The Step-by-Step Guide to INBOUND MARKETING

WEBDESIGNPHOENIX

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Introduction

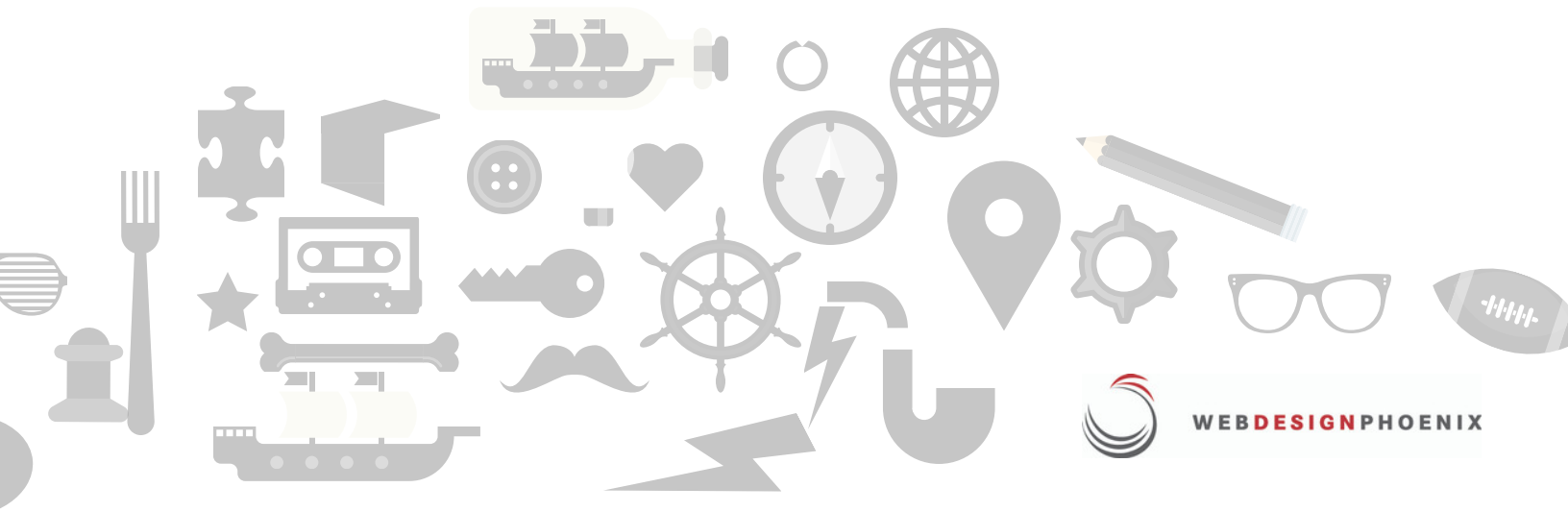
If you're reading this book, you're probably a marketer or business owner who understands how important internet marketing is today. It's pretty easy to see that the old marketing methods of cold calling, print advertising, television, and even email blasts are becoming more expensive and less effective.

Caller ID thwarts cold calls, print publication readership is declining, DVR and streaming softwares allow everyone to skip television ads, and spam blockers reject most attempts at email.

In failing to market your business online, you know you're missing out on an entire universe of opportunity that effective internet marketing can deliver.

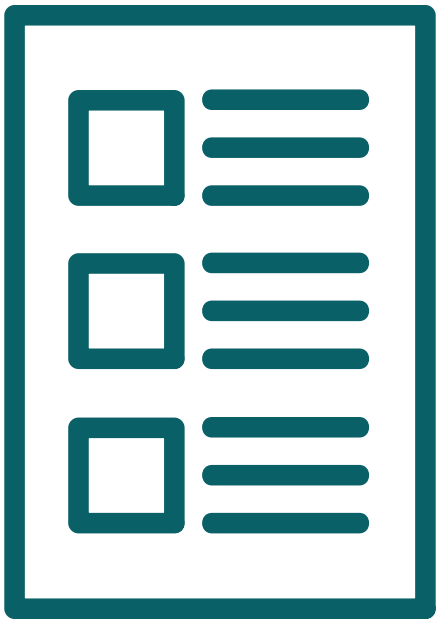
Maybe you're not really sure how it works...or where to begin. What sort of time and financial investment will be required? What kind of results should you expect? How do you measure returns on your investment?

Whether your business is considering a pivot toward internet marketing or you want to get refreshed on the basics, this step-by-step guide will show you how to set up and run a successful internet marketing strategy...one step at a time.



Optimizing Your Website

If you Build it, They Will Come (or they might not)



The plan is to build a super cool website, then everyone will find out how awesome you are online. That's great in principle, but you'll need to do more than just build a great website. You need to optimize it.

SEO, short for Search Engine Optimization, is the practice of helping your website get discovered by the Googles, Bings and Yahoos of the world.

Here are a couple important things to know about search engines before we get started:

• **Search engines cater to users, not websites** - Google's job is to list the most relevant and trustworthy websites for those performing web searches. Search engines don't care about your website unless it serves users well. Focus on helping people and the search engines will like you.

• **Web crawlers are a good thing** - Google handles over 3.3 billion searches every day...and that's just one search engine. Crawlers are how search engines learn about what websites are talking about. Every now and then, they'll run through your website to see what you're up to. Roll out the red carpet for web crawlers!

Traditional SEO involves two strategic areas: On-Page SEO and Off-Page SEO.

On-Page SEO is all about configuring keywords on your web pages. This means sprinkling them naturally, yet strategically in headers, urls, page titles, menus, meta descriptions, and in your content. It's about facilitating those web crawlers that sneak around the internet trying to figure out what everyone is talking about.

Off-Page SEO is more about how others (humans) actually feel about the content that you're putting out there. This is measured by how many inbound links or "backlinks" you can get. When other relevant, trustworthy, authoritative sites link to your website, search engines assume you know what you're talking about.

Today's SEO

While the basic concepts remain the same, search engines are getting a lot smarter. It used to be that most of these on and off-page tactics revolved around impressing (or tricking) search engines into giving you high rankings.

Today, search engines can tell the difference between a legitimate website actually providing helpful information, and those just spouting spammy BS to woo Google's algorithm.

Modern SEO is about appealing to people, not search engines.

The concept of “smarter” search engines actually has a name. It’s called **Semantic Search**, and there’s a fancy explanation on Wikipedia if you'd like to check it out.

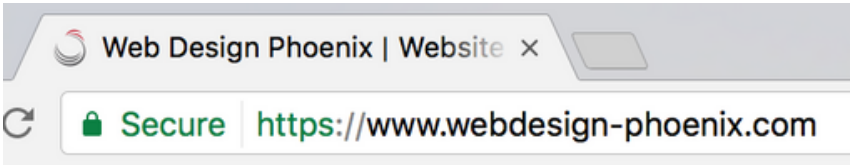
Semantic Search tries to improve search accuracy by understanding the searcher's intent and the contextual meaning of terms as they appear in the searchable arena, to generate more relevant results. Major web search engines like Google and Bing incorporate some elements of semantic search.

