



THE **INBOUND COMMERCE** PLAYBOOK

Inbound Marketing + Ecommerce
= Inbound Commerce

TABLE OF CONTENTS

-Introduction pg. 2
- 1What is Your Purpose? pg. 3
- 2Who Are You Speaking To? pg. 5
- 3What Language Does Your Buyer Speak? pg. 7
- 4What Stories Connect You With Your Buyers? pg. 9
- 5Where Does Your Buyer Live Online? pg. 11
- 6How Can You Attract the Right Buyer? pg. 13
- 7How Can You Build a Loyal Community? pg. 15
- 8How Often Do You Realign Yourself? pg. 17
-Conclusion pg. 19

INTRODUCTION

What occurs when you combine effective and proven inbound marketing best practices, best in class ecommerce technology, modern web design practices, and a carefully considered strategy?

You get #InboundCommerce.

Inbound Commerce is “the practice of attracting your ideal customers to your ecommerce site by building relationships with them.” It goes far beyond discounts and free shipping offers. Sure, discounts are enticing, but in the short term, you attract the “coupon clippers” of the Internet.

How can you move beyond these incentives and truly connect with your customers in a meaningful way based on their sincere interest in what you offer? We’re here to show you.

“Inbound Commerce is the combination of the 3 C’s: Content, Community, and Commerce.”

In order for your ecommerce business to succeed, you need to build a loyal community, attracting them with valuable, informative content.

To help you get started with Inbound Commerce (or reassess your current strategy), we’ve:

- collected the eight most important topics you need to address to succeed
- explained why they’re important for the success for your Inbound Commerce strategy
- developed a set of questions for each to help you drill down into the specifics for your ecommerce business

1. WHAT IS YOUR PURPOSE?

In just a few words, can you explain what makes you different than other companies? If you're stumbling for an answer, go no further--this is the first step of successfully implementing Inbound Commerce!

“With the right strategy, even the simplest of products – which may appear to be commodities – can be innovative and remarkable.”

You need to determine your **unique selling proposition (USP)**, if you haven't already. A unique selling proposition is more than just a catchphrase, it's the key values and identity that sets your ecommerce business apart from others. If you don't have a USP already, a mission statement or even an elevator pitch may be a great place to start.

First, understand deeply what motivates your customers to buy from you. Then, understand your products' appeal, your differentiation, and your position in the marketplace. Do you offer something truly unique and different? Something remarkable? Be honest with yourself here. If the answer is no, that's okay; some products are certainly commodities. Once you answer this, you can decide on your approach and strategy. Bear in mind that with the right strategy, even the simplest of products—which may appear to be commodities—can still be innovative and remarkable.

1. WHAT IS YOUR PURPOSE?

What makes you unique? Questions to ask yourself:

- What does your business exist to do?
- What do you offer that no one else can? Is it the products you offer? How you offer them? Your customer service?
- How do you stand out from other ecommerce businesses?
- Why will customers return to you? If you don't know, feel free to ask existing customers why they stay loyal. You may be surprised!

2. WHO ARE YOU SPEAKING TO?

Imagine what would happen if a comedian got up on stage and told a great joke to the wrong audience. The joke would fall flat and not resonate with the crowd. Without understanding who the audience is, even the best comedian will be a flop.

Understanding your audience and knowing your buyer personas are key in telling the story of your business. You must know where your conviction falls and what you stand for as a company.

“Understanding your audience and knowing your buyer personas are key in telling the story of your business.”

Everything from product descriptions to the social media networks you plan to use should be determined by who your buyer personas are. You also need to create engaging and tailor-made blog posts, content offers, and promotions based on your buyer personas' pain points, needs and interests. Consider using different positioning and tones for each buyer persona in all of your messaging.

The first step to understanding who you're selling to is to identify their needs. Uncover customer needs, pain points, and interests by reaching out to customers directly for interviews, running surveys, and doing general demographical and behavioral research. Determine what other associated or secondary needs exists in their lives. For instance, if your target customers are business owners, what are their partners' or customers' needs?

