



# Book Inbound Marketing

## Get Found Using Google, Social Media, and Blogs

Brian Halligan and Dharmesh Shah  
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### Recommendation

Conventional marketing no longer makes sense. Ads are costly and people are paying less attention to traditional media. Most marketers seek a young market (ages 18-34), but few youthful consumers read extensively. Many viewers record or stream TV shows and avoid commercials. A lot of today’s worthiest promotion happens online. But just shifting to blasting people with ads over the Internet is a backward marketing strategy. Now you need to direct your marketing so that people will look for you online. In their book, web-marketing experts Brian Halligan and Dharmesh Shah show how to reach out to your market through web pages, blogs, podcasts and social networks. Halligan and Shah demonstrate that commercial success depends on developing and producing quality content online. *BooksInShort* recommends this eye-opening report to businesses large and small, established and brand new.

### Take-Aways

- “Outbound marketing’s” megaphone approach no longer works.
- “Inbound marketing” has replaced intrusive advertising.
- Shifting your conventional megaphone ads to the Internet achieves poor results.
- Exploit your online presence so customers look for you and buy what you sell.
- Publish compelling Web content optimized for search engines and promote it to social media sites.
- Blogging gets you and your product noticed online.
- Become an active participant in the social mediasphere.
- Don’t try to trick Google into ranking your website higher in its indexes.
- Your Web landing page must include a compelling “call to action.”
- Hire employees who are accomplished “digerati.”

### Summary

#### A New Marketing Paradigm

“Stop wasting money blasting the world with marketing messages that nobody cares about.” With the right know-how, savvy small companies and startups, and even individuals, can have as compelling a presence online as giant firms. Unlike traditional marketing, web-based promotions can provide valuable expert information that people actively seek. Organize your online content so customers who want your product or service will find you and happily buy what you’re selling. This “inbound marketing” approach is 360o different from the traditional “outbound marketing” approach.

“The outbound marketing era is over. The next 50 years will be the era of inbound marketing.”

Consumers now take active steps to avoid commercial messages. This includes using spam filters to weed out unwanted emails, DVRs to fast-forward past commercials and satellite radio to avoid on-air spots, just to name a few. Plus, consumers entertain themselves with MP3 players and downloaded music, so they have little time for standardized broadcasting. Additionally, trade publications, once a popular venue for advertisers, are losing circulation and being squeezed by freebie blogs.

## It's All Happening Online

Advertising once supplied the information people need to make intelligent purchase decisions. Today, people go to Google and other online search engines to find background data on the items they want to buy. They also rely on the blogosphere (“100 million blogs and counting”) and on social media websites such as “Twitter, Facebook, StumbleUpon, LinkedIn, Digg, Reddit” and “YouTube” to learn about available products and services.

“To move from outbound to inbound marketing, you need to stop interrupting people in your target market and ‘get found’ by them instead.”

Smart companies do not simply transfer their traditional promotional approaches to the web. They understand that the Internet is not a “one-to-many broadcast tool,” that is to say, a megaphone. Companies using a megaphone approach on their websites drive visitors away. An astute firm wants its website to act as a “hub,” where individuals who share the same interests (such as a focus on your products or services) form communities and connect with one another.

## Become an Online Hub for Your Customers

Positioning your site as an online transit point or hub for your target market requires connecting to other sites. How? Provide great content that people value and will subscribe to through a feed reader such as RSS (a basic syndication). When you update your web content, your subscribers’ feed readers alert them to new material. People can also subscribe to your content via email.

“A good proxy for how you are doing in the blogosphere is to measure the number of links back to your site.”

Do not devote resources exclusively to website design. Compelling online content brings far more visitors than a flashy site. Instead of overspending on aesthetics, create a collaborative blog for your online visitors. Spend your money where the online payoff will prove the most rewarding: blogs, social media sites and Google. Learn how many links connect to your site from external sources and from “high-authority sites.” If Google crawls a website that links to yours, your site will be included in its index. You also can manually add your website to Google by using “the Google Add URL tool.”

“The good thing about inbound marketing is that everything is completely measurable.”

To cite one example, design your website to resemble 37Signals, a true hub. It includes the popular “Signal vs. Noise” blog, as well as a job board, a product blog and product information. Plan arresting content and tools to draw the maximum number of visitors. To score big online, you must offer an outstanding product or service. Consider two important strategies:

1. **Become a unique alternative, instead of a competitive choice** – Think of the iPod. Prior to its introduction, MP3 players had so many features that users had a hard time setting them up. Apple made it easy to download and listen to music.
2. **Be the absolute best that you can be in your special niche** – A manufacturer of monkey wrenches imaginatively managed to establish a unique online presence, even though many firms sell wrenches on the Internet. He specialized in monkey wrenches for left-handed plumbers, of which, it turns out, there are plenty. And now all those left-handed plumbers have an exclusive source.

## Content Rules

To succeed online you need quality content, many visitors and lots of comments about your site. Spark as many inbound links as possible. These links enhance your Google PageRank, which leads more searchers to your site. Think of each inbound link as a vote for your website. Garner enough of them, and your content quickly can go viral, spreading on popular social media sites. Typical content includes:

- **“Blog articles”** – Short and sweet and confined to topics in your niche area.
- **“White papers”** – Five- to seven-page compositions that discuss industry trends. Do not report on your own products or services.
- **“Videos”** – Two- to three-minute pieces focusing on industry topics or your products.
- **“Webinars”** – PowerPoint presentations about your industry.
- **“Podcasts”** – 10- to 20-minute informative audio programs.
- **“Webcasts”** – Live online video programming.