The Take Away: Slowly but surely, the fakers are getting weeded out…focus on composing interesting and valuable **content for people, not machines**.

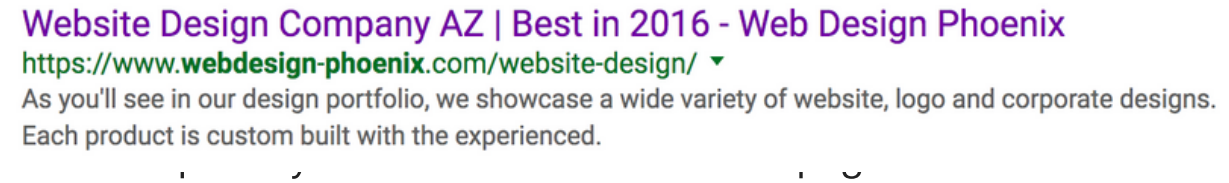
SEO Basics: 6 Page Elements you can Optimize

1. Page Title

The page title shows up in a few critical places…



…like the browser tab.



Most content management systems feature a simple field for page title, or you can find and edit in your website’s HTML code. It’ll be surrounded by the <title> tag.

Here are some recommendations for effective titles:

• **Add relevant keywords** - This should be done naturally, and if possible, place them closer to the beginning of the title. This indicates a greater importance.

• **Keep it natural** - Your page title needs to be consistent with what the page is actually about. Don't try to artificially "stuff" keywords anywhere.

• **Keep it short** - Anything over 70 characters runs the risk of getting cut off in search results and in web browsers. A long title also dilutes the relative importance of your keywords.

• **Make it unique** - Every page on your website should have its own page title. No duplicates.

• **Add your company name** - This is a good move assuming your company isn't a household name or commonly searched for directly. It's an added benefit if the company name itself carries a keyword or two...i.e., Web Design Phoenix :)

2. URL Structure

This is the website address. For example, Web Design Phoenix's blog page is https://learn.webdesign-phoenix.com. We're talking about how the text in your URL is presented, and also how different URLs and sub-pages on your website work together.

Here are a few best practices when it comes to URLs:

• **Choosing a company URL carefully** - It's usually really beneficial from an SEO standpoint to choose a company URL that contains a keyword or two. Rather than www.johnsmith.com, maybe www.scottsdaleaccounting.com would be better. Do a little **keyword research** before making this decision.

• **The URL should describe what the page is about** - Consistency and relevancy is advice you can follow throughout the page building process. Choose a URL that allows users to easily understand what they're getting into. For example, https://business.com/office-products/printers is much more relevant than https://business.com/762394649637.

• **Use dashes, not spaces** - Search engines don't like blank spaces. Separate individual words in your URL with dashes instead.
For example: https://webdesign-phoenix.com/online-marketing is a good one that captures both "online" and "marketing" keywords.

• **Make sure to add 301 redirects** - A 301 redirect permanently forwards from one URL to another. This is important if/when you decide to change URLs, leaving the old one linking to nothingness. Neither people nor search engines like to find dead ends, so make sure to check all your broken links and redirect them to the correct URLs. One common mistake is failing to redirect between yourwebsite.com and www.youwebsite.com Yes, they are treated separately.

3. Headings

Headings are portions of text that appear larger or more prominently than the rest. They are there to emphasize certain things...both users and search engines pay more attention to headings than your regular text.

This means that you should be including keywords in your headings when you can. If you're not sure where your headings are, most CMS systems allow you to delineate your <h1> (most important), <h2>, h3>, <h4> (decreasing importance), etc.

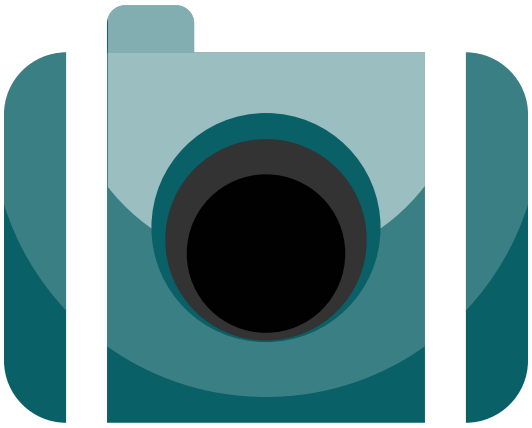
Alternatively, you can dig into the HTML code and look for the <h1>, <h2> wrappers surrounding certain text.

<h1> Headings are considered the most important and thus given more weight. Keep things natural and consistent, but try to include keywords here.

Using too many headers, especially <h1> and <h2> will dilute the relative importance of each. It's probably a good idea to have only a single <h1> header on each page, with sub sections becoming your <h2> headers.

4. Visual Elements

Images on any web page improve user experience. Even search engines are beginning to recognize this, and reward strong use of visual elements like photography, infographics, charts, etc.



There are a few things to keep in mind when using images on your website:

• **Images are "heavy"** - Don't use too many images as this will slow load times. Users don't like waiting on pages to come up, therefore search engines don't like it either.

• **Watch resolutions** - You don't need 300 pixels per inch for web usage. Again, really large pictures will slow load times. 72 Pixels per inch is about all you need for web...more if you're planning to print.

• **Use alt text** - Add keywords to the alt text field for each image. This tells search engines what the image is about - web crawlers can't see the cute puppy dog. Also, if for some reason the image isn't rendering on someone's browser, they'll get a look at the alt text for a relevant description.

• **Use keywords in the image file name** - This can help images come up in online image searches. The file name often serves to build the image URL as well. Separate the words with a dash.

5. Meta Descriptions

This is a quick summary about each web page that will appear beneath the page title in search engine results.

While the meta description doesn't play a role in SEO, it does play a big part in compelling people to click on your site. As users glance over the 10+/- search results on the page, they'll skim over page titles and meta descriptions.

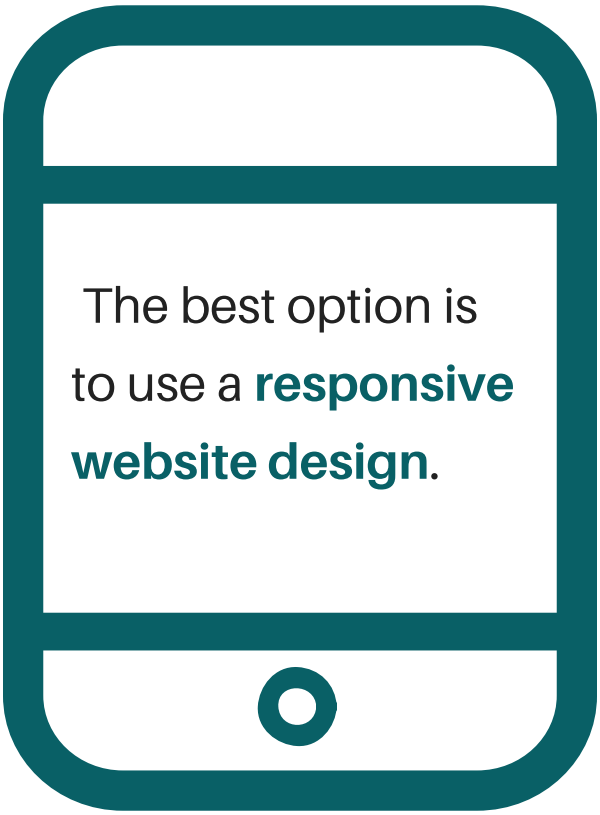
• Keep it **under 170 characters** to avoid getting cut off.

