

The logo for Madison Taylor Marketing is centered at the top. It consists of the words "MADISON TAYLOR" in a bold, white, sans-serif font, with "Marketing" in a smaller, lighter font directly below. The text is enclosed within two concentric white circles. The background of the entire page is dark, with a diagonal split. The left side is black with a pattern of glowing pink and purple streaks. The right side is a deep purple with a pattern of glowing blue and white bokeh circles.

**MADISON
TAYLOR**
Marketing

MARKETING RESOURCES

Inbound Marketing



INTRODUCTION

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What is Inbound Marketing?

Inbound marketing is a new way of thinking about marketing — new, but increasingly useful. The old system, called “interruptive” or “outbound” marketing, is what you think of when you picture advertising in the classic sense.

Outbound marketing is the force behind print and TV ads, billboards, live reads, and any other form of advertising that companies shove in front of you whether you asked for it or not. It’s crude, annoying, and — given the rise of ad blockers, streaming media, and DVR — increasingly easy to avoid.

Inbound takes a different approach. Instead of throwing yourself in front of a broad, ill-defined group of strangers, you sit back a bit. The inbound approach is to meet consumers when they’re starting to think about making a purchase, and then give them the information they need to make a smart one.

Inbound marketing also focuses on the buyer’s journey — the series of steps and states of mind that a potential customer goes through from realizing they have a problem to buying something that will fix that problem.

Inbound marketing is driven by content — content to educate, inform, and guide consumers toward an intelligent purchase decision. More importantly, it’s about delivering helpful, timely content to the right people at the right time. If you’re doing it right, your visitors and buyers won’t be annoyed by your efforts — they’ll be thanking you.

There are four pillars or stages to the inbound marketing methodology — attract, convert, close, and delight. We’ll get into more detail throughout this article, but it’s important to realize that each pillar is important to the overall goal. Some elements, like social media or a good website, are vital for all four phases.

Finally, before you pursue an inbound marketing approach, you’ll need to make sure that your foundational pieces are intact. If there’s a weakness in

your product, branding, corporate structure, website, or anything else that will start to interact with the customer, your efforts might go to waste. Let's get started!

Chapter One: Building the Foundational Pieces for an Effective Inbound Marketing Strategy

Know Thyself - Time For An Audit

First things first: figure out exactly what you're working with. [Sit down and think about who you are, not just as a person or a product but as a brand.](#) What do you stand for? What are you selling, and to whom? How have your marketing efforts been informed so far? And are they working?

Take a long, hard look at your website. If your website isn't mobile-friendly, that's your first priority. [More than half of global web traffic goes through mobile,](#) and the numbers are only going up.

What about speed? [Slow websites lose visitors, conversion, repeat customers, and therefore dollars.](#) A site that isn't optimized to load quickly on any platform isn't an annoyance, it's a ball and chain holding your business back.

Finally, [is your website user-friendly?](#) There's an old adage called the Three Clicks Rule — every piece of content on your site should be accessible with three clicks or less. It's not a completely hard-and-fast rule — exceptions can be made for sites with hundreds of pages, and obviously you don't want to over-crowd — but the principle is sound: don't bury your content.

What about your social media channels? Are they built out correctly? Make sure all your information is current, your logos are high-res, current, and matching, your links are working, and your "about" sections contain a relevant, up-to-date mission statement.

If you have brick and mortar locations, make sure the address is right. Add contact info, including email addresses and phone numbers — some people

don't like to (or know how to) contact you through social media.

Are you using the right social media accounts? Not every service is right for every business, and it's not worth maintaining a presence on a network that your customers aren't using. If you're in the B2B arena, you need to be active on LinkedIn. If you're in a photogenic business, like food, clothing, vacations, and the like, you need to be on Instagram. Take stock of where your customers are and follow them there.

How Are You Keeping Track Of Customers?

If you don't have one already, you'll need a CRM — customer resource management software. And a Rolodex isn't going to cut it. You'll need to be able to keep track of customers, where they came from, and how long it took. You'll want to track which pages they visited and in what order before they made a purchase. And you'll need to know what happened after their purchase — did they have complaints? Leave a review? Come back and buy again?

