

Build Strong Relationships

PROVIDE EXCEPTIONAL VALUE

Imagine that you are looking to hire a landscape designer. But since neither you nor any of your friends has hired one before, what do you do? You hop on the Internet, search for landscape designers in your area/city, check out their websites, read reviews about them, and when you find one that seems like a good fit, you pick up the phone and call.

This is the typical behavior of today's consumers. With the majority of people having access to the Internet on desktops and smartphones, their access to information on any topic is unlimited. Even after coming across a stimulus (advertisement), consumers are taking an initiative to find out more information on whatever they are interested in before they purchase.

The way traditional marketing is done goes something like this:

1. The advertiser/business puts out an ad on print, radio or TV.
2. The ad is relayed to millions of people (both interested and not interested in whatever is being offered).
3. The buying decision is made.

However, traditional marketing is just not working as well as it used to. Consumers are so much used to intrusive and irrelevant ads that they no longer pay attention to them.

If statistics are anything to go by, marketers are seeing lower ROI from traditional marketing than ever before:

- 200 million Americans have registered their phone numbers on the FTC's "Do Not Call" list. (source: [Mashable](#))
- 3 out of 4 inbound marketing channels cost less than any outbound channel. (source: [Mashable](#))
- 86% of people skip television ads. (source: [Mashable](#))
- Inbound marketing costs 62% less per lead than traditional outbound marketing. (source: [Mashable](#))

From the stats above, it is clear that outbound (traditional) marketing is not only less effective, but also more expensive than inbound marketing.

And this brings us to the next question, what is inbound marketing?

What is Inbound?

Inbound marketing (or, simply, inbound) refers to a new way of marketing that involves attracting prospects without being intrusive or irrelevant. The method involves the use of online techniques to get your business in front of prospects at the time when they are looking for information and are ready to buy.

Unlike traditional marketing messages that simply tell anyone who cares to hear to “buy” your product, inbound marketing is about building relationships with prospects before asking for a sale. Inbound techniques involve educating, delighting or providing value to prospects to build a trustful relationship with them.

When trust is built with prospects, it becomes easier to sell. The results of inbound marketing are higher conversions and lower cost than outbound marketing campaigns deliver. Apart from this, brands enjoy longer retention of satisfied customers, who can become brand ambassadors and refer new customers to them.

The question is: how long will it take to build a relationship with prospects to get them to trust and buy from you? The time needed to cultivate a relationship with your prospects will vary. It may depend on your existing brand equity (how well your business is known in your industry), price of your product/service, how much information customers need about your offer, among others.

According to a study by GE Capital Retail Bank, 81% of consumers research online before making big purchases. The study shows that, generally, the higher the price of a product/service, the more research prospects do before buying. So let's see how you can generate leads through inbound marketing.

The Inbound process

The inbound process can be divided into four distinct steps:

1. Attract: Get visitors who can be valuable to your business to know what you do and where you can be found online.
2. Convert: Convert traffic to leads by offering a more personalized experience.
3. Close: Convert leads into customers through targeted lead nurturing strategy
4. Delight: Delight existing customers with your product/service and turn them to ambassadors of your brand.

Let's look at each of these steps in detail.

Generating website traffic

Most online business owners are concerned with getting huge amounts of traffic to their websites. However, this is the wrong approach. With inbound marketing, you should not just be targeting traffic, but targeted traffic. This is traffic that is interested in your business and can benefit your sales.

To get targeted traffic to your website, you need to identify and define your ideal customer.

Determining your ideal customers (Buyer Personas)

A successful marketing campaign starts by identifying your buyer personas. This refers to the characteristics of your ideal customer.

You want to identify your buyer persona beforehand as it will help to improve your conversions along the line. By understanding your buyer persona, you can create more relevant offers, create meaningful engagements through your content, know where to find your prospects and develop a working strategy of closing on sales.

Your sales team or the person who deals directly with prospects or customers can help you determine your buyer personas. The personas can be identified by the common things they share. If you are a small business, you can conduct interviews and surveys to understand the demographics of your buyer personas as well as behaviors.

As your business evolves, your target buyer personas may also evolve with it. It is critical to carry out persona surveys whenever your business makes a significant change, especially with regards to products/services.

Creating and executing your content strategy

After identifying your buyer personas, you need a content strategy that will help to position your company as a leader in your industry and at the same time reach your prospects at a personal level. Your content strategy should address the needs and wants of your target market and add value to their lives.

