

YOUR COMPLETE GUIDE TO

# INBOUND MARKETING BEST PRACTICES IN 2018





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## INTRODUCTION

Inbound marketing, or “pull marketing,” has proven much more effective than traditional outbound, or “push marketing,” tactics. In 2018, marketers are investing more in their inbound efforts, which tracks with the evolving nature of search engines, technology and the customer-centric world in which we now live.

Scrap the cold-calling and generate higher-quality leads with these inbound marketing best practices. Your customers are out there waiting.

# EMAIL MARKETING: LEVEL-UP THROUGH AUTOMATION AND CUSTOMISATION

Every dollar spent on email marketing returns **an average of \$38** – that's ROI 101. At its core, inbound marketing rests upon email, so automating as much of this revenue-generating channel as possible is the best way to create a workflow that, well, works.



In 2018, more marketers will be utilising automation platforms, which enables more strategic decision-making, targeted budgets and measurable rates. Top offerings include MailChimp, Marketo and Constant Contact to name a few. In total, 49 per cent of marketers already have automated platforms, but B2B companies (55 per cent) are adopting this technology at faster rates than B2C.

To get enough eyes on your content, and to serve content that converts, you'll need to create custom newsletters; think of these as your brand magazine. **The content you deliver via email should be hyper-focused on relevant questions/concerns your subscribers have**, and the more you can personalise each email, the likelier you are to encourage responses and generate leads.

## SEO: CHANGE OR BE CHANGED

As one of the most dominant inbound marketing channels, SEO will only become more important. SEO-friendly content helps you rank organically in search, helps prospects discover you for the first time and helps deliver on searcher intent.



Search algorithms are changing at a breakneck pace, and **SEO today will not be SEO tomorrow.** For instance, in 2016 alone, Google conducted:

- **9,800 live traffic experiments.**
- **18,015 side-by-side experiments.**
- **130,335 search quality tests.**



These studies resulted in 1,653 official search changes – in one year!

Focus your SEO efforts on both technical and content updates. Every day your site performance lags, UX disappoints and content misses the mark, your SEO will suffer, making it much, much harder to produce the inbound traffic you need to compete in 2018.

## RETARGETING: CONVERT THROUGH RECAPTURES

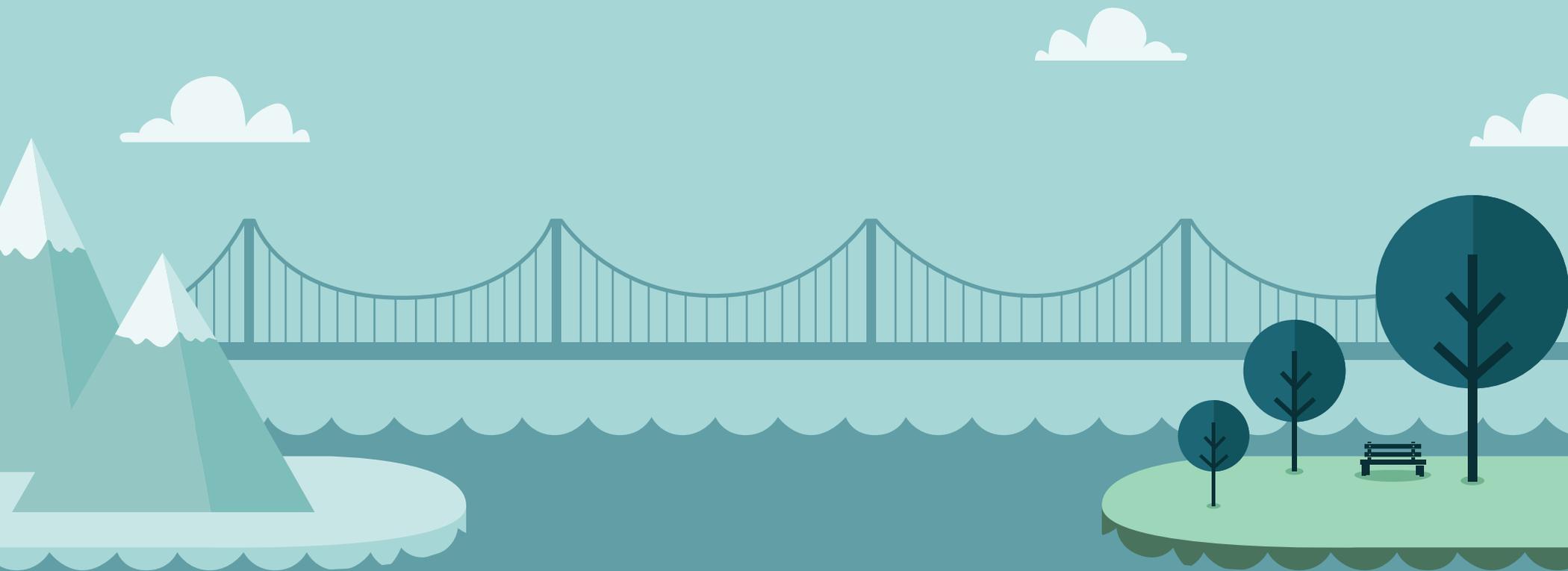
It's estimated that **96 per cent** of first-time site visitors are not ready to buy. Retargeting allows you to capture (and hopefully convert) this web traffic that came to your site but left.



