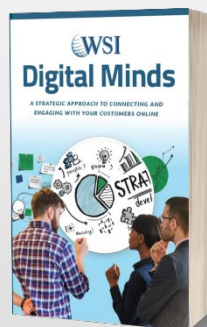# DIGITAL MINDS CHAPTER 5

## IMPLEMENTING INBOUND MARKETING BEST PRACTICES

*Written by: Marco Marmo*

The following is a chapter from WSI's 3rd book, *Digital Minds: A Strategic Approach to Connecting and Engaging with Your Customers Online.* If you'd like to read the book in its entirety you can purchase a copy on Amazon.com here: https://bit.ly/wsibook3

What determines success in inbound marketing? It all starts with—you guessed it—the strategy driving it.

Your role as an inbound marketer is to guide your customers down a path that gives them the information and resources they need and want throughout their buyer's journey.

Your company should be an authority in your industry and on the topics surrounding the products and services you offer. This knowledge will help you build trust with your buyer personas, along with long-term growth for your company.

The way to display this authority is through your content. Your content is your voice and will allow you to communicate individually with each person and deliver them the information, knowledge, and answers on the topics your company knows the most about.

In the recent past, communicating with your target consumers was only possible through your website pages and blog posts. But nowadays, with the advancement of technology and the emergence of new channels and tools, it is possible to improve online communication even further by using chatbots, live chat, and social media.

To build long-lasting, reliable relationships with your customers, you will need to know all about their goals and their behaviors. This knowledge will help you create relevant content tailored to your audience's needs. Remember: strive to provide the correct information, to the right person, at the right time, through the right channel!

Rather than interrupting your prospects while they're consuming other media (outbound marketing), inbound marketing focuses on attracting the right people naturally through shared interests and establishing relationships. Marketers do this by creating content that genuinely educates, guides, and informs the user. As a result, you'll start to emerge as a real leader and expert in your field.

This content will be part of your digital strategy, one that relies on different channels and is composed of offers based on the goals and pain points of your buyer personas.  By connecting with your target customers at various touchpoints, you'll begin to build a relationship between them and your brand—allowing for more opportunities to sell to them over time.

# Shifting Your Mindset Away from Selling

One of the most important aspects of inbound marketing is providing something valuable to your audience—whether it's the latest information, an entertaining take, or an inspiring idea involving a topic they're interested in.

In all of your digital content, you should focus on providing answers and solutions to the problems your customers are facing. By helping your site visitors, you'll be positioning your company as a valuable resource

they can rely on and even turn towards to resolve new questions they may have. You'll ultimately become a company they recommend to others or share within their social networks.

To achieve this goal, you'll need to attract visitors to your site with relevant content and drive visitors to your site using different communication channels.

The integration of all these steps constitutes the methodology of inbound marketing: attract, engage, delight, repeat. This concept was developed and improved by HubSpot, one of the leading technology companies that provide businesses with marketing and sales software.

# From Funnel to Flywheel

The most current model of inbound marketing methodology is a cycle called "Flywheel." In this model, consistent personal relationships will be strong drivers of your business growth as you provide more opportunities to sell and better serve customers and prospects.

This inbound marketing methodology has been recently updated to serve the interests of companies and users better. The first version of the inbound method was based on a funnel and was composed of four steps: attract, convert, close, and delight.

Over the years, it became evident that most businesses were putting the most effort into the "attract," "convert," and "close" stages, without enough emphasis on the "delight" stage and client retention after purchase or action had been taken.
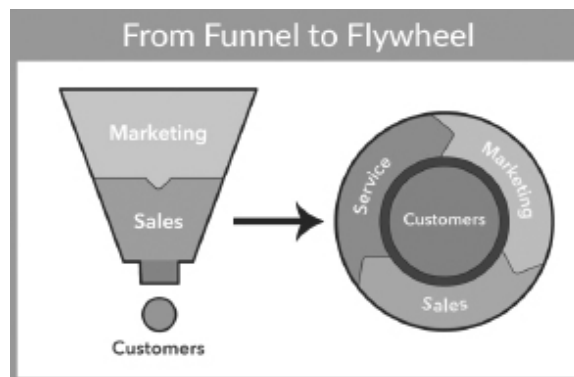


*Figure 11: Marketing Funnel to Flywheel*

Today, we know that customers can't be considered only at the end of the process or result. Instead, they should be the focal point of every stage of your inbound marketing strategy.

