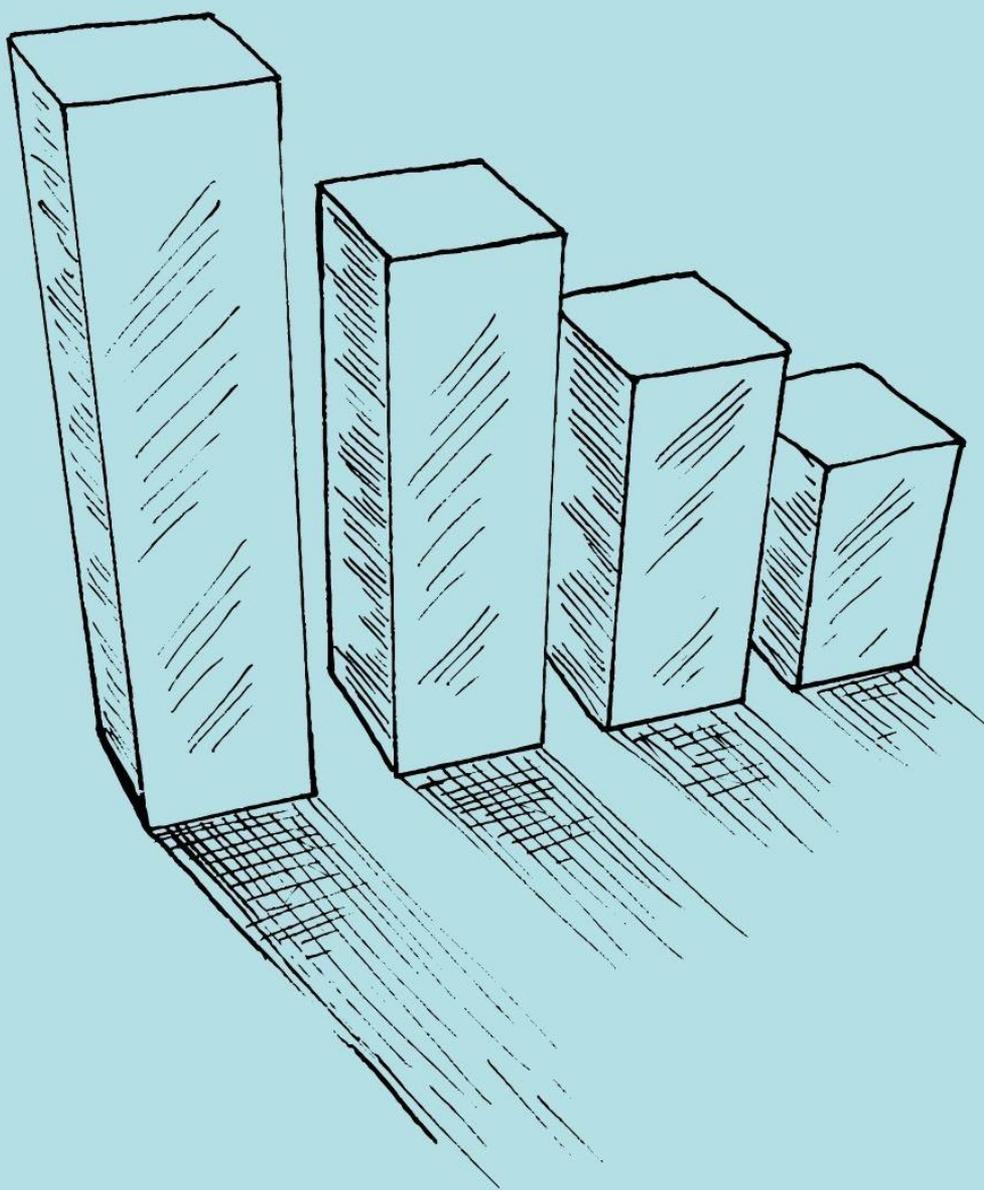


Why Your Marketing Is Not Working - And What To Try Instead



Contents

	Page
Audience and plan	1
The Funnel	1
Generating content to support the funnel	2
The problem with funnels	2
The truth about content	4
Awareness and brand	4
How to raise awareness	5
Your existing customers	9
Choices	10
Solutions	11
So what's next	14

So you and your team have followed the so-called best marketing practice, but it is not delivering the returns you expect. Let's summarise (in our humble opinion) why not:

- You failed to define your audience.
- You use sales funnels - Sales funnels don't work.
- You focus on organic marketing - SEO and social deliver diminishing returns.
- Your content targeting is all wrong.
- You fail to focus enough on brand building.

