

INTRODUCTORY

7 THINGS A MARKETING AGENCY FROM THE FUTURE WOULD **NEVER** SAY.



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Introductory content is for marketers who are new to the subject. This content typically includes step-by-step instructions on how to get started with this aspect of inbound marketing and learn its fundamentals. After reading it, you will be able to execute basic marketing tactics related to the topic.

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7 THINGS A MARKETING AGENCY FROM THE FUTURE WOULD NEVER SAY.

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After some time on the agency side of social media strategy, Shannon joined the Community and Content Team at Radian6 (now part of Salesforce Marketing Cloud together with Buddy Media) to develop educational resources about becoming a social enterprise, developing and executing social and content strategies, and gathering business insights through social media monitoring and measurement. She also worked closely with the internal agency sales team to ensure company content met the educational needs of agency clients. Nowadays she plays a similar, agency-focused role as part of the HubSpot inbound marketing team. She's an Arizonan-turned-Bostonian, a dog lover, and an ASU alum who likes to dabble in digital photography.



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Introduction: Wake Up and Smell the Disruption.

It's not the easiest time to be a marketing agency. The 2008 financial crisis sliced media budgets across all industries, forcing countless traditional media-buying agencies to close their doors. While some survived, many are still struggling to stay afloat amidst a transformational shift taking place in the marketing industry.

According to a [2012 study conducted by the Chief Marketing Officer Council](#), only 9% of surveyed senior marketers "believe traditional ad agencies are doing a good job of evolving and extending their service capabilities in the digital age," whereas 22% believe their agencies are struggling to transition their business models and service offerings. 51% of the 250+ senior marketers surveyed think their agencies are "playing catch-up" -- bolting on different aspects of digital marketing without taking an integrated approach.

There's a new wave of agencies that are emerging to meet client demands for measurable marketing. And then there are other agencies that are terrified of throwing away everything that worked for them for decades in exchange for what works today. The agencies that don't transform will disintegrate, and a new category of holistic inbound marketing agencies will emerge. Even boutique agencies that opt to specialize in one component of marketing will still have to justify their value through proven results because given the option, brands will choose partners who can truly help them understand how to optimize their spending.

Read on to get a taste of how agencies must think and act moving forward.

THE WORDS
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1 “We offer inbound marketing services to our clients, but we don’t do inbound marketing for ourselves.”

You’ve heard it before -- we do business with people we know, like and trust. Trust comes with credibility, so it’s safe to say we’d all opt to pay for professional services from someone with years of experience over someone with none. To put it another way, Greg Linnemanstons, President of [Weidert Group](#), encourages his prospective clients to ask themselves: “If I was going to hire a personal trainer, would I rather hire a fat one or a fit one?”

Brands want to work with agencies that practice what they preach. Lacking a social media presence, a blog, and some irresistible content to fuel a solid story about how your agency attracts new business through inbound channels is one surefire way to look and feel like a real doofus in an upcoming pitch. Furthermore, prospective clients are getting smarter. They Google. They check out your website. They’re looking to see if you walk the talk. Agencies from the future know they can’t expect to pull the wool over anyone’s eyes anymore; everything meaningful they do is out on the web to either be admired or abhorred.

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Any agency that utters these words is missing the whole point of inbound marketing: to shorten the sales cycle:

My agency, Ariad Partners, closes inbound leads 75% faster than direct sales leads and with a 80% higher close rate. When we reach out to prospects, they are more likely to take our call. When we move prospects through our sales process, they are less skeptical and more willing to share their goals and challenges. When we pitch for their business, we know exactly why and when they plan to buy from us. Our Inbound Marketing leads come to us educated and ready to purchase. - Brenda Stoltz, Founder, Ariad Partners

By attracting qualified potential clients who don't pick up the phone until after they've done the online research to conclude their agency is the right fit, next-gen agencies can start the conversation with, "What can we do for you?" instead of, "Please-oh-please choose us!"



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“² Our biggest problem is getting new business.”