• Try to make your meta description **interesting** enough to attract someones interest.

• Make it **accurate and relevant** to what the page is actually about...no bait and switch tactics.

6. Optimize for Mobile

Depending on your industry and other things, roughly half of all website visits are accessed from a mobile environment...and this number is rising every day. Your website needs to be optimized for mobile viewing on small screen sizes.



You've got options like creating a separate mobile website or building an app.

Most modern platforms like Wordpress use responsive templates that take care of the heavy lifting for you. Responsive design means that your website uses the same code and URL across all devices, but the style and formatting changes based on the screen size. This is a matter of altering the **CSS (Cascading Style Sheets)** for use on desktop screens, tablets, laptops, phones, or even watches.

Search engines like mobile responsive websites because users like them...and they make things easier for web crawling and indexing. CSS enables menus to shift and elements to orient themselves differently based on the size of the user's screen.

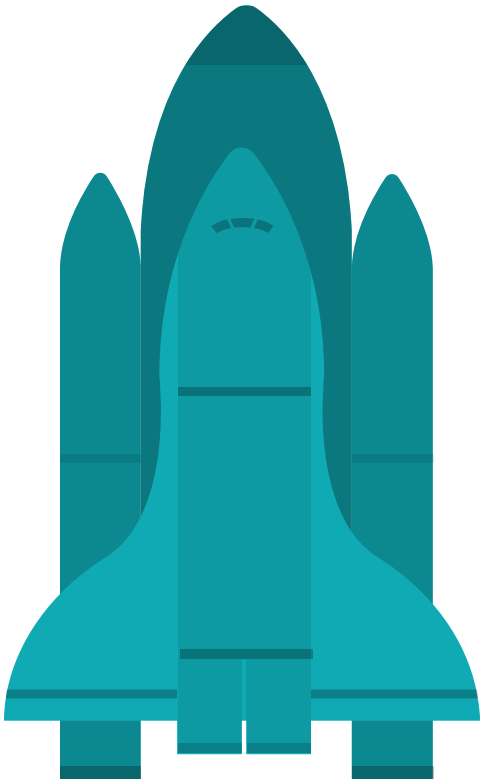
For example, mobile menus have larger buttons to accommodate finger clicking. Pages might convert to more scrolling rather than submenu drop-downs in a mobile environment as well. Laptops and tablets probably have some hybrid layouts between the two.

Creating Content

Here's the part that really separates the players from the pretenders.

Now that your website is optimized for search engine success, it's time to set up your content creation machine. Literally everything you see on the internet falls under the "content" category. Every bit of text, video, chart, social media post...everything. Without content, the web would be empty.

Think of your website as a rocket ship sitting on the launch pad. Content is your fuel. Use outstanding content to power your entire inbound marketing strategy. Beautifully crafted educational content, perfectly aligned with your target audience, will not only attract many more visitors to your website, but will **attract the RIGHT visitors**.



These visitors are interested in what you're talking about and are much more likely to convert into leads (and paying customers).

Additionally, more killer content is going to boost your website's SEO. Remember what we said before about off-page SEO...creating quality content is the best way to earn backlinks from other sites. Search engines love this stuff...it makes you **look smart and trustworthy ;)**

Blogging for Your Business

Blogs are great ways to publish new content on your website. Each time a new article is written and published, your blog adds a unique page to your site. Search engines love websites that are regularly contributing fresh content, rewarding them with higher rankings and more visitors.

Think of the websites you like to visit every day. Chances are, they are sites that constantly present new and interesting information.

As you're writing articles for your blog, take off your "business owner" hat and try to put yourself in the shoes of your target audience. Companies that do this the best will take time to create **Buyer Personas**, which are representations of each type of customer they are looking to target.

The goal of your blog is not to market your services, but to **provide valuable, non-promotional information to your audience**. Think of what problems people have that you might be able to solve. What are their interests? How are they currently doing things? Is there a better way you could make them aware of? This isn't a sales pitch...

you're just making people aware of possibly better ways of doing things. It literally should be free help.

Avoid industry jargon or fancy acronyms that nobody understands. Instead, **speak in layman's terms**, using words and phrases that your audience uses. You may need to simplify your language tremendously until your readers become educated on the subject.

What Do I Write About?

This one's pretty easy. Start with the 10 or 20 most common questions that you hear from new customers. Remember, we're focusing on the prospect's perspective, not trying to sell our stuff just yet.

Address common industry issues, the problems your potential customers are dealing with, trends in the marketplace, or case studies that your audience will find helpful or intriguing. Identify with their circumstances, recognizing that people in different job positions may be concerned about very different things.

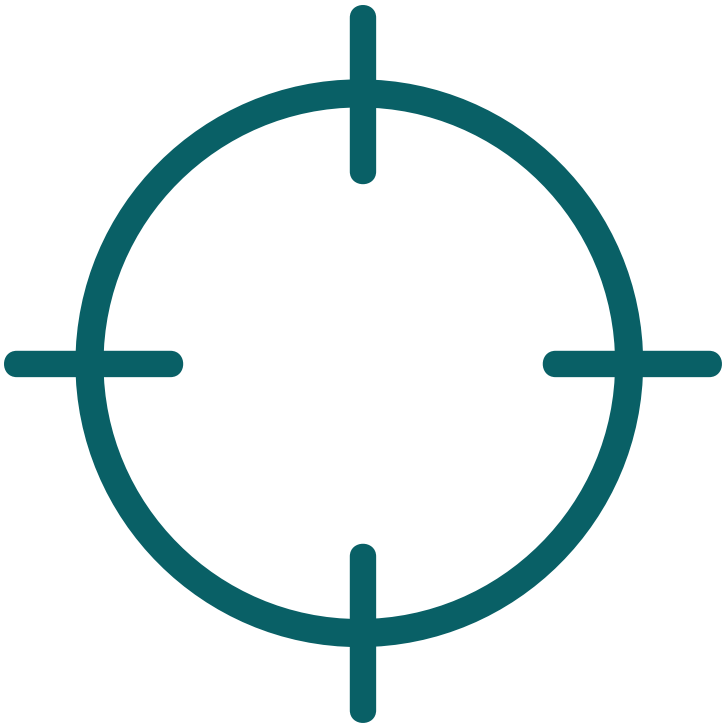
After you've gotten some articles under your belt, take a look at your blog analytics to get an idea which articles are your best performers. If several posts received more activity or inbound links, then try to expand on that subject matter. Maybe you can produce a video or interview a co-worker about their opinion on a matter.

