



STARTUP MARKETING BLUEPRINT METHODOLOGY

So you've nailed down your brand's message, but how do you actually set up a marketing plan to guide your strategy? Having a methodology to inform your goals is key.

As a startup, you're probably looking for a marketing methodology that will give you long term gains without high short-term costs. Luckily, inbound marketing is the perfect methodology to get you started. But how do you get educated on the latest marketing tactics without spending tons of money?

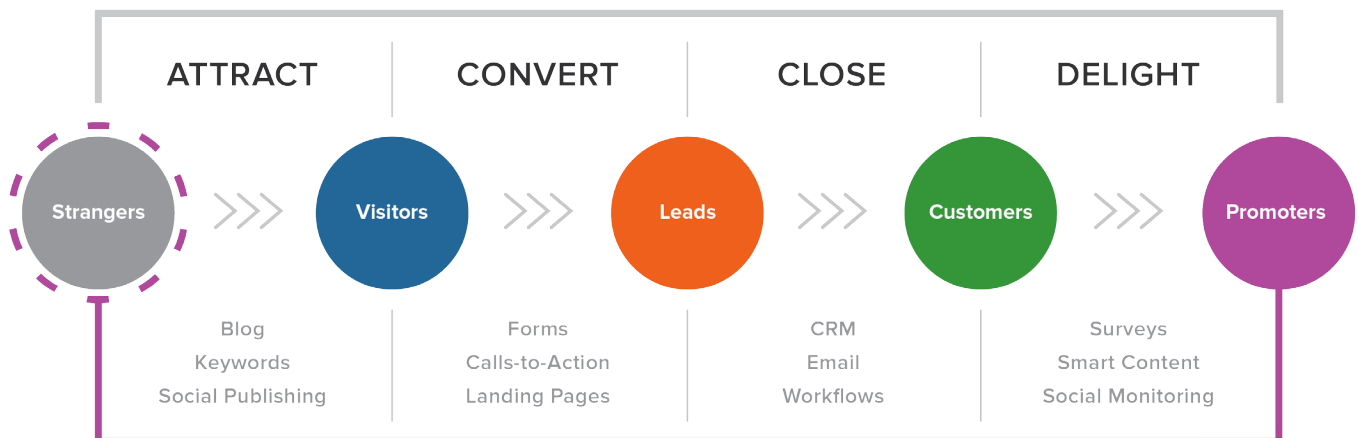
HubSpot Academy is a free learning center to help you learn everything you need to know about getting started with marketing in a way that will drive results for your business without annoying your potential customers.

We get it, though. Right now, you're just trying to get started and find out what you need to know. So we'll give you the rundown.

That's why we're giving you this guide. It's an excerpt from our in-depth Inbound certification, and it should provide clarity on what inbound is, why it's important, and how it can help you create a marketing plan that gets results.

Get started! Once you're convinced, you can [always come to your Academy learning center](#) to ask questions, learn more, and get certified!

Inbound Methodology



VIDEO 1: WHY INBOUND?

Hi there! I'm Lindsay with HubSpot Academy.

Welcome to the Essentials of Inbound. This class will introduce you to the world of inbound and provide you with a big picture view of everything you need for a successful inbound strategy.

Are you ready?

Let's start with the biggest question of them all - why inbound?

Before understanding why inbound is transforming the way the world does business, let's take a moment to think about traditional marketing.

In traditional marketing, companies focus on finding customers. Generally, they use techniques that are interruptive. These techniques could be anything from cold-calling and print advertising to TV commercials and junk mail.

But technology is making these techniques less effective and more expensive. Caller ID blocks cold calls, DVR makes TV advertising less effective, and spam filters block mass emails. It's still possible to get a message out using these channels, but it costs a lot more.

Traditional marketing is interruptive and marketer-centric. The traditional way of doing things is convenient for the marketer, because they can push content in people's faces whenever they want – even when those potential customers don't want it. But it's not such a great experience for the user – the potential customer.

Inbound Marketers flip this model on its head.

So what is inbound all about?

Well, inbound is a fundamental shift in the way we do business. Instead of that old, interruption-based message where the marketer or salesperson had all the control, Inbound is about EMPOWERING potential customers.

