How To Use Webinars For Inbound Marketing

Introduction

Inbound Marketing has changed the face of marketing over the past decade, yet many companies have not yet implemented or fully mastered the art (and science) of Inbound Marketing. In this whitepaper, we define, discuss and dissect what Inbound Marketing is and how you can use webinars to contribute and shape your Inbound Marketing strategy.

Definition: What is Inbound Marketing?

Hubspot, the company that coined the term "Inbound Marketing", defines it as follows:

Inbound marketing is about using marketing to bring potential customers to you, rather than having your marketing efforts fight for their attention. Sharing is caring and inbound marketing is about creating and sharing content with the world. By creating content specifically designed to appeal to your dream customers, inbound attracts qualified prospects to your business and keeps them coming back for more.

How does Inbound Marketing work in practice?

The name and definition for "Inbound Marketing" are simple, but what is really behind the term? After all, it has dominated the marketing landscape for over a decade and thousands upon thousands of organisations have built their business success on it. How does it work in practice?

Pull with content vs Push with advertising

As the name suggests, at the heart of inbound marketing is the principle that interest and enquiries from prospects are inbound, i.e. they find you and come to you – as opposed to the company making the effort of actively pursuing prospects by advertising and other "push" methods like email etc. That is not to say that outbound methods should no longer be used, but if implemented correctly, inbound marketing results in more cost-effective use of budgets and better conversion rates.

Beyond content creation

Creating content is one thing, but let's look at how this helps to attract prospects. The type of content required for inbound marketing to work is different to the content companies used to create. Product brochures and other product and feature-heavy documentation is not helpful in attracting prospects. In fact, the entire sales process has changed with the emergence of the internet and free access to more information than ever before. So, what has changed?
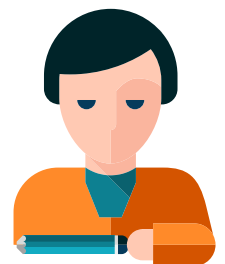
On the back of more access to information, buyers have developed the desire to self-educate prior to engaging in a sales conversation. AdWeek stated that 81% of us choose to self-educate before talking to sales. Historically, prospects would call the sales number to find out everything they needed to know, simply because there was less information freely available to them, which is why the product brochure was sufficient. However, now – with reviews, commentary, evaluations, and other information being published every second – companies recognise that they need to contribute to the content creation effort themselves.
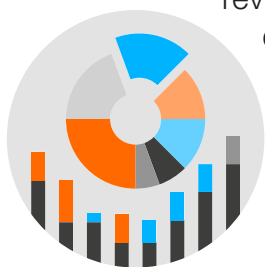
This also opens up the opportunity of becoming part of, and controlling, a prospect's self-education phase. By providing the quality information prospects crave, companies can become the source of the information. If they don't, the competition or the target market itself will surely do. What is important, however, is that companies are – or at least appear to be – as unbiased as possible. Today's buyers are very savvy and recognise a sales pitch immediately, regardless of how well disguised it is. The content you produce should also be of a high quality so as not to disappoint and turn away the readers.

Targeting prospects effectively using content

But Inbound Marketing will not work if all you have is a collection of content. The content also needs to be well targeted. Targeted not only at your ideal prospects, but also at the stage they are in the buying cycle. Each prospect will go through different stages during their self-education phase. These stages are shown in what is known as the "Sales Funnel":

