

# The Future of B2B Marketing in a Self-Service World

*How the best B2B marketers align sales and marketing teams around inbound principles.*

Written By:

Justin Spring

Jake Kaufman

Christy Goodman

adept

# Introduction

If you've been working in B2B sales or marketing for a while, you know that customer behaviors have changed significantly in the past 10 years, and at hyper-speed in the past three.

We're now living in the age of the customer, says analyst firm Walker, adding that "customers know more" about what they are buying and "expect more" from brands today. That's in large part due to the rapid evolution of online content, social networks and personalized technology.

## Consider the following:



Nearly half of all B2B researchers are millennials.

↑ THINKWITHGOOGLE



Only 1% of millennials surveyed said that a compelling advertisement would make them trust a brand more.

↑ FORBES



89% of B2B buyers use the internet during the research process.

↑ THINKWITHGOOGLE



In most cases, B2B prospects are 57% of the way down the path to a decision before they actually perform an action on a site.

## So, what's this mean for B2B marketing?

It means a seismic change is taking place right now, and you can no longer afford to keep doing what you've always done if you want to attract new customers to your business.

# Introduction *(Continued)*

## In this ebook, you will discover :



Why the traditional competing marketing and sales structure no longer works (and will actually bleed money from your business)



What the solution is to market against a highly complex, long sales cycle



How to align your marketing and sales teams into a unified force that creates, contributes and leads value-add conversations that directly relate to new business.

***That's quite a lot. So, let's get to it.***

## PART 1

# The Big Fat Pink Elephant Sitting At The Conference Table.

Sit in a room long enough where sales and marketing teams are assembled together to talk about business goals, and you'll feel the tension.

On one side, marketing sits confidently talking about the *volume* of leads that they've generated over the past year. They show how many people have filled out contact forms, or made calls, or sent emails inquiring about services. And they voice frustration that the sales team hasn't *done their part* to take advantage of all the leads that marketing is driving.

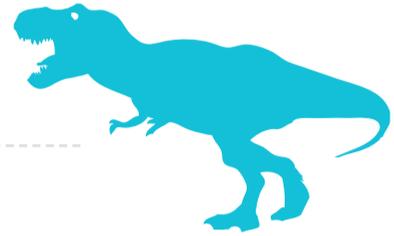
On the other side of the table, the sales team talks about how they are wasting a large portion of their time chasing down cold or illegitimate leads from marketing that aren't a good fit for the business. They advocate that, more than anything, they need quality leads to drive through the sales funnel.

There may be different perspectives, but it's clear from both sides: what we're doing isn't working the way that we want it to work, because it's no longer a viable way to engage the market.

That's the big fat pink elephant in the room that no one wants to mention.

But before we talk about how to fix it, we have to understand how we got here.

Before the Internet,  
the sales team made around  
***80% of sales.***

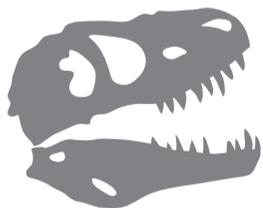


This is likely due to the way that customers used to buy. Traditionally, customers relied on salespeople to identify their needs and the solutions to resolve them. These are the conversations that salespeople live for.

In those days, all marketing departments had to do was generate “leads” and toss them across the metaphorical fence to sales departments. Then, it was back to the same old marketing to generate more leads.

Some of those leads were pretty cold, and the sales team couldn’t do much with them. Marketing may as well have thrown snowballs over the fence.

Whether hot or cold, the sales team were responsible for turning those leads into revenue. That made sense in an era when buyers relied on sales teams for information that would guide them towards a purchase.



But those days are gone.

The explosion of digital content, social networks, and personalized technology killed the traditional linear buyer journey and replaced it with a new chaotic and (seemingly) random journey.

Previously, a prospective customer went to your sales team for answers. Today, by the time a B2B buyer talks to your sales team, they are already at least 70% of the way through the buyer journey—having found the information they need outside of sales conversations.



94% of B2B buyers research products and services online before purchasing.

↑ ACCENTURE



58% of buyers say that sales reps can't answer their questions adequately, so they prefer to do their own research.

