

Marketing Made MSPeasy

The MSPs Ultimate Guide to Marketing



Introduction

People have long been enjoying the comings and goings surrounding the fictional Sterling Cooper ad agency in the popular TV hit *Mad Men*. For many, the series offers a nostalgic look back at the bygone days when marketing and advertising were nearly synonymous.

Traditional advertising still makes up a huge part of today's marketing programs. It's been estimated that globally companies will spend around \$757 billion on advertising by 2021.¹

The Internet, social media, and digital marketing have caused a sea of change in the way companies communicate to potential clients. Businesses in general, and MSPs in particular, are beginning to leverage evolving digital media to reach out to prospects and customers in new ways. As part of that shift, the concept of inbound marketing is becoming a significant driving force in the continuing evolution of marketing and the ongoing quest to attract and keep customers.

Many definitions are currently swirling around, but at its core, inbound marketing is about creating and sharing content focused specifically on your target prospect. By providing relevant content that helps your prospects answer their questions and solve their problems, you become a valuable and trusted resource. This helps you attract them to your company and makes it more likely you'll convert them into customers.

¹ Statista, *The Statistics Portal, Statistics and Studies from more than 18,000 sources*



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How does that impact the way you market your MSP business? Instead of jamming a sales pitch down the throats of your prospects, you pull people toward you and help them gain valuable insights about their business or industry. This approach has proven to be more successful in reaching today's business consumer.

So, what should you be thinking about as you develop a marketing program to help grow your managed services business? The most effective approach, and one which a greater number of MSPs are leveraging, is building a modern marketing program that incorporates both traditional and new marketing tactics.

We've collected a group of experts from successful IT service businesses and asked them to share their thoughts on putting together an effective business-to-business (B2B) marketing program. It's no surprise that their overriding advice is simple: inbound should clearly be a key piece of your program, but don't forget some of the more traditional marketing methods. In the end, using a multi-tool methodology – a modern marketing approach – will give you the best chance of reaching, attracting, and retaining customers.



Marketing

The management process responsible for identifying, anticipating, and satisfying customer requirements profitably.

-The Chartered Institute of Marketing



If you don't know where
you're going, any road will
get you there.

- Lewis Carroll,
Alice in Wonderland

1. What is Modern Marketing?

Traditional marketing has normally revolved around E. Jerome McCarthy's four P's: Product, Promotion, Price, and Place. The concept was developed in the early 60's and is still in use in many ways today.

The Chartered Institute of Marketing defines marketing as "the management process responsible for identifying, anticipating, and satisfying customer requirements profitably."

The concept of modern marketing takes these long-established definitions and incorporates traditional tools, the Internet and new media, to form a hybrid approach termed: "modern marketing."

Modern Marketing Partners, a B2B Marketing agency, has developed a four-pronged model that makes up the modern marketing mix: strategic marketing, inbound marketing, outbound marketing, and marketing measurement. Each category lists various tools and techniques that can be part of a modern marketing program.¹

The members of our expert MSP panel have embraced modern marketing to leverage every tool at their disposal to reach and attract customers. Their strategies and tactics can be helpful as you build your MSP marketing plan.

¹ *Modern Marketing Defined – Marketing Mix Infographic, Modern Marketing Partners, January 22, 2012.*



As you build your plan, it's critical to develop profiles of your target client. Once established, use those personas to focus your marketing plan by conducting research using industry databases like Hoovers to identify companies that match your ideal prospect profile.

2. Planning a Strategy

To develop an effective marketing program, you must identify prospective customers, determine goals, and decide which tools, tactics, and channels you can best put to use. Choose a particular marketing mix you feel will yield the greatest results for your business.

Use the Entire Toolbox

[Invenio IT](#) is a good example of a managed services business using multiple tools to achieve goals.

"We're expanding, as is our appetite to dedicate additional resources to marketing," says Tracy Rock, Director of Marketing at Invenio IT. "Up until recently, we had been laser-focused on generating leads via traditional inbound marketing. And while that is still extremely important—and the backbone of our efforts—we're working to deliver a more comprehensive brand experience from building awareness and encouraging engagement through retention. In addition to relaunching our website, we have increased our social presence and PR efforts. We have also added customer retention and brand ambassador programs that we expect to help differentiate us from other MSPs."

Like many MSPs, [Blackpoint IT Services](#) also uses a hybrid mix of both inbound and outbound marketing tactics.