With a small snippet of code (a cookie) on your site, you can track the history and mobility of your web traffic and then serve them ads afterward. In effect, your ad spend is going toward users who are already familiar with your brand, so the probability for a conversion at some point in the future is much higher.

When your inbound strategy comprises a strong retargeting campaign – and it better in 2018 – your dollars are trackable down to the cent, and you're able to stay in the forefront of visitors' minds at all times. This subtle yet effective nurturing encourages visitors to return to your site until they finally convert.





## SOCIAL MEDIA: KNOW YOUR CHANNELS

As social media displaces traditional advertising, more brands are focusing their attention on user-generated content and microinfluencers to win over perpetually skeptical customers. But rather than carpet-bombing the already-saturated social sphere, B2B and B2C companies are electing to invest their money only in proven channels.

For B2B, that's likely to mean a strategy that's primary built upon a strong LinkedIn and Twitter presence; B2C marketers may continue their push on Snapchat, Facebook and Instagram.

Conducting a competitive analysis of your competitors' social strategies can help inform where to focus your efforts as well.

Across every industry, however, the use of social influencers can generate **6X more traffic and 2X more conversions for your brand.**

And with every share, retweet and new follower comes a fresh prospect to cycle into your inbound efforts.

## BLOGS: MORE THAN JUST WORDS

There are enough keyword tools on the market to provide a solid foundation on which to create targeted content. But a one-size-fits-all keyword strategy only gets you so far – you need piece-by-piece, personalized research for every individual asset, not simply stuffing the same target keywords into all content.

Blogs keep your organic strategy moving forward, increase your search presence for relevant keywords and provide fodder for your email campaigns and social postings, so you better put them to work for you in an effective way. To do so:

- Focus on topical relevancy, not individual keyword rankings.
- Include multiple media formats, such as embedded videos, graphics, gifs, tweets and more.
- Map content direction to specific personas.
- Re-optimize old content for today's uses.

Companies with blogs generate more leads, and the only way to keep your inbound ecosystem churning with new prospects is through fresh content.



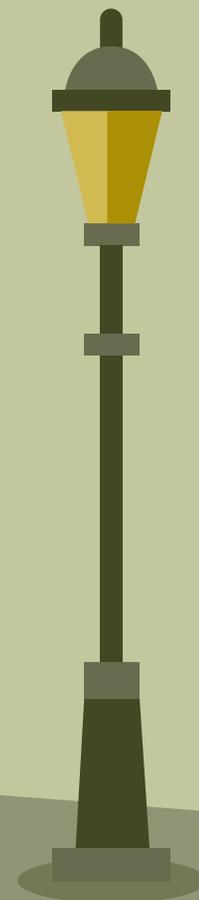
## PERSONA DEVELOPMENT: UNDERSTAND YOUR HIGH-VALUE PROSPECTS

Your inbound marketing strategy is essentially dead in the water if you don't have full insight into your true customers. Many marketers make the mistake of creating content and campaigns around their buyer personas instead of their site visitor personas. But, the people who consume your content are not necessarily the people who buy from you.