↑ CAHNERS



B2B buyers prefer to get information from and buy from trusted sources.

↑ NEILSON

## *This is an “us” problem.*

This isn't the fault of the marketing department. And it's not the fault of the sales team. The businesses who will win today and tomorrow are the ones that understand it's not about casting blame—but about sharing responsibility for the solution.

Both teams have to understand how they can work together to win sales at a higher rate and grow revenue for the business as a whole. **When B2B sales and marketing are aligned, magic happens.**

That's what produces the greatest success for the company as a whole—and that's the future for companies that want to grow revenue and retain customers in this new customer-centric age.



32% annual revenue growth with tight sales and marketing alignment. In contrast, companies without that alignment registered a 7% fall in revenues.

↑ ABERDEEN GROUP



When B2B sales and marketing are tightly aligned, the sales win rate rises by 38%. Customer retention, by the way, also improves by 36%.

↑ MARKETING PROFS

## PART 2

# The Future of B2B Marketing

As you can see, alignment between marketing and sales is a critical component of success in the future for B2B marketing.

This is called ***SMarketing***.



Coined by HubSpot, SMarketing is aligning sales and marketing teams around common goals via regular communication between the two in order to improve revenue.

In a SMarketing environment, marketing professionals understand how they acquire the right kinds of leads for sales, and sales professionals help marketing understand what kinds of leads are really valuable.

Instead of being separate teams, sales and marketing become part of the same team, working together to achieve common goals and to help each part of the business excel. That's what helps companies achieve the kind of revenue growth cited in the Aberdeen report mentioned earlier.

SMarketing is a more strategic approach to winning business, but it's not always easy to change the existing mindset.

In most settings, sales and marketing are two different teams, and they don't like each other that much.



87% of the terms sales and marketing professionals use to describe each other are negative.

↑ HUBSPOT

There are reasons for this mutual distrust, as author of *Inbound Marketing for Dummies*, [Scott Anderson Miller](#) points out. Often, sales teams think marketers have a superiority complex and downplay the role of sales in closing the deals that marketing has landed. Meanwhile, marketing teams think salespeople don't respect their work and hog the credit for completing sales.

That's why, in the past, there has been more competition than collaboration between sales and marketing. But in this new environment, this has to change. Sales and marketing need to work together, as a team, using a single customer funnel and taking responsibility both for their individual parts and for the success of the whole.

# 4 Steps To Align Marketing and Sales Into A Unified Customer-Focused Force.

Businesses who deftly align their marketing and sales teams into a unified customer-focused force will set themselves apart from the businesses who do not adapt the new customer-centric world.

It all sounds good in theory, but how do you implement such a seismic shift in your operations?

How do you get both teams to not only place nice together, but to truly operate like a team that relies on each other and compliments each other? In many businesses, it may seem a daunting task. There may be illegitimate feelings and prejudices between the departments—not to mention a spirit of competition and attribution jealousy.

It may be easier than you think. At the end of the day, both marketing and sales want the same thing. They both want to win new customers for the business, and grow the brand's recognition and positive sentiment in the market.

Here's how to *finally* align your marketing and sales teams into a unified force that strategically wins over new business by creating the right helpful content, and having the appropriate value-add conversations at every stage of the customer journey.

