

THE FIELD GUIDE TO HIRING AN INBOUND MARKETING AGENCY



10 ATTRIBUTES
AND CORE
VALUES YOUR
INBOUND
MARKETING
AGENCY MUST
POSSESS

AN INTRODUCTION TO InstantEDGEMarketing

About Marc Buote

Marc is an integrated marketing expert with more than 20 years experience in all aspects of traditional and new media marketing. From concept through to fruition, Marc has direct hands-on experience in strategic planning, campaign development and optimization, implementation and program management. His professional evolution has kept him on the cutting edge of all aspects of online marketing such as: website design and development, search engine optimization, social media marketing and blogging, analytics and more.

As Founder and Chief Marketing Consultant at Instant Edge Marketing, Marc leads a core team of inbound marketing specialists with over 100 years combined experience in a wide variety of Industries and sectors: Financial, Technology, Retail, Hospitality, Publishing, Not-for-Profit, Government and hundreds of local small business organizations.

Marc brings a level of confidence, experience and professionalism that makes him the ideal business builder, client champion and player coach.



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INTRODUCTION

INBOUND'S ROI CANNOT BE DENIED

The return on investment businesses experience when shifting from outbound to inbound marketing has been well documented - and with good reason! Companies who part with traditional marketing methods to follow their customers online stand to blow key growth metrics like marketing efficiency and sales productivity out of the water. The inbound combination of remarkable content and website engagement create a bedrock foundation for sales and marketing efficiency, effectiveness and growth.

AGENCIES CAN ACCELERATE RESULTS

Marketing dollars have shifted away from traditional outlets like PR and cold calling. But the skill sets of internal teams lag behind. For some, the time and resources needed to train internal people on how to master inbound cornerstones like SEO and email marketing do not exist. As a result, businesses wanting to take advantage of ROI charged online tactics like blogging and social media are looking to outside agencies for help. These agencies can use their deep online experience to help companies and businesses short on time and internal resources increase their online visibility and lead generation efforts. However, it is not one-size fits all. Agencies come in all shapes and sizes, with different specialties and talents. But there are core values and skill sets that make some better than others. Here are the 10 most important values to consider when choosing an inbound marketing agency.

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HABITS

**OF A HIGHLY EFFECTIVE INBOUND
MARKETING AGENCY**



1. Offers the Right Services

HIRE A MARKETING AGENCY THAT DELIVERS THE INBOUND SERVICES THAT MATTER THE MOST

Key Questions to Ask:

- 1 Do you offer Traffic Generation, Lead Generation, Leads-to-Customers and Analytical-Focused service packages?
- 2 What tactic or tactics does your firm use to deliver each of these service packages?
- 3 What past or current client example(s) best illustrate success you have delivered for each of these services?

While a specialty or two like social media or email is to be expected (more on that later), any firm that asserts themselves as an inbound agency must offer Four Core services. These services are each comprised of several tactical components. But to execute in a way that delivers real value and maximum impact, all need to be performed together. Seeing that an agency folds all the supporting pieces together into one cohesive strategy is a good sign they know how execute and get results.

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The first core service of inbound marketing is an agency's ability to generate traffic to a website through SEO, blogging and social media sharing. Second, agencies should be able to tell their clients they can develop the premium content needed to capitalize on that traffic by building landing pages and managing online lead generation efforts. Third, agencies need to be able to construct targeted lead-nurturing campaigns aimed at converting those leads into customers. Finally, analysis and measurement needs to be present at every step in the process.

2. Presents a Clearly Defined Delivery Process

HIRE AN AGENCY WITH A SOLID, PROVEN AND LOGICAL PLAN OF ATTACK

Key Questions to Ask:

- 1 Given your understanding of our situation, goals and challenges, what do you recommend we do first, second, third, etc.?
- 2 How does our situation, and the plan you're recommending, match that of another customer you've worked with?
- 3 What do you see as the most critical piece of inbound marketing for our business and goals?

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They know you. They know your business. They know their capabilities and what inbound marketing takes. Therefore, any agency worth considering should be able to plot out the specifics and detail for the campaigns and strategy they propose for your business.

Building on the goals and challenges identified in the sales process, your potential partner agency should be able to outline their approach in terms of the four core services and explain all the tactics they plan to employ in their execution. Expect a timeline for each chunk and a description of resources needed along the way. Make sure what precedes and proceeds each major component makes logical sense.

