THE TEN COMMANDMENTS OF INBOUND MARKETING: HOW TO ATTRACT THE LEADS YOU WANT

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THE 10 COMMANDMENTS OF INBOUND MARKETING:
HOW TO ATTRACT THE LEADS YOU WANT

With many things in life, there is a right way and a wrong way to do something. Many companies looking to implement a lead generation or inbound marketing program want to know the best way to reach their goal.

This is precisely the reason we created *The 10 Commandments of Inbound Marketing.* A commandment in its basic definition is a written rule that you must follow. With inbound marketing and lead generation, there is a lot to do when first getting started. In addition, there are a few things that will contribute to the success or failure of your lead generation program.

The 10 Commandments of Inbound Marketing are:

I. THOU SHALT CONDUCT RESEARCH FIRST. TWEET THIS

II. THOU SHALT INVOLVE SALES AT ALL STAGES. TWEET THIS

III. THOU SHALT HAVE AN OPTIMIZED WEBSITE. TWEET THIS

IV. THOU SHALT HAVE AN AGREED-UPON PLAN FOR FOLLOW-UP. TWEET THIS

V. THOU SHALT DESIGNATE SOMEONE TO BE RESPONSIBLE. TWEET THIS

VI. THOU SHALT CONSISTENTLY PUBLISH CONTENT ON YOUR BLOG. TWEET THIS

VII. THOU SHALT HAVE PREMIUM CONTENT TO GENERATE LEADS. TWEET THIS

VIII. THOU SHALT ATTEND TO SEO. TWEET THIS

IX. THOU SHALT WRITE FOR HUMANS. TWEET THIS

X. THOU SHALT USE A CRM. TWEET THIS

I. THOU SHALT CONDUCT RESEARCH FIRST.

This commandment is the first on the list of The 10 Commandments of Inbound Marketing because companies that skip this step generally do not yield good results. Unless you know who you are writing for and what their interests are, you can't author content that appeals to your audience. This might seem like a logical step when beginning your inbound marketing program, but time and time again we see companies develop content without a solid understanding of who they are trying to reach and what content is of interest to their Target Persona. One example came from a client who created content for a "Mommy blog," with recipes and recommendations for kid-friendly food places. However, the content was coming from a radio station that needed to generate advertising leads, and so this "Mommy blog" content missed their intended target for small and mid-size companies that needed to advertise.

CONDUCTING TARGET PERSONA RESEARCH

Prior to the Inbound Marketing Planning and Strategy Day that we conduct with each of our new clients, we begin to develop a detailed Target Persona for them. This becomes the basis for our conversations surrounding the type of content we should create to generate leads. In addition, we suggest how that content will be distributed.

To create these Target Personas, we ask the internal management team and those who interface with the customers or clients a series of custom questions that provide a detailed look at how the client is portrayed and what the client's challenges are. This provides us with our client's view of their Target Persona, which we then cross-validate with a separate survey that is sent to their customers. For this second survey, we send a similar survey to a list of clients. This allows us to learn more about each client's unique challenges and how the clients make purchase decisions.

I.

To create these Target Personas, we ask the internal management team and those who interface with the customers or clients a series of custom questions that provide a detailed look at how the client is portrayed and what the client's challenges are. This provides us with our client's view of their Target Persona, which we then cross-validate with a separate survey that is sent to their customers. For this second survey, we send a similar survey to a list of clients. This allows us to learn more about each client's unique challenges and how the clients make purchase decisions.

RESULTS

After we process the results of the two surveys, we put together an analysis that helps us determine the following:

- Top challenges of the client
- The most common questions asked in the buying process
- Biggest objections during the sales process
- If the clients are on social media and, if so, which networks
- What the buying process looks like
- How long the buying process takes
- The names of the decision makers and their titles
- And lots more!

By understanding what challenges a prospect faces, you can refine and develop content that's both of interest to them and that actually generates leads. We often go back to the Target Personas and ask ourselves if the Target Persona would be interested in specific content. Once we understand the challenges and questions that prospects have, we can formulate a large list of topics. From there, we can address issues that impact the client and create premium content such as white papers and guides.

I.

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II. THOU SHALT INVOLVE SALES AT ALL STAGES.