Instead of interrupting people with television ads, they might create videos that potential customers want to see. Instead of buying display ads in print publications, they could create a business blog that people would look forward to reading. And instead of cold calling, they create useful content so that prospects can contact them when they want more information.

Inbound Marketing is marketing focused on getting found by customers. It's customer-focused. It's helpful. Wouldn't you prefer to deal with a business that is focused on your needs instead of their own?

You've probably come across some of your favorite brands actively practicing inbound marketing. It's that problem-solving blog post that shows up near the top of the search engine. It's the new solution that was discovered on LinkedIn or the product review that was found on Facebook.

Inbound is about being a part of the conversation.

Being a part of that conversation means sharing helpful, relevant content with the world. It's about drawing people *in* -- that's why it's called Inbound, after all.

And most of all, it's about creating marketing that people love.

In today's world, buyers have all the power. Think about the process you went through the last time you made a purchase. Did you call up a salesperson, asking to buy? Or did you hop online and do some research? I'd be willing to bet you did the latter.

It's time for you to support *that* buying process. It's time for you to join in and *empower* your potential customers to make the right decisions for themselves.

So how do you actually *do* inbound? Well, the best way to start is by understanding the Inbound Methodology.

This is the inbound methodology. It illustrates the four stages that make up the inbound marketing and sales process. These stages are Attract, Convert, Close, and Delight.

Listed along the bottom of the methodology are the tools companies typically use to accomplish these actions. The tools are listed under the stage where they first come into play, but that's not the only stage where they're applicable! Some tools, like email, can be essential to multiple stages of the methodology.

Starting at the beginning, on the left, you'll need to attract strangers to your site, turning them into visitors. Some of the most important tools to attract new users are blogging, optimizing your website, and social media.

But it doesn't end there. Once you've attracted new visitors, the next step is to convert some of them into leads by gathering their contact information. At the very least, you'll need their email addresses. Contact information is the world of inbound's currency. In order for your visitors to offer up that currency, willingly, you'll need to offer them something in return.

That ‘payment’ comes in the form of offers, like eBooks, whitepapers, or tip sheets - whatever information would be interesting and valuable to your prospects. You can convert visitors into leads by using what’s called, as you might have guessed, *the conversion process*. Website components like calls-to-action and landing pages can entice these visitors and help you get information about them.

Moving along, now that you’ve attracted the right visitors and converted the right leads, it’s time to transform those leads into customers. In the Close stage, tools like email and a CRM can be used to help sell to the *right* leads at the *right* time.

Inbound is all about providing remarkable content to your users, whether they’re visitors, leads, or existing customers. Just because someone is already a customer doesn’t mean that you can forget about them! Inbound companies continue to delight and engage their customer base, turning them into happy promoters of the products and services they love.

Then, the whole methodology starts back at the beginning, when promoters talk to their networks – more strangers -- and spread the word about your products and services.

What you don’t see written in the methodology is “Analyze.” Why?

Because analysis is part of every single thing you do with your inbound strategy. Anything you do -- any piece of content you create, any campaign you launch, or any marketing action you undertake -- *should be analyzed*.

To be a true inbound marketer (and a truly successful one) you need to know what’s working, what isn’t, and how to implement new solutions and improve your efforts as efficiently as possible. And again, the only way to do this is by taking the time to analyze your work.

And that, folks, is why inbound is changing the way the world does marketing and sales.

Next up, learn the necessary best practices that make up a strong inbound strategy.

VIDEO 2: WHAT ARE THE FUNDAMENTALS OF INBOUND SUCCESS?

Before practicing inbound marketing, it's important to understand the fundamentals of inbound success. Remember, consumers don't want to be sold to, they want to be *educated*, and inbound tactics can deliver the kind of information your prospects need to help them make smart, well-informed decisions.

You can begin to do this by keeping these best practices in mind. First, by using buyer personas, second, by using the buyer's journey, then by creating remarkable content, and knowing how to leverage it.

Let's start by taking a look at how to use buyer personas.

Since inbound marketing and sales are customer-centric, you need to know who you're trying to reach.

You don't want just *any* traffic to your site, you want the right traffic. You want the people who are most likely to become leads, and, ultimately, happy customers. Who are the "right" people? The right people are your ideal customers, what we call your *buyer personas*.

