

Key Pieces to the Inbound Marketing Puzzle

Finding an Agency that will Strategize and Execute
for the Best Traffic and Returns





Key Pieces to the Inbound Marketing Puzzle

Remember putting together puzzles as a kid? Certain pieces needed to be put together in a certain way, and in a certain sequence before you could experience the glory of the final picture?

Just like a puzzle, the pieces of inbound marketing need to be put together in a certain way and in a certain sequence to reap the harvest of new leads and customers . . . aka, what you really want as a business professional.

Don't be fooled by fancy words and fantastic explanations from many of the marketing agencies out there. If they are confusing you, it's probably because that's exactly what they're trying to do.

You need transparency so you know what you're getting into. Many inbound firms are one sided in their offerings. They give you either

Strategy
Or
Execution

Few give you both.

If you're a small or medium sized business with limited resources, obviously a bunch of inbound strategy without the knowledge to execute it won't do anything for you.

That's like someone handing you a map that directs you to Madison Avenue in New York and saying "good luck," but you have no means to get there.

So how do you hire an inbound marketing agency that will make these things happen? How do you make sure that they are doing the things that will allow your business to experience more leads and result in more customers?

Dig in to these questions so you can find the right combination of strategy and execution and get the return you're looking for.





1) What exactly will be done for my campaign and how will it be reported?

SEO companies have been dodging this question for years. They will tell you that their product is proprietary, and they can't give specifics on what's going to be done. What that really means is they have a very low quality product, and they don't want to show you the exact work. If you hear this kind of response, run.



SEO companies have never been big on giving accurate reports. You definitely want to go with an outfit that gives you real time data about the actions being completed for the campaign. Don't settle for just getting a monthly update that gives you very broad info about the work being done for your brand.

If you are a marketing manager or director, finding the right digital marketing provider can mean the difference between your being a hero or a loser. You need to make sure you are going with an outfit gives you work you will be proud to show your boss.

Solution:

It is absolutely critical you vet the agencies you are thinking of hiring to do your online marketing.

Get samples of each of the work items proposed and stay away from the following if you are a national brand:

- blog network submissions
- social bookmarks
- blog comment links
- syndicated article submissions

Find an agency that offers real time reporting about the actions being completed for you website. This will give you the opportunity to see what's being done and decide if it's the quality you need to reach your target market.

2) What is your link building strategy?

Link building has turned into the most dangerous tactic for a website's overall organic presence. Back in the day, Google



used to say that a link couldn't hurt your website. This caused 99% of the SEO practitioners to abuse links and try to game Google's system.

You need to be very careful when hiring an outside agency to build your offsite authority. Most SEO agencies aren't going to be very concerned with the negative effects their work might have on your overall brand.

Ask some very specific questions about the work that will be done for your campaign. Link building is going to be part of pretty much every digital marketing company's fulfillment. You need to know exactly what is going to be done so you can avoid black hat practices. Here are the biggies you need to look out for.

The use of too much exact-match anchor text has always been the basis of how Google determines to give a penalty. Read more about the [here](#).

Ask very specific questions about how the agency is going to use anchor text. If they say they are going to use a lot of exact-match anchor text, take it as a sign to run the other way.

Link building networks have traditionally been one of the easiest ways to game Google's system. This is a way to get a large quantity of links on different Class C IP Addresses. Now days, this is the easiest way to get a negative hit by a Penguin update. If you ever hear anything about the use of a blog network, find a different vendor.

SEO companies are deathly afraid of how links from social media are going to play into obtaining organic rankings. Social media is extremely hard to scale and is a nightmare to most SEO companies. If an agency tells you that social media has nothing to do with, and will never mean anything to organic rankings, they aren't the agency for you.



Solution:

Links have always been a core part of Google's ranking algorithm. The sustainable way to generate high quality links is from creating high quality content. This can either be posted on your blog, social media, or offered as a guest post. The bottom line is: it is time to start adding value to the Internet. If you can do that, the links will come.



3) What is your content marketing strategy?

Content marketing is quickly becoming the foundation of a long-term, successful online marketing campaign. Content marketing isn't about using keywords to rank well anymore. Instead, it is a way for you to build up your reputation as a leader in your industry and that, in turn, brings in the leads and new customers.

Getting started with effective content marketing means you expand your organic footprint and begin to be an authority in your industry. Here are the best ways to do that.

If you are dealing with a Google penalty, content is the way to bring back your organic traffic. Many businesses have seen a significant drop in traffic on their homepage and a few other top landing pages. Rather than trying to keep building links to those few pages, you need to expand your index.



Google penalties work on a page by page basis rather than a domain level issue. That means that you can work on other areas of your site and reap the benefits right where you need them.

Carefully designed and crafted content marketing shows Google you deserve top placement in the rankings. This is the way to build up your social media presence, provide something useful to your readers, and get the traffic you want.

Solution:

In order for brands to prove that they are worthy of consumer investment, they have to prove it. And the way they prove it is by creating strategized, original, and relevant content that convinces prospective consumers that they are a reputable brand and leads them through to purchase.

In our social media age, the balance of power has shifted between organizations and consumers.

There was a time when a brand would buy above the line advertising space and watch the dollars roll in.

Things were simpler. It just worked. In this model of active business to passive consumer marketing, it was capital that did the talking.

But times have changed. Now that everybody can be a content creator thanks to Facebook, Twitter, and most importantly blogging platforms, we are now experiencing a currency of content.



