



The Essential Guide to B2B Marketing for Manufacturers

CAIN&COMPANY



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Introduction

Marketers for industrial and manufacturing companies are tasked with increasing brand awareness and generating high quality leads for the sales team. But many industrial marketers struggle to keep up with the explosion of marketing channels, especially online, and manage marketing budgets that remain largely static.

This guide examines some of the challenges faced by industrial marketers in today's economy and offers advice on how to create a successful marketing plan with the right mix to help you:

- 1. Improve your online presence and attract more website traffic from qualified prospects.**
- 2. Increase lead conversions and requests for quotes through your website, resulting in more sales opportunities.**
- 3. Improve lead data so the sales team can be more efficient and follow up with the best-qualified leads.**
- 4. Improve your marketing return on investment (ROI) with data that will show which marketing efforts produce the most leads and sales.**

We'll also look at how inbound marketing is a better fit for the long sales cycle of manufacturing than traditional outbound marketing efforts and introduce marketing methods you can use to create relevant, educational content, including the tools and tactics involved at each phase of the process.

Ready to make your manufacturing business more competitive? Let's get started.

The Buyer is in Control

Purchasing in the manufacturing industry is never an impulse buy. Suppliers that sell to original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) and other industrial buyers face long sales cycles with multiple decision makers. But the digital age has revolutionized buying habits in every industry.

Until recently, vendors controlled access to product information. Sales reps and distributors were the gatekeepers of important content like product specs, technical data, and pricing that the buyer needed early in their buying process, and they guarded that information closely. To gain even basic initial information, a buyer had to contact the rep or wait to attend the next trade show to see and compare different products and vendors. Of course this had advantages for the seller but was inconvenient for the buyer.

It comes as no surprise that today's business-to-business (B2B) marketplace has changed dramatically, presenting challenges for manufacturing marketers.

For example, more competition. Engineers and other technical professionals have access to more resources than ever before. The predominance of supplier websites and other online channels means buyers don't need to wait for a trade show or be interrupted by a cold call from a sales rep. They get the information they want online, whenever they want it, on whatever device they like. Buyers, not brands, control most of their own buying process – without input from a vendor.

THE SHIFT FROM SELLER-CENTRIC TO BUYER-CENTRIC PROCESS

The rise of the buyer-centric process has given customers control their own buying journey. Consumers are rarely without their smartphones, searching online to find the technical specifications, product comparisons, and pricing information they need to make a purchase – mostly without any contact with a vendor sales rep.

Internet technology has quickly evolved into a friendlier, easier user experience. This has raised the bar for B2B marketers to earn the attention of potential customers who expect personalization and convenience everywhere and friction nowhere in their buying process.

- Businesses need to catch up with increasing customer expectations. While buyers get much of their information from search engines, social channels, and online catalogs, companies struggle to get discovered on digital channels.
- Customers prefer to purchase from companies that make the buying process easy, yet businesses create artificial obstacles in the buying process, like gated content with long forms to get extra information.
- Customers expect a personalized customer service experience, but companies look at their support queue and see a list of problems, not people.

It's essential for B2B marketers to rethink how to market their manufacturing company, sell their products, and serve their customers. Just a few years ago it may have been good enough for your company website to be findable in a web search. Today, your online content must be personalized to the visitor's needs and appear proactively in recommendations and targeted ads where your prospects expect to see it.