"We work primarily with our vendors to develop co-branded campaigns and events that market to our existing client base and prospects," says Jennifer Watkins, Marketing Manager at Blackpoint. "We also work via an inbound approach that focuses on search engine optimization, new content, website presence, and social media."

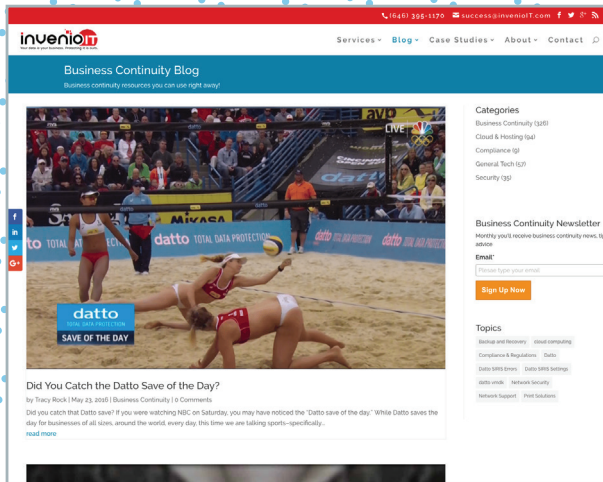
Grow the Sales Funnel

Most programs are focused on lead generation with an added emphasis on promoting loyalty with existing clients. That's a good place to begin since lack of a sales funnel is one of the biggest obstacles for MSPs expanding their businesses. According to a survey of nearly 400 MSPs, more than three quarters said they were participating on two or less sales calls with qualified leads on a monthly basis.²

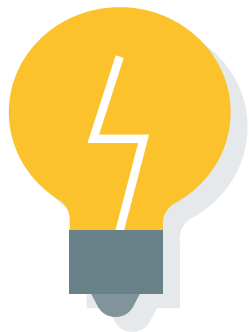
"Lead generation is our primary goal," says Rock. "However, we value our existing clients and have programs in place to make sure they feel heard and appreciated as well."

As you build your plan, it's critical to develop profiles of your target client. Once established, use those personas to focus your marketing plan by conducting research using industry databases like Hoovers to identify companies that match your ideal prospect profile.

Finally, as you create a marketing plan, it's important to learn from previous campaigns. Review your past marketing efforts to determine what worked and what didn't. If there were campaigns or actions that worked well, do more of them! Of the things that weren't effective, identify where the campaign fell short and try again. If you're still not seeing the desired results, move on to something new.



² How to Double the Number of Managed Services Clients Your Getting Every Month, Kaseya slideshare, November 2012.



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3. Inbound Marketing

Inbound marketing focuses on creating and sharing content, leveraging the power of the Internet and social media to distribute educational content via blogs, white papers, case studies, eBooks and more. By crafting content specifically designed with ideal customers in mind, inbound attracts qualified prospects to a business and keeps them coming back for more. Many IT service professionals have leveraged the benefits of inbound to help expand their business.

"To be honest, we have had far more success with our inbound efforts," says Rock, who uses a variety of inbound vehicles, including blog posts, eBooks and case studies, to attract prospects to the Invenio IT website.

Blogging

By now, most people are familiar with blogging. One estimate puts the number of existing blogs at 1.13 million as of early 2015.³ The effectiveness of blogging is the ability to share your thoughts about your business directly with your customers at a very specific level.

"Our blog has gained us the most traction," says Jason Horne, co-founder of the Preferred IT Group. Watkins agrees. "Our blogs and SEO efforts have been the most effective for us."

Brian Dunn, President of [Epic Sky](#), which provides marketing for software VARs, has found guest blogging—posting content on other organizations' blogs—to be successful in driving new leads. "We started guest blogging on different industry sites with specific calls-to-action," he says. "That raised traffic to our site

³Blogging Statistics - Worldometers



We ask for our client's input on a regular basis. Hearing from the client first-hand and noting trends has been very productive for us. Our current clients feel heard and most often, our target prospect is looking for the same content.



significantly. Timing is everything however. You can write a blog today and get little response. Post something next week and you'll get hundreds of people."

eBooks

eBooks are long form content pieces similar to white papers, but with a more conversational tone and enhanced design elements. You're reading an eBook right now! Rock has found eBooks to be her most effective inbound vehicle.

"We have several eBooks that have performed very well for us," she says. "We require prospects to register to receive the information so the content is a tool for growing our database. In addition, having relevant content helps with search as well as positioning us as the experts on the topic. We try to introduce a new eBook every quarter or so, depending on what is going on in the market."