Buyer personas are semi-fictional representations of an ideal customer, based on real data and some educated speculation about demographics, behaviors, motivations, and goals.

Personas are created through research, analysis, and taking a close look at who's already buying from you. They can help you get into the mindset of your potential buyers and create the right content. When you create the right content, you'll effectively attract your ideal visitors, convert them into leads, and close them into customers.

They're the glue that holds every aspect of inbound marketing together.

So, you could say that they're a pretty big deal, but how do you create buyer personas?

There are three things to keep in mind - research, identifying trends, and creating persona profile stories.

First, do your research. Buyer personas must be based off of actual research, not assumptions. Yes, research takes time, but if any of those assumptions are inaccurate, your personas will be, too.

When conducting research, there are a few questions that you can ask to develop your buyer personas. One way to start is by asking your current customers different questions that touch upon their demographics, goals, and challenges. Ask questions like:

- What is your job role? Your title?
- What industry or industries does your company work/is your role in?
- What are you working to accomplish?
- What are your biggest challenges?
- How do you learn about new information for your role?
- Do you use the internet to research vendors or products?

You don't have to ask these questions word-for-word. Make the questions specific to your industry, so you're getting specific answers in return.

And always focus on the 'Why' or the *motives* of your buyer personas, not their actions. The follow-up question to pretty much every question should be, "Why?" Through these interviews, you're trying to understand your persona's goals, behaviors, and motivations. What really drives them? People aren't always good at describing this for themselves, so it's important to dig deep. Uncovering their motives can lead to a truly powerful content strategy.

So, how do you do research?

Start by interviewing your current customers, former customers, prospects and even your co-workers. Your existing customer base is the perfect place to start with your interviews, because they've already purchased your product and engaged with your company. At least some of them are likely to exemplify your target persona. Reach out to both "good" and "bad" customers.

Once you've spoken to a few people, it's time to start looking for trends. Patterns and similarities in answers to persona research questions indicate who your personas really are.

How much research does it take to create personas? As much as it takes to identify trends. Be on the lookout for commonalities and similarities between the types of answers you're getting.

By now you may be thinking, how many personas should I have? As many as needed, as long as you start noticing trends that will help you build out your buyer personas.

Alright, you've done your persona research and identified those trends. The final step is to compile this research and create persona profile stories. You want these stories to contain information about who your persona is, using information about their background, their demographics, and their goals and challenges. You'll also want to include your plan to help them. Include common objections that they might have to your product or service and use real quotes

from your interviews. After all, what better way to represent your persona than to use their own words? This will make it easier for employees to relate to and understand them.

Let's look at an example of what a complete buyer persona profile might actually look like.

In this example we're looking at a persona named Sample Sally. Sample Sally is an example created by an HR database software company, let's call them HR Blast. And they clearly did their research and identified some trends.

Here's what they put together: Sally tends to be the head of HR. She's married, has 2 children and has been at the same company for many years. She tends to be female and around the age of 40-45. She has a very calm demeanor and typically has an assistant screening her calls. Her goals are to keep employees happy and turnover low. She also has to support the legal and finance teams. Some common challenges she runs into are getting everything done with a small staff and rolling out big changes to the entire company.

So what about solutions? Well, this HR Blast can best help Sample Sally by making it easy for her to manage all of the employee data in one place and integrate with her current legal and finance systems. The company should be prepared for the common objections that she typically has, such as worrying about losing data when moving over to a new system. And she doesn't want to have to train the entire company on how to use it.

After interviewing a few current customers they were able to pull real quotes to use for Sample Sally, like "It's been difficult getting company-wide adoption of new technologies in the past." and "I've had to deal with so many painful integrations with other departments' databases and software."

These quotes can make it easier for one of the company's employees to identify if they might be on the speaking or emailing with a Sample Sally.

These personas give you a really clear idea of exactly who these potential customers might be, what they are interested in, what they are dealing with, and what they are working towards.

But when it comes to creating a great inbound strategy, it's not enough to know just who you're trying to reach, you also have to know what they want to see.

And who are buyer persona's right for? Is it B2B, B2C, or nonprofit? Buyer personas are necessary for any type of business.

