Uncovering why Inbound Marketing has Become so Popular for Communication   agencies

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Abstract

Title: Uncovering why Inbound Marketing has Become so Popular for Communication agencies.

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In introduction, the topic of this dissertation is 'why has Inbound Marketing increased in popularity with communication agencies in recent years?' The context of this dissertation is establishing why many communication agencies have defected from using traditional, outbound marketing methods in recent years in favour of Inbound Marketing techniques such as e-stores and social media platforms. The central issue of this dissertation concerns identifying the main reasons why an increasing number of communication agencies have started using Inbound Marketing techniques in recent years. Due to the revolutionization of the internet, Inbound Marketing techniques have become increasingly popular with modern organisations (Xiaoge, 2016). In the communication agency industry, Inbound Marketing excellence is a strategic capability which has become especially well sought after as firms try to gain a competitive advantage in a fiercely contested industry (Xiaoge, 2016).

This research topic has principally been chosen as even though the topic of marketing has been highly researched in the last number of decades, this current iteration of marketing called Inbound Marketing has little academic research performed on it.

A further reason why this topic was chosen is because the researcher has direct access to communication agency owners. To find out exactly why Inbound Marketing has become so popular, it is important to gain an understanding of how to approach the research itself. This was achieved by first carrying out an extensive literature review containing some key theories and concepts from the subject of marketing. The researcher's primary field investigations principally involved carrying out rounds of in depth interviews with 5 different communication agency owners. A qualitative thematic analysis was then used to interpret the results of these to pick out the key themes and patterns which emerged from the interview transcripts.

Submission of Thesis and Dissertation

National College of Ireland

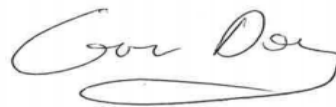Research Students Declaration Form

(Thesis/Author Declaration Form)

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Degree for which thesis is submitted: Msc Business Management

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1 Table of Contents

1 Introduction

Research carried out by Lee (2018) and Steimle (2016) suggests that Inbound Marketing methods have proven increasingly popular with most businesses in recent years including communication agencies. Similarly, field studies conducted by Lee (2018) have also found that the uptake of Inbound Marketing techniques as a replacement for outbound methods has accelerated hugely (Steimle, 2016). Several key authors in the field of Inbound Marketing state that it is the cost-effectiveness of inbound vs outbound that largely accounts for its vast increase in popularity among modern-day commercial enterprises such as communication agencies. For communication agencies, the figures suggest that Inbound Marketing techniques such as blogging are now essential to the continued success of their business.

For example, Hub Spot (2018) report stated that over 53% of modern marketers say that inbound blog content creation is their top priority when enacting a new marketing or branding strategy. Additionally, Lee (2018) explains that Inbound Marketing techniques have a higher conversion rate and lead generation rate than traditional, somewhat outdated outbound methods. This view is supported by the following statistic sourced from Hub Spot (2018) which suggests that 93% of modern businesses which used Inbound Marketing techniques then recorded a significant boost in their lead generation. Due to its vastly increasing popularity, now represents a good time to carry out an extensive research study on the issue of Inbound Marketing's increasing popularity in the contemporary business landscape.

1.1 The Gap in the Research

This research is needed because the existing literature available on Inbound Marketing's increasing popularity is largely based on businesses as a whole rather than an industry-specific analysis. With this dissertation, the researcher will solely focus on the communication agency industry and uncover key findings from five main players within this industry as to the reasons behind the growing popularity of Inbound Marketing in recent years. This industry in particular has been chosen due to the transformative change in recent years as to how communication agencies go to market, changing from an outbound service oriented approach to a portfolio of Inbound Marketing services such as content creation , search engine optimization and social media management.

The gap in the existing body of literature which this dissertation seeks to fill is why Inbound Marketing techniques are increasingly being adopted by modern, contemporary communication agencies. Presently, many authors in the field of Inbound Marketing attribute its increasing popularity to its cost-effectiveness. For example, Inbound Marketing authors such as Xiaoge (2016) and Tynemouth (2014) suggest that it is lower in cost in relation to outbound techniques and that this is primarily why inbound has significantly increased in popularity. This is where a gap in the literature exists because this dissertation will propose several other key reasons other than cost which have contributed to the increasing popularity of Inbound Marketing techniques.

Some of the alternative reasons which this dissertation will provide include some of the following; high conversion rate, high lead generation rate and website traffic generation at a departmental level and increased alignment of sales and marketing teams at a business level.

In relation to the available literature on the topic of Inbound Marketing's increased popularity with modern organisations, this research study has a considerable opportunity to contribute some novel, new findings to the field. For example, some of the more popular studies in the field such as Tynemouth (2014) and Wollan (2010) have not carried out an extensive analysis of Inbound Marketing's increased popularity in reference to a single industry as this dissertation has done. Therefore, the findings of this dissertation research study are likely to contribute some new data to

add to the existing theories of marketing authors in the field such as Baker and Hart (2016) and Corrado and Freedman (2013).

1.2   Rationale of the study

The main rationale behind this study is that it is an issue which is current and will continue to evolve as the researcher prepares this dissertation. Saunders et al (2009) explains that a research study or dissertation which is carried out on a current event is likely to be more academically valid than older studies. The key research question prepared is 'why has Inbound Marketing increased in popularity with communication agencies in recent years?'. From this overarching research question, the researcher has then chosen some other key questions which must be answered within this dissertation. These include the following; 'other than cost, what are the key drivers behind Inbound Marketing's increased popularity in recent years?' and 'To what extent do Inbound Marketing techniques correlate with the existing content marketing strategies of modern communication agencies?'

The dissertation methodology proposed for this research study to assist in achieving the main aims and objectives outlined by the researcher is to use an interpretivist, subjectivist research philosophy. By adopting this philosophy, the researcher will then use non-probability sampling techniques to interpret the qualitative data streamed from the semi structured interviews carried out with 5 communication agency owners. The research onion developed by Saunders et al (2009) was used as a template to ensure that the researcher mapped out their dissertation research in the most effective way possible. Assessing the methodology required to assist this research study also helped the researcher to identify the key ethical considerations and limitations associated with the chosen research question of 'why has Inbound Marketing increased in popularity with communication agencies in recent years?'

1.3   Aim of Study

The main aim of the dissertation is to find out why Inbound Marketing has increased in popularity with modern communication agencies in recent years. From this main, overarching aim the following objectives have been created:

- To underpin the key contributing reasons behind Inbound Marketing's increased popularity with modern-day organisations within the communication agencies industry.
- To offer alternative reasons behind Inbound Marketing's increased popularity other than its cost-effectiveness and inexpensive price rates.
- To find out from 5 communication agency owners interviewed why their organisation has started to use Inbound Marketing techniques instead of traditional, outbound marketing techniques which they have used previously.
- To establish the subtle differences between content marketing techniques and Inbound Marketing techniques.

1.4   What is the benefit of the research?

By achieving these objectives, the output of this research will be of benefit to communication agency owners and marketing professionals. The aim is that they will be better equipped to identify what the key advantages and benefits of using Inbound Marketing for not only their own organisation but also their clients organisation. One of the key areas which the researcher developed at the outset of this dissertation was that Inbound Marketing has increased in popularity with modern communication agencies in recent years for other reasons than its cost-effectiveness. Instead the area developed by the researcher suggested that reasons such as its high conversion rate, increased sales and marketing alignment and increased popularity of video content marketing were equally pertinent. The output of this research will also be of genuine interest and value to social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook whose business model is largely based on a content strategy as they may choose to increase their advertising space prices and PPC (Pay Per Click) rates based on an increasing

number of modern organisations beginning to exclusively use Inbound Marketing techniques.

2 Literature review

2.1 Introduction to Literature review

The purpose of this literature review is to investigate and analyse why Inbound Marketing is a core service offering for communication agencies. Additionally, the literature review will also seek to clarify how changes in consumer behaviour in the communications agency industry have changed how communication agency marketers deliver marketing services to their clients. The literature review will also consist of applying some key elements of consumer behaviour theory to highlight the important role in which Inbound Marketing plays in modern day organisations.

2.2 Aims and Objectives

The main aim of this literature review is to investigate and analyse why Inbound Marketing is now a core service offering for communication agencies.

The objectives of the literature review are;

- To introduce changes in consumer behaviour.
- To analyse how Inbound Marketing has changed in response to changes in consumer behaviour.
- To provide recommendations to marketers in communication agencies to assist them in using Inbound Marketing techniques to increase lead generation.

2.3 An introduction to consumer behaviour – what has changed and what does it mean for communications agencies?

Boone and Kurtz (2015) explain that one of the biggest changes in consumer behaviour in the communication agency industry has been that consumers are now spending more time researching a product before making a final purchase. Similarly, Duivenvoorde (2015) states that a key change in the communication agency industry is that consumers are now taking longer to decide on which product or service they would like to buy than they had been before. Boone and Kurtz (2014) explain that one of the main reasons why consumers are taking longer to decide on what product or service they wish to purchase is because of the amount of product information that is now available for them to source online. Lamb et al (2010) add that product/service recommendations listed on e-stores such as Amazon, eBay, company websites and social media platforms give the consumer more information to use in their decision-making process.

 Additionally, Powell (2012) states that the availability of product/service information and online consumer feedback threads is the key reason why consumers spend longer deliberating on their purchasing rationale.

Conversely, Trigwell-Jones (2016) suggests that consumers are now spending more time researching a product before making a purchase because they want to ensure that they are getting the best deal.

By comparison, Gatward (2011) also explains that consumers are now spending more time finalising their purchasing rationale because they are using price comparison websites to make sure that they get the best deal financially. Crew and Brennan (2014) explain that a further reason why consumers are spending longer periods of time in making purchasing decisions is because the market is saturated with companies who post regular and consistent high-quality content on their websites and social media platforms. De Chernatony (2010) adds that the high-quality content being streamed regularly by so many companies means that consumers require more time to formulate their final purchasing rationale. Molineux (2011) concludes that because consumers are now taking longer to make buying decisions, the agencies have reacted by making changes to their inbound/content marketing strategies. Similarly, Peitz and Waldfogel (2012) also conclude that the change of consumers

taking more time to research products and thus make a buying decision has resulted in various communication agency organisations now offering Inbound Marketing as a core service.

2.4 Where do consumers go to research product suitability?

2.4.1 Company Website

Lowenstein (2011) argues that one of the first places consumers go to assess product suitability and finalise their purchasing decision is the website of the company that they intend to buy the product from. Similarly, Hoyer et al (2016) explain that when a consumer is trying to decide if they want to buy a product, the company website is one of the first places they visit because this gives them the best chance to view all the product's features and key selling points. Pride et al (2017) add that most modern company websites also have a product rating system and recommendations algorithm built in which enables the consumer to easily identify what other consumers have said about the product they wish to buy.

Furthermore, Mills and Law (2004) state that the company website is also a place where consumers go to research product suitability because the website lists the various features, specifications and key selling points of the product. This brings with it an opportunity for communications agencies to offer services to companies to help them optimize their websites to not only attract more traffic but the right type of traffic.

2.4.2 Social Media

Camillo (2015) argues that another place a consumer goes to in search of assessing products suitability is social media sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram and Twitter. Camillo explains that one of the key reasons why consumers visit social media in trying to assess the suitability of a product is because these sites contain a lot of recommendations from family, friends and acquaintances. Furthermore, Lowenstein (2011) states that social media is a key place where consumers go to finalise their purchasing decision because it is a place where they can receive instant feedback from family and friends in terms of their decision. Fabio (2014) suggests that a modern consumer will use social media a lot when attempting to finalise their

buying decision. To optimise this consumer traffic to their online social media assets, companies today have multiple engagements across all social media platforms. Communications agencies have expertise in social media content engagement to offer to brand's social media platforms with an aim in engaging the target audience.

2.4.3   Price Comparison Websites

Gatward (2011) explains that another key place where consumers go to assess the suitability of a product is price comparison websites. MacLennon (2010) states that price comparison websites are primarily used by consumers who are in search of getting the best deal. Jaffe et al (2006) explains that consumers often use price comparison websites based on the recommendation of a family member and/or friend who is trying to help them save money. Additionally, Manzoor (2010) states that consumers use price comparison websites to work out how they can get the cheapest deal on a product or service. De Chernatony (2010) further adds that consumers who use these sites are not overly concerned with other product features such as quality or service delivery speed and are instead interested in price above all else.