In the new methodology, as you'll see in Figure 11, the customer becomes the central element. All areas of customer interaction are part of the inbound method: marketing, sales, and services. These three areas are

integrated and work in a very cyclical manner. The customer has become the growth driver of a company and is what keeps the flywheel turning.

The more aware of this concept and the more efficient your execution of the methodology, the greater the success your company will achieve with inbound marketing.

# Inbound Marketing Stages

Let's walk through each of the three main phases of the modern inbound marketing methodology: attract, engage, and delight.
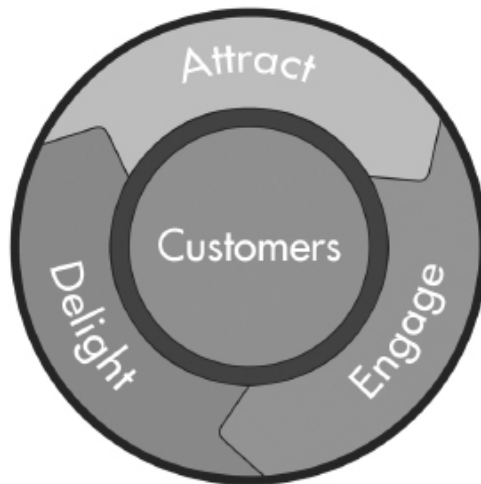


*Figure 12: Modern Inbound Marketing Methodology*

## Attract

You can't build a relationship with potential customers if you don't know who you want to attract. Creating buyer personas (see Chapter 2) and understanding their goals and pain points will help you structure your content around the needs of your target audience. It will also help you build trust and credibility for your brand and ultimately enable you to create a better informed digital strategy.

Developing your personas also serves another great purpose. It helps you see where your customers are "hanging out" and how they generally interact with digital content.

For example, if you have a very visual product that targets young millennial women, you may have better luck connecting with your audience on Instagram than you might on LinkedIn.

Additionally, your personas will help to inform any paid ads you might run to attract new site visitors. Given the extremely detailed targeting options when running social media ads, you'll be in better shape to connect with your audience if you know exactly who they are and what information they are looking for.

How your personas use search engines is another factor that will inform your inbound marketing strategy. If your prospects prefer mobile voice search over typed queries at a desktop computer, your content should be optimized for mobile devices and voice search rather than desktop search.

There are a ton of ways to attract your ideal audience once you've identified who they are. These include:

- Organic search
- PPC and Google Ads
- Social media advertising
- Organic social media posting
- Multimedia (video) content creation

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## Engage

After you've started to attract your audience, it's time to engage them. Like looking for a romantic partner, the attraction phase might only require you to show up where your future mate likes to spend time. But the engagement phase requires you to bring them something of value, often through conversation.

It's no different from inbound marketing. The engage phase begins when your target audience starts to interact with the content you've produced, whether on your website, social media, or elsewhere online. At that moment, they're getting their first impression of you, so it's essential to make the right moves.

Again, getting this phase right goes back to having defined buyer personas. You should know and deeply understand the reasons this target customer came to you for information or a solution to their challenges. Having a well-structured website with relevant content, conversion architecture, and compelling calls-to-action will be paramount at this point.

