Blogging

Introduction

to the Inbound Marketing Methodology

Although it's been around for quite some time, many businesses still don't really understand how inbound marketing works. They like the idea of it -- after all, any kind of marketing is intended to bring in more customers, which is music to every business owner's ears. But is there really a methodology that can be followed, i.e. a step-by-step process that can increase your conversion and retention rate? Luckily, the answer is yes.

If you're expecting a 50-step list, you can rest easy. The Inbound Marketing Methodology consists of a mere four -- yes, four! -- basic steps that will take customers through a series of transformations as they start out as complete strangers to your business and wind up as customers and possibly even promoters.

Step #1: Attract

When you first start out, the majority of people you'll be trying to lure into your business are strangers. Although you may have been taught to fear strangers, these are the people who you want to pull in. Your job is to attract them to your business by any means necessary. With the digital age of inbound marketing, this includes the use of social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, blogs, etc. to promote your company. It also means that you will want to learn how to utlize specific keywords to help increase your exposure.

Step #2: Convert

Once these strangers have found their way to your website, they become visitors. Now that they've made their way to your website, it's time to go in for the kill. To begin the conversion of these visitors into actual customers, you must utilize good calls-to-action, i.e. clicking on a button or link that will allow them to learn more, download a free product, etc. Each call-to-action must then take the visitor to a precise landing page, where you supply what was promised, have the visitor fill out a form for more information, etc. And finally, this is the part of the process where you will want to be gathering a list of the contacts (visitors to your site) for future use.

Step #3: Close

If the visitors have gotten this far, you're in good shape. These people have been transformed into leads, and you now have a great chance to close the sale. This takes a bit more savvy, and is often the area where businesses tend to lose customers. Lead scoring, which allows you to track what the customer is doing on your site will tell you if the person is a good prospect and how much energy you should expend to go after them. If a solid lead leaves your website, it's a good idea to follow up with the marketing e-mails focused on content relative to the lead. Concurrently, you will want to determine which effots are bringing in these leads, which is where CRM (Customer Relationship Management) comes into play.

Step #4: Delight

This is the step where your hard work has finally paid off and those people who were once strangers have been fully converted into customers. You're not done yet, though. This is your opportunity to delight the customer after the sale, which will keep them coming back for more. There are numerous ways to do this, between using social media for customer service options, utilizing smart calls-to-action to focus promotions based on that customer's buying trends, and automated marketing to introduce new products and features that the customer may be interested in. If you are successful, these customers will then become promoters of your business, which will bring in even more revenue.

ATTRACT — Strangers → Visitors
Blog
Social Media
SEO
Web Pages

CONVERT — Visitors → Leads
Calls to Action
Landing Pages
Forms
Contacts

CLOSE — Leads → Customers
Email
Workflows
Lead Scoring
CRM Integration

DELIGHT — Customers → Promoters
Social Media
Smart CTAs
Email
Workflows

> " Audiences everywhere are tough. They don't have time to be bored or brow beaten by orthodox, old-fashioned advertising. We need to stop interrupting what people are interested in & be what people are interested in.
>
> - CRAIG DAVIS, CHIEF CREATIVE OFFICER
> J. WALTER THOMPSON (WORLD'S 4TH LARGEST AD AGENCY)

Step 1

Make Them an Offer They Can't Refuse

Without leads, everything else in your marketing campaign serves no real function. Your campaign may look pretty and your product or service may offer something that no one else does, but if you can't generate any leads, everything you're doing might as well be a hobby. Since lead generation is absolutely vital to every marketing effort, we don't want to zip through it and simply give you a few tips and tricks here and there. So here we'll be exploring nearly everything there is to know about lead generation.

Part One: Make Them an Offer They Can't Refuse

Like an old time gangster, it's important that you provide potential leads with an offer that they simply cannot refuse. Whether you deal with products or services, what you want is for people to see what you're offering as not only desirable, but absolutely irresistible. This can be broken down into these six steps:

Create a Shortage

There's this strange, psychological thing that happens when something is scarce. When the Playstation 2 was released many years ago, the shortage of available systems at launch caused demand to skyrocket, allowing systems to sell on eBay for upwards of $5000 in some cases. While you may not be able to control supply and demand to such an extent, what you can do is create limited time offers, limited quantity offers, or a mixture of the two.