Old Model   **New Model**

Marketing / Sales

Awareness, Interest, Consideration, Evaluation, Purchase
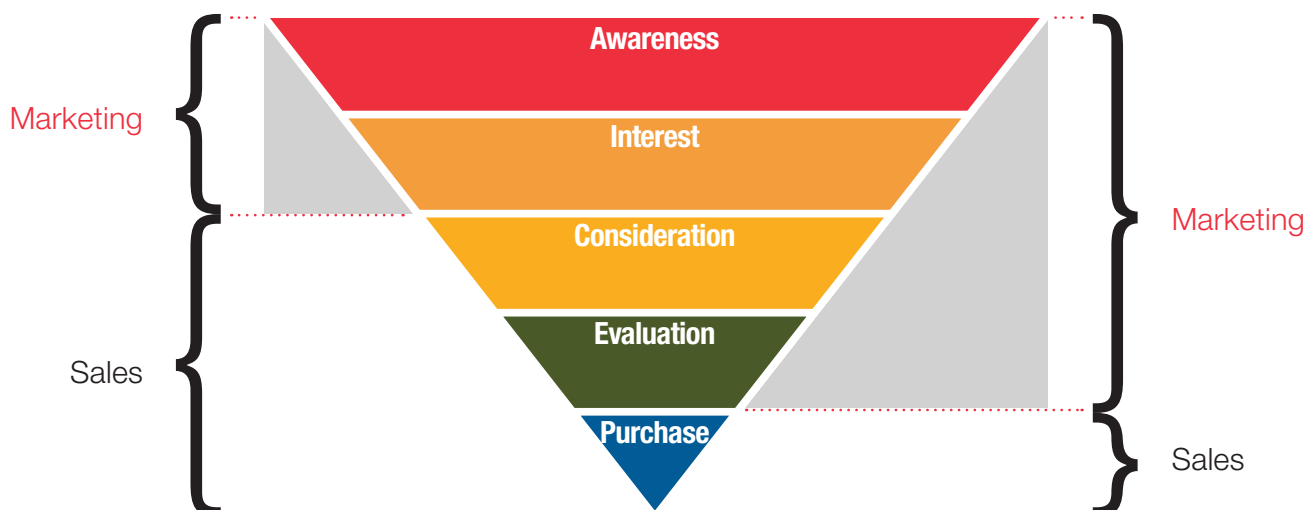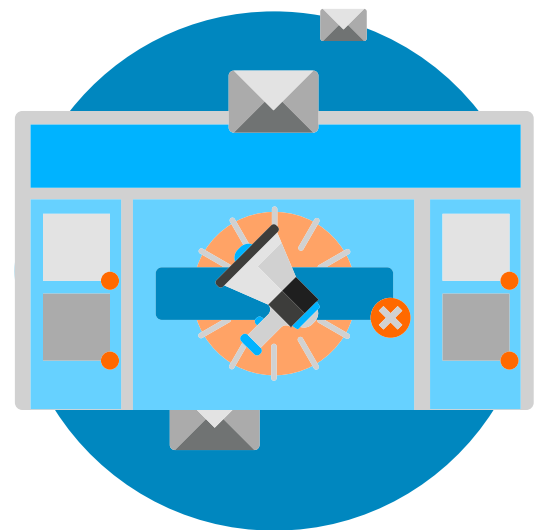
Marketing / Sales

When creating content, you should be clear which sales funnel stage you are targeting. Without a clear plan, or a lack of content for one or more sales funnel stages, you will struggle to make your inbound marketing work effectively. Here are some examples of how you can target webinar content at different sales funnel stages:

Sales funnel stage	Webinar topic
Awareness	5 reasons why you should create better content
Interest	10 ways to create more engaging content
Consideration	Case study: Learn how company X used high quality content to increase revenue
Evaluation	Demo: See the tools in action that helped company X drive 50% more revenue from high-quality content

As you progress down the sales funnel, your content should become more specific, technical and sales oriented. Prospects that are progressing through these stages will expect and welcome this level of detail.

In the next section, we will explain how webinars take the content creation and targeting principles and extends them to make inbound marketing more successful. You will learn why webinars are better suited for inbound marketing than other marketing assets and how webinars are used to increase conversion and close ratios.

How do webinars contribute to inbound marketing success?

