# The Executive's Guide to Inbound Marketing

## An Updated Edition for 2017 Including Newly Released Research

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# Introduction

When we created the previous version of The Executive's Guide to Inbound Marketing, we focused on helping executives wrap their minds around the key concepts of inbound marketing. But in 2017, with three out of four marketers tapping inbound as their number one priority, we think it's safe to assume that you know what inbound marketing is.

This revised edition for 2017 is more than your ordinary inbound marketing primer: we've curated the latest research to help you get started with inbound or double down on—and accelerate the results of—your existing strategy.

We've created this guide to give you clarity and confidence as you spearhead your company's inbound initiatives.

In the following pages, we will begin a refresher on inbound methodology so you're clear on what inbound is, and what differentiates the inbound marketing experience from traditional marketing tactics.

Next, we will examine the chief concerns facing inbound marketers today, and the biggest inbound marketing trends. More importantly, we'll take a look at what best-in-class marketers are doing to keep pace and achieve healthy returns on their inbound marketing investments.

After we've shed some light onto the latest inbound marketing research, we will explore the core components of successful inbound marketing strategies. In this section we will do a deep dive into buyer personas, content creation, conversion-centered design, lead nurturing, sales and marketing alignment, and closed-loop software tools.

Finally, we will give you a step-by-step roadmap for getting your colleagues on board with inbound marketing and investing in your plan.

Want to discuss anything you read in this guide or ask questions about your organization can benefit from inbound marketing? **Let's chat**!

Let's Chat!

# Part 1: An Overview of Inbound Methodology

Let's go ahead and state the obvious: the internet has fundamentally changed the world of marketing. The days when companies could rely on interruptive outbound advertising alone are long behind us. Today's buyer is empowered by increasing control over the information they seek—which means they can also control what information they don't want. Outbound marketing tactics are at the top of their hit list.

Just take a look at some of these studies which really put this change in consumer behavior into perspective:

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# 90%

of consumers are moving between multiple devices/screens a day to browse the internet, shop online, manage finances, plan trips and more.

(Source: **Google study**)

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# 90%

of people use their smartphones in store while shopping, with 54% using it to compare prices.

*(Source: **MSession**)*

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# 226 Million

The number of Americans registered on the National Do Not Call List. That's up a whopping 4.9 million from 2014.

*(Source: **Federal Trade Commission**)*

# 60%

The percentage of television viewers who say they download or record a show so they can skip the ads.

*(Source: **Wall Street Journal**)*

# 84%

The percentage of Millenials who report they've stopped visiting a website because the advertising was too intrusive or irrelevant.

*(Source: **Vol & Tier Digital Marketing**)*

# 47%

The percentage of folks who say they've unsubscribed to email lists because the emails were too frequent or irrelevant.

*(Source: **MarketingSherpa**)*

# 64%

The number of people who use ad blockers because they believe ads are annoying or intrusive.

*(Source: **HubSpot**)*

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# 82%

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The number of consumers who have closed a browser or exited a webpage because of an autoplaying online video ad.

*(Source: **HubSpot**)*

The people have spoken: they don't want their lives interrupted by marketing messages anymore. They want to interact with brands on their own terms, and they want those interactions to be meaningful, relevant, and personalized.

# The Era of Inbound

Enter inbound marketing: a laser-focused approach which puts the power into the hands of the target buyer. Since 2006, inbound marketing has been the most effective marketing method for doing business online. Instead of the old outbound marketing methods of buying ads, buying email lists, and praying for leads, inbound marketing focuses on creating quality content that pulls people toward your company and product—where they naturally want to be.

Outbound marketers barge, buy, and beg their way into the awareness of the public; inbound marketers focus on getting found by buyers who are already seeking their services or products. By aligning the content you publish with your customer's interests, you naturally attract inbound traffic you can convert, close, and delight over time.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Core Philosophies** | **Inbound**: Draws in ideal buyers using targetd and relevant content, SEO, & social media channels. | **Outbound**: Pushes out messages to public using purchased lists, ad space, or airtime. |
| **Buyer Motiviations** | **Inbound**: Internal, need-based. | **Outbound**: External, attention-based. |
| **Communication** | **Inbound**: Two-way communication via social media, email, phone, live chat, and more. | **Outbound**: One-way broadcast communication. |
| **Content** | **Inbound**: 80% value-based content, 20% promotional content. | **Outbound**: 0% value-based content, 100% promotional content. |
| **Lead Generation** | **Inbound**: Leads opt-in. | **Outbound**: Leads are purchased. |
| **Sales Outreach** | **Inbound**: Permission based; "warm calling." | **Outbound**: Disruption based; "cold calling." |

# The Core Values of Inbound Marketing

Inbound marketing is about creating and sharing high-value content with purpose. By creating content designed to attract your ideal customers, an inbound marketer can draw in qualified prospects and nurture them towards becoming customers and loyal brand advocates.

The major themes of inbound marketing, include:

- **Content Creation + Distribution**: Create content that answers your customers' questions and adds value to their life. Share that content far and wide.

- **Lifecycle Marketing**: Specific marketing actions and tools transform visitors into contacts, contacts into leads, leads into customers, and customers into promoters. Performing the right action at the right time (aimed at the right person) makes this transformation possible.

- **Personalization**: The most effective content is tailored to the needs of the people who are viewing it. You'll learn more about your leads over time, empowering you to better personalize your messages based on their specific wants and needs.

- **Multi-channel**: Different people prefer interacting on different channels. The inbound marketing approach involves learning which channels work best for you and your customers. That doesn't mean picking one channel and sticking to it—inbound marketing is multi-channel by nature.

- **Integration**: Content creation, distribution, and analytics tools all work together to create a closed loop, allowing you to figure out what's working (and what isn't).

Inbound is about the exchange of knowledge, passion, and (most importantly) value.

# Watch "The Core Values of Inbound Marketing" by HubSpot CTO & Co-Founder, Dharmesh Shah

# The Four Stages of Inbound Methodology – Attract, Convert, Close, & Delight

The four stages of the inbound marketing methodology provide a framework to follow as you aim to attract targeted visitors to your website and convert them into leads, customers, and loyal promoters of your brand. The new methodology acknowledges that inbound marketing doesn't just happen: you do it. And you do it using tools and applications that help you create and deliver content which will appeal to precisely the right people (your buyer personas) in the right places (channels) at just the right times (lifecycle stages).
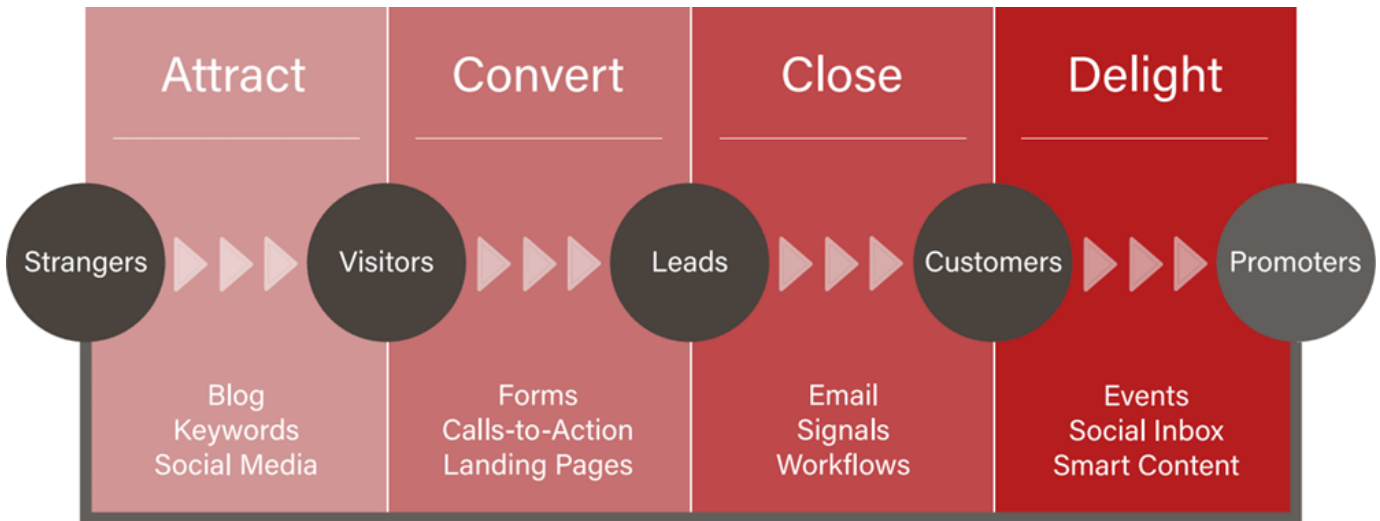
# Attract

The goal of this stage is to publish content that attracts highly targeted visitors to your website. As you can imagine, we don't just want to attract any traffic—we want the right traffic. We want the people who are most likely to become leads and, ultimately, happy customers. Who are the "right" people? Our ideal customers are also known as our **buyer personas**. Buyer personas are holistic ideals of what your customers are really like, inside and out. Personas encompass the goals, challenges, pain points, common objections to products and services, and marketing triggers, as well as personal and demographic information shared among all members of that particular customer type. Your personas are the people around whom your whole business is built.

The tools of attraction include:

- Blogging

- Search Engine Optimization

- Social Media

- Website Content

- Google Adwords

# Convert

Once you've attracted targeted website visitors, the next step is to convert those visitors into leads by gathering their contact information. At the very least, you'll need their email addresses. Contact information is the most valuable currency there is to the online marketer. So, in order for your visitors to offer up that currency willingly, you need to offer them something in return! That "payment" comes in the form of content—like eBooks, whitepapers, or tip sheets—whatever information would be interesting and valuable to each of your personas.

The tools of conversion include:

- Landing pages

- Forms

- Calls-to-action

- Valueable content



## Create Inbound Marketing That Sells

Kula Partners is a HubSpot Platinum Certified Agency that has launched more than 200 websites and inbound marketing strategies over the past dozen years. Every step along the way, our objective has been to help our clients sell more. Sell more products. Sell more services. Sell more ideas.

If you are looking to go beyond the standard inbound marketing playbook, work with an agency that:

1. Is a team entirely comprised of inbound certified and HubSpot certified marketing professionals—we eat, sleep and breathe this stuff

2. Is both a HubSpot Platinum Certified Agency Partner and a Google Partner Agency with a track record of success

3. Has over a decade of experience creating conversion-focused websites—200+ and counting

4. Has worked with mid-market and enterprise organizations from across North America

5. Equips your team for inbound sales success by giving them the tools to convert and close as well as your website does

To get started, we've prepared three of our most popular inbound marketing guides for you.

Simply fill out the form on this page and you will recieve our Epic Guide to Creating an Inbound Marketing Strategy, The Inbound Marketing Website Redesign Guide, and the Inbound Marketer's Quick Start Guide to Conversion Rate Optimization.

### Get Started With Our Top 3 Guides

Work Email *

What is your biggest marketing challenge? *

Who are your top three competitors? *

Are you using HubSpot *
- Please Select -

How advanced is your knowledge of inbound marketing? *
- Please Select -

How many employees does your company have? *
- Please Select -

**Download My Guides**

# Close

You're on the right track. You've attracted the right visitors and converted the right leads, but now you need to transform those leads into customers. How can you most effectively accomplish this feat? Certain marketing tools can be used at this stage to make sure you're closing the right leads at the right times.

