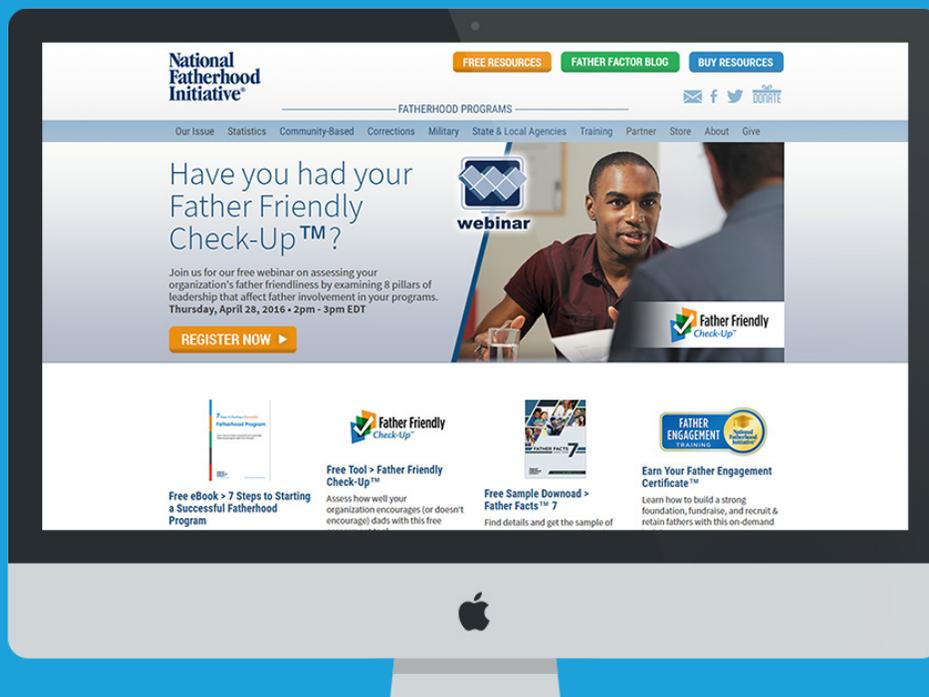




*A Crash Course On*  
**INBOUND MARKETING**  
**FOR NONPROFITS**

*8 Simple Steps to Growing Your Community, Building Influence,  
and Attracting More Members*





**L**et's start this guide with a story about the National Fatherhood Initiative (NFI), a nonprofit organization that aims to improve the well-being of children through the promotion of responsible fatherhood. Since the early 1990s, this Maryland-based organization has been committed to awareness-building, education, and research. Over time, the company has developed a powerful voice by engaging with governments, local community stakeholders, and the public at large.

But marketing has always been a challenge for the reasons you would expect for a nonprofit—limited time and resources. NFI has spent the last decade moving into new, digital channels but perceived marketing expenses as a luxury along the way. The organization relied on free or budget tools to build brand awareness and expose their products to more people.

### **The challenge?**

Their system wasn't working as well as it could and should have. Disjointed processes were hindering sales and donations. It was extremely difficult for marketers to make changes to their website, and without clear paths for visitors to take action, NFI wasn't generating the donations or leads that they needed.



**With more exploration, the organization realized that their frugality was actually causing them to lose rather than preserve their valuable marketing dollars.** NFI's marketing team made the decision to redistribute their marketing budget and double down on reaching their unique target audiences of military, corrections, and community-based organizations. The end result was a **40% increase in organic traffic**, a 5.3X database growth of new constitutions, and an 11% reduction in annual marketing spend.

The moral of the story is that it's possible for nonprofits to have the best of two (seemingly contradictory) marketing worlds: growth and a reduction in marketing budget. The process involves working smarter rather than harder by investing your marketing resources in the right areas.

For-profit businesses have long-championed this idea using a technique called inbound marketing, a practice that focuses on creating quality content that pulls audiences towards an organization, company, or product (i.e. where they naturally want to be). As with NFI, marketing teams in the corporate sector are improving the efficiency and impact of their marketing every day. **Here are 8 tips that nonprofits of all types and sizes can embrace and make their own to grow their communities, build influence, and attract more members (while reducing their budgets along the way).**

## STEP 1:

# Understand What Moves Marketing Needles in Today's Digital Age



The biggest challenge in marketing today is also its biggest opportunity: organizations have access to countless digital channels for reaching key audiences. With power of choice comes the need for exploration and experimentation, which is why it's common to hear about companies running five or six figure marketing tests that they eventually grow into seven figure campaigns.