So let's look at each of those issues in more detail.

One important point to note. What follows applies to small to medium-sized businesses. The conclusions we reach often do not apply to larger businesses, especially those with a strong brand. Why will become clear.

Audience and Plan

You should have goals and objectives for your business. You should know who your target customer groups are and why. Marketing then is simply a way of delivering on your objectives.

What are your priorities and what will you sell to which group of customers? Once you have built a plan, you need to focus and remain consistent. Fail to do so and you will waste time and money. That is guaranteed.

The Funnel

The standard advice suggests B2B marketers should move a target audience through a funnel using specific marketing tactics at each stage. The funnel shape suggests prospects will drop out at each stage. So you start with many prospects at the **Awareness** stage to deliver a few customers at the **Action** stage.

The AIDA funnel dates back to the early 20th century. It suggests a prospect must first be **Aware** of your brand. They need to be aware in general terms of your name and what you do.

The theory continues marketing should then attempt to generate **Interest** in your solution by highlighting its benefits. Further marketing effort persuades a proportion of prospects that they want (**Desire**) the solution. The final challenge is to push the prospect over the line by persuading them they need to take **Action** (to buy).

This simplistic model has developed over the years. There are now many versions of the marketing funnel. One example expands AIDA to Awareness, Interest, Consideration, Intent, Evaluation and Purchase steps.

Generating Content To Support The Funnel

The standard model assumes the prospect will fulfil their information needs (inbound marketing rather than outbound). Therefore, the aim is to deliver the right content to the right place at the right time throughout the different stages of the prospect's journey (AIDA).

So, in theory, during the awareness stage, the prospect finds your carefully positioned content. That may be in the search results, in social channels, at an event or in print. They like what they see and go on to view more of your content.

You have now piqued the prospects interest and (ideally) you have captured their details (email). This enables you to deliver next stage content to them directly. Failing that (you hope) the prospect remembers the helpful information and returns to consume your next stage content.

The Problem With Funnels

There are many problems with marketing funnels, but the most obvious is:

- They are linear.
- They assume you can deliver content to the prospect.
- They assume the prospect remains engaged - Funnels leak.
- They are, by their very nature, simplifications.

In a B2B environment, when selling a (non commodity) product, the reality is several people can influence a purchasing decision. Do you need a funnel for each of them?

Let's use a simplistic example and assume you sell application-specific power supplies. You have a small standard product range but most of your products are custom.

In our example an engineer will specify the product, perhaps with the help of Q.A. The purchasing department will then get involved and with the help of engineering and Q.A decide on a supplier. They will negotiate prices and terms. In some cases, the decision will then be reviewed by system and project engineering, possibly also senior management.

In this example, the engineer is a close fit to the funnel model. They might research options, compare suppliers and consider price. But will they start their research cold, or will their initial search be influenced in some way? Will they find your content among the masses of content online and offline?

More likely, the first stage in the engineer's process will be to talk to their peers (internal recommendation) and this will influence their first step. If your business has a strong brand (more on this below) or the engineer has used your company before, again this will influence the search. The engineer will be some way through their research before they interact with your salespeople.

Q.A will have specific information requirements. This they may find online or offline, or more likely, they will engage with sales. The same applies to purchasing, once initial research is complete they will often engage directly. They engage someway through the funnel. Funnels are not linear and different prospects follow different paths.

The Truth About Content

Returning to our engineer, the standard inbound model assumes that once he sets off on his journey, he will find your business wherever he might look for information (online, social, or print). It assumes if he comes across (and likes) your content he will stick with you and read the next piece and the next.

Returning to our engineer, the standard inbound model assumes that once he sets off on his journey, he will find your business wherever he might look for information (online, social, or print). It assumes if he comes across (and likes) your content he will stick with you and read the next piece and the next.