2.4.4   Online search engines

Handley and Chapman (2012) argue that a further place in which consumers go to assess the suitability of a product or service in relation to their needs and wants is search engines such as Google, Bing and Yahoo. Research conducted by Clown and James (2013) suggests that a search engine is the first-place consumers will go when trying to assess the suitability of a product or service and ultimately finalising their purchasing decision making process. Study conducted by the consumer barometer (Figure 1) suggests that consumers will use search engines twice as much rather than going directly to a company's websites which indicates that consumers don't actually know the brand that they want they just use search engines to get informed before making a purchase
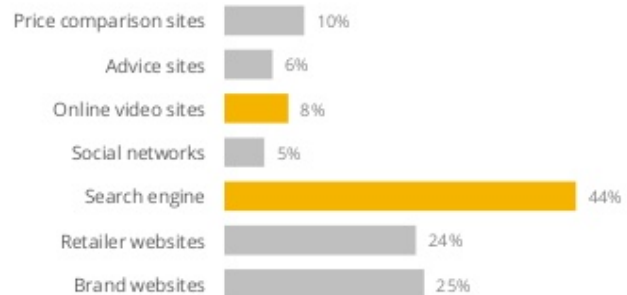
FIGURE 1: RESEARCH LEADING TO A PURCHASE (SOURCE: CONSUMER BAROMETER, 2015)

"*89% of consumers turn to Google, Bing or another search engine to find information on products, services or businesses prior to making purchases*'' Griwert, A. (2012).

A focus on creating content which is personalised to brand's direct target audiences is important to draw in new visitors to the websites. In fact, to facilitate and evolve with this change in how consumers are consuming online content for everyday reasons, in 2014 Google created a new algorithm Humming Bird to curate relevant content based on specific questions searchers will have, (Lin and Yazdanifard, 2014). This indicates that buying Google Adwords to ensure your business proposition is found with keywords will no longer be the only way businesses can attract new website visitors in the future, they will also need a developed and relevant content/Inbound Marketing strategy to ensure Hummingbird ranks their organic content.

Research by (Smartinsights, 2018) shows how in the previous year of 2017 46.8% of the global population accessed the Internet and by 2021 this figure is projected to

grow to 53.7 hence increasing the number of people using search engines.
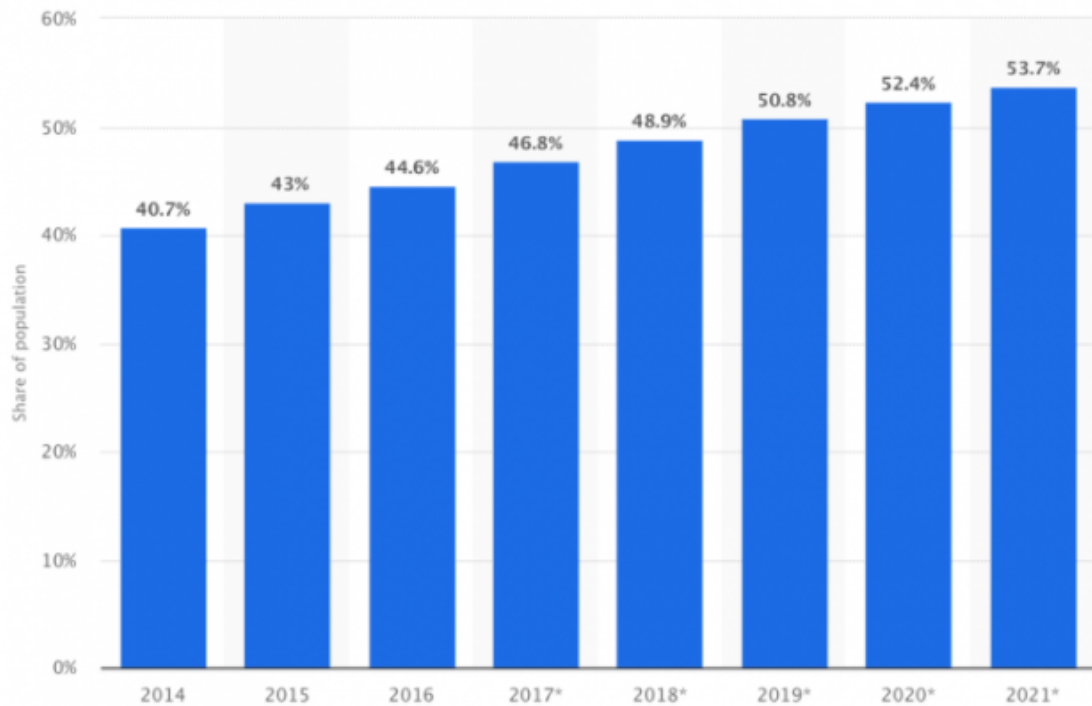
FIGURE 2: POPULATION SHARE (SOURCE: WWW.SMARTERINSIGHTS.COM, 2018)

Cass (2007) explains that the key reason why so many consumers use search engines to assess the suitability of a product or service is because it is the quickest, easiest and most simple method of trying to find out information. Xiao (2016) adds that the search engine represents the quickest, easiest and most simple method of product research for consumer because most modern, handheld mobile devices have an in-built Google search engine which consumers can use at the click of a button. Conversely Yao and Mela (2009) explain that another key reason why consumer use search engines to research a product or service is because this is where they are likely to find out all the available information on that product or service.

Fiore and Tang (2006) add that there is no other online channel where a consumer can type in the name of a product or service and instantly receive such a large amount of information and/or content on that product or service.

2.5 What is Inbound Marketing?

In a business context the Internet can be viewed as a 'pull marketing' strategy where companies pull customers to their brand websites by using content and other marketing efforts such as search engine optimisation and social media, Smith and Chaffey, (2013). This pull strategy is where Inbound Marketing formed its foundations. Pull Marketing focuses on understanding the customer and their journey. It implies that customers will conduct research before making a final purchase decision. T.V. marketing forced people to watch 'push' whereas the new age of marketing is to 'pull' people towards your marketing through engaging content. Prest, (2015). A paradigm shift from outbound (described by some as interruptive) to Inbound Marketing Halligan, B and Shah, D. (2014) has happened.

Xiaoge (2016) explains that Inbound Marketing is where a company distributes online content, product and service information to consumers via various online channels to encourage them to buy their products and services. Similarly, Lieb (20111) argues that Inbound Marketing is where companies try to attract consumers to engage with their brand and product and service range via channels such as blogs, search engines and social media. In comparison, Shipley (2014) states that Inbound Marketing is where companies reach out to their consumer base to try and grab their attention. Pulizzi (2013) also explains that this can be achieved by companies manipulating their online content to appeal to their consumer's needs, wants and desires. Corrado and Freedman (2013) add that a company can manipulate their online content on their company website, social media profiles, blogs, outbound e-mail communications and search engine results. Shipley (2014) states that the core purpose of Inbound Marketing is to create online content which is most likely to capture the attention of the wider consumer base. Conversely, Lieb (2011) suggests that the core purpose of Inbound Marketing is to increase a brands rate of lead generation – the process of generating new consumers and building new consumer relationships.

Corrado and Freedman (2013) further state that there are many advantages to using Inbound Marketing. Jefferson and Stanton (2015) explain that one of the main

advantages to companies of using Inbound Marketing is that it is an extremely effective way of engaging consumers with its products, services and brand. Shipley (2014) adds that a further advantage to companies using Inbound Marketing is that it can increase their level or rate of lead generation. Similarly, Jefferson and Stanton (2015) state that another advantage of Inbound Marketing to companies is that it increases the quality of their content creation on their company website, blog, social media platforms and e-stores. Pulizzi (2013) adds that increased content creation quality also ensures that a company has a better chance of increasing their rate of lead generation because content will better match the wants, needs and desires of the wider consumer base, this backs up Lieb's (2011) vision of lead generation as the core purpose of Inbound Marketing.

2.6   Return on investment in Inbound Marketing

The retailer John Wanamaker famously said, *"Half the money I spend on advertising is wasted; the trouble is I don't know which half."* How to demonstrate return on investment on marketing budgets is a key challenge for modern marketers. Steward et al., (2015) stated that apart from using traditional metrics (e.g.: awareness, purchase intent and brand recommendation), the results of marketing actions needed to be financially measurable using metrics such as Return on Marketing Investment (ROMI). Farris et al. (2015) discussed the standardisation of the ROMI definition, owing to its growing acceptance, but in many cases used and interpreted in very different ways.

Baker and Hart (2016) explain that Inbound Marketing is one of the cheapest methods of marketing. Similarly, Tynemouth (2014) states that Inbound Marketing is much cheaper than outbound marketing because money and resources are not spent on chasing increased lead generation. Wollan et al (2010) therefore, conclude that because it is so cheap, Inbound Marketing offers a much higher rate of return than outbound logistics.

Additionally, Tynemouth (2014) explains that Inbound Marketing offers a high return on investment because it has the potential to massively increase a brands lead generation and reduce the costs accumulated in marketing activities. Research

conducted by Impact (2014) suggests that the return on investment (ROI) in inbound and content marketing has increased by over 300% in the previous 3 years. Baker and Hart (2016) suggest that Inbound Marketing is more cost effective than outbound marketing because companies simply optimise their website and social media platforms to increase their lead generation. Research carried out by HubSpot (Impact, 2014) backs up the theory suggested by Wollan et al (2010) as they have found that companies which rely on Inbound Marketing as opposed to outbound marketing save on average $14 per newly acquired customer. Further research carried out by Hubspot (Impact, 2014) has found that Inbound Marketing costs 61% less on average than outbound leads and is 80% cheaper in customer acquisition after 5 months of marketing. Hubspot did an analysis demonstrating the lead to sales conversion of an inbound lead.
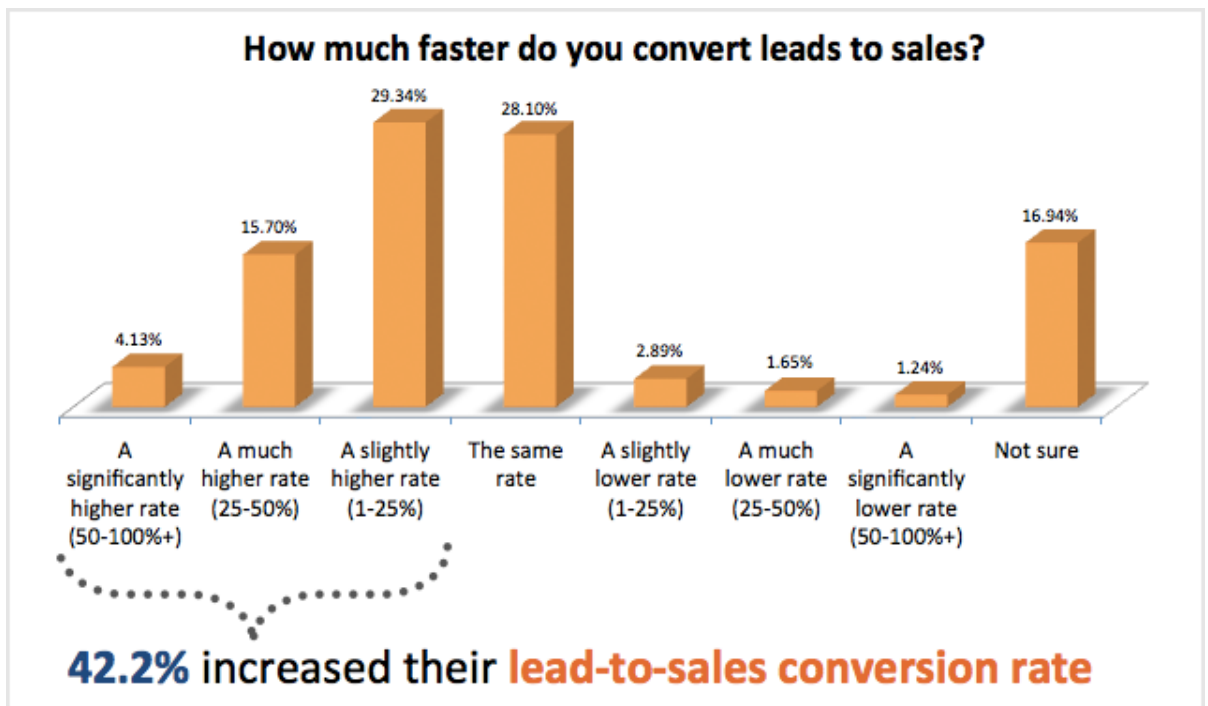
FIGURE 3: COMPANIES WHO USE INBOUND MARKETING INCREASE THEIR LEAD TO SALE CONVERSION RATE (SOURCE: HUBSPOT BLOG, 2017, WWW.HUBSPOT.COM)

They further highlighted how the adoption of an Inbound Marketing strategy dramatically increased web traffic within 7 months

When did you first start to see an increase in traffic?

