

THE DIGITAL MARKETING GAME PLAN FOR MSPS AND VARS



6 Key Components of a Solid Marketing Strategy for the IT Channel



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Why Use Digital Marketing for the IT Channel

There's a change underway in marketing strategy and it's been driven by a shift in the behavior of business-to-business (B2B) buyers over the last decade. More buyers are researching their options first and engaging with the brands that present the best option for helping them reach their goals.

The IT channel continues to evolve, and MSPs and VARs looking to capitalize on all it has to offer would do well to embrace digital transformation. You know it's what you should do, but when it comes down to it, marketing to reach your ideal customers can be a vast and complicated endeavor.

We've all seen organizations that didn't quite get it right and they end up abandoning their efforts mid-stream. That's no place to be for a progressive company with aspirations to dominate an industry.

The key here is to take a measured, intentional approach to marketing one's business online. Digital marketing streamlines the process that brings prospects to you. It strives to be customer focused, to answer the prospect's questions, offer solutions and ultimately convert them into paying customers. You'll notice this contrasts with traditional marketing which is usually a one-to-many broadcast. Examples include TV, billboards, radio, or print advertisements.

Creating Your Digital Marketing Strategy

Truly effective marketing for MSPs and VARs is grounded creating a simple and effective strategy with clear goals and objectives that lead to the ultimate prize, sustainable/long-term business growth and differentiation in the marketplace.

One challenge standing in the way of developing this strategy may be the current marketing materials from your vendors. You may or may not have co-branded assets. Whatever form the content takes - data sheets, brochures, press releases, or even emails - it's probably identical to what every other channel partner relies on, too.

Instead of depending on pre-made materials from vendors, consider using a customized digital marketing strategy that allows you to go beyond standard marketing assets. This gives you the chance to develop something truly unique that speaks profoundly to the challenges your ideal customer faces - and the challenge only you can solve.

Keep in mind if you're looking to implement a solution unique to your firm developing a solid marketing strategy takes time and preparation.

We've developed a six-step process specifically designed for your unique needs:

Step 1: Create a Game Plan

Step 2: Develop Digital Assets

Step 3: Drive Traffic and Awareness

Step 4: Convert Traffic into Leads

Step 5: Turn Leads Into Customers

Step 6: Inspire Customers to be Promoters

It's also important to note that analysis is an inherent part of inbound marketing. It should be an integral part of your plan in every step of the process. The sections that follow detail each step and provide checklists to keep you on track.





STEP 1: CREATE A GAME PLAN



Create a Game Plan

This first step is where you'll do your preparation and planning. It involves assessing where you are in terms of available content, existing information, research needed, and goals.

- ☐ **Review existing digital assets.**
Knowing what you already have available makes the rest of the planning easier. This includes materials from vendors as well as internally generated content.
- ☐ **Create or review buyer personas.**
You'll need accurate, and up-to-date information on your ideal prospects, and what they're looking for during their buying process, often referred to as a "buyer's journey." This includes everything from the moment they begin researching for a solution to when they make their final decision.
- ☐ **Map the buyer's journey.**
Your ideal customer will move through three stages (awareness, consideration, decision) as the person moves from a prospect to a customer. How you roll out your strategy and 'speak' to your ideal customer changes based on each stage of the buyer's journey. You'll keep an eye out of triggers or actions the prospect takes that moves the person from the awareness stage to consideration and eventually to making the decision to work with your firm.
- ☐ **Clearly define your goals.**
Each goal should have a metric that you can use to evaluate if your strategy is working. Examples are a 30% increase in website traffic or a 10% boost in desktop-as-a-service sales.



Remember to pay attention to any specific industries or niche markets you serve. Understanding your existing assets and buyer personas for each is important when beginning step two.

STEP 2: DEVELOP DIGITAL ASSETS



Develop Digital Assets

The next step in our process is creating the assets you need for a successful inbound strategy. You may have some of the most important ones already, such as your website. But as you move forward in this process you'll probably find you need to update or revise it. When you develop marketing assets such as your website and blog, you're making it easier for your personas (ideal customers) to find you online through popular online tools such as Google.

As you develop and distribute these assets, keep in mind it's important to have a way to measure how each of them is performing with your audience. There are many options for integrating analytics with your digital assets. Google Analytics, Hubspot, and Salesforce are names you'll recognize, but there are many CRM, email, and website tools available. Some offer full integration and workflow automation; others focus on one piece of your strategy, such as email marketing.

