

Have you ever been tasked with producing or updating your company’s marketing strategy? It’s easy to get overwhelmed with information and advice — should you focus on making splashy signage, talking to potential leads at an industry event, or developing an exclusively digital strategy?

Fortunately there are two universal marketing concepts that can help you limit your scope: inbound and outbound marketing. These are two of the most common overarching marketing strategies, and they each have distinct applications, benefits and challenges. In this article, we’ll explore an overview of inbound and outbound marketing, give examples of how to apply each strategy, and provide the pros and cons of each method.

Inbound vs Outbound Marketing

There are several main differences between inbound and outbound marketing. Outbound marketing involves proactively reaching out to consumers to get them interested in a product. By contrast, inbound marketing centers on creating and distributing content that draws people into your website.

Outbound marketing typically has a more aggressive, wide-sweeping approach, with the expectation that at least some people will convert. Inbound marketing is usually more subtle and focuses on convincing a particular group of individuals to make a purchase over time. Here are a few other differences at a glance:

Inbound Marketing	Outbound Marketing
Informative digital content targeted at specific audiences, written to help solve consumers’ problems	Non-digital content designed to capture any consumer’s attention and written to sell products
Content comes in interactive forms, such as social media posts, blogs, reports, webinars, etc.	Content is displayed in direct mail, magazine ads, billboards, on TV, etc. and is meant to be passive
Messaging is tailored to specific consumers	Messaging must stand out among millions of other ads consumers see each day
All-encompassing strategy across multiple channels	Linear strategy with limited channels
Measurable through digital marketing software	Difficult to measure attribution from physical advertising

Inbound Marketing

Inbound marketing is focused on attracting customers to your products and services. Your best prospects are searching for products online — up to [63% of consumers begin their shopping journey online](#). They begin by searching for products, services, or content to fulfill a need or solve a problem. As such, your content

should explain how your products or services will resolve their issues, answer key questions in their niche industry, or satisfy their needs.

There are many ways to do this, including blogs, video content, guidebooks, and more. Each of these content pieces can also serve as a way to differentiate your product from the competition. Embed product comparisons, amazing testimonials, competitive pricing, and outstanding reviews into your podcast, social media posts, or reports. Keep in mind that prospective customers should receive thoughtful content at various points throughout their buying journey that is varied in material but consistent in messaging.

Let's say a customer is looking for a new marketing software. First, they may type "best marketing tool" into a search engine to explore the landscape. The first organic result will be a blog outlining the top 10 marketing platforms in a clear, unbiased way. After reading the blog post, they might want to learn more about digital marketing.

Conveniently, the end of the blog has a link to encourage them to sign up for an upcoming webinar to learn more about a new digital marketing strategy. They click the link, then enter their name and email address to access the content. The site stores their contact information and tracks whether or not they attend the webinar.

Once they attend the webinar, they might wonder if any companies successfully implemented the strategy that was discussed. Right on cue, the vendor will send them a follow-up email containing case studies that show how one of their competitors effectively used digital marketing to achieve a huge ROI. This prompts them to request a demo with a sales representative. They go into the sales call already interested in (and educated on) what the software does, providing you with an easier sell.

The Benefits of Inbound Marketing

There are several benefits to inbound marketing that can help you determine if it's the right strategy for your company:

Inbound marketing is non-invasive — prospects can read your blog posts or attend a webinar on their own time.

Inbound marketing content is educational — it's specifically designed for each stage in the sales funnel.

Inbound marketing is quantifiable — you can tie each part of your strategy to a metric that gets monitored over time.

Your website and content are continuously being updated, so Inbound marketing continues drawing in qualified leads over time.

The Challenges of Inbound Marketing

Of course, inbound marketing isn't for every company. There are some drawbacks to focusing on digital content:

Inbound marketing requires continuous maintenance, to ensure that content always speaks to consumers' evolving wants and needs.

Inbound marketers spend a great deal of time and effort developing and testing out different content that will entice customers to convert.

Inbound marketing demands a holistic strategy, meaning you'll need to buy tools to help you implement integrated, cross-channel campaigns.

Outbound Marketing

Outbound marketing sends a message to a massive amount of people in the hopes of making a sale. This strategy is rooted in the thought that the larger the group you message to, the larger the return. Outbound marketing is often associated with traditional marketing, like direct mail, events, billboards, cold calling, newspapers, and radio. However, outbound marketing can also be applied to more modern technology, like pay-per-click advertising and spam emails.

Frequently, consumers are not even aware of or looking for the product that's being advertised. Prospects could be watching TV or perusing a website and be interrupted by an ad illustrating why they should buy a certain product.

For instance, let's say a customer is driving on the highway and sees a billboard for a furniture store in the area. They might briefly think that they really should invest in a new couch, but they keep that in the back of their mind. A few weeks later, as they watch the local news, they see a commercial for the same furniture store. Again, they think about buying a sofa, but forget after the news comes back on.

Three months later, they check their mailbox and find a discount coupon for the furniture store. As it happens, they just received a bonus at work. Finally, they decide to go ahead and buy that new couch. None of the ads referred to a sofa, and they weren't necessarily looking to buy a sofa right away. Nevertheless, ads kept popping up in their everyday life, so they ended up shifting their attention to a need that wasn't top of mind.

The Benefits of Outbound Marketing

Outbound marketing has a few perks that should not be overlooked:

- Outbound marketing promotes brand awareness, helping you reach people who haven't heard of your products or services before.

- Outbound marketing can yield immediate results — people interested in your products and services are likely to take action on your ads and make a purchase.

- Consumers are accustomed to outbound marketing — they know that there will be ads in the Sunday paper or on TV and may trust those ads [more than the ones presented to them on newer technology](#)

The Challenges of Outbound Marketing

Outbound marketing can be difficult to get right. Here are some disadvantages to going the outbound marketing route:

- It's difficult to make outbound marketing appealing and relevant to everyone, so outbound marketing is more generalized.

- It's easy for consumers to tune out outbound marketing — many people mute the TV during commercials or immediately throw out or recycle their junk mail.

- It's challenging to measure the effectiveness of some outbound marketing strategies like billboards.

- Outbound marketing is costly, traveling to trade shows, paying for banner ads, and purchasing billboard spaces add up.

Overall, outbound marketing is all about sending a message at scale, while inbound marketing has a very targeted approach. The likelihood that at least some people

will convert from your outbound marketing efforts is high, but it is often associated with a high acquisition cost. Rather than shouting your product's name from the rooftops and hoping that a few people respond, inbound marketing content can be finely tuned to appeal to your best-fit prospects.

Get started on your inbound or outbound marketing strategy

No matter your marketing strategy, you need a way to keep up with the constantly changing marketing landscape. [Marketo solutions](#) specialize in consumer marketing, email marketing, mobile marketing, revenue attribution, account-based marketing, lead management, and more. Marketo has helped hundreds of enterprise clients achieve their inbound and outbound marketing goals by suggesting new ways to engage with your customers at scale. Start unlocking the power of inbound and outbound marketing today, with a [free Marketo Engage product tour](#).