

Issue Sixty Nine

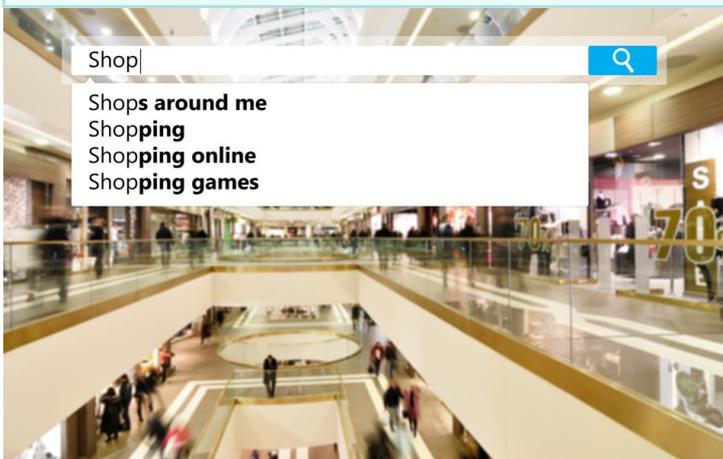
LAUNCHPAD

Incoming...

The last few years have seen a new wave breaking in the marketing world. You may be aware of it under different labels, but 'inbound marketing' is an umbrella term for the change.

The bedrock of marketing was always outbound strategy: the print advertisement, the billboard, the commercial on TV or in the cinema (remember going out to the movies?). Market share used to be heavily influenced by how much you could afford to spend on advertising. So the companies most likely to succeed were those who could afford billboards and full page ads. Smaller competitors had to be a lot craftier, the quality of their products or services had to be outstanding and their appeal to niche markets was often their secret weapon.

Today's customers are much more proactive about seeking out products and services for themselves, empowered by their confidence online. If they want a plumber or a palm tree or a book on rare birds, they're more likely to begin their search on Google before they reach for the yellow pages or walk into a shop. They don't only search online. They compare prices and features. They look at product surveys and access customer reviews.



By the time they email, pick up the phone, or complete the online form on your website, they're more than likely well informed about you, your business and what you have to offer. And they're already inclined to buy your product or use your services. They're a prospect who's generated a lead for you and they've invited you to contact them. You don't have to cold call them. You 'warm call' them. Of course, it's up to you to delight them from there.

Businesses have been quick to recognise the need to connect with the new style of customers. They're making it easy for customers to find them with inbound marketing strategies. Inbound marketing outperforms outbound strategies and is cheaper.

An eConsultancy survey from 2012 found the cost of acquiring a new lead was \$346 using outbound marketing strategies, yet only \$135 using inbound strategies. So, while larger companies have been quick to spot the trend, many smaller businesses are finding inbound strategies well within their reach and their budget.

The message for your online strategy is: make it easy for customers to find you. Make it enticing to stay and play. Offer takeaways with sufficient value for web-surfers to be happy to exchange their contact details for your white paper or presentation or your podcast. Create opportunities to interact with potential customers so your web presence is less of a billboard and has more potential to personalise future contact.

 **JOYCE BROOKS** and Associates Limited

Telephone: 07 838 2228
P O Box 607 • Waikato Mail Centre • Hamilton 3240
5 Hardley Street, Whitiara, Hamilton 3200

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'A meeting is an event at which the minutes are kept and the hours are lost.'

Anonymous

Meetings matter

Meetings: scourge of the working day or a top way to make things happen? Go for the biggest outcome from the smallest window. Start with basics.

Focus

Do you want to share information or status reports, make a decision, brainstorm ideas or solve a problem? Complete this sentence 'by the end of this meeting I want us to have...'. If appropriate, circulate an agenda in advance. Ask people to think about a task or problem ahead of time so they come prepared.

Who needs to be there... really?