## Stand Out in the Blogosphere

A blog is a great way to get noticed online. Use it to showcase your knowledge as an industry expert. Write about subjects of interest to your field. Capture other online content about your field with an RSS reader (Google Reader is good). To find such content, use a search engine. Enter a phrase that describes your industry. Click on the search returns that interest you. Use your RSS reader to subscribe to relevant blogs and websites. Read and comment about online articles. Your comments can encourage other authors to visit your blog. Keep your individual blog articles to one page. Include videos. Ask industry experts to contribute guest articles. Post new articles at least once a week. Don’t turn blog posts into ads for your products and do not moderate other people’s comments. Be sure your blog titles match the terms people search for within your industry. Include keywords in your blog’s content and its title that meet these criteria:

- **“Relevance”** – Your content must relate your niche area.
- **“Volume”** – Take advantage of how often searchers use the terms you choose.
- **“Difficulty”** – If your key words are overused, you won’t make Google’s top hits page.

“Getting started on Facebook is easy, but it requires a certain amount of ongoing attention to achieve maximum value, as users expect to see fresh information on the site.”

Put the most relevant words first in the title; for example, “Inventory Management Software That’s User Friendly,” not “User Friendly Inventory Management Software.” Add your company name to your “Page Title tag for your home page.” Use strong keyword links. Reach your market by including links to your blog posts

on LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter and similar social media sites. Send your blog links to the people on your email list. Never try to trick Google with “keyword stuffing” and similar subterfuges. These tactics can backfire. Google might ban your website from its rankings.

## Become Active Online

“Today, anyone with a story to tell can command an audience – and customers – on the Web,” promises David Meerman Scott, author of *The New Rules of Marketing & PR*. To tap into this potential, develop a strong “online profile” to maintain an active presence with social media sites. This consists “of your username, avatar image [for example, your photo], a summary of your biography and web links.” Start a Facebook business page linked to your website so visitors can “become ‘fans’.” Start a LinkedIn Group in your niche area. Showcase your expertise by providing questions to LinkedIn Answers.

“Many marketers in mid-size and large companies spend 80% of their time worrying about conversion rates and 20% of their time on getting more visitors in the first place.”

Create a following on Twitter. Find your most relevant Twitter users with Twitter Grader. “Follow” these individuals and converse with them to develop your own followers. Pick your best online articles and set up an account on the Digg website. Create an account at StumbleUpon, a “social discover site.” There you can secure “up-votes” for your online content. Set up an account on YouTube and create videos about your business or niche area.

## Convert Prospects into Sales

Enhancing your presence online increases your sales. Once people visit your website, get them to engage with you. That requires a strong call to action that’s valuable to visitors and answers their pivotal question: “What’s in it for me?” Suggest something easy for visitors to act upon and make it prominent on your website, as “a clickable image with a relatively large font.” That first connection must be “action-oriented,” for example, “Win Our Contest.” Avoid “Contact Us,” which is not compelling.

“Seventy-five percent of your focus should be on what is happening off your Web site concerning your brand, your industry and your competitors.”

Tie your landing page specifically to the feature that drew visitors in, for example, another web page. If you use Google AdWords, make sure your landing page’s content concerns the keywords you targeted. Your landing page and call to action should match. The landing page has a single goal: “to get people to fill out your form.” Keep it clean and simple. Visitors must be able to fill out your form quickly and easily, so don’t ask too many questions. If 15% of landing page visitors fill out and submit your form, you have succeeded.

“The more people following/subscribing to you, the broader your reach across your marketplace.”

The next step is to convert these leads into customers who will buy what you have to sell. Grade all of your sales leads based on where you got them; for example, “email marketing, trade shows, seminars, sales relationships, telemarketing, cold calls... search traffic from social media sites, traffic from blogs and other web sites,” and so on. To track everything, use the sales funnel metaphor, which depicts how prospects become leads and then eventually, customers. Monitor how many prospect types become customers and then adjust your future marketing accordingly. For example, if you get more customers from blog visits than telemarketing, increase your blogging activities.

“It’s not smart to try to outsmart Google engineers.”

Inbound marketing is completely different from traditional outbound marketing. You need a special type of employee to be successful with this new approach. Use the “DARC” framework to select the right people:

- **D** – “Hire digital citizens,” accomplished “digerati,” who know, love and understand the Internet.
- **A** – “Hire for analytical chops.” You can measure everything on the web. Therefore, hire people who know how to use and build metrics and analyze their results.
- **R** – “Hire for Web reach.” The best inbound marketing employees will have numerous blog subscribers, friends on Facebook and followers on Twitter and LinkedIn.
- **C** – “Hire content creators.” Look for great writers.

“Either write something worth reading about or do something worth writing about.” (Ben Franklin)

If you hire a public relations firm, seek a company that is tied in to the web, with its own popular blog, as well as many fans and followers. Use TwitterGrader, Facebook Grader and Website Grader to evaluate the firm’s Internet stature. You can use these and similar tools to evaluate your competitors’ online presence and your own.

## Get in the Inbound Groove

Still stuck in an outbound marketing ditch? Retire your outdated approach and begin an inbound marketing program. The individual steps required are not complicated. Develop great content, optimize it for Google and the other search engines, as well as social media sites, publish your content online, market it via the “social mediasphere” and constantly measure how you are doing. This all requires perseverance, so be prepared for the long haul. However, if you do everything correctly, the payoff can be huge. Consider these big-time Internet winners: Amazon (books), Salesforce (customer relationship management), Google (searches), eBay (auctions) and Zappos (shoes). The Internet represents the ultimate meritocracy. Your job is to offer a great product, develop terrific content and transform your online visitors into customers.

## About the Authors

**Brian Halligan**, CEO, and **Dharmesh Shah**, CTO, cofounded HubSpot, a marketing software firm. Halligan lectures at MIT and the Harvard Business School. Shah created the blog OnStartups.

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