Use the Bandwagon to Your Advantage

Human beings have a tendency to flock where other human beings are. Once a product or service catches on, success can snowball very quickly as people jump on the bandwagon to avoid missing out. You can take advantage of this by declaring sign-up numbers, subscription amounts, and other bits of information on your blog or in a new campaign.

Come Up with an Amazing Title

Have you ever seen a movie or read a book based on the title alone? Yeah … we have, too. Do you think people flocked to see Snakes on a Plane because of its Oscar-worthy screenplay? If you can create a title for your campaign that will immediately catch a person's attention, you've already begun reeling them in, and they haven't even gotten to the good part yet.

Avoid Overused Terms

The English language can create some beautiful works of art by use of the written word, but when overused, certain terms can quickly turn people off. We're talking about marketing terms that you're tired of hearing, like "cutting edge" and "ground breaking." While those terms might truly describe your product or service, it's best to come up with more entertaining, and less annoying, jargon to get your point across.

Use the Best Formats Available

When providing information to potential leads, it's vital to understand which formats are more likely to draw them in. It's been shown in recent years that ebooks or guides are among the best, followed closely behind by whitepapers and presentations. Blogs have also proven to be a fantastic driving force in lead generation, as long as you continuously post new content on a weekly basis.

Discover What's Trending and Use It

This sometimes take a little more ingenuity to do it right. What you want to do is look for anything that's trending that either aligns with a product or service that you're offering or create a new marketing campaign around it. This is known in the industry as "newsjacking" and if you do so successfully, your company may end up being the new trending phenomenon.

Inbound converts leads into customers

Lead-to-Customer Close % by Channel
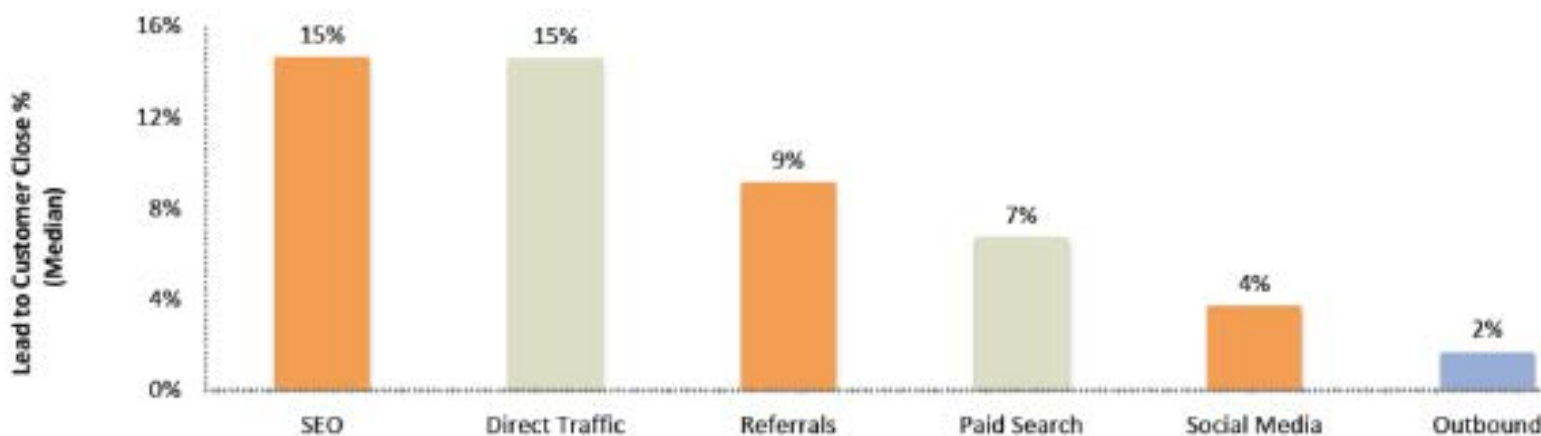
SOURCE: STATE OF INBOUND MARKETING, HUBSPOT, MARCH 2012

Step 2

Create Awesome Calls to Action

Back before the west was won and people knew what true dental care was, the "flimflam man" was born. These were the guys who pulled around a cart full of elixirs that supposedly did everything from grow hair on a bald man to help people walk again. Of course, these were all scams, but their business sense was sound -- seize a person's attention with whatever you're selling by creating awesome Calls-to-Action. In today's market, this can be explained in six steps:

Utilize Line-of-Sight

Did you know that when you go to the grocery store, the more expensive items or ones with a higher profit margin are placed at a person's average eye level? There are actually experts for this kind of thing that stores consult with on a regular basis in order to maximize profit. The same is true with the way you design your website. When a person visits your website, he or she is much more likely to be entranced by something "above the fold" (the area that's immediately viewable) rather than something "below the fold" (the area that you must scroll down to see). Because of this, your Calls-to-Action must be be located at the user's line-of-sight.