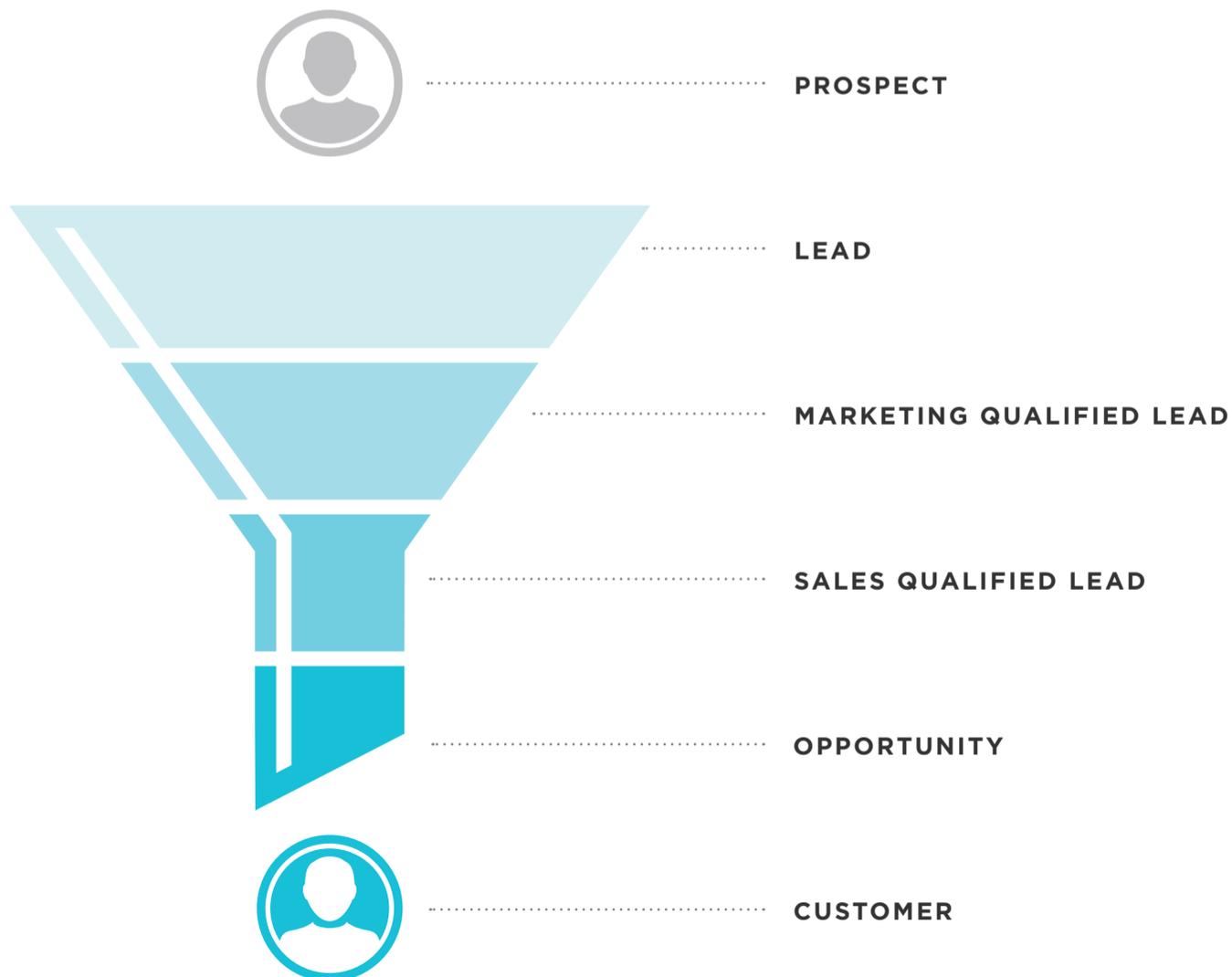
## *Step 1:*

# Speak a shared language.

As mentioned earlier, a shared marketing and sales funnel is the first step to an aligned SMarketing team.

In *The Power of Smarketing*, HubSpot outlines a six stage marketing and sales funnel that matches the customer journey. This funnel divides contacts into prospects, leads, marketing qualified leads, sales qualified leads, opportunities and customers.

*Both marketers and salespeople  
have to understand all parts of the funnel.*



**PROSPECT**

A prospect is someone who has visited your website and allowed you to collect a certain amount of information. For example, a blog or email newsletter subscriber would count as a prospect.

**LEAD**

A lead is someone who has taken the interaction with your company a bit further by downloading a piece of content that you have created to attract a particular customer. If you have ever grabbed a white paper or ebook from a company, then that company would count you as a lead.

**MARKETING QUALIFIED LEAD (MQL)**

A marketing qualified lead (MQL) is a lead that is more likely to become a customer, based on analytics about their actions before converting. For example, a lead that has shown repeated interest in your white paper and ebooks could be an MQL.

**SALES QUALIFIED LEAD**

A sales qualified lead is a lead that the sales team thinks is worth following up with a sales call. Again, this will be based on data about the typical pre-sales behavior of your customers.

