The Ultimate Inbound Marketing Guide for Manufacturers
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Why do we plan?

There’s a quote about proper planning that gets attributed to Benjamin Franklin:

“He who fails to prepare prepares to fail.”

There’s also a quote that is credited to Abraham Lincoln that illustrates the importance he put on planning:

“Give me six hours to chop down a tree and I will spend the first four sharpening my axe.”
If you’re in business, and you’ve achieved any measure of success, **you know the value of preparation**, whether that means researching new products or suppliers, or conferring with your colleagues on strategy and presentation before important meetings.

This type of planning should also extend to your marketing efforts. So, we’ve put together this guide that manufacturers can use when they’re ready to launch an inbound marketing campaign.
First, know your customers

Knowing your audience is a key part of successful content marketing, which is why you need to do your research. We all pride ourselves in knowing our customers, but by doing proper research, we can often uncover surprises and details that help us connect with them in an authentic way.
Research can take many forms. We often use online surveys or detailed, over-the-phone interviews with existing customers. It’s important to get a large enough sampling so that your information reveals patterns in your prospect’s behavior.

Topics you can discuss include:

- Their company, what it does or makes.
- Their role at work, their responsibilities and a typical day at their job.
- The skills needed to do their jobs.
- Their biggest challenges.
- Who they report to and how they are evaluated.
- The blogs, websites and other sources they use to stay informed.
- Their career path and education.
- Their age and family background.
Once you’ve done the interviews, look for patterns in the answers. Those patterns will help you craft a profile of your ideal customer – also known as a “persona”. Fill out some basic demographic info: age, family, education, etc. Add what you’ve learned about their goals and challenges, as well as some real quotes from the interviews.

Your “persona” will serve as a point of reference whenever you are creating messages for your audience.

Always ask yourself if your content speaks to their needs in a way that resonates with them.
Next, set goals that are SMART.

We’ve all heard the expression “What Gets Measured Gets Done”. We value what we can quantify and it helps us evaluate the worth of an activity.

So, here’s an acronym to help us think about measuring our marketing goals: SMART. It stands for the types of goals you want to set for your content marketing campaign: **Specific, Measurable, Attainable** and **Realistic** and **Time-Bound**.
Let’s take a closer look at what each one means:

**Specific** – The goals you set should target a single objective and identify ways to reach it. The goal needs to be specific enough to answer these questions: What do we want to accomplish? Why are we doing it? What do we need to do to make it happen? When will it happen? Specific inbound marketing goals should focus on three things: Getting more visitors, leads and customers to your website.

**Measurable** – It’s great that you want more leads, but it’s important to have a number attached to your goal to allow you to measure your results: “We want the number of visitors to grow by 20 percent.”

**Attainable and Realistic** – When we discuss an attainable goal, we refer to something that might be challenging, but is still possible. Other definitions of SMART substitute attainable for things achievable, action-oriented, ambitious and aligned with corporate goals. By realistic, we mean a goal that is attainable based on the current status of your online presence.

**Time-Bound** – Once you’ve named your goal, set a deadline for yourself. “We want to increase our traffic” sounds nice, but “We want to increase our traffic by 10 percent by the end of the year” sounds like a goal.
Once you’ve identified your goals, share the goals with your team so that everyone understands them and can offer their input. Making them visible keeps them top of mind and helps to focus activity appropriately. Use analytical software to test your marketing performance against your goals. The results of your analysis can tell you what’s working, and where you may need to adjust your efforts.

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Understand the Journey

Not all visitors to your site are ready to buy. The content on your website should be diverse enough to appeal to people at all three stages of the decision making process, also known as “the buyers journey”.
The Stages Of The Buyer’s Journey Are:

1. **Awareness** – This is a point where your potential customers aren’t really thinking about being anyone’s customer. They know they have a problem and need a way to solve it.

2. **Consideration** – This is where the customer has begun to say “I know what the problem is, now I need to find someone to solve it.”

3. **Decision** – This is where the visitor has identified a few possible people or companies that can solve their problem and they need to decide between them.
For customers in the **awareness stage**, you will want to provide content focused solely on helping them research their problem. An engineering firm could talk about a common technical problem faced by their typical client.

In the **consideration stage**, the same company could publish a case study that walks readers through how they helped a client – for example specifying a custom part that addresses the technical challenge and sourcing a manufacturing partner to produce it.

And finally in the **decision stage**, the engineering firm could offer a free consultation or project review.

**Your home page and your landing pages should include a clear call to action:** “Read this case study.” “Download our free e-book.” Multiple types of offers should be provided on the site to capture people at each stage of the buyers journey.
Tell the world

Once you have developed your personas, your goals, and content that is meaningful for each stage of the buyer’s journey, **it’s time to tell the world about the great content you’ve developed just for them.**
You can start with a targeted e-mail campaign that engages your existing leads, and then move outward with blog posts that let the world know about your campaign. After that, you’ll need to announce the campaign on your social media channels.

**We should say a few words here about why each of those things are important.**

**Email marketing:**

- One of the most effective methods of acquiring new customers.
- Less expensive than print and more targeted
- Allows you to address people in your audience by name, meaning they’re more likely to open the message.
- Allows you to target only certain segments of the audience depending on the topic.
- Measureable and trackable
- Stays with your audience wherever they go. If they have a smartphone, they have your messages with them.
Tell the world

Blogging:

• Helps drive traffic to your website, and exposes potential customers to your content offers.
• Allows you to do some soft PR for events, announce new products or other company news.
• Establishes you as an expert in your field.
• Improves your standing with search engines (assuming you keep your blog current).

Social media:

• Provides you with a platform to share your new content, your company’s news and milestones, or let people know about events and trade shows.
• Allows you to respond to customer complaints or questions (and hopefully to hear compliments on your product or service).
• Gives you a glimpse of the conversations people in your field are having, which helps you keep on top of industry trends.
Track your results

Once you’ve set your goals, created your content and launched your campaign, it’s important to establish the amount of visitors, leads and customers your campaign has generated.

By following a **checklist**, you’ll have a solid content marketing plan in place for the customers – and potential customers – who want to know about what your business does.
IQnection is a full-service digital marketing agency, 100 percent committed to the philosophy of continuous improvement, especially where service to our clients is concerned.

Whether it’s content marketing, search engine optimization, web design and development, we’re known for consistently generating leads and customers for our clients.

We’ve spent more than 15 years helping companies ranging from manufacturers to service organizations to ecommerce businesses.

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