Agencies that refuse to acknowledge this shift towards content creation and neglect to form any kind of content strategy are failing to acknowledge the power of inbound marketing in the 21st century, and won't produce the returns you expect.

When an agency does recognize that they need a content strategy, it is not necessarily all clear sailing from there. A content strategy has to be matched with buyer personas in order for that content to have any traction with the target audience.



When top business owners create product lines, a great deal of research goes into understanding a target audience to ensure that the product is sellable and that the business will be profitable.

Through this research process, businesses are effectively creating buyer personas that can assist every function of a business by creating a better understanding of what interests consumers have, where they hang out online, what they do with their free time, and crucially, how they spend their dollars.

This valuable data needs to be mapped into a content strategy too. In fact, it may be one of the most important things most content strategies neglect.

Every piece of content created needs to be, not only unique and engaging, but it must also be genuinely relevant to the target market of the business. If your agent doesn't plan for this, look elsewhere.

After understanding buyer personas, it is vital to ensure that content is mapped into the buying cycle of those consumers. When each of us considers a purchase, we go through a number of stages before we commit to opening our wallets. Namely, there are 3 basic stages: awareness, evaluation, and then purchase.

Awareness: Leads have either become aware of your product or service, or they have become aware that they have a need that must be fulfilled.

Evaluation: Leads are aware that your product or service could fulfill their need, and they are trying to determine whether you are the best fit.

Purchase: Leads are ready to make a purchase.

For a content strategy to maximize its potential, unique content must be created for every stage of this cycle, and it must

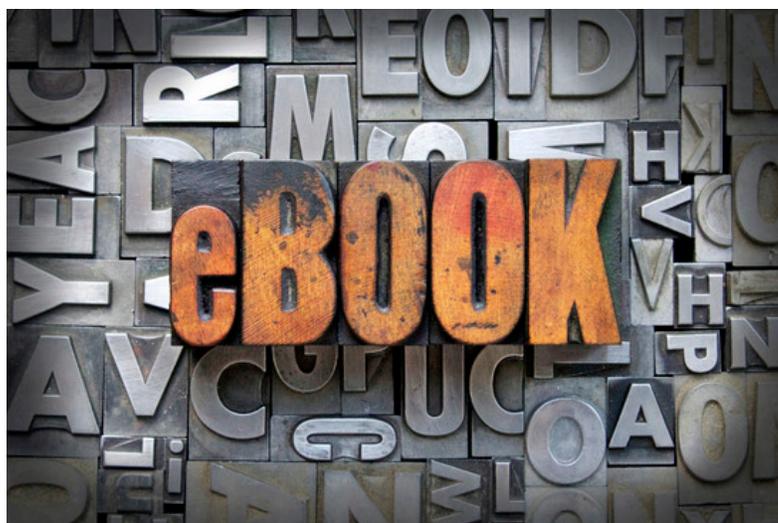


also be posted to the most appropriate online platform and distributed the right way.

For example,

At the awareness stage, your agent should create an offer (free e-book) about a common issue you have identified that is relevant to your target audience's interests and/or problems. In the e-book you provide solutions, and tie in your product/service that could potentially be a solution. You promote this offer via social media, and your website.

At the evaluation stage, an industry report should be presented that showcases all of the unique features of your product. Your agent builds a compelling case on why your product is superior to the other options that are available. You send this report through email to all your leads who have indicated they are interested in more than just information (lead nurturing).



At the purchase stage, you get the prospect on the phone and provide a detailed product demonstration. What happens next? Your sales person closes the deal.

The better your agent is at this process, the more customers you will win.

We all have big plans. Big dreams. Big hopes.

Often times we know what needs to be done, but we simply can't get ourselves to do it. This is true in business, just like it's true in our personal lives.

How do you combat this inaction? A publishing calendar.

Without a planned editorial calendar for content distribution, your inbound marketing agency will be publishing content at random times that are not optimal for gaining consumer traction.

By creating a content calendar (ideally plotted for the next three months), an agent can ensure that it is pushing out content every day, and that there is a mix of content being distributed within any given week.

A calendar overview can be a great way of ensuring you are reaching every single buyer persona at every single stage of the buyer cycle, and that there is a mix of content being published. Without this calendar, a business may find that it is



reaching out to one consumer group too much, or that it is placing too much emphasis on purchase with too little focus on creating brand awareness.

4) What are the success metrics of the campaign?

Having the right success metrics for your online marketing campaign gives you the ability to hold your provider accountable. If you ever run across an agency that counts the number of links or page rank as the success metric, you need to look elsewhere.

Most reputable SEO agencies will use keyword rankings as the core success metric of a campaign. You need to be very careful with this kind of analysis. What benefit is it going to be to your brand if you are ranking for keywords that get very little to no search volume? Search volume is a means to an end, but it does not signal real success to your business: leads and new customers.

Solution:

What is the real goal of your website and online marketing efforts? Probably to increase your online visibility and increase revenue, right?

If that is the real goal, what metrics should you be looking for in an agency's reports? Traffic, bounce rates and new conversions would be a much better way to evaluate success.

Conclusion

There is no question, the Internet is a powerful way to increase exposure and drive new sales. The old school days of gaming Google's system are over.

Remember, inbound marketing is like a puzzle. Certain pieces need to be put together in the right way, and in the right sequence. Make sure the agencies you're looking into clearly understand this so that you get the long-term results you want.

P.S. Digital Flavor is offering a for companies looking to take marketing efforts to the next level. If you are interested in a sustainable solution to your online marketing needs, we would love to talk.