**OPPORTUNITY**

If a sales call bears fruit and the contact is interested in buying, then sales teams will tag the contact as an opportunity (a potential customer).

**CUSTOMER**

Finally, a customer is someone who has purchased your products or services.

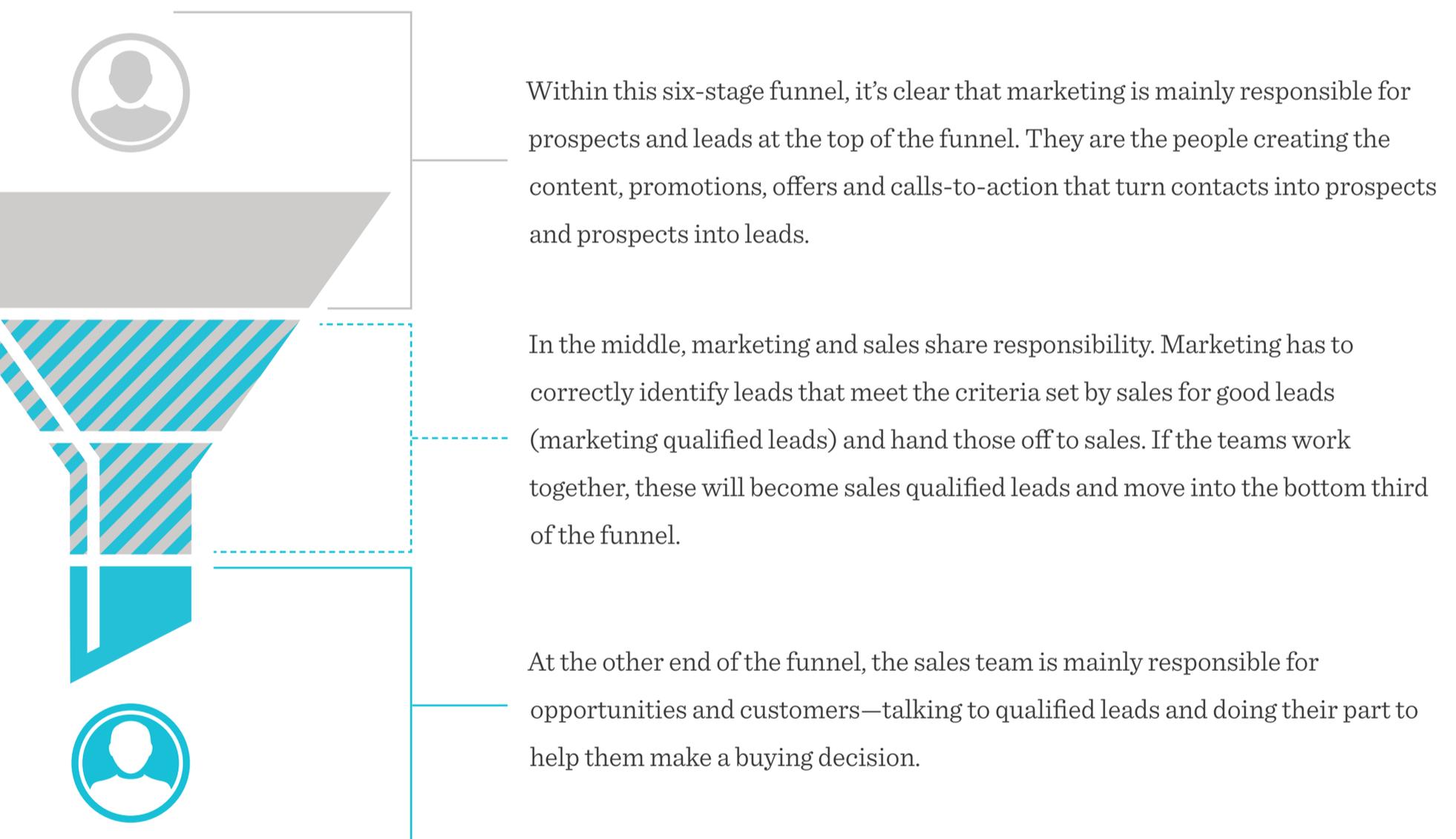
***Only 45% of businesses have established a company wide definition of a sales ready lead.***

For maximum success, both marketers and salespeople have to understand all parts of the funnel.

