YOU DON’T NEED FANS
YOU NEED CUSTOMERS

Tips from 25 Experts on Converting Prospects to Customers
CONVERTING PROSPECTS TO CUSTOMERS
YOUR 25 GUIDES

John Paul Aguiar, Ardath Albee, Jay Baer, Danny Brown, James Chartrand,
James Clear, Heidi Cohen, Gini Dietrich, Chris Ducker, Tara Gentile,
Ann Handley, Amy Harrison, S. Anthony Iannarino, Shelly Kramer, Jim Kukral,
Amy Porterfield, Joe Pulizzi, David Risley, Francisco Rosales, Stephanie Sammons,
Mark Schaefer, Marcus Sheridan, Stanford Smith, Robert Rose, Pamela Wilson
Introduction

1.0 Why did I write this eBook?

Well, the pros on the following pages have generously offered their own sage advice when it comes to attracting and retaining customers online. And if you’re reading this, I’m assuming that’s what you’re looking for.

So, I want this to be a guidebook for you — the consultant, business owner, or dreamer who wants to go beyond social shares and comment count.

And after reading this I hope you’ll better understand the online marketing maze, and can take that first step to finding those great clients you covet.

Here’s to your success!
Before I get into the “why,” let me give you a little backstory.

THE BEGINNING
I started blogging several years ago. Within months I was happily typing away every morning on the verge of something special, or at least I thought.

I was maintaining a tenacious schedule and spirit, but at the end of each day had nothing to show for my efforts. Sure, I made friends, had tens, sometimes hundreds of social shares, and several posts had 50-100 comments, but that was it.

It didn’t take me long to realize that blogging is a futile pursuit without real goals and EXTREME focus. The kind of focus that builds successful businesses.

LITTLE BUSINESS MAN
I’ve been in business since 1995, so am no stranger to the peaks and dips of entrepreneurship. I also know how to find the right customers using methods you might call old school. Now I’m ramping up for the modern age and that’s why I created this book. I’m now a student of blogging, social media and online marketing done right. And I’m always asking myself: “Are you doing it right?”

Are you?
How are you utilizing the new and varied methods of delivery to grow your business? Are you zeroing-in, then crafting a cohesive brand and storyline that sticks?

Are you taking a stand or blending in? Is your content focused on solving your ideal client’s problem? Are you dialed-in or lost in the woods, obsessing over metrics that don’t matter?

And the big one:
Are you finding the right customers for your business?

That is what this book is about:
Growing your business by finding the warm bodies that might just come to love you and buy from you. Not passive readers, looky-loos or fans. No, we’re talking about people who buy from you, because they are so right for you.

Even though I’ve been in business for 20 years, I’m approaching this as a fresh-faced blogger. Why? Because I’m on a journey. So several years in, my mission is to build a destination filled to the brim with value. And part of that usefulness is teaching you what I’ve learned from the best and brightest.
You Don’t need fans, you need Customers

How have they built the kind of authority that has people lining up to do business with them? And how you can do the same?

The truth is it’s not so complicated and there’s nothing secret about it. The entrepreneurs on the following pages understand and practice the following ...

1. The golden rule: Work to build a lasting connection with your audience.

This seems obvious, but few practice it. Instead they go for that first, hard kiss before thinking it over.

The rules of modern content marketing center on relationship-building. You get your audience to like, know and trust you by courting them over time and helping them.

True love doesn’t happen overnight. Start thinking about your efforts as a long, drawn out love affair that will score you a home run, for all the right reasons.

Online relationships done right.
I can think of no better example of this than Mark Schaefer. He’ll hate me for this, but he really is an A-List blogger, influencer, and social media rock star. He consults with big brands, writes best-selling books, is a college professor, trains, speaks, podcasts, and authors an AdAge 150 blog. He even has his own Wikipedia page. To say he’s busy is an understatement, but he clearly understands the importance of long-term relationships.

I have firsthand experience here, because I’ve emailed him, called him, and even cornered him at New Media Expo, but he took time to offer me advice. Not sugar-infused, back-slapping, Pollyanna-like advice. No, it was his own brand of constructive guidance. Something he delivers to aspiring bloggers, students and businesspeople trying to gain traction in the online jungle. He’s simply taking the time to be helpful.

Part of online marketing done right is knowing your audience. Mark sure does. The other? Giving. Giving. Giving. It’s what online love affairs (not “that” kind) are built on.

In a nutshell: Be patient, helpful and never stop giving. For this you shall be rewarded.