Does your business have no web presence? Then traffic generation services like SEO, blogging and social media need to come first. Is your website underperforming from a lead generation standpoint? If so, your agency partner will need to ensure that your site has decent traffic and then begin crafting premium offers and landing pages. Are too few sales being attributed back to

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the website? An agency brought on to help with that challenge will (again) need to look at the traffic and lead numbers to ensure quality is present, and then begin crafting targeted lead nurturing and email follow-up sequences. Obviously, the ability to measure and interpret data is a baseline skill for each of the core services, and each agency you consider should be able to set benchmarks, identify trends and take action.

3. Conducts a Goal-Oriented Sales Process

A MARKETING AGENCIES PITCH SHOULD BE TAILORED TO YOUR BUSINESSES SPECIFIC CHALLENGES AND GOALS



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Key Questions to Ask:

- ① Have you worked with clients who have faced similar challenges?
- ② How does each piece of what you are proposing take aim at my challenges and goals?
- ③ What is the timeframe for achieving these goals, based on the strategy you have in mind/outlined for my business?

The sales process of a good inbound agency will start with your goals and challenges, and dovetail into how they can help you. You're sure to see slides about who they are and what they do, but they should understand that their services are most compelling when they can be seen as potential answers to the business challenges you are facing.

They should begin by asking about your goals, and then get a sense of the timing and urgency around those goals. How are you being measured? What are the metrics and benchmarks most important to you? Also, what does the size and makeup of your internal team look like?

Getting answers to these critical questions at the outset will allow them to prescribe a plan unique to your business. Your goals and challenges should be natural segues into discussions round their capabilities and case studies.

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4. Maintains a Website Optimized for Inbound

HIRE A FIRM THAT CAN CITE ITSELF AS A CASE STUDY

Key Questions to Ask:

- 1 What have been the results of your own firm's inbound efforts?
- 2 Does what you are outlining for us match what your own firm does online?
- 3 What are some key lessons you have learned from using inbound marketing for your own business?

They will most likely talk the talk, but does the agency you are considering walk the walk? Meaning: do they do inbound for themselves? Digging into their site for a solid YES or NO answer to this question could give you interesting insight into just how good they really are at what they do.

Because you're in "hiring mode," your trips to their site have likely been dominated by scouring their services and client testimonial pages. But take a step back from these self-promotion-heavy pages and ask yourself, do they do the things they're proposing for me? Do they blog with the frequency they say. I will have to? Do

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their social media accounts boast the type of activity they preach will be critical for your success? Can Call-to-Actions buttons and premium content offers that display their thought leadership be found throughout the site?

“A truly effective inbound marketing agency should be its own best case study. Think twice about engaging with an inbound firm that doesn’t make the services it sells a priority for their own business,”

says Patrick Shea, HubSpot’s Channel Marketing Manager.



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5. Showcases Their Specific Areas of Focus

YOUR INBOUND MARKETING AGENCY SHOULD SPECIALIZE, NOT GENERALIZE

Key Questions to Ask:

- 1 Have you worked in my industry before?
- 2 Which piece of inbound marketing is your strongest capability, and how does the strategy you plan to lay out capitalize on that in particular?
- 3 If you have worked in our industry before, how familiar are you with our thought leaders and key blogs? If not, how do you plan to go about finding these?

Does the prospective agency you are talking with have a sweet spot? If yes, is that sweet spot service or tactic-specific? For example, maybe they've done SEO for years and years and gotten phenomenal results. Or is their sweet spot industry specific? Meaning they have crushed numerous client engagements

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in your industry (or a close relative to your industry) before? If they do, look to see if those sweet spots align with the challenges you are facing and goals you identified in the sales process. They should.

Use the sales process to get a solid handle on your prospective agencies areas of focus. If they have a service sweet spot, like social media for example, they should know the fastest and most surefire ways to leverage social media for traffic and leads. Or if they've worked in your industry before, they'll likely know all the key industry terms and thought leaders – which will make content easier to create at the outset.

Specialties like the examples referenced above can shine extra bright when incorporated into a comprehensive strategy spanning the four core services. Just make sure their biggest strengths make you stronger.



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6. Teaches and Trains Your Internal Team

HIRE AN AGENCY THAT KNOWS HOW AND WANTS TO LEVERAGE YOUR TEAM'S INDUSTRY EXPERTISE

Key Questions to Ask:

- 1 To what extent do you plan on using members of our team for content creation, etc?
- 2 How do you plan on setting those folks up for success and ensure the pieces they work on with you is a good use of their time?
- 3 How has involving client team members in your efforts worked in the past?