## *Step 2:*

# Assign clear roles and responsibilities at each stage of the funnel

Once both sales and marketing understand what each part of the funnel is, the next step is to identify who is responsible for each part of the funnel.



In a SMarketing approach, there's shared responsibility for moving contacts through the funnel from being prospects to becoming customers.

## *Step 3:*

# Implement a service level agreement

One way to crystallize that shared responsibility is to put a service level agreement (SLA) in place that defines the respective commitments of sales and marketing in order to achieve their shared goals.

For example, marketing has to commit to delivering the quantity of qualified leads needed for the company to meet its revenue targets. To do that, all team members need to understand what the overall revenue goal is, how many customers usually deliver that revenue, and how many leads turn into customers (the close rate).

Meanwhile, sales must commit to the most appropriate speed and depth of follow-up in order to turn sales qualified leads into opportunities and customers. Salespeople have to know how soon and how often they should attempt to engage with leads so they don't lose them to a competitor.

Both marketing and sales have to know how many prospects need to be at the top of the funnel to end up with the right number of customers at the bottom of the funnel.



## **An SLA is a key tool in making SMarketing work.**

Adept has a FREE Excel worksheet to help you create your own service level agreement.

[GET IT HERE](#)

## *Step 4:*

# Close the loop between marketing & sales

The final piece of the puzzle to help with this new approach is to create a closed-loop reporting system. This avoids issues such as disappearing or duplicated leads, poor information about leads, and incomplete understanding of how a particular function helps the team gain revenue for the company.

A closed-loop reporting system allows both sales and marketing people to understand what a good lead is. This enables both teams to see what's working and what's not working to win business and close the sale by covering the whole customer journey from initial contact to winning new business



### **Business Online implemented closed loop reporting for a client and achieved:**



52% more high quality leads than anticipated



6.9% overall increase in leads

With closed loop reporting, marketing people can understand which content is attracting which kinds of customers, which sources are best for lead generation and how their actions contribute to closing sales and earning revenue. For example, knowing the most important questions potential customers ask can help marketing focus content to attract better leads.

Salespeople can also get better information about the actions sales qualified leads have taken, so their sales calls can be more successful. This allows them to cater for today's customers who are likely to respond better with helpful value-add content rather than pushy conversations.



As Hubspot points out, closed loop reporting helps the team focus on the right channels and offers, deliver better results, gain more customer insights and reduce the sales cycle. It also means there's no more guesswork about what works.

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Now that you know the importance of SMarketing and the key pieces you need to implement for success with this approach, let's look at how you can turn this into an inbound marketing strategy that wins customers for **YOUR** business.

## PART 4

# Pulling it All Together Into a Customer Winning Inbound Strategy

Creating an inbound marketing strategy that actually works is no small task. Some people forget about the need to plan strategy before creating content, while others nail the strategy but are unable to create the content that will really grab those customers.

In Adept's experience, **there are six steps you need to take to prime you for success in this new era of B2B marketing and sales:**

- 1 --- Identify your buyers
- 2 --- Embrace your buyers' journeys
- 3 --- Create a content strategy to attract visitors and convert them into leads
- 4 --- Create a content strategy that inspires leads to become happy, loyal customers
- 5 --- Embrace Inbound Sales
- 6 --- Embrace Technology

*Let's take a look at each.*

## Identify Your Buyers

Personas are fictionalized representations of your ideal customers. And if you're going to do inbound marketing well, they are absolutely critical.

**For each ideal customer type you want to reach, a persona should identify:**

- ▶ --- Their title or role within an organization
- ▶ --- Their core responsibilities
- ▶ --- The key challenges they need to solve
- ▶ --- What drives their decision making process
- ▶ --- What and who inspires them
- ▶ --- How they prefer to consume content
- ▶ --- What marketing messages work with them
- ▶ --- What sales messages work for them

The goal of personas is to serve as the guiding force for all your Smarketing efforts. Every communication, every piece of content, every visual, should be matched against the persona to ensure it is an ideal asset that helps them solve a problem, and communicates with them in the manner they prefer.