The closer's tools include:

- Customer relationship management software

- Closed-loop reporting

- Marketing automation

- Email campaigns

- Sales acceleration tools

# Delight

The Inbound way is all about providing remarkable content to our personas, whether they be visitors, leads, or existing customers. Just because someone has become a customer doesn't mean you can forget about them! Inbound companies continue to engage with, delight, and (ideally) upsell their current customer base into happy promoters of the organizations and products they love.

Tools of delight include:

- Surveys

- Social monitoring

- Smart content

- Educational content

# Social Media

Search for new prospects on Twitter

**Compose a message**

Inbox (100+)   Monitoring   Publishing   Reports   Settings

About me | #Inbound | Inbound Marketing | Hubspot Certified | Hubspot Certificat... | More ▾ | +

Interacting as:

Edit     Filter results...

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**eBooks & Digital Pub**
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3,873
**FOLLOWERS**

4,957
**FOLLOWING**

**Social History**
20 stream matches
View All

More Details

**Michael J. Schiemer** RETWEET                                      4 mins

The Buyer's Journey Has Changed. Has Your Sales & Marketing?
myfrugalbusiness.com/2017/03/buyers... <-- Read   #Marketing #Inbound
https://t.co/GHugeUdIqO

↩ Reply   ⟳ Retweet   ♥ Like   ✉ Forward   💬 Share   🔗 Link

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**Steve Haldi**
@AdworkzSteve
+ 🐦

Be ultra-selective in pursuing directory listings, as they are generally not an effective way    6 mins
to build #inbound #links. #SEO

↩ Reply   ⟳ Retweet   ♥ Like   ✉ Forward   💬 Share   🔗 Link

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**Enough Content**
@EnoughContent
+ 🐦

How to Design a #B2B Landing Page that Converts ow.ly/KjSy30aOE89 #marketing    6 mins
#inbound

↩ Reply   ⟳ Retweet   ♥ Like   ✉ Forward   💬 Share   🔗 Link

Help

# Get *Writing Website Content that Converts: The Inbound Marketer's Handbook*

Crafting website copy that sells isn't about yelling "BUY NOW" to anyone who will listen. To effectively attract and convert traffic, your copy has to meet SEO requirements, address your visitors' needs, be sharable, and encourage people to give up their contact information. Get the *Writing Website Content that Converts: The Inbound Marketer's Handbook* now!

**Download Now**

# Part 2: The State of Inbound Marketing in 2017

# The Top Priorities, Challenges, & Trends in Inbound Marketing This Year

Okay, so now that we've discussed the major themes and principles of inbound marketing methodology, let's take a look at where things stand today. As you know, the profession of online marketing is extremely fast-paced and ever-changing.

The following sections will provide you with a breakdown of the top priorities, challenges, and emerging trends in inbound marketing reported by over 6,000 companies who participated in the most recent edition of **HubSpot's annual "State of Inbound"** report.

# 1. Digital marketing is the new norm

Over the past few years, marketers have experienced a massive shift in the way their organizations communicate with their audiences. Having a website and a blog isn't enough to garner attention, and a salesperson is no longer the primary resource when seeking information for a potential purchase. According to a report by SiriusDecisions, 67% of the buyer's journey is done digitally.

Digital is quickly becoming the primary marketing focus for organizations of all sizes, and with so many marketers turning into digital experts, there's a lot more competition when creating digital content and strategies. Marketers are being trained in new methods, are adapting to the shift, and are learning how to figure out what's worth their money and time. This year, survey respondents expressed concern about resource allocation and how to manage the growing number of social platforms. Emerging social channels and trends are demanding more time and effort, which has many marketers trying to figure out what's priority for their organization's objectives.

**3 out of 4 marketers across the globe prioritize an inbound approach to marketing.**

# 2. Inbound marketing produces the most high quality leads

By now, most marketers know that inbound marketing is the most effective method for turning visitors into quality leads. In fact, HubSpot says this has been the case since 2006. Over the past ten years, we've seen companies who use outbound marketing strategies grow more and more unsatisfied with the results of their efforts. In this year's State of Inbound report, over half of participants who use outbound as their primary methodology say their strategies are ineffective, and once again, traditional advertising has been ranked as the most overrated marketing tactic.

Again this year, we're seeing marketers report that inbound is producing the most high quality leads for their sales teams, with self-source leads and outbound practices lagging far behind.
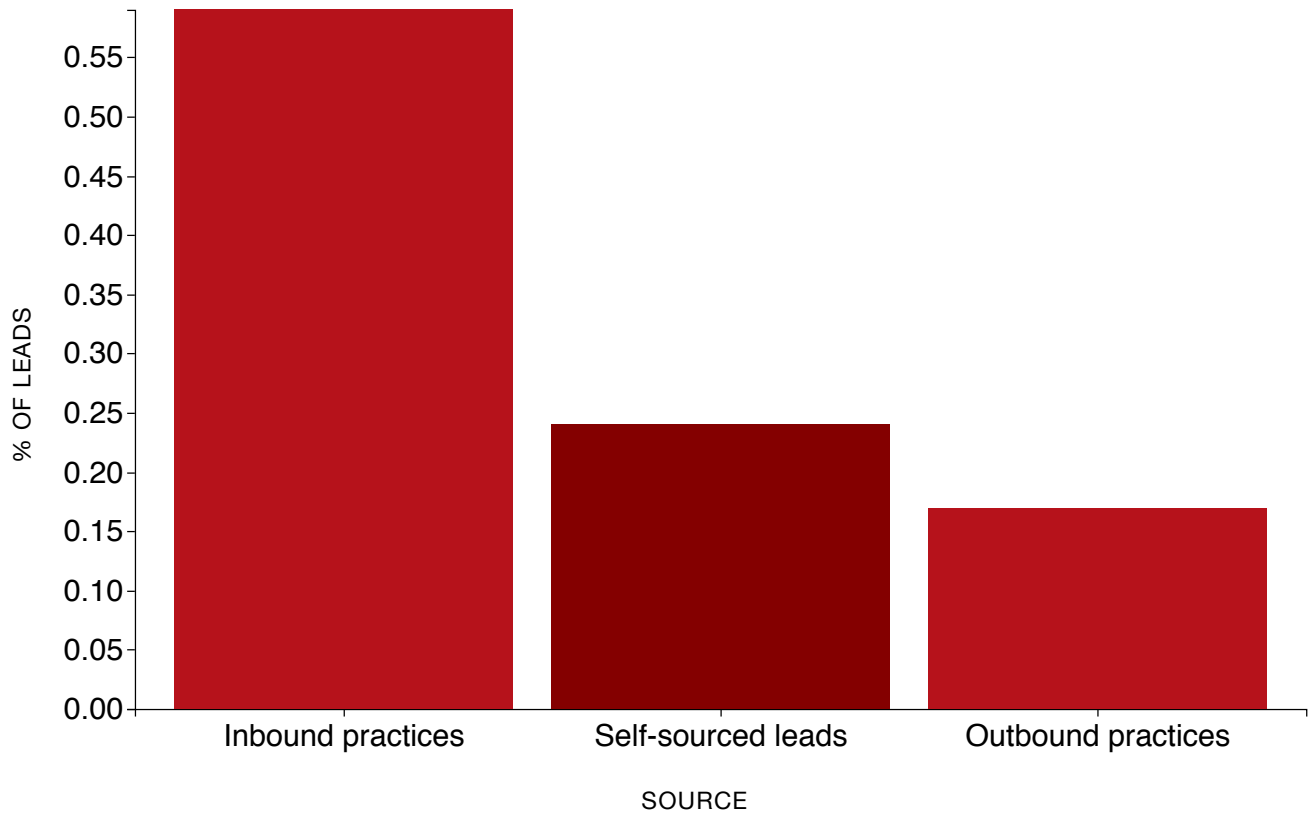
In 2016, 59% of respondents reported inbound practices acquired the most high quality leads, with 24% reporting self-sourced leads from sales team and 17% outbound practices.
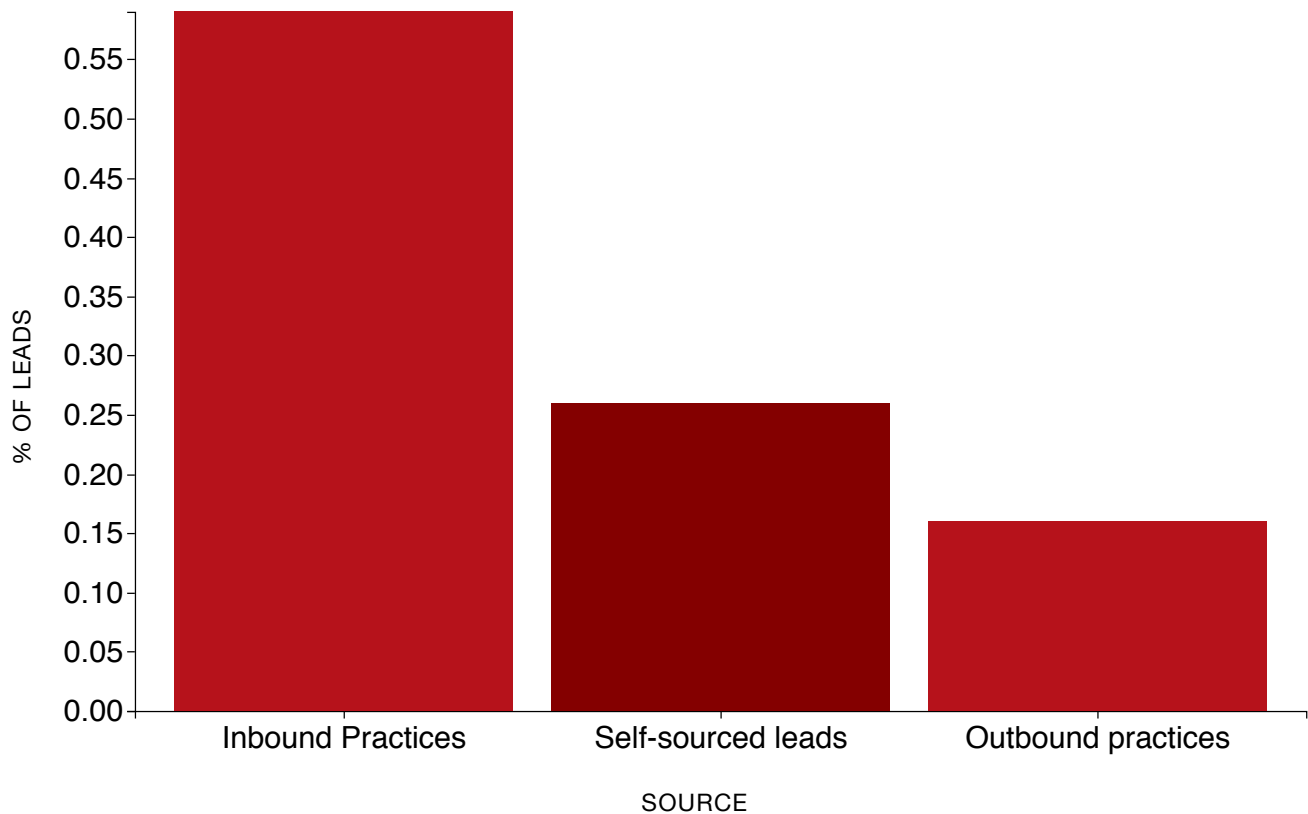
In 2017, 59% of respondents reported inbound practices acquired the most high quality leads, with 26% reporting self-sources leads from sales team and 16% outbound practices.