Don't Replace Being Clear with Being Cute

Although Internet users love to be entertained while browsing, your Calls-to-Action should always be clear in their intent. Leave your stand-up skills at home (you know you're really not that clever, right?), and concentrate on providing offers that are clearly spelled out so that no one misinterprets them. If you're offering something for free, for example, be upfront and forward about exactly what it is that the user will receive, whether it's a guide, an actual product, or something else. No need for confusion.

Avoid Camouflaging Your CTA

One big mistake that's been made by many companies over the years is to use a Call-to-Action that actually blends in with the rest of their page. They'll create a new button to click for the offer, but choose the same color as the page. This is a recipe for disaster. Your CTA should stand out against the page at all times, forcing a visitor's eyes to go straight to it.

Remember to Use Dedicated Landing Pages

You might be surprised to learn how many websites include Calls-to-Action that link directly to the company's homepage. This technique makes absolutely no sense. When you create a CTA, it should take the visitor to a landing page that's been created specifically for that Call-to-Action. This helps everything stay nice and neat, and enables you to add more CTAs to that landing page.
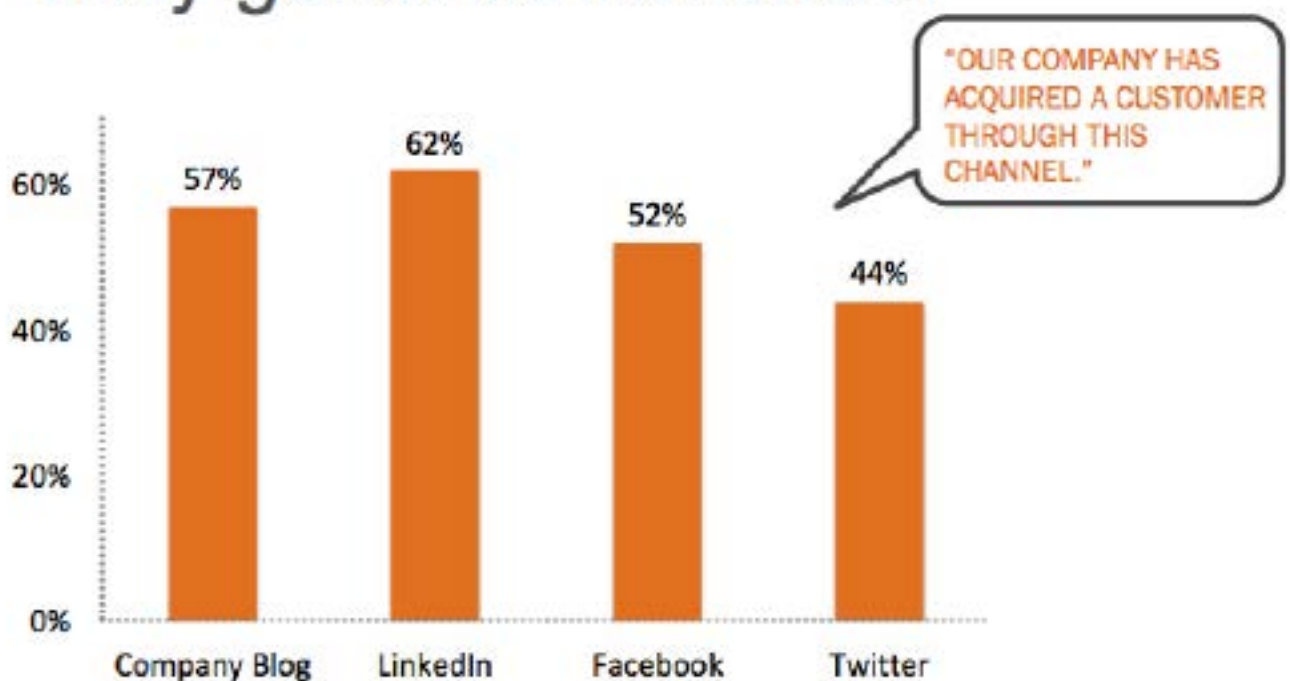
Thank You Pages Aren't Just for Saying "Thanks"