85% increased **traffic** within 7 months
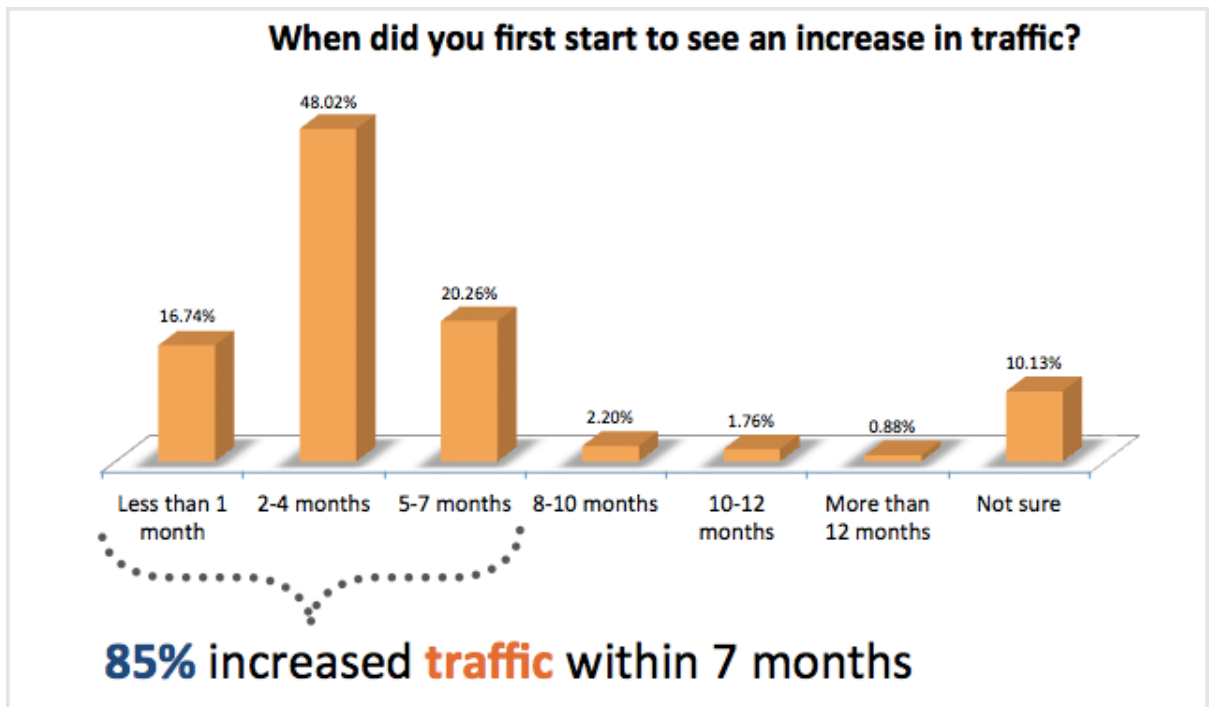
FIGURE 4: COMPANIES WHO USE INBOUND MARKETING INCREASE WEBSITE TRAFFIC WITHIN 7 MONTHS OF IMPLEMENTATION (SOURCE: HUBSPOT BLOG, 2017)

2.7 What is the role of content in Inbound Marketing?

Corrado and Freedman (2013) introduce content as the main element which draws consumers towards engaging with a brand or visiting a company website. Similarly, Adikesvan (2014) states that content is used by companies as the main element of enticing and attracting consumers to their company website, social media sites and YouTube channels. Cohen (2017) explains that the key role of content in Inbound Marketing is to keep customers up-to-date with the latest information, campaigns and advertising communications of a company. Therefore, Xiaoge (2016) concludes that it is important for a company to manage its content effectively to ensure that it is relevant, up-to-date and creative. Lieb (2011) further explains that the role of content in Inbound Marketing also involves sharing and distributing media to drive profitable consumer action i.e. purchasing a product. Similarly, Bly (2018) states that one of the main roles content has within Inbound Marketing is to ensure that consumers receive relevant information if they type the company name into a search engine or visit the company website and/or social media pages. Pulizzi (2013) further adds that relevant content is essential because the content needs to be created with the core purpose of

converting a website visitor or search engine user into a permanent customer. As such, Pulizzi (2013) explains that if content is not kept relevant, the Inbound Marketing campaign will fail to increase a brands lead generation, return on investment and profitability.

2.8 Differences between inbound and content marketing

Due to the fact that any previous research conducted in this area cross references between inbound and content marketing the researcher will discuss the difference between inbound and content marketing. Janning (2015) explains that the key difference between inbound and content marketing is that Inbound Marketing is the overall process of turning a website visitor into a customer and that content marketing is a smaller part of this process. Conversely, Brubaker and Tehrani (2015) state that the key difference between inbound and content marketing is that content marketing is the process of creating, sharing and distributing online content via various channels such as company websites, social media platforms and search engines to entice consumers whereas Inbound Marketing is the process of turning these enticed content visitors into permanent consumers. Typically, the digital marketing activity of email marketing will nurture prospects to become paying consumers.

Additionally, Pulizzi (2013) explains that the key difference between inbound and content marketing is that Inbound Marketing is where a company tries to attract interest from the wider consumer base through effectively managing their online marketing channels whereas content marketing is the process of a brand regularly and consistently posting up-to-date, relevant and high-quality company news and updates on their online platforms. Pulizzi (2013) further explains that another key difference between inbound and content marketing is that content marketing serves a subset of activities to Inbound Marketing because it is the process of creating, sharing and distributing high quality content which will therefore attract online consumer interest which is the core aim of Inbound Marketing.

Additionally, Day (2011) explains that the key difference between inbound and content marketing is that Inbound Marketing is where an organisation tries to attract interest from the wider consumer base through effectively managing their online marketing channels whereas content marketing is the process of an organisation regularly and consistently posting up-to-date, relevant and high-quality company news and updates on their online platforms.

'*Content marketing mirrors the natural occurrence and unobtrusiveness of content in private online media spaces while natural messages also add more warmth and a familiar brand voice in social media.*'' Du Plessis, (2017 p.2). Muniz, A.M. and O'Guinn, T. (2001, p.412-432) defined a brand community as '*a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand.*''

2.9 Changes to Inbound Marketing in the communications agency industry

Mehdi (2008) states that one of the main changes which communication agencies have made in response to their consumers deliberating longer on purchasing decisions is to increase their level of SEO (Search Engine Optimisation). For example, Krow Communications – a London-based enterprise – have steadily increased their SEO since their formation in 2005 to keep up with changes to consumer behaviour (Campaign, 2017). In relation to consumers taking longer to research products, Krow Communications' increased SEO optimisation is a good response strategy because it ensures that when consumers type a query into google, the first hit they will receive will feature company content (Campaign, 2017). Additionally, Mehdi (2008) explains that another change which communication agencies have made in response to their consumers deliberating longer on purchasing decisions is increased social media marketing. For example, communication agency VMA Group have rapidly increased their level of social media visibility in recent years, consistently adding new and high-quality content to their Facebook and Twitter pages (Ruck 2015). BY VMA mastering

the art of social media they become their own best-case reference and prospects will be drawn to them to get help in managing their own social media channels.

VMA Group's increased social media visibility will help them to engage consumers who are spending longer deliberating on purchasing decisions because these platforms will provide product information and consumer recommendations (Ruck, 2015). This also highlights how Inbound Marketing has now become a core service offering for communication agency firm VMA Group (Ruck, 2015). Lowenstein (2011) explains that a further Inbound Marketing revision which communication agencies have made to respond to consumer behaviour changes in the communication agency industry is to increase content quality on company websites. A case example of this is BIG Partnership which makes a point of producing regular, consistent high-quality content on their company website as well syncing up their social media accounts to company website updates (BIG Partnership, 2018). This ensures that BIG Partnership are in a much better position to try to react to consumers deliberating longer on purchasing decisions because their regular high-quality content output will entice consumers in and increase their level of lead generation (BIG Partnership, 2018).

2.10 Summary of previous sections

Some of the key terms introduced in the previous section include the following; SEO (Search Engine Optimisation), social media marketing and content creation. Varndell (2015) explains that SEO refers to the process of a company paying a search engine provider i.e. Google, Bing or Yahoo to ensure that their company name is positioned at the top of the search results list when a consumer types the company name into the search engine. Similarly, Ledford (2016) states that SEO is where a company pays a search engine provider a set fee to increase the likelihood of their company website featuring at the top of the list of search results for consumers to see. Agencies have evolved now to provide experts in delivering search engine optimisation as a service. Evans (2012) defines social media marketing as the process of a company increasing

their level of traffic and numbers of consumers through their social media platforms i.e. Facebook, Twitter and/or Instagram.

Conversely, Barker et al (2012) describe social media marketing as a form of internet marketing which involves creating, sharing and distributing content on social media sites. Varndell (2015) defines content creation as the process of a brand creating and distributing online media to increase the likelihood of their brand and/or company product range attracting interest from their end users and the wider consumer audience. Alternatively, Evans, (2012) states that content creation is where a company strategically creates and distributes videos, brand campaigns and advertising slogans via their online media channels (i.e. e-store, company website and social media sites) to attract internet consumers. These combined marketing activities make up the services offered by communications agencies. So not only has Inbound Marketing proved a lucrative opportunity for communications agencies in recent years other services like search engine optimisation, social media management and content strategy have become additional revenue streams to communication agencies portfolio.

2.11 What are communication agencies and what are their roles and responsibilities?

Thorson and Moore (2013) explain that communication agencies are highly skilled and talented marketing consultation experts, which support companies in their various inbound and outbound marketing activities. Additionally, Busch et al (2006) state that communication agencies are external firms which companies outsource their marketing activities to so that they can benefit from their expert knowledge on how to anticipate and capitalise on changes in consumer behaviour. Similarly, McPhail (2011) argues that communication agencies are very specialised in their field and are therefore used frequently by companies in direct relation to marketing because they aim to benefit from this specialised knowledge in terms of content quality and lead generation.

Furthermore, Lee (2006) states that when communication agencies first gained popularity they were highly specialised and knowledgeable in the field of traditional

outbound marketing activities i.e. radio, T.V, newspapers and billboard campaigns. However, in the modern, increasingly digitalised world, Werr and Furusten (2016) further add that communication agencies are now sourced and used by companies to aid them in better managing their online content and internet marketing activities. McPhail (2011) explains that the key role of a communication agency is to assist a company in creating, sharing and distributing higher quality online content to increase that brands level of lead generation. Busch et al (2006) also add that the core purpose of a communication agency is to increase a company's effectiveness in communicating with their online consumer base and online audience via their various online marketing channels i.e. company website, e-store and social media accounts.

2.12 Distribution channels used by communication agencies and inbound marketers

Kelly (2012) explains that the key difference between Inbound Marketing and other distribution channel methods such as outbound marketing is that instead of reaching out and pursuing sales leads, it is a process of enticing consumers in. Hall (2017) argues that within Inbound Marketing, one of the main distribution channels which is used is paid for in search advertising. Diresta et al (2015) explain that paid for in search advertising also known as PPC (Pay Per Click) is where a company pays for their content to appear higher in the list of search results when a consumer types in a search query on an engine such as Google and/or Yahoo. Reece et al (2013) argue that the paid for in search advertising distribution channel is used by many communication agencies and inbound marketers because it increases the likelihood of their content reaching the biggest audience possible. Chaffey et al (2006) add that a new and innovative distribution channel which communication agencies and inbound marketers are using with increasing regularity is digital influencers. Chaffey et al (2006) explain that digital influencers are bloggers or vloggers who have millions of followers or who gain a lot of attention on their online channels.

Reece et al (2013) argue that if a company can convince these digital influencers to promote and distribute their content they will benefit hugely from gaining access to the large consumer audience which the digital influencer has.