From the user's very first interaction with your content, you should provide a great experience and meet their expectations. If they prefer to engage with your brand on a more direct and personal basis, provide them with a more personalized experience to guide them through the content of your website. If they are not ready for direct contact, structure your content to help them learn more about the topics they're interested in. This can include:

- Free resources on your website
- The option to subscribe to a newsletter or blog

- A variety of content (educational, inspirational, and entertaining) in different formats (audio, video, written, or graphic).
- Interactive tools like chatbots and customer service reps to answer initial questions

Convert site visitors into official leads by offering valuable materials in exchange for an email address and name.

During the engage phase, take the opportunity to find out more information about these users. Go beyond what you already know and update your existing customer persona documents if necessary. You can garner a wealth of data by monitoring how, when, and why users interact with your content. Then you can use this information to improve your engagement with them further.

One major part of the engage phase is remarketing. By capturing information from leads during this phase and segmenting leads based on their demographics and other interests, you can continually nurture them by sending content they're most likely to be interested in reading or watching.

Imagine this, for example. You own an ecommerce store that primarily sells two things: shoes and hats. You've started bringing leads to your website through Facebook, where you're running paid advertisements about your brand.

Site visitors come pouring in, some of which are visiting your "shoes" page, while others are visiting your "hats" page. Using Facebook's retargeting capabilities, you group your site visitors into people interested in shoes and those interested in hats. Then, in your next marketing campaign, you can display hyper-targeted ads to each of these two audiences to get them back onto your site and shopping.

As you gather information about your leads, you can serve them better (and more relevant) content. Messages and emails become much more impactful as you begin to communicate directly with a person, rather than communicating generally.

## Delight

After you've built trust with your target customers through engagement, the third and final phase of inbound marketing is *delight*.

This phase is about delighting your customers and delivering enough value that you've essentially forged a personal and individual relationship with them.

When your leads are delighted, they're confident enough to make a buying decision and to keep coming back for more. Beyond that, your company becomes a resource that your customers truly value and recommend to others—serving as a source of lead generation for months or years to follow.

The more efficiently you can work through these three inbound marketing phases, the better your long-term results will be.

# Main Components of an Inbound Marketing Strategy

Inbound marketing is exactly what it sounds like: marketing that draws customers to you, rather than actively reaching out to them. Though there are hundreds of ways to "do" inbound marketing, inbound marketing is not about forcing a sale on your potential client. If anything, inbound marketing is about pre-selling your leads and warming them up to you long before they speak to your sales team.

To warm your leads up with inbound marketing, here are the five key components involved: contacts, buyer personas, the buyer's journey, content, and goal-setting.

## Contacts

Contacts are the most critical component of your inbound strategy, as well as one of the most important resources of your business. Contacts are real people you are relating to: leads, prospects, customers, employees, partners, suppliers, etc.

Having a solid and consistent contact database will contribute significantly to your business growth. This database tends to increase in the number of contacts and the quality of information over the years. It will help you to:

- Store the details of each contact in one centralized place
- Understand who your potential customer is
- Use lead and consumer data to improve your marketing strategies

Each time a contact progresses in the buyer's journey, you obtain more information about them. Having all the details and behaviors stored and easily accessible will allow you to do more personalized marketing. This information is what you need to understand, segment, engage, and delight your contacts.

## Buyer Personas

Since the inbound strategy is customer-focused, you need to know who you want to reach. Having this profile clearly defined will help you to attract the right people to your web properties. You do not just want visitors, but visitors with greater potential to become prospects and future customers.

The people you draw to your digital channels should match the buyer personas you've created for your business (see Chapter 2). Don't underestimate the importance of this step. If you're attracting the wrong types of leads, you'll have a much harder time selling your product or service. That also may result in many dollars wasted on marketing.

You will also need to know the needs of your customers at each stage of their buyer's journey.

# Buyer's Journey

The buyer's journey is the natural process a customer goes through when they want to acquire something. For business-to-consumer (B2C) companies, the buyer's journey tends to be short and emotion-based. Consumers often purchase products and services because of how it makes them feel, rather than basing their judgments on unbiased research.