But nonprofits don't have the luxury of an open-ended testing and growth budgets. These organizations need to focus on marketing initiatives that are proven to generate value to stakeholders. It's this reason why so many nonprofits are stuck with a chicken-egg scenario in their marketing: they want to launch new marketing concepts that results, but they need to demonstrate results before making any changes.

How can nonprofit marketers strike the right balance in moving new initiatives forward?

The key is to focus on a foundational set of marketing tactics that prioritize impact and long-term audience relationships above quick wins. Instead of relying on old, outbound marketing methods of buying ads, purchasing email lists, paying for leads, and sending direct mail campaigns, entice your audiences come to you.

That's where inbound marketing comes in.

HubSpot developed this methodology in 2006, as the most effective marketing method for doing business online. Instead of archaic 'outbound' marketing methods of buying ads, buying email lists, and praying for leads, inbound focuses on creating quality content that pulls people toward your nonprofit, where they naturally want to be. By aligning the content you publish with your community's interests, you naturally attract inbound traffic that you can then convert, close, and delight over time.

There are 5 dimensions of inbound marketing that can help you achieve these goals:



#### CONTENT CREATION + DISTRIBUTION:

Create targeted content that answers prospects' and customers' basic questions and needs, then share that content far and wide.



#### LIFECYCLE MARKETING:

Promoters don't just materialize out of thin air: they start off as strangers, visitors, contacts, and customers. Specific marketing actions and tools help to transform those strangers into promoters.



#### PERSONALIZATION:

Tailor your content to the wants and needs of the people who are viewing it. As you learn more about your leads over time, you can better personalize your messages to their specific needs.



#### MULTI-CHANNEL:

Inbound marketing is multi-channel by nature because it approaches people where they are, in the channel where they want to interact with you.



#### INTEGRATION:

Content creation, publishing and analytics tools all work together like a well-oiled machine - allowing you to focus on publishing the right content in the right place at the right time.

Inbound marketing connects these pillars for a marketing strategy that's cohesive, workflow-driven, and measurable as a result.

## STEP 2: Build a Framework Around the Inbound Methodology

With inbound marketing, success comes from connecting disparate dots of the customer journey.

For instance, AIIM (Association for Information and Image Management), a professional community that provides educational resources to help guide companies to adapt to the ever-changing technology landscape, saw an 87% increase in memberships and a 4.8X increase in leads within 12 months of integrating its previously disconnected systems. The organization tailored its sales and marketing processes to include sequential calls to action, live follow-ups from team members, and a more strategic approach to promoting training products.

The best way to piece together your own strategy is to know how inbound marketing's four biggest actions close the loop between awareness-building, engagement, and conversion.

### Inbound Methodology



## ATTRACT

INBOUND MARKETING ACTION: **ATTRACT** **GOAL:**

You don't want any traffic to your website. You want the right traffic. Focus on reaching audiences who have the most alignment with and interest in your organization.

**BLOGGING:**

The right educational and inspirational content can help you reach the right audiences.

**SEO:**

Help your audiences find you when they're researching information on Google. Optimize your pages, create content around handpicked, highly searched keywords, and build the best possible resources out there (so that search engines will recognize your organization as having the best, most thorough information around a particular topic).

**SOCIAL PUBLISHING:**

Put a human face to your nonprofit, and build visibility by participating on the networks where your audience spends their time.

## CONNECT

INBOUND MARKETING ACTION: **CONNECT** **GOAL:**

Building an audience is only the first step of a successful inbound marketing strategy. In addition to attracting website visitors, make sure to offer a clear conversion goal such as a membership sign-up, email list sign-up, or donation request. The key is to offer audiences something of value so that they will want to engage with your organization. Your mission, values, and work will suffice here: focus on converting the audiences who care about your work.

**FORMS:**

Make sure that your audiences have a clear process for submitting their information. The process should be simple and smooth.

## CONNECT



### CALLS-TO-ACTION:

These buttons encourage audiences to take action. Test a few different variations to see what's most enticing to your audience.



### LANDING PAGES:

Make sure that your value proposition is well-communicated, easy to find, and clear. A conversion optimized landing page will ensure that your marketing initiatives drive value.