# 3. Inbound marketers are still seeking bigger budgets

Obtaining more budget is a top challenge marketers are facing in 2017. After all, there is a lot that goes into creating a comprehensive inbound marketing strategy. Content creation, design, development, software, optimization—the list goes on. It's no wonder that inbound marketers are requesting more budget to tackle the to-do list.

Seven out of ten survey participants say their inbound budgets are staying consistent or increasing in 2017, which is great news. Advocating for bigger marketing budgets will require you to prove positive ROI, which is done through a process called closed-loop reporting. When you're set up with inbound marketing tools like Google Analytics, data is collected about every visitor who reaches your website. Which pages did they spend time on? What offer pulled them in? Which buttons did they click? With this information, you can look back on a customer's history engaging with your content and determine the details the caused them to convert from a visitor to a lead, and eventually to a customer. Closed-loop reporting validate your claim that—that inbound is working, and you need more budget to accelerate customer acquisition.

Don't want to lose budget dollars? Again: show a positive ROI. Companies which showed a positive ROI were nine times less likely to see a lower budget the following year.

# 4. Inability to measure ROI is a roadblock

Over the past few years, proving ROI has consistently been reported as one of marketer's biggest challenges. Which campaigns are our prospects coming from? Which channels provide the best ROI? Where is our marketing budget most wisely invested? These are the questions on the minds of marketers, and many report being unable to find answers.

Almost half of marketers claim inbound marketing tactics produced higher ROI for their organizations, but that doesn't mean the other half is stuck on outbound. In fact, only about 10% of marketers believe outbound marketing tactics have proven to be the best option. The other 40% can't (or don't) calculate their ROI.

The inability to measure ROI is a growing pain for many marketers who need to prove their team's value. Without strategic and measurable marketing plans, teams will have trouble advocating for bigger marketing budgets.

# What are your company's biggest challenges?
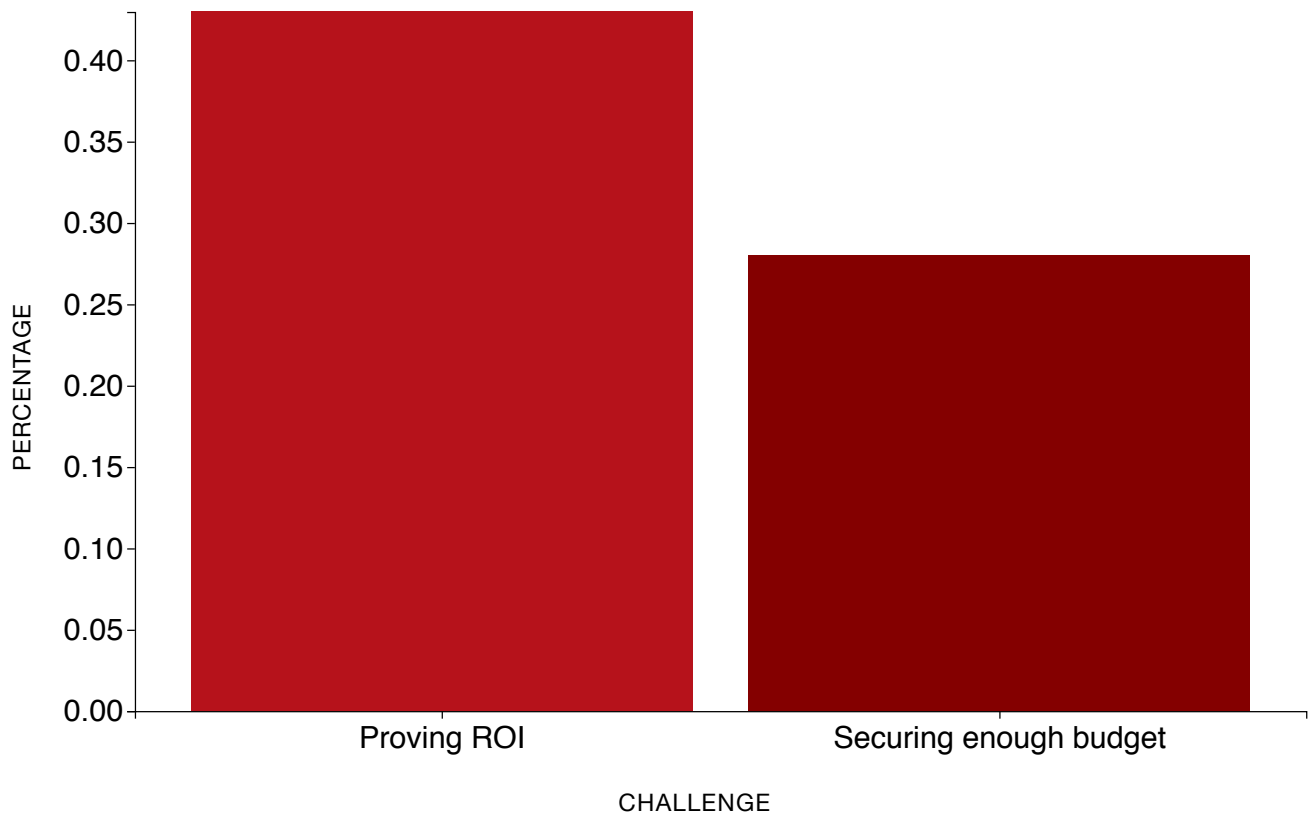


In 2016, 43% of marketers reported biggest challenge as proving ROI and 28% said securing enough budget.
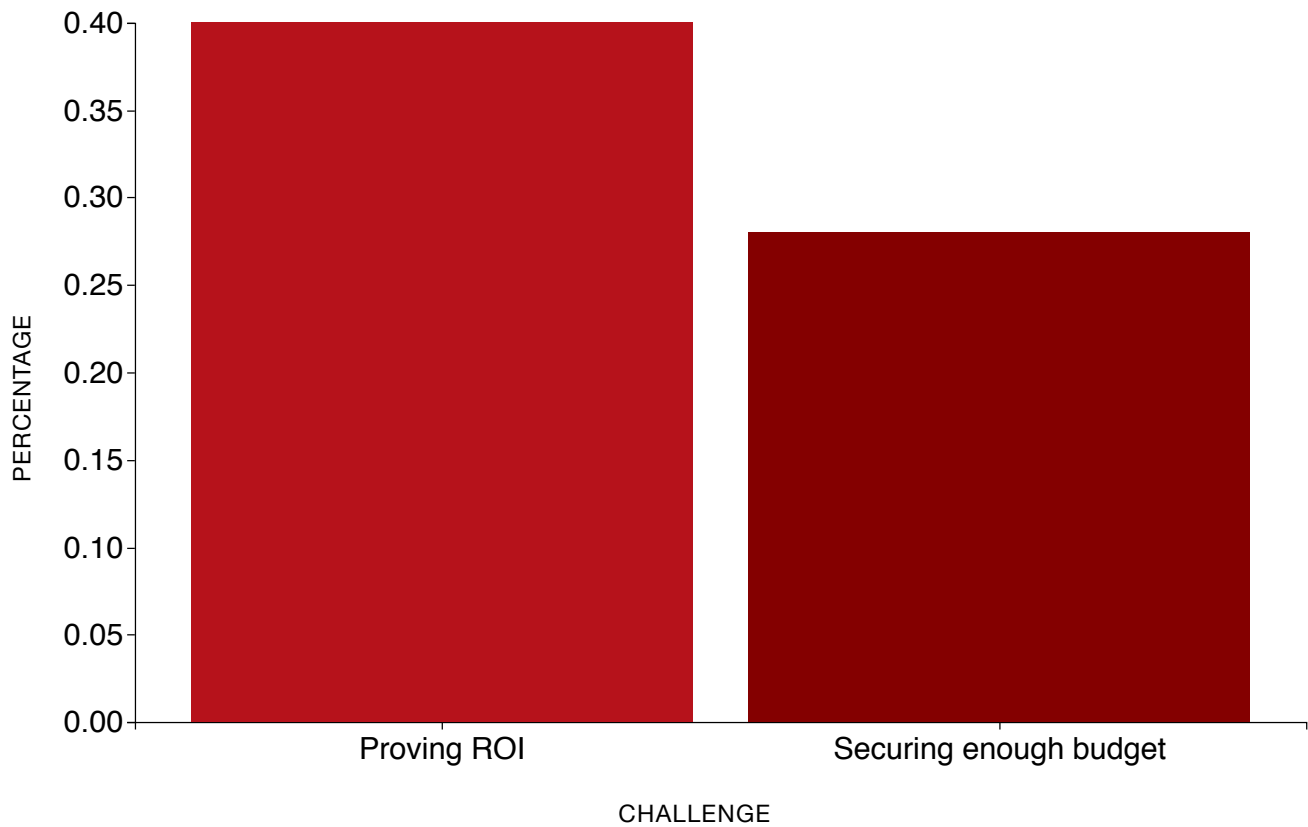
In 2017, 40% of marketers reported biggest challenge as proving ROI and 28% said securing enough budget.

# 5. Training teams is a growing challenge

As organizations continue to increase their investment and reliance on inbound initiatives, it's becoming more necessary to get team members up to snuff on inbound methodologies and tools. Team training is considered the biggest challenge by three times as many marketing executives as four years ago.
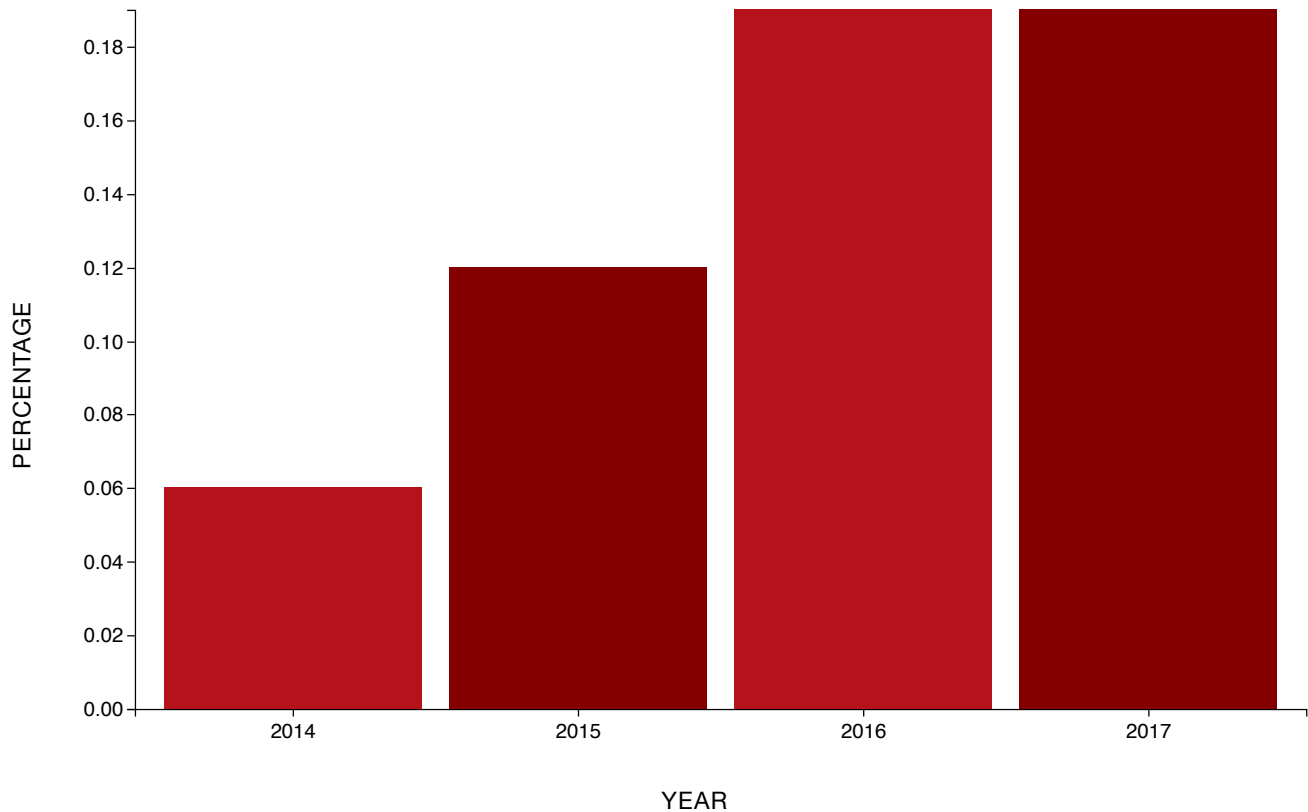
In 2014, 6% of marketing executives found team training to be their biggest inbound challenge. In 2015, 12% reported it as their biggest challenge. In 2016 and again in 2017, 19% reported team training as their biggest challenge.