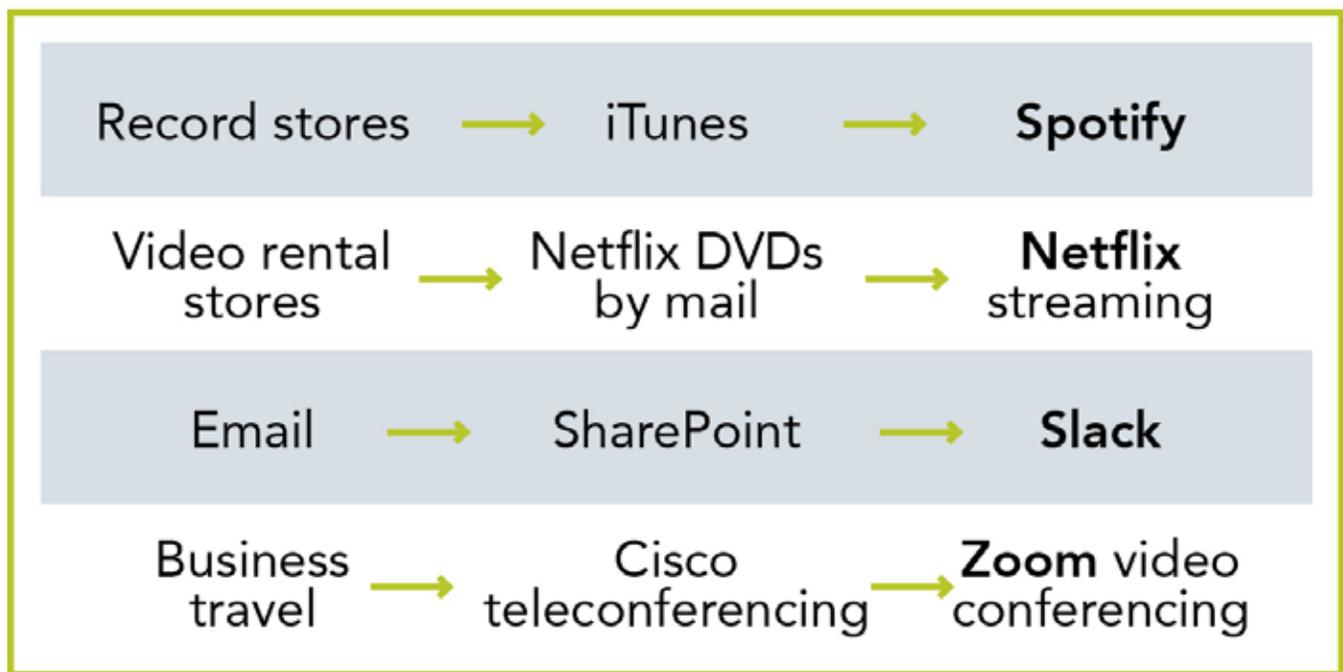
COMPETITION IS INCREASING

With the vast array of digital channels, industrial engineers and other technical professionals have more resources for discovery at their disposal than ever before. This exposure to more suppliers levels the playing field, making it more challenging for industrial marketers to differentiate their companies from others based simply on the quality of their products and services.

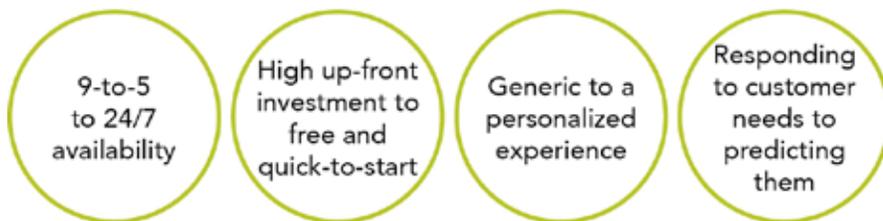
Customers favor simplicity. Throughout history, people have developed tools and technology to make life easier. Consider, for example, the evolution of navigation. Early explorers found their location using a sextant to navigate by the stars. Then someone drew a map to make it easier to find their way from point A to point B. Fast-forward – GPS speaks directions. Soon self-driving cars will be commonplace, making navigation an effortless task.

Companies are redefining their industries by making things easier for their customers.

COMPANIES THAT REDEFINED SIMPLICITY



THESE COMPANIES SHARE A FEW KEY TRAITS



“It’s not what you sell. It’s how you sell it.”

- HubSpot

To succeed, your business cannot be simply one of an increasing number of choices, you must offer additional value and convenience that the customer cannot find elsewhere. While it's good to be helpful, it's better for your company to be easy for your customers.

Transactional customer service must become more tailored. Before, it was good to ask what your customer needed. Today it is better to know, and proactively provide them with just the right information that they need.

54%

of marketers say their key differentiator is the quality of their products and services, yet it is becoming more challenging for industrial marketers to differentiate their companies from others.

