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## Article

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# Inbound Marketing vs. Outbound Marketing: Independent or Complementary Strategies

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*This article tends to explain the differences between the Outbound Marketing strategy and the Inbound Marketing strategy, by offering a comparison of these techniques used by these two approaches. This paper aims to determine the impact of the “new marketing strategies” on the existent ones, and clarifies if these two strategies are complementary or independent for a company operating in a highly competitive environment.*

**Keywords:** Outbound Marketing, Inbound Marketing, Digital Marketing, Marketing Strategy, Online Marketing

**JEL Classification:** M31

## 1. Introduction

The development of marketing strategy has undergone a valuable evolution, with the existence of the digital communication and social networks, the content creation has been changed. Several years ago, the companies were using the traditional strategy, as sending a message to an audience, in order to push them towards their company or product, in opposite to the development of the new marketing strategies, namely Inbound Marketing, a new way to pull the audience towards the company, by creating more innovative content.

The State of Inbound Marketing (Hubspot, 2013) describes Outbound Marketing or traditional marketing as a technique used by firms in order to attract a large public, hoping to get a feedback. Using the outbound strategy, mainly based on the diffusion of the message and publicity, without studying the target, in order to receive an effective response and generate more sales and incomes.

Outbound marketing is interruption-based marketing, perceived as the traditional model of product promotion in which people have to stop what they are doing to pay attention to the marketing message or deal with it in some other way (Rancati et al., 2015). Outbound marketing is also a strategy in which a business advertises its products and services by presenting information to consumers even if they are not looking for those products or services (Goodwin, 2013). However, this strategy is no longer effective in getting the message across and making traffic in the web world, that is why companies, nowadays, tend to explore new strategies such as Inbound Marketing approach in order to get more results from the internet.

In the first second section of this paper, we will define inbound marketing and get an overview of the

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emergence of this concept. In the third section, we will explain the components of inbound marketing. In fourth section, we will compare Outbound and Inbound Marketing in order to know if they represent independent or complementary strategies.

## **2. Definitions of Inbound Marketing**

Inbound marketing is the strategy of connecting with potential customers through materials and experiences they find useful. Using media like blogs and social networking, marketers hope to entertain and inform viewers with content they seek by themselves (Marketing-Schools.org, 2016).

On other hand, inbound marketing can be explained as a form of marketing that requires a very careful targeting of the audience and a custom communication via high quality content (Patruti-Baltes, 2016).

Moreover, Venisse (2016) defined inbound marketing as a way to become its own media in order for the audience to convert more easily into customers. The implementation of the global inbound marketing strategy requires the respect of certain essential steps (Venisse, 2016). The first step is to develop its own media and build a qualified audience. For a company that sets up this strategy, it is important to offer interesting content on its site, its blog or its social network page, to attract and sustain an audience.

Also, Schwebel (2017) suggests that inbound marketing has the potential to develop a brand to become its own medium, that is to say, to offer content that is intelligent and relevant enough to build an audience, instead of intrusive ads (Dabi-Schwebel, 2017).

Cantin (2014) defines inbound marketing is a digital marketing strategy aimed at bringing the customer to the company rather than picking him up. The prospect is attracted by relevant content positioned according to phases of maturity of purchases and levels of commitment. Therefore, in this line of thoughts, we could also talk about the acquisition marketing (Cantin, 2014). We define inbound marketing also as a digital marketing strategy whose general idea is to continuously attract potential prospects with quality content. To do this, Inbound Marketing uses a four-step methodology: Attract, Convert, Transform, and Retain (InboundValue.com, 2018). Moreover, as Rouse (2014) proposed, inbound marketing can be defined “as a technique that focuses on bringing consumers or leads via relevant content, so that consumers search for the company instead of the opposite. The concept of inbound marketing make tasks easier for the consumers who want relevant goods, products or services” (Rouse, 2014).