Whether a visitor to your website is ordering a product or receiving a free download of some kind, it's imperative that you include a "Thank You" page. What many businesses don't realize is that this provides you with a final chance for a Call-to-Action. You already know that the person is at least somewhat interested in what your company offers. So include an extra offer such as a subscription to a blog or e-mail service that will provide special discounts or announcements. In fact, this is the time to go all-out and offer a second CTA on the same page.

FACT:

Companies with 30 or more landing pages generate 7x more leads than those with fewer than 10. Those with over 40 landing pages got 12x more leads. (HubSpot)

Inbound marketing tactics don't just generate leads. They generate **revenue.**

"OUR COMPANY HAS ACQUIRED A CUSTOMER THROUGH THIS CHANNEL."

	Company Blog	LinkedIn	Facebook	Twitter
	57%	62%	52%	44%

SOURCE: STATE OF INBOUND MARKETING, HUBSPOT, MARCH 2012

Step 3

Create Landing Pages that Sizzle

When someone is sent to your website, you might think that the best strategy is to send them directly to your home page. After all, this will give them a good overview of your business and its website. The problem is that a home page is often too general. Instead, what you want to do is have visitors arrive on landing pages that compliment the link they clicked and what they're most likely interested in. When utilized properly, the rate of conversion from lead to customer can be substantial, and here are seven techniques to increase the chances of that happening:

Learn What Makes Up an Effective Landing Page

The first step to creating an effective landing page is to learn what it needs to include. There are four necessary elements -- headline (and possibly a sub-headline), brief description of the offer, at least one supporting image, and a form to capture visitor information. The form is the most important part. And if you'd like, you can also add supporting items like testimonials.

Remove the Navigation

Each landing page is intended to keep the visitor in place to increase the chances of conversion. By removing the primary page navigation, you'll avoid distracting them with other areas of your website. This is an easy fix, so there's no excuse for not following.

> **"**
>
> While social media is not the silver bullet that some pundits claim it to be, it is an extremely important & relatively low cost touch point that has a direct impact on sales & positive word of mouth.
>
> - josh mendelsohn

Match Headline with Call-to-Action

People don't like the ol' Bait 'n Switch, so make sure you're not guilty of doing this to your potential leads. When a person clicks on a link that brings them to your landing page, he or she will expect the offer to be the same. Any deviation could spell trouble or, worse, a lost lead.

Keep It Simple

No one likes clutter in their home, and the same is true with the websites they visit. If your website is too "busy," it becomes distracting. Your offer should be clear, concise, and immediately noticeable. If it's more like playing a game of "Where's Waldo?", then you aren't doing it right.