We have all heard the metaphors about Sales and Marketing "being from different planets" or like "cats and dogs" because they can't get along. Some have tried to express this distaste between Sales and Marketing as a full-blown war. I think a lot of this is sensationalized to get people to read targeted books and articles, but one this is for sure: companies that have more closely aligned sales and marketing teams tend to perform better. This is why we encourage early involvement and involvement throughout the process from the sales team when implementing an inbound marketing program.

THE PERILS OF NOT GETTING SALES INVOLVED EARLY ON

Since Inbound Marketing's main purpose is to generate leads and close more sales, any effort is doomed to fail if Sales is left in the dark until the strategy is fully developed and implemented.

After all, it's the sales team that will need to understand how to follow up on leads that are generated from white papers and form fills. Sales staff must understand that the inbound sales process differs from a traditional outbound sales approach. In addition, key sales leaders who enter into the discussion early can help shape and develop the plan and feel accountable and vested in the outcome. Without buy-in from the senior sales team, your chances of success rapidly decrease.

Another issue that can be discussed early on between Sales and Marketing is the development of goals and acceptable lead counts. This includes defining what a good lead looks like, what's deemed a Marketing Qualified Lead (MQL) and Sales Qualified Lead (SQL), and the roles that each of the respective departments should play in managing the process.

Without this early communication, you have Marketing working hard to develop leads that may or may not be qualified and Sales unsure of how to qualify or follow up the leads. This creates a scenario in which Marketing feels as though they are doing what they are supposed to and Sales feels as though Marketing is setting them up for failure with poor quality or a lack of leads.

II.

A PLAN TO KEEP SALES AND MARKETING ENGAGED

As with any sound strategy, it's not as simple as "set it and go forward" without periodically reviewing progress and course correcting. At LeadG2, we recommend that Sales and Marketing meet at least quarterly, but preferably monthly, to discuss the quality of leads and the sales pipeline. By conducting a monthly meeting with the key leaders in each department, you can make sure that Marketing is bringing in enough quality leads and producing enough content. You can also review if Sales is doing a good job of following up and closing sales. This will also help to fine-tune any challenges that either department has along the way.

At LeadG2 and many other companies, this process and plan for Sales and Marketing to communicate results is called a Service Level Agreement (SLA). The SLA is a written document that explains in detail the responsibilities for each organization involved in the Inbound Marketing program as well as the program's goals.

You are not guaranteed success if your organization follows Inbound Marketing Commandment #2. However, you are in a much better place than those companies who still believe that Sales and Marketing should function entirely as separate organizations.

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III. THOU SHALT HAVE AN OPTIMIZED WEBSITE.

Since it's 2016, I am going to take a GIANT leap of faith and assume that your company has a "modern" website that's been updated in the past few years and includes more than just pictures and descriptions of your products and services. If so, that's a great start. An even better next step is to add a blog and make sure that you have plenty calls-to-action that help generate leads and transform visitors into customers.

Assuming you already have a website that has a blog and you are getting a few leads from it, the next thing to do is to ensure that your website is either mobile optimized or responsive.

The reason why companies need to have a mobile-friendly site is that last year, Google made an announcement that its latest update to its search algorithm will favor sites that are mobile optimized. This means that sites that are not optimized for mobile access will miss out on lots of potential traffic and possibly lose that traffic to a competitor's mobile optimized site.

If you want to to know how mobile friendly your website is, use the Google Developers Mobile-Friendly Test.

MOBILE OPTIMIZED VS. RESPONSIVE WEBSITE

It's time to get slightly technical for a few minutes because there is a difference between mobile optimized and a responsive website, and it's important to know the difference.

A mobile optimized site will detect what type of mobile device being used to access it and reconfigure the content to look great on any mobile browser or tablet. Typically, a mobile optimized site has its own navigation that's easier to navigate than your normal desktop website; this may include larger buttons and calls-to-action, or images that render faster or not at all to increase speed. The mobile optimized site tends to arrange the content so that it is organized intuitively for the user. The website is basically optimized to look good on any mobile device. One possible downside to a mobile optimized site is that when creating a site that's optimized for mobile, the site sometimes exists on a separate subdomain such as m.yourdomain.com or mobile.yourdomain.com.

III.

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A responsive website, on the other hand, is a site that looks great on mobile as well as desktop. While browsing, you are able to size different content areas and the site's configurations change based on the way you move your device. For instance, if you have an iPad and you are viewing the responsive site, it will allow you to zoom and make the site larger or smaller and allow you to zoom in and zoom out by using your fingers. A responsive site can also incorporate different menus and navigation based on the size of the screen / device that you are on, which gives it functionality similar to a mobile optimized site.