Build Out Your Buyer Personas

We talk a lot here at MTM about [buyer personas](#), but it's only because they're so important. A buyer persona is a broad-strokes image of your perfect customer. You don't need to know everything about them — that would get very granular, very quickly — but you need to know who you're selling to and what makes them a good fit.

Think about big things like age, family size, income, and location. Some of those will be deal-breakers — if you're a carpet cleaner, you're not interested in people who don't live near you, and if you make luxury cars, you're not interested in people who don't make enough to afford them — and you can exclude them from your marketing efforts right away.

Take hobbies, careers, interests, and buying habits into account. Do people who use your product also tend to have other hobbies? Most rock climbers drink beer and most motorcycle owners also buy leather clothes — making

connections across industries can help you find markets you'd be missing otherwise.

Finally, think about your product from the point of view of the problem it solves in broad terms. If you make a robot vacuum, you're not just selling a vacuum. You're selling convenience, time, and effort. Think about your potential customers from the point of view of how you can help them, not what you can persuade them to buy.

Chapter Two: The Buyer's Journey (or the Funnel) and How it Works with the Pillars of Inbound

The buyer's journey is a description of the phases that a buyer goes through before making a purchase. At the beginning, the buyer doesn't yet know that they have a problem, and maybe has never heard of you. At the end, they've concluded that your product is the best fix for what ails them.

The buyer's journey is broken into three stages: awareness, consideration, and decision. It's also sometimes expressed as a "funnel," in which case we'll talk about the top, middle, and bottom of the funnel, where each stage of the funnel represents a smaller number of people.

We'll go into more detail when we talk about the four pillars of the inbound methodology, but generally speaking, they match up as follows: the "awareness" phase of the buyer's journey corresponds to the "attract" phase of inbound marketing, "consideration" to "convert", and "decision" to "close".

The "delight" phase of the inbound marketing methodology doesn't correspond to the buyer's journey — it stands alone, but it's equally important. We'll talk about that more later as well.

Chapter Three: Attract

The first stage of the inbound methodology is all about attracting people to your website or business. Remember, this isn't interruptive marketing — we're

not trying to get in people's faces. We're waiting people to start seeking out answers and then doing the best we can to make ourselves visible when they do.

Make the Most of Social Media

Social media is an excellent tool for the attract phase of inbound marketing. Since the attract phase corresponds with the awareness phase of the buyer's journey, you're just trying to make potential customers aware that you exist. Posts in this stage are all about showing people who you are and that you might have a solution to their pain points — at the very least, you know what those pain points are.

Write a Blog

Blogs let you dig a little deeper into your subject matter than social media does — it's a good idea to link your social posts to your blog so that readers who want to know more can learn about a topic in more depth. Your blog is where you prove that you know what you're talking about — demonstrate authority and expertise on a subject so that the reader knows that you're familiar with their problem and know how to help.

Get Started on Whitepapers

Whitepapers are similar to blogs, but a little more packaged up — picture a print magazine vs. a website. Despite the name, whitepapers aren't usually print collateral, but they're a good downloadable asset for interested visitors to take with them and read later.

If you're going to make whitepapers, make sure your branding is on point — fonts, logos, colors, formatting, language choices, and so on should be in line with your brand guidelines so that the association remains strong, even with relatively static pieces of information.

Show Off Your Best Work With Case Studies

Once you've gotten rolling, you can start to prove your expertise with real-world examples of how you've impacted another person or company. Talk about the person, the problem they had, and how whatever they were trying previously wasn't working. Then talk about how you came along and fixed it. These stories should be emotional, not clinical — talk about how your customer felt rather than fixating on facts and figures.

Ebooks

Ebooks are similar to blogs and whitepapers, but often build out in more depth in order to be a one-stop shop for a particular topic. Ebooks used to be more popular, but they're starting to be overshadowed by...

Pillar Pages: Ungated Content For All

Pillar pages! Just like the one you're reading now, pillar pages are a comprehensive, in-depth look at a particular topic. While it was popular for a while to require some sort of form submission before downloading an ebook — just submit your name, email, and job title to download! — lots of companies (us included) are starting to lean toward open, no-strings-attached information.