Content is the pinnacle of inbound marketing. It helps to create relationships, forge partnerships, improve brand visibility and gain clout in your industry. But more than this, content can be indexed by search engines and help you generate new leads for your business. You should be focused on creating targeted content that resonates well with your audience.

Three principal tips on content creation

Content is KING. By content, we mean the way you present your message to your target audience. You can create content in the form of blog posts, articles, eBooks, white papers, videos, webinars, and podcasts, among others. But perhaps the most important form of content in lead generation is blog posts. Check these three statistics from Hubspot:

- 57% of companies have acquired a customer through their blog.
- Companies that blog convert 70% more leads.
- Blog frequency impacts customer acquisition. 92% of companies who blogged multiple times a day acquired a customer through their blog.

Creating content helps to improve your traffic numbers.

However, driving traffic and generating leads through your content is not just a matter of churning out massive amounts of content. No. The content has to be relevant to your audience and provide value. Here are some tips to keep in mind when producing content:

1. Be relevant to your target audience

When creating content, have your target audience in mind. What do you want them to do? Your content should add value to your readers by entertaining or delighting. If you are writing blog posts, ask yourself the following questions:

- What challenges/problems are your prospects facing?
- What do you want your audience to do after reading the blog post?
- What value do you hope to provide the audience through the content?

2. Build Thought Leadership

Making sales, whether online or offline, is all about trust. Trust breaks down the hesitation that prospects may have when it comes to buying. The content you produce should be geared towards positioning you as an authority in your industry. To do this, you can create thought-provoking, educative content that your audience will want to share. Establish an angle that your brand will be known for through its content.

3. Produce content regularly

To build a relationship with your online prospects, you need to communicate with them regularly. This can be done through your blog. Producing blog articles on a regular basis not only helps to improve your brand awareness, but also attracts backlinks to your website from other websites. Backlinks help to move the articles higher on search engine rankings.

Blogs with more content get indexed faster and are likely to rank higher than those with flimsy content. However, you have to strike a balance between production and value. Avoid producing content simply for the sake of getting indexed. Remember, you are looking to generate leads, not simply drive traffic to your website.

Get found on social media

Social media networking sites have become important avenues for businesses to connect with customers and prospects. Moreover, there are a range of tools that can help you automate your social media marketing and collect leads easily. When starting out on social media, most businesses grapple with the question of which social networking sites they should be on. The answer to this is simple; be where your target customers hang out.

You do not have to join all social media networks. Ideally, you want to be in one to three networks depending on your target customers. Most B2C companies find Facebook and Twitter important social networks for their lead generation. On the other hand, B2B companies find LinkedIn and Twitter as their top social media lead generation sites.

You should understand the characteristics of the prospects on different social media networks to reach them in a meaningful way. Below is an overview of the audiences across Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn.

Facebook

Facebook is the largest social network in terms of users. Prospects on Facebook like to discover information based on the people they are connected to. Effective Facebook lead generation starts by creating personalized content that reflects your brand or company culture. On your Facebook page, you can share articles, photos and videos that will help prospects relate more with your company.

Depending on your industry, you can use Facebook to drive traffic to your website, generate leads, promote sales, or build brand awareness.

Twitter

The majority of Twitter users in the US are between ages 25-34. The audience is looking for trending news related to their interests that they may be missing. For this audience, fine tune your content to be much like a media company would be. Sharing headlines in your industry, events, and reviews work best here.

Some prospects may use Twitter and Facebook to request support on things such as your products, status of their accounts, and so on. If a significant number of customers are using Twitter and Facebook for sales or support queries, have a dedicated support team to handle the queries.

LinkedIn

Prospects on LinkedIn are mainly professionals looking to connect with potential employers, suppliers or partners. Members of this audience are highly targeted and actively participate in issues related to their industries. You can reach this audience with in-depth content such as white papers and technical articles. To successfully generate leads through LinkedIn, join the groups where your prospects are and start helping members with their problems. Being helpful will cultivate trust from other members, making them connect with you on your profile or follow your LinkedIn business page.