For business-to-business (B2B) companies, the buyer's journey tends to be a little longer and more evidence-based. These buyers are looking for facts, demonstrations, and proof that your solution is what they need—especially if it's a high-dollar purchase.

Regardless of B2B or B2C, the buyer's journey generally includes three phases: awareness, consideration, and decision.

1. **The awareness stage**: this is when a prospect is experiencing a problem or opportunity and is seeking more information and education to help define their problem.
2. **The consideration stage**: this is when a prospect has clearly defined their problem or opportunity and are doing more in-depth research to determine their options. At this point, they may be familiar with your brand, or they might not be.
3. **The decision stage**: this is when a prospect has decided on the solution to their problem or opportunity. At this stage, they are creating a shortlist of products or services to purchase and the brand or company they may buy from.

Customer journeys can take hours or months, and they may not even follow the journey in a linear fashion. They may bounce around as their priorities change, moving back to consideration several times before making a decision.

Whatever the case, when you know the journey of your unique personas, you'll be better able to create relevant and appropriate content for each stage.

# Content

The fourth component of an inbound marketing strategy is content. Content is the fuel of inbound marketing and can be produced in different formats: website pages, blog posts, interactive tools, guides, ebooks, videos, infographics, podcasts, and more.

You shouldn't produce content at random. It should always serve a specific purpose, be aimed at a particular audience, and hit at a specific stage of the buyer's journey. For example, a lead in the "awareness" phase is just learning about your business for the first time. Providing them a pricing discount or special offer may not result in a conversion since they don't trust you yet—and they may not even be fully aware of the problem they're facing.

However, if you present that same offer to someone who's been reading your emails, blogs, and social posts for several months, and they may be ready to make a purchase.

## Goal-setting

The fifth and final major component of an inbound marketing strategy is goal-setting. To see if your marketing plan is working or not, and what you need to improve, set your goals, and then follow up on them. What are your goals? Increase traffic to your website? To a particular page? Generate conversions for a specific offer? Defining your goals will also help align your marketing and sales teams.

Review your results regularly. One of the significant benefits of digital marketing in today's environment is how easy it is to get data in real-time, and make quick changes to marketing campaigns. Take advantage of this, and be flexible!

# Content Marketing

Content marketing is a strategy focused on producing and distributing relevant and valuable content to attract and engage a particular audience. When managed properly, content marketing helps to build a relationship of credibility and trust with your future customers. If your audience trusts you, they're more likely to feel comfortable choosing you as their solution provider.

Your content should map to each stage of your buyer's journey. Create uniquely targeted pieces with the intention to attract, engage, and delight your customers.

## How to Create a Content Plan

Content planning helps to set your inbound marketing campaigns up for success. It'll help you (and your internal or external content team) determine:

- How much content to produce
- Priorities for what needs to be created first
- Objectives for each piece of content
- Identify which existing pieces of content can be reused
- Resource, budget, and freelancer management

Though your marketing team may be the driving force behind your content strategy, the truth is, your whole company should be involved. Your Sales team has fantastic insights into what customers are interested in. While your Customer Service team has its own intimate perspective of your target market. The same goes for your product development and research teams.

Take some time to identify your business objectives so that you can integrate your content marketing goals accordingly. Your Marketing Team may be eager to get active on social media channels. But a big-picture view might reveal that your Sales Team could be closing 50% more deals if they had access to share content with prospects on your social channels as well.

And although it can be difficult to plan which types of content you'll need six months or one year from now, try to structure your plan with a long-term view.