It's pretty simple...do more of what's working, less of what isn't. Remember to always let your passion and your experience shine through in your messaging.

Key Components of a Great Blog Post

• **A great title** – This is the first thing everyone is going to see. It's got to be captivating and should clearly indicate what your going to be telling readers about. Try to be clear and look to entice readers to share the post with their networks.

• **Well written and property formatted text** – Your writing should be free of any grammatical mistakes, and it should be easy to read. Break things up into sections with headlines or bullet points. Ask someone else to proofread the post before you publish it to the world.



• **Add visuals and multimedia** – Relevant supporting materials like charts, slideshow presentations, infographics, and even videos make things more memorable and more fun to read. Pages full of text are not so interesting aesthetically, so break it up with some other stuff! Shoot for at least one good supporting image per blog post.

• **Effective internal and external links** – Sprinkle some internal and external links throughout the post. These should include mostly in-text links to relevant content using targeted anchor text. Don't use "click here" ever again.

• **Compelling Call-to-Action (CTA)** – Every blog post should have an enticing call-to-action in the article to help you generate some leads. We'll talk more about that next.

Generating Leads with Blogging

Business blogging is a great way to improve SEO and drive lots of traffic to your website. It's the perfect opportunity to target your ideal customers with laser focus by addressing the things they care about the most.

But what happens after they read your posts? What's the next step for them to make? You should be trying to convert these strangers into bona fide leads for your company. We do this through a call-to-action (CTA).

A good call-to-action will be a link, image or button that offers your readers access to more in-depth learning materials...something of **real value** to them. This could be an ebook download or access to a webinar. In exchange for access to this helpful information, they'll need to provide you with their email address...**this is when the conversion from stranger into lead happens**.

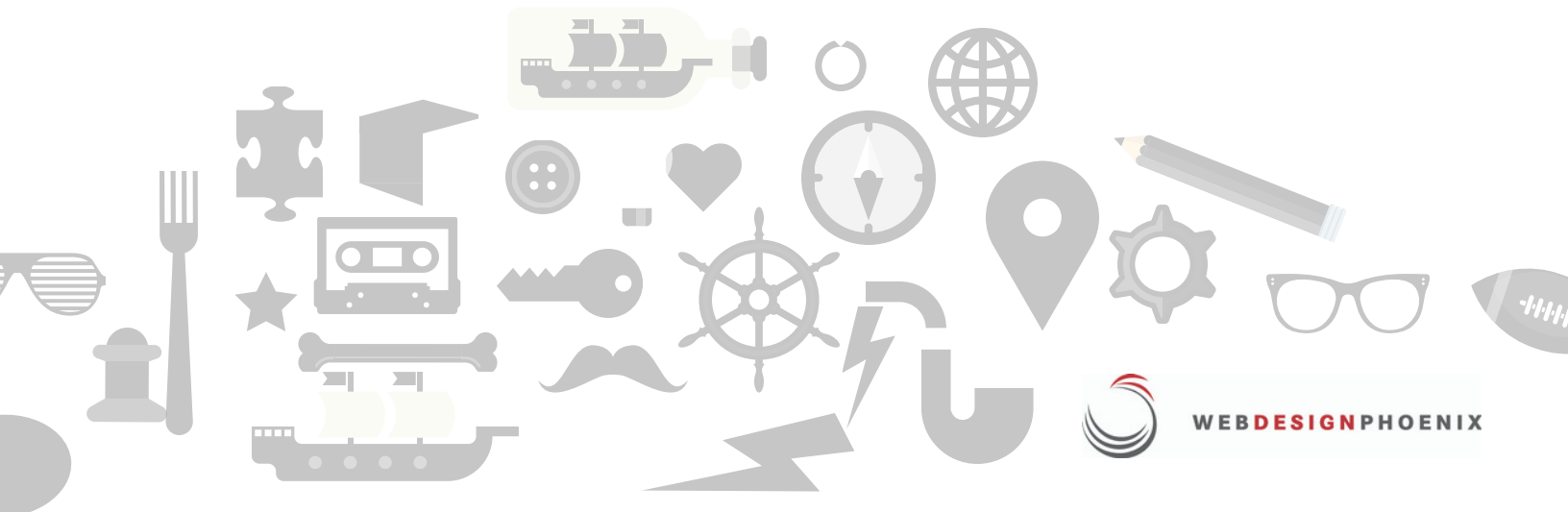
Make sure to include CTAs both in the sidebar of your blog as well as on every individual post you publish. You can also include links to these offers within the body of your blog posts and content pages.

Other Content for Generating Leads

While blogs are a great place to start, this isn't the only type of content you should be creating for your prospects. Successful internet marketing companies also produce longer-form content items like **whitepapers, ebooks, surveys**, and **research reports** that can be used for lead generation. You might also consider creating easily digestible visual media content like infographic presentations, how-to videos, webinars or slideshows.

These can be used as content "offers", with the power to achieve an information exchange: **a visitor fills out a lead capture form to access the resource**. Offers can be educational or entertaining. They should perhaps take a bit of time and effort to put together, and should be just what your visitors are looking for.

Over time, the offers you decide to produce should not be based on assumption or personal preference. These decisions should be based on actual data. Analytics reporting will guide you toward the type of content that your target audience prefers. If an ebook on air conditioning systems brought you more leads and new customers than a webinar on the same subject, you should focus on creating more text-based material.

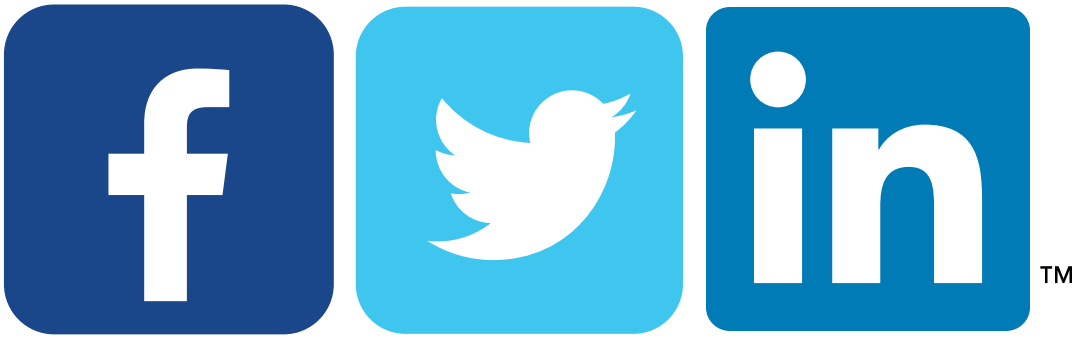


Amplifying with Social Media

Social media is a means of direct communication with your prospects, customers and employees. With literally billions of people using social media every day, it can be a key driver of brand visibility online.