# Embrace Your Buyers Journeys

The buyer journey is the bedrock of your inbound marketing strategy. To make inbound work, you will need to understand the different journeys of each of your unique, specific customer personas.

**Suppose you want to grow your business by 10% this year.**

**You will have to think about questions like:**

- ① ---- Who are we trying to reach with each product or service?
- ② ---- What does the funnel look like for them?
- ③ ---- What problems are they trying to solve?
- ④ ---- What are their key questions while they're doing research?
- ⑤ ---- What questions will they ask when they're serious about buying?
- ⑥ ---- What's stopping them from buying now?
- ⑦ ---- What will help them decide to make a purchase?

**Follow that up by considering:**

- ⑧ ---- What topics can you talk about that will attract these kinds of people to your website?
- ⑨ ---- How can you provide free education to further their understanding of this service/or to define their need for this service?
- ⑩ ---- Can you give them a special offer to help “win” them over to become a customer?

Remember, it's now a self-serve buyer journey. The role of your SMarketing team is to help contacts make an informed buying decision. That means going beyond the formula of attract, convert, close and delight to provide what they need at each stage of the funnel.

Every buyer journey is different. Research from Forrester shows that the influence of different information sources on the final decision varies depending on the product being bought.

## Create a content strategy to attract visitors and convert them into leads.

The next step is to follow the data to identify the best time to make contact with visitors, leads and MQLs and what information to provide, depending on what content they have already consumed.

If you're not constantly gathering leads and nurturing them to the point where they are ready for deeper interaction with you, then you're missing the chance to turn leads into customers.

### Attract visitors and turn them into leads by:

-  Creating helpful blog content
-  Using social media content
-  Optimizing your site so visitors find you via search
-  Connecting with them through email

You start to convert them as they provide more details in exchange for deeper content such as an ebook or white paper or the opportunity attend a webinar. Landing pages and calls to action are essential elements in these early stages where leads are making up their minds about solutions. The content you deliver at this stage gives them a reason to consider you. By the end of this process, you should have acquired some MQLs that you're ready to pass over to the sales team.

*“We don’t publish blog posts to convince people they should buy our products. We publish them because we want people to level-up their skills and be better marketers. Our hope is that ... if you ever find yourself in need of tools for your digital marketing efforts, we’ll be top-of-mind as a reliable choice.”*

QUOTE FROM MOZ.COM

## Create a content strategy that inspires leads to become *happy, loyal customers*.

Your job isn't done yet, though, because in the SMarketing approach, you also need to have content that helps those SQLs choose you.

Customer relationship management (CRM) software plus the data you have on different customer touchpoints will help you know when to help close sales with case studies, webinars, data sheets, demos, testimonials, guides, calculators and more.

And after the sale you can delight your customers by providing smart, tailored content that they will want to share, or special offers for existing customers. After all, it's easier to win repeat business than a new sale.



Nurtured leads produce **20% more sales opportunities** than non-nurtured leads.

↑ HUBSPOT

## Embrace Inbound Sales

The fifth piece of the puzzle is inbound sales. This is about putting your buyer's needs above your own. Instead of the old hard sell, inbound sales is about a non-intrusive and consultative approach focused on helping buyers make an informed decision to purchase.

Inbound sales is educational, respectful and helpful rather than promotional, pushy and negotiation-oriented.

Again, the SMarketing approach gives you a lot of information about your customer interactions up to this point. When you know what attracted them to your website, what they subscribed to, what they downloaded and what they searched for, you're in a better position to provide information that defines their needs and your solutions to those needs. It's about guiding opportunities to make the right purchasing decision so that they become happy customers.



44% of sales people give up after a single follow up, but **80% of sales require at least five follow-up calls before they close.**

↑ HUBSPOT



Knowing what to discuss with potential customers ahead of time is a major advantage in helping you close sales quicker and short circuit this process.

## Embrace Technology

Throughout this ebook, we've kept on talking about data. It's essential. To power SMarketing you need both a CRM and a marketing platform.