THE ENTREPRENEURS FEATURED HERE have built real businesses by constantly fine-tuning their own form of online marketing. In fact, I consider them creative, ambitious and extremely helpful business owners who just happen to blog, and I’ve been following them around like a tail-wagging puppy.

2.0 The Secret to Their Success

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2. A firm foundation is a must.

Each person featured here has a blog built on foundational content.

Foundational content is NOT bragging about your accomplishments. No, it’s your expertise woven into the fabric of your site in the form of Value.

These people roll value into foundational content — to turn the gears, support the brand, and educate their audience. It’s the bedrock everything else is built upon — and most importantly — it’s why people keep coming back. Their know-how is infused in their content.

James Chartrand is wickedly creative. She is also relentless when it comes to filling the pages of her site with value.

And it’s an art form you can master. Watching James operate might be the best place to start.

As her bio states, “...she’s partial to strong coffee and fine Shiraz. She loves the color blue, ice skating, Nike sneakers and her two wonderful daughters,” but she also loves her clients.

Why do I know this? She’s great at what she does, but delivers value-packed, engaging and consistent content — the solid ground the Men With Pens brand is built upon.

Does your site showcase your expertise in a clear and consistent way?

3. They’ve embraced the power of story.

How?

By taking facets of their foundational content and teaching this in a decidedly engaging way.

Modern content marketing is about crafting useful content AND finding and connecting with a certain audience.

You achieve this by delivering valuable content in such a way that people not only pay attention, they fall head over heels in love and can’t wait to share what they’ve learned.

It’s content strategy done right, and this is how my A-Team delivers ...

A. Each blog has a consistent narrative. Their content has a specific tone, and they work daily to ...

B. Tell a story built to help the reader (their ideal customer) get past a particular problem.

C. Work to spread this cohesive story across various media (social, video, podcasting, etc.)

Helpful, story-like, and extremely consistent.

This is branding done right and it’s how successful content marketers operate.

How’s your storyline?
4. They think like teachers (not marketers).

They are incredibly useful. They listen. They are experts and they deliver. The fine folks in this book dive deep into their client’s world and treat them like a hero. Each teacher available 24/7 with content to help a prospective client blow past a problem.

They’re good at selling because they don’t sell. It’s sounds counterintuitive, but it’s a big reason they are successful.

Gini Dietrich is one of the hardest working people I know. She’s also very patient and is more teacher than marketer.

If you follow her around social media, you’ll soon discover her self-effacing character and strong work ethic. She is also extremely generous when it comes to dispensing advice. It’s a long-term strategy that’s paid off, but it’s not the least bit calculated. It’s natural.

I think we are all teachers inside. It’s just a matter of finding your medium (writing, podcasting, video or all of the above) and getting your groove on.

If you’re selling every minute of the day, it’s time to stop, look and listen, like a good teacher should.

5. They pay attention.

They’re Agile — continually adapting, refining and over-delivering. They don’t ignore their audience or their potential clients. In fact they do quite the opposite. They study their audience and take feedback from their readers so they can deliver better products and services.

Danny Brown does not focus on meaningless metrics. Numbers like social shares and reach are fine and dandy, but kinda worthless if you’re not finding the people who put food on your table — customers.

According to Danny, it’s almost criminal not to be utilizing the crazy amount of data available to us all. Your potential customers are out there sharing their preferences, buying signals and showing you (through data) what impacts them to make the big decision.

Through data you can find your ideal persona, find where they live online, and start to build content inline with their wants and needs.

And if you have an email list and a community of commenters, why not analyze and utilize what they have to say? Take advantage of their smarts and constructive advice to improve your business.

How well are you watching and listening?

That customer you seek has a problem, something they must get past — a point of pain. The bloggers in this book have mastered the art of framing and delivering those points. This is why great customers find them, not the other way around.
SO ... WHAT ABOUT YOUR BUSINESS?

Feeling stuck or overwhelmed?

Like you’re heading in the wrong direction and need to put the brakes on?

Are you sick of blogging with nothing to show for it?

Well, if you need to attract and retain paying customers, you’re in the right place.

Yes, I love making friends, writing is rewarding, and the practice of blogging is a catalyst for so many things.

BUT if you want to create something more — a business with paying clients — the entrepreneurs featured here can get you started in the right direction.

I sincerely hope this content on the following pages helps in some way.