## Marketing Funnel

The steps of your buyer's journey correspond to the stages of your marketing funnel. In Figure 13, the marketing funnel on the right describes your customer in relation to your brand. When they're brand new (entering the "awareness" phase), they may only be a site visitor with no intention to purchase.
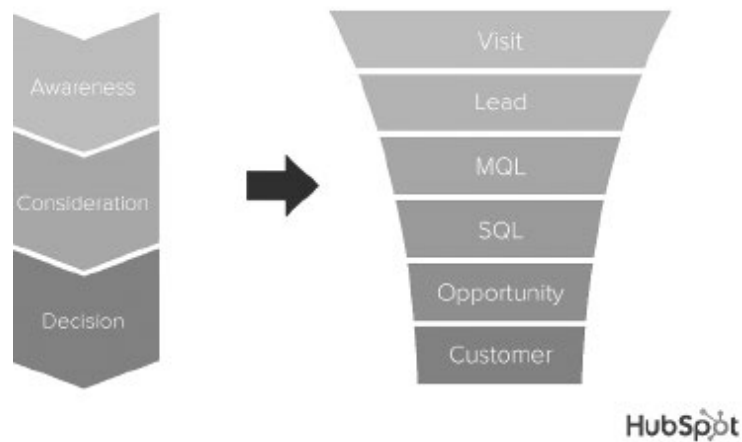


*Figure 13: Buyer's Journey and Marketing Funnel*

However, they move down the marketing funnel a bit and become a lead when there's the notion that they may fit your target market. It's important to note that a lead is just a lead—you can't know, just yet, if they fit your typical customer persona description.

When a person moves from "awareness" to "consideration," you'll usually have enough data to determine if they're a marketing-qualified lead (MQL) or sales-qualified lead (SQL). The only difference between these two types of leads is who deems them "worthy" of a follow-up—the marketing team, or the sales team.

Finally, when someone first moves into the "decision" step, they become more than just a lead: they become an opportunity or a customer.

Both funnels have the same goals: attract visitors, convert leads, and close customers. Using marketing funnels allows you to view users at each stage of the buyer's journey, and your content should help guide the user to the bottom of the funnel.

So, how does content planning fit into all of this?

# Three Steps to Creating a Content Plan

Here are three steps you can use to ensure your content plan aligns with your inbound marketing objectives: set marketing goals, map the available content to your goals, and identify the buyer's journey for your buyer personas.

Put these three steps down in a single document and build out the details from there. Here's a bit more about each step to help guide you.

## 1. Set Marketing Goals

Each piece of content produced needs to correspond to a marketing goal, which in turn is aligned with the purpose of your business. Having clear goals will contribute to the organization of available resources and prioritizing efforts for content creation.

Each goal you set should be a SMART goal:

- **S**pecific: provide a clear description of what needs to be achieved
- **M**easurable: include a metric with a target the indicates success
- **A**ttainable: set a challenging target but keep it realistic
- **R**elevant: keep your goal consistent with higher-level goals
- **T**imely: set a date for when your goal needs to be achieved

Imagine this scenario. A company wants to acquire two new customers per month for a particular product or service. Let's assume a lead-to-customer conversion rate of 10%. The business will need to generate 20 new leads per month.

If the website visitor-to-lead conversion rate is 5%, then this content needs to attract 400 visits per month to reach that goal. This example is hypothetical and used to show the importance of setting marketing goals. In real life, multiple variables are interacting at the same time and influencing your goals.

## 2. Map Available Content

This step is crucial, particularly for companies who have been producing content for some time since they already have content floating around that isn't being put to use. Some of this content is valuable and could be reused, rewritten, used as a source of reference, or even as raw material to create more structured or compelling content.

For content mapping to be useful in your planning, first, define the aspects of the content you want to assess. That may include:

- Content title
- Buyer persona
- Buyer's journey stage
- Marketing funnel stage
- Format or type of content (blog posts, interactive tools, guides, ebooks, videos, infographics, webinars, presentations, seminars, brochures, etc.)

If you are planning a project, future event, or thinking of developing some material that involves content creation, you may include your ideas in a "brainstorming" section.