2. WHO ARE YOU SPEAKING TO?

Who are your customers? Questions to ask yourself:

- Who is currently buying from you?
- Who would you like to buy from you?
- Do you have any hard data on the demographics and habits of your buyers?
- How can you better serve the people that buy from you?
- What are the needs and wants of your buyer?
- What would a day in a life of your buyer look like?
- What is your buyer passionate about?
 - What are they passionate about finding for their business?
 - What are they passionate about finding for their family?
 - What makes them tick?
 - What do they value?

3. WHAT LANGUAGE DOES YOUR BUYER SPEAK?

Would you market soap the same way to a soccer mom whose top priority is her child's safety as you would to a busy socialite whose focus is on having a signature scent and staying ahead of trends? Most likely not. Similarly, you would speak differently to a 23-year old shopping for rollerblades than a middle-aged accountant shopping for office supplies.

“Speaking in a way that your buyers understand will help them form a positive association, and maintain a level of trust with your brand.”

Match your tone to both your brand and your buyer. Think about who you are catering your message to and how it affects the content being created. What feels right for your image? What tone is your buyer most receptive to? Find the balance between what is professional enough for your business and comfortable enough for your brand in order to best relate with your buyer personas. Speaking in a way that your buyers understand will help them form a positive association and maintain a level of trust with your brand.

3. WHAT LANGUAGE DOES YOUR BUYER SPEAK?

What's your tone? Questions to ask yourself:

- Does your buyer use particular jargon or catchphrases?
- What style speech and writing would make them most comfortable?
- What words would your buyer type into a search engine to find your product or solution?
- Would your buyers respond best to a professional or conversational tone?
- What unique forms of digital communication and online media is your buyer most accustomed to?

4. WHAT STORIES CONNECT YOU WITH YOUR BUYERS?

You know those guilty-pleasure clickbait headlines you see in your social media feed or blog sidebars? There's a reason why they work. People like to read interesting, entertaining stories they can connect with and then share. So, what engaging story are you telling about your business? Is it a story that consumers will connect with enough to remember? Don't settle for a mere transaction. Create a relationship with your buyers.

“Don't settle for a mere transaction. Create a relationship with your buyers.”

Knowing your buyer persona means you can now speak in a way they relate to. Tell your story in a way to positively influence people, that they can relate to and connect with.

Leave a good taste in your customer's mouth with the messaging you deliver. Instead of ringing a dinner bell and yelling for everyone to come in, create a personalized dinner party and invite them to join a feast catered just for them.

4. WHAT STORIES CONNECT YOU WITH YOUR BUYERS?

Tell your buyers the right stories. Questions to ask yourself:

- What inspired you to start this business?
- Why are you offering these products?
- What are your buyers' triggers?
- What parts of your story will resonate with your customers?
- What motivates your buyers? What pulls on their heartstrings?
- Do your buyers want to be a part of your story?
- Are your buyers inspired by the current story you are telling?

5. WHERE DOES YOUR BUYER LIVE ONLINE?

If you want your buyers to see you, you have to be where your buyers are. So where do they live? Instagram or Facebook? Blogs or forums? How do they like to digest content? Video or text?

Distribute your message where your buyer personas will find it. If you don't know where your buyer goes online, ask them. Add a quick question into a landing page form or send out a short survey. If you're using HubSpot, you can use a sources report to identify where landing page traffic is coming from.

“Start talking where your buyer is listening, in the way that they absorb it best.”

Establish yourself as a leader in your niche by providing the right content in the right places. Publish your content and offers on the media platforms that your personas prefer. Start talking where your buyer is listening, in the way that they absorb it best. Are they avid social media buffs who need visuals and infographics to keep their attention? Are they logically-inclined, requiring data and facts in the form of technical documentation? Adjust your strategy accordingly.

5. WHERE DOES YOUR BUYER LIVE ONLINE?

Where can you find your customers? Questions to ask yourself:

- Do your customers use social media?
- What websites and blogs do they read? What are the top blogs your buyer visits?
- Are they subscribers to certain publications?
- What social platforms are your buyers on?
- What platforms are most popular with your buyer's age range?
- What type of content does your buyer prefer?

