

HANDBOOK

2012 Inbound Marketing

Synchronize search, social, and content to get found more often, more effectively, by more customers

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Would you rather find customers – or get found by them?

If you answered the latter, then you're ready for inbound marketing. Inbound marketing is the integration of search engine optimization (SEO), social media tactics and content creation. Each of these tactics is a proven performer when separately implemented. But, **when strategically synchronized, the result is significantly reduced costs, increased sales, and improved ROI.**

This handbook will equip you with a 10-step, research-supported process for creating a transformative, scalable inbound marketing strategy. You will learn:

- How inbound channels help customers find *and* choose you.
- How search, social and content marketing interact with each other to produce ongoing enhanced results.
- How inbound marketing powers the customer engagement cycle across awareness, consideration, inquiry, purchase and retention.

You will also get answers to important and practical questions like:

- How has the buying process changed, and why should this matter to you? (p. 7)
- What lead sources are increasing and decreasing in importance for organizations? (p. 13)
- If inbound marketing is a “no-brainer,” why isn’t everyone doing it? (p. 15)
- What are the components of a good strategic process for inbound marketing? (p. 18)
- What are the six steps for crafting an inbound buyer persona? (p. 22) a
- How can you benefit from aligning these personas to the customer engagement cycle? (p. 25)
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- How do you translate general inbound marketing goals into SMART objectives? (p. 34)
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- How does engaging content accelerate inbound lead quality and conversions? (p. 101)
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- How does the lack of an inbound marketing architecture impede conversions? (p. 116)
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- How can you forecast your inbound marketing budget, in terms of ROI? (p. 155)
- What should you consider before outsourcing your inbound marketing? (p. 163)
- Why is a commitment to improvement so important to inbound marketing success? (p. 167)

Inbound Marketing Handbook

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INTRODUCTION

The integration of search engine optimization (SEO), social media tactics and content creation – also known as inbound marketing – has inverted the purpose of marketing for many organizations, from “finding customers” to “getting found by customers.” Each of these tactics is a proven performer when separately implemented. But, **when strategically synchronized, the result is significantly reduced costs, increased sales, and improved ROI.**

These types of results don’t “just happen.” To attain such favorable outcomes, **organizations must develop a scalable and repeatable process for synchronizing tactics.** Accomplishing this poses a challenge for many marketers, due to the dynamic nature of inbound marketing and its many moving parts.

The goal of the *Inbound Marketing Handbook* is to guide you through the development of **an effective process that can scale to meet the growing, ongoing need for inbound marketing across your organization.** You will learn:

- How inbound channels help customers find *and* choose you.
- How search, social and content marketing interact with each other to produce ongoing enhanced results.
- How inbound marketing powers the customer engagement cycle across awareness, consideration, inquiry, purchase and retention.

To support these learning objectives, this handbook will equip you with a **10-step, research-supported process for synchronizing search, social and content to create a transformative, scalable inbound marketing strategy.** Best practices, worksheets and Sherpa case studies – developed through extensive interviews with brand-side marketing VPs and directors – illustrate and reinforce these steps.

SECTION 1: PREPARE

The first section deals with preparation, both mental and operational, and covers the first three steps of the process.

STEP 1: RETHINK END-TO-END ENGAGEMENT

This first step lays the groundwork for your inbound marketing programs. Much of this foundation begins with rethinking how customers currently shop, and why a new approach to marketing is necessary to engage them. Here, you will also learn how to **articulate a vision for inbound marketing success, including how to develop a strategic process and plan of action for inbound marketing.**

Handbook

MarketingSherpa handbooks present research-supported best practices for improving the performance of marketing programs. They also serve as curriculum for self-instructed and professional career advancement training programs. Handbooks include case studies, methodologies, best practices, worksheets and data to support recommended practices.

Learning objectives include:

- How to rethink the customer buying process
- Why inbound marketing powers the customer engagement cycle
- Where to focus when developing a strategic process for the planning, execution and measurement of your inbound marketing programs

STEP 2: UNDERSTAND YOUR TARGET MARKET'S BEHAVIORS ON THE PATH TO PURCHASE

It's not just enough to segment your customer base; you have to put yourselves in your audience's shoes.

Researching and profiling your customers' triggers and behaviors along the path to purchase are critical components for gaining greater understanding.

