital can be used to achieve a variety of goals, which should all be taken into account when measuring ROI.

75%
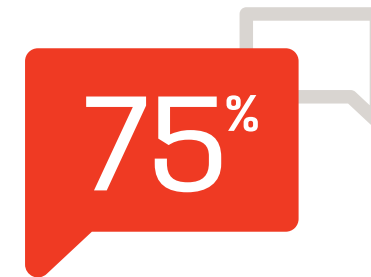
of buyers want marketers to curb the sales-speak in their content

Data Helps You Develop More Successful Campaigns

As stated before, digital tools are unrivaled when it comes to capturing and storing customer data. Big names like Google, Facebook and Twitter put market data at your fingertips, which you can use to your advantage in campaigns, customer service initiatives, and more.

- **Identifying search trends about product research** so your business can showcase relevant and popular products or services.
- **Identifying demographic trends** so your business can determine the best way to target the customers that will connect best with your product or service.
- **Identifying segments within your current customers** to inform shared interests and determine market segments and commonalities.

By using this information as a basis for our digital marketing strategy, we can ensure that we create a digital ecosystem tailored to the most pressing wants and needs of our top customer personas.

For instance, understanding that your Sam Spud persona — made up of middle-aged potato farmers in small-to-medium sized, family-owned farms in rural Idaho — is worried about late blight in potatoes, and that his Google searches are largely about researching methods of control, you can begin to develop a highly specified campaign unique to his needs.

Armed with knowledge of his most pressing pain point — as well as his demographic and psychographic information — you can create a series of blog posts about best practices in potato farming and new fungicide innovations, then share them through automated email newsletters and Facebook ads targeted towards family farms in Idaho. Next, you might develop a webinar featuring industry experts who discuss the best late blight management techniques, and then capture the email addresses you collect in the webinar sign-up form with your CRM, where your system will begin to track their interactions with your site. Eventually, you'll find yourself with an SQL — a sales qualified lead — which you can send over to your sales team for follow-up.

As you can see, collecting market data as part of the research process *before* developing a campaign can help you net a higher ROI. But it's important to gather data during the campaign process as well.

Data Keeps You Close to Your Goals

What level of engagement are you generating with every dollar spent on your Facebook ad campaign? How many link clicks? Form fills? Downloads?

With traditional marketing techniques, you often have to wait until the end of a campaign to measure its efficacy. But with digital marketing, that data is literally just a click away, meaning you can correct course in real time if one of your tactics is underperforming or a total flop, saving you time and money in the long run.

But before you can measure progress towards your goals, you must first ensure they are measurable and clear.

Part of building your digital marketing strategy is translating your business goals into digital marketing objectives with clear, measurable outcomes connected to your business goals. These objectives will:

- Provide direction for your marketing tactics
- Help allocate budget to areas of importance
- Assess performance of your efforts

This plan should be unique to your organization, as it translates business objectives into digital marketing tactics. And it should be there at the start. After all, without knowing what you are measuring, it is difficult to assess your performance. A measurement plan will help identify your business objectives and outcomes, and will ensure that you have the systems in place to track metrics that quantify your success.

50% *of sales time is wasted on unproductive prospecting*

Data Makes Marketing Effective and Efficient

Once you have clear goals in mind and a measurement plan in place, you can begin to use data to streamline your marketing efforts.

After all, agility is what sets apart a digital strategy from a traditional marketing strategy. The data available to us allows marketers to make decisions and adjustments during the course of a campaign so that we can optimize for performance. This makes us incredibly efficient with our marketing budgets.

So rather than creating a digital strategy that focuses on KPIs, benchmarks or quotas, create a strategy that focuses on your customers and your objectives, then measure engagement with real-time data.

When it comes to measuring the efficacy of your digital ecosystem, make sure you ask the hard-hitting questions:

	Instead of asking...	Ask
Content	How many words per month? How many blogs per week?	**What questions are my customers asking? What content is relevant to their pain points? Their goals?**
Social	How do I get more followers? How many Tweets and posts do we need?	**What content is popular? How do we increase engagement and provide value?**
Digital Media	What should my budget be to get the clicks that I require?	**What audience is most engaged with our content? How can we focus on them and cut out the unengaged users to lower our cost-per-click (CPC) and increase our click-through-rate (CTR)?**
Email	How do I increase the size of my email marketing list?	**How do we eliminate the unengaged users that delete our content? How can we personalize our offerings to connect even more with our engaged users?**

By getting in the customer's head, and pulling data that helps us make our initiatives more customer-centric, we begin to become more agile in our marketing strategies. For instance, we might see that product posts have the lowest engagement on our Twitter page, while posts that focus on how to safely operate farm machinery get high engagement. If our objective is to increase brand recognition by beefing up our social media following, we might decide it's a better use of our time to develop content about farm safety, rather than writing product ads.

Once you have measurable outcomes in place, you can begin to track your campaign. This can be done through a variety of means, including tracking time on page and unique users via Google Analytics, tracking engagement via Facebook's native analytics or analytics offered by a service like Sprout Social, and more.
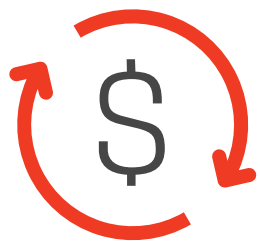
Companies with good smarketing practices in place generated **208%** *more revenue from marketing efforts.*

By measuring your data regularly and tracking it against your measurable objectives, you'll begin to have a better idea of the tactics that work — and those that don't. This allows you to make changes during a campaign to budgets, targeting and creative to improve performance.

With digital marketing campaigns under your belt, you will have even more data to help inform future tactics. With a benchmark for clicks, conversion rates, and costs, you will be more knowledgeable in your planning, and can use this information to streamline your entire marketing strategy. **Just as importantly, you have the power to track your holistic return on investment for your marketing efforts.**

It's no secret: it's time to go digital. And you're not the only agrimarketer who knows it.

To stay ahead of the curve and achieve the highest ROI possible, you'll want your digital marketing efforts to go beyond building an efficient website and getting on social media. You'll want to create a complete digital ecosystem based on personas, where your social media accounts, blog posts, gated webinars, CRM, automated marketing campaigns and other digital assets work together to address your ideal customer's major pain points and enhance your ROI.

We hope the knowledge in this eBook has given you the tools you need to build a complete and cohesive digital ecosystem. But before implementing any of these tools, you'll want to take a step back and prioritize your organization's unique needs to help determine exactly where to begin. It won't be a fast or easy process, but the payoff will be far worth the investment.

And don't think you need to do it alone. If you would like to discuss the steps required to transform your marketing perspective, please reach out. We are always happy to help.

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