That brings us to the buyer's journey. Every interaction your persona has with your organization should be tailored to where they are in the buyer's journey.

The buyer's journey is the active research process someone goes through leading up to a purchase. Knowing the buyer's journey for your persona will be key to creating the best content possible.

Instead of talking about top, middle, or bottom of the funnel, the buyer's journey is made up of 3 stages: the awareness stage, the consideration stage, and the decision stage that portray the experiences your potential customers go through.

Every single one of you has gone through the buyer's journey. It's the path you take when you have a problem to solve, from researching potential solutions to purchasing one.

The awareness stage is when your prospect is experiencing and expressing symptoms of a problem or opportunity. They're doing education research to more clearly understand, frame, and give a name to their problem.

The consideration stage is when a prospect has now clearly defined and given a name to their problem or opportunity. They are committed to researching and understanding all of the available approaches and/or methods to solving the defined problem or opportunity.

The decision stage is when a prospect has now decided on their solution strategy, method, or approach. They are compiling a long list of all available vendors and products in their given solution strategy. They could also be researching to whittle the long list down to a short list and ultimately making a final purchase decision.

Here's a real life example of the buyer's journey. Ever been sick before? Yes, I'm sure you have. Remember that feeling of feeling ill but you're not really sure what you might have. In the awareness stage you're experiencing symptoms or having a problem. In this case, you feel like you have a sore throat, fever, and are achy all over. You ask "what's wrong with me?"

In the consideration stage, that's when you've given a name to your problem and now needing to figure out your options. You realize - a-ha! I have strep throat, but what are my options for relieving or curing my symptoms?

That's where the decision stage comes in, this is when you decide on your approach to solve the problem. If you have strep throat you could see a primary care physician, go to the ER, or go to a clinic. You might decide that the ER costs a lot, but you insured and you go with that option.

That's how one could go through the buyer's journey - it's from the buyer's perspective.

But imagine you as the marketer, or in this case - the doctor. Doctor's will typically listen to your symptoms, provide options for you to get better, and prescribe you your solution. But what if you

went into a doctor's office and they paid no attention to your symptoms and just gave you some sort of medicine immediately. Not a pleasant experience.

That's what can often happen with website content. Rather than creating content that covers your buyer persona's problems and potential solutions, we jump to explaining our products or our services and why they're the best option.

Website visitors might come to your website for the first time in any of the different buyer's journey stages, but you need to have content prepared for each and every stage.

Feel good about the buyer's journey? Let's test your knowledge because the buyer's journey comes up a lot when it comes to inbound.

If you were to create a blog post about your product or service, where would it fall into the buyer's journey?

- A. Awareness stage
- B. Consideration stage
- C. Decision stage

Your product or service will most likely help solve your persona's problems, but that doesn't make this blog post awareness stage.

Your product and service will be some form of solution, but in this case, your blog post is talking all about you. So this would be a decision stage piece of content.

But here's the thing - blog posts aren't really for the decision stage. A bit of a trick question!

When you're creating content, specifically blog posts, keep it educational. Not educating them on who you are and what you do, but educating them on their problems and solutions. It's the inbound way. A way to build trust.

Once you understand your buyer personas and their buying journey, it's time to start doing inbound marketing. Inbound marketing can't exist without content, and that's why the third best practice is to create remarkable, tailored content.

Inbound Marketing is Content plus Context.

Your content is your marketing toolkit. Things like blogs, interactive tools, photos/infographics, videos, and eBooks/presentations work to attract, convert, close, and delight.

Context is who you're creating it for: you can't just write any blog posts, you have to write the right ones, tailored to who you're trying to reach and what they're interested in.

The best content – the stuff that's really going to fuel your entire inbound strategy – *has* to be grounded in the correct context. It's not enough to just write a blog post or send out an email. The content in that blog post and that email need to be tailored to who you're trying to reach (your persona) and what they're most interested in seeing (which depends on where they are in the buyer's journey).

The last best practice is to leverage your content.

Make that content available for your buyer personas to find: content distribution is what provides the context to your content. It's not enough to just have great content. You need to have a way to get that content out into the world. Distribution makes content relevant.