Citizens of the web are ever-more concerned with privacy, and don't like to give out even information as innocuous as an email address. The way we see it, your main job is to show your visitors that you know what they're talking about, and the easier it is for them to see that, the better! Hence the pillar page — detailed, useful, educational materials for anyone who wants to read them.

Chapter Four: Convert

The second stage of the inbound marketing methodology is all about converting visitors — the people you managed to attract to your site in the previous phase — into leads. You've gotten someone to visit your site, read your blog, and check out your products. Now it's time to start a conversation.

This stage corresponds directly with the “consideration” stage of the buyer’s journey — visitors are weighing their options, collecting information, and working toward a decision, but they’re not ready to pick a finalist just yet.

The Role of Social Media

At this phase, your social media posts are more direct about the problem you’re trying to solve. The people seeing this content are already aware that they have a problem — they don’t need the high-level education that you provided in the attract phase.

Your content should be directly addressing their needs at this phase. Wording and design are speaking directly to the customer, telling them that you can fix whatever pain points brought them to you in the first place.

Your social media posts should also contain a call-to-action at this phase. Whereas in the attract phase, you were merely trying to educate visitors about the capabilities of your product, now you’re trying to get them engaged. CTAs along the lines of “learn more” are perfect for this phase.

Don’t Sleep On Email Marketing

The convert phase is also a good time to focus your email marketing campaigns. You already know that potential customers at this phase are looking at you, so keep in touch with them! Use landing pages or social campaigns to get their email addresses — you know they’re interested if they’re willing to give you contact info.

Emails in the convert phase should be about checking in, asking about a problem, and providing detailed info like whitepapers and case studies to show off your credentials. If you run a B2B business, this is the time to offer an audit or demonstration to show people precisely how you can help them.

Blogs Can Help Pull People Through The Funnel

Blogs oriented toward the convert phase — the “consideration” phase of the buyer’s journey — should be all about guiding readers further through the

funnel. Content should be similar to the emails — educational, specific, and addressing the exact problems that readers are trying to solve — and CTAs should encourage readers to take further steps.

For example, CTAs could ask for contact info so that readers can stay informed on new developments, or offer a one-on-one call with a salesperson to answer any specific questions they might have. If you have a complex pricing model, you might offer to go over the reader's exact needs and generate a price list for them.

The convert phase is precisely where CRM software comes in so handy. With a CRM that your marketers and salespeople are diligently updating, you can keep track of who's visiting your site, which pages they've read, what info they've given you, how many times you've reached out to them, and so on.

Chapter Five: Close

The close phase corresponds directly to the decision phase of the buyer's journey — the customer is ready to make a decision, and you're ready to turn a lead into a customer. It's the bottom of the funnel, so this is hard part, but don't give up!

If you have a dedicated sales team, make sure they're in the loop with marketing efforts, pricing, promotions, and so on. You don't want them to go in blind and over- or under-promise because they haven't kept up.

At this point, the marketing work is mostly done. This is the sales team's territory. That doesn't mean marketing is out of the picture, though. [It's important for your sales and marketing team to work together \(we call it "smarketing"\) so that everyone's goals and expectations are aligned.](#) If they are, you should have no trouble handing off your leads to the sales people. How Do You Turn Leads Into Customers?

Sales is not an exact science, and the exact approach you take will depend on your business and personal style, but there are some good places to start.

Use your CRM and your closed-loop reporting software, as well as meetings between marketing and sales, to determine which marketing efforts are bringing in the best leads and which ones become the best customers.

Every lead also needs to be nurtured, according to their interests and where they are in the process. Keep track of which pages they've visited, social posts they've clicked on, whitepapers they've downloaded, and info they've given. All of those things will help you keep track of shifting interests and stay relevant in the customer's mind.

Don't forget about emails. If someone clicks on a CTA, fills out a form on a landing page, or downloads a whitepaper, but isn't ready to become a customer, email is the perfect tool. Use your knowledge of the kind of content they're browsing to intuit their problems and questions, then send targeted emails to address those concerns.

If you're not already, you should be scoring your leads. How you do so is up to you, but lead scoring is the idea of assigning values to various characteristics, like the channel the lead came from, their demographics, whether they've reached out to you, and anything else you think is relevant.