Website developers typically recommend responsive websites over mobile optimized sites. The reason for this is because responsive sites offer a much better user experience and offer developers more creative options when developing a site.

Whether your site is mobile optimized or responsive, it's important that your website provides the best user experience and appears as high as it can in search rankings.

IV. THOU SHALT HAVE AN AGREED-UPON PLAN FOR FOLLOW-UP.

Each year, companies spend hours developing revenue targets and putting together sales and marketing strategies that detail how these revenue targets are going to be achieved. I can't think of any CEO or CFO that doesn't request a written plan for achieving revenue growth each year, and some even require three- and five-year plans. If a written sales and marketing strategy for your company is essential, why do so few companies have a written agreement that determines how leads will be followed up on?

OUT OF SIGHT, OUT OF MIND

As someone who has worked as a media salesperson and as head of the Marketing Department, I understand the challenges that both departments face. Marketing focuses on generating a high number of quality leads through various methods, while Sales focuses on getting more appointments and moving leads through the sales funnel. However, neither focuses on providing feedback to the other department about how things are going and, in the case of Sales, what processes are being used to follow up on leads.

This is why a written plan for following up on leads is crucial. Without a written plan that identifies what actions are taken after a lead is generated, Marketing doesn't know for sure if the leads are being followed up on and Sales doesn't have a way to provide feedback about the quality of the leads or the progress of the leads through the sales funnel. This lack of understanding and visibility regarding how leads are followed up on is partially why a real or perceived war can take place between Sales and Marketing departments.

SLA AND CRMS PROVIDE TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The written lead follow-up strategy that we have discussed is usually included in the Service Level Agreement (SLA) that's developed between Sales and Marketing. It identifies the definition of leads, describes how the sales funnel works, and outlines the interactions between the two departments. The SLA's chief goal is to get everyone on the same page by providing a written and agreed-upon plan that explains what happens through the sales process and all the way to a sale.

IV.

While SLAs are great for providing a written process, it's critical that some type of CRM (Customer Relationship Management) tool is used as well. This will help both Sales and Marketing with measuring the success of the SLA and overall lead generation efforts. For years, many small to mid-sized companies relied on spreadsheets and cobbled-together systems to track leads and the sales pipeline.

For most companies, the use of spreadsheets as a CRM has disappeared as the prevalence of a company wide CRM has become more mainstream. This increased use of CRMs has partially arisen from the reduced cost of having a CRM. Many companies are even giving away unlimited use of their CRMs or have created Freemium offerings, which works well for most companies.

To have successful and smoothly-operating Sales and Marketing teams that works together, a written lead follow-up strategy isn't just nice to have… it's a necessity.

IV.

V. THOU SHALT DESIGNATE SOMEONE TO BE RESPONSIBLE.

Every successful inbound marketing program has someone accountable for and in charge of the inbound marketing program. Even though many companies use inbound marketing agencies like LeadG2, there still needs to be someone that's leading the charge and keeping the internal team moving in the right direction and at the right pace.

RESPONSIBLE NOT JUST IN TITLE, BUT IN ACTIONS

During the Inbound Marketing and Planning Day that we conduct with every new client, we emphasize the need to identify someone who will be responsible for a company's inbound marketing program. Having a designated person responsible means that the company will have someone who is ultimately accountable and able to make important decisions.

When you are planning your inbound marketing program, there is a lot of information to take in and lots to accomplish in those first few months. Not only do you need to determine who is going to be involved in your inbound marketing program and what resources will be needed, but you also have to determine who your Target Persona is, develop a content strategy, create a blog, and find a way to get your content in front of prospects. It's a lot to grasp, even before you push the Publish button on your first blog post.

It's at this point in the process that you need to have someone firmly in charge of guiding these efforts, making critical decisions, and putting everything together. There are best practices to follow, but every company is different and not all advice should be followed to the T, especially if you are not confident about what you should do in the first place.

DEFINING ROLES

At this early stage in the planning process, having a few roles identified will make this planning process go more smoothly and create some clear lines of responsibility.

The first role that needs to be defined is **the Blog Manager.**

V.