'Blogging, You Tube and social media can serve as a 'communal channel' with the ability to spread word of mouth advertising through communities and fans, brand

advocacy on social sites, and in social collaboration communities.' Frost and Sullivan (2014).

Kelly (2012) explains that there are three main digital distribution channels within an Inbound Marketing strategy; paid channels, earned channels and owned channels. Hall (2017, p.8) states that paid channels are paid for promotional channels such as Facebook, Google Adwords, LinkedIn, Twitter and Instagram used by companies to distribute their content to the largest audience possible.

Diresta et al (2015) explain that earned channels is where social media followers or media editors distribute created content for a company of their own accord – it is therefore earned and not paid for.

Kelly (2012) argues that owned channels include social media accounts and company website which a company has complete control over and can therefore make changes to it in line with changing consumer needs, wants and desires.

2.13 Black box theory

The Black Box theory is an essential theoretical tool to use in investigating and analysing the key reasons why Inbound Marketing activities have become a core service offering for communication agencies. Hage (1994) explains that the Black Box theory is used by marketers to try to understand the inner decision-making processes consumers go through when deciding whether to purchase a product or service. Similarly, Wan (2013) explains that the Black Box theory is also used by marketers to identify how consumers respond to external marketing stimuli and whether this encourages them to engage with a brand or product. Show below is a diagram of the 'Black Box' theory:
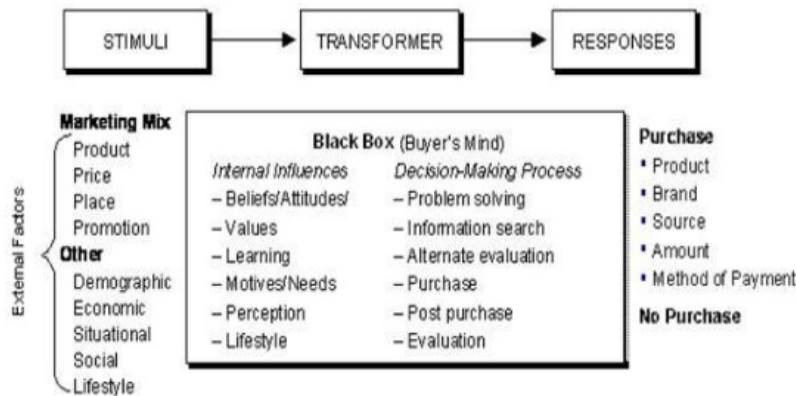
FIGURE 5: BLACK BOX MODEL (SOURCE)

Wan (2013) explains that the input function within the consumer Black Box theory refers to the process of how a consumer reacts to external marketing stimuli. The second function of the theory – the Black Box function – is where the consumer deliberates on whether they wish to buy the product (Wilmot, 2017). Wang (2014) then explains that the third function of the theory, output, refers to the process of the consumer buying the product and consuming it. In relation to the recent change in consumer behaviour in the communication agency industry, the black box function represents the extended timeframe consumers are using when deciding on what product to buy. The input function is where the communication agency marketers use Inbound Marketing techniques such as; paid for in search advertising, SEO and PPC to increase a consumer's exposure to external marketing stimuli (Wang, 2014).

The output function of the Black Box model is then where the communication agency consumer finalises their product decision making rationale and buys the product or service (Wilmot, 2017). Communication agency marketers can then learn from the output function as to how consumers choose to buy products i.e. analytics, AdWords

to see what consumers typed into search engines in search of the product (Wilmot, 2017).

2.14 Relationship marketing and Inbound Marketing

Godin in his 2007 book Permission Marketing likened customer- business relationships to personal relationships. As in you don't ask a girl to marry you the first time you meet her and the same for businesses is true in that you shouldn't expect consumers to buy from you the first time they engage with any of the companies messaging, businesses should be seen to be helping prospects in the information stage of the consumer decision making process. Smith (2011) explains that Inbound Marketing is closely linked to the broader concept of relationship marketing where a company tries to build a relationship with their consumer base.

Halligan and Shah (2014) add that the key advantage of using Inbound Marketing techniques in relationship marketing is that it relies on the consumer expressing an interest. Further to this Halligan and Shah (2014) outlined a framework of attracting visitors whose interest was piqued via engaging content and converting them to customers.

Baran et al (2008) explain that because of this, the relationship between the brand and consumer is likely to last much longer. Von Rosen (2012) also states that a company through building an Inbound Marketing relationship with consumers can then develop a much better understanding of what content was most relevant in establishing the relationship. Theaker and Yaxley (2017) explain that the company can therefore use this information when attempting to build new consumer relationships in the future. Smith (2011) further adds that the use of effective Inbound Marketing can help a company to facilitate a long-lasting relationship with their new consumers because their content creation is of such high quality and relevance to consumer needs and wants.

2.15 Conclusion

In summary, this literature review has investigated and analysed the key reasons why Inbound Marketing activities have become a core service offering for communication agencies. One of the main, important findings of this literature review is that the high availability of online product information via channels such as company websites, social media platforms, online blogs and e-stores has caused communication agency consumers to spend longer deliberating over the purchasing decisions. Another key finding from the research, analysis and discussion carried out in this literature review is that communication agency marketers have responded to consumers spending longer deliberating on their purchasing decisions by ramping up their level of Inbound Marketing services. Not only has content creation proven a lucrative opportunity for communications agencies but also social media management and search engine optimisation are areas where agencies can help consumers. A further key and important finding of this literature review is that the use of Inbound Marketing offers many advantages to communication agencies such as increasing consumer engagement, increasing the quality level of online content and increasing lead generation.

Furthermore, the investigation, research and analysis carried out in this literature review has found that communication agency consumers are spending longer deliberating on purchasing decisions because they are trying to find the best deal financially. A further finding from this literature review is that inbound and content marketing are different because Inbound Marketing is the overall process of converting an online user into a permanent consumer whereas content marketing is simply a small part of this process which creates, shares and distributes company media on their website and social media sites. Another key, important finding of this literature review is that the key role of a communication agency in the Inbound Marketing process is to advise companies on how to create content of the highest quality and utmost relevance. A further very important finding from this literature review is that there are four main places where consumers go to assess the suitability of a product to their needs, wants and desires and these are the following; company websites, social media, price comparison websites and search engines.

3 Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The topic of this dissertation is 'why has Inbound Marketing increased in popularity with communication agencies in recent years?'. The context of this dissertation is establishing why many communication agencies have gone from using traditional, outbound marketing techniques in recent years in favour of Inbound Marketing techniques such as content strategy and social media marketing. The central issue of this dissertation concerns identifying the main reasons why an increasing number of communication agencies have started using Inbound Marketing techniques in recent years. Due to the advances in technology and the revolutionization of the internet, Inbound Marketing techniques have become increasingly popular with modern organisations (Xiaoge, 2016). In the communication agency industry, Inbound Marketing excellence is a strategic capability which has become especially well sought after as firms try to gain a competitive advantage in a fiercely contested industry (Xiaoge, 2016).

To find out exactly why Inbound Marketing has become so popular, it is important to gain an understanding of how to approach the research itself. This was achieved by first carrying out an extensive literature review containing some key theories and concepts from the subject of marketing. The researcher's primary field investigations principally involved carrying out rounds of in depth interviews with 5 different communication agency owners.

A qualitative thematic analysis was then used to interpret the results of these to pick out the key themes and patterns which emerged from the interview transcripts.

This section of the dissertation will also further detail the key limitations and ethical considerations inherent in this research study and what the researcher's role will be in addressing these. As well as detailing the limitations and ethical considerations, the research methodology segment of this dissertation will additionally highlight the researcher's approach to tackling the research question i.e. whether it is inductive or deductive.

3.2   Research Onion
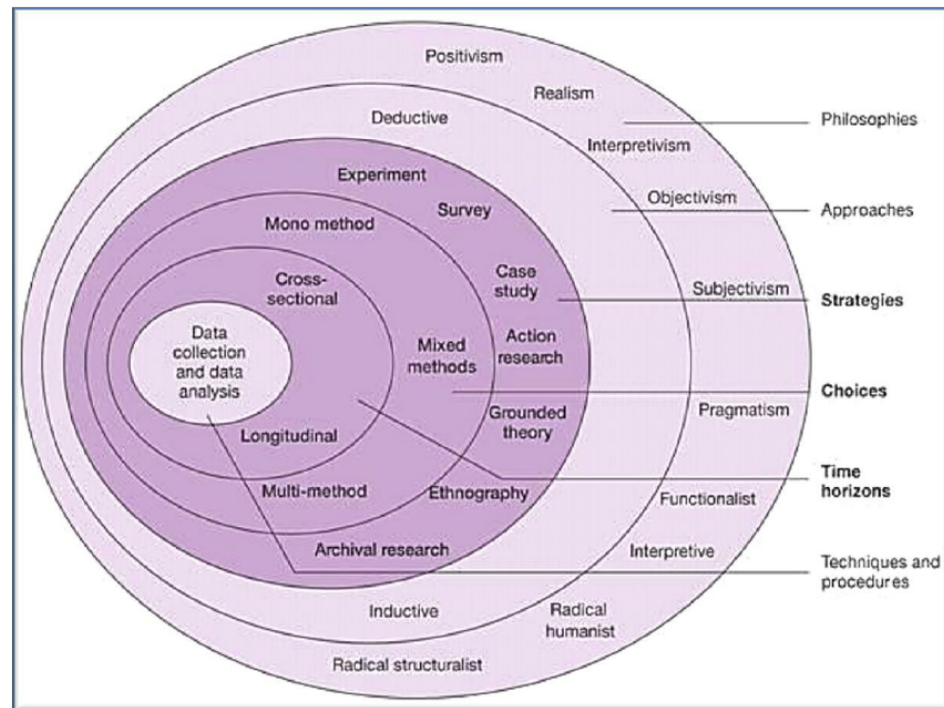
FIGURE 6: RESEARCH ONION (SOURCE: SAUNDERS ET AL 2007, P. 197)

Developed by Saunders et al (2007), the research onion is used by academic researchers to map out how best to approach each stage of their research cycle. Datum (2013) explains that the research onion is used by researchers to identify the approach which they need to take to each stage of the research process to ensure that they tackle their research question in the most effective way possible. Differently, Ahmed et al (2016) argue that the research onion is where a researcher outlines how their subjectivist, interpretivist or pragmatist perspective is likely to affect the nature of their research study. The approach method in which a researcher selects at each stage of the research onion has a knock-on-effect to the next stage of the research cycle (Gomez and Mouselli, 2018).

For example, if at the outset of the research study or field investigation the researcher chooses to adopt an interpretivist perspective this will likely result in them choosing inductive research tactics and using non-probability sampling techniques (Gomez and Mouselli, 2018).

Musson and Stebbings (2012) state that the research onion provides an accurate and effective process map for the route which the research needs to take for its results and findings to have any value in the field. The main benefit of using the research onion is that it ensures that a researcher's proposal will be approached using the correct methodology and practices (Oriesek, 2004). A further key, additional benefit of the research onion is that it is concise and simple to use which enables researchers to identify the best route for their research with minimal time loss to their overall research (Oriesek, 2004).

3.3   Research Philosophy
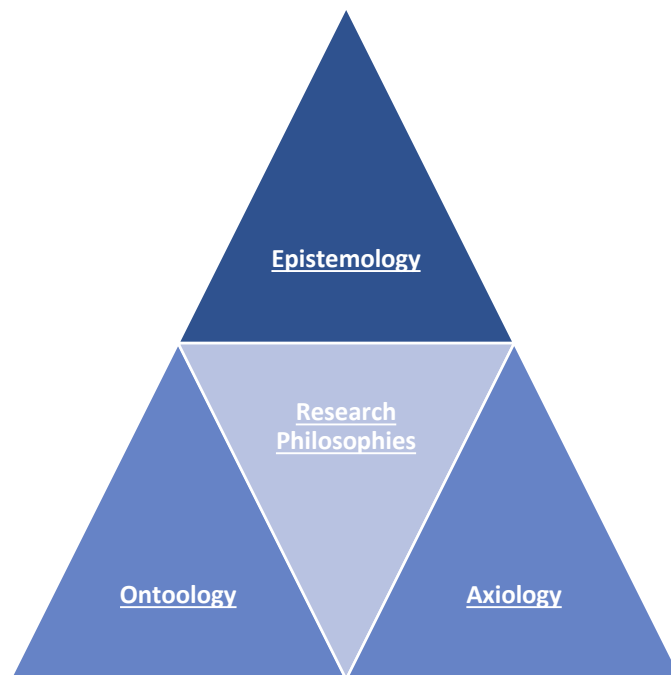
FIGURE 7: RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY (SOURCE: ORIESEK, 2004)

This section will cover the three overarching research philosophies which a researcher can adopt to shape their research study; epistemology, ontology and axiology (Ahmed et al, 2016). Ahmed et al (2016) explain that each of these three research philosophies have a large bearing on the structure and findings of a researcher's field investigation. Similarly, Gomez and Mouselli (2018) state that the research philosophy chosen by the researcher will directly affect how they choose to approach each stage of the research cycle from how the data is collected to how it is ultimately sampled later.