White Papers

Epic Sky's Dunn has found white papers, which are formal, long-format content pieces with a more scholarly tone, to be his most effective content vehicle.

"We've done a number of white papers on a variety of topics directed at industries we're looking to engage," he says. "They're very specific to each industry. We discuss a particular pain or set of pains and how the services we offer can help relieve them."

Next, Dunn posts the white papers on their website behind a form so anyone who want to read one needs to provide their contact information to get it.

"That generates a follow up call from our sales team to learn more about their situation and starts a dialogue about our services," says Dunn.

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Content Topics

One of the challenges of developing content for any of these vehicles is coming up with appropriate topics. There are a number of ways to develop a relevant topic list that will appeal to your audience.

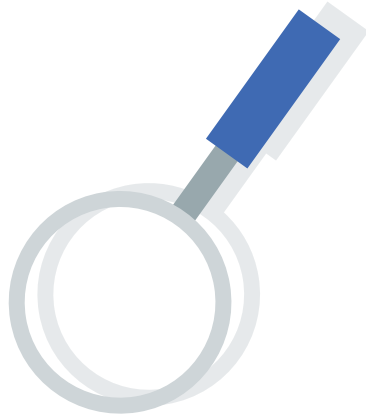
"We talk to our sales people to tap into the last few deals they did," says Dunn. "We find out about customer pain points and what people were trying to solve with our software. A lot of our blog articles come from the support staff. They may mention customers are dealing with some issue on a regular basis and we'll do a blog post on it. Also, other departments will tell marketing about an issue we need to get out there and we'll do some kind of content piece on it."

"We ask for our clients' input on a regular basis either as part of our regular client follow ups or online surveys," says Rock. "Hearing from the client first-hand and noting trends has been very productive for us. Our current clients feel heard and most often, our target prospect is looking for the same content."

Google Adwords

Another effective inbound tactic is the use of Google Adwords, Google's ad service in which advertisers bid on certain keywords in order for their clickable ads to appear in Google's search results. Vince Tinnirello, CEO of [Anchor Network Solutions](#) uses Adwords as his primary inbound technique.

"I worked with a third party company that does inbound lead generation," he says. "We've identified keywords and contacted vendors to get some marketing development funds. We've created landing pages around Office 365, disaster recovery, and business continuity."



Basic Marketing Acronyms

B2B: Business-to-Business

CTA: Call-to-Action

CTR: Clickthrough Rate

SEO: Search Engine Optimization

PPC: Pay-Per-Click

CPL: Cost Per Lead

CAC: Customer Acquisition Cost

CX: Customer Experience

"My recommendation is that you work with a company that has a good reputation for producing results and understands the small business IT space," Tinnirello continues. "Ideally somebody who has worked in your industry with companies like yours and understands the services you sell. Define the deliverables and reporting and monitor it."

Landing Pages and Call to Actions (CTAs)

Regardless of how you are reaching out to your prospects, most times you'll be directing them to a landing page with a call to action (CTA). CTA's have proven particularly valuable to Watkins. "Combining a CTA with a landing page with specific forms with drop downs has weeded out a lot of the fluff that we used to get when it comes to leads," she says.

For Dunn, CTA's have worked best when it comes to lead conversion. "We put a picture of what's going to be downloaded and leave everything on a single screen. We don't require too much information, just the minimum amount to get started. All we ask for is the name of the person, the name of the company, phone number and email. You can fill in the rest of the information from Hoovers. We don't use captcha's because they're a pain and decrease inquiries. We respond immediately with the download and then follow up with a call within 24 hours."

Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

Creating compelling, relevant content is the best approach to Search Engine Optimization (SEO). However there are some other things you can do to enhance your searchability.



"SEO is extremely important," says Rock. "It may make sense to hire a citation building expert to help with local SEO. We recommend being very specific in the terms you want to own yet still be relevant to the target. Ideally this will minimize the competition and allow you to have an impact more efficiently."

Dunn agrees that outsourcing is the way to go when it comes to SEO. "If you're just starting with your marketing program, SEO won't be a priority. A third-party partner can scan your site and generate a to-do list and tell you exactly what you need to do."

For Dunn, outsourcing is the most effective way to spend time and money to get SEO done the right way. "We subscribe to an SEO service, and there are many services out there from the expensive to the inexpensive," he says. "They all do the same thing with a varying number of services that go behind it. Our site is culled weekly or more with ongoing tracking. They give us suggestions on how to make the site more SEO friendly by pointing out things like pages missing titles, some pages not having H1, or images missing text. They also optimize for keywords. They give us the list to plug SEO holes and we prioritize it. It's a continuous thing."