*Now onto those 25 master guides ...*
I don’t know that there’s really a “secret” to my success other than a long-term, consistent commitment to providing useful information that helps professionals get better at social media and content marketing. I don’t have the resources (or frankly, the desire) to be a social media “news” source like Mashable, or other daily update providers. And I don’t have the patience or the time to do super in-depth, 12,000-word analyses of key issues in blog post form. Instead, Convince & Convert has always strived for something in the middle, providing interpretation and context that helps people understand not just what’s happening and how-to but rather “why” business and marketing is changing. Taking the complex and making it approachable for the mid-market is where I see our sweet spot.

Fortunately, it works. The same time I started to produce truly useful content is when consumers began seeking out truly useful content, and educating themselves like never before. Self-serve information is a key tenet of my new book, Youtility: Why Smart Marketing is About Help not Hype, and it’s a way that ALL companies can create customers ... by making marketing so useful that people would pay for it, and then just giving that knowledge away.
“The moral of this story is a simple one write about stuff that your clients want to know, NOT your buddies in the blogosphere (or industry you’re in).”

That being said, here are some tips you can use to start generating *customers* and not simply visitors.

1. Focus on “Money Keywords”
This is a subject that gets overlooked way too much in the blogosphere, so let me give you an example of what I’m talking about.

I once wrote a post about some “issues” I had with the conference “Blog World” that was quite controversial. Not only did the post generate thousands upon thousands of readers, but it also generated over 500 comments! Pretty cool, huh? Actually, in hindsight, that post has done almost nothing in terms of helping me at The Sales Lion generate...
paying customers. Although it may have made me feel pretty good in the moment, it simply didn’t pay the bills.

On the other hand, I once wrote a post on “HubSpot vs. Infusionsoft.” Although the subject line isn’t juicy, and although the post generated few comments and shares (comparatively speaking to the other article), it has generated hundreds and hundreds of qualified visitors to my site over the last year due to the fact that it ranks for some incredibly important keywords that my potential clients (marketing departments of small-medium sized businesses) would be focused on.

The moral of this story is a simple one—write about stuff that your clients want to know, NOT your buddies in the blogosphere (or industry you’re in).

2. Leverage Assignment Selling with your Content

Although you may not have heard of “Assignment Selling,” it’s a process that has basically changed my life, and can be used with any business that leverages content to generate more traffic, leads, and sales.

To give you an example of how it works with The Sales Lion, it all starts with my free eBook—250 pages of information about inbound and content marketing.

Because I get so many emails of people asking me about content marketing and potentially working together in some capacity, I have to have a means whereby I can sift through the leads and work with the most qualified and best aligned prospects. This being said, when anyone contacts my company for a possible engagement (or just free advice), they are REQUIRED to read the eBook FIRST. As you might imagine, *requiring* anyone to do anything can turn off some potential customers, but this is exactly what I want. My desire is to *only* work with the best of clients, and once someone reads 250 pages of my words, thoughts, and feelings on marketing, you can be assured they have “bought-in” by that point and are going to be a great fit to work together.

And if they don’t read it, they’re simply not a good fit, and I let them go.

It’s that simple.
“You’ll turn prospects into customers when you convince your prospects that your product is critical to them achieving their goals.”

None of these goals are about writing blog headlines, growing email lists, or publishing posts. My content only matters if I can show how my techniques empower my prospects to achieve their goals.

You have the same challenge. You’ll turn prospects into customers when you convince your prospects that your product is critical to them achieving their goals.

Understand the role your product plays in your prospect’s personal story.

I discovered that my readers come to my blog for specific reasons. Some want the freedom to chart their career path, others are fulfilled by offering advice to others, still more want to feel that they’ve used their talents in a productive way.
In 2012, we began to expand our marketing communications firm beyond word-of-mouth and referral sales to revenue generated through blogging, inbound marketing, and speaking. What used to be 100 percent of our business is now only 10 percent. The other 90 percent are made up of Spin Sucks readers (40 percent), speaking (40 percent), and cycling (they say it’s the new golf!).

Having blogged for five years before it became a revenue generator for us, it was a long-term investment. Like running a marathon or riding a Century, if you will.

But today, it not only generates nearly half of the revenue for the professional services side of the company, it has allowed us to create
revenue opportunities through content sales, sponsorship of webinars, and production of events.

That said, it’s one of the most time-intensive business development tactics we use. Not only is it the full-time job of our content director, Lindsay Bell-Wheeler, I spend between 10 and 15 hours a week on it, and every person on our team blogs once a week.