Hubspot (2018) defines Inbound Marketing as a strategy that attracts customers with relevant and useful content and adds value at every step of the customer-shopping journey. With inbound marketing, potential customers find their way through channels such as blogs, search engines and social media (Hubspot, 2016). Unlike Outbound Marketing, Inbound Marketing does not need to fight for the attention of potential customers. By creating content that addresses the issues and needs of ideal customers, the brand attracts qualified prospects and builds trust and credibility. Hence, inbound marketing is a systemic approach that allows each brand to become its own media, create an audience and convert it into prospects and then customers. A whole process works well on the details while eliminating any failure (Dabi-Schwebel, 2017).

## **3. Emergence of the Inbound Marketing**

The term « Inbound » was used by Brian Halligan (Halligan et al., 2009). The term inbound refers to attracting and convert individuals to lasting customers.

Corresponding to the creators of inbound marketing Brian Halligan and Dhamesh Shah, the needs for this innovative concept was created from the fact that people are sick and tired of being interrupted with traditional outbound marketing messages. Moreover, the marketing tactics used successfully in the past didn't produce the desire results anymore (Halligan et al., 2009).

It all started when Shah started a blog on startups and entrepreneurship, then, he noticed that his blog gained a massive traffic more than websites owned by companies with professional marketing crews and big budgets. After a lot of analysis and discussions, they came out with a simple observation that “People did not want to be interrupted by marketers or harassed by salespeople, they want to be helped” (Halligan and Shah, 2014). The main idea of inbound marketing is using marketing techniques that will try to pick up the interest of customers, by sharing creative and useful content that it is shared through multiple online channels, including search engines and social media.

Even if inbound marketing was first introduced in 2005 by Halligan and Shah, it is actually not a new concept, it is similar to the marketing method named “Content marketing” an it can also be associated to “Storytelling marketing”, namely a technique used way before the emergence of the internet (Pulizzi, 2012).

Moreover, content marketing is defined as marketing process that aims to develop relevant content in order to attract and engage a target audience, thus, getting a profitable consumer action (Pulizzi, 2012).

Also, content marketing must include strategic planning, content creation and distribution for multiple stages of the buying cycle to multiple customers, means that a complete content marketing strategy should incorporate the Inbound marketing principle (Pulizzi, 2011).

One of the inbound marketing's techniques known as the search engine optimization (SEO) was practiced for a long time before the concept of content marketing, and SEO is mostly used to increase the number of visitors that come from search engines.

The keywords were considered the most important element to achieve high ranking, then, with time and after the introduction of many updates that were included, such as Panda in 2011, Penguin in 2012 and the Hummingbird update in 2013 (Wainwright, 2014), this importance of keywords decreased. Also, because of these updates, SEO becomes a very difficult task. From here, inbound marketing comes in place, according to Rand Fishkin, SEO is a tactic, and inbound marketing is a strategy.

Email marketing also refers to one of the important elements of inbound marketing based on sending newsletter, articles or others, via an e-mail. It is a type of marketing based on the permission given by the visitors, is it also known as permission marketing, namely a concept that was developed by Seth Godin (Godin, 1999).

## **4. Components of Inbound Marketing**

### **4.1. Content Marketing**

Although content marketing has remained in the shadow of traditional marketing given the lack of technology at that time, it has managed today to establish itself as an effective strategy especially with the rise of new technologies.

Chaffey and Al (2000) define content as a text and graphic information design that forms a web page. Good content is a keystone to attract customers to a website and retain their interest while provoking repeat visits. Content marketing can also be the company's intranet content or the company's internet content, including databases and various types of knowledge (Chaffey and Al, 2000).

For their part, Pulizzi and Barret (2009) also define content marketing as a marketing technique that consists of creating, publishing and distributing relevant, useful and valuable content to get profits from the consumers. Content marketing tends to have media rather than renting it. It is defined as a marketing process that attracts and retains customers by constantly creating content that aims to change or evolve consumer behavior (Pulizzi, J. and Barrett, 2009).