Epistemology: Collins (2017) explains that epistemology is concerned with justifying known beliefs and/or assumptions of what is fact.

Ontology: Saunders et al (2009) state that ontology differs from epistemology in that it is concerned with questioning how and why reality has evolved in the way in which it has.

Axiology: Saunders et al (2009) argues that an axiological research philosophy identifies how variables such as morals, beliefs, ethos and culture affect a researcher's approach to a field investigation.

This dissertation used an ontological philosophy because the issue of uncovering why Inbound Marketing has become so popular for communications agencies will involve questioning how and why reality has evolved in the way in which it has.

3.4   Philosophical Dimensions

A further important consideration when effectively structuring a dissertation study is to identify which philosophical dimension to use. There are five main philosophical dimensions which a researcher can choose to use, and these are the following; positivism, interpretivism, realism, objectivism and subjectivism (Manuel, 2012).

Positivism – Rich and Brown (2014) argue that positivism is where a researcher accepts the existence of something only if there is data available to quantifiably prove it. Similarly, Manuel (2012) states that a positivist researcher will immediately discount the existence of something in their data set if it cannot be accurately proven.

Interpretivism – Martin (2009) states that interpretivism is where the researcher influences the outcomes and output of their research study by actively taking part in it. Differently, Manuel (2012, p.48) states that interpretivism *"focuses on reality as a human construction which can only be understood subjectively. Since no researcher can distance himself/herself from the social reality being studied it is important to take note of the context in order to make sense of the phenomena and to create knowledge about them"*.

Realism – Realism, different to both positivism and interpretivism, is concerned with data which can still be valid even if it is vague or difficult for the researcher to interpret (Martin, 2009). Additionally, Neergaard and Ulhoi (2007) explain that a

realist research philosophy involves incorporating data which is hard to interpret or that was unanticipated by the researcher.

Objectivism – Objectivism is the view or perspective that reality is measurable only by science (Brown and Baker, 2007). Brown and Baker (2007) further add that an objectivist researcher is one who is commonly affiliated with a scientific discipline such as biology or chemistry. In these subject areas, data is only believed if it can be tested and measured.

Subjectivism – A subjectivist research philosophy is where a researcher relies on their own knowledge and expertise of a subject discipline to interpret the findings and reach new conclusions (Dean et al, 2006). Brown and Baker (2007) argue that subjectivism in research involves a researcher using thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, values and opinions to shape their research study and/or field investigation to approve or disprove a known hypothesis.

This research dissertation used an ontological research philosophy which followed on from the main aim of the research which concerned questioning how and why reality has evolved in the way in which it has. An interpretivist and subjectivist research perspective then followed on from this philosophy to accurately uncover why Inbound Marketing has become so popular with communication agencies.

3.5   Approach to Research

Moving on from the research perspective and the various research philosophies it is now important to document the approach to the research which was undertaken by the researcher. Lodico et al (2010) explain that there are broadly two main research approach options available to a researcher – inductive and deductive.

3.6   Inductive Research

Lodico et al (2010) explains that inductive research is where the researcher forms an initial opinion about the subject matter from carrying out some small, preliminary research and then gradually builds on this through researching more thoroughly into

the subject area. Similarly, Cargan (2007) theorises that inductive research is where a researcher becomes actively involved in the research by carrying out an initial round of interviews to formulate a testable hypothesis on the subject. Different to the theories of Lodico et al (2010) and Cargan (2007), Knight and Ruddock (2009) instead suggest that inductive research is the process of a researcher subjectively testing out their hypothesis on a subject by involving themselves at all stages of the research onion.

3.7   Deductive Research

Knight and Ruddock (2009) explain that deductive research, contrary to inductive research, is where an academic researcher collects previously retrieved data on a subject matter to gain an understanding of what sources are most effective. By comparison, McMurray et al (2004) argue that deductive research is where a researcher makes use of previous researchers work in the same subject area or field of literature to gain a fuller understanding of how to approach their own research study.

Spinks and Reid, 2011) argued that semi structured interviews not only allow the researcher to get a better understanding of the topic it also fosters flexibility to allow further insights to be discovered outside of the main question guide.

 A deductive approach to the research would have been inappropriate because that approach would not have allowed the researcher to incorporate their own expertise into the research study.

3.8   Methods of Data Collection

This section of the dissertation will now outline the methods used by the researcher to collect the data used to support the main findings and conclusions drawn from their research. Goswami (2011) argues that there are two, main methods data collection open to academic researchers and these are qualitative and quantitative. Differently Saunders et al (2009) suggest that there are now three main methods of data collection available due to the evolution of a mixed methods approach to add to the existing qualitative and quantitative option.

Mixed Methods

A mixed methods approach to data collection essentially involves integrating quantitative and qualitative sources together to develop a researchers understanding of a research topic (Tashakkori et al, 2003). Creswell et al (2011) explain that the mixed methods approach to data collection evolved because researchers wanted their research study to benefit from the advantages of both quantitative and qualitative data rather than relying on one over the other.

Quantitative Methods

Goswami (2011) explains that a quantitative approach to data collection chiefly involves using numbers, statistics and units to develop knowledge on a subject discipline. Goswami (2011) further argues that a quantitative approach to data collection is where a researcher discounts written arguments or subjective opinions in favour of measurable, provable statistics. Commonly, selecting a quantitative method of data collection signifies that a researcher has chosen to undertake a positivist research philosophy earlier in the research onion cycle (Saunders et al, 2009). This is because quantitative data collection methods are traditionally used by science majors and academics to trace statistical relationships between different data sets (Saunders et al, 2009).

Qualitative Methods

Taylor et al (2015) state that a qualitative approach to data collection is where a researcher collects written data such as opinions, viewpoints and perspectives to

increase the level of understanding on a subject area. (Henwood, 2007) suggested that qualitative research allows for "understanding the meaning of experience, actions and events as these are interpreted through the eyes of particular participants and for sensitivity to the complexities of behaviour and meaning in the contexts where they typically naturally occur" this was further added to by (Denzin and Lincoln ,1994) who commented that qualitative research takes place in a natural setting and this forms a great arena for qualitative researchers to make the best interpretations of the new findings respondents provide them with.

3.9   Data Sampling

As well as identifying the type of data which will be collected it is equally important to identify how this data will then be sampled by the researcher. It is important to discuss how the data was sampled as this will identify how objective or subjective the results and findings are likely to be (Saunders et al, 2009). There are two main methods of data sampling and these are probability and non-probability (Saunders et al, 2009).

3.9.1   Non-Probability Sampling

Singh and Mangat (2013) argue that non-probability sampling involves the researcher relying on their own knowledge and expertise on a subject area to subjectively choose research participants. By comparison, Neelankavil (2015) explains that non-probability sampling is where, instead of a random procedure, research participant selection is based on a set criteria developed by the researcher. Tayie (2000) states that "nonprobability sampling is frequently used in mass media research, particularly in the form of available samples, samples using volunteer subjects, and purposive samples."

Tayie (2000) further explains that there are many benefits to a researcher and their field study of using non-probability sampling techniques. For example, by using non-probability sampling, a researcher can immediately eliminate data which is of no benefit to their research study or field investigation (Singh and Margat, 2013). An additional benefit to a researcher of using non-probability sampling techniques is that

they can rely on their own expertise to select the data which is most relevant to their research question (Neelankavil, 2015). The non-probability sampling method which was used in this dissertation was snowball sampling because the researcher started with one agency owner and then gradually built on this to interviewing 5 different communication agency owners.

This dissertation benefited from the main, key advantage associated with snowball sampling which is that it is most effective in a situation where a researcher has limited access to a large group of participants (Tayie, 2000). Further to this snowball sampling allowed the researcher to probe further into areas the more interviews the researcher conducted.

3.9.2   Semi Structured Interviews

To uncover why Inbound Marketing has become a core service offering for communications agencies in depth interviews were conducted using the video collaboration software zoom. This provided first-hand information from communications agency owners that had varying levels of tenured agencies ranging from one who had started the agency in 1990 to one that had started the agency in 2012. Respondents either came from UK, Norway and the Netherlands.

Nine questions were drafted in advance of the interviews however were not shared with respondents before interviews commenced. The semi-structured approach adopted a flexibility within the interviews to gain a deeper understanding into the motivations behind the respondent's answers. The semi- structured style yield "rich insights into people's experiences, opinions, values, attitudes and feelings" (May, 2001) this was further compounded by (Patton, 2002) who highlighted designing the question guide and pre-empting probes is imperative to gaining the most insightful answers. (King, 2004) referred to semi-structured interviews as qualitative research interviews and by contrast to structured interviews adopt non- standardised approach.

Cramb (2001) explains that a semi structured interview is where a researcher uses a series of questions to guide an interviewee through a discussion about a particular item. The questions compiled by the researcher are used only as a guide and may not

all be used during the course of the interview (Cramb, 2001). The researcher asked the same core nine questions to all respondents but follow on questions varied across all respondents. The main goal of using a semi structured interview is to instil a conversational style to the interview to increase the opportunity of the researcher unearthing some new, unanticipated rich data about their research topic (Hersen, 2011).

This dissertation used semi structured interviews because the research question has a very broad scope and therefore the researcher was keen to maximise their learning opportunities about aspects of the research topic which they had not previously thought of (Hersen). The semi-structured interviews in this dissertation were carried out with 5 key agency owners within the communication agency industry to source their industry-relevant knowledge and expertise. In this section, a qualitative thematic analysis will be used to interpret the results of these to pick out the key themes and patterns which have emerged from the interview transcripts.

3.10 Limitations of Research

One of the main limitations of this dissertation was that using non-probability sampling techniques such as snowball sampling increased the risk of researcher bias. Saunders et al (2009) explains that using an interpretivist research model unequivocally increases the risk of researcher bias because the researcher is actively influencing the outcome of the research thus distorting the results somewhat. Another limitation of this dissertation was access to the research participants which was fairly limited. This was due to an unanticipated difficulty with getting managers to agree to sit in for an interview. This resulted in the dissertation relying on fewer participant responses than would have been ideal.

3.11 Research Ethics

In carrying out the research for this dissertation, the researcher had to comply with various ethical requirements. For example, the first of the ethical considerations of

this dissertation was informed consent. Woodfield (2017) explains that informed consent is where a researcher attains the consent of the research participant to use his or her data in the research project. This dissertation adhered to this ethical requirement by asking each of the 5 different communication agency owners for their consent in using their data to support the research argument. A further ethical consideration of this research was to use the data collected for the intended purpose. Woodfield (2017) states that this is one of the foremost ethical requirements of any research undertaken because it ensures that a researcher does not distort the data collected to support their own subjective argument. To ensure that the data was used for the stated purpose the researcher consistently referred back to the main aims and objectives of the dissertation which were developed at the outset of the research.

3.12 Conclusion

This section of the dissertation has used the research onion developed by Saunders et al (2009) to map out the best way to answer the research question of why Inbound Marketing has increased in popularity with communication agencies in recent years. A key finding of this section is that qualitative methods of data collection were the most applicable to the researcher's chosen topic. Alternative studies carried out by Boone and Kurtz (2014) and Lamb et al (2010) in the same subject area also principally used a qualitative approach to collecting the data. The qualitative approach utilised in this dissertation entailed carrying out 5 semi-structured interviews with communication agency owners. This section of the dissertation also found that a qualitative thematic analysis was the most efficient method of interpreting the interview transcripts collated from the interviews.

