

Digital Marketing for B2B Investment Management

I've been working as a digital marketer in the B2B investment management industry for over a decade, and believe that marketing teams can do a much better job at helping their firms to succeed.

While their lacklustre performance is at least partly due to some wider issues in the modern office – which mostly boil down to an inability to focus due to smartphones, overflowing inboxes, and back-to-back meetings – there is also a less obvious reason: digital marketing teams haven't adapted their approach (when they have one) to the peculiarities of the B2B investment management industry, and have therefore been repeatedly trying to fit the proverbial square peg into a round hole.

This guide aims to help digital marketing teams serve their firms more effectively by demonstrating how a popular marketing methodology, **inbound marketing**, can be adapted to properly fit the industry.

What is inbound marketing?

Inbound marketing is a methodology used to build more authentic and durable relationships with a firm's audience through a patient and subtle approach, rather than interrupting them with generic advertising or unsolicited emails – which seems especially well-suited to the world of investments, in which a long-term and patient attitude is also typically required in order to achieve success.

From the perspective of the business implementing it, inbound marketing consists of three stages: **attract**, **engage**, and **delight**. The first aims to attract members of the firm's target audience, the second to engage and convert them into customers, and the third to provide

exceptional post-sale customer service. The overall goal for marketing is to deliver the right content, to the right people, at the right time.

As an example, a business that sells software to other businesses could try an inbound marketing approach by following these broad steps:

1. **Attract:** publish valuable content to attract members of the firm's target audience from search engines and social media.
2. **Engage:** allow website visitors to submit their contact details to subscribe to the firm's blog, and send emails to subscribers about the topics they express an interest in.
3. **Delight:** send customers a welcome email upon purchase, a series of helpful tips about the product, and encourage them to upgrade and/or purchase add-ons where appropriate.

Importantly, to implement inbound marketing, the marketing team must be able to identify the current stage of each contact – attract, engage, or delight – so their experience can be personalised accordingly.

For businesses operating outside the investment management industry – such as a software firm – this should be relatively simple: a data point can be added to each record in the firm's **marketing database** (in which details of all mailable contacts are stored) to note if a contact, or the firm they work for, owns the product. It could be set as a Boolean value (“yes/no”) or describe which version of the product is owned (if basic and premium versions are available, for example). Once created, it could then be set up to update automatically upon purchase, or even updated manually if automation isn't possible.

Once the data point has been set up, contacts in the firm's marketing database can then be segmented and marketed to accordingly: leads who haven't yet become customers can continue to be emailed blogs and case studies of interest, recent purchasers can be sent an automatic welcome email, and those who have purchased the basic product can be enticed to

upgrade to the premium version. Audiences for future marketing campaigns can be compiled by filtering the marketing database on this new data point.

Why should inbound marketing be adapted for investment managers?

For investment managers that sell their products directly to retail investors (D2C) – purchased through the firm's website – adding a data point to identify if a contact is invested in any of the firm's products may be feasible, albeit with additional complexity: as investment managers tend to offer multiple products (versus, say, a single software offering) a separate data point will be required for each product offered. This could be a problem for firms who offer a large number of products.

And due to the fact that investments can be bought and sold frequently by investors (unlike software), some form of automation would probably also be needed to keep each data point up-to-date.

Lack of transaction and holdings data

The investment products of **business-to-business (B2B)** investment managers aren't bought and sold through the firm's website. Instead, salespeople develop relationships with – and try to win business from – investment professionals at other organisations (such as financial advisors, fund selectors, or research analysts) who are able to allocate money, either directly or indirectly, into the firm's products.

Any trades in and out of a B2B investment manager's products are handled by the firm's salespeople, or conducted entirely through third-party investment platforms, so it's unlikely that transaction and holdings data will be available to the marketing team. And even in cases where holdings data is available someplace internally, it often can't be linked to the firm's marketing systems so it can be utilised by the marketing team,

is unreliable, and often applies to holdings at a company level (and therefore might not be relevant for specific contacts).

This lack of data means that the aforementioned data points can't be used by the marketing team to identify which contacts are invested in the firm's products (i.e., those who would sit in the delight stage). Put simply, the marketing team don't know who the firm's "customers" are.