Here's a list of the key assets you need to have:

- ☐ **Website** - Include pages for your products, services, vendor certifications, bios, and partners.
- ☐ **Blog** - The articles here should be easy to read, SEO-optimized and updated frequently.
- ☐ **Email** - To communicate with leads and customers.
- ☐ **Sales Collateral** - These include case studies, white papers, brochures, FAQ sheets.
- ☐ **Video Content** - You can create videos for customer testimonials, case studies, reviews and even product demonstrations.
- ☐ **Social Media** - To help raise awareness and drive traffic to your other assets.



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STEP 3: DRIVE TRAFFIC AND AWARENESS



Drive Traffic and Awareness

How can all the assets listed above help you generate traffic and raise awareness of your company? The answer is you need to piece them all together into what we call campaigns. Each campaign will have a specific offer you want to promote to your prospects.

For example, your ideal buyer may be looking for assistance in moving their applications to the cloud, implementing a disaster recovery program, or doing an in-house infrastructure upgrade. You'll want to come up with information that addresses their most pressing concerns.

To get started, follow these steps for developing a successful, attention-grabbing campaign:

- ☐ **Pick your buyer persona.** ([Click here to create your own buyer persona.](#))
Decide on which audience you are trying to reach for your campaigns. Understand their needs, the size of their business, and their responsibilities within the business.
- ☐ **Determine your goals.**
What is the measurable outcome of this campaign? How will you know you succeeded? This usually includes an increase in leads through email list growth.
- ☐ **Create the offer.**
The offer can be a variety of things. You'll want to base what the offer is on how your audience consumes information. Make it highly valuable and easy to access. Often an offer will be a white paper, an ebook, a video, an interactive quote calculator, or a high-value infographic that solves a nagging problem your audience faces on a regular basis.
- ☐ **Create the post-lead content.**
After someone accepts your offer, you'll want to send them more content to move them from being a prospect and into a customer. This usually is an email or sequence of emails.

- ☐ **Start the campaign.**
You can begin with a blog post or an email to existing contacts. The blog should be related in content to the offer and end with the offer's call to action (examples include: download an ebook, sign up for a webinar, sign up for a free trial).
- ☐ **Promote the campaign.**
Share your blog posts, and your offer, on your social media channels. You can also send emails to existing contacts. This will get the campaign started faster than SEO results only.
- ☐ **Analyze your results.**
Evaluate how your campaign performs and adjust if necessary.

You can use this checklist for each offer you create. And remember, your buyer personas will want different offers depending on where they are in the decision-making process.

STEP 4: CONVERT TRAFFIC INTO LEADS



Convert Traffic into Leads

A successful campaign is about more than traffic. You want prospects to take that next step and provide their information in exchange for your offer. If you're offering the standard vendor assets - even co-branded - you could struggle with this step of the digital marketing process. But if you followed steps two and three, your assets will be different. You'll be offering solutions to your prospect's problems, and that type of content has high value for the right prospects.

A percentage of the visitors to your site will provide their contact info to get the valuable, problem-solving information you're offering in your campaign. As your results come in, be sure to ask:

- What percentage of the traffic converted to leads?
- Is that conversion rate good?
- Where in the process did you lose traffic?
- Are the leads you have any good?

Analytics and data are the keys to measuring your performance and evaluate them against benchmarks. To define benchmarks, you can use published industry data such as surveys of IT companies or your data from previous campaigns.

Using benchmarks lets you know when you're doing well, and when you need to make adjustments.

The last question listed above, about how good your leads are, can't be answered by benchmarks. To understand this, you'll need to look at your leads and assess each one individually. This process is called lead scoring.

Here's a checklist of the steps involved:

- ☐ Review the information the lead filled into the form on the landing page.
- ☐ Compare that to existing data on other who became customers. For example, look at company size, title, location and the industry of your current customer base. If a lead has similar information, they probably are a good fit.
- ☐ Examine their behavior. Which offers did they click on? Which pages did they view? Which type of content did they consume (ebook, video, white paper, quiz)? This information can help determine where in the buying process they are and where in your marketing funnel they belong.
- ☐ Use all this data to generate a score for the lead by assigning values to the aspects you identify as most important.

This lead score is what you use to determine how to engage - or not - with the lead. Do they need more nurturing or are they ready to become customers? Complete the next step to find out.

