

Inbound vs Outbound Marketing: What's the Difference?

Learn about the difference between inbound vs outbound marketing and why one is the clear winner for marketing your business online.

Inbound vs outbound marketing, which one is the best choice? Modern marketers are presented with questions like this because obtaining the attention of consumers who are flooded with offers, ads, and options from all angles has become a large challenge.

Today's consumer is more educated and aware than ever before, so marketers who used to rely on broad campaigns to build awareness now have had to figure out new ways to persuade.

[78% of consumers will use the internet to conduct product research](#). So, businesses are left with the option to sit back and hope their product comes out as the best choice, or they can take a proactive approach and be the source of information that consumers are looking for. That's why inbound marketing was born and continues to grow to this day. But what makes inbound marketing distinct from more traditional "outbound" marketing? Inbound vs outbound marketing is not just a difference in strategy, it's sometimes a difference in philosophy for businesses. Read on to learn more about each type of marketing, their pros and cons, and what makes them unique.

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What are Inbound and Outbound Marketing?

[Inbound marketing and outbound marketing are two sides of the same coin](#). They have the same destination (converting customers) but they get there in different ways.

While inbound focuses more on nurturing prospects, inviting them in and delivering helpful content along the way, outbound focuses more on spreading awareness, casting a wide net, and reaching out to more people in hopes of bringing them in as customers.

Here's a deeper dive into the differences between the two, their pros and cons, and why you might choose one over the other for your business' marketing needs.



INBOUND MARKETING VS. OUTBOUND MARKETING



INBOUND

Inbound marketing focuses on delivering helpful information to prospects at the right time and in the right place to inform and pull them onto your site by creating a more genuine connection and meeting people on their own time.

EXAMPLES OF INBOUND MARKETING:

PPC ads leading to your content or website

Content like blogs, eBooks, checklists, infographics, and more

Email marketing to your audience featuring you

Earned social media (posts on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc. without use of ads or boosting)

Organic traffic gained through optimizing your website using SEO best practices

OUTBOUND

Inbound marketing focuses on delivering helpful information to prospects at the right time and in the right place to inform and pull them onto your site by creating a more genuine connection and meeting people on their own time.

EXAMPLES OF OUTBOUND MARKETING:

Cold calls and emails to potential prospects

Physical advertising like billboards, commercials, and print ads

Direct mailers containing offers or information

Social media advertising

Inbound Marketing Definition

Inbound marketing, sometimes referred to as [content marketing](#), is a marketing strategy that focuses on "pulling" customers in with useful and informational content. Its emphasis is on education and spending time with people to create a deeper, more genuine connection with them.

Inbound marketing is often broken up into three stages:

1. Attract

This stage is the epitome of the difference between inbound and outbound marketing. Rather than yelling your message to the masses, inbound marketing focuses on attracting (pulling) people to your brand. This is done by writing Search Engine Optimized (SEO) content (blogs, eBooks, pillar pages, etc.) to bring them organically from search engine results pages (SERPs). This can also be done using Google ads, social media posting, email campaigns to your opt-in lists, and more. But the crux of it is that you aren't force-feeding anyone your brand or products; instead, you offer value, which brings people voluntarily to you.

2. Engage

Once you have their attention, you can wow them with even more helpful content that guides them further down the funnel (the journey customers make, starting as prospects and, eventually, becoming customers). Modern consumers do their own research, buy on their own time, and make their decisions when they feel like they have a full understanding of their options. This stage of the inbound methodology is about providing people with the resources they need to become informed and understand that your product is what they're looking for.

3. Delight

The final step is all about turning customers into advocates. This is about providing great experiences that leave customers satisfied, happy, and willing to talk about your company to their friends, family, coworkers, or anybody who is listening. [94% of customers](#) say that their purchases are influenced by reviews. The delight stage is about encouraging people to use word of mouth to increase your brand's influence in natural, organic ways post-purchase. Plus, a delighted customer is typically more apt to become a [valuable repeat customer](#)!