Search Engine Optimization

Your website should be developed to rank well on search engines. When implementing your inbound marketing strategy, do an audit of your website to ensure it is designed based on the best SEO practices. Some of the things to check include:

- Your pages should have the Title tag. If you are using WordPress, make sure the Title tag is not duplicated across the pages. You can use a plugin like [Yoast SEO](#) to prevent instances of duplicate Title tags.
- Check that your website does not have JavaScripts, Flash and other elements that cannot be read by search engine bots.
- Optimize the images on your website to ensure it loads fast. Slow-loading websites provide poor user experience and lower your site's SEO score.
- Make your website responsive. With many people accessing the Internet on their smartphones, you want to give them a good experience.
- Include a SiteMap on your website. This will make it easy for search engine bots to crawl and index your website pages.

Apart from the design of your website, you need to optimize your content to rank well on search engines for your target keywords.

Important: Producing great content will not have any impact on your bottom line if the content cannot be found by your target prospects.

Your blog posts should be optimized for various keywords and interlinked with other related articles on your blog. However, make sure the articles are written for humans and not search engines. Quality content can be shared on social media sites and linked to by other websites, resulting in new inbound links to your website.

You should also proactively work to improve your site's ranking on search engines by seeking linking opportunities. For example, you can seek guest blogging opportunities at high-traffic industry blogs that will expose your content to many readers. Posting articles at authority blogs can increase traffic, leads and inbound links to your website.

Converting visitors into leads

When you start attracting web traffic to your website through some of the above inbound marketing techniques, this is a good sign. However, traffic does not pay the bills. You need to convert the traffic to leads, and ultimately to customers. Just like we did during the content development strategy, you need to understand your buyer persona to get good conversion rates. To generate meaningful leads that you can appropriately place in your sales funnel, provide content that resonates well with the audience.

Your content should over-deliver on your promise such that leads will remain active on your list and will want to hear more from you. With lead generation, it's both a numbers and quality game. You need many high quality leads. You do not want a lead that is not enthusiastic about your business or that feels shortchanged after going through the downloadable content you provided.

The first step to building a relationship with your web visitors is to help them. While your blog posts and articles should be helpful, you can provide premium information such as eBooks, white papers, videos and other forms of content to your subscribers. Remember, prospects are looking for resources to help them in their buying process. The downloadable content you provide should help them accomplish this.

Your Offer

Before visitors agree to give you their email addresses, you must have an offer.

The "offer" is simply high quality or premium content you are providing. The offer should be relevant to your prospects. Keeping in mind that the visitors to your website may be at different stages of the sales funnel (some are just researching while others are ready to buy), you should have multiple offers to target the different buyer personas.

Your offer should be provided through a landing page. Every offer should be placed on its own landing page to enable easy segmentation of the leads based on their interests. The content your prospects' download will help you know where to place them in your sales funnel.

For example, prospects who are just researching your product may be interested in an eBook on how they will benefit from the product. On the other hand, prospects who are ready to buy may sign up for a webinar or sales video demo. Segmentation is crucial to improving your lead conversions.

Anatomy of a high converting landing page

Getting traffic to your website is already hard work. After getting traffic, you do not want to lose the chance to convert the visitor into a lead. Your landing page will affect your lead conversion rate. Studies have shown that different elements contribute to the landing page conversion. Let's look at how you can increase the conversion rate of your landing pages.

1. Have a compelling offer

You should present an irresistible offer to your prospects. Ideally, the offer should be downloaded or offered online. Examples of downloadable offers include videos, eBooks, white papers, graphics packs, infographics, worksheets, video training courses, among others.

Other offers you can provide include exclusive webinar access, free consultation, and free physical gifts, among others.

Your offer should live up to the promise on the landing page. If you promise an online course when a visitor opts-in your email list, then provide the course on the backend. Tricking visitors into opting into your list and not living up to your promise can result in an unresponsive list of prospects. Selling to an unresponsive list can be a headache.

2. Landing page design

The landing page is a special page dedicated to pre-selling a prospect to an offer with the aim of getting their contact information. The landing page should be uncluttered, direct, and to the point. Visitors should know what to do when they visit the page.

Below are some design tips related to landing pages:

- Remove any navigation links or outbound links that can make visitors leave the page.
- Avoid using heavy images that will make the landing page load slowly.
- Highlight the benefits of the product/service to your prospects.
- Avoid using a fancy, difficult-to-read font for your text.

3. Split-test and optimize your landing pages

Test different landing page designs to determine the one that results in the highest conversions. To begin, you can split test two different landing pages, send the same amount of traffic and measure the conversion rate. The page that leads to the highest conversions should then be further optimized.