There are a wide variety of social media networks to choose from. You need to figure out who your target audience is and where they spend their time. It doesn't make much sense to promote your company on Instagram if everyone is active on LinkedIn.

We're going to focus on the biggest 3 networks out there: Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. Just remember that when you get rolling with each of these platforms, you need to use the analytics systems that they each provide...and other tools like Hubspot's Social Inbox to monitor results and return on investment.



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Facebook

At last check, Facebook is the most popular social network in the world with over 1.3 billion users. It serves as a powerful platform for marketers, allowing you to build a community of advocates and promoters...an online version of word-of-mouth marketing.

To grow your Facebook follower base, set up a great company page. Your company page needs to be well designed and as discoverable as possible. Here are a few tips to make that happen:

• **Fill in your company information completely** - Include all contact information and a detailed description of what your business specializes in and offers. Use keywords as much as possible.

• **Include a link to your website** - no brainer here.

• **Design with company branding in mind** - It should be as consistent with your corporate identity as possible.

• **Invite your contacts to like your page** - Reach out to all your friends, family and existing customers as well. Have your colleagues and employees do the same.

• **Integrate with your website** - Facebook has a wealth of social plugins, like boxes, streaming displays and other utilities that can bring your Facebook feed to people without having to visit Facebook.com.

• **Post valuable content** - As always, quit talking about yourself and how great your company is. Your posts should be helpful, interesting, sharable and captivating for your target audience.

• **Advertise for new Facebook likes** - Use Facebooks handy advertising platform to promote your brand to the demographics of your target audience. The more likes and followers you have, the stronger amplification Facebook becomes.

Twitter

Twitter is the second most popular social network in the world overall. People share 140-character mini-messages, and users can follow one another or subscribe to updates.

Unless you're a household name or a famous celebrity, compiling a huge following isn't so easy. Here are a few ways to kick start your Twitter presence:

• **Create an optimized Twitter profile** - Let people know who you are and give a reason why you're worth following.

• **Tweet constantly** - The best tactic to grow your audience is to tweet all the time...around the clock. Tweet about content that you create, content created by others, and tweet about the same content multiple times!

• **Curate tons of content** - Use apps like Feedly, Alltop, Pocket, Goodreads, LinkedIn Pulse, and other hotlists on Pinterest or Google to discover great stuff that your audience might appreciate.

• **Add visuals** - Posts with visuals (photos, infographics, videos) generate 94% more views and activity than simple text-only posts. Take the time to put something together...it'll pay off in engagement, conversions, and clicks.

LinkedIn

LinkedIn is a great social platform for engaging with businesses, prospective customers and prospective employees. It's unique because it seems to blend business insights and information sharing with socialization and relationship building.

Just like with Twitter and Facebook, you want to build a company page that is well optimized, looks professional and is easy to find. You're looking to position yourself as a thought leader in your industry. Here's how to do it:

• **Create a great company description** - It should be complete and accurate, packed with keywords that your target audience might be looking for. You can also add specific keywords to the 'Specialties' section.

• **Make it visually appealing** - Keep it fresh with professional grade cover images that reflect the nature of your company.

• **Use Showcase Pages to highlight products and services** - Depending on your business consider creating unique presentations for each line of offerings.

• **Share company updates regularly** - Every interaction...likes, shares, comments increases your reach. In your posts, prompt your audience to share your stuff with their networks. The trick is writing great content that's actually worth sharing!

• **Compel interaction by asking questions** - Ask thoughtful things to your audience through surveys or raise topics that might invite some discussion.

The Art of Social Listening

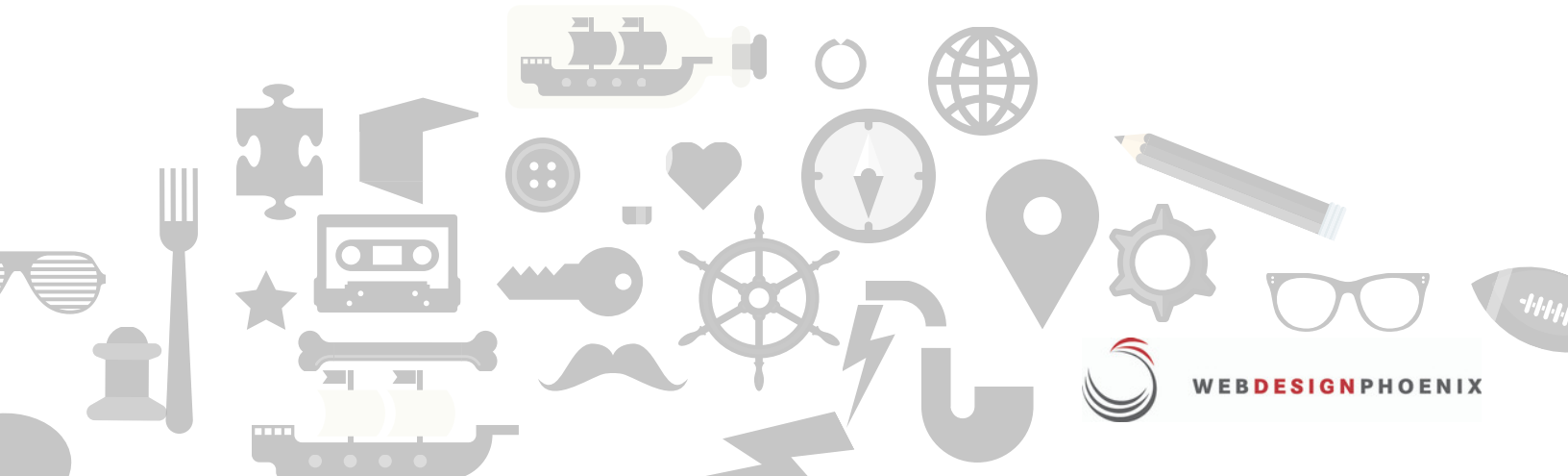
The best communicators do more listening than talking. While just listening won't bring customers in the door, it does help keep a pulse on what is happening around you. This is great practice when it comes to staying relevant with your customers and prospects.

Social media grants you the ability to listen to EVERYONE...here are a few tools to help you take full advantage:

• **Google alerts** – Set up a bunch of alerts for your company, industry, brand, product lines, individuals, etc. Alerts come to your email inbox hourly, daily, weekly based on configurations. It's a great way to track mentions of your brand or keep tabs on your competitors.

• **Social media management software** – There are many different tools that allow you to save keyword searches, furnished to you as a live stream of information. You won't miss a thing.

• **Hubspot Social Inbox** – In addition to all the social monitoring functionality, Hubspot's Social Inbox integrates with your contacts database and updates their profiles automatically as things happen. People and companies are even color coded based on engagement so that you can focus on the conversations that are most important for your business.