While speaking makes up the other majority of our revenue, that requires me to pack a suitcase, go through security, fight the crowds, fly to some exotic destination such as Omaha or Grand Rapids or Fargo, speak, network, attend cocktail parties, do my regular job, and then fly home.

I can blog from the comfort of my home, in my PJs or cycling clothes, and not have to worry about expense reports and finding bed bugs in my luggage.

Blogging is not a small investment. It’s not an easy investment. But it’s the most efficient way we have found to create inbound marketing, generate leads, and build our business.

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The very first step on having customers is to have an offer. So many people wish they had customers, but then they act almost afraid to make an offer and assign a price tag to it. You’ve got to get over that.

From there, realize we’re in the content marketing business. So, you need to have an understanding of basic human psychology and basic copywriting, then create useful motivational content that will provide value to your prospects while gently nudging them into the position that your offer is the next logical step for them. But, when that time comes, you tell them what to do.
“It’s my experience that the number one factor for generating clients online has been “creating value before attempting to claim any.”

S. ANTHONY IANNARINO

It’s my experience that the number one factor for generating clients online has been “creating value before attempting to claim any.”

It’s counterintuitive—especially to salespeople. We’re used to capturing our share of the value we create before we create it or when we are creating it, never after we create it. But content marketing is different.

You share your best ideas with a community of people who care deeply about those ideas. You give away your insights, you share your knowledge, and you share the perspective you’ve gained through your experiences.

You give all of this away and, by doing so, you give your dream client the opportunity to understand how you create value and to experience your work. By doing so, you develop the kind of relationship on which an opportunity to work with your dream client can be built.
To build a strong customer attraction campaign, you must first understand why your potential customers use the Internet.

There are two reasons why people go online. Only two. Those are: A. To be entertained, or B. To solve a problem. Once you understand that you are able to begin to create products and services and content that does one of those things, or both.

It’s important to remember that you must also understand that people are busier than ever with their lives and jumping around from one website and blog to a video, etc.

Humans are simply overwhelmed these days with options. This is a good thing for people who understand one major rule. And that is that people are looking for time savers.

What about your marketing message shows the potential customer that you have something that saves their time? Think about all the things you search for online. Which one have you ever bought?
that told you it worked, but it took a lot of time to get done. We live in a fast-paced world where people need time saving tips and tools and products and services. Hitting this message to your customers will help you increase your conversions.

Lastly, when considering the creation of content as a marketing plan, aka, content marketing, it would be wise to remember that all great content goes viral because of one major rule: Emotions create reactions.

Think of anything you’ve shared without being asked (the definition of viral) online. A video that made you laugh or cry. An article that made you angry. We share content that makes us have an emotion. So when you go to create content, you must always remember to ask yourself if you have created something that might cause an emotion in someone. Because then you have a chance at a reaction, which could be a sale, a download, a lead, a phone call, etc.

“So when you go to create content, you must always remember to ask yourself if you have created something that might cause an emotion in someone.”
“In the social web, curating makes you a great middleman. Creating, on the other hand, makes you the final destination.”

FRANCISCO ROSALES

SOCIAL MOUTHS
WEBSITE: SOCIALMOUTHS.COM
TWITTER: @SOCIALMOUTHS

I think the key has been to, not only understand, but respect the process from social connection to an actual sale.

The starting point has to be “Creation” because in the social web, curating makes you a great middleman. Creating, on the other hand, makes you the final destination.

Once you’ve created something you have to put it in front of the right people, this is when community becomes important.

The recommendation and discovery engine is put to work. New connections are established and, you find yourself in front of a relationship you have to nurture and service.

It’s like you have to go through all the marketing areas: Content, Social Media, Search, and Relationship, and all this needs to happen before you can make an actual sale.

If you understand the process, you will most likely not look like a douchebag asking for a sale too soon and, business should happen organically instead.
“Being an entrepreneur in the 21st century means you need to educate first and inspire second.”

Being an entrepreneur in the 21st century means you need to educate first and inspire second. The ‘close’ of a deal, or the bringing on-board of a new customer should be the natural conclusion to the relationship building process that you’ll achieve through focusing on these two points. Throw in a little entertainment for good measure, and you have the recipe that will catapult your business to a whole new level.

The fact is that the way we do business has changed. It’s not about collecting subscribers, or fans. It’s about making friends. View your customers as your friends and you’re off to the races!
“All you need to do is reply quickly with engaging, reassuring words that convey your expertise, and you’ve practically won the project.”