❶ Webinars are a high-performance content creation engine

Inbound marketing relies on content and webinars are arguably the only piece of content that was conceived with the internet in mind. All other marketing assets, including whitepapers, reports, guides, videos etc have been around longer than the web. As a result, only webinars are self-hosted, i.e. don't need third-party software to host them, and provide their own forms and integrated analytics without relying on other applications. They are entirely self-sufficient.

More importantly, this internet DNA means that the features and functionality of webinar platforms have always had online lead generation, interactivity and engagement in mind. When was the last time you engaged with a whitepaper in a Q&A session? Exactly, you haven't. But that interactivity is exactly where webinars have the edge over other assets.

But apart from being great content pieces themselves, webinars are also the source of many other pieces of content. Marketers can easily create whitepapers, blog posts, social media updates, videos, slideshares and other content pieces from their webinars. All of these combined create a crumb trail of content that can be optimised for search and distributed into the target market.

The content created on the back of webinars will remain available for your audience to find and the more content you produce, the higher the likelihood is of it being found.

❷ In-webinar touch points

Inbound marketing is about providing prospects with the information they need, across a number of touch points. These touch points create an ongoing interactivity between content provider and the prospect.

Webinars contain a number of touch points that are built into the platform. By featuring these touch points inside the webinar itself, webinar organisers have a captive audience. The likelihood of prospects accessing these touch points is high, which means the webinar organiser gains a deeper insight into the prospects' interests and behaviour. These additional touch points are not available across other marketing assets, such as whitepapers. Some of the in-webinar touch points include:

- Cross promotion of content and other webinars via resources sections
- Live and on-demand Q&A
- Polls & Surveys
- Demo offers
- Free trial offers

❸ Multi-channel content distribution ensures wider reach

Inbound marketing relies on a wide portfolio of content, as much as it relies on a wide distribution of this content. As mentioned before, the wider content is distributed, the higher is the likelihood of it being found by prospects. Below are some of ways webinars contribute to the dissemination of content across various channels. It is important to note that good webinar technology offers these capabilities out of the box and without having to rely on third party applications.

Distribution of content via social media

Webinar technology makes it easy to share information about the webinar and its topic. Especially across social media. A good webinar platform will allow webinar organisers to include social sharing buttons on the webinar registration page, as well as within the confirmation and reminder emails for attendees. These are pre-webinar opportunities to gain further exposure on social media.

Within the webinar itself, a good webinar platform should also allow attendees to share information on social media. Attendees have the ability to access their Twitter, Linkedin or Facebook feeds directly within the webinar console without having to navigate into a different browser tab. A good webinar moderator will encourage and facilitate this type of social sharing and interactivity to increase the reach of the webinar content.

Other social functionality also includes sharing the webinar URL across other social media platforms, as well as sending emails from within the webinar to colleagues with the webinar URL and details.

All of these distribution channels access the audience's peers without the webinar organiser having to do the work themselves. This also reiterates the importance of high-quality content, as this is more likely to be shared by attendees.

Distribution of content via blogging

Webinars provide in-depth content, which is the perfect basis for multiple blog posts. The short-form nature of blogs makes it easier for your target audience to consume content in bite-size chunks. At the same time, you are creating teasers for the main piece of content. Blogs are free to access, but pave the way for lead generation with calls-to-action for a webinar registration which results in collecting the prospect's contact details.

Blog posts are easy to optimise for search (see next point) and deal with all or specific parts of the webinar. For example, blog posts can be about:

- Your webinar in general
- About specific statistics or key points of the webinar
- The attendee questions discussed during the live Q&A
- The questions submitted by attendees during the on-demand phase of the webinar
- The webinar presenters and their backgrounds and epertise

Obviously, each blog post contains a call-to-action that leads prospects to the webinar registration page. Given this choice of topics, it is easy to see how much content you can produce form just one webinar and how specific this content can be targeted around the topic you are promoting

Distribution of content via Search Engine Optimisation (SEO)

The previous points have led up to SEO. You should, by now, be familiar with the fact that inbound marketing is all about being found, and that webinars are providing an excellent basis and vehicle for this.