To do this, you'll first work to develop inbound buyer personas, and then consider these personas in light of the customer engagement cycle. This will provide **a practical working model to help you generate ideas for inbound marketing tactics, and craft an extensive engagement strategy**. Upon completion of this step, you'll be able to clearly see and appreciate how inbound marketing transforms all stages of the buying funnel.

Learning objectives include:

- How to develop inbound buyer personas in six steps
- How to align inbound buyer personas with the customer engagement cycle
- How to methodically think through ideas for inbound marketing tactics by considering your persona in light of the customer engagement cycle

STEP 3: ESTABLISH SMART OBJECTIVES TO ACHIEVE OPTIMUM ROI

Setting objectives is something we all do, but the best objectives are SMART. This means they are:

- **S**pecific
- **M**easurable
- **A**ctionable
- **R**ealistic
- **T**ime-bound

In this section, you will identify your inbound marketing objectives, and then use the framework of your personas to develop details. You will also learn to **select the correct set of primary and secondary metrics to drive optimum performance**.

Learning objectives include:

- How to identify and dissect your most pressing inbound marketing challenges
- How to set SMART objectives and goals
- What role your personas play in clarifying your objectives

SECTION 2: PRACTICE

Section 2 is about putting search, social and content marketing into practice. As your proficiency in these areas grows, so will your ability to connect each of these disciplines. It is here that you will see your inbound marketing architecture begin to take shape.

STEP 4: ATTRACT ATTENTION WITH RELEVANT AND TIMELY SEARCH RESULTS

SEO is about how humans behave (query, scan and click) *and* how search engines behave (crawl, index, process, calculate relevancy, and retrieve). Understanding both sets of behaviors is important for optimal effectiveness in your SEO endeavors. Here you'll learn how to **create search results that attract and pull prospects in to your company.**

Learning objectives include:

- Why tactics need to be evaluated with attention focused on popularity, effectiveness and difficulty
- How to identify key characteristics for successful SEO campaigns
- How to approach and execute common SEO tactics

STEP 5: BUILD AND ENGAGE SOCIAL NETWORKS

In traditional outbound marketing practices, you control the information your audience receives – meaning your brand “is what you say it is.” With inbound marketing, the control of information received shifts to your audience. Social media – and the exchange of information – has been a major contributor to this paradigm shift.

The result? Your brand is now what *they* (your prospects, customers, influencers) say it is. **Learning how to amplify this earned media, and then leveraging what's said on your behalf for greater influence, is the secret to success with social media** – and the central point of this chapter.

Learning objectives include:

- How to engage your audience on social networks and organically increase your reach
- Which practices work best for engaging the vocal minority and pitching the social authority

STEP 6: CREATE AND SHARE ENGAGING CONTENT

Sharing content is a critical component of inbound marketing. The secret to creating contagious content is to educate, or even solve the reader's problem, without explicitly selling your product. **When you move away from focusing on just a product or service, and towards helping the consumer, you will generate better content ideas.** Original, repurposed and user-generated content all have a place in your content marketing plans.

Learning objectives include:

- Which types of content perform the best, and are worth the time and effort to create
- How to conduct a content inventory audit to uncover where you are content rich or poor
- How to pick content topics using the customer engagement cycle

STEP 7: CONSTRUCT AN INBOUND MARKETING ARCHITECTURE FOR SYNCHRONIZING CHANNELS

When all three programs operate in synchronicity, you will see powerful results. In this section, you will **learn how to purposefully construct an inbound marketing architecture that connects search results, conversations, and content to conversion points.**

Learning objectives include:

- How a “hub-and-spoke” architecture systematically directs lead capture and customer conversion
- What percentage of marketers agree with the importance of integration – rather than practice it
- How to roll out an inbound marketing architecture with a plan and purpose

SECTION 3: PERFECT

If Section 2 is about practice, then Section 3 is about how practice makes perfect. In these final steps, you look at improving the performance of your programs, your budgets and yourself.

STEP 8: GATHER ACTIONABLE INSIGHTS AND INTELLIGENCE

Gathering data is not synonymous with gathering intelligence. While data collection simply involves pulling together information, **gathering intelligence on your inbound marketing programs means you measure, understand, control and improve performance** ... and then repeat the entire cycle.