The biggest problem agencies of the future will face won't be attracting new business; their online marketing will do the heavy lifting in that sense. Instead, their biggest challenge will be growing and training their employee base to ensure they have the inbound marketing skills they're most likely not learning elsewhere, and definitely not learning in higher education.

Finding top talent has always been a struggle for most agencies, and this will continue to be the case especially as the role of the future marketer evolves to wear far more hats than in the past. At the very least, future marketers must have digital chops, outstanding writing and multimedia creation skills, interpersonal skills, some online influence and reach, and an ability to understand, manipulate and analyze data. Very few people have all of the above. Next gen agencies will have robust onboarding and training programs in place to accelerate ongoing employee growth and development.



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3 “Our clients keep paying us even though they don’t know what they’re actually getting!”

Clients are no more impressed with tired, senseless metrics of marketing success than gymnast [McKayla Maroney was with her vault](#) during the 2012 summer Olympics. Besides, an increasing number of CEOs are fed up with their CMOs, and are starting to breathe down their necks for some actual results that don’t include gains in impressions, reach, daily effective circulation, PR value, or some other false KPI.



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In 2011, [Fournaise Marketing Group in London](#) surveyed 600 CEOs and decision makers to find that 73% of them think marketers “lack business credibility and are not the business growth generators they should be: they are still too far from being able to demonstrate how the cross-channel marketing strategies and campaigns they deploy grow their organizations’ top line in terms of more customer demand, more sales, more prospects, prospects, more conversions or more market share.”

But wait. There’s more.

- 72% of CEOs think marketers “are always asking for more money, but can rarely explain how much incremental business this money will generate.”
- 70% think marketers “bombard their stakeholders with marketing data that hardly relate to or mean anything for the company’s P&L.”
- 67% think that, “unlike CFOs and Sales Forces, they don’t think enough like business people: they focus too much on the creative, ‘arty’ and ‘fluffy’ side of marketing and not enough on its business science, and rely too much on their ad agencies to come up with the next big idea.”

There are legacy agencies that will continue to manifest their clients’ problems, and there are others who will truly become their clients’ solution.

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4 “Our employees aren’t very active in social media.”

So here’s something that may not come as much of a surprise: trust in institutions of all kinds is on the decline, and agencies are far from exempt. Edelman’s Trust Barometer indicated that when consumers are forming their opinions of companies, they trust what they hear from everyday employees over the



company CEOs. And, the trust they actually do have in CEOs is diminishing; trust in company CEOs dropped from 50% to 38% between 2011 and 2012! Contrast that drop with trust in “a person like me” rising from 43% to 65%, and trust in regular employees shifting from 34% to 50%. The takeaway, here? Let your employees do the talkin’.

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New wave agencies will encourage and empower their talent to both share their expertise and personalities online, and use social media to foster deeper relationships with clients. Making each client feel like a one of a kind partner won't just be up to the account teams; it will be everyone's job to scout for opportunities to make clients feel smart and valued by sharing their content and telling their success stories. The more your clients feel connected to your team based on backgrounds, hobbies, and other non-work related topics, the harder it will be for them to part ways.

And, given that individual online authorship and credibility is becoming an increasingly important search engine ranking factor for Google, there are some major SEO benefits to having more of your employees publishing their digital know how on the web

-- not just your leadership team.

Another big plus? The more your employees are working to improve their own personal brands, the more savvy they'll be with new digital tools and tactics that help strengthen the work they do for clients.



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5
“ We don’t offer SEO services because social media is the new SEO. ”

Anyone who says something along these lines is not reading the latest digital marketing headlines. And guess what? Clients aren’t looking for agencies that are behind the times. Here’s the truth about search engine optimization and social media: they’re codependent and becoming increasingly so.

There are two parts of SEO:

First, there’s the practice of ensuring a website is technically sound so search engines can actually index all of a website’s various pages to later display them in search results pages (on-site optimization).