Accounting for gatekeepers

However, even if the marketing team *could* identify contacts who held investments with their firm, there's another complication: in addition to working with individuals who invest for themselves and on behalf of others, B2B investment managers also work with people who select and monitor investment products solely for providing recommendations to others – without making an investment themselves.

These individuals, known in the industry as **gatekeepers**, analyse investment products to make recommendations for internal or external use. Examples of gatekeepers include:

- **Fund selectors**, who evaluate and select funds that their firm's client-facing advisors can choose from to invest client money, usually at a wealth manager or private bank.
- **Manager research analysts**, who perform research on investment managers and compile lists of investment strategies that can be recommended to their firm's clients, such as an analyst at an investment consultancy selecting strategies for field consultants to recommend to pension fund clients.

As they can make an investment product available to wider audiences – and ripe for potentially large investments in the future – gatekeepers are a priority for salespeople at B2B investment managers. Therefore, the marketing team should be aware that gatekeepers may be monitoring

products as if they are an existing investor – despite not holding an investment themselves – and if certain marketing communications were limited to only those who held an investment, a key portion of a firm’s target audience could be excluded.

Lack of specific content for audience sub-segments

However, we now arrive at another complication: even if the contacts in an investment manager’s marketing database *could* be segmented based on ownership of their products, *and* gatekeepers could be accounted for, I still don’t think there’s any reason to do so. I’ll explain why.

Firstly, from a customer’s point of view, all an investor receives is exposure to the change in value of their investment, and not much else: there’s no tangible product. Apart from an individual report of their account balance – which would only be sent if they held investments directly with an investment manager – there’s nothing “special” that an investor is given, or receives exclusive access to, versus anyone else.

And secondly, the vast majority of product-related content published by investment managers – factsheets, brochures, commentaries, webinars, and so on – tends to be appropriate for the entire segment of the firm’s audience with an interest in the product. In other words, it isn’t aimed at a specific sub-segment of this group, such as only contacts who are considering a new investment in the product.

The reason for the lack of content aimed specifically for new prospects within the firm’s audience is probably because investment products can be compared based on their historical performance (alongside other aspects) – using reporting standardised for this exact purpose – without having to “experience” or learn how to use the product oneself. This nullifies any need for demos, case studies, testimonials, or other content typically aimed at new prospects. For businesses outside investment

management, there's usually a much clearer distinction between prospects and customers.

For investment managers, even non-product related content – such as commentary on interest rates, inflation, and so on – can be appropriate for multiple segments of the firm's audience, as a lot of these external factors can influence investment values. A prediction that interest rates will fall might influence new investments into a bond mutual fund, as well as reassure existing investors in the fund to continue to hold, or even increase, their investment.

These reasons highlight why marketing teams at B2B investment managers don't need to segment contacts by their invested status, even if they could: it makes no difference to the content they would be sent.

Adapting the inbound marketing approach

If the marketing team can't identify who their invested clients are – the contacts who would sit in the delight stage – an obvious initial change to the original inbound marketing approach is to remove the delight stage entirely. Only two stages now remain: **attract** and **engage**.

New audiences will be attracted as usual – by publishing content the firm's target audience finds valuable, ensuring it is discoverable on search engines, and distributing it on social media.

When engaging with the contacts who have become part of the firm's marketing database, however, some changes will need to be made to account for the various complexities that have been highlighted.

Segmenting the marketing database

The first change applies to how contacts are segmented. As a contact's status as an investor in the firm's products won't be stored on their record, they won't be segmented on this status; instead, contacts will be

segmented primarily on their interests – which they explicitly express via **website subscriptions** – for marketing purposes.

Website visitors will be able to subscribe to areas of interest among the options offered by the investment manager – such as topics, investment strategies, products, and so on – by submitting a website form (which includes their contact details). From this point, the contact will be added to the marketing database, segmented accordingly, and sent any content that aligns with their individual preferences. Contacts will be able to change their preferences, or unsubscribe entirely, at any time.

Segmenting the firm's audience based on this **explicit data** about their interests – which can only be provided by the contacts themselves – and limiting any communications to the preferences they set is a key part of the inbound marketing approach, and aligns well with the principles of **data protection regulations** (such as GDPR).