# 6. Communication between senior execs and managers is lacking

The higher you rise in the ranks of your company, the more you'll think your marketing strategy is effective. C-level executives are much more satisfied with their organization's marketing activities, whereas individual contributors rank as much less confident. Maybe it's the absence of clear, measurable results that's causing managers to question their initiatives. Even more concerning, maybe performance is actually low and senior executives aren't aware of it. Either way, there's a major disconnect between senior execs and managers, and bigger business problems are bound to develop when communication is foggy.

## Do you find your marketing strategy effective?
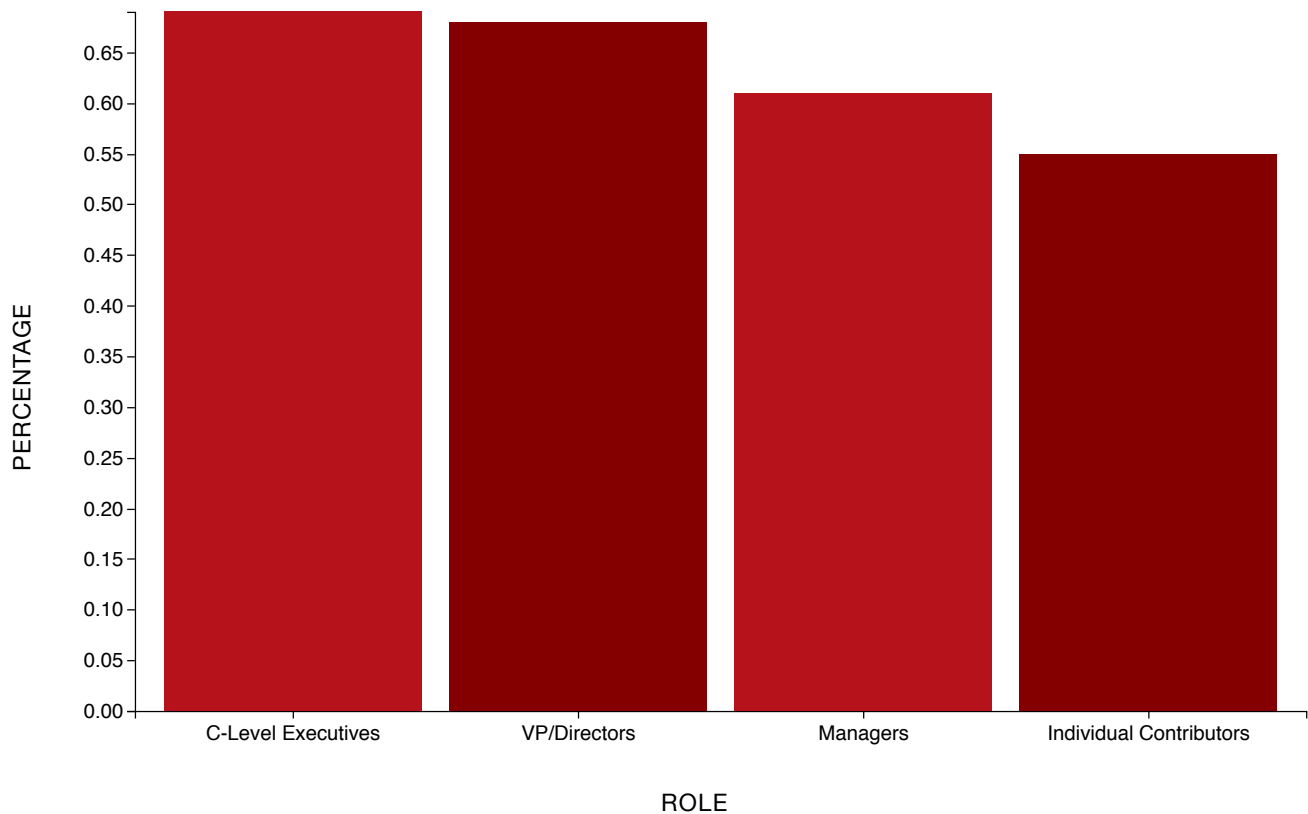
When asked if their marketing strategy is effective, the following said yes: 69% of C-level Executives, 68% of VP/directors, 61% of managers and 55% of individual contributors.

# 7. A tight relationship between marketing and sales equals success

It's come up frequently over the past few years, and 2017 proves it's a growing concept: alignment of an organization's sales and marketing teams results in better performance. Half of the organizations surveyed claim their marketing and sales teams are generally aligned, and the number of teams with a formal SLA (service level agreement) in place is increasing. Participants whose organizations have a SLA in place are three times more likely to believe their strategy is effective compared to those with misaligned organizations. The relationship between marketing and sales has always been important, but with social selling becoming a powerful force in the sales world, it's even more significant.

# 8. It's no longer only executives that believe in the power of social selling

Social selling is the process of researching, connecting and interacting with prospects and customers on social networks to develop and nurture your relationship with them. Just two years ago in the 2015 report, social selling was considered by marketers to be more hype than a realistic tactic. Executives were ranking social selling as a priority, but non-executives still weren't seeing the value in the process. One year later in the 2016 report, 28% of marketers listed it as their top sales priority, and in this year's report, social selling has grown to be the third highest sales priority for global businesses. According to Sales For Life, companies that focus on social selling report a 63% increase in sales revenue versus only 41% of those who don't. Social selling is a strategy that's becoming more important for employees at all levels, as sales and marketing teams are looking for new ways to get noticed while engaging leads.
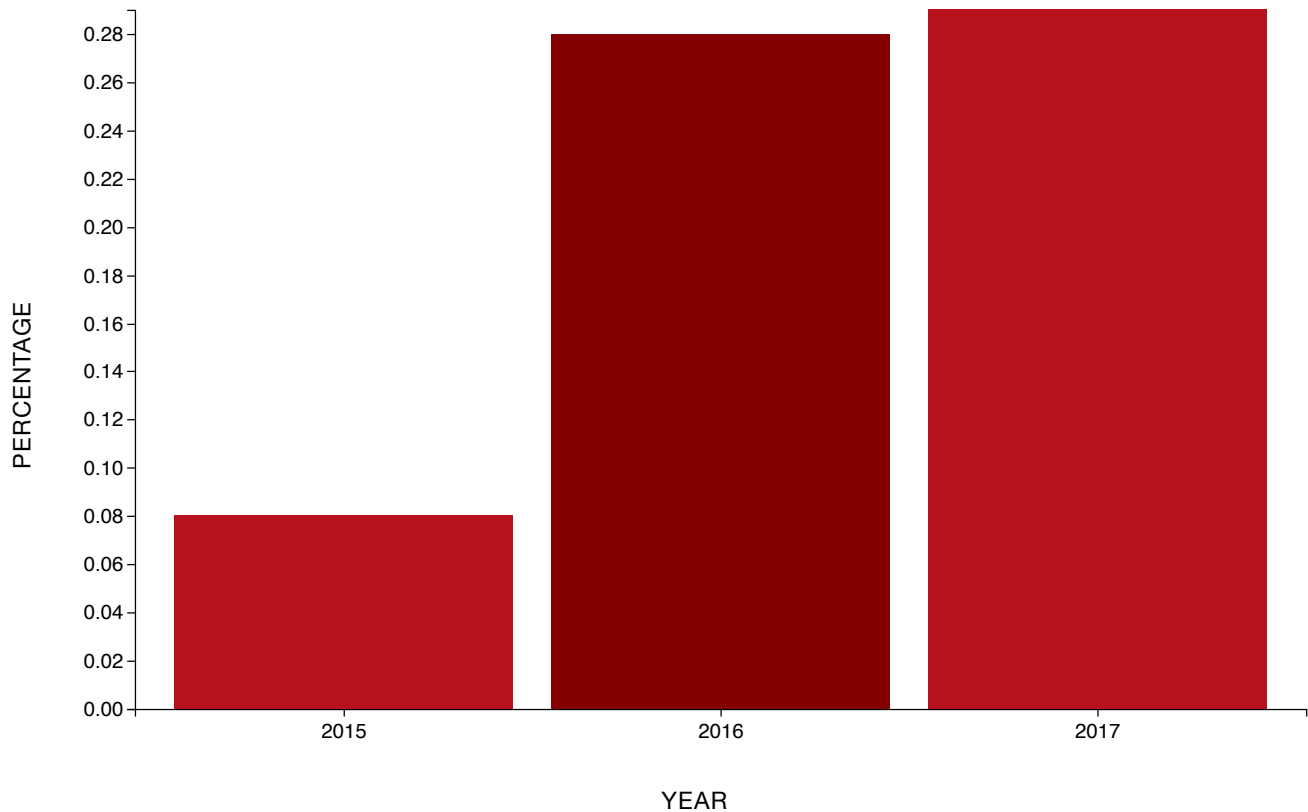
Social selling has grown as a priority since 2015, with 8% of marketers reporting it as a top priority in 2015, 28% in 2016 and 29% in 2017.

# 9. Want to generate a great ROI? Check your numbers

Analytics is to a healthy marketing budget as exercise is to a healthy body. HubSpot's 2016 State of Inbound report found that proving ROI was a common challenge for marketers, with those participants reporting they lacked the tools and technology necessary to track concrete results. The 2017 report doesn't show much difference, with marketers still struggling to measure and report ROI to prove value in their actions. To prove ROI, there's no way around it—you need to check your numbers. Marketers who check their analytics at least three times a week are over 20% more likely to achieve positive ROI. Furthermore, companies that continually measure ROI are 20% more likely to increase their budget year-over-year than folks who don't track the return of their investment in inbound marketing.

The need to check analytics isn't a trend that's going anywhere anytime soon. It may seem obvious, but in order to evaluate your ROI in inbound marketing and gain a bigger budget each year, you have to obsessively measure your results.

This might seem obvious, but in order to evaluate your return on investment in inbound marketing and gain a bigger budget each year, you have to obsessively measure your results.

