

# How do you find vendors (or employees)?

Inbound marketing vs. outbound marketing—which is better?

Clearly, if you are a business looking for customers, inbound marketing, where people come to you, is better. If potential customers find you, without you having to go out to find them, means something is attracting them to your offering.

Outbound marketing is where you are spending time and money to find prospective customers who are not otherwise attracted to your offering. It is harder and more costly.

Lately, I have seen a variation of inbound marketing, which is the attempt by businesses to find vendors (not customers) by asking people to apply for the job. Similarly, some employers find employees by advertising a position and accepting resumes for it, which often results in receiving an overwhelming amount of resumes where a high percentage of the applicants are not suited for the job. This is why some employers hire headhunters, who search for someone fulfilling the exact qualifications the employer is looking for.

Today I came across this posting:

*I am launching a small site for my new business and I am in need of a copywriter to polish the content on the site.*

*It is a small project about 5 pages tops.*

*If you're interested please send me a description of your experience, contact information, and your hourly rate.*

*No resumes please. Convince me.*

When I saw this, I was intrigued at first and considered

“applying.” Then , on second thought, I asked myself why this person would put up a posting like this. First of all, she describes it as a small project. This is probably code for low-budget. And then, that last sentence: Convince me. She is looking for someone to blow her away. It doesn’t look like a promising situation because it seems this person is looking for someone to write amazing copy at a cut rate price, which may be good for her but not very good for me.

Is this how you find vendors? I don’t. I have found vendors by using several ways:

- Asking trusted sources
- Searching for vendors who do what I need (for example, doing a Google search of flooring sales in Rockville)
- Using ratings websites like Angie’s List

In this way, I am in control of the vendors I contact. And for the vendors, it is inbound marketing, which is more efficient.

What do you say? If you are a vendor, do you (should you) respond to these queries? If you are looking for a vendor, is this the best way to go?

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## Testing strategies and the dangers of assumptions

The Metro in Washington, DC is again considering hiking fares (news story in today’s Washington Post). For those of you who don’t live in this area, Metro raised its fares a little over a year ago. Additionally, it made fares even more complex than they already were (there is no flat fare here in DC:

there are regular fares and peak fares and the fare changes depending on the distance you are traveling) by adding a peak-of-the-peak fare. None of these changes were popular in 2010, and I assure a fare hike won't be welcomed in 2012.

Why am I discussing this? Because of this statement by Metro's General Manager Richard Sarles in the Washington Post:

*Metro officials, however, are promoting the simplification of fares as a plus. The new fare structure would eliminate the "peak-of-the-peak" rate, in which passengers pay a surcharge for riding the subway during the busiest weekday periods. It was implemented with the last round of fare increase, in 2010, to ease crowding and encourage riders to use trains just outside the peak periods, but the strategy failed, Sarles said.*

*"We weren't accomplishing our policy objective, and we were just complicating the fare," he said.*

Basically, Metro thought that by increasing the fares at rush hour fewer people would use the train and this would reduce crowding. But that shows a basic lack of understanding of rush hour—people leave work at around the same time and that is what causes crowding—not the cost of the fare.

The strategy was based on an assumption, and was not successful as proven by ridership numbers. Metro is wise to discontinue this policy. **Strategies (and tactics) that don't provide intended results need to be ended.** This is an important point for marketing and communications. How many times do you see a company engaging in the same tactic/strategy regardless of whether it is accomplishing its objective?

Testing will help. And questioning assumptions will help too. Many people ASSUME things like: if we advertise, people will know about us.

Basing strategies on false or untested assumptions will lead to stupid, costly mistakes like Metro's peak-of-the-peak fare.

What assumptions are you operating under? What strategies are you basing on those assumptions? Are these strategies really accomplishing your objectives?

My advice is to question both assumptions and strategies, and correct course if they are not working.

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## **Can two or three words guarantee business success?**

The two or three words that may well guarantee business success are any of these options:

**Happy holidays, Merry Christmas, Happy New Year, Happy Hanukkah, Happy Kwanzaa, Happy Thanksgiving, Season's Greetings, Best wishes.**

not to mention the two most effective words in business:

### **THANK YOU**

Two to three words that work to show other people (customers, clients, vendors, business associates) that we are thinking of them. That we value the relationship. That we do not take them or their business for granted.

This year, I received a season's greetings card from my eye doctor! That was a first for me...I think most doctors take one's business for granted.

