

OUTBOUND VS. INBOUND MARKETING: WHY DO YOU HAVE TO CHOOSE?

Deciding how to invest your marketing dollars to receive the best return on investment (ROI) can be challenging. Should you invest in outbound marketing or inbound marketing? Which is a better fit for your business? Which will be most effective?

There are predominantly two schools of thought, each with strong opinions on the matter. As you do your research, you start to feel like a tennis ball being volleyed back and forth: People practically live online, so inbound is the way to reach them; people prefer to speak to a person, so outbound is the way to reach them; inbound marketing brings leads to you; targeted outbound marketing delivers highly qualified leads that convert ... and so on. How do you effectively choose between the two?

Well, the simple answer is: You don't have to.

First There Was Marketing

At one time, before the pervasiveness of the internet, marketing efforts were all outbound. Marketers pushed messaging out through various channels—buying advertising, attending trade shows, making cold calls using directories or phone books, etc. It was more of a “spray-and-pray” approach. A company would send its message out to as many people as possible and hope they needed what was being sold. The term outbound marketing didn't exist; it was just called marketing.

Dawn of Internet Marketing

And then came the internet, and inbound marketing was born. Prospects could use the internet to find products and services they needed. Marketers didn't need to

reach out to them; search engines brought them directly to their websites. With the right content, blogs, e-books, videos, and podcasts posted on their website and pushed through social media—all created with keywords and phrases intended to maximize search engine optimization (SEO)—leads could come directly to them.

Suddenly outbound marketing was looked at as old-school, outdated, and costly. The new kid on the block, inbound, was being touted as the most effective way to bring in leads. A great divide was created: inbound vs. outbound. Agencies that specialized in inbound marketing pushed the message online, and companies started sinking more and more money into it. Some with great success, some not.

However, the rise of the internet didn't just create this new way of marketing—inbound. It also provided a means to modernize and optimize the approach to outbound marketing and bring with it a more substantial ROI. Today, outbound marketing is no longer taking a “spray-and-pray” approach, but instead allows companies to create a tightly focused approach, and when paired with refined processes that are consistently followed, the results can be very successful. However, similarly to the inbound marketing folks, outbound marketing agencies often claim that their method is the best.

You Don't Have to Choose

Companies have many reasons for choosing one way of marketing over the other. For example, some may have had a bad experience with one method or heard

of someone else's bad experience. You may have heard statements like “no one comes to my website” or “direct mail doesn't work.” The problem with statements such as these are that they are looking at singular components, whereas marketing should be looked at as a system with strong component interrelationships. To isolate one component from a system and then suggest the system didn't work isn't giving it a fair chance.

By implementing both inbound and outbound, you create a system that allows you to extend your reach in a customizable manner. When it comes down to it, people, not companies, are buying products and services. In most industries, the decision-makers and influencers you are trying to reach will be a mix of personalities (introverted and extroverted), age groups, life stages, and demographics, and each will have their own way of finding the solution they need. Some will get an email and pick up the phone, others will head straight to a search engine or social media to quietly do research, and some need to see hard copy information that they can read and pass on. By choosing one type of marketing over the other, you risk alienating potential customers.

For a complete approach, companies should be doing both, including a mix of SEO optimization, pay-per-click, phone calls, emails, direct mail, social media, blogging, etc., depending on their business models. The key to success is ensuring you have a clearly defined strategy around your inbound and outbound marketing practices, and they are not working independently of each other. Your strategy must include goals, an execution plan, and follow-through.

When you build your strategy around sales goals and monitor it consistently to measure against those goals—making process corrections when needed—you will have greater success. There are a few key components to consider when creating your strategy:

- **Tight target profiling** — industry, position, company size, geographic region, etc.
- **Compelling messaging** — specific to the target's needs, including educational and industry information.
- **Technologies** — email and social media automation software, CRM, etc.
- **Processes** — both inbound and outbound processes that detail what you are doing and the frequency, including a nurturing process.

- **Goals** — should be measurable and realistic.
- **Tracking** — an imperative component used to gauge success and drive process improvement.
- **Process improvement** — often overlooked; it is critical to know where you are falling short and when to make adjustments to messaging, targets, follow-through, etc.

The ideal marketing strategy includes both inbound and outbound marketing and will deliver with comprehensive reach your targeted message, which drives results. There is no need to pit outbound marketing against inbound marketing or view them as two separate strategies. The two should be looked at as

components that dovetail to create an optimized plan for increasing qualified leads and boosting revenue. ■



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