(Source: **State of Inbound 2015**, P30)

# 10. Marketing automation software goes hand-in-hand with positive ROI

HubSpot's 2015 research indicated that top inbound marketers are use marketing automation software in some form or another. Specifically, those who saw a higher marketing ROI in 2014 versus 2013 were more likely to have used marketing automation software than not. 2017's report shows that marketing automation is still a top priority for marketers, and that participants are still seeing the value in marketing automation software and the results it helps deliver.
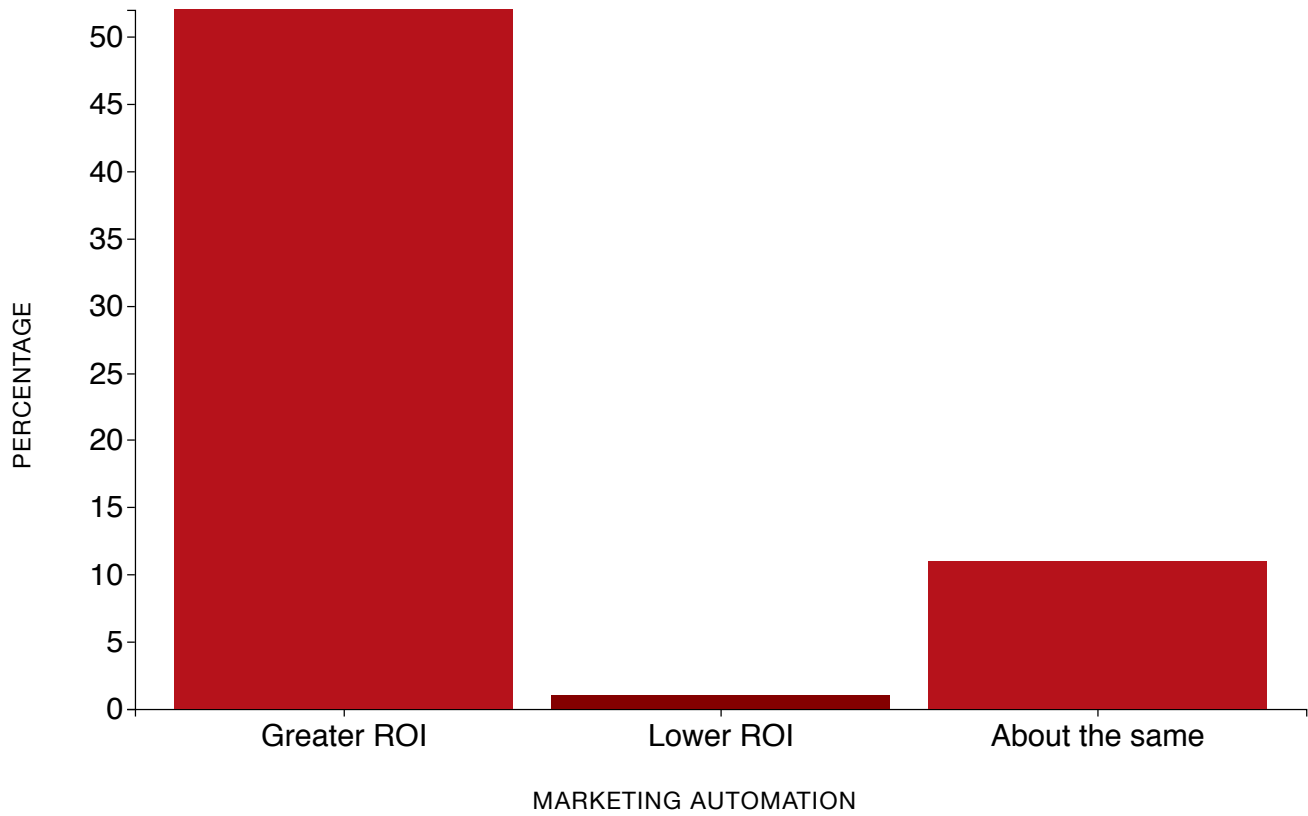
In 2017, 52% of respondents reported marketing automation software resulted in higher ROI than the previous year.
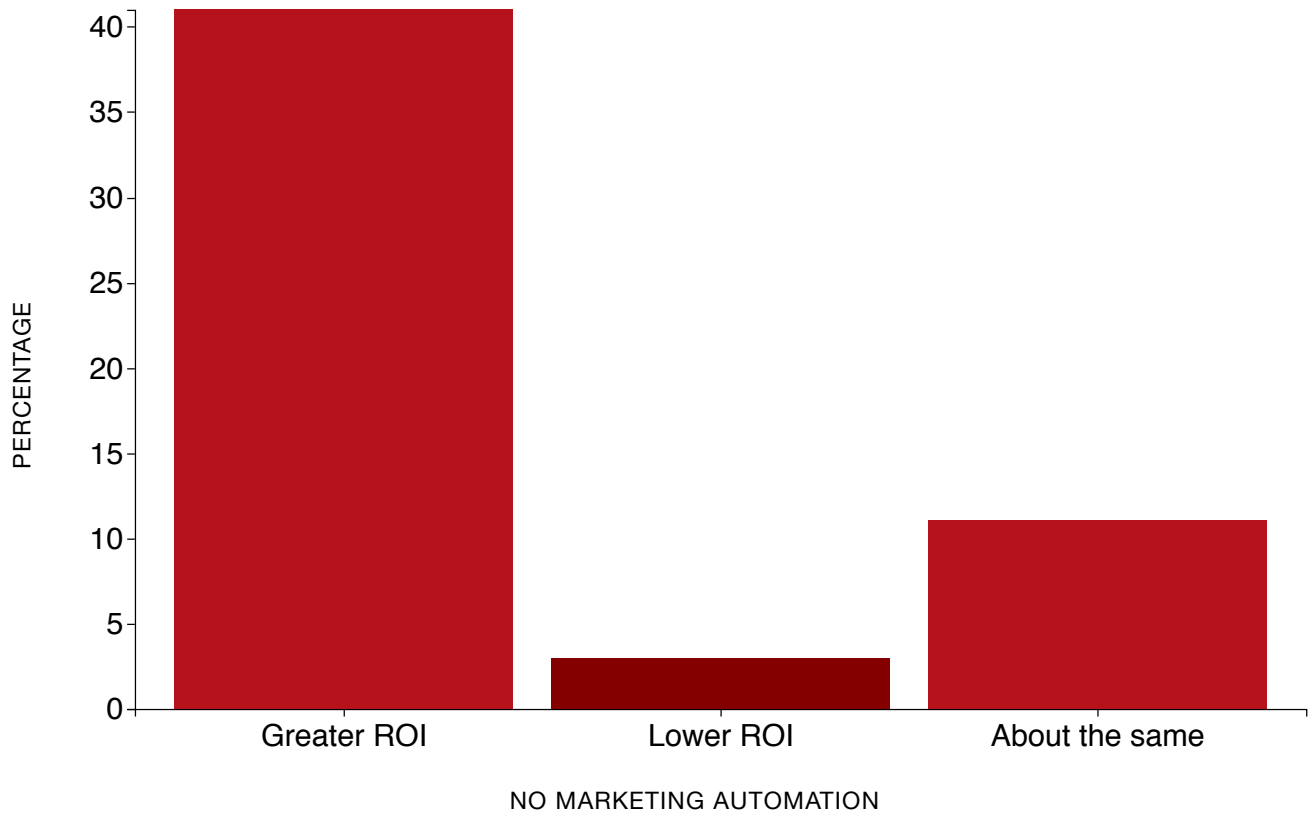
Just 41% of respondents reported that no marketing automation software resulted in higher ROI than the previous year.

In review, here's a recap of this year's most prominent inbound marketing trends, challenges, & opportunities:

1. Digital marketing is the new norm.

2. Inbound marketing produces the most high quality leads.

3. Inbound marketers are still seeking bigger budgets.

4. Inability to measure ROI is a roadblock.

5. Training teams is a growing challenge.

6. Communication between senior execs and managers is lacking.

7. A tight relationship between marketing and sales equals success.

8   It's no longer only executives that believe in the power of social selling.

9   Keeping track of analytics, metrics, and returns will increase your likelihood of getting a positive ROI and higher budget.

10  Using marketing automation software will lead to better ROI and a bigger budget.

# Part 3: The Core Components of Successful Inbound Marketing Strategies

As we've seen from the latest research, implementing a marketing automation system and monitoring analytics are key to achieving high ROI from inbound marketing. Of course, you'll need to understand, execute on, and implement a thoughtful inbound marketing strategy to get data worth analyzing or activities worth automating.

Not every inbound marketing strategy is the same, but they should all begin with similar foundational elements. Think of building your inbound strategy like building a car: the features will be different (and some will be optional), but you still need four wheels and an engine to make it go.

To get right down to the basics, you'll need thoughtful, well-researched content, a place for it to live, and a plan to make it work for you by guiding potential buyers from awareness to purchase. In the following section, we will discuss the key components of successful inbound marketing strategies and help you lay the foundation of a comprehensive plan for your organization.

# 1. Persona Focused, Search Optimized Content

In order for your inbound marketing strategy to be successful, you're going to need a shrewd game plan for developing buyer personas, creating targeted content, and promoting it to your target audience. The more specific you are about who you want in the crosshairs of your content marketing efforts, the more likely you'll be to attract that type of buyer.

> **"Before you ever start publishing or even writing website content and blog posts, you should identify exactly which target prospects you are speaking to. Selecting a target buyer persona for each piece of content is crucial to delivering valuable content and associated offers that ultimately influence lead conversions."**
>
> **Nick Salvatoriello**, *Principal Inbound Professor at HubSpot*

If you aren't familiar with exactly what a buyer persona is and why they are so important, here is a quick definition:

*A **buyer persona** is a semi-fictional representation of your ideal customer based on market research and real data about your existing customers.*

# Sample Sally

**BACKGROUND:**
- Head of Human Resources
- Worked at the same company for 10 years; worked her way up from HR Associate
- Married with 2 children (10 and 8)

**DEMOGRAPHICS:**
- Skews female
- Age 30-45
- Dual HH Income: $140,000
- Suburban

**IDENTIFIERS:**
- Calm demeanour
- Probably has an assistant screening calls
- Asks to receive collateral mailed/printed

Well researched buyer personas can provide tremendous structure and insight for your company. A detailed buyer persona will help you determine where to focus your time, guide sales and marketing initiatives, and allow for alignment across the organization. When creating your buyer persona(s), consider including customer demographics, behavior patterns, motivations, marketing triggers, and goals. The more detailed you are, the better.

According to the State of Buyer Personas 2016 by Customer Think, over the past two years, 60% of marketers have developed their first ever buyer personas, and 72% said they were either familiar or very familiar with buyer persona development. This is a huge jump from just a few years ago. Although the adoption of buyer persona creation has grown, there's still a little confusion about how to create them and recognize their value. Almost 70% of respondents said they were confused about what buyer personas were, and only 30% of marketers using buyer personas found the tactic effective.

The problem isn't that buyer personas themselves aren't useful; the problem is that marketers aren't spending enough time conducting proper research. Here are a few steps you can follow to ensure your buyer personas are thorough enough to serve as the basis for a thoughtful inbound marketing strategy:

## Conduct interviews

As you begin researching your buyer personas, set up interviews with real prospects and customers. These discussions will help you uncover relevant background information about your personas, as well as common goals, challenges, pain points, behaviors, and marketing triggers. You can also interview members of your internal teams to get their perspective on what constitutes an ideal buyer for your organization.