Test different elements on the landing page and measure the conversion rate. Some of the elements you can test include the landing page copy, images, call-to-action (CTA) button, positioning of different elements and so on. Keep testing and optimizing until you find the right design that results in the highest conversions.

Closing leads into customers

Congratulations on making it this far!

You started by identifying your buyer persona, you created a content marketing strategy, used social media and SEO to drive web traffic to your website and finally managed to convert the visitors to leads.

Now, we come to the most important part of inbound marketing; closing the sale.

For leads to finally buy from you, it takes a combined effort from your marketing and sales teams to determine where the leads are in the sales funnel. Apart from this, there needs to be a marketing automation strategy that will help to move the leads further down your sales funnel.

You can use marketing automation software like HubSpot to categorize your leads based on their behaviors or particular profile attributes. Sending targeted emails is a powerful way of improving your leads-to-sales conversion rates. Your leads should be segmented based on their interests and other profiles, and targeted messages should be sent to them.

Setting up conversion workflow

Every email you send should be geared towards making the prospect do something that will move him down the sales funnel. For example, you may be looking to get the prospects to download another offer, schedule a consultation, request an assessment, and so on. The stages involved from the first email up to when the lead converts is referred to as workflow.

To set up your workflow, you need to determine your end-goal and the steps in-between that the lead will have to take. For example, if you are selling a service, you might enroll the lead into the workflow by introducing him to your service.

Here is a typical workflow for a consulting services company:

1. Initial interaction – This can be an eBook or white paper introducing the consulting services.
2. How will I benefit from the consultation service?
3. Why is this particular consulting company right for me?
4. How can I request more information on the consulting services?

Every stage of the workflow should be addressed through content that works best for it. For example, a software company will find videos more effective in providing an overview of the software than an eBook.

TIP: Use case studies in your workflow. They bring your company out as an expert in your industry and show proof of your product or service.

By following the workflow, you will be able to close the lead or reach the point for your sales team to take over. Check the metrics of the emails you send to better understand what your leads are interested in. Most email marketing software enables you to track the number of emails opened and links clicked. If you realize a certain email message had a high open rate, this should tell you something about the leads. For example, the message may have resonated well with them.

With this insight, you can tailor your subsequent emails along the same lines to ensure high engagement levels, and, consequently, sales. The same information can help your sales team prepare adequately to convert the leads in the subsequent communication.

Delight your customers

After attracting a web visitor, converting them to a lead, and finally selling them your product, you will have reached the final stages of your interaction with the customer. To complete the buying cycle, you should now work to turn the customers into your brand ambassadors.

If your customers are happy with your product, they will tell others about it. According to an [article in Harvard Business Review](#), 23% of customers who have a positive experience when interacting with a brand tell others about it. Make your customers happy and they will tell others about your product/ services.

Your whole team should be focused on customer satisfaction. This will pay off in the long run with positive PR from them. Below are some ways in which you can delight your customers after a sale:

- Provide support for your product/ service. While you may no longer be getting any revenue for offering support, you can essentially convert a customer to a brand ambassador by being helpful.

- Educate your customers how to get the most value from your service/product. Think of this as an unadvertised bonus for the customers who bought from you.
- Listen to your customers to create the best possible experience for them. Join forums and social networking sites where prospects are talking about your brand. Listen to what they say and participate in the conversations.

Generally, measure your Net Promoter Score. This is the number of customers that positively promote your brand versus those who present your brand negatively. Aim to achieve an NPS of +100 (i.e., where all customers are promoting your brand).

Measure your Inbound Marketing efforts

The above is an overview of how you can generate traffic and leads on your website. Ultimately, you want to measure your traffic and lead generation efforts to ensure they are contributing to your bottom line as expected. When initiating any traffic or lead generation campaign, you should have execution timelines and benchmarks for success. The benchmarks are also known as Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

The KPIs will vary depending on the technique you are measuring as well as your goals. Generally, you want to measure KPIs that contribute towards getting a sale. Measuring KPIs will help you know which lead generation techniques are working and which ones need to be optimized for better performance.

The KPIs should be reviewed after a set timeline. For example, you can review them on a monthly, quarterly or semiannual basis. You can also measure them based on campaigns you launch.

Inbound marketing is here to stay, and it is cost-effective and results in a better ROI than traditional marketing. This white paper should help you get started with lead generation for your business.