JAMES CHARTRAND

MEN WITH PENS
WEBSITE: MENWITHPENS.CA
TWITTER: @MENWITHPENS

Speed is of the essence.
There’s one secret on which the success of Men with Pens was forged. It’s a valuable one that consistently earns us respect, lands us new projects, books up our schedule and makes for unbelievably happy clients.

This secret isn’t mystical voodoo. It’s not rocket science. It’s just plain common sense, and so often overlooked you’d be amazed.

I’m willing to share this secret with you, because it’ll give you an edge. Chances are good that the people who aren’t serious about success will just skim this, nod and never actually put anything into practice. (There are more people out there like this than you’d think, by the way.)

It’s a good thing: the nodders-and-do-nothing give serious people like you the opportunity to scoop up what they leave on the table. And because you care about building a thriving business, you deserve to know this secret.

Ready? Here it is:
Answer all your emails quickly.

That’s it. That’s all. I know some people might be disappointed there’s no magical incantation or wizardly spell involved, but that’s often the case with solid, proven advice that works.
If you care about winning more clients and booking yourself solid, keep reading, because this secret – and understanding why it works – is crucial to your business success.

You see, when people send you an email, they’re already thinking about working with you – they could’ve not sent you anything, after all, or sent an email to your competition instead.

But they didn’t. They took time out of their lives and reached out to your business… which gives you full opportunity to show them you’re the best business for their needs.

All you need to do is reply quickly with engaging, reassuring words that convey your expertise, and you’ve practically won the project.

If you wait… if you decide to answer tomorrow, if you’ve set up one of those silly “I only check my email twice a day” auto-responders, if you put it off thinking you’ll get to it later… that might cost you everything.

People hate waiting. We human beings love instant gratification, no matter what form it takes. And we like to think we matter, that we’re important. We want to be seen and heard and acknowledged with the reaction we’re hoping for - the faster, the better.

Make us wait, and we feel like you don’t care.

So why work with you?
You can justify waiting any way you’d like. Perhaps you think it’s good to train clients that you don’t jump at their command. Maybe you’ve decided it’s more efficient to answer email on a restricted, set schedule. Maybe you feel people should show patience – after all, you’re not tied to your computer, and they shouldn’t expect you to be.

And all those are true. You’re not tied to your computer. You shouldn’t be at anyone’s beck and call. It is efficient to schedule time to reply to emails.

But that’s all about you. And good customer service is all about the client. If you want the work, the faster you answer, the more chance you have of winning that person over.

It’s proven: at Men with Pens, clients consistently tell us they chose to work with us over others because of our lightning-fast response time. It wasn’t our skill levels or qualifications (which were a given). It wasn’t because we were cheaper (we’re not). It wasn’t even because we sounded smarter, friendlier or had pretty blue eyes (though that does help).

It’s because we acknowledged, respected and demonstrated interest in our clients by responding to their email in short order… while the competition took their sweet time.

We were there. Where will you be?
“Be Great at One Thing – Whether you have a consistent blog, podcast, video series, book series, etc.”

2. Be Great at One Thing - Whether you have a consistent blog, podcast, video series, book series, etc., pick a channel for your message that you simply own. You don’t have to be great at everything, but you have to be great in at least one channel.

3. Give More to Get More - Building audiences today on the web is a lot about a share-first mentality. Create an influencer “hit list” (where are customers are hanging out when they aren’t on your site) and consistently share their content more than your own. Build lasting relationships with these people. Watch the opportunities appear before your eyes.

4. Email Subscription - Followers, Fans and Likes are great, but don’t build your content ship on rented land. Focus on building your email subscription list and deliver an amazing email newsletter. You’ll find out that subscribers may in fact become your best customers.

Be THE expert informational resource. Remember the days when a few news outlets ruled the world? Those days are long gone.

Today, any person or company can become a “go-to” resource to solve customers’ pain points. How do you start? Here’s a few tips.

1. Go Small - Find a content niche that you can actually be the leading expert in that particular industry. If you choose a niche where there are a lot of players, that’s a tough road.
I had a student in one of my classes completely turn her business around in the middle of a recession. She ended all her advertising and instead devoted her energies to helping people through her content.

While her competitors were failing, she increased revenue by 19%, and improved her conversion rate of visitors to her business from 50% to 75%.

It is difficult for many to make the leap to the social media mindset of 1) meaningful, 2) surrounding yourself with a relevant audience, and 3) being authentically helpful but if you do it, and trust it, the system works!
I think that with all of the hype around social media, people have forgotten that all of your integrated marketing efforts (including social and content marketing) should be tied to business objectives and driven by data as much as possible.