### CONTACTS:

Ensure that your leads' information is in a centralized marketing database so that you can build relationships, through future interactions, over the long-term. Your contacts database will help you more effectively plan your personas too.

## INBOUND MARKETING ACTION: **ENGAGE**

### GOAL:

Now it's time to convert your leads into members and donors. This step will be a continuation of the 'conversion stage.' You'll need a few tools to ensure a structured, impactful process.



### CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT (CRM) SOFTWARE:

Use data to build profiles around your leads, community members, and audience as a whole.



### CLOSED-LOOP REPORTING:

Integrate your marketing analytics and CRM systems to identify your best audiences and see how they are engaging with your organization over time.



### EMAIL:

A series of emails focused on useful, relevant content can build trust with prospective members and donors over time.



### MARKETING AUTOMATION:

This process involves creating email marketing and nurturing campaigns tailored to the needs and lifecycle stage of each person in your audience and community. For example, if a visitor downloaded a whitepaper on a certain topic from you in the past, you might want to send that lead a series of related emails. But if they follow you on Twitter and visited certain pages on your website, you might want to change the messaging to reflect those different interests.

## ENGAGE

**INBOUND MARKETING ACTION: INSPIRE** **GOAL:**

Inbound marketing is about providing remarkable content to your audiences, including prospective and current donors and members. As a core part of this process, you'll want to keep audience feedback close to heart.

**SURVEYS:**

Reach out to your audiences on a consistent basis to make sure that you're sharing the right information.

**SMART CALLS-TO-ACTION:**

Tailor your value proposition based on audience segment and lifecycle stage.

**SMART TEXT:**

Provide your existing customers with remarkable content tailored to their interests and challenges. Help them achieve their own goals, as well as introduce new offerings and features that might be of interest to them.

**SOCIAL MONITORING:**

Keep track of the social conversations that matter to you most. Keep your ears open for your audience's questions, comments, likes, and dislikes – and reach out to them with relevant content.

**THE BENEFITS OF EMBRACING INBOUND:**

Inbound marketing is a process that builds on itself. With content as your foundation, you'll build distribution channels that are scalable, sustainable, and make sense for your nonprofit. The result? Higher marketing impact at a streamlined budget—the ultimate win for an organization that is looking to make more out of limited resources.





## STEP 3:

# Create Connection-Building Audience Personas

Nonprofits tackle specific causes that matter most to members and donors. If you market to the wrong audience, your message risks becoming lost—and you end up wasting valuable marketing resources as a result. That's where personas, fictional, generalized characters represent the needs, goals, and observed patterns among your actual and potential members, enter the picture and allow marketers to put themselves in their audience's shoes.

You can research your personas by creating forms on your website and using fields that capture important information. You can also interview your members, donors, and externally facing teams within your nonprofit to uncover trends. Here is a simple, 3-step process that you can follow:

### INTERVIEW YOUR STAKEHOLDERS:



Conduct interviews to make sure that your messaging and value proposition are making an impact. Make sure to consult multiple perspectives and talk with donors, volunteers, past members, new members, and long-time members, too. You'll want this blend to see multiple, hidden sides to your customers' stories. Here's a quick checklist to get you up and running with your qualitative interviews:

- Take a look through your community database. Identify patterns based on common attributes, and create groupings.
- Recruit a few people from each of those groups (maybe 2-3). Schedule 30-45 minute calls with individuals who opt-in: keep reaching out to new contacts until your bandwidth is full.
- Record your calls so that you can analyze patterns and introduce new groups that you may not have noticed.



#### SANITY-CHECK YOUR DATA:

In addition to the qualitative research that you're conducting, you've probably collected a lot of information about your members and stakeholders--particularly details around what made them become active.



One way to answer this question is to cross-check your data with industry publications and trend reports. To get started, take a look at the sector-specific reports that your donors and leadership team are already consulting.

#### UNDERSTAND NEGATIVE PERSONAS:

By now--based on internal and external data that you've gathered, analyzed, and vetted, you'll understand who makes a strong member within your nonprofit's community. You'll also know who doesn't.



As a nonprofit, your teams have limited bandwidth. Make sure that you're investing your efforts in the areas with the highest ROI. This focus will ensure that you always reach your highest value audience and pursue a direction for your organization that makes sense.



## STEP 4:

# Create Systems to Build Upon Your Personas and Database Information

The more detailed you can be about your personas and audience profiles, the better. With audience attention spans being so spread thin, the organizations with the clearest advantage are the ones with the most tailored messaging and value proposition.