Think about whom you received greetings from, and from whom

you did not. Any surprises? Also, if you ordered gifts or other merchandise online, did you receive a thank you for your order? If you didn't, would you buy from that retailer again?

If I feel my business is not valued, why would I continue to do business with that vendor/merchant/consultant/individual?

Perhaps sending a greeting or saying thank you is not enough to GUARANTEE success, but it will help prove you think they are important to you. Making sure your customers and clients feel valued will help make it easier to continue to do business with them.

What say you?

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## Communications wishes for 2012

My main wish for 2012 is that it ends up being a better year than 2011 (although that is not a very high bar). In terms of marketing communications, I offer you my top ten lists of what I wish to see more and less of.

What I wish to see more of:

1. People/companies who know the difference between strategy and tactics and that you can't substitute one for the other.
2. Easy-to-navigate websites that include REAL contact information and a comprehensive ABOUT page
3. Clever taglines that actually communicate a message (like Red Lobster's "Sea Food Differently")
4. Nonprofits that understand that marketing communications

are an important part of their operations

5. People who use effect and affect correctly (AKA better copyediting)
6. Plain English
7. Thinking of social media as a tool (like advertising) and not as a substitute for marketing communications as a whole.
8. Companies and organizations that understand that the quality of their customer service will directly impact their marketing efforts.
9. Personalized LinkedIn invitations
10. Connecting IRL (in real life) with social media friends and followers

What I wish to see **less** of:

1. The search for the ROI of social media/Klout scores
2. Sexist language (using terms like man hours) and sexist advertising (yes, I am looking at you Budweiser and GoDaddy)
3. Grammatical mistakes and typos (perennial wish of mine)
4. Check-ins
5. The words utilize, monetize, incentivize; and clichéd/meaningless terms including low hanging fruit, sweet spot, pivot point.
6. Sending out too many newsletters
7. LinkedIn profiles without a headshot
8. Blatant self promotion and re-tweeting of one's own tweets/mentions
9. Overpriced and overhyped social media conferences
10. Life lessons and how to live advice from marketing/social media bloggers

What do you wish for in 2012?

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# Marketing lessons from the gym

Today, as most days, I was working out at the gym and observing those around me (the gym can get very boring). There were some people working up quite a sweat, and there were those that were barely working. Some were older, some were younger. In short, there were all types. But three stood out to me:

**The multi-tasker:** Today, the multi-tasker was a woman using one of the ellipticals while responding to email and/or texts on her smart phone. She was so engaged with her phone that her legs were barely moving. Was she there to exercise or was she there to deal with work?

- **The lesson:** If you are distracted from your goal, you won't get there. In marketing, you could be trying to do too many things at once and not succeeding in any of them.

**The repeater:** The repeater is the person who does the exact same exercise, at the same level of intensity, on the same machine. Always. In this case, I have seen this woman "run" at a very slow pace on the exact same machine, at the same time every single day. And guess what—her body is not changing (she is not even breaking a sweat).

- **The lesson:** If you do the same thing over and over without change you won't be effective or see any change. For instance, some companies have always used a full

page ad in the Sunday newspaper. And they have been doing that for years. It may produce some results but it will not expand your reach.

**The guy wearing jeans at the gym:** Have you seen these guys? They come in to the gym in their jeans (usually with belts too) and sometimes, with street shoes instead of sneakers. How are you going to run in jeans?

- **The lesson:** You have to dress appropriately for the occasion/venue. In marketing terms: you have to know what marketing vehicle is the right one for what you are trying to accomplish. If you are trying to target seniors, perhaps a spot on the evening news is the best way to go.

Have you seen these people at your gym?

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## Is threatening your customers ever a good idea?

Today, in my inbox, I had an email from an online bookseller with this subject line:

“Last day for FREE shipping in time for Christmas.”

I also had an email from an online drugstore, with this subject line:

“NOW OR NEVER: get \$5 dollars off your order and free shipping.”

Although both emails have virtually the same message, the former is URGENT, the latter is THREATENING.



Threatening is telling me that unless I do something there will be consequences (in the drugstore's case, no more free shipping or something). Urgent is telling me that I should act now because time is running out.

It is more effective to **show your customers why they should act now** instead of telling them that if they fail to act, they will suffer consequences. Don't you agree?

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## Being more effective

If you are the type to make New Year's resolutions, make one to be more effective in your marketing communications efforts. Being effective—that is, actually successful in producing your intended result—should be the goal of all marketing communications.