4. Outbound Marketing

Despite the relentless growth of inbound marketing, it shouldn't be the only piece of your marketing plan. The most effective modern marketing programs involve combining a mix of both inbound and outbound marketing techniques. There are a number of popular options on the traditional outbound side that can yield impressive results.



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Referrals

One of the most effective is word of mouth. People are more likely to want to work with you if someone they trust has recommended you. Putting together a referral program can be one of your most lucrative tactics.

[Preferred IT Group LLC](#) developed a referral program that generated \$250K in gross sales in one quarter. "We offered anyone referring a prospect to us to be entered into a drawing for a 60 inch LED Smart TV," says Jason Horne. "They received one entry for every referral. We used HubSpot to promote the program via social media. We also sent out reminders in our monthly and quarterly newsletters."

Tinnirello says the key to a successful referral program is to make sure you're offering something of value. "You have to have something in place that actually makes it worth the referrers time," he says. "You can't give them a \$25 Starbucks card. We'll give the referring client either a free month of support or a credit on their bill."

Events

Organizing events can be another good way to reach your potential prospects. "The most successful outbound campaigns we've done are co-branded vendor events," says Watkins. "We've done CFO Golf Days, and taken prospects and clients to sporting events. We also do a bi-annual Tech Fair with our vendors that has proven monumentally successful for us. We do demos during the event, but it's mostly breakout sessions to facilitate discussion and growth."



**Marketing without data
is like driving with your
eyes closed.**

- Dan Zarrella, HubSpot



Newsletters and Emails

Dunn has found the tried and true newsletter to be an effective way to reach current clients and prospects.

"We send out newsletters with lots of information but they aren't necessarily 'salesy,'" he says. "That generates leads by farming our own client base. The newsletters also educate our customers so they're aware of new technologies or solutions that they don't currently own or use. We'll also do targeted email blasts to companies in specific industries."

"Our quarterly printed newsletter has been a big hit," agrees Horne. "It's a great place to start to promote your business to current clients and prospects."

Talks and Presentations

Dunn has used a variety of outbound tactics including daily email blasts, nurture email campaigns, trade shows, and customer events but recently found another way to reach potential clients.

"Our most successful tool lately has been doing talks and presentations," Dunn says. "For example, for one of the industries we're targeting, our CTO gave a talk to an industry group and it really raised our profile. We've gotten several leads out of it."

Selecting an industry and working with their trade associations to get speaking engagements can really work well according to Dunn. "For our software division, we go after manufacturers and get in front of their industry associations by speaking at events and trade shows. Instead of casting a wide net, we're using a fishing hook. And those are the exact kind of "fish" we're going for."



If you're just beginning, start with some basic activity metrics, like the number of unique visitors to your website, page views, search engine traffic, bounce rate (% of visitors who come to your site and then immediately leave before clicking on any pages), and conversion rate.

5. Keeping Score

Once you've implemented your marketing program, it's important to measure the results. This allows you to make adjustments to ensure that you are reaching your targets and meeting your goals.

"It's important to test, learn AND listen to the data," says Rock. "You might expect something to perform well and then it doesn't or vice versa so it is important to set your opinions - and ego - aside and objectively review the results."

There are a number of ways to measure the impact of your marketing efforts. Traditional metrics include customer acquisition, PR clips, and lead generation. Digital measurements involve web statistics and analytics, pay per click information, SEO tool feedback, and Google alerts. Social media metrics come in the form of likes, views, retweets, and favorites.

If you're just beginning, start with some basic activity metrics, like the number of unique visitors to your website, page views, search engine traffic, bounce rate (% of visitors who come to your site and then immediately leave before clicking on any other pages), and conversion rate. At its core, your marketing plan should be generating leads and ultimately customers so those should be key metrics to monitor.

Putting together a marketing program to build your MSP business can appear to be a daunting task. However, there are many partners out there who can help. The diversity and variety of traditional and digital options ensures there's an appropriate mix for you. Choose the ones you're most comfortable with, monitor activity, and adjust as needed. To sum up, Tracy Rock offers the most helpful advice.

"Be patient and consistent," she says. "It takes time to make headway and see real results. There are many variables, but it could take months to see results. Don't get discouraged. We all have to start somewhere."