So, it comes as no surprise that SEO plays a key role in inbound marketing. Good SEO increases the likelihood of being found, and by multiplying your webinar content into different formats and across different channels, you are able to optimise each variation for search. Like soundwaves, your content expands outwards and reaches a growing audience the longer its stays available.

From registration and landing pages, to blog posts, social media updates and follow-on content like whitepapers, SEO helps to drive inbound traffic across a variety of touch points. When you build the number of potential touch points with your audience, you also build the number of actual inbound enquiries. Ensure you build on-site and off-site SEO for best results.

❹ Sales funnel targeting increases conversion rates

Having established the benefits webinars hold for content distribution, in this section we turn our attention to how they help to increase conversion rates, too.

Webinars are very versatile and their features and functionality allow them to be used in all sales funnel stages. Inbound marketing works, because the content is designed to nurture leads through the different sales funnel stages at their own pace. Doing so enables leads to get the answers they are looking for and be guided along a natural narrative.
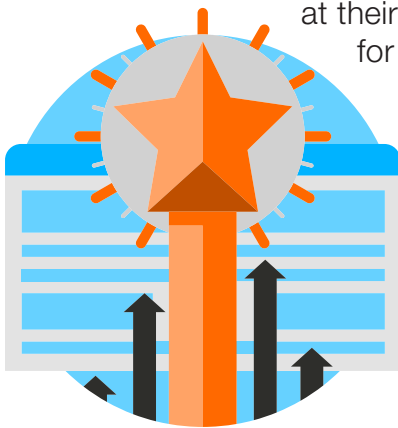
Historically, companies have been aiming for a conversion from an initial (unqualified) enquiry to new customer, with only a sales conversation or process in between. That will usually have been an uncomfortable experience for the buyer, which is probably why sales reps tend to have a bad reputation. In modern (inbound) marketing, marketers aim for many smaller conversions. With each conversion throughout the sales cycle, the likelihood of a (qualified) conversion into a customer becomes more likely.

It is important to be aware of how to use webinars to target different sales funnel stages. It is so important that we have dedicated an entire whitepaper to it. You can access our detailed whitepaper on this topic here.

⑤ Integration with Marketing Automation and CRM helps close more deals

Webinars are efficient standalone marketing tools, but combined with other marketing and sales technology, such as Marketing Automation and CRM tools, they help to significantly increase deal close ratios.

Connecting your webinar platform with marketing automation tools enable a more efficient and effective lead generation and nurturing process. Lead nurturing, driven by well-designed lead scoring and qualification processes, increases insight and ultimately conversion rates.

In addition, CRM tools give sales teams the insight and control they need to better manage their sales opportunities. But without data CRM tools have very limited capabilities. Webinars are popular with sales teams because they provide more information, data and insight than any other marketing asset. Both marketers and sales leaders should aim to integrate the two systems as early as possible.

As a trio, webinars, marketing automation and CRM form a powerful combination to drive leads into the sales funnel, with closed loop reporting and comprehensive view from initial promotion to attributable revenue.

Conclusion

Inbound marketing has been a key marketing principle for over a decade. It relies on quality content being found by your ideal prospects. Increasing the number of touch points between your prospects and your content, results in more inbound enquiries. Inbound enquiries have higher conversion rates than opportunities that were generated from push / outbound marketing tactics.

Webinars contribute to effective inbound marketing on a number of levels. They help to increase the content output volume, as well as increasing the overall number of touch points between the content and the prospect. Webinars make content distribution easier, allowing webinar organisers to gain a wider reach for their content.

The versatility of webinars makes them ideal for targeting prospects during the different sales funnel stages. By integrating your webinar platform with marketing automation and CRM tools you can directly ingest data and insight and produce actionable leads in real time for your sales teams.

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