This step is characterized by *evaluation* and *reassessment*, representing two elements added to SMART objectives to make them **SMARTER**. Here you set the feedback loop in motion. *Evaluating* and interpreting results within the framework of your objectives increases your understanding and shows you areas to improve. After you’ve implemented plans for improving performance, you then *reassess*, paying particular attention to the new or different factors you’ve put into play.

Learning objectives include:

- How to methodically evaluate your results and reassess your plans for action
- Which inbound marketing metrics are most revealing
- What organizations turn to for analytics and monitoring solutions

STEP 9: BUDGET TIME AND MONEY WISELY

On average, online marketing comprises half of total marketing budgets. Of this, **companies put almost half of online marketing dollars into SEO, social and content marketing programs.** With these types of budgets at stake, it is important to plan your programs with ROI in mind from the outset.

When you quantify the outcome you expect from your marketing investment, you can then determine exactly how you will measure the program against those goals and position yourself to achieve them.

Learning objectives include:

- How to forecast your budget, in terms of ROI
- Which expenses should be factored into your budget requests
- What to consider when deciding whether or not to outsource inbound marketing management

STEP 10: COMMIT TO ONGOING IMPROVEMENT

Inbound marketing is a dynamic field. Though many overarching principles will remain the same, new developments, practices and applications will continue to come along. In this section, you will **learn to develop a plan for continued learning and improvement – a plan that focuses on creating connections and delivering a great experience.**

Learning objectives include:

- Why you need a growth mindset
- What approach to learning is best suited to inbound marketing
- Where to go for good resources

After reading the *2012 Inbound Marketing Handbook* you will be prepared to develop an effective, scalable process to meet the ongoing need for inbound marketing across your organization. Though the dynamic nature of inbound marketing means this won't always be an easy process, the **proper strategy can result in reduced costs, increased sales, and the dramatically improved ROI your organization wants and needs.**

About MarketingSherpa LLC

MarketingSherpa is a primary research facility, wholly-owned by MECLABS, dedicated to determining **what works in marketing** via exclusive case studies, surveys, and results data analysis. Then we publish what we learn so our community of marketers and weekly readers can improve their results and train their teams.

Praised by *The Economist*, Harvard Business School's Working Knowledge Site and Entrepreneur.com, MarketingSherpa is distinguished by offering **practical, results-based marketing** information researched and written by a staff of in-house reporters.

MarketingSherpa features:

- **Best Practices:** 1,000+ brand-side marketer case studies and 3,500+ Creative Samples
- **Research:** 2,000+ marketing and research abstracts
- **Instruction:** 800+ how-to articles
- **Newsletters:** 230,000+ marketers read weekly case studies on topics such as email, search, social, lead generation, lead nurturing, optimization and content marketing
- **Training:** 100+ live, hands-on training sessions providing practical and proven solutions
- **Summits:** 3 annual vendor-neutral, research-based marketing events

About MECLABS

MECLABS is a science lab that uses real-world research and training to **help business leaders get better use out of sales and marketing technology and resources**, including Internet marketing, website optimization, and lead management. We have been involved in direct research partnerships with companies throughout Europe and North America since 2001.

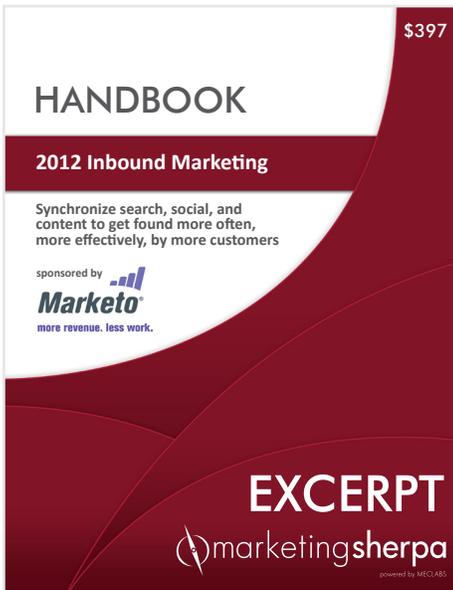
MECLABS deploys a rigorous methodology to conduct research. This research is compiled from:

- More than **10 years** of research partnership with our clients
- **1,300** experiments
- Over **1 billion** emails
- **10,000** landing pages tested
- **5 million** telephone call
- **500,000** decision maker conversations

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