Converting Visitors into Leads

At this point, you've already optimized your website for search engine results, set up your blog and started posting insightful articles, and begun participating on the social media front. After several weeks, you may already be seeing growth in your web traffic numbers.

Here's a new problem for you. All this new traffic isn't generating any new business yet. People may be visiting your site, but they're leaving without a trace. They're not leading to sales or conversion into new customers.

This leads us to our next step: **Focus on conversion.**

Till now, we'll been focused on the very top of our marketing funnel – basically driving new visitors to your website. Now it's time to move down a notch and start converting these visitors into sales leads.

To do this, you'll need to create some compelling content to offer your visitors, build calls-to-action in different areas of your site to promote these offers, and launch landing pages associated with each offer.

Each landing page will include a form that visitors will need to fill out in exchange for access to your cool content. Last but not least, you'll need to track and measure performance of each phase of this process...improve and repeat.

Let's go over this "Conversion Process" in more detail.

Conversion Process Step 1: Crafting a Content Offer

Your content offers include ebooks, videos, webinars, tools, templates, and the like. They are the most important part of any inbound marketing campaign. Your offer is the initial interaction with your prospect and it will be what catches the attention of your website visitors. Your content offers need to be compelling enough to make them want to fill out a short form asking for their contact information.

Your offer should be crafted to target the type of leads that you're trying to attract. To best do this, you'll need to take the time to develop **buyer personas**. A buyer persona is a fictional representation of your ideal customer (although based on real data and experience).

For example, if you're a golf instructor, you might have a buyer persona named "Barry Beginner" who represents a novice player. Through some research, interviews and some surveys, you may find that Barry is in his early 30's, he makes about $50k/year, has never considered joining a country club, has played golf less than 10 times in his life, and prefers instructional videos over reading articles and books. With this information, you'll be well equipped to target Barry with your content offer.

Conversion Process Step 2: Creating Calls-to-Action (CTAs)

Once you've decided and built your offer, you'll need a few compelling calls-to-action (CTAs). A call-to-action is an enticing image, button, or link that grabs a visitor's attention and sends them to a landing page. They can be located everywhere...in blog posts, on website pages, in emails, advertisements, social media posts, and even within other content offers.

CTAs are the key trigger when it comes to lead generation...when visitors take some sort of action, they'll leave some handy digital footprints behind.

On the offer landing page, the visitor is given an opportunity to access the offer in exchange for entering their contact information, or other details. This is considered a conversion – when an unknown visitor turns into a lead with whom your sales team can follow up

Of course, **not all conversions are considered equal**. Over time, a system for scoring leads will serve you very well in inbound marketing.

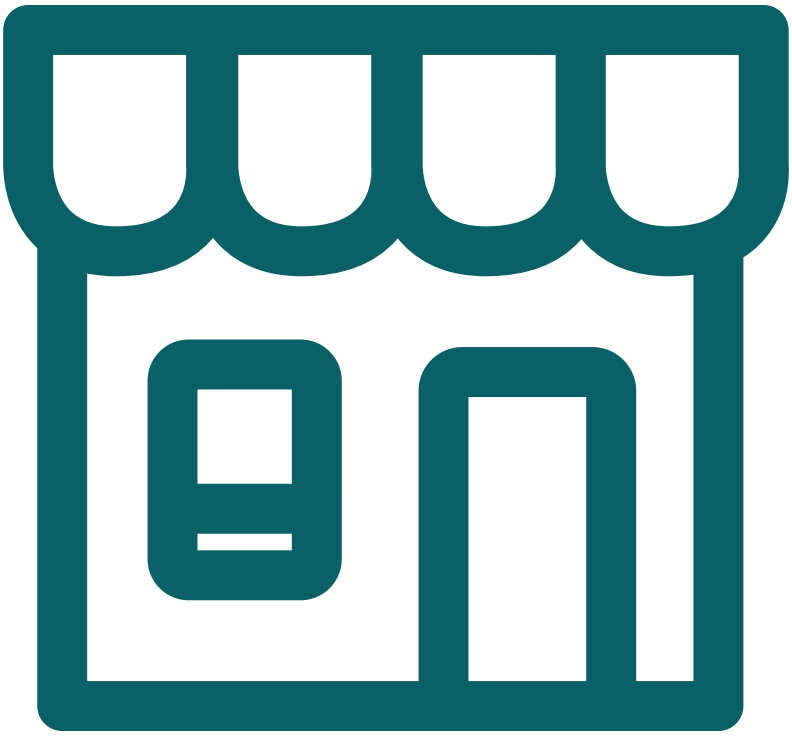
The better your call-to-action, the higher rate of conversion you'll see. This requires **A/B Testing** where you might run a performance test based on headlines, colors, styles or locations of the CTA. Over time, you can refine your presentation to maximize lead generation.

Conversion Process Step 3: Creating Landing Pages

As mentioned above, landing pages are where your website visitors arrive when they click on a call-to-action. This is where they have the opportunity to gain access to the offer in exchange for some contact information.

Test out different landing page designs to optimize for highest conversion rates. Also be mindful of the requested fields in your contact form. This information can be used by your sales team; however, asking for too much information may deter visitors from completing the form.

Once visitors complete the form, they should be forwarded to a **thank-you page** where they can access the offer.



Conversion Process Step 4: Analyze and Repeat – A/B Testing

The best inbound marketers are constantly evaluating and refining the strengths and weaknesses of their lead generation machine. You first have to know what's working well and what's not working at all...then you need to act on it. Over time, you'll end up with the perfect system. Sounds easy, right? Here's how.

First, there are some metrics that need your close attention – traffic counts, where the traffic is coming from, click through rates on your calls-to-action, conversion percentages of your landing pages, and the number of leads and customers generated.

Content offers are the focus of your campaigns. Calls-to-action and landing pages are the core elements of the total conversion process. So long as you've only set up one single pathway for visitors to follow, there is nothing to compare. You'll have no idea whether you're performing well or poorly in certain areas.

For best results, you need to test different concepts and **play them against each other**. Try different CTAs, landing pages, and content offers. Figure out what your audience is responding to the best. If a particular call-to-action has been on your home page for 2 months, try switching it up and seeing which one performs best.

If your landing pages aren't converting, try making a layout change and measure the results. Don't be afraid to try new variations...it's easy to switch back any time. It's all worth it when you find a magic recipe.

Nurturing Leads into Customers

Most visitors on your website are probably not ready to buy immediately. In fact, this number is estimated to be about 80%...of course depending on the industry and what they're shopping for. Lead nurturing is about developing and maintaining relationships with these prospects until they're ready to pull the trigger.

When it comes to inbound marketing, lead nurturing involves sending personalized, relevant, and valuable messages to your prospects in a timely manner. It's not about persistence or selling, but simply staying on their radar screen by offering helpful stuff. The goal is to get your leads to "raise their hand" and self-discover that they need your business.

A good lead nurturing system includes software that allows you to send and track an automated series of emails to your leads. You're looking to pre-qualify these leads, parsing out the ones who may be considered sales-ready.