The Blog Manager's role includes:

- Maintaining and updating your content calendar
- Coordinating blog writers
- Editing, optimizing, and publishing blog posts
- Creating landing pages and conversion forms
- Creating calls-to-action
- Drafting lead nurturing emails and setting up workflows
- Managing keywords and SEO efforts
- Setting up lead scoring and distributing leads to sales for follow-up
- Setting up and managing social media outlets and messaging as part of promoting your blog
- Building relationships with community contacts and organizations to help cross-promote your blog

Every successful inbound marketing effort needs a champion or executive who is ultimately responsible and accountable for results. This is a description of that key role, **the Blog Publisher.**

The Blog Publisher's role includes:

- Ensuring that inbound marketing activities, blog posts, premium content, and the overall spirit of the blog is consistent with the blog pledge
- Confirming that leads are being followed up on in a timely manner by facilitating ongoing communication between Sales and Marketing
- Cultivating strategy and the direction of inbound efforts
- Giving the final word on creative decisions, blog post topics, and other issues that may come up. For example, if there's a controversial blog post written or one not exactly in line with the blog pledge, the Blog Publisher would decide whether to publish it or not
- Building relationships with community contacts and organizations to help cross-promote your blog
- Responsibility for the overall success of the inbound marketing efforts

Questions you may ask to make sure that the roles and responsibilities of the Blog Manager and Blog Writers are being carried out successfully:

- Are blog writers hitting deadlines?
- Do you need to solicit more writers?
- Is your team adhering to the blog pledge and style guide?

The commandment, **Thou shalt have someone responsible** for your inbound marketing program, doesn't guarantee your success, but your chances of success are much higher than if you don't have anyone on your team responsible for the results of your inbound marketing program.

V.

VI. THOU SHALT CONSISTENTLY PUBLISH CONTENT ON YOUR BLOG.

As an Inbound Marketing and Sales Consultant, I have seen dozens of inbound marketing programs over the years and can easily point to the #1 reason why companies fail at inbound marketing and lead generation: they are not publishing enough content on a consistent basis. It's true. The basic premise of inbound marketing is that by creating compelling content and offers that resonate with your Target Persona, you can attract visitors via search and social media to your website and convert them to leads. The key here is publishing content frequently and consistently enough so that you can create a large-enough library of great content to direct visitors to and have enough content on social media and indexed by Google to create new visits to your website.

In the grand scheme of things, the biggest benefit that companies engaging in inbound marketing see is an increase in traffic to their websites. This increase in traffic is typically derived from an increase in organic (search) traffic since there is more publishing content to be found on Google and shared via social media when publishing content more frequently. Having a new blog post every few days that gets indexed by Google or shared across your social media platforms is like pouring gas on a fire. Each new blog post or page added to your website gives your website more credence with Google and brings in more visitors.

THREE WAYS TO PUBLISH MORE CONTENT TO YOUR BLOG

1. Write a blog post about an article of interest to your Target Persona instead of posting the article to directly to social media. Then, share your blog on social media.

2. Come up with a series of blog posts (such as Ten Ways to XYZ); then, write a post on each "way" over several months.

3. Hire freelance writers to write filler content. Many blog posts don't need to be written by someone with intimate knowledge of your industry.

You may think that the most important thing to do to increase sales is "ABC" (Always Be Closing), but the real key for inbound marketing programs is "ABP" (Always Be Publishing). Without new content on your blog and something to share on social media or email out to your blog subscribers, your website traffic and leads will dry up quickly.

VI.

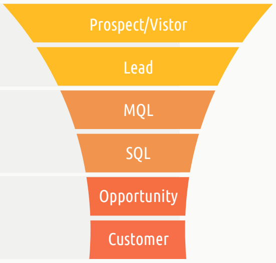
VII. THOU SHALT HAVE PREMIUM CONTENT TO GENERATE LEADS.

If your goal with inbound marketing is to generate leads and increase your company's revenue, you need lead generation materials. When visitors come to your website, it's important that you have some type of offer for them to convert on in order for you to create leads. If you don't have any content for your visitors to convert on, your website acts purely as a brochure and doesn't do too much for your company's bottom line. Regardless of whether it's a Top-of-the-Funnel Offer (blog post subscription, a guide) or a Bottom-of-the-Funnel Offer (demo or contact us page), the key is that you have something that your visitors can convert on.

Top of the funnel
Marketing's Responsibility

Middle of the funnel
Shared Marketing and Sales Responsibility

Bottom of the funnel
Sales responsibility



WHAT ARE LEAD GENERATION MATERIALS?