- IEEE Globalspec

Inbound Marketing for Manufacturers

If the typical buying cycle for a manufacturing purchase is measured in years, an industrial buyer may have already been in the market for months before you even find out they're shopping. HubSpot research indicates that B2B buyers today are 57% less dependent on salespeople during their decision-making process than they were just a few years ago.

This means that for nearly two thirds of their buying process, your customers are self-educating, doing web searches, browsing company websites, and getting recommendations from colleagues and industry experts on social networks and review sites. They're comparing you and your competitors, learning technical specifications, building requirements lists, narrowing their options, and forming their opinions, all on their own, with minimal influence from you.

OUTBOUND MARKETING

Cold calls, direct mail, and trade show exhibits rely on interruption to catch the ideal prospect at just the right time. These methods depend either on coincidence or years of expensive effort building top-of-mind awareness by showing up in front of the prospect again and again. The buyer's decision to finally hire your company may have more to do with familiarity than a solid expectation that you can do the best job.

INBOUND MARKETING

Attract qualified leads easier, more efficiently, and more effectively. With an inbound marketing strategy, your prospect comes looking for information that can help solve their problem when they're ready and is rewarded with the answers that you provide. The buyer has visited your website, read your expert content, and developed trust that you are an industry expert. You've observed their interest in specific content and have seen them exhibit behaviors that indicate they're ready to buy. And a well-qualified lead is easier to close.

Lead nurturing is made even more effective by sophisticated marketing automation and sales Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software like HubSpot. Intelligent nurturing campaigns introduce new content to leads based on their behavior rather than blasting the same message to an entire contact list. Finally, a combination of lead scoring analytics and behavioral observations signals when a lead is sales-ready and more open to an initial phone call.

Every potential buyer expects to see marketing messages, but there's always the danger that a slew of irrelevant marketing content will be seen more as self-promotion than providing helpful solutions. The inbound approach to marketing and sales – offering helpful resources, rather than a sales pitch – builds trust, establishes you as a thought leader, and solidifies your company's reputation and brand, while leading buyers toward the ultimate goal: making an informed purchase.

Inbound marketing provides a method of measuring the result of your marketing actions, using website and customer data to inform marketing decisions, and prove ROI. Typical inbound marketing process involves targeted messages and tactics at each stage of the buyer's journey.

The Buyer's Journey

| | |
|------------------------|--|
| Awareness 1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Create blogs and other content to attract visitors• Search engine optimization (SEO) and keyword research to optimize search engine ranking• Social media publishing |
| Consideration 2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Create lead conversion campaigns using HubSpot marketing automation software• Design premium content for download (e.g., eBooks, white papers, checklists)• Create landing pages, calls-to-action, and lead conversion forms |
| Decision 3 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Create automated email lead nurturing workflows• Design lead qualification methodology• Integrate with HubSpot CRM to close the loop between marketing and sales |
| Delight 4 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Monitor social media keywords and #hashtags• Design customer surveys using HubSpot, or integrate with other survey software |

How to Maximize Limited Marketing Resources

As in many businesses, industrial marketers focus on three aspects of business growth:

- 1. Lead generation**
- 2. Customer acquisition and retention**
- 3. Customer service and satisfaction**

In fact, 42% of industrial marketers listed customer acquisition as their primary marketing goal, according to a 2017 survey by GlobalSpec.

However, across the industry, manufacturers have learned to become more efficient. As a result, marketing departments often lack marketing resources, budget, people, and time. While generating enough high quality sales leads is a priority, marketing budgets frequently do not keep pace as the complexity of marketing increases.

Technical professionals use more channels than ever throughout their buying process. This presents a challenge for marketers who must allocate limited resources across a diverse mix of marketing channels and programs. In an effort to cut expenses, the instinct might seem to be to bring marketing activities in-house, stretching marketing staffs and budgets even further.

For many manufacturing companies, working with a trusted marketing partner can provide substantial value. The right partner is an essential ally who can provide expert advice to help you get the most out of your limited marketing budget. A good agency will also execute marketing campaigns and activities, like writing, design, and marketing automation to more efficiently optimize your marketing mix and free up internal resources for other efforts. In addition, an experienced marketing agency will prove their worth by measuring marketing results to demonstrate ROI.