Inbound marketing hinges on effort. Effort to create content. Effort to Tweet. Effort to research keywords for SEO. Effort to blog. Effort to think about conversion events on your site and how lead nurturing campaigns could be tuned to better perform. Lots of effort. Any agency you hire will need to spearhead and facilitate all these efforts, but should also be ready, willing and able to teach those any members of your team interested in being part of the overall effort.

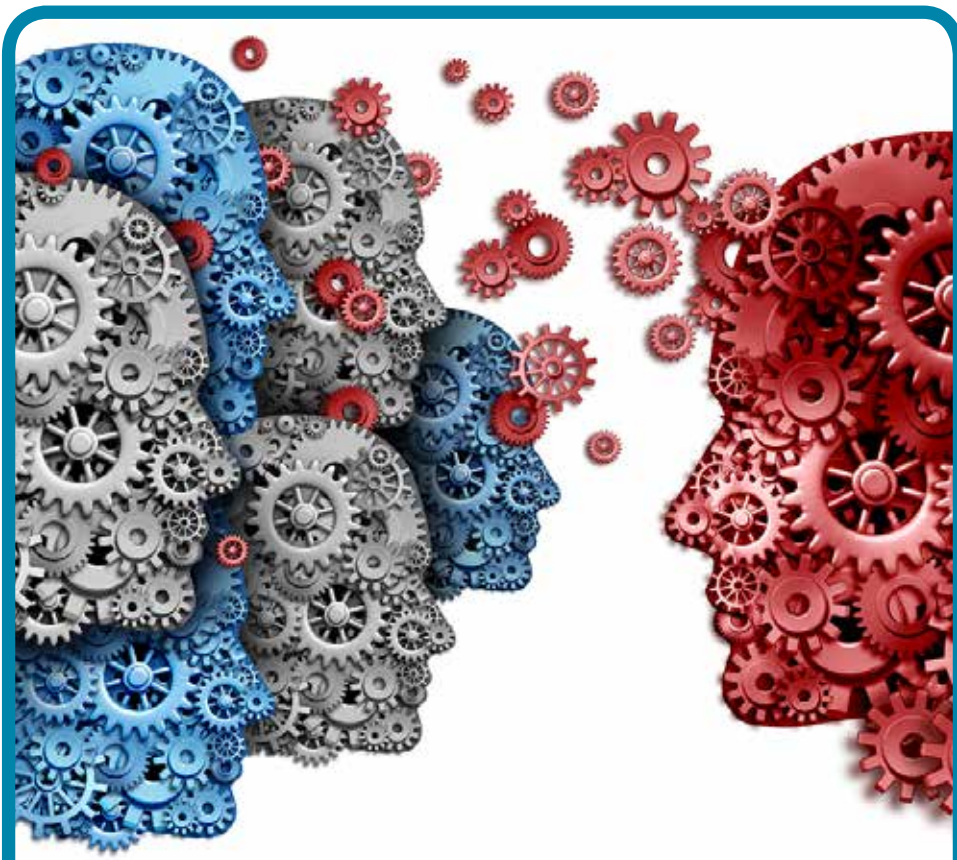
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Consider all the different sides to your business. There are no doubt sales and marketing departments – but what about operations? Manufacturing? Research and development? Packaging? Think about the remarkable content folks from these different departments could contribute to your businesses inbound marketing efforts. Consider how much more visibility a tweet will get if it's tweeted out by 15 or 20 members of an organization, rather than just the company account.

“An agency truly worth it's weight will be eager to talk with all your folks, train them on blogging and social media best practices, and harness their brain power. The more hands on deck, so to speak, the quicker things take root and being yielding results. Everyone wins,”

says Patrick Shea, HubSpot's Channel Marketing Manager.



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7. Key Capabilities Reside Either In-House or with a Trusted Partner

HIRE AN AGENCY THAT CAN EXPLAIN HOW IT DOES WHAT IT DOES

Key Questions to Ask:

- 1 Do you do all your inbound marketing work in-house?
- 2 If yes, who on your team specializes in what?
- 3 If no, to whom do you outsource what? And how long have you worked with them?



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A complete inbound marketing strategy is comprised of many different tactics. It's like a puzzle – but not because it's confusing. It's a puzzle in the sense that it's got a lot of pieces. Pieces that should not stand on their own, but when put together, make total sense. And to truly succeed online, business will need to have a comprehensive strategy inclusive of all the right pieces.

Assembling the pieces together into one, cohesive strategy is the job of your agency. Make any prospective agency be truthful about each step of the strategy they are proposing and how it gets done. Each of these pieces represents a crucial tactic, and it is important that you understand a potential partner firm's capabilities at the outset of your relationship.