Inbound Marketing Examples:

- Content (blogs, eBooks, checklists, infographics, videos, etc.) that are SEO-optimized to show up higher on SERPs
- Consistent social media posting
- Conversion-focused landing pages
- Email marketing campaigns targeted at opt-in lists
- Webinars and other opt-in content types to convert prospects
- Referral links from other related websites

Pros and Cons of Inbound Marketing

Pros:

- **Non-Interruptive:** Rather than an ad interrupting your YouTube video or favorite show to talk about a new product, [inbound marketing strategies find consumers on their own time](#) and of their own will. It's an invitation, not a megaphone to the face.
- **Highly Targeted:** Inbound marketing allows you to target keywords that your ideal customers are already searching for so you can write and give them the perfect content at the perfect time.
- **Long-Term Effectiveness:** Inbound keeps working over time and tends to "snowball" once things get going and Google notices you. If you keep updating and posting new content, you can continue to build and use your library of content in new and exciting ways.
- **Deeply Engaging:** Content works on a deeper level than an ad or cold call. It's been shown that [the more time people spend with a brand, the more attached they feel to it](#). That means the more blogs they read, videos they watch, or emails they interact with, the more of a positive impression you make on them and the higher the chances are that they convert into a customer. These authentic connections also make them more likely to become brand advocates and repeat customers.

Cons:

- **Not a Quick Fix:** You can't expect a blog you wrote yesterday to start trending on Google and attracting thousands of visitors. SEO-focused strategies, like inbound marketing, require time and effort to work. You need to consistently write new content, promote it on social, update it, and optimize it to make it work.
- **Time-Consuming:** There are a lot of moving pieces involved in inbound marketing. You need people operating your strategies on social media, ads, email, content writing, lead management, and more. This requires a lot of time and expertise to do it right.

Outbound Marketing Definition

[Outbound marketing is what most would consider "traditional" marketing](#), where a company reaches out to potential customers via strategies like cold calling and advertising. Rather than waiting for customers to find you through organic search, outbound strategies actively push out messages about their products and brand.

Outbound Marketing Examples:

- Cold calling or cold emailing
- Direct mail
- Booths at tradeshow or conferences
- TV, radio, or print ads
- Sponsorships
- Billboards

Pros and Cons of Outbound Marketing

Pros:

- **Faster Turnaround:** Typically, it's easier to set up and implement an outbound strategy because it requires less research and much less time to execute. An inbound strategy can take years to come to fruition while outbound can start working quickly.
- **Large Audiences:** Outbound methods can get your brand or product in front of a lot of eyes. Giant billboards, television commercials, and mass cold calls or emails are all great ways to cast a wide net and improve overall awareness.

Cons:

- **Interruptive:** By their nature, outbound marketing tends to interrupt people as they're doing something they love (i.e., watching YouTube or television, being out and about in the world, or when reading magazines, newspapers, or other media with ads). This tends to have less impact and can even risk damage to your brand if overdone.
- **Vague Targets:** Unlike your inbound methods, outbound marketing is hard to pinpoint. You have control over your messaging and where your marketing is displayed (billboard locations, commercial channels/programs, etc.), but it's only soft targeting. Your ad will still run for many people for which it was not intended. This lack of a hyper-targeted audience also lowers your success rate; only [2.5% of cold calls are successful](#).
- **Difficult to Track:** Large ad campaigns, commercials, and large outbound marketing methods can be difficult to track. Unless you use discount codes, it's tough to know the direct impact that these ads are having on your business aside from general sales increases.

The Difference Between Inbound vs Outbound

Marketing

The [core difference between inbound and outbound marketing](#) is in how you reach your audience. Inbound focuses on your potential customers finding you by searching their interests or pain points while outbound marketing pushes your message in front of them. Inbound is education-based, outbound is awareness-based.

Neither of the two is *wrong* and which one you decide to use as a strategy is entirely reliant on your goals. But, in the digital age, inbound marketing is specifically designed to lean into your knowledge of your products and your customers and it gives you a chance to connect with consumers on a deeper level than a billboard along the freeway.