Guest et al (2011) explain that a qualitative thematic analysis is the process of a researcher reading through their data transcripts searching for key themes and patterns. By carrying out an extensive overview of the methodology involved in this dissertation, this section has also found that there are some key limitations of the research which the researcher must address. For example, the use of non-probability sampling techniques to sample the data has increased the risk of researcher bias

distorting the findings. Finally, the research methodology section of this dissertation has found that the topic chosen by the researcher is a valid one. It is also a topic which has not been researched into extensively, thus giving the researcher the opportunity to generate some new findings into the field.

4 Findings and Analysis

4.1 Introduction

This section of the dissertation concerns outlining the main findings and results of the primary research undertaken by the researcher. The central issue in this section of the essay is underpinning the key reasons why Inbound Marketing has increased in popularity with communication agencies in recent years. The findings and results of this dissertation were a mix of learning outcomes earlier streamed from the literature review stage and some new, insights. As for the research question, the primary investigations carried out by the researcher has found there to be a variety of key reasons why Inbound Marketing has increased in popularity with communication agencies in recent years. In comparison with the theories of Trigwell-Jones (2016) and Gatward (2011), this dissertation has also found that Inbound Marketing techniques are increasing in popularity with modern-day communication agency firms for a variety of reasons. This section of the dissertation will cover the main findings and results of the primary field research carried out by the researcher. To interpret the findings, a qualitative thematic analysis was utilised. This process involved collating all the interview transcripts together and tracing key themes and patterns in the data. Some of the main, key themes which emerged from the qualitative thematic analysis carried out included the following; Lower cost of marketing spend for higher returns, only superior content will survive, customer feedback is essential to ensure content resonates with target audiences, sales and marketing alignment and the future state of Inbound Marketing

Evans et al (2014) explain that a findings and results section within a dissertation is perhaps the most significantly important part of the research. Similarly, Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) state that the findings and results section of the dissertation is crucial to the overall success of the research because this is the section where the researcher demonstrates what knowledge they have gained from their primary investigations. It is also the section where the researcher compares their work with that of others in the field. This is the most effective method of highlighting where the researcher's primary findings fit into the existing body of literature available on the

topic of Inbound Marketing's increased popularity with modern communication agencies in recent years. From the literature review conducted earlier, the findings and results section were prepared with the knowledge that Inbound Marketing and content marketing are two separate, distinct elements.

As (Xiaoge, 2016, p.323) explains, *"Inbound Marketing such as standard search engine optimisation techniques and freemiums, on the other hand, might not be considered content marketing per se"*. The findings and results section of this dissertation will provide a qualitative thematic analysis table. This table will be used to highlight some of the key themes and terms which surfaced frequently during the semi-structured interviews carried out with the 5 different communication agency owners.

4.2   Thematic Analysis

A qualitative thematic analysis was chosen by the researcher because it has previously been used by other seminal authors in the field such as Crew and Brennan (2014) and Peitz and Waldfogel (2012). These authors used this interpretive technique to good effect and this dissertation aims to repeat this. According to Boyatzis (1998) thematic analysis is a process undertaken to analyse qualitative data results describing it as *"not another qualitative method but a process that can be used with most, if not all qualitative methods"*. Boyatzis discussed the skills required for effective thematic analysis were pattern recognition, openness and flexibility. Differently Braun and Clarke (2006) referred to a method that focused on identifying, analysing and reporting repetitive themes. Common repetitive themes across all five respondents will be categorized and then interpreted in relation to the chosen research topic.

4.2.1   Lower cost of marketing spend for higher returns.

The most common theme from the primary research across all respondents was that it provides companies with a higher return for less marketing spend. Several respondents attributed this to an increase in website conversions, a conversion rate refers to how many website visitors communication agencies are able to transfer into customers through producing quality online content.

This higher conversion rate is brought about by higher quality content, which is another key theme raised throughout the primary research with respondents saying that *'only a superior quality of content will survive'*. This indicates that the quality of content produced by the agencies directly correlates to tangible results to their clients.

One of the respondents explained that *''I would much rather invest time and resources into creating high quality content which shows an authority for my customers than encourage them to spend the largest share of their budget on traditional Marketing methods.''*

As well as Inbound Marketing providing a higher conversion rate, a further sub theme which emerged was that it is more cost effective than other methods of marketing. In line with the theories of Baker and Hart (2016) and Wollan et al (2010), this dissertation has also found that Inbound Marketing is the cheapest method of marketing available to modern communication agencies. Like these theories, this dissertation has also found that Inbound Marketing also offers the highest ROMI (Return on Marketing Investment).

A common opinion uncovered from one respondent in the interviews was that the low-cost benefits of Inbound Marketing have become increasingly more magnified since 2008 when the economic crash resulted in a significant dip in consumer confidence levels across all economic sectors. They suggested that *"Buyer behaviour has changed, I see this in how they bought post the 2008 economic crash to how they buy now. How I would go to market then is very different to how I would go to market now. The tools that worked before then were not working after then or becoming less effective"*. Comparable to the theories of both Tynemouth (2014) and Farris et al. (2015), this dissertation study has also concluded that the cost effectiveness of Inbound Marketing is a key reason why it has become so popular among communication agencies in recent years as they continue to progress forward from the economic crash of 2008.

A common supporting factor which came from the respondents when discussing the higher returns for less marketing costs was the additional advantage of being able to properly measure results, almost as a by-product of Inbound Marketing.

One of the respondents stated that *"and that measurability is in contrast to when I was running businesses in the 90s, you would have your PR agency and they were almost proud of that fact that they couldn't tell you anything. They would want you to spend money and hope that the overall result was good"*. Measurability is a common supporting factor across all the themes and will be explored in relation to each theme throughout the dissertation's findings.

This complements the views of Baker and Hart (2016), Wollan et al (2010) and Farris et al (2015) earlier introduced in the literature of this dissertation. In critical analysis, the high measurability rates of Inbound Marketing increase its level of popularity with communication agencies because it becomes much clearer whether a marketing campaign has succeeded or failed. This key benefit cannot be underestimated because if measurability was more complex, communication agencies would incur far greater costs in trying to determine the success of new Inbound Marketing campaigns.

4.2.2   Only a superior quality of content will survive

Due to the vastly increasing volume of customers who now conduct a disproportionate amount of their shopping online, it is now more important than ever for modern communication agencies to ensure that their online content is of a high level of quality. In the contemporary era of communication agency marketing, effective management of online content is the activity most likely to generate new customers for an agency. Respondents all commented on the importance of high quality content and some going further to say that they must be *''their own case references.''* Meaning they cannot support companies in creating top content if they as a company do not do the same. One manager *commented "You have to live Inbound for yourself to provide these services to your clients."*

This indicates that agencies needed to be experts in content delivery to be seen as credible service providers of not just inbound services. However, the overarching response from the respondents was that as the majority of their time is spent servicing clients, their own marketing suffers, and they are not always *''practicing what they preach.''*

When pressed on what they thought makes quality content, the majority of the respondents stated that the best content is created with a persona in mind. 4 out of 5 respondents echoed the same sentiment, that prior to launching a content marketing campaign, the most successful campaigns are borne from in-depth research into the target audience right down to the specific personas being targeted.

A respondent elaborated on what motivates the use of personas stating; *''I think our Inbound philosophy starts from a position of help, you have to understand your personas and your customer to give them what they are looking for.''*

This process relates back to the 'Black Box Theory' earlier outlined in the literature review of this dissertation. This is because at the input stage of the theory, customers are self-motivated to source information whilst evaluating a product range as opposed to the traditional method of awaiting an advert to capture their interest or whet their appetite for a particular product range.

This common theme which emerged from primary research has a high level of comparability with the findings of other key authors in the field such as Corrado and Freedman (2013), Adikesvan (2014) and Cohen (2017) who also concluded that quality online content is perhaps the most important element in trying to engage new customers with a brand in the modern marketplace.

4.2.3   Customer Feedback is essential to ensure content resonates with target audience

During the interviews customer feedback was discussed as an important factor in creating relevant content. 3 of the 5 respondents highlighted the importance of using social channels as a content distribution tool. The reason for using the channels is the ability for brands to stay as close to their customers as possible and to gather primary feedback from them directly. The objective of this collation of feedback is to analyse it and make changes to the content accordingly whether negative or positive and is further explored by Lowenstein (2011, p.307) who discusses how *''social media is a key place where consumers go to finalise their purchasing decision because it is a place where they can receive instant feedback from family and friends in terms of*

their decision.'' This supports the theme that emerged in the interviews of social channels being an important place for consumers to discuss their needs/purchasing journey and thus an important channel for brands to analyse feedback when creating content for said consumers.

The majority of the respondents stated that without customer feedback, inbound techniques would be largely ineffective in enhancing the commercial success of their enterprise. For example, one of the respondents said *"Well if you don't listen to your customers you cannot deliver the right service. We originally tried to market to everyone using Inbound Marketing, but we found that it was too broad, and we had little success. Now we solely target internet security companies and manufacturing companies and all of our content addresses personas in those given industries and this is based on feedback we received from the companies we were working with".*

Exploring this theme further, a key reason why customer feedback is so essential to the success of modern communication agencies is because of the direct response nature of content on social channels. Brands have the ability to instantly make the required changes to their content based on customer feedback and with minimum disruption. The interviews carried out suggest that social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter foster increased consumer engagement, indicating that feedback is a core component of the process of increasing the level of consumer engagement with an organisation's brand. Muniz, A.M. and O'Guinn, T. (2001, p.412-432) defined a brand community as ''*a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand*'' and it is these online communities which agencies target for primary customer feedback. As one respondent stated *''companies need to go online where their audience lives and hear what they are saying about your brand versus your competitor.''*

In the literature review it was discussed how *''the availability of product/service information and online consumer feedback threads is the key reason why consumers spend longer deliberating on their purchasing rationale.''* Powell (2012, p.187)

These feedback threads are readily available online and according to the theme which emerged respondent's brands should utilize them to help shape the content they create for these online communities.

Looking at the theories of Smith (2011), Halligan and Shah (2014) and Baran et al (2008) this dissertation study has also found that the concept of Inbound Marketing is symmetrical with the concept of relationship marketing. Particularly in relation to the theme of customer feedback because Inbound Marketing requires high levels of customer feedback to help modern communication agencies to foster and develop stronger and longer lasting relationships with their key customer groups.

The importance of relationship marketing within the industry was discussed with one of the respondents stating; *"By understanding personas, by understanding what the persona pain points would be, by understanding genuinely what content works and what doesn't, I think it forces you to get to grips what the pain points of a specific customer are and what content is going to have impact. Helped us to understand customers better on that basis"*.

Understanding personas appears to go far beyond just understanding target audiences for a marketing campaign, now organisations have evolved into having a customer centric focus. One respondent discussed how *''only customer centric companies will survive''* and another responded how *''Only customer centric organisations will prosper''*. This demonstrates that agencies believe that failure to understand your customer and serve them by using that knowledge will hold them back. Putting the customer at the centre of your business and listening to what they are saying about you and your competitors is an important theme throughout the primary research.

4.2.4 Future state of online marketing – Video

As part of the primary research carried out the researcher discussed the respondent's opinion on future trends in marketing. The resounding response from each respondent was that video is the future trend/channel marketeers are thinking about.

The primary field investigations carried out by Adikesvan (2014), found that YouTube channels are of premium importance to the marketing strategies of modern day organisations and communication agencies.

During the primary research carried out for this dissertation, one respondent stated *''because audiences have much reduced attentions spans it's (video is) becoming the*

best way to get their attention in a world of insta videos and Facebook live.'' Another respondent discussed the next channel marketeers need to focus on saying *''Video of course, I cannot see anyone answering that question without mentioning video.''* The marketing world is catching up with this video trend with research showing *'the percentage of both B2B and B2C marketers using video advertising, for example, has risen by triple digits over the last two years.' (*Salesforce 2017 pp 9).

The principal reason cited by the respondents on why they think video-based content will be become more important to marketeers is due to the decreased level of modern consumers attention spans. Greenfield 2015 asserts that because of the digital revolution and subsequent reliance on online technology our attention spans have shrunk. This particular theme of reduced attention span is echoed across all 5 respondents. This decrease in turn affects their willingness to consume lengthy content created by marketeers with another respondent actually stating *"gone are the days of key decision makers consuming 25 page e-books we see now that video is having far more of an effect on buyers decision."*

As well as the increasing importance of video-based content, as already discussed when looking at the theme of how only a superior quality of content will survive, the primary data collated also suggests that modern day communication agencies are becoming savvier to consumer centric needs. This is underpinned by the resounding agreement across all respondents that video will become more important due to decreased attention spans, showing the communications agencies are in tune to customer's needs, becoming customer centric companies.