All you can achieve is raise awareness that you are a potential supplier and build your brand. You could capture details in return for detailed information like a guide.

The information you need to provide to each of your prospects is different, where they will look for that information is different.

In our humble opinion, inbound marketing content should be secondary. You should focus on content to build awareness and brand. You need content to support your existing customers. Your salespeople need content to support their interactions with customers and prospects. You need content to reinforce your credibility.

Awareness and Brand

Think of awareness as surrounding your prospects and existing customers. It is always there, always on. How much do your potential future customers take in from the constant awareness noise? That is difficult to quantify (or prove).

The standard inbound marketing funnel models tend to assume some trigger has already occurred. It is not about awareness (A - in AIDA) it is about research. The prospect is already on their path. They are in the learner phase.

In simple terms, your brand is your name, what you do, what you stand for - it's a promise. Ideally, it is an emotional connection.

Your prospects are exposed to many promotional channels. Once triggered to take action they could drag a brand interaction, some connection with a brand, from the depths of their memory and use that as a starting point for their search.

Before starting their research engineers are aware of you (hopefully) and your competitors. This influences their search. Generally, they are not starting with a blank piece of paper.

They might come to your site directly. If they do, you need to deliver the information they need. But they have come to you with purpose, they have not stumbled across your content. What drove them to your site. Recommendation, brand or something else?

As suggested above, other members of the decision-making team are more passive. They come to you (or your website) because of some interaction within their business.

If they know what they need, they are more likely to dive into the Ads. They want to do something. The search phrases are action oriented. If you are using your brand in your Ads (often a good idea), this could lead them to click on your Ad ahead of the rest.

Remember that people refer because they know (and have a positive impression of) a brand. They are aware of that brand and will refer even if they have no direct experience of the business or service. Awareness then is critical to securing interactions with your salespeople.

How To Raise Awareness

Without appropriate targeting and planning, it is possible to spend large amounts on awareness (brand) campaigns for little return. If you are only interested in prospects within a defined local area, the process is much simpler (and cheaper) but let's first take the worst case and assume you operate nationally.

How are you going to make your prospect aware first that you exist and second of the services you offer (and your USP)? You have online and offline options. First online

Website:

Whatever you do, you will need a website for brand building and/or lead generation. In theory, your chosen promotional tactics should drive prospects to the website to learn more and convert.

The standard process suggests the key is to deliver the information that matches the stage of the prospect in the buying process - see inbound discussion above. That content (the model suggests) should be on your website.

Consumers need to build a level of trust before they will buy. The website should deliver the information they need to build that trust. This all makes sense, but the big question is, how do you drive traffic to the website?

Driving Traffic

Ideally, prospects will come to your site, because they know you or your brand. Failing that, you need to drive prospects to your website.

If we take the traffic driving elements from Google analytics there is organic, direct, social, referral and paid. Organic is driven by SEO (see below), paid is traffic from Google paid channels, social is traffic from Twitter, Facebook etc. Referral is traffic from other sites. Direct is more complex and we will ignore it for simplicity.

Where do you focus your efforts? It depends on the audience, where they jump into the process and what triggers them to start the search. It also depends on how much you are prepared to pay. Remember producing content also has a cost.

Search Engine Optimisation

Returning to the standard funnel model, it assumes you can get your content in front of prospects when they use a search engine. That is one huge assumption. We will be controversial here and suggest that if you are a medium-sized business starting out with an SEO exercise to drive significant organic traffic to your website on a national scale you will find it extremely difficult.

Why? Because as a business new to SEO you have no authority (as perceived by the search engines). If you hope to rank for common terms or phrases you may never build sufficient authority to achieve your goal. Suffice to say for a business with a national customer base SEO is a complex, expensive, long term operation.

If your SEO process is a success, the standard inbound model makes a further significant assumption. It assumes once the prospect has engaged with your content he/she will come back for more. Of course, you can collect details or re-target via ads (more on that below) but that involves more effort and cost.

Content is more than text. If your product is visual in some way or lends itself to video, you have more chances to show in the SERPS. The competition can be a little lower than text, but in many markets, it remains intense.