Develop ultra-specific personas using the data you already have on hand.

- Who buys your product?
- Who influences purchasing decisions?
- What are the interests of your core readers/subscribers?
- What assets actually move the needle in your customer journey?

Separate your avid readers from your commercial influencers and your final decision-makers – each of these personas is unique and requires personalised content. **This is how you drive macro conversions.**



## BRAND ACTIVATION: INTERACTIVITY AS A SERVICE

How do you get people to interact with your brand, to understand it, to trust it? That's the goal of brand activation, and it should be a core component of inbound marketing.

**Spending on brand activation is on track to surpass more than \$700 billion in 2018.** This means you need interactive content that connects with consumers and solicits feelings of innovation, creativity and problem-solving.

To accomplish this, host live webinars, conduct real-time chats and contests over social, run experiential and physical marketing events, create games and quizzes and so on – if it involves user participation, do it. The more of these efforts you invest in, the more prospect data you capture and the more shareable your content becomes.

Stale, text-heavy, stock-image branding hurts your commercial perception – you know what you need to do better.

## VIDEO: CONTENT THAT CONVERTS

Humans are visual creatures whose attention spans are rapidly shrinking (approaching seven seconds!). Cut the fluff and hit site visitors and email subscribers with content they're hardwired to digest and enjoy: video.

Video marketing has grown into its own subset of content marketing and is proven to generate higher conversions, better-quality leads and more-engaged brand advocates.

You need product videos on landing pages, short explainers on mobile and shareable animations/interactive features on social – you need it all and then some. Moving forward, you'll more specifically need augmented and virtual reality videos, which are an untapped marketing initiative for most companies.



95%

The number of marketers using videos in their campaigns is **approaching 100 per cent**, and viewers **retain 95 per cent of video's content** (only 10 per cent of text). To get your message out and new prospects in, video is the way to go in 2018.

## ADS: PAY TO PLAY

Ads enable you to own branded terms, better serve customer intent throughout the search journey and remarket to prospects across any channel. And where do you get some of the best data to craft your ads? Your inbound strategy: those who've landed on your site organically.

Paid media spend on social is up **61 per cent in 2017**, and with more than 2.3 billion smartphone users, mobile will be a primary vessel for social ads.



61%

Paid ads complement your organic efforts, giving your brand the boost it needs to get the right message in front of the right audience.

With AdWords you can bid for top visibility for the highest-value commercial-intent keywords that are most likely to generate leads. Social channels provide the podium for amplifying the visibility of your great content, ensuring maximum readership and sharing. Paid efforts should never replace an organic strategy but rather should be used in tandem to ensure maximum reach.

## ANALYTICS: TOOLS OF THE TRADE

The success of your strategy is only measurable if you have the right analytics tracking in place. And to keep fueling additional efforts throughout 2018, you need data as your starting point. Review past performance of content, analyse the data and tweak your strategy accordingly. Data and content go hand in hand, so if something works, chase it; if it doesn't, well at least you weren't afraid to be creative.

Setting up custom reports, goal tracking, campaigns and other segmentation in Google Analytics allows you to report back to executives and creative teams on the performance and future trajectory of your inbound marketing. Without this level of granularity, you're blind – plain and simple.

Additionally, inbound is all about refining and pivoting – if something didn't work (because the data tells you), scrap it and move on. If you've uncovered a tactic that is more effective in converting, shift resources accordingly. There's no such thing as a "set it and forget it" mentality – prospects in 2018 demand only the best, which can change daily.

**Your marketing strategy should too.**



## CONCLUSION

With these tips, you should be primed for greater inbound success in 2018. Perhaps the biggest takeaway, however, is that great results in Q1 2018 should not necessarily dictate the remainder of the year's strategy.

Keep on innovating, experimenting and refining month to month, asset by asset. Inbound marketing works only if there is a continuous stream of fresh and engaging content to feed your highest-value customers, so the overarching objective here is to be tuned in to your analytics at all times while still keeping your ear close to upcoming trends and unknown variables that may arise.

**Good luck!**



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