Using implicit data about digital activity

The second change applies to how **implicit data** about a contact's digital activity – collected by the marketing automation system without the contact's input, but only if they give consent – is used.

Collecting this type of data is possible because when website visitors subscribe (and consent) the marketing automation system sets a cookie on their browser to track any future digital activity – website visits, engagement with emails, document downloads, and so on – which is logged on their respective contact record in the marketing database.

As you can imagine, the ability to observe the behaviour of members of the firm's audience – at an *individual level* – is incredibly powerful: it offers the potential for marketing activity to be individually personalised for each contact based on their digital activity (assuming that they have explicitly expressed an interest in receiving any communications that are sent as a result).

Unfortunately, as highlighted, marketing teams at B2B investment managers are limited in two key areas – an inability to segment audiences based on their stage in the customer journey, and a lack of content aimed at specific sub-segments of the firm’s audience – which renders implicit data almost useless for tailoring marketing activity.

However, it is incredibly useful information which will still be put to use by being passed on to the firm’s salespeople, helping them to nurture relationships with their clients and prospects. And, unlike the marketing team, salespeople will usually know the individual circumstances of a large portion of their assigned contacts (such as their stage in the sales process) due to spending most of their working day in direct communication with them offline – via meetings, dinners, phone calls, and so on – and storing notes about any communications in the customer relationship management (CRM) system.

Therefore, the digital activity of tracked contacts will be reported to their assigned salesperson via **email alerts**, set up to be sent automatically by the marketing automation system – either in real-time, or as some kind of periodic summary (e.g., a daily notification of a salesperson’s assigned contacts with digital activity in the previous 24 hours).

When alerted to the digital activity of an assigned contact, a salesperson will also be able to reconcile it with any direct communications they may have had. In cases where the observed activity was a direct result of these communications, they can simply consider the alert as “nice to know” information. But in any cases where it wasn’t, opportunities will arise to reach out to engaged contacts for an introduction, catch-up, or to reignite a relationship that might have become stale – with the information in the alert at hand (although they must use subtlety when reaching out, to avoid the impression of contacts being “stalked”).

Sending implicit data about the digital activity of tracked contacts to the sales team, in place of using it to influence marketing activity, marks a

shift in the overall focus for the marketing team in the adapted approach: it now becomes the provision of support to salespeople to help nurture their relationships with clients and prospects.

This support – which will involve sourcing new leads, sending alerts about the digital activity of tracked contacts, and providing content and materials – is a much better fit for an industry in which most of the sales process happens offline, visits to the website are short, and salespeople are ultimately responsible for winning business.

Is the adapted approach too simple?

It might seem to some that the adapted approach is too simple, and once the initial setup is complete – when website visitors are subscribing, entering the marketing database, and their digital activity is being automatically reported to their assigned salesperson – there won't be much ongoing work for the digital marketing team to tackle. However, I can assure you that this won't be the case, on both counts.

On the first point, I've found a simple approach to be the most effective – especially when even small projects and tasks can spiral into complexity very quickly – yet many marketers seem insecure and lack the confidence to suggest or adopt them. Instead, they are seduced by the promises of complex software and technology (such as artificial intelligence) without developing a true understanding of whether they are truly useful, or can be properly harnessed, in the real world.

I'm not saying there's no place for more complex solutions, just that additional complexity should only be added when warranted – if the problem and its respective solution are fully understood – and the basics are already in place. At the very least, by implementing the adapted approach, the digital marketing team will build a solid foundation on which more complexity can be layered, if needed.

And secondly – unless an investment manager has a perfect investment performance, a brand known the world-over, and a robot that can post content – there will be plenty of ongoing work required for the digital marketing team, such as sourcing, posting, and distributing content, running marketing campaigns, testing and tweaking, and delivering other projects as needed. An added bonus of implementing the adapted approach will be more time and space for the team to tackle smaller tasks and properly consider how any changes or enhancements can be implemented in the best way possible.

A few key areas for additional focus will probably arise soon after the initial setup is complete – increasing the volume of website traffic, the number of subscribers as a percentage of website traffic, and the amount of digital activity of tracked contacts – which will depend on the individual circumstances of each investment manager. These will be covered in detail later on.