Handley and Chapman (2010) argue that content marketing is all that an individual or organization creates or shares to tell their stories. The content is conversational, human and does not constantly seek to sell. It must be a state of mind that is both timid and encouraged (Handley and Chapman, 2010).

Gunelius (2011) defines content marketing as a process of direct and indirect promotion of a company or brand through the benefit of a text, video or audio content at a time, in online and offline environments. It can appear in long-form (blogs, articles, e-books and sound), in short-form (Twitter, Facebook, images ...), or in conventional form, (content sharing via Twitter or participate in an active discussion via comments on blog posts or through online forums) (Gunelius, 2011).

Staler (2014) explains that content marketing is a dynamic technique aimed at attracting customers, it is a process of sharing expertise and knowledge in order to attract potential customers and establish a relationship with them (Slater, 2014).

Ramos (2014) defines content marketing as a high-quality marketing technique, relevant content that aims to be educational and mobilizing to acquire the target audience (Ramos, 2014).

Kotler et al. (2017) define content marketing as a marketing approach that consists of creating, organizing, distributing and amplifying interesting, relevant and useful content for a clearly defined audience group to create content conversations. Content marketing is also another form of branding and branded journalism that creates closer links between brands and customers. Ultimately, content marketing is about planning, creating, promoting, and monitoring performance for a targeted audience, always with the goal of customer satisfaction and revenue generation in mind (Kotler et al., 2017).

### **4.2. Social Media Marketing**

The characteristics of social media and their immense popularity have revolutionized commercial practices such as advertising and promotion.

Social networks are original spaces. They can give rise to conventional top-down communication companions (one to many), but also change this vertical and unilateral communication towards a dialogue between the user and the brand (one to one) or even more between the Internet users themselves same (many to many).

However, consumers are less and less interested in traditional advertising, which puts enormous pressure on marketers. The challenge lies in spreading complex information through messages without overwhelming consumers. The attitude of today's consumers has changed profoundly, the time of appreciation and reading of message has diminished a lot. The average attention span of humans has decreased from 12 seconds in 2000 to 8 seconds in 2013. Even more, this attention is destined to diminish in the future, because of the massive and overwhelming volume of messages constantly bombarding connected mobile devices that require immediate consumer attention (Kotler et al., 2017).

Social networks have played a very important role in these changes. In the past, consumers were limited to commercials generated on traditional media because they did not have much choice. Today, with the advent of social networks, consumers have a wealth of content generated by businesses or even by other consumers that they find more credible and interesting. The idea is that content that is shared on social networks is voluntary and accessible on demand, unlike content that was shared on traditional media whose character is imposed.

At the social media level, consumers can now choose which content they discover and enjoy. Ads can no longer stop viewers, as it is the example of YouTube ads (True View), which precede videos, consumers can now ignore these ads after five seconds. If brands or advertisers fail to attract attention in the first five seconds, they cannot complain that consumers choose to ignore the rest of their content (Kotler et al., 2017).

The use of social networks, especially via content marketing strategies, has become very useful in the marketing approach of brands, first by approaching Internet customers of their brands favorably thanks to direct and immediate contact. Then, they give brands the sense of innovation and taste of advertising, without spending too much money. Finally, social networks allow brands to benefit from word of mouth through the interconnections between their members. Brands must be very attentive and listen to advice, comments and publications left by users on the page of the brand.

Unfortunately, companies often transfer their content to social media without modifying it, considering that content is just a longer version of an advertisement. However, there is a clear difference between these two modes of communication, advertising represents the message the brand wants to convey to consumers. While content marketing disseminates the information that consumers will use to achieve their personal and professional goals (Kotler et al., 2017).

In order to ensure optimal consumer involvement, companies must take advantage of social media by creating content that, even if it does not contribute to the sale and promotion of the brand, the brand will become essential for consumers.

#### **4.3. Search Engine Optimization**

A SEO marketing logic (Search Engine Optimization) is based on the assumption that the organic traffic (free traffic, without advertising on media) of a site depends on the quality of its natural referencing, so that search engines (including, first and foremost, the unmatched Google) can locate it and especially list it correctly (Sauvage, 2016).