STEP 5: TURN LEADS INTO CUSTOMERS



Turn Leads into Customers

For this strategy to be effective, marketing and sales need to be working toward the same goals. Eighty-one percent of marketers who say they are “Tightly aligned with sales” report that their marketing strategy is effective.¹

When you think of your sales and marketing funnel, the need for common goals makes sense. Once a lead enters the funnel, it will transition from marketing to sales at some point. When everyone agrees when that should happen, both marketers and sales can be more effective in their jobs.

The following checklist can be used to define how your teams will work together, including when a lead is ready to be handed over to sales.



- ☐ Have both teams meet and agree on the terminology used to describe visitors, leads, qualified leads, and customers. (See ‘[Step One: Create a Game Plan](#)’ for more on the buyer’s journey.)
- ☐ Determine the criteria for a sales-ready lead and include that in the lead scoring from step four. Once a lead reaches the defined threshold, marketing provides the information to sales. (See ‘[Step One: Create a Game Plan](#)’ for more on buyer personas.)
- ☐ Ensure everyone is working towards the same organizational goals. An example may be to grow revenue from new accounts by 20%.
- ☐ Marketing goals of visitors and leads needed should be based on sales quotas. If your sales team needs 100 new accounts, then marketing should be responsible for providing them enough leads to meet that goal. If 50% of qualified leads convert to customers, then marketing should find 200. Based on your conversion rates, move that number up your funnel to determine the number of visitors required to meet that final 100 new customers.
- ☐ Each team should have insight into each other’s goals and progress towards those goals. It can be frustrating when a lead is handed over and never heard about again. Marketers need to know their hard work is helping sales, and sales need to know marketing is doing their best to provide qualified leads.
- ☐ Sales should provide feedback to marketing on buyer personas. Marketers research to build their buyer personas. Salespeople talk to actual customers every day. This close contact provides them insight that can’t be found by research alone. Putting the two together improves the entire inbound marketing strategy.

STEP 6: **INSPIRE CUSTOMERS TO BE PROMOTERS**



Inspire Customers to be Promoters

The last step of effective digital marketing is maintaining connections with your happy customers. Offering a referral program to your best customers can result in higher revenues and conversion rates.²

One study showed that 69% of B2B companies that use these types of programs have a faster time to close, and 59% reported higher customer lifetime value when compared to companies that don't use a referral program.³

Here is a checklist on how to get your customers excited to share their experiences, send you referrals, and how you can reward them:



- ☐ Choose your incentives or rewards.
 - Discounts or cash back on service or contracts.
 - Special access or perks like early access to new products or services, invitations to events, or relevant upgrades to their account.
 - Donations to charities in their name.
 - Joint marketing opportunities that highlight their business to your customers.
 - Free training.
 - ☐ Create marketing assets such as blogs and emails to promote and explain the referral program.
 - ☐ Create materials your customers can share with their referrals such as emails, landing pages, social media posts.
 - ☐ Integrate a system to keep track of referrals. Automating this process ensures everyone gets the proper incentives.
- To find your happiest customers, you can do the following:
- ☐ Monitor social media for comments and shout outs about your company. Be sure to reach out and thank those that give you kudos. (Note: Hubspot has a helpful tool for social monitoring that makes this process a snap.)
 - ☐ Research your brand on review sites and respond where appropriate.
 - ☐ Locate existing customers who have agreed to case studies or to be a partner.
 - ☐ Ask sales or your customer service team for the customers they feel are enthusiastic about your company.



Next Steps

VARs and MSPs are part of a growing market estimated to be worth \$257.84 billion by 2022 while growing at 11% CAGR.⁴ Yes, this means there are new opportunities, but it also signals increased competition.

Digital marketing is a guaranteed way to differentiate your company. When you create and follow a game plan using the six steps outlined here, you'll attract more visitors, convert more leads, and inspire brand loyalty.

Here are the next steps to take to start using a digital marketing strategy:

Obtain buy-in from all relevant parties including sales, marketing, and senior leadership. Inbound marketing is often a cultural change requiring everyone to understand and support it.

Determine the practicality of creating and executing your game plan in-house. You likely have a strong IT staff and sales force. But you may struggle to find the resources to manage and organize a marketing team. Many companies in the IT channel outsource their marketing, allowing them to concentrate on their core skills while still growing their company.

FIND OUT MORE ABOUT DIGITAL MARKETING FOR MSPs AND VARs

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