For instance, being on Facebook (or any other social network) solely because “everyone is there” isn’t a viable business reason to invest in what it takes to build a legitimate community there and, more importantly, reap any benefit from it in terms of sales.

You need to focus first on a brand strategy. You need to ascertain where your customers are, what problems and pain points they have and what they need to make their lives (and their jobs) easier and their businesses more profitable.

Then you need to create, curate and share content (blog, white papers, case
You Don’t need Fans, You need Customers

studies, video, social channel content, etc.) that speaks to those problems and delivers those solutions.

This is the age of the consumer, and marketing is no longer about marketers pushing our products and services on captive customers. Marketing today is about delivering the right solutions, in the right format, to the right audience, at the right time, in the most effective, most credible manner possible.

Social media channels and the network building, research and outreach you can do using them, great content, distributed strategically across the web are important.

Also important, and a crucial component of success, is an understanding of not only search engine optimization and search engine marketing but also of your buyer personas, the sales funnel and how to communicate with prospects differently depending on where they are in the sales process.

Smart marketers let data drive decisions and strategy.

“You need to focus first on a brand strategy. You need to ascertain where your customers are, what problems and pain points they have and what they need to make their lives (and their jobs) easier and their businesses more profitable.”
“Good, helpful, trustworthy content delivered on a regular basis over the long term has been my biggest tool.”

The way to take those new connections and turn them into customers is to stay consistent with the content I have shared.

Good, helpful, trustworthy content delivered on a regular basis over the long term has been my biggest tool.

Doing this helps you lay certain physiological truths.

1. I know what I’m talking about.
2. My information is actionable.
3. I’m here for the long haul, and will be available to help.

For me, I have used a 70 - 30 ratio to connecting with people online.

70% hard targeted to what I do and 30% soft targeted.

Example:
Hard targeted = bloggers
Soft targeted = mlm or real estate people

Both need blogging help, but the MLM or real estate person may not know it yet, or have not taken action yet.
Acquiring a prospect or generating a lead is the beginning of the sales process that isn’t fully realized until they make their first purchase and experience it first hand. Conversion is an iterative process that requires continual refinement.

To convert prospects into customers, here are five actionable marketing tips.

1. Provide product related information prospects and customers seek. Skip the promotion. Give them the content they want in plain English. This means supply useful product information, answers to product-related questions, show them how to use and style your products and offer customer ratings and reviews.

2. Give your products and services the star treatment. Show off their best features in the environment in which they’re to be used. Provide photographs and videos. These are as important pre-purchase as they are post-purchase because if your product winds up sitting in the closet, customers won’t buy from you again.
“The bottom line is that converting prospects into customers is an on-going, work in progress where you gather incremental learning from each campaign.”

3. Incorporate a contextually relevant call-to-action in your social media and content marketing. Remember that customers may need to see your content multiple times before they’re ready to buy. Therefore use different calls-to-action to get prospects to take another step in the purchase process.

4. Use targeted landing pages. Continue to use the same creative and content to convert prospects. Bryan Eisenberg refers to this as scent. This is one area where one size doesn’t fit all!

5. Test different presentations. Continually test (either A/B or multivariate testing) each aspect of your conversion process to determine what changes improve your results. (Anne Holland’s Which Test Won http://whichtestwon.com/ is a great resource.)

The bottom line is that converting prospects into customers is an on-going, work in progress where you gather incremental learning from each campaign.

Happy marketing,
Heidi Cohen
“Forget about the products and services you’re selling, and figure out how to help your prospects solve a problem, get smarter, feel better, or achieve more.”

STEFANIE SAMMONS

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The most important thing to realize about finding prospects and converting them into customers is that it’s part art and part science.

Almost anyone can build an online presence and put together a system for getting in front of prospects given today’s digital opportunities (the science part). However, it takes creative and strategic thinking to determine exactly what will influence your prospects to move them toward becoming a customer (the art). You may think you know the pain points of your ideal clients, but the truth is that most people are completely missing the boat on this.

Get out there and ask the tough questions. The answers may surprise you. Forget about the products and services you’re selling, and figure out how to help your prospects solve a problem, get smarter, feel better, or achieve more. Give your prospects exactly what they need and want through your digital presence.
Take a Stand

Writing about topics that everyone else is covering won’t differentiate you among the sea of choices your target market could choose to rely on for valuable information. Instead, find the elephant in the room that can make the biggest difference to your prospects based on what you do and take a stand about it.