Second, There’s the practice of ensuring on page content is so freakin’ fantastic and up-to-date that search engines want to rank them higher than all other pages containing similar, but less helpful information (off-site optimization).

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Off-site optimization is heavily influenced by blogging (more authoritative pages to index) and social sharing (the more an article is shared, the more authoritative it may be considered).

Neither SEO nor social media replace one another. SEO needs social sharing to boost rankings, and being active and authoritative in social media helps content get shared. This is why the marketing agencies of tomorrow package their services in a way that these practices can work in tandem.



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6 “We rely on RFPs for new business.”

When your agency rocks at marketing itself through inbound channels, something amazing happens: your personality, your thought leadership, your client stories, and your past work do all the selling for you without having to waste your best talent on an expensive and time-consuming RFP process that may not actually win new business.

Marketing agencies of the future will rely less on crossing their fingers after giving away some of their best ideas in an ultra-competitive pitch, and instead put their best ideas to the test on their own agency marketing.

Next gen agencies let the vast majority of potential clients knock on their door, and enjoy the benefit of getting to turn away clients that really aren't the right fit rather than adding them to the roster just because they've gotta make payroll.



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7 “We are all creatives here. We only do branding and graphic design.”

There may always be a market for creative shops that only sell one breadcrumb of the entire branding pie, like a website redesign or a logo revamp, but marketers who hire firms to change the world’s perception of their brand are signing up for a whole lot more: actual data that proves that the desired shift took place.

That broadens the branding discipline to encompass how consumers perceive a company’s brand promise both online and off.

Online, a [brand is defined](#) by three things:

1. The information Google and other search engines have indexed about it;
2. The conversations people are having about it within social media; and
3. The way consumers experience a brand via one of the brand’s web properties (website, blog, content, social media sites).



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Social media is democratizing the conversation with and about brands, but it's also democratizing marketing itself; the customer has a vital, public, and unchangeable role in how a brand is defined. Agencies don't control the way their clients' brands are defined anymore. They can only influence how they're defined. So, other than being an inherently awesome company, what are the three things that agencies and companies can do to influence a consumer's perception of their brands on the web?

1. Create fantastically useful content.
2. Listen and respond authentically to social media conversations.
3. Provide the best user experience possible when someone visits an owned web property.

Avant-garde marketing agencies understand that their creative ideas are only as good as how far they spread and what impact they make, so all the pretty things they make are promoted through digital distribution and measured with [closed-loop analytics](#).

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Conclusion: It's Time to Adopt & Adapt.

There's a lot of change in the marketing industry happening all at once. End consumers have more choice than they've ever had before, and they have more ways to block out unwanted messages than ever before.

Technology is advancing at an increasingly faster rate, so firms aren't already investing in cloud-based and other technologies to run their agencies are going to have an increasingly more difficult time catching up.

And last but not least, clients are getting smarter and demanding more meaningful data as well as actual results. Although agencies of the future will still be able to specialize by vertical or region or practice, all will need to start thinking and acting like inbound marketing agencies, dedicated to providing holistic, closed-loop marketing for clients.



Here's some pointers:

- Start by making the commitment to inbound marketing. You can't reap the benefits with one foot in and one foot out.
- Start doing inbound marketing for your own agency. Prove to your agency you can do it before you sell it.
- Start small. Any major business transformation is scary. Focus on learning the ins and outs of inbound marketing and repackaging the way you price and sell your services so that you can more easily get clients on board with longer contracts.
- If you can't offer clients holistic inbound marketing, figure out where you exist in the inbound marketing process so you can partner with other firms that can fill in the missing pieces.

If you find yourself saying or thinking anything along the lines of what we've outlined in this article, your agency might not be ready to endure the inescapable disruption hitting the marketing services industry. If that's the case, you're not completely out of luck just yet: We can help with inbound marketing training, sales training and support, and bottomless agency-specific resources available to you as part of our [Agency Partner Program](#). If you want to see how offering inbound marketing services can help your agency grow, go ahead and [request a strategic agency consultation today](#).

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