Think of your contact database and personas as living, breathing organisms (after all, we're all people on the other side of the computer screen). Here are some strategies that can help:



### EVENT-BASED RESEARCH:

If you're hosting an event, ask your attendees to fill out interesting details about themselves in the registration process.



### INDUSTRY RESEARCH:

Compare your internal data with publicly available datasets (from the CDC, academic journals, or the Census Bureau, for instance).



### YOUR CONTENT:

Learn what content your audiences are reading and why. Track this engagement to see what messaging resonates most with your audience. This is where the concept of conversion optimization comes into play. Use forms and content offers to capture more information so that you can better segment your lists.

Automate as much of this data collection as possible, and conduct regular sanity checks from time to time. This evolutionary process will help ensure that your inbound marketing efforts always stay current and relevant.



## STEP 5:

# Pay Careful Attention to Your SEO Strategy

Everyday people are asking Google how they can get involved with the community. Don't you want your organization to provide the first answer that comes up? Search engine rankings don't happen out of the blue—they're the result of a diligent planning process called search engine optimization (SEO).

SEO refers to techniques that help your website rank higher in organic search results, making your website more visible to people who are looking for your brand, product, or service via search engines like Google, Bing, and Yahoo. Search engines look for elements including title tags, keywords, image tags, internal link structure, and inbound links -- and that's just to name a few. But search engines also look at site structure and design, visitor behavior, and other external, off-site factors to determine how highly ranked your site should be in the search engine results pages. If you want to read more about SEO, [check out this resource here.](#)

When planning out your content, make sure to prioritize SEO as a core part of your process by focusing on the following:



### KEYWORD RESEARCH:

Start by making a list of important, relevant topics based off what you know about your nonprofit. It helps to think about these topics as generic buckets. Start with 5-10 buckets that you think relate most closely to your organization and use those to identify specific keywords later in the process. Still stuck? Try putting yourself in the shoes of your member personas. Ask yourself what types of topics that they might be seeking out.

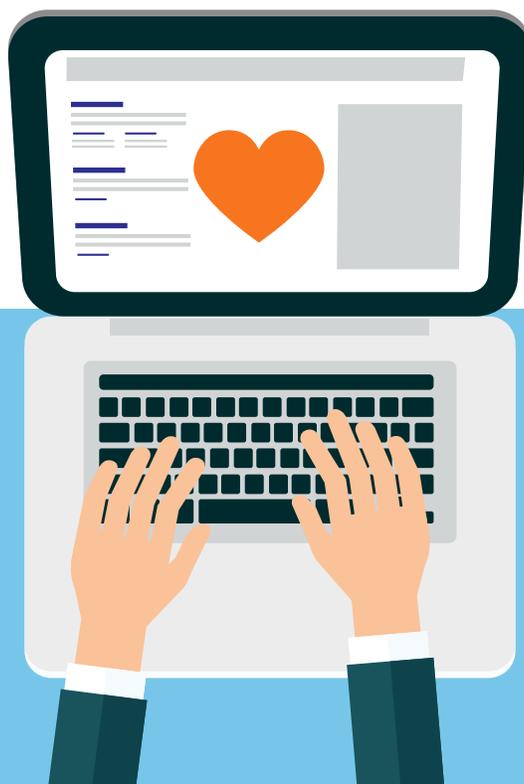


#### ON-PAGE SEO:

Start by making a list of important, relevant topics based off what you know about your nonprofit. It helps to think about these topics as generic buckets. Start with 5-10 buckets that you think relate most closely to your organization and use those to identify specific keywords later in the process. Still stuck? Try putting yourself in the shoes of your member personas. Ask yourself what types of topics that they might be seeking out.

You need to make sure your content is straightforward to find. Done correctly, SEO can bring audiences directly to your organization—free. But you also need to make sure that the content you produce should be clearly tied to what your audience cares about, what they're looking for in terms of educational materials, and what questions that they're asking on Google.

Being easy to find is important, but quality counts, too.





## STEP 6:

# Learn More About Your Visitors: Educate and Convert

When you generate premium content, you'll start building an audience on your website--especially if that content includes offers that are unique to your target audiences.

If you're investing in bringing visitors to your website, you'll want to find a way to learn more about them and gain permission to market to them over the long term--following up with specific offers, in addition to membership and donation requests.