By keeping track of email open rates, clicks, or website pages that they are revisiting, you'll have a good idea what sorts of services your leads are interested in. More experienced inbound marketers use this information to construct rather elaborate workflows based on lead behavior.

From the lead's perspective, they should be receiving helpful information about the subjects that they are interested in. Over time, personalized email responses based on their expressed interests demonstrates that your company is the perfect fit for them.

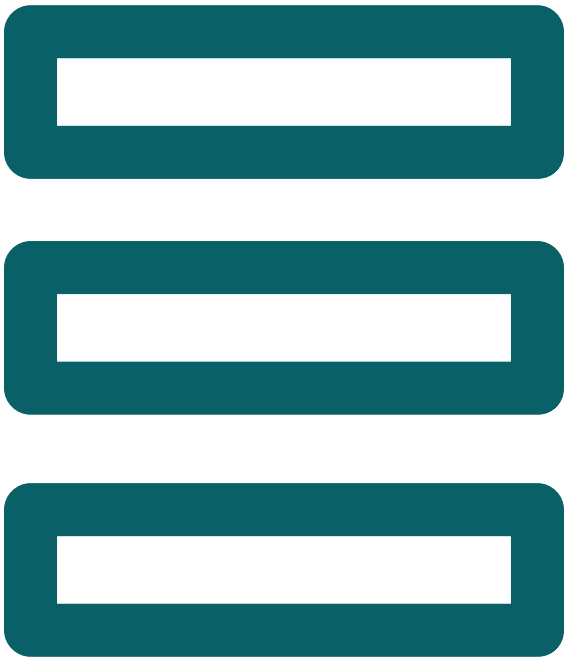
Look over your existing sales funnel. How long does it typically take for leads to become customers? Is the cycle different for different types of purchases? As you look into these sorts of details, you'll be able to develop an incredibly effective automated lead nurturing workflow.

Email Marketing Best Practices

Beyond nurturing your current roster of leads through personalized and timely email messages, you should be looking to leverage the power of email to grow your database, follow key metrics, and increase conversion rates. Here's how to do the email thing right:

List Building

Building your subscriber list means offering your readership opt-in opportunities. This is one of the biggest challenges, even for the most experienced internet marketers.



Make sure your lead forms allow visitors to enter their email address and to opt-in to receive your future messages. You'll need to give them a reason to opt-in. What's so great about your emails? What sort of interesting or unique information should they expect to receive from you? Be clear about the benefits in a way the audience is going to understand.

Only send messages to people who have explicitly indicated their interest. Seth Godin takes it to the extreme with a principle called "permission marketing". Ask yourself "would my recipient be upset if they didn't receive my message?" If yes, then go ahead and send away.

Sending Basics

• **Send emails that relate to the interests of your contacts** - What initially brought them to you? Have they indicated an interest in certain issues? How can you follow up on their interests to further the relationship?

• **Make it personal** - Use language that the audience uses, not industry jargon. Use a real email sender name and add a personal signature. Personalize the first line or two so the recipient remembers how and why they came to your website in the first place. You might start out with "you recently watched our video on..." or "thanks for downloading our ebook on SEO".

• **The message has to add value** - Don't send email for the sake of chatter. Sit on the recipient's side of the table and ask "what's in it for me?" Offer to solve a problem. Don't just promote your stuff. Make the value clear in the subject line to improve open rates.

• **Don't lean heavily on images** - Many email clients don't bother loading images, so your recipients may not ever see them. Keep images as supplementary content, and make sure you've got enough text to communicate value.

• **Stick to a regular schedule** - You should be pretty consistent in your communications to set up your readers' expectations. Whether you're writing daily, weekly or monthly, pick a schedule and go with it.

Converting...Then Reconverting

Every marketing message should have a goal. What are recipients supposed to do once they open your email? Are you suggesting they read a product announcement on your blog? Asking them to check out your latest offer that you think they'll find useful?

If you're looking to generate new leads, be sure to include a call-to-action that links to a landing page for some other conversion. This "re-converting" strategy can indicate that they are more sales-ready. Maybe they acted on a product-specific offer to qualify themselves for your sales team. If not, continue to nurture them to stay top of mind with broader offers.

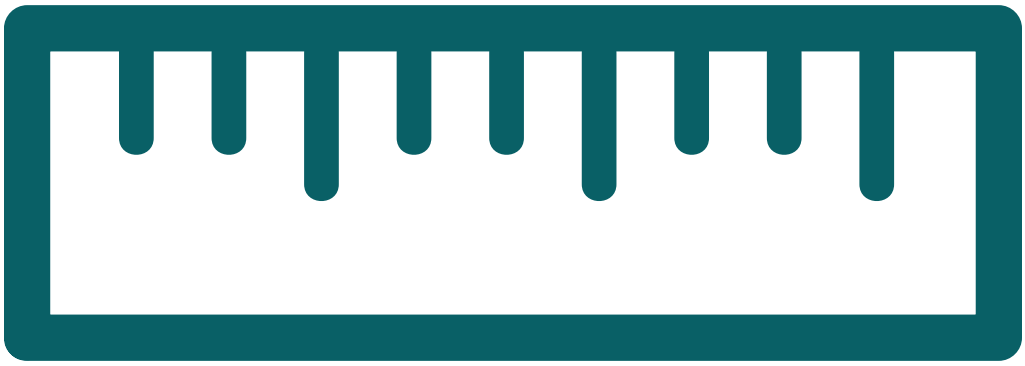
Remember that your landing pages are integrated with your email campaign. When recipients click on a call-to-action, the next page needs to be consistent in language and content. This is where the conversion takes place, so it should feel consistent and logical to your prospect as they progress through each step.

Measuring Email Performance

• **Click-through rate (CTR)** – How many people clicked on your suggested links? This is a measure of response and can give you a sense of how compelling your offer and email messages are. Test different offers, calls-to-action, subject lines, and timing to improve your email CTR.

• **Open rate** – This is not a very strong metric in general, but more of a measure of how compelling your subject line is. It is better to focus on the clicks that your emails receive.

• **Unsubscribe rate** – This is a measure of the number or percentage of recipients who opt out of your communications. This isn't a very reliable metric for measuring email performance either. Subscribers often just won't bother unsubscribing. Again, focus on your click through rates (CTR).