You must be sure to back up your premise with points that help to prove it, but don’t be afraid of a bit of controversy. That’s what inspires comments and sharing and inquiries. Never get defensive, but remain curious in responding to challengers. Biggest point is to give people stuff to think about that leads them to come to you for answers and insights they can’t get elsewhere.
“The point of content marketing is not to get really good at creating content. It’s to get really good at creating content that drives business.”

ANN HANDLEY

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The best way to spread your marketing message these days is to create and share content as a cornerstone of your marketing.

Content has always been part of marketing, of course. But advances in technology and the rise of social media bring new and (I think!) exciting opportunities for organizations of any size. Increasingly, the social and online interactions we have with one another are leading us to brands – it’s no longer simply brands leading us to their products.

So here’s how I define that opportunity: Content marketing means you consistently create and share information that is useful, inspired and honestly empathetic to attract customers to you. Two critical parts of that last sentence are “consistently create and share” and “to attract customers to you.” Let’s break that down:
“Consistently create”
Content isn’t a one-and-done campaign, it’s a commitment.

“Consistently share”
You can’t sit back and expect Google to do all the work of delivering customers to your door: The opportunity of social media means we can share content and resources and directly engage with the people we are trying to reach.

And finally, “to attract customers to you” The point of content marketing is not to get really good at creating content. It’s to get really good at creating content that drives business.

Pitch your tent in a single content campsite, so to speak, and let that campsite become the home base – your hub – around which all other activity centers (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and so on). You can always add to that hub later. But master one tactic or channel first, and use it really, really well in fun, inventive, interesting ways.


And from there: Create marketing your customers will thank you for.
Lately, it seems as if we, as marketers, have gotten lazy. We’ve stopped thinking beyond the easy, Marketing 101 prospecting that we learned when we started our profession, and happily hide behind numbers that don’t mean all that much.

- Impressions;
- Social proof;
- Social shares;
- Reach;
- Awareness.

“We have the most insane amount of data available to us that it’s almost criminal not to be utilizing that to market smarter.”

DANNY BROWN
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All good numbers, and useful if that’s the goal of your marketing endeavors. But something that’s primarily missing from these numbers is the main reason we got into marketing in the first place – customers.

Sure, having a lot of reach can help you get in front of those prospects you want to turn into customers. And yes, without potential customers being aware of your brand, the prospecting factor diminishes immediately.

But we’re so much better than that - or we should be.

We have the most insane amount of data available to us that it’s almost
criminal not to be utilizing that to market smarter. Today’s social web users are freely sharing their Likes, preferences, buying signals and, more importantly, who impacts them to make the decisions that matter – so why are we not using this data more?

• Build your archetypal persona based on transactional and archival data, and combine with today’s wealth of information;

• Identify where they live online. More importantly, identify who they live online with, based on their current needs and situations;

• Use weighted keywords – placing more emphasis on the words that matter to your brand and that of your customer;

• Filter the conversations around these topics and build secondary and tertiary filters around the people in your prospect’s immediate circle for these topics;

• Drop your prospects into a CRM platform like Nimble, to connect the dots when it comes to the buying cycle and life events that impact their decisions;

“Today’s social web users are freely sharing their Likes, preferences, buying signals and, more importantly, who impacts them to make the decisions that matter – so why are we not using this data more?”

• Monitor, react, be pro-active, offer solutions;

• Rinse and repeat.

Okay, so that’s a simple overview for brevity – but as simple as it is, it’s a strong foundation for truly understanding what it takes to move your desired customers from prospects to leads to acquisition.

It takes legwork, but the results are worth it. Unless you prefer to wallow in the lazy marketing pool, of course.
“As we use content to drive deeper engagement, everything we do should be to attract that consumer into a deeper, more engaged relationship with our brand.”

ROBERT ROSE

Marketers no longer have to rent access to customer attention. We have the power and responsibility to aggregate our own audiences – and engage consumers across every touchpoint of the brand experience. The approach of Content Marketing is a process, an approach to marketing that attracts and retains customers by consistently creating, curating and distributing content in order to change or enhance a consumer behavior.

The key to engaging customers instead of attracting “fans” is to understand those last six words. Every piece of content should have a call to action – it’s just not always a call to sale. 80% of marketers still use measurement/analytics to measure the quantity of transactions instead of the quality of the relationship. As we use content to drive deeper engagement, everything we do should be to attract that consumer into a deeper, more engaged relationship with our brand. This is what will ultimately change or enhance that consumer behavior.