6. HOW CAN YOU ATTRACT THE RIGHT BUYER?

Sure, you can focus on attracting as many people as possible...or you can focus on attracting buyers who are actively looking for your product and solutions--the right people. On a regular basis, provide your buyer personas with thoughtful, new content that will interest them in keeping the conversation--and the conversions--going. Again, focus on their previously identified needs and pain points. Can you solve their problems in a unique way with informational content? That's the content to focus on. Engage in a conversation in which the main outcome is to add value to your buyers. Your buyers should think of you as a thought-leader they can go to for the information, products and solutions they need.

“Provide your buyer personas with thoughtful, new content that will compel them to keep the conversation – and the conversions – going.”

Do you provide social proof on your ecommerce site? This is an important part of the buying process. Buyers trust products that are related to other brands they know and trust. Think of it as positive peer pressure. Content in the form of social proof can weigh heavily into this, whether it is reviews, press, or celebrity endorsements.

Do your buyers have access to review your products and compare them to others on the market? Do you have notable customers whose testimonials and reviews have you been featured by media or other companies? Showcase this proudly on your ecommerce site to establish trust. When a buyer sees how others trust you and respect your opinion, their positive thoughts of you will grow naturally.

6. HOW CAN YOU ATTRACT THE RIGHT BUYER?

What attracts qualified traffic? Questions to ask yourself:

- What content would add value for your buyers?
- What are your buyers' pain points? What problems are they looking to solve?
- How can you weave solutions to pain points into your content?
- How are you currently engaging in a meaningful conversation with your buyers?
- Are you demonstrating enough social proof on your site?
- How do your buyers review your products and services? What are you doing to showcase these reviews as positive social proof?

7. HOW CAN YOU BUILD A LOYAL COMMUNITY?

The key to cultivating a community around your ecommerce business is to focus on engagement. A passionate community is a powerful force. Build a brand that is digitally approachable. Interacting with buyers and engaging in conversation on a personal level will increase customer loyalty and trust. Blogging is a great place to start the conversation. Start thinking of creative ways that you can create and encourage active engagement on your social channels. Find interactive ways to integrate your product and service into the lifestyle of your buyers.

Give your shoppers a virtual experience that quells their biggest concerns about shopping online. Use large product imagery to give them an in-person experience with your product. Provide customers with an easy return policy to lower their barriers to purchasing with you for the first time. Think about what other products, services or incentives you can add to your online shopping experience to get buyers to keep coming back.

“Give your shoppers a virtual experience that quells their biggest concerns about shopping online.”

Engage your community and encourage a relationship with your brand. Be sure to talk about your products in action. Showing your products being used helps people see themselves using them. Over time, this creates a pseudo-memory and regular readers will find themselves more connected to your products and brand.

7. HOW CAN YOU BUILD A LOYAL COMMUNITY?

How can you build ecommerce customer loyalty?

Questions to ask yourself:

- What encourages your buyers to choose you over a competitor?
- What are the reasons that your customers keep coming back?
- Would you consider your customers loyal? Why or why not?
- What has prompted your evangelist customers to rave about your brand?
- Do your buyers refer you to their friends? Why or why not?
- How are you actively improving customer confidence through your online shopping experience?
- Is your ecommerce website up-to-date with the latest user experience design trends?

8. HOW OFTEN DO YOU REALIGN YOURSELF?

If you rest, you rust. Nothing lasts forever. Needs change. Wants change. People change. This doesn't have to affect your business, but that doesn't mean it won't!

Think about it: do you want the same phone you had a decade ago? You've probably adapted to evolve with new technology. The ecommerce industry may change faster than most, but all industries change. It's up to you to adapt and stay ahead of the curve.

“In the Inbound Commerce world, there are two things that are never complete: your website and your buyer personas.”