How to Create the Right Marketing Mix

Technical professionals use a wide variety of digital resources to find suppliers, products and services. Therefore, it is critical for suppliers and vendors to optimize their marketing mix to include both push, or outbound marketing tactics, such as email, trade shows, and display advertising, and pull, or inbound marketing methods such as online content, blogging, and the corporate website.

Today's industrial marketers are tasked with not only understanding the industry's shift toward online and content marketing, but also how to use these new tactics to effectively reach engineers. It is important to understand what content engineers consume, why they look for it, and how they find it.

There are countless channels, media, and formats in which to market your business. However a successful marketing plan is an individual endeavor that involves some experimentation, tracking, and measurement to figure out what works best for you. While this is by no means an exhaustive list, here are several marketing tactics common to the industrial space.

TRADE SHOWS

Trade shows and industry trades have been a staple of marketing for manufacturers for decades. Expos and trade shows offer a great opportunity to expose your brand to a niche audience and connect face-to-face with existing customers, key customers, and prospective customers. In fact, 88% participate in trade shows to raise awareness of the company and its brand, according to SpinGo Event Management.

There's more to displaying at a trade show than just popping up a background and hoping people stop by your booth. Whether you plan to attend the trade show as a spectator or as a presenter, here are some things you can do before, during, and after a trade show to make your appearance more valuable.

PLAN CONNECTIONS

Setting goals for what you want out of the trade show can help maximize your time and budget most effectively. A clear understanding of your ideal buyer persona can help identify which visitors to your booth you should focus on most.

PRE TRADE SHOW OUTREACH

Create marketing content leading up to the trade show to target ideal prospects you know will be attending and invite them to visit your booth. Be sure to include your booth number in an email marketing campaign. Additionally, reach out to any current customers who might be attending to schedule a face-to-face meeting while you're both at the conference. If you use CRM software like HubSpot, include a link for the recipient to book time on your calendar.

ON-SITE TRADE SHOW MARKETING

We've all come home from trade shows with a bag full of pop sockets and pens. While free swag has its place as a conversation starter, it often attracts a wide range of people who are not your ideal prospects. Create an experience at your booth to give target customers a reason to visit and stick around to hear your pitch.

- Schedule live demonstrations or educational mini info sessions.
- Have a tablet or laptop computer for visitors to subscribe to your blog or eNewsletter.
- Offer premium swag in exchange for visitors' name and email address.
- Post fun photos of your booth visitors on your social channels and tag them and their company. Be sure to use the event hashtag.

POST TRADE SHOW FOLLOW-UP

Perhaps the most important time to connect with your trade show contacts is after you've returned home. Weed through the stack of business cards you collected, import contact data into your CRM software and segment your leads. Of course you'll follow up with hot leads differently than someone who just stopped by for a free pen.

Follow-up email messages should include a reminder that you met at the trade show. Recap some highlights from the show and display photos from the event. You could produce a special eBook or other valuable content offer exclusively for trade show contacts for download to further enhance their experience.

Remember, whether you're attending as a spectator or as a presenter, the goal of your trade show appearance is to generate leads. Taking things one step further can make your booth stand out from your competitor across the aisle.

PUBLIC RELATIONS AND EARNED MEDIA

Earned media refers to references to your company by external media. This may include a TV news story that mentions your business or a quote from an employee in an industry journal. Strictly speaking, this also includes links back to your company website from an online article or mentions and tags on social posts.

Earned media enhances your brand by presenting your company as a trusted source and an industry expert. Online sources also demonstrate to Google and other search engines that your online content is valuable, thereby benefiting SEO.

Getting quoted as an expert for a positive news story rarely happens by chance. Public relations is a general term for the activity of gaining earned media. To get started simply, add a section to your company website for Company News. If you manage your website using a content management system (CMS) like Wordpress or HubSpot, you can set this up as a blog category. Take note of

anything of interest at your company to publish news releases on your website. Extend the reach of your news stories by posting highlights on your company's social networks with links back to the article with shortened, trackable URLs using Bit.ly or HubSpot.

Here are some activities that could make for good PR:

- New employee hires, promotions, or
- New products or updates.
- Upcoming presentations, whitepapers, or conference attendance.
- Advanced trainings or certifications

Make a list of industry trade publications and reach out to the editors for topic ideas that they may be looking for. Trade journals often publish their editorial calendars in advance and are happy to share information with potential content creators and advertisers.

