



Working the Web

Ellie Becker and Bernadette Nelson | October 2011

Inbound Marketing 2.0: Addressing the Purchaser Power Shift

The early years of Inbound Marketing have focused on 'getting found' online to build website traffic for lead generation. In effect, inbound marketing tactics and automation tools have been about stretching the top of the sales funnel.

The rapidly evolving industry is now shifting emphasis to the middle of the sales funnel (known as MOFU). New and existing players are developing improved strategies and technologies for nurturing leads through the buying cycle – with the ultimate goal of converting them to sales.

These were key topics at the Inbound Marketing Summit 2011, held recently in Boston. The event attracted more than 1000 inbound marketers from around the world to hear from IM leaders, to discuss where we're headed in the near and longer term, and to demo new software products.

Sales & Marketing are Shifting Places

In his address to the group, HubSpot CEO and co-founder Brian Halligan – also co-author of the book Inbound Marketing – pointed to the fundamental power shift in the purchasing process that is driving today's new online marketing approaches. In the past, the sales function held the power, i.e. control of product information and the buying process.

Not today. Power has now shifted to the purchaser, who can go online and find in-depth information about products/services and competitive offerings. This is why it has become critical to success that companies attract and engage with potential customers as early as possible in the buying cycle and build trusted relationships during the process.

According to Halligan, this new paradigm also necessitates a shift in the relationship of sales and marketing. Traditional sales forces have been large compared with smaller marketing departments. Using today's online tools, marketing has taken responsibility for lead generation, qualifying and nurturing – formerly sales functions.

The new process requires significant levels of activity related to creating and delivering content useful to prospects at each step of the buying cycle – activities more in line with marketing than hard sales. It's helpful information that builds the customer relationship.

Although sales teams may shrink, the good news is that leads coming through the new process are more likely to convert to sales. This should reduce the long-standing complaint of sales reps that marketing turns over too many 'bad leads'.

New MOFU Software Tools

Once leads have been generated and qualified, today's automated online marketing systems are built to integrate with CRM – customer relationship management – software. Inbound marketing platforms like HubSpot, Pardot and Net-Results can communicate with proprietary CRM systems like Salesforce and open source software like SugarCRM. Systems are available for companies of all sizes and budget levels.

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“In the past, inbound leads flooded in by email and had to be entered into CRM systems by hand – or die in our inboxes,” said Sonja Fridell, Director of Marketing and Business Development for BrainSell Technologies a business consultancy in Topfield, Mass., a reseller of inbound marketing software, including SugarCRM. “Today, leads can flow directly from inbound marketing software into a CRM system for tracking, follow-up and analysis. This represents a major advance in efficiency and productivity.”

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