How can you be more effective? There are several ways to make sure your communications meet their mark, but it probably starts with the basics:

- Do you know and understand your **TARGET AUDIENCE**?
- Do you know what your **KEY MESSAGE** is? Are you expressing it clearly and unambiguously?
- Are you properly **TIMING** your communications efforts?
- Do you know your **USP** (unique selling proposition)?
- Are you aware of who your **COMPETITION** and what they are doing?
- Have you gotten **FEEDBACK** from outside sources on your creative? Is it conveying the attributes you are trying to convey?
- Are you following a **STRATEGY** or are you just engaging in

## TACTICS?

What are your suggestions for being more effective? Please share in the comments.

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# Let's get together soon! (she said)

You know this person right? The person who says "let's get together soon" but never does anything to make it happen? Or worse, the person who says you should get together and when you follow up, s(he) actually rebuffs you/comes up with an excuse/doesn't respond at all.

In marketing communications this person is the equivalent of the false brand promise or the product that does not perform as advertised(truth in advertising).

It is something to watch out for. If you are marketer—are you blithely promising to get together and then promptly forgetting your promise? That is, are you telling prospects that your product/service is the most effective way to XXXX, but falling somewhat short?

You know what happens when you fail your brand promise? You lose customers, and you most likely won't be able to get them back.

Recently, I attended a business event that was billed as a goal-setting workshop. It wasn't. Not even close. Guess what? I am not going back to that group. Same thing happened a few months ago when I attended a local communications group event on the strategic use of video...except there was no mention of strategy whatsoever.

When you fail to do what you promise to do—whether in your marketing efforts or your personal outreach—you lose business (current or potential).

Instead of saying “let’s get together soon” say “how about we meet up for coffee on Monday at 2 pm.”

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## One week without Facebook

It’s been a week since I logged into my personal Facebook account. One week in which I haven’t “liked” anything or found out what my “friends” are busy doing in their lives. And guess what? It’s been OK.

I decided to avoid Facebook this week because frankly, I am sick of the site. Between the false feeling of connection to the inspirational quotes, location check-ins and general braggadocio, I am not sure which irritates me the most. And it is definitely not the point to be annoyed when you are on a website.

This week I have been on Twitter and LinkedIn. On these social networks I generally learn more than I ever do on Facebook. Twitter provides me with up-to-the-minute news, links to information I may have not seen and a way to chat with people in real-time. LinkedIn lets me see what people are doing professionally.

This leads me to social media marketing. If you are relying on just one social network like Facebook to do all your marketing communications, you may be putting all the proverbial eggs in one basket. You should diversify. Yes, Facebook has a HUGE audience. But it is a POTENTIAL audience, not a measured, constant audience. People do not yet HAVE to go to Facebook

every day. They may choose to, but they don't need to go there to check mail or get their news.

I would still counsel you to use Facebook as part of your marketing mix. **Because it is opt-in for people, you are communicating with those who are receptive to your message.** That is truly valuable. Just don't share inspirational quotes or you will lose me!

Your thoughts? How do you feel about Facebook?

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## Too much marketing?

I got a jar of apple butter on my doorstep the other day. It was from a local real estate agent who delivered this "gift" to everyone else in my townhouse community. He is also selling one of the houses in the community. It is not the first thing I get from him. I got a magnetic calendar earlier in the year, and a housing sales report too. But apple butter? Is that too much?

Can you do too much marketing? Some would argue that as long as you are getting customers/clients, there is probably not too much marketing. True...but are you doing too much to get those customers/clients? In other words, are you spending more than you have to, making each acquisition very costly?

There is no set formula to figure this out, unfortunately. And you have to accept that much of your marketing effort will be wasted, which is why it is important to figure out how much each client/customer is worth to you.

In this case, no amount of apple butter, postcards or calendars will get me to use the real estate agent. I already

have a real estate agent, and that is who I will use if I ever need to sell this house or buy another. I will grant that this amount of marketing is providing HUGE name recognition. Is it promoting conversion? Not sure.

I believe that the more targeted your marketing is, the better chance you have of it being effective. In this case, the real estate agent is being geographically targeted, which may be the best he can do. His marketing may not work for me, but should he get one of my neighbors to use him, then perhaps he has achieved his objective.

When is it too much marketing? When it produces few if any results. And you get there sometimes by trial and error. What do you think makes too much marketing?