## Leverage analytics & customer data

The data that you're most likely already collecting in your sales and marketing platforms can be a very effective way to learn more about your buyer personas. By looking at trends in your data, you can uncover important signals which indicate when leads are highly engaged, what makes certain leads qualified or unqualified to buy, or what characteristics your existing customer base share.
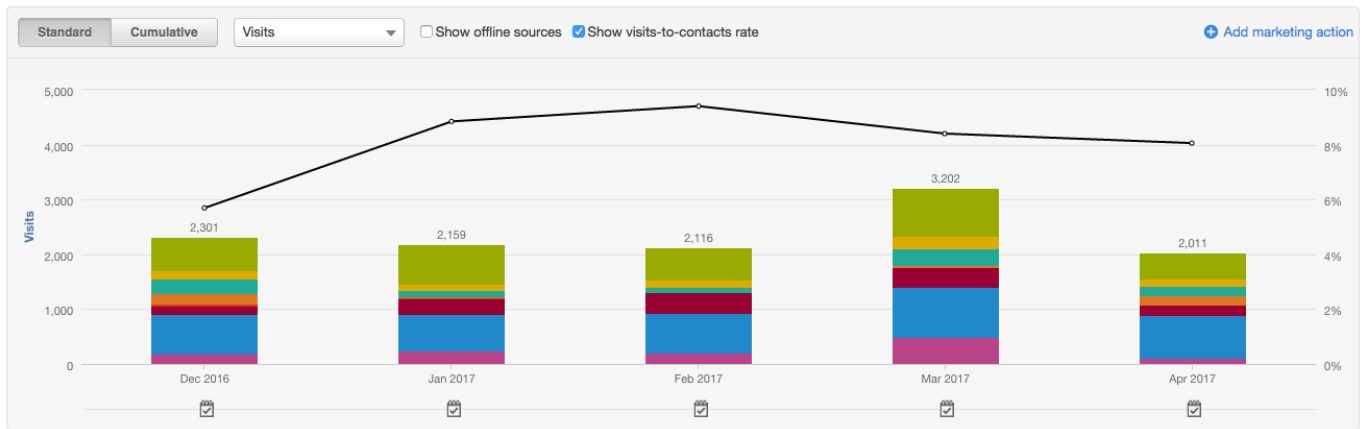
# Map out the buyer's journey

The path to purchase is different for every product and service. By creating a clear visualization of your target buyer's path through every stage of the decision-making process—from awareness through to purchase—you'll be able to better align your marketing efforts with their objectives along the way. These visual representations of a buyer's path to purchase are commonly referred to as customer journey maps.

# Identify content requirements

With a clear view of who your ideal buyer persona is, and how they progress from general awareness of your offering to ultimately making a purchase, you can begin to map out your content marketing strategy. By conducting keyword research about the topics which you've outlined in your customer journey maps, you'll be able to identity opportunities to create persona-focused content which will attract your ideal buyers as they actively research your product category.

# Get the *Buyer Persona Development Template*

Buyer personas are a crucial component for developing an effective inbound marketing strategy. This free ***Buyer Persona Development Template*** will help you create well-researched buyer personas so your sales and marketing department will have the information they need to reach and engage your ideal customers with content that speaks directly to them. Get your template today!

**Download Now**

# 2. A Conversion-Centered Website Experience

Imagine doubling the number of unique site visitors your site attracts each month. Sounds great, doesn't it? It could be—but only if your site is designed to convert those visitors. If it's not and they don't, your extra visitors aren't doing you any favors.

What if you didn't attract any extra site visitors, but instead increased your on-site conversions by just a few percentage points? Here's what that might look like:

| | Current Site Performance | Scenario 1: Double site traffic | Scenario 2: Conversion rate increased to 4% |
|---|---|---|---|
| Traffic (visitors/month) | 50,000 | 100,000 | 50,000 |
| Conversion Rates | 1.8% | 1.8% | 4% |
| Leads (# of leads generated/month) | 900 | 1800 | 2000 |

As you can see, improving your site's conversion rate can actually generate more leads than a 200% increase in traffic. This is why a conversion-centered website is so important—and so lucrative.

So, how do you build a conversion-centered web experience? You'll need the following:

## Conversion-centered design

Conversion-centered design (or CCD) involves using psychological triggers and visual cues to focus a page viewer's attention on completing a specific action. This is most important when building and designing landing pages, where the only goal is to encourage your site visitor to convert.

Outlining the principles of conversion-centered design deserves a guide of its own, and Oli Gardner, co-founder of Unbounce, **happens to have written an excellent one**. If you apply these principles to the design of your landing pages (and, ideally, your entire site), you'll see better results than you would have pouring that effort into simply attracting more unique site visitors.

## Conversion-centered copy

Writing killer copy for your conversion paths is critical. The average visitor only stays on a page for ten to 20 seconds, so you need to make it count.

Using the five most persuasive words in the English language—You, Free, Because, Instantly, and New—really works. So does writing amazing, attention-snatching headlines which clearly communicate something valuable or beneficial for your visitor.

Keeping it simple is key (many individuals possess a propensity to eschew flowery, redundant, convoluted, labyrinthine, redundant copy), as is making it scan-friendly by breaking your content into chunks which can be divided by headings, subheadings, and bold text. Bullet-point lists, photos, and whitespace are also awesome for breaking up long-form content.

## Contextual marketing

Contextual marketing means serving visitors up content based on set criteria such as their recent browsing behavior, location, device used to access your site, or lifecycle stage. Additionally, once a lead has converted on your website, you can use personalization based on their List Membership or Lifecycle Stage.

If you're using HubSpot, you have the benefit of a number of advanced tools to help you with contextual marketing. If the tools at your disposal aren't quite that high-tech, you can still improve the context of your calls-to-action by aligning the offer with on-page content, considering your buyer persona's goals and purchasing criteria, figuring out where a page visitor might be in the sales cycle, and so on.



## Data-driven conversion rate optimization

An inbound marketer's work is never done. Creating thoughtfully designed, well-written, and contextually appropriate conversion points is awesome—now, you need to continually improve on your efforts.

CRO is done by statistical testing and continuous iteration to a page's content and design. It's time-consuming, but it will make your marketing more successful. You can use an affordable CRO software tool such as Visual Website Optimizer to quickly and easily test landing pages and other site pages and elements.

Just in case you're not familiar with split testing, here's a very basic primer: if you had two possible calls-to-action and wanted to figure out which version converted the best, you could run a split (or A/B) test on the variations. Half your site visitors would see variant A, and the other half would see variant B. Once your test is over, you tally the results to determine which one performed best.

Advanced CRO tactics can include multivariate testing, also possible with Visual Website Optimizer. Multivariate testing is a technique for testing a hypothesis in which multiple variables are modified. The goal of multivariate testing is to determine which combination of variations performs the best out of all of the possible combinations.
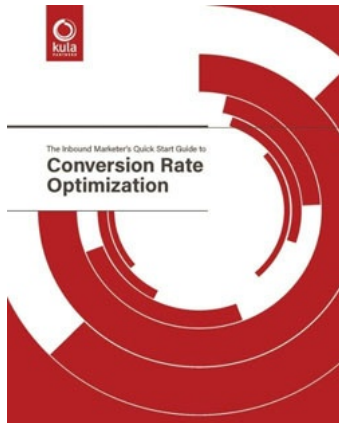
## Get the *The Inbound Marketer's Quick Start Guide to CRO*!

Designed to help savvy inbound marketers learn the basics of conversion rate optimization, this guide will outline the basics of CRO, how to adopt a structured approach to testing, and outline which types of test to tackle first. Get this gude today!

**Download Now**

# 3. Targeted Lead Nurturing

Most of the leads arriving at your website are not ready to make a purchase—they're simply looking for information. Getting them to convert is a win but, if you don't do anything to nurture them beyond that first conversion, you may as well be tossing their information in the garbage.

Companies that excel at lead nurturing generate 50% more sales—and it costs them 33% less to close them (Source: Forrester). 67% of B2B marketers credit a 10% increase in sales opportunities to lead nurturing tactics, with 15% seeing opportunities increase by at least 30% (Source: DemandGen) Most marketers have realized the potential and opportunity lead nurturing provides to businesses, and almost half have been implementing lead nurturing campaigns for over two years. With that said, there's still a lot of room to refine lead nurturing tactics and outshine the competition. The other half are still new and experimenting with what works for them, with 20% of those marketers having only adopted tactics over the past year. (Source: DemandGen) With a lot of fresh opportunity still on the table, now's the time to start developing your lead nurturing strategy.

But you don't just want to do any lead nurturing, do you? You want to do great, ultratargeted lead nurturing which will vault you over your competition. "Companies with mature lead generation and management practices have a 9.3% higher sales quota achievement rate" (Source: HubSpot).

Here's how to get started with lead nurturing:

# Develop targeted content

One-size-fits-all lead nurturing doesn't exist. You have to strategically nurture your leads to see inbound success. Marketers struggle with this—in 2014, **Forrester Research reported** that 33% of B2B marketers said "targeted delivery of content" was their biggest lead nurturing challenge.

To better understand how to target your content, you need to have a deep understanding of your buyer personas. Imagine what they will need at each stage of their buyer's journey to naturally draw them closer to the bottom of the sales funnel. Align your content with their anticipated questions and goals along their journey. Then, implement marketing automation to deliver the right content at the right time.

**Inbound Marketing for Orthodontists: 5 Key Strategies to Take a Bite Out of Your Competition**

GET THIS FREE GUIDE AND LEARN THE SECRETS OF ORTHODONTIC MARKETING SUCCESS WITH INBOUND
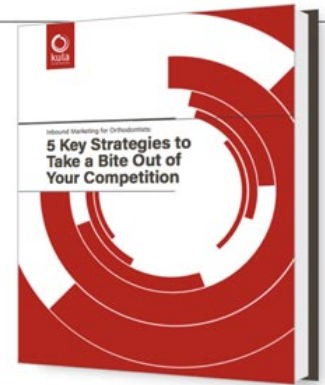
# Create a broader (and better) communication plan

Each buyer's journey is unique, but research from the **Marketing Lead Management Report** indicates that prospects who ultimately become customers receive an average of ten marketing touches from the top of the funnel to the bottom.

Lots of marketers getting started with lead nurturing think ten touches is too many. The **2015 Lead Nurturing Benchmark Study** from Demand Gen suggests that half of marketers include fewer than five marketing touches in their lead nurturing programs.

Instead of relying solely on marketing email communication, expand your lead nurturing efforts to multiple channels—social media, blogging, timely phone calls, paid retargeting, and dynamic website content (contextual marketing, remember?!) all have a place in your effective lead nurturing program.

# Know which leads are likely to pay off

68% of successful marketers say lead scoring is the most effective tactic to drive revenue from lead nurturing efforts (Source: **2013 Lead Generation Marketing Effectiveness Study**). That's a pretty compelling statistic, so everyone in the lead nurturing game must be doing it, right?

Wrong—MarketingSherpa says that only 21% of B2B marketers are using any kind of lead scoring system as part of their marketing efforts. Here's another way you can gain a serious advantage over your competition.

Lead scoring is easiest (and most effective) when you have a marketing automation platform doing the heavy lifting for you. With a little setup effort, you can begin to rank each lead against a scale which represents the perceived value of each prospect to your organization. The ranking of each lead is determined by numeric values assigned to certain browsing behaviors, conversion events, email engagements, or social media interactions.

Once you're assigning lead scores, you can use the data to determine which leads should be immediately followed up with by your sales department, and which need a little more nurturing along their journey.