Emphasize Benefits

Now that you've caught your visitor's attention, it's time to remind them why they linked to your landing page in the first place. List the benefits of your offer in either a short paragraph or bullet points, or possibly even both. But also be sure to put a cool spin on it, using verbiage that conveys the true value of your offer.
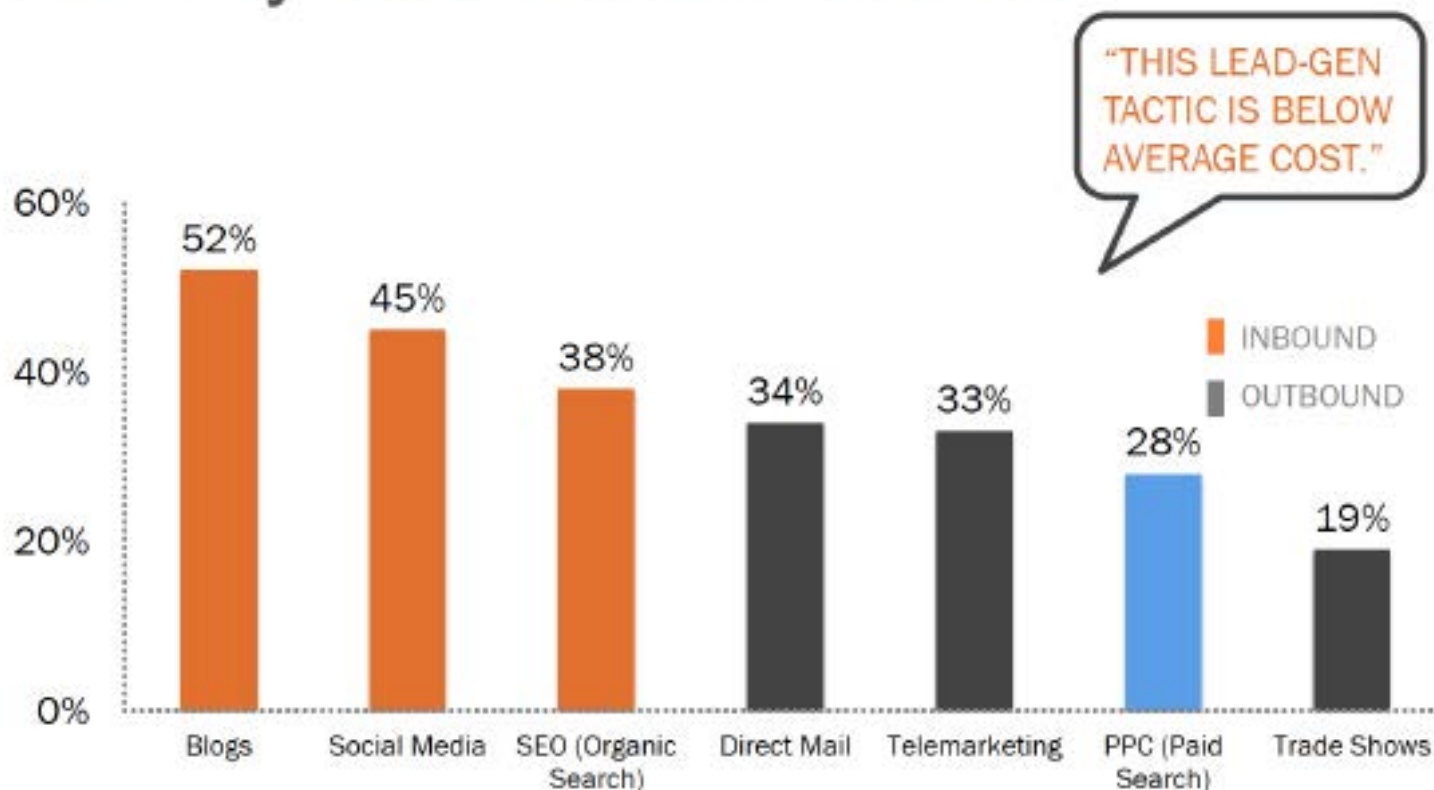
Encourage Social Sharing

Even though Social Media websites have proven to be quite effective in the marketing world these days, many companies still don't take advantage of them. Each of your landing pages should include buttons that will give your visitors quick access to e-mail, Facebook, Twitter, and other ways to share your offer.

Increase Number of Landing Pages

The more landing pages you have, the more leads you'll obtain. Increase your number of landing pages from 10 to 15, for example, and you'll see quite a boost to the number of leads that visit your website.

Inbound marketing channels **cost less** than any outbound channel.

"THIS LEAD-GEN TACTIC IS BELOW AVERAGE COST."

■ INBOUND
■ OUTBOUND

Channel	Value
Blogs	52%
Social Media	45%
SEO (Organic Search)	38%
Direct Mail	34%
Telemarketing	33%
PPC (Paid Search)	28%
Trade Shows	19%

Step 4

Get Some Highly Effective Forms

Gathering information about the visitors who come to your website is essential if you want to convert them into leads and, at a later date, customers. One of the easiest and most effective ways of doing this is by including a form on each of your landing pages. The information that you want to gather will vary, but the trick is to optimize these forms for maximum effect. Here are four ways that will help improve your conversation rate through the use of forms:

Choosing the Right Length

In a perfect world, we'd be able to ask every website visitor a hundred different questions so that we could create a full analysis of what they're looking for and how to market to each person. Unfortunately, we don't live in that perfect world. In the world we do live in, most people want to keep things simple. Although there are no specific guidelines to follow, it's best to trust your instincts -- such as, consider collecting only the most basic information that you require in order to attempt a further connection with each visitor. A great strategy is to make only a few fields required and leave the rest optional. But, of course, you must also consider that the more required fields you have, the higher quality each lead will be. Strike a good balance and you're golden.