Meetings lose momentum when there are just too many people there. Are there some things you want everyone to know about but other business involves only a small core group? Schedule so you can deal with what involves everyone first. Then, like the man said, 'let my people go'. They'll thank you. The core group can then focus on what they need to achieve. If there are a lot of people moving at once, this is your moment to schedule coffee for those staying on.

Timing

When are all the participants most likely to be available, awake and enthused? Early mornings are good though you can lose points on the 'awake-o-meter' or because of latecomers and 'what was on TV last night'. But everyone wants to be done quickly so they can get on with the day. Mid-morning means people have made some headway on their desk, they're awake and in work harness. However, you risk burning up the most productive hours of the day if you let it drag on. Work to an 'end stop' event like lunch so there's a natural time to finish. Late afternoons are low on the 'awake and enthused-o-meter' but may still work. If you call a meeting in the last half hour of the day, you risk energy being low but you increase your chances of everyone in the room being committed to achieving outcomes in the fastest, smoothest way possible.

When scheduling, a half hour is good, an hour at most. No matter how much business there is to go through, after an hour you've lost them. Schedule a series of smaller purpose-built appointments if you have to.

Who's leading?

A facilitator is clear on the purpose of the meeting, keeps the group on task, summarises outcomes and outlines who is accountable for them. Gain the reputation of someone who starts on time, keeps to time and ends on time. People appreciate you understand they're busy. Be firm with anyone who takes the meeting off-topic. Keep it light too - it's important to stay on task but a sense of humour keeps you on task as a team. Ask someone to note down outcomes. As chair, model good listening skills by being respectful and attentive to all participants. Make sure everyone has input and is heard. At the close of the meeting summarise what's been achieved. Ask everyone if they thought the meeting was useful and field suggestions for how it could have been more effective.



Kill the toys

Nothing is more soul destroying and unproductive than trying to drag a meeting to a result while one or more people monitor their emails and texts. Be firm but fair and thank the group for staying on task.

Agenda, minutes, action!

Agenda and minutes attract flak as hallmarks of the typical boring meeting. They don't have to be. Use an agenda to establish the purpose of the meeting. When you plan it, plan how much time to allocate to each agenda item. When you chair the meeting, it will keep you on track.

As far as possible, pare back minutes to what decisions were taken, what action is required, who's responsible and by when. Follow up after the meeting by emailing a brief summary highlighting tasks and outcomes. At the next meeting, use the minutes to check that people have done what they've said they would and, if not, detail the next best course of action.

Avoiding the January blues

Many people kick start the New Year with a myriad of resolutions, from keeping fit to losing weight or achieving financial goals. However, many of those resolutions fail to embody anything remotely close to working life. The first week back is usually a slow one; clearing out the inbox (usually spam as most other people were also on break) dusting off the keyboard and restocking the cupboard with fresh new stationery.

So when your employees hit the deck with the January blues, here are some ideas to instil excitement and motivation.

Know your team

Inspiring your team can start even before the New Year kicks off. If you give out Christmas gifts at the end of each year, do your research first. Find out about your team and ensure you're getting each and every one of them something that is thoughtful and representative of how you see them as individuals. If specialised gifts are not within your budget, ensure you do something, whether it be a Christmas party or even a personalised card that lets each of your employees know how much you've appreciated their efforts throughout the year. By feeling this appreciation, they are more likely to come back to work in a positive frame of mind.

As a by the by, when you're planning the office Christmas party, if it's likely to be especially festive, make some provision so that people don't have to drink and drive. Often someone's willing to volunteer as sober driver but give it some thought and talk it over with the team so there's a plan for everyone to make it home safely.

Include your staff in the company goals

In your initial meeting at the beginning of the year, let everyone know what the overall plan is for the year and where the business is going. Sit down with each staff member individually and chat about personal career goals, how you and the company can help to achieve these and reiterate the importance of the company values. This makes each team member feel valued and appreciated, with the knowledge that you care about his or her future.

Make it fun

In this initial meeting, make sure you include some exciting goals and talk about ideas for functions and team outings. It's good for your crew to have something to look forward to. More importantly, make sure it happens. You don't want to plan big and be greeted with exasperated sighs and rolled eyes for not following through on promises from previous years.