By the way, don't wait to get started—the odds of a lead entering the sales process are 21 times greater if they're contacted within five minutes of conversion versus 30 minutes. Every minute counts.
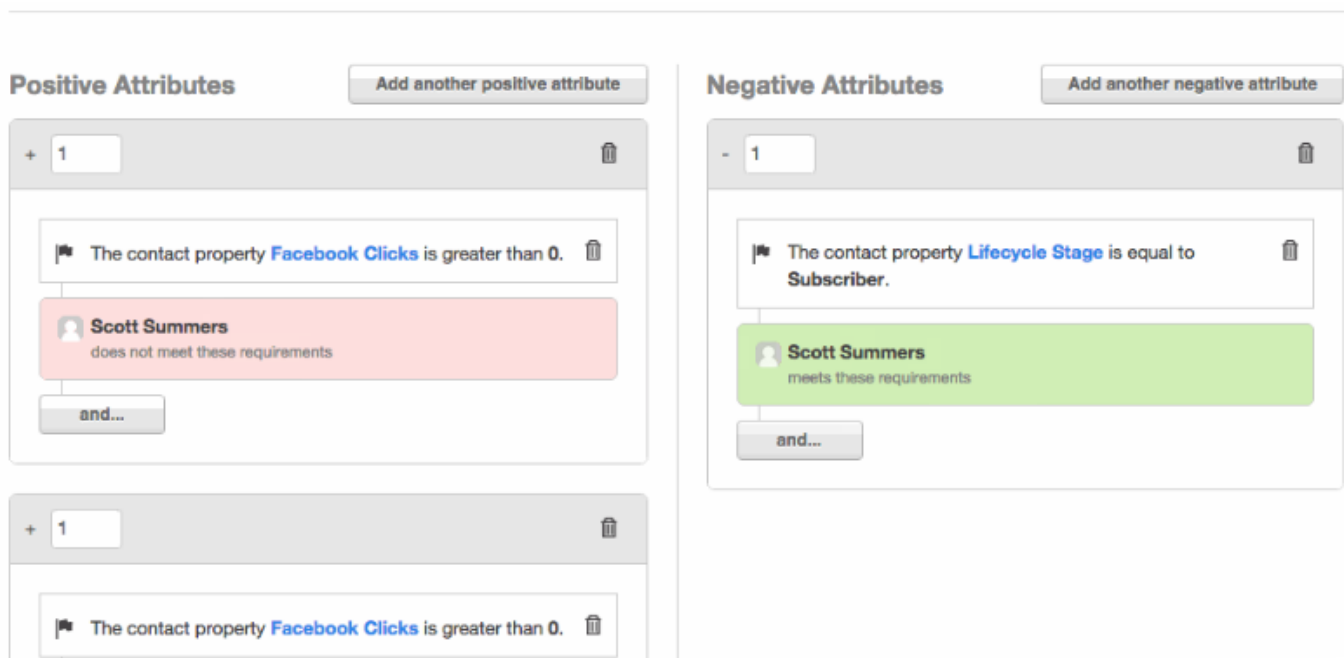


# Figure out what's working—and what isn't

Your lead nurturing efforts (like all of your marketing efforts) should be measured and monitored. Like your site content, you'll want to iterate and optimize your lead nurturing content over time to maximize its effectiveness.

Click through rates and other engagement metrics, conversion rates, cost of customer acquisition, and funnel velocity are all excellent ways to measure the effectiveness of your lead nurturing campaign. Figure out where lead interest is dropping off and adjust your tactics accordingly.

**Get Started on Your Inbound Strategy Now**

# 4. A Shared Commitment to Sales & Marketing Alignment

Organizations who've adopted inbound marketing quickly come to understand the importance of sales and marketing alignment. Research shows that well-aligned teams close a higher percentage of leads, hit their quotas more consistently, retain more customers, and grow their revenues significantly more quickly.

The key to aligning your sales and marketing teams for inbound marketing is to agree upon a mutual service level agreement (SLA). The sales and marketing SLA is essentially a contract between the two departments that defines common terms and aligns goals.

For marketing, this means defining how a lead needs to be qualified before it is ready to be handed to the sales team, and the number of such qualified leads marketing needs to generate each month. For sales, the SLA describes things like how quickly sales reps must attempt to contact a new lead from marketing, how many times each sales rep must attempt to contact that lead and the expected lead-to-customer conversion rate.

Here's what goes into great sales and marketing team alignment:

- Shared goals which are mutually agreed upon and easily measured.

- Clear definitions for lead and sales lifecycle criteria.

- Clear reporting and communications.

## Shared goals

Sales teams are accustomed to working toward a shared target revenue goal. In the past, marketers haven't done the same, simply because there wasn't always a reliable method of tying marketing activities to the generation of revenue. Now, with closed-loop analytics, marketers can set easily measured numerical goals. These goals could include total number of leads generated, number of qualified leads delivered to sales, or a percentage of revenue—whichever makes the most sense to the overall goals of your organization.

By "signing up" for a number, each team will be more inclined to hold each other accountable for generating results. There will be a mutual understanding of the pressure of hitting quota month after month.

## Clear definitions for lifecycle criteria

A steady stream of inbound leads is great—but if those leads aren't ultimately proving to be valuable, you'll end up frustrating your sales team. Coming to a mutual agreement with regard to lead lifecycle criteria is crucial.

With your sales team, work to define exactly which criteria must be met in order for a lead to become marketing qualified, to become sales qualified, and to be marked as a sales opportunity. Your internal definitions may vary, but here are the standard criteria suggested by HubSpot.

**Lead:** Leads have shown more interest in what you offer than subscribers have. Typically a lead has filled out a form with more than just an email address, often for some sort of content-based offer on your website. We see companies use the lead lifecycle stage for what we think of as general, broadly appealing, or top of the funnel offers. As each lead demonstrates a higher degree of sales readiness and qualification, they will move to further stages.

**Marketing Qualified Lead:** Marketing Qualified Leads, commonly known as MQLs, are those people who have raised their hands (metaphorically speaking) and identified themselves as more deeply engaged, sales-ready contacts than your usual leads, but who have not yet become fully fledged opportunities. Ideally, you should only allow certain, designed forms to trigger the promotion of a lead to the MQL stage, specifically those that gate bottom of the funnel offers like demo requests, buying guides, and other sales-ready calls to action.

**Sales Qualified Lead:** Sales Qualified Leads are those that your sales team has accepted as worthy of a direct sales follow up. Using this stage will help your sales and marketing teams stay firmly on the same page in terms of the quality and volume of leads that you are handing over to your sales team.

**Opportunity:** Opportunities are contacts who have become real sales opportunities in your CRM.

**Customers:** This is everybody's favorite lifecycle stage: an actual, paying customer.

Come to an agreement upon when and how leads will be handed off from marketing to sales. Conversely, if sales-qualified leads go stale or become unresponsive, agree upon how they will be handed back to marketing for additional nurturing.

# Clear reporting and communications

As much as possible, open your sales and marketing reporting dashboards to your entire team. Let the marketing team see how sales is trending, and vice versa. Doing so will help create a results-driven culture.

It's also important to hold regular check-in sessions where both sales and marketing can report on their progress (or anything which may be hindering their progress). To begin try holding a monthly kick-off session and a mid-month check-in meeting. In these sessions, review the quality of leads being generated by marketing, recap the most common objections and questions being raised by leads, and discuss ways to improve both your sales and marketing processes.

## Watch "What is a Inbound Sales Process?" by HubSpot CRO, Mark Roberge
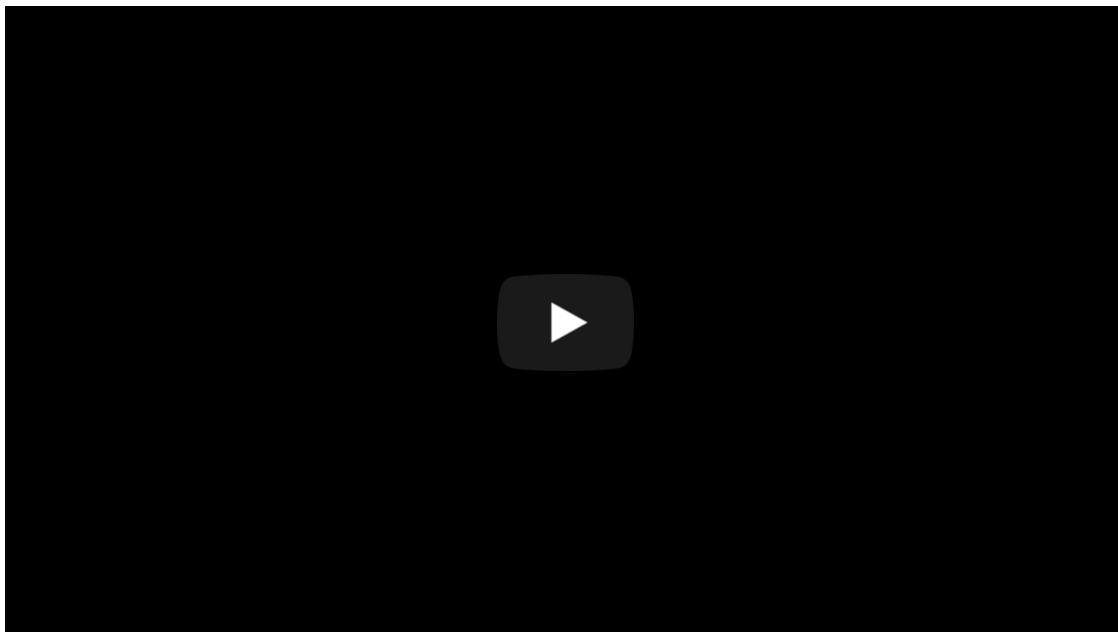


This idea of a feedback loop between sales and marketing naturally leads us to:

# 5. Full Customer Lifecycle Sales and Marketing Tools

Being able to measure your marketing strategy's effect on the bottom line is an excellent way to prove ROI and justify your budget (and win additional budget). Implementing closed-loop reporting directly ties sales results to marketing activities. Rather than measuring your success based on metrics like impressions and clicks— which don't necessarily translate to sales—you can now measure your success by showing how (and which) marketing activities led to closing more customers and generating more revenue.

When you "close the loop" by integrating your marketing analytics software with your CRM sales data, marketing becomes just as much of a mathematical equation as it is an art. The easiest way to close the loop is by making your website the central hub for all your marketing activities—organic and paid search, social media marketing, referral links, and even offline campaigns. Here's how that would work using HubSpot:

# Step 1

A visitor arrives at your site, and a cookie is set on his / her referral source.

# Step 2

The visitor browses your site, and the cookie tracks his / her activity including pages viewed and links clicked.

# Step 3

The visitor converts into a lead by filling out a lead capture form. Their submission information is paired with their previous browsing history and activities.

# Step 4

The lead—with the help of sales—becomes a customer, and the original source of their referral is credited.

Integrating your marketing software and CRM platform doesn't have to cause a headache. HubSpot's free CRM platform is already integrated with their marketing software, requiring zero effort on your end. They also offer easy integrations with a number of popular CRM platforms, including Salesforce, SugarCRM, Zoho, Netsuite, Pipedrive, and Base.

Don't let unsynchronized data prevent you from proving the effectiveness of your marketing efforts. Closing the loop enables a strong results-driven relationship between sales and marketing.

Here's a quick review of the Core Components of Successful Inbound Marketing Strategies:

1. Persona focused, search optimized content

2. A website experience built to convert

3. Targeted lead nurturing

4. Sales and marketing alignment

5. Closed-loop sales and marketing tools

## Get *The Epic Guide to Creating an Inbound Marketing Strategy*

In **The Epic Guide to Creating an Inbound Marketing Strategy**, you'll learn to evaluate your baseline sales & marketing performance, pap your customer's decision journey, set proper marketing goals and more. Download it now to get proven advice in over 15,000+ words from more than 20 industry experts.