COMPANY WEBSITE

The industrial marketplace has changed. The Internet gives consumers unlimited access to information on an increasing number of online channels and web-connected devices. It's no longer enough for a company's website to be simply a digital brochure.

Your website is your biggest marketing asset and is the centerpiece of all your marketing activities. It is often the first place people go when looking for more information on your products or services. It is the place where we drive all of our marketing efforts and is often the first place prospects come to look for information.

Additionally, your website is also your best salesperson. It's been said that a prospect has already nearly two-thirds through their buying cycle before ever contacting a sales rep. Where are they finding the information before talking to someone? – Your website.

To stay competitive and achieve business growth goals, your website is the hub of your multi-channel online presence using relevant content to attract prospects, along with marketing automation to generate and nurture leads.

Before you get started on actually redesigning your website, or launching a new one, here are some helpful tips to consider.

1. **Define your goals.** How much traffic do you expect from your new website? What other metrics, such as pages viewed, traffic sources, or bounce rate are important to you? How will you measure these key performance indicators (KPIs).
2. **Define your brand.** Other than your product, what is unique about your company? Is your branding changing for this website redesign? What brand standards need to be followed?
3. **Define your competition.** Who are your top three to five competitors? How do they position themselves? What are the top three keywords that your competitors' websites rank for on search engines?
4. **Audit your assets.** What is the most viewed page and content downloaded on your current website? Which of your current website's pages rank well on search engines? Not sure? Install Google Analytics to find out.
5. **List any new assets.** What new pages or content will you need to create?
6. **Design.** List websites that you really like and describe the elements that draw you to them. Also list websites and elements that you don't like.
7. **Usability.** Have you received questions or complaints from visitors about how to use your current website? Is your website accessible for people with disabilities?
8. **Technical details.** What CMS do you plan to use? What features will you have on your new site, such as a blog, calendar, photo gallery, maps, ecommerce, etc.? What domains will you use?
9. **Content.** Who will handle copywriting for your new site? Will you need new photography or video production?
10. **Structure and navigation.** List the menu items you will have on your new website.

Even with the best planning, a company website redesign project is a major undertaking. Remember, the primary motivation for redeveloping any website should be to improve business performance. A beautiful website, although intriguing and aesthetically pleasing, is secondary to one that drives traffic and generates leads.

CONTENT MARKETING

As industrial professionals increasingly look online for work-related information, marketers are beefing up their corporate website with more relevant content. Blogs, videos, and downloadable white papers show up in search results. This content attracts qualified website visitors and positions the content creator as a trusted industry expert and thought leader.

According to a study by Maryville University, 86% of marketers use content marketing as a regular part of their strategy, whether they're working for global conglomerates or small, local businesses. However, only 36% assess their content marketing expertise as mature or sophisticated.

Here are 3 tips to improve your content marketing efforts:

- 1. Develop a content marketing strategy based on achieving specific, measurable objectives**
(Future blog: learn how to make SMART Goals)
- 2. Produce content for all stages of the industrial buy cycle and track where and how customers access your content**
- 3. Develop a content publishing calendar.** Gain efficiencies by repurposing content for use in different formats across different channels. For example, create a video using one of your blogs as a script.

VIDEO MARKETING

Video production might sound like an intimidating, lengthy, and expensive process. In reality, technology has made it easy to produce simple videos. Video production that once required a film crew and a truck full of equipment, can today be done on a smartphone, and online software like YouTube and HubSpot make it easy to incorporate video into your marketing and sales process.

While there is certainly a time and place for big video productions, here are three simple tips for creating great video regardless of the budget:

- 1. Tell a story:** All great content tells a compelling story. Don't wing it. Write a script and use a video storyboard to sketch out your visual scenes.
- 2. Use good light:** Even with the great low-light cameras on current smartphones, nothing is a good substitute for good light. Shoot outside or near a window for good quality natural light or purchase an inexpensive LED light panel.
- 3. Use good sound:** If your video features a narrator, the built-in microphone on your smartphone might be good enough for close-up shots but will sound distant on medium and full-length shots and capture unwanted ambient noise. Use an external lavalier or boom mic to capture better, more consistent voice-overs.