As you generate more leads, you'll find that it's not worth your time to reach out to every single lead. Lead scoring is the perfect way to prioritize the leads that are most likely to convert and most likely to turn into good sources of revenue.

Chapter Six: Delight

This is the final phase of the inbound marketing methodology. It doesn't line up with the buyer's journey anymore, but it's just as important.

The delight stage is about three things: retaining your existing customers, turning them into repeat customers, and getting them to spread the word to new customers. Customers these days have high expectations — they expect quick responses, good customer service, and detailed, accurate information.

Why bother? Because repeat customers are the best customers. Acquiring a new customer [costs five times as much as keeping an existing one](#), so keeping your existing customers happy is the best way to keep your sales numbers up without ballooning your marketing budget. Always be looking for little ways to delight your existing customers, whether it's exclusive discounts, birthday gifts, or just great service – remember, that's money you're not spending on marketing.

Not only are existing customers better customers – [they're 50% more likely to try new products and spend 31% more than first-timers](#) – but they tell their friends. Word of mouth and influencer marketing account for trillions of dollars in consumer spending, and are estimated to account for 13% of consumer sales.

People trust their friends. More than ever, it's easy to consult with friends, family, and people you trust online before making a purchase, so it's vital that you become one of the companies people recommend. [Word of mouth impressions result in five times more sales than paid impressions, and people are 90% more likely to make a purchase](#) if it's recommended by a friend. Every lead generated by an existing customer is a lead you didn't have to spend marketing dollars on.

How To Be Delightful

Personalize everything! Your customers know that you're not sending individual marketing emails just to them, but putting their name or other personal touches in the email will help make it feel more like a one-on-one interaction.

If you can, give them the opportunity to tell you what they're interested in, and serve them content accordingly. If you make outdoor clothing, for example, you can personalize your email lists by not sending promos for a new women's jacket to your male customers.

Offer little tokens of appreciation that make sense for your business. If you run a law firm or tax preparing business, offer a free consultation for existing

customers. If you run a restaurant, a free appetizer or exclusive all-day happy hour might be fun. If you own a brewery, consider a mug club or growler discounts.

Don't be too liberal with coupon codes or limited-time-only offers. Not only have customers seen hundreds of them before — how many 20% off coupons from Bed Bath and Beyond are in your mailbox right now? — but they're impersonal, and the customer knows you didn't have to spend any effort on them.

Chapter Seven: Why Bother?

Sure, inbound marketing sounds great. But does it work?

Let's take HubSpot as an example. [HubSpot says that 75% of their blog views and 90% of their blog leads come from old posts](#) — posts that continue to draw traffic long after they're published, because they contain useful content. And they're not the only ones. Companies that publish 11 or more blog posts a month get about 4.5 times as many leads as companies that blog 4-5 times a month. Those leads are turning into real dollars.

As a result, [55% of marketers say that blog creation is their top inbound marketing priority](#), and 43% of B2B marketers say that blogging is their most important type of content. Today's customers want more and more information before they make a business decision, and content marketing is giving them access to that information.

Finally, let's talk customer retention. Depending on who you ask, it's anywhere from 5-25 times more expensive to sign a new customer as to keep an existing customer. Not only are existing customers cheaper to keep, but they pay dividends — they buy more often and spend more per purchase. Inbound marketing gives you the tools to keep your existing customers happy and coming back for more.

Some Food For Thought

Inbound marketing is the way of the future in the marketing world. While billions of dollars are still spent on traditional interruptive marketing like TV and web ads, consumers are increasingly annoyed by them and able to avoid them.

Tools like Tivo and DVR, easily available to anyone with a TV, allow them to skip ads during their favorite shows – ads that might not have been remotely relevant to them anyway. Netflix, Amazon, and others use subscription models to deliver high-quality content with no ads at all. Ad blockers on the web ensure that customers never see your expensive banners, and “[banner blindness](#)” means they won’t notice them if they do.

The point is that the old model of putting your ads in front of as many people as possible and hoping they make a purchase isn’t working any more. Customers want research, information, and recommendations, and inbound can give them that. Inbound marketing is taking the marketing world by storm – do you want to ride that wave? Or be swept away by it?