There are a few different tools you can use to leverage content by distribution. The right distribution technique gets the right content in front of the right person at the right time. You can use your website pages, business blog, social media, landing pages, calls-to-action, and marketing emails. Just make sure you're using tactics that help your content reach your buyer personas where they're spending their time. If they aren't spending their time on Twitter, Twitter shouldn't be a major part of your distribution plan.

And that brings us to the end of the inbound best practices. Remember: research, develop, and use your buyer personas. Then combine that new knowledge with the buyer's journey to help you create and leverage remarkable content.

VIDEO 3: WHAT DOES INBOUND LOOK LIKE?

Inbound has been taking the world by storm. Let's look at what one company has done with inbound marketing and what effective inbound strategies look like in action.

CFO On-Call is a financial services advisory group. The company is a smart pro-active team of Chief Financial Officers, Financial Controllers and Business Advisors, with over 20 years experience that help business owners in Australia and New Zealand. The management team at CFO On-Call realized that the company had to improve their marketing strategy if they were to remain successful, as traditional methods were no longer working like they used to.

The marketing team at CFO On-Call once relied heavily on telemarketing and cold calling to generate leads for sales. Over time, they saw a decline and no longer had enough leads to support their new customer or partner channels.

Lacking a strong digital presence and search engine authority, their website and blog articles weren't performing well enough for lead generation. When they *did* generate leads, they struggled to educate their prospective clients on services that they and their partners could provide.

Fortunately, they understood the value of inbound marketing and began to expand their online presence, focused on generating more leads to support their revenue goals.

The marketing team began working on developing their buyer personas and created a detailed profile representative of their target audience, Gary the Business Owner. By understanding their main customer's demographics, role, and business problems, the team could create better targeted content, emails and offers for that audience.

After conducting research, here is the buyer persona that they created.

Gary the Business Owner is typically in his mid-40s. He runs a small business that he started after a career in the industry. He's married with a couple of children and drives a modest vehicle. He's been running his own business for about 3 years and it's growing due to his energy and contacts in the industry. He has a secondary school education with either a trade or professional qualifications.

Gary's an achiever, a determined individual and a natural leader. He has an entrepreneurial flair. He has high ambitions for his business and can see great opportunities in his marketplace for growth. Cash flow can limit growth potential and lenders aren't too helpful about borrowing funds to grow.

His income can be a little erratic at times due to business cash flow. He occasionally has to borrow money and the can cause him stress at times. He occasionally speak with his accountant but he doesn't feel they are on the same wavelength as he doesn't always understand what they are talking about.

Gary also feels a little stretched at times due to having to be everything in the business but enjoys being his own boss.

Imagine yourself as being on the marketing team for CFO On-Call, do you have a better picture of who you are trying to market and sell to? Do you have an idea of some different types of content you could create to help this buyer persona solve their problems and address their challenges?

That's the idea of having a buyer persona story! You can get in the mindset of your buyer and understand them that much more.

Next, the team at CFO On-Call worked on expanding the content offerings on their website by creating whitepapers, eBooks and blog posts sharing financial advice to small business owners who were looking to grow.

Look at the different titles of these blog posts -

- 22 Warning Signs of a Business in Trouble
- 9 Keys to Small Business Growth for 2014
- 8 Ways to Improve Profit in a Business

Do you think these are blog posts that their buyer persona would be interested in? Yes! Remember in Gary's buyer persona story, his income is a little erratic, cash flow has been limiting growth, and he has high ambitions for his business. All of these blog posts speak directly to CFO On-Call's buyer persona.

As a result of adopting an inbound marketing strategy, CFO On-Call was able to increase web traffic by 200% in a six-month period. They have the tools in place to easily capture more leads from their site and have seen a 9.6X increase in leads. With lead management and nurturing, they've improved sales-ready leads by 153% and have a 1:3 success rate as compared to the 1:20 close rate prior to doing inbound marketing. Sounds like it worked well, doesn't it?

Every industry is different. This mix of inbound marketing is what worked best for CFO On-Call, but your inbound strategy will be your own.

Congratulations! You finished the first class of the Inbound Certification, but there's still lots to learn. So keep it up, and good luck!

Ready to learn more about inbound marketing?

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