Keep it moving

Is everyone in the team already a bit nostalgic for the days on the beach? Or are they talking about their healthy lifestyle resolutions? Would they be up for a detox week at work? Programme some healthy shared lunches, with everyone bringing in their favourite salads and juices. Make the most of the long summer days and go for a walk in the sun during lunch or before work. Make a date to go out to a local lookout for a scenic moment. Get the blood pumping with a game of touch after work.

Leave room for treats

Build in some reward moments, too. Simply surprise the team with an occasional morning tea treat. Or, if people are in the mood to be social but a little cash-poor after the holidays, suggest an evening get-together at someone's house for DVDs and snacks.

These ideas can also be helpful tools to check in with your team throughout the year. Open communication, positive attitudes and keeping everyone in the loop is just the start to maintaining motivation and keeping energy levels up. This can encourage respect and in turn, reinforce staff retention and loyalty. By treating your employees as valued team players, you can have a far more productive and efficient year ahead.



Leading questions

How well do you know your market? Do all your customers just walk in off the street? Or do you carefully build up relationships over time so your customers know the full range of what you can offer them? If it's the latter, how do you first come to know them? There are lots of answers to this but they mostly boil down to: do you contact them or do they seek you out? And, once contact is made, how will you engage them?

In marketing-speak, the world is full of 'prospects' and 'leads' whom every business hopes to turn into 'sales'. Confusingly, different marketing gurus define prospects and leads in different ways. And what's really confusing is that some marketers talk about how important it is to turn leads into prospects while others are equally enthusiastic about turning prospects into leads.

It's easier to understand why there might be a little fuzziness around this because, whether they believe their goal is to convert leads to prospects or prospects to leads, the ultimate goal of marketers is to convert leads AND prospects into buyers.

Without buying into the argument, think about a prospect as someone who might potentially be interested in buying your product or using your services. But until you know who they are, it's not much help. When you have their contact details, they're a lead. You can then begin to nurture the relationship and interest them in what you have to offer. When you start to do this, they're said to be moving through the 'marketing cycle' or in the 'sales pipeline'.

What are you saying?

Being aware of body language in your interactions with customers and colleagues can help you communicate more successfully. Reading others is important but it's also vital to be aware of when you might be sending out signals you don't intend to. For instance, before you've even said 'hello', do your clients perceive you as confident and open, with your head up and shoulders back? Or does your slouchy posture let them know you're not very sure of yourself and maybe they should be speaking with someone else?



Over the course of a day, monitor yourself when speaking with clients and colleagues. Notice your posture, when you're making eye contact and when you're not, where your hands are and what they're doing, how often you smile and when. Notice your own body language in relation to that of those you're with. Are you mirroring their body posture or are they mirroring yours?

Your body language can promote trust and support what you're trying to say. When you start to notice the non-verbal clues you're sending, you might want to tweak them a bit to become a more effective communicator.

FYI

Outbound marketing: marketing that is based on outbound messages to potential customers, using media such as advertising, commercials and billboards.

Inbound marketing: marketing based on the idea of drawing potential customers to you by providing something of value to them, making it attractive to them to seek you out and learn more about your products and services.

Warm calling: contact with a customer with whom the business has already had some prior contact, such as a direct mail campaign, an introduction at a business event, a referral, or when the client has contacted the business themselves. The opposite of cold calling where the business has not had any prior contact and calls a potential customer out of the blue.

An Important Message

While every effort has been made to provide valuable, useful information in this publication, this firm and any related suppliers or associated companies accept no responsibility or any form of liability from reliance upon or use of its contents. Any suggestions should be considered carefully within your own particular circumstances, as they are intended as general information only.

 **JOYCE BROOKS** and Associates Limited
Telephone: 07 838 2228
P O Box 607 • Waikato Mail Centre • Hamilton 3240
5 Hardley Street, Whitiara, Hamilton 3200