What to Measure

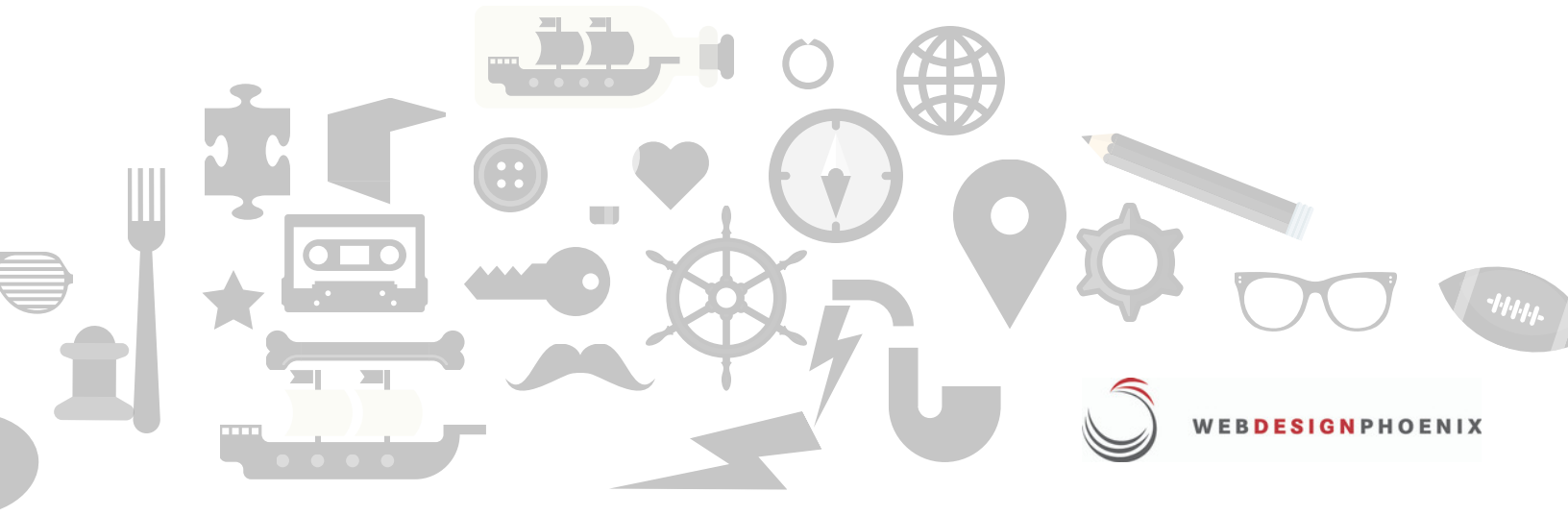
The best measure of an email's effectiveness is to track how many email clicks turned into conversions or reconversions on your landing pages. With high conversion rates, the content must have been compelling and the offer was well suited for your audience.

Conversion rates depend on a number of variables. Be sure to test each step of the process to find the weak links. Maybe the email language was off, or perhaps the call-to-action wasn't compelling enough, or the landing page itself wasn't consistent with the message. Test, test, test.

Going Beyond Email

In this section, we looked at how to use the principles of lead nurturing and email marketing to follow up and engage with your leads on an ongoing basis. Effective nurturing is relevant and personalized, ushering prospects down the sales funnel.

Nurturing your contacts isn't limited to email. You can always communicate with your leads through social media, an occasional phone call, or any other platforms that they use. Behavior-driven communications, both on and off your website, are triggered by your leads' entire history of interactions and interests.



Analyzing and Refining

Now we're at the bottom end of the marketing and sales funnel. It's time to review the performance of every stage of the buying process and your various marketing activities. You need to identify the winning strategies so that you can replicate. As for the under-performers, you'll need to drastically modify or cull the herd.

Let's review some metrics that will help you with this and we'll offer up some suggestions for refining your inbound marketing strategy.

Identify Opportunities

As you're reviewing your marketing activities, figure out what you want to improve. Do you need more people following your blog? Are you not converting enough visitors into bona fide leads? Are you losing these leads before they ever become customers? Find the weak links in the chain.

Set a Metric to Define Success

Follow the S.M.A.R.T. approach to metric goal setting: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Time Sensitive. For example: "Increase website leads by 15% in the next 30 days".

Refine Your Strategy

Analyze how your programs did. What seemed like a great idea initially may not have turned out that way. Conversely, that old article that you wrote 2 years ago may have been an unexpected hit. Do more of what works and less of what doesn't. Modify what isn't working to turn it around.

Metrics to Report On and Track

You'll need to keep a pulse on several important factors for your refinements to have a big impact. Let's go over what they are:

• **Marketing Grader** – A marketing grader report will reveal all the strengths and weaknesses across your entire marketing funnel. It will reveal information to guide you through the optimization process.

• **Website Traffic** – How many people are coming to your website? What channels drive the most visits? Use this knowledge to launch campaigns to increase your numbers.

• **New Visitors vs. Repeat Visitors** – Both are great. Lots of new visitors means that you're attracting new prospects to the website all the time and people are finding you. Good repeat numbers means you're giving people good reason to come back to the website. Strike a good balance here for successful inbound marketing.

• **Leads Generated** – What percentage of website visitors are converted into leads or potential customers? The number of leads in your pipeline should be constantly growing to ensure a steady revenue stream.

• **New Customers** – This is the ultimate goal of every campaign. You should be mapping the pathway to closed sales. How many sales were completed this month compared to last month? You need to have the ability to make this comparison...both for charting improvement and also to show your boss ;)

• **Customer Acquisition Cost** – How much financial and time investment is required for each new customer. Inbound marketing typically lowers this figure substantially. Measure it, compare it to months and years past, and demonstrate the value that your marketing efforts are bringing to the company.

• **Results by Channel** – What promotion channels serve you the best. Is it your blog's search engine ranking? Maybe the company LinkedIn page is hugely popular. Focus on long-term results rather than short-term spikes in traffic counts that might be related to specific announcements.

Steps for Improvement

• **Keywords** - Search for new keywords all the time. Try new keywords or variations of older successful keywords to help you get found. Every page on your website incorporates different keywords, so there are endless opportunities.

• **Search Engine Optimization** - Run an on-page SEO audit to make sure you've got all your SEO factors in place. A small change in headings, page names, meta descriptions and other elements can really help boost visits. Try testing out a new page name for one of your pages and see if you bring in more traffic.

• **Conversions** - Try new calls-to-action and conversion forms. Change color schemes, language, fonts, images, layouts, or locations. Emulate your successful pages, and play around with the lousy ones.

• **Content** - Figure out which content is bringing in the most business. Maybe whitepapers and ebooks are outperforming webinars and videos. What subject matter is creating the most interest or social shares? What are people interested in?

• **Promotion on Social Media** - Which channels generate the most site visits and leads? What are your most powerful ways of amplifying your messages? Social media channels like Facebook or Twitter might be underperforming, while LinkedIn may be the winner. Would it be worth a small pay per click advertising campaign to garner more Facebook likes and increase your audience?

• **Lead Nurturing & Email** - Take a good look at your email workflows and how successful your email marketing has become. Are you sending emails too frequently? What are you writing about? Is it personalized enough? Are there ways to improve your targeting, like asking leads to reconvert?

Always keep tracking, experimenting and refining.

Resources

Inbound marketing may seem really difficult and challenging, but it's manageable if you stick to addressing each tactic step by step. It won't take long before you start seeing results. We hope that this guide will serve you well as you try to improve your inbound marketing results and grow your business online.

Some Other Stuff We Think You'll Like:

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