Put simply: Traditional marketing is telling the world you’re a rock star. Content Marketing is showing the world you are one.
“The best way I know to build trust is to give away more than you think you should as often as you can. The more you give, the more it will come back to you.”

First and foremost, you have to solve a real problem. There are plenty of them out there – losing weight, making more money, finding love, and a thousand other variations – but you need to find one and solve it in some way.

Second, your customer needs to trust you. The best way I know to build trust is to give away more than you think you should as often as you can. The more you give, the more it will come back to you. If people trust you and you solve a real problem for them, then selling is easy.
“It’s about collaboration. It starts by listening intently to your current customers, even if there are only a handful of them.”

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The most foolproof way to turn prospects to customers is to make something that solves a sticky problem, and make it affordable, and easy-to-use.

But how exactly does that work?

It’s about collaboration. It starts by listening intently to your current customers, even if there are only a handful of them.

For example, my original business idea was to share information and sell classes about how to combine marketing and design to create a strong brand for your business, even if you’re on a budget.

But in the process of teaching those classes, I kept hearing two big complaints.

The first one was that people wanted to jump on the ebook bandwagon so they could share — or sell — their ideas without going through a publisher.
“The most foolproof way to turn prospects to customers is to make something that solves a sticky problem, and make it affordable, and easy-to-use.”

The second one was that people had terrible, frustrating experiences trying to get a working business website. Either they did it themselves and weren’t satisfied, or they hired someone and felt they’d been ripped off.

It wasn’t until I developed products to solve these two very specific problems that my own business really took off.

I continue to listen, and my customers continue to offer great ideas.

My current project shows people how to build an email list step-by-step — from picking a vendor, to strategy and implementation. It’s something my customers have been telling me they needed for years, and I’m delighted to offer a solution.
Facebook is the ultimate platform to help you turn your fans into raving customers. What most people miss is the fact that there is a process for making this happen and it’s not about throwing up a few posts on Facebook and sending fans directly to your sales page! When it comes to Facebook, you want to think in terms of list building. Use this mega platform as an opportunity to turn your fans into leads. Once you have these new leads, use the power of email marketing to cultivate your new relationships and turn your new lead into raving customers.

So how do you turn a fan into a lead? Create an irresistible giveaway offer (a free video, ebook, webinar, cheat sheet, guide, etc.) and build a lead capture page inside a custom app on Facebook to collect names and emails in exchange for your irresistible offer. Post about your giveaway on Facebook and drive traffic to your new custom app. This strategy allows you to post great content and build engagement with your fans before you sell.

When you try to turn a Facebook fan into an instant customer before you build trust and add value, you lose the opportunity to create good will and offer support to your fans and because of this, your sales often suffer. However, when you do the work up front and move a fan to a lead first and then cultivate that relationship over time, it is so much easier to then transition your new lead into a loyal, happy customer.
Your prospects want to know you get them, their current circumstances, and their goals. I’ve had the most success when I pair that knowledge – my customers’ perspective – with an insight I have because of my process and experience – my expert’s perspective.

I strive to put all of my offers in my prospect’s voice and make them aligned with their definition of success. Instead of promoting a free tool to help them understand their customers’ perspective, I promote the possibility of spending less time marketing and more time making an impact.

That gets their attention. In order to make the sale, I challenge a misconception they have about their problem or desire to show I truly have something to offer them. For instance, I might point out that even though they know their ideal client, they’re having the wrong conversations with them which then leads to developing the wrong products.

The combination of perspective-taking and finding an insight I can use to challenge their status quo has been my most powerful one-two punch for turning prospects into clients.
“It’s easy to fall into the trap of building fans if your whole marketing strategy is writing a blog.”

Don’t be static: make offers and create events.

It’s easy to fall into the trap of building fans if your whole marketing strategy is writing a blog. You end up with a community that makes you feel good, but never buys anything.

Your blog is a landing base, a credibility tool, an SEO tool and a funnel into the newsletter. Whenever I see an influx of customers, it’s because I’ve created an offer or event and promoted it with content off my site (guest posts / interviews / webinars etc). But this doesn’t just drive sales to that offer. Many of my highest paying clients found me promoting a paid product and skipped straight to working with me.

When you create offers and build (useful) content to promote them, you’re seen as a trusted business, not just a friendly blogger. That sets a great tone for new prospects.
If you would like to learn more about the author, please visit http://www.craigmcbreen.com/about/ or connect with him:

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Thank You and Happy Marketing!
Craig