Ten Tips and Tricks to Optimize your MSP Marketing Program

- Blog, Blog, Blog – Create unique content and do it consistently – ideally a few times a week. Don't hire a third party to do your blog. Content should be specific to your business and to the MSP industry.
- Get on social media and start sharing helpful information.
- Don't be afraid to try new things. If it fails, it fails, but you won't know if you don't try.
- Use landing pages to gate longer format content like eBooks, but make sure the perceived value is worth visitors giving up their contact information.
- Don't ignore partnering and networking with other businesses. Don't forget about the human side of things.
- When you're writing content, be human. Be conversational not "salesy."
- Be Helpful – present yourself as the solution to your customers/prospects questions and problems. Make this the core of everything you do and they will flock to you.
- Be Specific. You can't be everything to everyone. Find your sweet spot, where you have the right to win based on what your firm offers – your USP or point of differentiation.
- Be social. It's a great way to stay top of mind—as well as aid in search. Social is the price of entry for any marketer in 2015.
- Be patient, it doesn't happen overnight. Use different tactics to see what works for you.

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6. Where Do I Start?

Here are some ideas from our experts to help you get off on the right foot.

"Content generation comes first. That's the way Google ranks. They look for original content and then they figure out where it goes. Start a blog and stick to the schedule. That's going to start your whole SEO process. Make sure you have ways for people to contact you. Include CTA's and forms everywhere on every page of your site." – Brian Dunn

"Beginning with SEO via your website and social media platforms are your best bet. Good, relevant content that's free will organically get you higher and higher in those rankings if you're consistent with it." – Jennifer Watkins

"I suggest joint venture programs with chambers and associations, client referral programs, and face to face networking." – Vince Tinnirello

"The newsletter and referral contests are great places to start promoting your business to current clients and prospects." – Jason Horne

"There are lots of free resources out there, especially for inbound marketing. Make sure you understand the target and what they are looking for as well as how your firm intersects with their need. Put together a content strategy that includes blogging, social, eBooks and then expand to webinars and videos. Make sure the place you're driving visitors – your website – is clean and professional looking. That sounds obvious, but seek a professional here— perception is reality and first impressions will make or break you. If funds are limited, de-prioritize more traditional advertising efforts, where you need to pay to play." – Tracy Rock

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Our Experts:



Brian Dunn (@brianwdunn) is the President of [Epic Sky](#). Previously, he worked at [SWK Technologies](#) as Director of Marketing. Brian is a certified SalesLogix Implementation Consultant, Sage CRM Implementation Consultant and Sage Employer Solutions Technical Consultant, and he has previously been certified in Sage 100 ERP Programming Standards. He is also a Microsoft Certified Professional for SQL, Internet Information Services (IIS) and Vista, and he has earned the Computer Technology Industry Association A+ certification for computer service technicians.



Jason Horne (@jason_horne79) – Co-Founder of [Preferred IT Group](#) has been working in the Information Technology industry since 2001. In 2005 Jason and a partner formed Preferred IT Group, LLC located in Fort Wayne IN. Since then he has been focused on making Preferred IT Group North East Indiana's premier Managed Services Provider.



Tracy Rock (@invenioIT) has over 15 years of experience as an advertising executive and is currently the Director of Marketing at [Invenio IT](#). Before venturing into technology, Rock worked at several New York ad agencies, leading integrated communication plans for global Brands such as: Procter & Gamble's 3D White, Pfizer's Celebrex and Lyrica as well as Aflac. When she isn't sailing the Atlantic with her husband and bulldog, you can find her at home in Hoboken, New Jersey. Tracy can be contacted at Tracy@invenioIT.com.



Jennifer Watkins has over 10 years of Sales and Marketing experience spanning many different industries including national franchises, non-profit theatre arts and the Information Technology sector. She's currently the Marketing Manager for [BlackPoint IT](#), a Seattle-based company with over 30 years expertise in technology and business IT solutions. BlackPoint's Managed Services Solution is consistently ranked on the MSPmentor's global top Managed Services Providers list.



Vince Tinnirello (@vtinnirello) is CEO of [Anchor Network Solutions](#), a Denver-based managed IT services provider founded in 2002. A CompTIA Managed Services Trustmark holder, Anchor provides technology consulting services to SMBs in Colorado. The company is nationally recognized and has been featured in Channel Pro Magazine, PCWorld, Business Solutions Magazine, and the Denver Post for the service they deliver. Vince is co-author of The Business Owner's Essential Guide To IT And All Things Digital Version 2.0, the Vice Chair of the CompTIA Managed Services Community, and has been recognized by MSPmentor and SMB Nation as one of the top small business technology executives.