**A CRM is an essential tool to support sales. It makes it easy for your sales team to:**

- ▶ Ensure they follow-up with all customers in a timely way.
- ▶ Make sure they log all customer information for future sales calls.
- ▶ Learn from what's worked before by including best practice workflows.
- ▶ Avoid having to rely on their own memory.
- ▶ Access metrics to help them predict sales outcomes.
- ▶ Wow your customers and understand what's important to them.



The only problem is that CRM systems don't handle all your communications. For SMarketing you also need access to the data the marketing team has via web, social media and email marketing analytics.

Marketing data provides a more intimate picture of your visitors at different stages of the SMarketing funnel, enabling you to know which campaigns brought people to your website, what they looked at when they landed there, and where they went next.

## *Sales & Technology:*

# **Putting the two together creates a customer-winning engine.**

The same technology that has changed the buyer journey has also given you the tools to make the customer journey better by creating a personalized and relevant experience for them.

At the bottom of the funnel, sales people can approach their first call with potential customers with a lot more background than they normally have. They will know whether a lead is good, depending on the actions they take on the website. If a visitor is reading your blog, he's probably not ready to buy. If she's looking at pricing, then she almost certainly is.

With an integrated system, salespeople can track every touchpoint on the customer journey, which will help them have more relevant conversations when they speak to those customers. And real-time information and alerts allow sales people to respond almost instantly when qualified leads request a consultation or interact with information offer designed for this part of the funnel.



Closing the loop, marketing people can also see which campaigns and touch points are leading to actual sales, enabling them to create better marketing material.

## *Conclusion:*

# Go Forth and SMarket

In this customer-centric era, it's no longer enough to rely on interruptive methods, promotional advertisements, and cold leads to win over new customers.

### **This means:**

- ▶ *Aligning* marketing and sales to be a unified customer-winning force that contributes value at each stage of the extremely complex, extremely long customer journey.
- ▶ *Embracing* an inbound marketing methodology and strategy to attract strangers, convert them into leads, help close them into customers, and continue to delight them as brand loyalists.
- ▶ *Integrating* an inbound sales process that centers on value-add, helpful conversations at each stage of the buyers journey.
- ▶ *Implementing* smart technology and a closed loop reporting system to fully track and understand what works (and what doesn't) to attract and win new customers.

The B2B organizations that dominate in the future will be those who make the transition to an inbound marketing and inbound sales methodology. AND those who are able to get the two teams to work together seamlessly without hostility or attribution wars.

No more snowball fights. It's time to spend that energy on what matters most: getting the right content to the right people at the right times with the right call to action.

***Let's go SMarket, shall we?***

# What Now?



## Get A Free Evaluation Of Your B2B Marketing Efforts

**Wondering if inbound is right for you?** We'll perform a free assessment to identify what you're doing well, what you can do better, and what gaps exist in your marketing program.

[GET ASSESSMENT](#)



## Let's Talk

Hi, I'm Gail. Convinced that inbound is the right evolution of your B2B marketing efforts? Want to talk about next steps? Let's set up a time to discuss your goals and needs.

[EMAIL GAIL](#)

# About the Authors



**Justin Spring** | *Co-Founder, Adept Marketing*

With more than 12 years of experience in strategic marketing and entrepreneurship, Justin leads the continual evolution of Adept's capabilities to maximize client results. Since 2003, his chief passion has been discovering, testing and deploying new methodologies that drive marketing strategies and growth for companies of all sizes.



**Jake Kaufman** | *Director of Content Strategy, Adept Marketing*

With experience in content and marketing strategy, Jake architects holistic content strategies and oversees the creation of content experiences for Fortune 10 companies, Fortune 500 brands, nonprofits and mid-market businesses across a variety of distribution channels including branded asset development, social content, video strategy, email, banner ad copy, and website content.



**Christy Goodman** | *Inbound Strategist, Adept Marketing*

A certified HubSpot expert, Christy manages all of Adept's inbound marketing clients, leading them on strategy and execution. Because of the holistic nature of inbound, Christy commits herself to multiple tactics and channels, including blogging, social media, automated workflows, email campaigns, and reporting.