EMAIL MARKETING

Your contact database is perhaps your most important marketing asset. Email continues to be one of the most effective marketing tactics to communicate with your contacts. Why? Because email is the one channel your audience accesses regularly.

On any given day, your customer may or may not visit your website, blog, or Facebook page. But with few exceptions, customers check their email every day, if not multiple times a day – or multiple times an hour.

Email still matters, but subscribers have become more sophisticated. Marketers for industrial and manufacturing companies face increasing challenges connecting with potential customers.

- **Economics of Attention:** Information abundance and attention scarcity make it harder than ever to get buyer attention
- **Opt-Out, Screen Out, Tune Out:** Consumers don't want to feel they are being marketed to, and will find ways to tune out unwanted communications
- **The Cross-Channel Marketing Revolution:** New communication channels, like social media and live chat, mean email can no longer be a standalone channel

Therefore, the way you use email for marketing needs to change.

It sounds silly, but do not use your personal or company email account to send your marketing emails. An experienced email service provider, like Constant Contact or HubSpot, will provide a central database to capture and store your contact information. Contact information can be sorted and segmented based on various criteria to create highly targeted marketing contact lists.

The starting point for your email marketing is your contact list. An email address is the minimum requirement, but the more you know about your contacts, the more information you'll have available to split your list up into smaller, more targeted segments. For example if you ask for a zip code, you could send a campaign to only the contacts in that zip code.

Use a personalized greeting to make marketing messages relatable and increase open and click rates. You can customize your email message by adding the recipient's name or other information to the subject line or message.

THE 5 RULES OF EMAIL MARKETING

Buyers today are tech-savvy and wise to marketing. Their email inboxes are full and they're very good at tuning out the marketing messages they don't want. In order for your email to get opened and clicked, your email marketing must be:

- 1. Trusted - people must allow your message past their filter.**
- 2. Relevant - deliver the right message to the right people at the right time.**
- 3. Conversational – use a familiar tone that speaks to subscribers one-to-one.**
- 4. Coordinated - integrated customer experience across several channels.**
- 5. Strategic - use metrics to measure the value of your email marketing.**

Remember, the best email campaigns are not about you or what you want your customers to do. They're about your subscribers and what they want.

SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

Inbound marketing is all about creating and sharing content that your visitors, leads, and customers will enjoy, and social media is a great platform to accomplish this. Social media marketing should be used to share information that's not just about your business, but is also relevant to your industry and would be truly helpful and delight your followers.

With the sheer volume of content needed for the variety of social media channels, it can be a challenge just to have something, anything, to post on a regular basis. But avoid the shotgun approach where the same message is posted on every social channel. Social posts should be tailored to the culture of each network.

Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn are still the time-tested big three of social media publishing. While similar, each of these three platforms has their own specific tone:

- LinkedIn is professional, while Twitter is more fun, fast-paced, and informal.
- Facebook is more casual than LinkedIn but provides opportunity for more media and characters than Twitter.

GOAL-ORIENTED SOCIAL POSTING

Every social media post and campaign should be tied directly to a business goal in order to measure success. After all, how else will you know if your marketing is working without a benchmark to measure it against?

These goals need to be SMART, that is, specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and timely. A general goal, like “Increase brand awareness,” is too vague to be achieved. But “Gain 100 high-quality leads through content offers like eBooks in second quarter,” is a specific goal. To accomplish this, you may want to create an inbound lead flow so your social posts link to a blog post that’s relevant to your content offer, and then link the reader to a landing page to download the eBook to convert.

- **Persona-Oriented Social Posting**

As with any other marketing activity, social media marketing should be targeted to your ideal customer persona. The type of content you create should appeal to your buyer personas and a specific stage of their buyer’s journey.

- **Best Times to Post on Facebook**

The best time to post on Facebook is the early afternoon, ideally between 1 p.m. and 3 p.m. on Thursdays and Fridays.

- **Best Times to Post on Twitter**

The best time to post on Twitter for retweets is 5 p.m. The best times to post for maximizing click-through rates are noon and 6 p.m.

- **Best Times to Post on LinkedIn**

The best time to post on LinkedIn to maximize clicks and shares is in the morning on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday.