This exercise will help you identify existing content that you can use to support your strategy. It will also help you to determine how you can use this content to connect with your audience in the different stages of the buyer's journey.

If this feels overwhelming, it's okay! Analyzing each piece of content you've created tends to take time, but it's worth it. The purpose here is to help you save time and prevent you from having to recreate content unnecessarily.

## 3. Identify The Buyer's Journey for Your Buyer Personas

Bear in mind that the content you create will be responsible for attracting your buyer personas at each stage of their journey: awareness, consideration, and decision.

The buyer's journey is continually evolving, but before you can identify it, you will need to know your personas in detail. The more you understand your persona, the better your chances of meeting their needs during their journey.

Begin by identifying the content needed to guide a particular audience through every step of your buyer's journey and plan to create that content on a regular schedule. We suggest that you start with the most important persona for your company—the one that has the most potential to generate results for your business.

*Figure 14: Content and the Buyer's Journey*

# A Model of Content Planning

Once you're done content mapping with existing content, you will be able to start planning new content.

You may use a spreadsheet to organize, direct, and prioritize your content production according to your goals. You can use Google Sheets, Airtable, Trello, or another service for your editorial calendar planning. It's essential to choose a tool that keeps everything in one place, allows for collaboration, and manages version control.

If you use a spreadsheet, here's a suggestion for organizing it.

- Column 1: Month when content will be published
- Column 2: Your SMART goal and the purpose of that piece of content
- Column 3: Headline, title, or summary of the piece of content
- Column 4: Deadline
- Column 5: Writer or content creator

Add custom columns as needed depending on the type of content you're focusing on. For example, if SEO is part of your inbound marketing strategy, you may need a column for keywords or guest post submission destinations. You may also want to create columns to help categorize your content by funnel position or stage of the buyer's journey.

Repeat your content planning process for each of the months of the year. This is a job that requires a lot of effort and dedication, but be patient. Once you have a system in place, content creation will come more naturally to you and your teams.

If planning a year's worth of content is intimidating or impossible at this time, work in three-month or shorter sprints. The key is to always work from the top down. Start with the big picture, then produce content to

support those goals. Creating content without strategy and planning will only waste your time and money, and will not bring the intended results.

Inbound marketing is a complete digital marketing strategy with massive potential for results. Be disciplined, measure and evaluate your results, and involve representatives from every area of your company to get the most out of your inbound marketing activities.

**TIP: We have several different templates and sheets to help you with your inbound marketing and content planning tasks. Visit www.wsiworld.com/book-resources to access them.**

# About the Author

## Marco Marmo

Marco Aurelio Marmo is an MBA professor at FGV, one of the leading business schools in Latin America. He is ranked among the foremost consultants in the WSI world and has been recognized as a Top Gun and a Top 25 Consultant since 2015. Marco holds an MBA in Communications and Marketing and a Master's degree in Entrepreneurship and Innovation from FEA-USP. He has received recognition in two categories of international awards: the "WSI People's Choice Awards," and "Top WSI Consultant for Latin America and the Caribbean." His main projects have been conducted in the areas of SEO, digital media, social media, and inbound marketing. His national and international background endorses his work in several business segments, such as health, real estate, industries, products, and services.

# About WSI

For 25 years, WSI has been providing digital marketing services and comprehensive marketing strategies to businesses of all sizes and across various industries. We are the largest network of digital marketing agencies around the world.

We are a full-service digital marketing agency that helps elevate your online brand, generate more leads and sales, and improve your overall marketing ROI. Our Digital Marketing Consultants use their knowledge and expertise to make a difference for businesses all around the world.

We don't believe in the "one-size-fits-all" approach to digital marketing. Instead, we take the time to understand your organization and customers so we can recommend a strategy based on your individual business needs. When you invest in any of WSI's digital marketing solutions, you'll have some of the top minds in the industry, contributing to your goals and vision.

You have a vision for your business. We can help make it happen. Reach out; we're happy to help.