You need to align with your buyers in order to turn them into enthusiasts. Do a check-in regularly to ensure that you're keeping current with industry trends and your buyer personas' evolving needs. In the Inbound Commerce world, there are two things that are never complete: your website and your buyer personas. These are two ever-evolving entities that you need to be mindful of you if you want remain competitive in the fiercely competitive online marketplace.

8. HOW OFTEN DO YOU REALIGN YOURSELF?

How are you staying aligned? Questions to ask yourself:

- How often are you reevaluating your buyer personas?
- Are you making adjustments to your strategy based on results and analytics of your inbound marketing campaigns?
- What are you actively doing to stay engaged with industry trends?
- Are you following ecommerce web design and development trends and best practices?
- How can you connect with your buyers regularly to hear their thoughts, and concerns?

CONCLUSION

Go beyond the product and service you provide and dig deeper into the purpose and value you create for people. What does this mean to you and your business? Remember the 3 C's: Content. Commerce. Community.

Content is the difference maker.

Community is created by engaging the loyal advocates for your brand.

Commerce is a natural result of content consumption and community interaction fusing together.

These eight sets of questions should ensure that you are well on your way to developing an Inbound Commerce strategy for your ecommerce business by leveraging content, community, and commerce to differentiate yourself.

CREDITS

SUSANNAH MORRIS

As an Ecommerce Marketing Manager at HubSpot, Susannah oversees the ecommerce marketing program to help ecommerce companies use inbound marketing to grow their businesses.

[INTERACT WITH ME ON TWITTER:](#)

[@SWMORRIS2](#)



EVELYN TAPIA

Evelyn is an inbound marketer at EYEMAGINE and specializes in maximizing the use of HubSpot and ecommerce platforms together to execute seamless and effective marketing plans.

[INTERACT WITH ME ON TWITTER:](#)

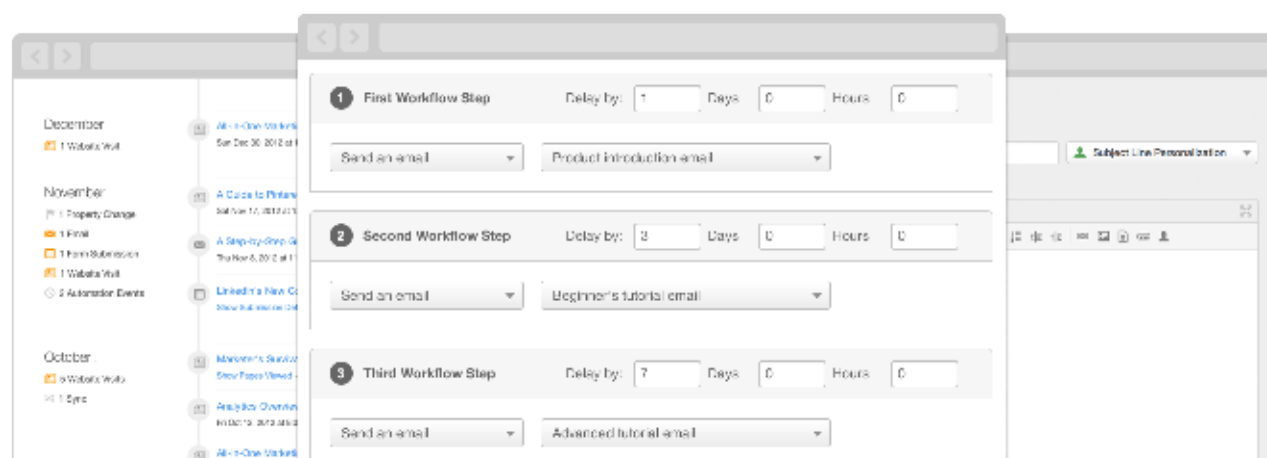
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**TO JUMPSTART YOUR INBOUND COMMERCE
STRATEGY, CONTACT US TODAY.**

1 Technology Drive, Suite J709
Irvine, CA 92619
(949) 218-1331

sales@eyemaginetech.com
twitter.com/eyemagine
linkedin.com/company/eyemaginellc