THE 10:4:1 RULE

Great social content resonates with your buyer personas and helps your company gain authority in its field without overtly selling your product. Your social posts should not be all about you.

A good rule of thumb is to follow the 10:4:1 rule. Here’s what the ratio looks like:

- 10 posts should link to third-party articles, content on other people’s websites, or shared social content that is interesting to your reader and relevant to your topic
- 4 posts should link to your company blog posts.
- 1 post should link directly to a landing page.

Like anything, mastering social media publishing takes practice. Content is at the heart of your social media marketing strategy. Learning how to share that content through social publishing is a great skill that can help you achieve your marketing and business growth goals.

Marketing Automation

A strong content marketing strategy consists of many moving parts:

- Search-optimized and mobile-responsive website
- Regular blogging and other content creation
- Social media marketing and social monitoring
- Email marketing
- Lead-capture forms and landing pages
- Marketing analytics and reporting

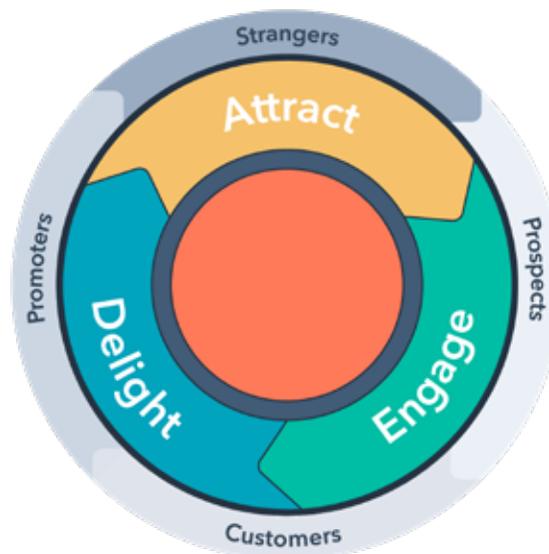
All of these disparate marketing activities must function together to produce optimal results.

It's possible to cobble together some sort of marketing workflow using blogging software like WordPress to create a website and publish content, email marketing software like MailChimp, postings to Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn, and an analytics software like Google Analytics. But to try to get some idea if any of it is working, many industrial marketers struggle to efficiently integrate these separate tools to carry out the process and report on results.

Marketing automation software brings together all of these components into one functional, integrated inbound marketing package. Because it offers an all-in-one platform, marketing automation software like HubSpot not only automates marketing activities, but because the contact database is a core component of the platform, content can also be personalized to each individual visitor based on their history or status.

Here is an example of how the HubSpot Growth Stack can help streamline marketing automation processes throughout the customer journey to connect with and report on a contact's experience.

Inbound Methodology with Customer Lifecycle



HUBSPOT MARKETING HUB

Create highly relevant personalized web pages, blogs, and marketing email messages that are more likely to convert. Because the contact database is integrated with the HubSpot CMS, you are able to display specific content to certain visitors based on their activity. For example, display general content to a first-time visitor. But if a contact has visited your website several times and has viewed your pricing page, you could display an offer for a free consultation or initiate a live chat.

HUBSPOT SALES HUB

Track the customer journey in the HubSpot CRM. Sales people can save time and become more efficient by setting up sales sequences to automate a series of follow-up emails to qualified leads. Eliminate the back and forth of scheduling meetings by integrating calendars and allow visitors to book a meeting at a time that works for them.

HUBSPOT SERVICE HUB

Happy customers give glowing referrals. For companies that pride themselves on a great customer service, Service Hub automates the customer experience. Create and track service tickets, provide a searchable knowledge base of commonly requested information, and use chat bots to initiate easy customer contact on your website.

Conclusion

The proliferation of online channels and the ease of access to information has produced a marketplace where customers, not companies, control their buying journey. In the face of this competition, industrial marketers must allocate limited marketing budgets and resources across a diverse mix of channels and programs. Often, this means taking an inbound marketing approach, using content marketing and digital channels to attract qualified visitors and convert more leads, and marketing automation software to track engagement and prove results.



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685 Featherstone Road | Rockford, IL 61107 | 815-399-2482 | cain-co.com