4.2.5 Sales and Marketing alignment

Another theme which emerged from the interviews was related to structural set up. The respondents discussed how marketing and sales departments had become more aligned because of Inbound Marketing. Respondents commented on this new tighter alignment as *"in the past marketing departments would roll out a campaign hoping to generate some awareness. The only time they saw a sales person was at a Christmas party but now Inbound Marketing has allowed sales and marketing to work more closely. Now we are starting to see with some of our clients from the marketing*

department asking sales what new challenges are coming up on sales calls and if the blog or social post will resonate with the target audience they are talking to". Taking a more strategic look across the business means that sales and marketing are benefiting from having a holistic view of the full end to end sales cycle, and thus analyzing where it can be improved/changed.

Janning, R. (2015, pp 38) discussed the importance of cooperation between sales and marketing and how *'it is hardly surprising that lack of cooperation between marketing and sales is one of the most importance reasons why lead management is not yet working properly in the vast majority of companies.'* Collectively all respondents also discussed the potential consequences for how companies go to market and how *"if sales and marketing don't talk it's going to create a bad experience for the customer."* One respondent further added *"companies over the past few years have gained a lot of knowledge about their customers through social media interactions, blog visits, subscriptions and unless companies use this information to align their sales and marketing themes to better serve their customers they will fail, only customer centric organisations will survive."*

Another respondent talked about the marketing communication agencies' direct relationship with sales teams saying *"We now sit with the sales team to define what a sales qualified lead looks like, is it that they request a consultation or is it that they have downloaded 4 pieces of content. If sales are part of that definition they will buy into the process more.''* again highlighting that this alignment is keeping sales and marketing leaders in the business better informed on the operational level processes, so they can improve at a strategic level.

Converting leads into real sales is a fundamental part of a communications agencies performance metrics with their clients so this tighter alignment is seen as a positive by the agencies interviewed with one respondent commenting *that "one sales rep even fed back to marketing that they believed they could convert a lead that read this one piece of content into a customer every time"*. This type of alignment will have a direct

impact on campaign success and revenue generated which are the key aims of any brand working with an agency.

Linking to the previously explored theme of customer feedback, marketing departments have been using the feedback from customers to enhance content creation and coupling this with feedback from the sales team however it is also clear that this alignment has not been smooth.   A couple of respondents discussed how *"sales have always used bad quality leads as an excuse for missed numbers without being specific as to why they weren't any good.''* and   *''sales teams are now receiving such high-quality leads that it is making then lazy when it comes to calling the not so high-quality leads – but all leads have a cost and need to be followed up in some way regardless.''* This highlights the need for alignment but doesn't address how to best bring alignment about as sales and marketing have long been siloed so there is more work for companies to bring about this change and Inbound Marketing could be a start.

4.3   Conclusions

This findings section has explored the question of why Inbound Marketing has become so popular with communication agencies in recent years. One of the key findings of this dissertation study was that the lower cost of marketing for higher returns and how it is an attractive proposition for modern-day communication agencies to deliver high quality servces for a much lower cost base than previously. This ties in with the theories of other authors in the field such as Tynemouth (2014, p.44), an Inbound Marketing author, theorized how Inbound Marketing offers a high return on investment because it has the potential to massively increase a brands lead generation and reduce the costs accumulated in marketing activities. This reduction is further discussed in comparison to outbound activities with Tynemouth discussing how Inbound Marketing is lower in cost in relation to outbound techniques and that this is primarily why inbound has significantly increased in popularity suggesting that the outbound method is fundamentally more expensive.

Wollan et al (2010) further compounds this theory that outbound activities are more expensive suggesting that Inbound Marketing is cheaper, offering a much higher rate of return than outbound logistics.

The research and critical analysis carried out within this dissertation has also found that Inbound Marketing has become increasingly more popular with communication agencies in recent years because of the opportunity to align sales and marketing teams. This is driven by the underlying theory that modern companies need to be more customer centric to survive. The new customer-driven sales and marketing alignment culture brings sales and marketing on the same journey meaning both departments benefit from understanding the full buyers journey. This contrasts with the traditional siloed departmental structures in place in non-customer centric companies.

5 Discussion Chapter

5.1 Introduction

The discussion chapter of the dissertation will critique and examine the main findings of the overall dissertation in relation to how they have built on conclusions derived from previous papers of the same subject matter.

5.1.1 Finding One

The primary finding which was uncovered in this dissertation is that Inbound Marketing has given modern communications agencies an opportunity to deliver an ROI (Return on Investment) centric service offering at a relatively low cost. This has been uncovered in both the primary research and also the secondary research. It has been validated through the secondary research findings of Baker and Hart (2016) and Wollan et al (2010) who have both found that Inbound Marketing is the most cost-effective marketing strategy available to companies today. The factors which increase the cost effectiveness and return on investment; high conversion rate, high lead generation rate and website traffic generation have been discussed at length in the dissertation. This indicates that Inbound Marketing is set to become even more popular with communications agencies in the future as the benefit is considerable for agencies who are typically smaller sized companies in the communications industry and to whom budget is of the utmost concern.

In light of the cost effectiveness findings in the secondary research similar commonalities in the in depth interviews reinforced these viewpoints where all respondents echoed the higher tangible returns that were gained from inbound campaigns with one respondent sharing the experience of paying a PR agency back in the day the lion share of their marketing budget and *"they were almost proud of that fact that they couldn't tell you anything"* .

This dissertation has also found that Inbound Marketing increases the conversion rate for organisations. While it is commonly assumed in the field that this is the case from authors such as Wollan et al (2010) and Tynemouth (2014), it was still necessary to apply it to the communication agency to see if this concept varied between different industries. This links back to the common underlying assumption held by the majority

of authors in the field that communication agency uptake of Inbound Marketing activities is primarily motivated by finance. This builds on the theory of Wollan et al (2010) in particular, in that the lure of Inbound Marketing is increased due to its lucrative ROI figures in comparison with other traditional marketing techniques such as content and outbound.

5.1.2 Finding Two

Following on from the cost benefit to communication agencies another finding in the dissertation is the avenue of demonstrating tangible results to their customers. This in turn has allowed communications agencies to become more of a trusted advisor to their customers, supported by quantitative results as illustrated in Figure 3 and 4, thus opening up new revenue streams for the agencies focusing on customer service. These results include traffic and lead generation which are used today as key performance indicators to hold marketing teams accountable. Throughout the dissertation authors such as Tynemouth (2014) and Baker and Hart (2016) have focused more on the ROI (Return on Investment) and financial benefits of Inbound Marketing rather than the inherent customer service potential. Furthermore when looking at the dissertation, studies by Impact (2014) and Hubspot (2014) demonstrated quantitative results which implies that further research on the quantitative side could be explored further by the researcher for a more holistic view of the industry.

The researcher has found through the literature review that understanding new streams of revenue potential for communications agencies has not been discussed in the literature and thus confirms the contribution to the available literature in the field. This customer centric viewpoint surfaced across multiple respondents in the primary research interviews. On reflection it may have been more advisable to structure the dissertation study solely around the sub theme of service quality as this would have given the researcher a better chance of contributing more new data to the field. It may also have enhanced the research findings if the researcher had sourced more and varied agency owners to interview. This would have allowed a less bias set of data to

be collected and allowed for more of an insight from non-advocates of Inbound Marketing.

5.1.3 Finding Three

This research has also provided several new explanations behind the recent increase in communication agency uptake of Inbound Marketing strategies. For example, the primary investigations carried out by the researcher as part of this dissertation has found that Inbound Marketing has become more popular due to its ability to produce superior content quality. It surfaced during the in-depth interviews that superior content quality only came about where open dialogue was happening between sales and marketing departments where sales teams would discuss with marketing what challenges customers and prospects were having. This gave rise to an opportunity for marketing people in the organisation to drive a particular inbound campaign with a content strategy that engaged new prospects. Specifically, this dissertation study has found that without sales and marketing departments collaborating effectively, a new Inbound Marketing campaign is likely to fail in resonating effectively with the targeted customer groups. In the case of the communication agencies studied during the primary research investigations, prior to enacting an Inbound Marketing methodology many agencies had sales and marketing departments which functioned in isolation with little or no communication with the other. This was an unanticipated finding as the initial research studies sourced by the researcher to gain a baseline understanding of the Inbound Marketing concept did not touch on the non-monetary benefits of Inbound Marketing. While this dissertations objective is to uncover why Inbound Marketing is popular for communications agencies, Inbound Marketing across a wider set of industries does warrant further analysis to provide a more holistic answer on why Inbound Marketing as a methodology has become so popular.

This is line with the key findings of the work done by Janning (2016) who explored the benefit of marketing departments understanding what happens in a sales process to fuel their marketing messages to attract new audiences. Specifically, the dissertation has found that the use of Inbound Marketing gives organisations greater strategic

visibility of the sales cycle from beginning to end thus enabling them to make valuable changes where improvements are necessary. This is another example of where this dissertation study has contributed some new data to the existing literature available about Inbound Marketing's increased level of popularity with modern communication agencies in recent years. This is in line with how all five respondents in the primary research interviews think about the operational need to align sales and marketing while using an inbound methodology. The dissertation found from the primary and secondary research that if sales teams don't follow up on leads companies will view the Inbound Marketing campaign a failure. Understanding the lead management and conversion is an important factor in the increase in revenue and cost effectiveness of Inbound Marketing. The sales and marketing alignment finding is an important factor which could give rise to an additional piece of literature exploring the role of people in Inbound Marketing.

5.1.4 Finding Four

Further exploring non-monetary findings uncovered in this dissertation, it is apparent from the various academic literature analysed that a change in consumer behaviour is a driving factor in the popularity of Inbound Marketing amongst communication agencies. Authors such as Boone and Kurtz (2015) and Duivenvoorde (2015) discussed how a key change in consumer behaviour is the lengthening in the consumer evaluation cycle. Supported by the primary and secondary research findings it is clear this extended research period is a complete change in consumer behaviour to previous decades prior to the commercialisation of the internet.

Whilst the secondary research outlines the increased popularity of Inbound Marketing stemmed from consumers spending more time online to make informed buying decisions the primary research findings uncovered some new data as to how consumer buyer behaviour has evolved. It was common across all five respondents that it was becoming more difficult to get the attention of a consumer to commit to a lengthy piece of content. Now agencies were exploring new avenues to reach a more modern contemporary buyers whose time is of the premium. Reduced attention span was uncovered as an evolved milestone of consumer buying behaviour during the in-depth interviews. The implication is that understanding what changes are happening to

consumers and forecasting potential impacts on businesses is an important part of a modern communication agency owners role to keep abreast with the optimum way to engage audiences.

5.2   Conclusion

In critical analysis, this dissertation study has found that the financial benefits of enacting an Inbound Marketing campaign far outweigh the non-monetary benefits in the case of communication agency firms. This therefore complements the view of Wollan et al (2010) who suggest that Inbound Marketing has increased in popularity among contemporary firms based on the financial benefits it has the potential to generate for the firm. A disproportionate number of the findings produced by this dissertation study link back to the existing research base suggesting that it may have been significantly more effective to analyse one additional industry and therefore carry out a comparative analysis. This would have given a clearer view of whether the common underlining assumptions in the field regarding Inbound Marketing are true across all industries or instead industry-specific

6 Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

The core purpose of this section of the dissertation is to advance comment on whether this dissertation study has developed the researchers understanding of the concept of Inbound Marketing's increased popularity with communication agencies. This section of this dissertation will outline the additional contribution to the previous study already undertaken in this area, it will conclude the evaluation of the research instrument used and finally the implications for key stakeholder groups.

6.2 Contribution to Existing literature

Some of the findings of this dissertation have built on the common underlining assumptions of many authors such as Lieb (2013) Wollan et al (2010) and Farris et al (2015). For example, comparable to these authors this dissertation study has also found that the high conversion and lead generation rates of Inbound Marketing significantly increases its appeal to contemporary organisations. Like the theories of Baker and Hart (2016), Wollan et al (2010) and Farris et al (2015) earlier introduced in the literature review, this dissertation has also found that the measurability of Inbound Marketing is also an important factor in the significant increase in the popularity of Inbound Marketing among modern communication agencies. This suggests that one of the main benefits to organisations of using Inbound Marketing strategies is that their success or failure is easy to measure. This prevents the organisation from over committing and overspending on a new marketing campaign which is unlikely to generate new customers and new sales leads. Furthermore it allows marketing people at a strategic level to easily demonstrate measurable results to their customers in a way not previously possible.