To do this, powerful algorithms locate the domain name (another name for the website) and analyze the content. They identify linking such as internal and external links and URL sources, and estimate the quality of each page on the topic chosen. This assumes that the website is properly structured at the base so that the bots can easily go from one page to another (Sauvage, 2016).

That is why having a content strategy is relevant from an SEO point of view: it simply gives more chances to tell Google "here's what I'm talking about, and here's my site with the most relevant pages for each subject".

The precise recipe for each of these algorithms which are more than 200, according to the Mountain View firm remains a jealously guarded secret. However, over time, SEO has been better understood by marketers, and so it has been partially debunked.

### **5. Inbound Marketing vs. Outbound Marketing**

Outbound marketing is interruption based marketing, perceived as the traditional model of product promotion in which people have to stop what they are doing to pay attention to the marketing message or deal with it in some other way (Rancati et al., 2015).

The difference between inbound and outbound marketing is constantly challenged. Inbound marketing has now experienced growth compared to outbound marketing which is declining. In addition, the investments in the channels of inbound marketing has come to increase significantly, compared to other channels of outbound marketing that are now either stagnant or are experiencing slow growth (Volpe, 2015).

Volpe (2015) suggests that the difference between the incoming and the outgoing is artificial and meaningless. Moreover, he proposes a cross between the strategies of the incoming and outgoing marketing, defined as a gray zone (Volpe, 2015).

**Table 1. Inbound and Outbound Marketing Comparison**

| <b>Outbound Marketing</b>   | <b>Inbound Marketing</b>   | <b>Grey Zone</b>  |
|---|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Print Ads</li> <li>• Direct Mailings</li> <li>• Outbound Call Center</li> <li>• TV, Radio advertising</li> <li>• Intrusive online ads</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Content Marketing</li> <li>• Blog Marketing</li> <li>• SEO</li> <li>• Social Media Marketing</li> <li>• Viral Marketing</li> <li>• Podcasts</li> <li>• RSS</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• E-mail Marketing</li> <li>• Display Advertising</li> <li>• Search Engine Ads</li> <li>• Social media (when used as broadcasting medium)</li> </ul> |

Source: adapted from Volpe (2015) and Rancati et al. (2015)

“Inbound Marketing creates Top of Mind Preference, while Outbound Marketing is mainly focused on Top of Mind Awareness. With inbound content marketing programs, you can move beyond simple awareness to generate preference and implicitly brand addiction, this goal can be achieved through the positioning of a brand as the preferred choice” (Martin, 2013; Rancati et al., 2015).

Inbound Marketing’s great challenge is to get the consumer to find the company online, because of the highly competitive keyword space. The timeframe in which a company is waiting for consumers to find it online might result in a sale loss (Rancati et al., 2015).

## 6. Conclusion and Future Research

One of the great advantages of the internet is that it reaches consumers around the world, the globalization of business promises a lot thanks to the advent of new technologies.

The inbound marketing is a strategy that aims to attract prospects to a company’s website, convert them to leads and then further, to lifelong customers and brand promoters.

In this article, we have proposed a comparison between Inbound and Outbound Marketing strategies. That said, based on this paper’s propositions, we conclude that both Inbound and Outbound strategies are complementary for the success of any viable marketing campaign. Both strategies have their pros and they can both be used together, often to a greater effect, creating a synergy.

Indeed, the mix of outbound and inbound marketing strategies can work most effectively and reach the most amount of people when done hand-in-hand

Nevertheless, Inbound Marketing is primarily content marketing and its efficiency is superior to the Outbound Marketing efficiency because inbound aims to identify the target customers and adapt the communication, however it allows a better targeting of the audience and a better adaptation of the company’s communication mechanisms.

### 6.1. Future Research

This theoretical article can be extended to encompass an empirical study that calculates through different metrics the impact of inbound marketing practices on consumers, via data gathered from websites such as www.Alexa.com.

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