The key to forging this connection is to provide more value and information in the form of offers and magnets. The idea is simple: you're giving them an incentive to continue to learn about and continue to engage with your nonprofit over the long-term. The key is to provide them with more value and information.

When asking audiences to fill out a form, always make sure that you're giving something back like an ebook, webinar, whitepaper, or case study in return. Ensure that these resources and their accompanying landing pages are eye catching, well-designed, and attractive to new audiences. Ask survey questions that might be helpful to your marketing efforts down the road--you can use this information to build lead nurturing sequences and workflows that facilitate long-term engagement with your nonprofit.

Last but not least, focus on the most subtle detail of your landing page: your call to action (CTA). Remember that today's audiences are research driven, and "click here" will fall short in piquing their interest. In your CTAs, be specific about the action that you want your audience to take.

This step will help you achieve and make the most out of your first conversion milestone.

## STEP 7:

# Nurture Converters into Subscribers

Now comes the fun part.

When your audiences discover your nonprofit for the first time, they may be interested, but they may not be ready to make a commitment in terms of financial resources or time. And if you push them towards a conversion event too early, you'll risk coming off as too aggressive or off-putting in your messaging.

That's why you need to launch lead nurturing campaigns.

Essentially, you'll rely on a combination of workflows that trigger an automated series of emails based on actions that visitors have taken, or information that they're shared with you about themselves. You'll use this information to build and segment your email lists so that you can better target these audiences with the right messaging, at the right times in their buying journeys.





The goal is to avoid selling too early and to invest in audience education early-on. How can you invest in audience education? Here are few ideas for types of content that you can use in your lead nurturing campaigns to convert your email list subscribers into members and donors



#### PRESCRIPTIVE CONTENT:

Blog posts, templates, and guides that help leads learn a specific skill or solve a specific problem in their daily lives.



#### THOUGHT-LEADERSHIP CONTENT:

Blog posts, podcasts, external articles, and longform pieces that focus on high-level concepts related to your organization.



#### IMPACT ASSESSMENTS:

Resources that illustrate exactly how your nonprofit is making a difference to the lives of donors and members.

To use a real world analogy: imagine that you're forming a new friendship with another person, and both of you are taking time to get to know one another after your initial handshake. Eventually, you'll become great friends, or your relationship will fizzle out.

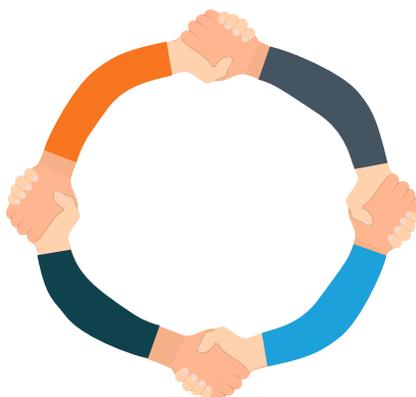
## STEP 8: Double Down on Retention & Re-engagement

The best supporters of your nonprofit are the individuals who already know and support your work. If you've taken the time to build your audience base, recruit members, and collect donations, the last thing you want to do is let these already-strong relationships fall through the cracks.

Inbound marketing, at the end of the day, is a means of building long-term relationships. Great options for continued retention include implementing referral programs, educational pieces for current members, segmenting newsletters, opportunities for networking or even a kit that shows them how to launch their own donations campaign—the list goes on.

If you're not sure where to get started, revisit step 3: conduct qualitative interviews with your existing community to make sure that your content, messaging, and marketing campaigns are on-point. From there, take a look at your analytics to evaluate your highest value lead sources.

Launch, learn, and iterate. Focus on your highest-value and most engaged audiences.





## FINAL THOUGHTS:

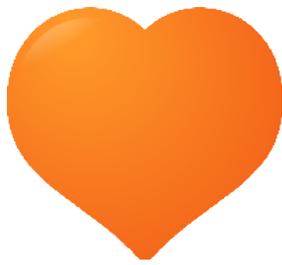
A healthy, inbound strategy will be long-term and relationship driven. Invest as much time in research, listening, and learning to get to know your audiences. Deliver hyper-targeted campaigns to your most engaged audiences. You'll end up with a self-sustaining, self-driving strategy.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR:



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Juliana Nicholson is a Marketing Manager for HubSpot, where she focuses on helping nonprofit companies attract, connect, engage, and inspire their communities with content and communications they love.



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