**Download Now**

# Part 4: How to Get Your Executive Team On Board with Inbound

Perhaps your company has never committed marketing dollars to a comprehensive inbound approach before. Or perhaps you're coming into a position where previous attempts at inbound marketing didn't meet expectations for ROI. How can you convince your executive team—especially your CFO—that inbound is a sound investment?

> **"Getting senior management to believe and invest in something that does not have a record is tricky because top management usually wants reassurance and historical figures to base their decisions on. I believe the most successful brands and CMOs will be the ones that dare to believe in the opportunities that evolve from new media and have the guts to walk where no one has tread before."**
>
> Ann Ystén, ***Perfect Fools***

Here are a few ideas and resources to help you lay out a rock-solid business case for inbound that will get even the most conservative of investors to say "Let's do this thing".

# 1. Discuss the drastic shifts in buyer behavior we're encountering

Unless your company leadership have been hiding in a bunker, they're aware that the internet is a huge part of the way people make buying decisions these days. What they may not fully understand is the opportunity for long-term customer relationships behind the inbound approach.

Here are a few facts to share:

As of 2016, **2 billion people worldwide own a smartphone**. This creates an unprecedented opportunity for brands to connect with their prospects and customers in an immediate, meaningful way. Brands can literally get into their targets' back pockets!

The average cost per lead is consistently lower using the inbound approach. In HubSpot's 2014 State of Inbound report, their survey of 3,500+ marketers found that for a mediumsized B2B company, the cost per lead was over three times greater for outbound vs. inbound marketing tactics.

The goal of inbound marketing is to draw customers in and focus on building stronger loyalty and long-term customer engagement. The key? High quality, relevant content that guides prospects and customers through every step of the sales funnel.

# 2. Discuss the importance of SEO

As recently as a few years ago, SEO really just came down to keywords and backlinks. This is no longer true. Google is smart, and getting smarter. It's impossible to be 100% certain which factors are now most important for SEO, but the search engine consistently rewards publishers for authoritative content which people click, link to, and share.

Google is also getting much better at deciphering search intent, which means you can spend less time keyword stuffing (actually, don't do this at all—Google can tell), and more time creating quality content which actually answers searchers' questions. In fact, an increasing number of Google users have stopped typing keywords into the search bar and have started entering fully-phrased questions.

# 75%

of users never scroll past the first page of search results.

*(Source: **HubSpot**)*

# 33%

of clicks from organic search results go to the first listing on Google.

*(Source: Social Fresh)*

Natural and conversational language is also becoming more and more important in SEO, so inbound marketers who focus on creating useful content are gaining a natural advantage over the keyword-stuffers of yore. Because of this, you're going to need to guide your leadership team through the new fundamentals of search engine optimization so they'll buy into your content creation plan.

Here are a few resources to help you get up to speed on SEO:

- **In-Depth Guide to Implementing An SEO Audit, With Template**

- **Beginner's Guide to SEO**

- **SEO: A Comprehensive Guide for Beginners**

# 3. Be prepared to dispel common objections, myths & misconceptions

You've demonstrated the philosophy and necessity of inbound marketing in today's digital world. But what's to say inbound will even work for your company? Now's the time to address potential objections and inspire with some great stories.

Let's take a look at some common objections, myths misconceptions about inbound marketing:

# It takes too much time

Let's face it: anything that seeks to create long-term benefits is going to require a longterm investment of energy and time. Relationships take time to build and nurture. But any executive worth their salt knows that time isn't the measure of success. The returns on investment from inbound versus traditional outbound tactics are without a doubt impressive.
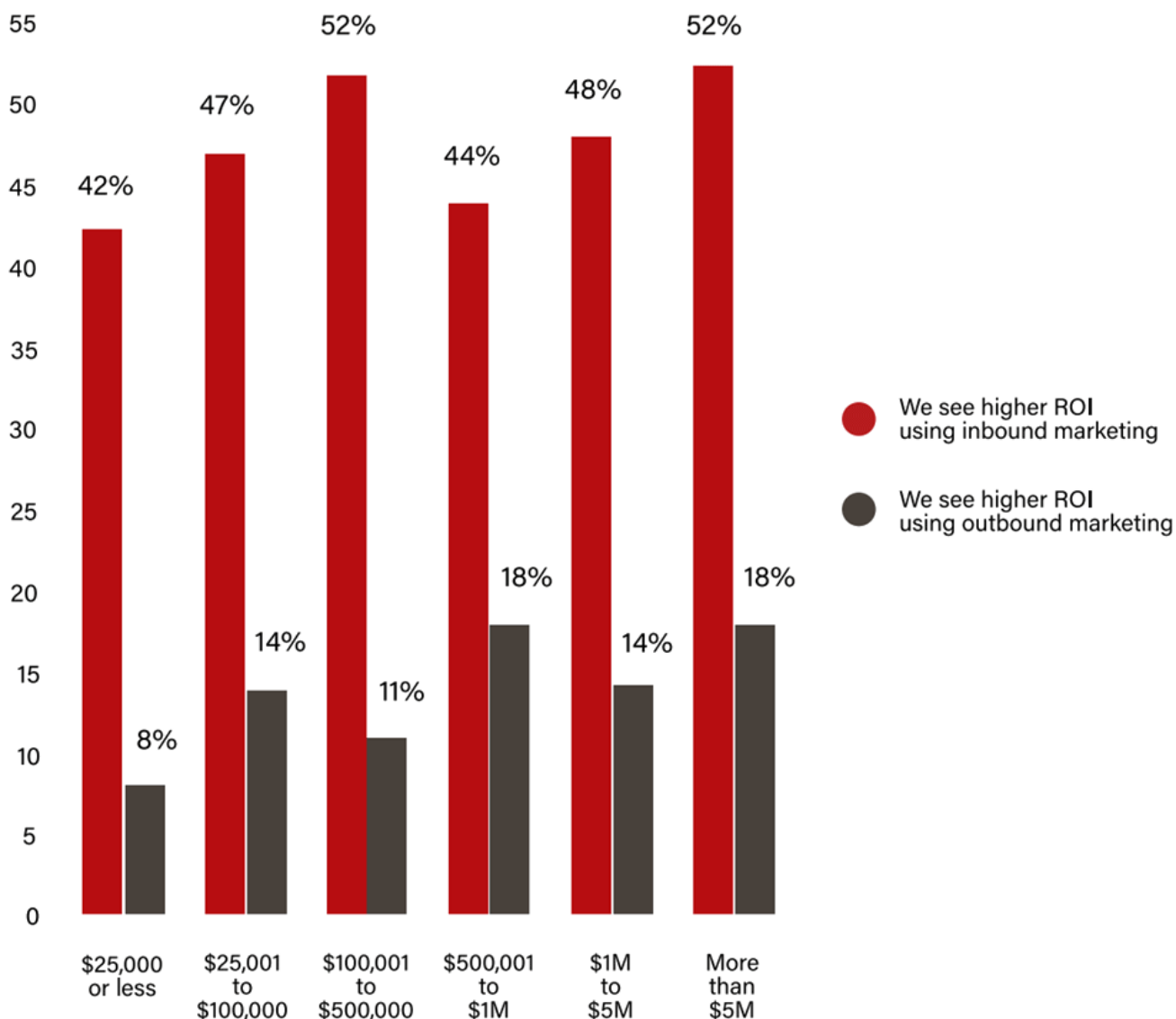


No matter the size of investment, many more executives see higher ROI using inbound marketing rather than outbound marketing.

As highlighted in the 2015 State of Inbound Report, companies of all sizes agree that inbound marketing provides a higher ROI than outbound marketing. So even if it takes a few months longer to start generating leads from your inbound strategy, rest assured that the returns are well worth playing the long game.

## You can't measure the ROI of marketing

As of 2016, it's easier than ever to determine value of your inbound marketing campaign down to the penny. Most digital marketers eat, sleep, and breathe analytics. With closed loop analytics tools like HubSpot, leads can be tracked with every interaction with your brand; from the first click on an email to conversion.

## Inbound doesn't close sales

The beauty of inbound marketing is that it's intrinsically customerfocused. A well-designed inbound program will have plenty to offer in terms of lead generation, lead scoring, and lead nurturing so your sales department can close more customers.

**Forrester Research** has found that companies that excel at lead nurturing generate 50% more sales-ready leads at a 33% lower cost.

# 4. Discuss your ideas for a basic strategy

We've already covered the bases in terms of best practices. Now, it's up to you to take the reins and craft a superb strategy that will serve your company's growth goals.

If you need help as you outline a strategy, you'll find plenty of guideposts in **The Epic Guide to Creating an Inbound Marketing Strategy**, or **click here to chat with our team**.

# 5. Present an implementation plan, associated costs, and outline potential ROI

To achieve a great return on your investment in inbound marketing you'll need to have access to a rather diverse, yet specific range of skills. These include:

- Content writing

- Analytical marketing

- Design

- Development

- Social media expertise

- Business development

- Project management

In-house marketing teams often lack some of the technical and analytical skills to required to execute inbound marketing – this can be offset by partnering with a specialized inbound marketing agency. As many inbound marketers can attest, partnering with an inbound marketing agency has numerous benefits including eliminating the time required to recruit, hire and train internal employees, faster time to ROI, a broader range of expertise in the various components of inbound marketing and proven track records drawn from servicing a portfolio of clients.

Of course, as you present the business case for investing in inbound marketing, you'll want to provide some detail in terms of the associated costs of adoption and implementation. Whether you keep your inbound marketing strategy in-house, or you choose to hire an agency, there are four core budget line items you need to consider as you adopt inbound:

1. Software costs

2. Content production

3. Website design & development

4. On-going inbound marketing strategy growth & optimization

Pitching a marketing idea to a "numbers person" can be difficult. Creative vision and hard data don't always align—but with closed-loop analytics as part of your inbound plan, they can. This is the part where you're going to have to lay some numbers on the table.

To do this, you're going to need to speak the language of the people who control the money—namely, the CFO.

It's best if you already have some answers to ROI calculations using metrics like:

- **Cost Per Lead (CPL)**: How much do you spend to acquire a new lead?

- **Customer Lifetime Value (LTV)**: How much profit does your average customer generate for your company?

- **Cost per Customer Acquisition**: How much does it cost to convert a lead to a customer?

- **Lead Conversion Rate**: How many leads turn into customers?

Once you're able to break your sales funnel down and measure these core customer acquisition and retention metrics you'll be able to more accurately articulate the impact that investing in inbound marketing could have for your organization.

## Get *The Comprehensive Guide to Creating an Inbound Marketing Plan*

Learn to create a rock-solid inbound marketing plan that prioritizes each aspect of your strategy, puts more focus on the tactics that produce the best results, and ensures your executive team gets on board. Download *The Comprehensive Guide to Creating an Inbound Marketing Plan* now.

**Download Now**

# Conclusion

As you create your inbound strategy, you're mapping out an exciting evolution for your business. And you're to be applauded for having the vision to see the bold new direction you need to go in order to keep pace with the digital age.

Have confidence: not only are you standing at the beginning of a new path, but you also have an unprecedented amount of resources and tools at your disposal to navigate and track your progress along the way. With inbound marketing, not only will you provide a better overall customer experience; you'll enjoy sales efficiencies and the ability to measure real, tangible sales results every step of the way.

And if you need a guide, we're here to help. To learn more about inbound marketing and how it can help you convert more visitors to leads and more leads to customers, sign up for a **FREE Inbound Marketing Strategy Consultation** or learn more insights from **our blog**.