Lead generation materials are anything that you can put on a landing page and have someone fill out a form to receive the information. Some of the easiest pieces of lead generation materials to create are checklists, eBooks, and newsletter signups.

The Most Common Lead Generation Materials include:

- Case studies
- Press releases
- eBooks
- Webinars
- Podcasts
- Videos
- Contact pages
- Tutorials
- Free demos
- Free trials
- Training materials
- Newsletter signup

If your goal is to generate leads for your business, you must have premium content on your website.

VIII. THOU SHALT ATTEND TO SEO.

Social media, social media, social media… it sometimes seems like most companies are focused on social media nowadays. However, for most B2B websites, the majority of website traffic comes from Organic traffic and not social media. This is why we have our Eighth Commandment: **Thou shalt not ignore SEO / Organic search.** This is your website's lifeblood.

WHAT IS SEO?

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is a methodology of strategies, techniques, and tactics used to increase the amount of visitors to a website by obtaining a high-ranking placement in the search results page of a search engine (SERP) such as Google, Bing, Yahoo, and other search engines. When 60% of all organic clicks go to the organic top three search results, you must focus on improving your search results. (Business2Community). As a matter of fact, businesses with websites of 401-1000 pages get 6 times more leads than those with 51-100 pages. (HubSpot Lead Generation Lessons from 4,000 Businesses, 2011.)

A few ways to optimize your website for SEO include: make sure you include keyword-rich content on your website; increase the number of keyword-optimized landing pages on your site; use keywords in titles and in meta descriptions; and include keywords in the body of your content.

Don't forget: any money that you can save by not having to pay for keywords on Google Adwords is money that you can either allocate to other marketing or simply let fall to the bottom line.

VIII.

IX. THOU SHALT WRITE FOR HUMANS.

Have you ever read a blog post that repeated a keyword over and over and didn't make much sense? Yeah, me too. It kind of made me throw up in my mouth a little bit. That's what happens when a company decides they want to "focus on a keyword" instead of creating easy-to-read content. The is why the Ninth Commandment of Inbound Marketing is so important… **Thou shalt not publish content for the sake of Google. Write for humans.**

Writing content that is solely focused on trying to increase your search rankings can work, but you have to be smart about how you do it. What you don't want to do is to jam your keywords into the titles of blog posts or into the body of your content in an awkward way. Having well-written blog posts that include keywords but don't overuse specific keywords is what you should try to accomplish with your blog. At LeadG2 we like to call this, "Writing for humans, not Google." When you write specifically for Google and repeat keywords, it doesn't make for compelling reading and won't get much interest from your Target Persona.

The saying "garbage in, garbage out" applies to content creation and inbound marketing. If you are creating content that is overly stuffed with keywords and not of interest to your audience, you also won't generate any leads. The result? The crappy content that you create won't translate into the flood of leads you were expecting, and everyone will be disappointed.

If you really want to connect with your Target Persona, write for humans and not Google!

IX.

X. THOU SHALT USE A CRM.

If you want to be successful with inbound marketing, the first step is to generate leads. As we looked at earlier with previous Inbound Marketing Commandments, it's critical to create lead generation materials and consistently publish content. After you begin to generate leads, you need to ensure that the leads are being followed up on and monitor the progress of these leads through the sales funnel. Without the use of a Customer Relationships Management (CRM) tool, you can't adequately follow up and keep track of these leads.

LEAD FOLLOW-UP AND PIPELINES

If you are serious about your inbound marketing efforts, the use of a CRM is mandatory. No, you can't keep track of your leads via a spreadsheet or some offline method. You have to have a CRM that's updated regularly and serves as the master record for everything that's taking place with your inbound efforts.

There are two main benefits of using a CRM. First, they are able to track the progress of leads through the funnel, which creates visibility. Second, they can develop pipelines that help with business forecasting. Without the use of a CRM to track how your leads are progressing through the sales pipeline, you can only guess how well your inbound marketing program functions.

Even though it's listed at #10, this might be one of the most important inbound marketing commandments. You must use a CRM!

While these commandments won't get you condemned for eternity if you break them, they will serve as a solid foundation that will ensure your inbound marketing is set for success. Once you have these elements in place, you can continue to build on them to provide more and more value for your prospects and, as a result, convert more of them to customers.

X.

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If you are starting an inbound marketing program and would like to learn more about how we help companies achieve their inbound marketing goals, or would like customized feedback on your current inbound marketing efforts, then schedule a consultation with us today!

CLICK HERE