Avoid That Evil Word: "Submit"

It may be nothing more than a psychological effect, but when someone sees a button on a website that says "submit," it can very off-putting. It can be construed as a commitment and no one likes to commit to anything if they can avoid it. Instead of using that particular word on your form, instead come up with something to reiterate your offer, such as a button that says "Get your free newsletter" or "Download your free ebook." And make the button easy to see, whether it's a larger font than the rest of the form, a different color, or whatever else might help it stand out.

Ensure a Visitor's Trust

Although Internet security has improved over the years, many users are still weary when it comes to using websites they aren't familiar with. They want to be sure that the information they provide will be safe once it's released to you. They don't want information to be compromised, nor do they want an influx of spam. One technique you can use to appease visitors is to add testimonials to your website, but a more effective way would be to use security seals such as "Norton Secured" or "TRUSTe Certified Privacy." These will make your leads feel more comfortable.

Adjust the Form to Appear Shorter

If your form appears to be longer than it actually is, you should switch up the style a bit. For example, perhaps you need less space between the fields on your form. You'd be surprised at how much difference this optical illusion can make. It's really all about perception. If a visitor thinks the form looks too long, he or she is less likely to fill it out. Luckily, this is easily fixed.

Step 5

Multi-Channel it Out

Anyone even slightly familiar with current marketing technology will tell you that there are a number of channels available that will help you spread the word about your company and what you offer. This is why our final discussion, will be about Using Multiple Channels to Your Advantage.

Part Five: Using Multiple Channels to Your Advantage

In today's marketing atmosphere, there are more choices than ever to help get the word out about the products or services that your company offers. Each of these channels provides an opportunity to generate leads on a regular basis. And if you learn how to use several of them at once, your lead generation will increase exponentially. Now let's take a glimpse at some of the most popular channels you can utilize:

Blogging

The idea of blogging began as more of a personal endeavor. It allowed Internet users around the world to have his or her own soapbox, whether they wanted to discuss politics, their favorite clothes, or what happened to them at the market that day. In recent years, however, businesses have learned how effective blogging can be to drawing in leads and keeping customers coming back for more. Just remember -- consistency is the key.

Social Media

It doesn't seem like too long ago when MySpace was the only social media website that most people used. Now we get to choose from Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, and many other popular sites and applications. When used wisely and on a regular basis, each one of these sites can help draw in customers from all over the world. Once you build a following, you'll definitely see an increase in your lead generation and customer conversion rate.

E-mail Marketing

Although the proliferation of social media might make e-mail marketing seem antiquated in comparison, the fact is that e-mails continue to be highly effective in generating leads. The best way to do this is to focus your efforts on creating offers that will be valuable to the targeted recipients of each e-mail. Another great strategy is to provide a way for recipients to share the offer with a friend, which can include social media sharing buttons to make it easy.
Search Engines

If you want people to find you easily when searching the Internet for a product or service that is similar to what you offer, you need to concentrate on Search Engine Optimization (SEO) techniques. One technique that works quite well is to choose a primary keyword for each landing page and then optimize that page for the specific keyword. Also make sure to use your primary keywords in your headline and sub-headline, which have a greater weight with search engines.

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Links and Calls-to-Action within Offers

Many companies don't seem to realize that the offers they send out can actually act as their own channel for lead generation. Each offer should include links and calls-to-action that provide access to additional offers to potential leads. There's no rule that says you can only provide one offer per e-mail, ebook, etc. The more you provide, the better your chances to entice leads to your company.

Well, there you have it -- how to rock Lead Generation. As we said, it isn't rocket science. But it's definitely something you must take seriously and work at on a daily basis. If you can keep the torch alive by making an effort to connect to potential customers by using the techniques we've outlined, success is almost assured.

Ready to Get Started?

We can help you each and every step on of the way. Contact us for pricing and how to get started.

(303) 500-3265 | info@MadisonTaylorMarketing.com