



## Integrate Inbound Marketing Strategies Into Your Plan

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Marketing tactics have evolved drastically over the past 10 years and will continue to evolve at a rapid pace. For years now, traditional outbound methods such as trade shows, print ads, direct mail, and cold calling have not produced the same results. It's become increasingly difficult for A/E/C marketers to break through the noise and generate leads.

Google, Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn have transformed customers into savvy researchers. According to the Social Buying Study conducted by the International Data Corporation, 75 percent of business-to-business buyers use social networks to research products. That's a staggering number that can't be ignored.

However, many A/E/C firms are risk-averse, and leadership is hesitant to make investments in new methods of lead generation. Many think the solution is to double-down on current strategies or hire additional salespeople. Unfortunately, these methods magnify, rather than solve, the issue.

To break through the noise and generate qualified leads, you must integrate inbound marketing strategies such as social media, search engine optimization (SEO), paid search, and content creation into your existing marketing plan.

Convincing a risk-averse leadership team to shift investment dollars and commit 12-plus months to test new strategies is easier said than done. Here's a five-step

process A/E/C marketers can follow to integrate inbound marketing strategies into their existing plans.

### 1. Start Small

Luckily, a number of inbound marketing tactics can be implemented with a small budget of \$10,000. If your firm is unwilling to allocate new funds, shift some of your existing funds. Conduct a strategic return on investment (ROI) analysis on your tradeshow, events, and sponsorships from the previous year. If you can't prove a solid ROI, shift those funds for one year.

### 2. Find Your Champions

First, find a consultant or digital marketing agency willing to start small and help you get some quick wins. Working with



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a professional will help you maximize your investment dollars and expedite the learning process. Next, identify one or two salespeople at your firm who embrace technology and are hungry for new business. Enlist them to serve as your beta group. They will help you develop the strategy, create content, follow up with leads, and ensure the new strategies not only work, but are embraced by the entire sales team.

### 3. Focus on Quick Wins

If results don't come fast, your champions will lose momentum and your leadership team may demand a premature shift in the plan. To avoid this fate, focus on quick wins. Find your highest converting offers with the shortest sales cycle.

### 4. Leverage Existing Resources

Creating content consumes the largest chunk of an inbound marketing budget. To save precious budget dollars, brainstorm the existing content assets you own. This can include white papers, case studies, and PowerPoint presentations. Transform what already exists into a compelling offer that provides your ideal customer with actionable advice. For example, instead of a typical case study on XYZ Company, offer a free download to "learn how to lower construction costs 10 percent without sacrificing quality."

### 5. Track Results and Tell the Story

Once your strategy has been implemented, track everything—every click, lead, phone call, and meeting. Create

a regular cadence to share the results with your leadership and sales teams, and go beyond just sharing facts and figures. Tell the story of each win, big or small. Tell the intangible details that connect emotionally, and use the facts and figures as supporting evidence. What's the potential lifetime value of that customer? Is this someone the sales team hasn't been able to get a meeting with in years? Is this an existing contact who didn't realize your firm provided this service?

Telling the story, instead of just sharing facts, will inspire your leadership team to enthusiastically increase your budget and beg you to scale up your efforts. When this happens, walk through the five steps again, this time expanding on each one as investment dollars allow. ■