Social Media

Of course, prospects use more than search engines to search online. They will often also be active on one or more social channels. Building a presence on social media channels has branding potential (discussed below) but let's focus on content distribution for now.

Again we assume you are a medium-sized business with low to medium brand recognition and follower counts in the hundreds to low thousands. If you are hoping for significant traffic to your website from content posting on organic social media, you will (we suggest) be disappointed.

Why, because organic (that is unpaid) reach on all the major social channels is low. You then have to estimate how many of those will take some action (read the content). Of course, there are many things you can try to increase reach, shares and engagement. The point is increasing engagement by a few percent will make little difference.

Referral Traffic

A long-running debate is content on owned sites vs content on others sites. Let's ignore guest blogging as a link building tactic (more of that in Appendix B) and only consider delivering content to those in learner mode.

The standard advice is to concentrate on placing any content you produce on your site. The theory is this will help your SEO efforts and increase organic traffic. It also builds the brand.

Great in theory, but if we assume our chances of our SEO efforts succeeding are low then what is the point of loading your site with more and more content. Instead, you can piggyback on another websites strong position in the search results pages.

Yes, it dilutes the brand and to gain publication on a site your prospects value is tough. Referral traffic might be low, but the effort spent here could deliver more content to more prospects than publishing on your site.

Remember, we are discussing small to medium-sized businesses here without an existing strong brand and profile in search. The marketing process for those with an existing strong brand/profile is often the opposite of what we discuss here.

Online Ads

Google Adwords, and display Ads (and the Bing equivalent) and social media Ads are the most common but there are others (including Reddit and Quora). The objective should be to choose the Ad network with the most relevant audience. Then choose the appropriate Ad type.

Using Ads to boost awareness is expensive. It is important to evaluate if that spend can be justified. That said, display type Ads can be used to effectively spread your (brand type) content on others sites. The sort of sites your target audience might visit.

Offline

There are many offline promotional techniques including print advertising, PR, direct mail and events/exhibitions. Most need some form of content. Many focus on building the brand, with some designed to generate leads.

To reach a mass audience using offline marketing techniques can be expensive. Lower cost was one of the main drivers of online marketing when the internet became a thing. That said, for smaller, clearly defined audiences, offline marketing still works well.

Slowly the wheel is turning full circle. A move from (perceived) expensive offline to (perceived) cheaper online and now back to (perceived) cheaper and more effective offline marketing.

Your Existing Customers

Your existing customers are your best salesmen. The key is to build credibility but remember there is much you can't control. Review sites are everywhere and you should have a presence.

You know who your existing customers are. They should be happy for you to communicate with them. You should know what information they need and if you don't, you can ask and receive reasonable feedback.

Often it is best to focus your content efforts on existing customers rather than prospects. You know what information they need and that content has a significantly higher chance of engagement than prospect focussed content.

If you can build a community among your existing customer base. If you can make them feel valued and important, you have a much better chance of referrals and internal recommendations.

The biggest problem with content is how to deliver it to your desired audience. That should not be an issue with existing customers.

Choices

You have to decide if putting the resources into lots of learner content is the right thing to do. Remember, you will also have to put in significant effort (SEO) to ensure it is found. Is that effort worth it, given that whoever reads that content is a long way from the sale.

You have to decide if putting the resources into lots of learner content is the right thing to do. Remember, you will also have to put in significant effort (SEO) to ensure it is found. Is that effort worth it, given that whoever reads that content is a long way from the sale?

You need to decide if it is worth paying to deliver specific content to an active (has intent) prospect. What is your client lifetime value and hence what can you afford?

You need to decide what builds your brand. As discussed above building a brand has advantages, but you need to decide what you can afford as audiences are often pre-trigger and wastage is high. There are many promotional tools that are not content-based.

Finally, you need to decide on how you allocate your efforts between new and existing customers. You need to support your sales teams with the content they need before (we suggest) you even consider inbound content. Reviews, testimonials and other information generated by customers support the entire marketing process.