Ask who is responsible for each piece, because they might not have the talent in-house to deliver a service entirely on their own. They might outsource. Agencies that use partners for technical pieces of the work, like website design and integrations, will be relying on the schedule of another when they make the handoff. Probe them around who their partners are, how long they have been working with them, general timetables and what pieces of the work will get shifted to them.

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8. Possesses Strong Project Management Skills

INBOUND MARKETING IS A SERIOUS PRODUCTION AND THE MARKETING AGENCY YOU HIRE SHOULD WANT TO RUN THE WHOLE SHOW

Key Questions to Ask:

- 1 What types of requests, technical or otherwise, do you anticipate making of myself and my team and the project kicks off?
- 2 What types of requests do you anticipate making of myself or other members of my team on an ongoing basis?
- 3 What project management software, spreadsheets or other orientation materials should we expect to receive and when?

Inbound marketing is an organic process. It requires time, elbow grease and coordination. Any inbound marketing agency you choose to partner with is going to need to make requests of your time at the outset of your engagement, and also at other points along the way.

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They will need to understand your customers and get a sense of what type of content will be most effective in attracting them to your site. They'll need to add forms and other inbound elements to your site as well. To do these tasks, and many others, an agency will need to get inside your head, and on the calendars of your website admin, as well as others at your company.

Does the agency you're considering have the process and communication skills to make you think they will make reasonable and realistic requests of other folks on your team? Also, have they set clear expectations around what each inbound component will require in terms of time and resources? Do you get the impression that they can manage campaigns with lots of moving parts?

"A good agency will make your life easier"

says Pete Caputa, "not the other way around", HubSpot's VP, Sales

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9. Places an Emphasis on Measurement

AGENCIES THAT MEASURE EVERYTHING SUCCEED FASTER

Key Questions to Ask:

- 1 How will you measure the success of the campaigns you are proposing?
- 2 How often will you report back to us on these campaigns and progress being made towards other key metrics?
- 3 What adjustments can be made if certain metrics are over/underperforming?

The Internet is an infinitely measurable place. This makes each piece of the inbound methodology trackable. This should be a fact leveraged heavily by any inbound agency you considering working with. Your prospective agencies should have presentations littered with the words “metrics,” “benchmarks,” and “analytics.”

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Progress made toward your goals should to be measured at every step of the way, and an inbound marketing agency worth its weight will be able to track all campaigns and report on performance regularly. You have goals. You are trying to meet those goals by hiring this agency. Therefore, it should be as focused as you are on charting success in an undeniable, data-driven way.



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10. Values Transparency

YOUR MARKETING AGENCY PARTNER SHOULD WANT YOU TO SEE EVERYTHING THAT THEY SEE

Key Questions to Ask:

- 1 What online software packages does your firm use to execute and manage inbound marketing?
- 2 Will we be trained on this software?
- 3 How often will you share wins and progress with us?

Make sure the agency you are considering embraces transparency as a core value. Though you're not likely to see this word next to a bullet on PowerPoint slide, an agency can infer and prove they are transparent with their clients by citing and discussing three main business practices.

First, they should outline a regular meeting schedule in their sales process. These meetings allow the agencies a regular venue to raise questions and concerns as an engagement is ramping and progressing. Second, agencies should jump at the

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chance to train your people. The more you understand what is being done and why, the more you are able to thought partner with your agency and set their efforts up for success. Third, truly transparent inbound agencies will insist on your having login credentials to the online marketing software they use to run your campaigns. These accounts are loaded with data, and they should be open and comfortable with you walking around in their world.



Transparent agencies make their end client part of the team and get better velocity for it. They solicit input and feedback often, and couple their own expertise and judgement with their clients industry experience to craft inbound strategies and call audibles where needed.

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CONCLUSION

WHY PARTNER WITH AN INBOUND MARKETING AGENCY?

You're short on the time and manpower needed to execute key, strategic inbound tactics like blogging and social media. Fortunately, there are marketing agencies out there that specialize in the inbound methodology that can help. But like any other agency partner, make sure this agency is a good strategic match for the type of goals and challenges you have, as well as your internal teams and processes. Agencies whose personalities, leaders, skill sets and core values map to the above 10 attributes will be well positioned to deliver positive results for your business.

Partnering with an inbound marketing agency will help you:

- Connect with sales prospects by driving traffic to your website
- Convert prospects into qualified leads
- Nurture prospects into sales
- Quantify results with 100% measurable analytics

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