Solutions

Before working on brand and promotion, you need to understand:

- Your offer and what distinguishes that offer from the competition.
- Your audience - Their needs and how to reach them.
- Your position in the marketplace.
- Your value chain - What protects you from the competition.

Fail to do so and you WILL waste a large proportion (if not all) of your marketing budget.

Branding

Given the difficulties with building a brand outlined above, we suggest offline should be the focus. Options include:

- Press activity (PR).
- Sponsorships.
- Events and exhibitions.
- Poster and display.
- Location specific.

If budget allows, digital PR (online) can be powerful for some businesses with the right type of product/service. Organic social media is a branding rather than a lead generation tool.

If budget allows, digital PR (online) can be powerful for some businesses with the right type of product/service. Organic social media is a branding rather than a lead generation tool.

Content and SEO

Content for the website should focus on building the brand and focus on the needs of existing customers. It should also satisfy the demands of those who come to the website directly. A priority should also be content that supports the work of sales, business development or partners.

Content to support and prospect based inbound marketing process should (we suggest) be a lower priority. The focus of any prospect focussed content should be to collect the prospect details for remarketing.

Try to optimise customer and sales support content for SEO but don't expend too much effort. It will be necessary to pay to distribute content aimed at collecting customer details.

If you concentrate on content on other sites this will compromise your ability to build audiences to re-target, but we suggest this is a price worth paying.

Social Media

Post the content described above directly (or repurposed) on relevant social channels but accept this is a brand-building exercise, that's all. Support this with curated relevant content from others. Company pages on social channels should support the brand.

Existing Customers - Building A Community

Try to build a community of existing customers. The promotional effort will be mostly offline (events/networking and their promotion), but online marketing can help. If relevant, this activity will often require an Ad budget.

Online Ads

Allocate Ad spend appropriately. It is important to know a customer's lifetime value and set budgets accordingly. In general the Ad budget for collecting prospect details should be much lower than that allocated to bringing in those at buyer stage.

Email and Nurture

The primary purpose of early-stage content (we suggest) should be to secure prospect details and build an audience. Then remarket to that audience. Distribution (as discussed above) will often be via paid ads, but micro pages and specific SEO activity is an option.

If you can generate useful information that prospects will download in return for their email address, you can stay in touch. Over time you can build trust and hopefully convert. That's the theory, but in practice to make this work you need to build a large list (high hundreds minimum) and that takes time.

You need to think through where your prospect is in the buying cycle and how you will progress them from one stage to the next. You need a process. You cannot spam and whatever you deliver via email must be both useful and relevant.

One process can be to progress the prospect to the point they are happy to sign up for a seminar or webinar.

Direct Mail

Gathering prospects online details is not the only option. If it is possible to deliver a simple message then direct mail can work well, but mailer design and targeting are crucial. Success depends on the type of business, the quality of the list and execution. A multi-step process rather than a one-off hit tends to work best.

So What's Next

First, we suggest you go back and re-evaluate your objectives and your target audience. They may be correct, but it is certainly worth checking, or all that follows is likely to fail.

Next, as a thought experiment, take some time to think through how you would market your business if the internet did not exist.

Finally, forget funnels, and try to rebuild your online and offline marketing plan step by step. Keep what has worked well in the past and build around it.

Need help? We will work with you to build a plan, then (if required) help you deliver on that plan. To discuss how we may be able to help call 07747 042320 or email phil@eighteagle.co.uk

About the author:

Phil Smith is an experienced B2B marketer and digital marketer. Learn more at <http://eagleteagle.co.uk> or call 07747 042320

Copyright © 2021 HundredOctopus Ltd All rights reserved. No part of this guide may be produced in any form or by any electrical or mechanical means including information storage and retrieval systems – except in the case of brief quotations in articles or on social media – without the express permission in writing from the author.

The content of this guide is for informational purposes only and is subject to change without notice.

Great efforts have been made to ensure the accuracy, timeliness, and completeness of the contents of this guide. However, the advice and strategies contained herein may not be suitable for every situation. Neither the author nor HundredOctopus Ltd will be liable for any losses or damages (including but not limited to commercial, special, incidental, consequential damages) arising from the use of the contents in this guide.

EightEagle is a trading style of HundredOctopus Ltd.