Another key finding of this research study which is supported by the secondary research of existing authors in the field is that finance is the primary influence behind the increased uptake of the Inbound Marketing methodology among modern day communications agencies. Like the theory of Wollan et al (2010), the primary research carried out as part of this dissertation study has also found that many organisations use Inbound Marketing due to its lucrative ROI figures in comparison with other traditional marketing techniques such as content and outbound marketing.

Therefore, the financial benefits of implementing an Inbound Marketing campaign far outweigh the non-monetary benefits in the case of communication agency firms. This therefore complements the view of Wollan et al (2010) who suggest that Inbound Marketing has increased in popularity among contemporary firms based on the financial benefits it has the potential to generate.

This research has also provided several new explanations behind the recent increase in communication agency uptake of the Inbound Marketing methodology. For example, the primary investigations carried out by the researcher as part of this dissertation has found that Inbound Marketing has become more popular due to its ability to produce superior content quality, to boost an organisations conversion rate and to synchronise and better align the sales and marketing department of companies. With respect to alignment, this dissertation differs from the studies of Wollan et al (2010) and Tynemouth (2014) as it has found that one of the main benefits of Inbound Marketing is its ability to better synchronise sales and marketing departments together. Specifically, the use of Inbound Marketing gives agencies greater strategic visibility of the sales cycle from beginning to end thus enabling them to make valuable improvements where necessary. This is another example of where this dissertation study has contributed some new data to the existing literature available on the subject of Inbound Marketing's increased level of popularity with modern communication agencies in recent years.

6.3 Critical Evaluation of Research Instrument

The research instrument used in this dissertation was effective in assisting the researcher to achieve the main aims and objectives stated at the outset of the study. The dissertation study was able to achieve its main aims and objectives with the data collected therefore, the research tool utilised can be argued as being successful. Looking back however, it may have been more beneficial to the research to use a mixed methods approach to data collection. For example, in the case of analysing the ROI and conversion rates of Inbound Marketing strategies, quantitative techniques would have been more appropriate than qualitative. Using quantitative techniques would also have helped if the study was based on a much larger sample size such as increased numbers of communication agency owners sourced for interview. To reduce the risk of researcher bias it may also have been more effective to use a research philosophy other than interpretivism.

A further small tweak in which the researcher would have made if given the opportunity to tackle a similar research question in the future would be to use probability sampling techniques. This would eradicate the risk of researcher bias and increase the likelihood of generating unanticipated findings which could possibly provide new insights into the concept of Inbound Marketing in the modern, digital age. Another benefit of utilising probability sampling methods is that it would therefore result in a set of findings which can be generalised to apply to a wider research population or sample size. In the future, if the researcher was to attempt a similar dissertation study they would use two industries instead of one to provide a direct comparison of how two different organisations use Inbound Marketing to further their level of commercial success. Using an additional industry as part of the primary research process would also provide further insight into the key reasons why Inbound Marketing has increased in popularity with modern organisations in recent years.

It could also be argued on reflection that the researcher should have used structured interviews to reduce discussion time with the interviewees and instead steer them towards giving more direct answers. This would have furthered the researchers understanding of the concept of Inbound Marketing's increased popularity with

modern communication agencies. It would also have increased the amount of actionable data (data which can be used to form conclusions) streamed from the interviews carried out with the 5 different communication agency owners. Due to the conversational nature of the semi-structured interviews carried out with the communication agency owners, the amount of data which could be used in this research study was fairly limited. In the future, the researcher will consider using structured interviews to ensure that they are able to collect significantly more actionable data. To supplement the structured interviews, the researcher would also consider conducting a round of questionnaires. This would grant the researcher the opportunity to compose a more focused set of questions geared more towards successfully achieving the key aims and objectives of the dissertation study.

6.4 Output of the Research: Implications for Key Stakeholders

In relation to the output of this research, the findings are likely to be of interest to owners of modern communication agencies and marketing professionals . They will be interested to find out how to implement Inbound Marketing methodology and strategies to improve the commercial success of their organisations. In recommendation, the findings of this dissertation study would suggest that contemporary communication agencies should utilise Inbound Marketing to increase the quality of their service to the client demonstrating more tangible results. The primary research undertaken by the researcher as part of this dissertation study indicates that Inbound Marketing has already extended the service portfolio of many communication agency firms. As well as communication agency owners and marketing professionals, the findings of this research study are also likely to be of interest to other authors in the field who are seeking information to help benefit their own individual study in the same subject area. Other authors in the field are also likely to be interested in the learning outcomes and output of this research because Inbound Marketing is a significantly new and complex subject that requires specialist support ie an agency for campaigns to garner results. Additionally, the impact of Inbound Marketing could vary depending on the industry chosen for analysis which again adds to the complexity of the concept.

On reflection, it may also have been beneficial to the output of the study if the researcher had contacted communication agency consumers to gauge their perception of the benefits of Inbound Marketing from a consumer perspective. This would have benefited the learning outcomes of the dissertation study because the researcher could then have compared the benefits and limitations of Inbound Marketing from an agency perspective and a consumer perspective. This action may also have increased the likelihood of uncovering further elements of data to support the researcher in achieving the main aims and objectives of the research. For example, consumers may have responded in a different manner to the communication agency owners with respect to the popularity of Inbound Marketing activities. It would therefore be of interest to modern organisations to identify what aspects of their Inbound Marketing campaigns or strategies require change in order to more successfully meet the needs, wants and desires of their target market.

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8 Primary Research

8.1 Interview One

Interviewer - Why has Inbound Marketing become so popular in recent years ?

Respondent - The key with inbound was a couple of things that made me quite excited about it.
One was it demonstrated quite early on was it gives you a better response for a lower cost in your Marketing efforts so it allows you to focus your marketing effort better and gives you more success at a lower cost than traditional methods
And aligned to that was the second thing was a high measurability of it, because you are tracking web activity you can clearly see what bits or not are resonating with the client.
You can see that if you put two pieces out one gets read by everyone and actioned and one doesn't, you can see what the client is getting to.

And that measurability is in contrast to when I was running businesses in the 90s, you would have your PR agency and they were almost proud of that fact that they couldn't tell you anything. They would want you to spend money and hope that the overall result was good.

It was also responding to the fact that the way people buy has changed, people are researching online now that's the first thing they do, they don't look at magazines and don't look at ads.

So it was in response to that, the world has caught on now. It took some time and we thought we were evangelists but now people accept that is the way the world buys now.

Previously you were an evangelist, how has this made you change the way you do business?

Interviewer - If I was presenting a digital or inbound approach in 2013 you'd have an audience of 50 people and if I used the word persona you might get 1 or 2 people who had heard of this term out of 50.
If I asked that question today I would get 20-30 hands raised out of 50 and these would-be business owners who would be targets for inbound.
So the awareness of digital has gone up but I would say also when I am talking to small business leaders they are kind aware of it now but still don't know how to use it

How do you continue with that education?

Respondent - One of the interesting things for me in the last year or 2 is when you sit down with a CEO of a business they can't really articulate what is it they do and who they do it for. So, the digital approach is forcing organisations to ask 'what is it we do? What is it we want to be known for? Who is it we are targeting?'

As each part of Inbound becomes bigger, data analytics, personas, how you apply it to what you do, how social works, paid social, all that stuff. Each of these small areas of Inbound has become a discipline.
In terms of agency evolution, the whole go to market for agencies is bigger and more complex.
A live chat we are having in the communications agency is do we acquire other companies and become bigger that way or do we become more specialized, and this is a chat a lot of agencies are having.

Interviewer - In your opinion, has the popularity of Inbound Marketing forced an agency like yours to get better at your own marketing. If so, why?

Respondent - I think we do a lot better job for our customers than we do for ourselves. We probably don't spend as much time on our own stuff as we should do. I think we have a decent website and do some decent things with lead nurturing and inbound.

Interviewer - Has that had an impact on the business? Do you feel that by not focusing on marketing you could lose competitive edge?

Respondent - I think it allows us to be realistic, we are not rubbish at it, we just don't spend a lot of time on it.
What we say is, this is not a silver bullet, if you have big problems in your business this is not going to fix all via Inbound. In the communications agency we typically get 50% of our business from an Inbound program and the other 50% comes from networking and referrals. That gives us a realism when talking to clients being realistic about what this will deliver for you

Interviewer - Outside of delivering Inbound Marketing as a service to your customers, has it brought any additional revenue streams?

Respondent - Back to your question about evolution, back in 2012 it really was all about the marketing teams, now it's all about the sales team as well. When you can get the sales leadership, marketing leadership and CEO in a room, that's when you are most effective.
There is a whole revenue stream around sales enablement there is also a revenue stream around templates. There may be consulting work which will add to it.

Interviewer - How do you think about delivering sales enablement as a service.

Respondent - We have both being leading that because we have both been sales leaders we are credible in front of CEOs.

If you are working to produce some sales support content you can get the marketing producers to create that content. As we scale that side of the business we are going to need people from a sales background. That is the only way you can be credible in front of a sales team, if you have done it yourself and worked in sales.

I had a really nice testimonial from one of our clients the other day, he said 'this time last year I was very sceptical about whether or not it would work, and now our whole digital and sales enablement approach is giving us half of our leads so in a year its gone from here to there and now I am a convert.' That's only based on the fact that you understand what he is trying to achieve as a sales leader and you can help make that transition from marketing to sales.

Interviewer - How Has Inbound Marketing allowed you to understand your customers?

Respondent - One of the things we do is a workshop at the start of the process and I guess we are typical in that respect. One of the really interesting things in doing that workshop is, you may have the leadership in the room, the CEO, the head of Marketing, the sales team, but quite often the questions you are asking them to really platform out the inbound stuff, is causing them to think about their business and really think about what their business is about.

They usually come out of those sessions saying I really enjoyed that and never thought about that before , we have never had to look at that issue or this issue, so actually it helps us really get into the nuts with the customer because it helps us ask things like exactly are you doing? who are you targeting? What happens this time next year, if this all works out beautifully what could this look like? And were asking them to really think about their customers, really think about their offering, really think about the process how they acquire customers and that's all great learning stuff, you really get deep into where they are thinking as an organisation and my experience is when it works you build up a lot of trust with the CEO on a personal level and they are then very frank about what they are trying to do with their business . So I think the

discovery type tools we use to uncover Inbound Marketing are the ones that allow us to really understand the customer in a deep way.

Interviewer - Since your duration as an agency owner, how have you learned from customers about what kind of a commitment do you need for you to deliver an effective inbound strategy?

Respondent - So this is interesting, all of us in the communications agency have run IT businesses previously and the interesting thing with an IT business is that if you tell someone we are going to sell you all these bits of kit and it's going to work, then at the end of the process they have kit in their office and its working and the lights are on and all of that.

Whereas if you are selling an Inbound Marketing service clearly it's a bit more nebulus as there are no guarantees and they are really putting their faith in you that you are going to deliver what you said.
So trust is highly important, and as much as it is possible, de-risking it for the client is highly important and the biggest transformational piece, we have found, is taking out as much of the big commitment as you can. So previously you may have been looking at 1, 2 year retainers/contracts. People don't want to sign up for that . They may sign up for that with someone really huge who they have heard of, they are not willing to sign up for that with someone they have not really heard of .
So we made a change last year, we ask for a three month commitment that's it, so it is a rolling commitment after that but you can cancel on a month's notice anytime. And that has really helped take the risk out for the client, because they are prepared to see out 3 months for doing things like rebuilding the website as they can tangibly see the results of that . Even if you hate us, at the end of three months you have a new website.
 But saying you can cancel anytime you like, gives then more comfort. And then a lot of it is more around the personal trust element, more than selling has been in the past .In the past there has been trust but also you are selling something physical and they have got it., whereas this is much more about the reputation of the individual, you shake the guys hand and look him in the eye and tell him you're going to deliver for him so he has got to trust you.

I think they are the things I have learned, it is about taking risk out and gaining trust from the client.

Interviewer - if there is push back in your process, what is the typical hesitation for someone moving forward with you guys as an agency?

Respondent - There are 2, one is cost. We have learned to qualify that quickly. For our money you really want to be spending at least £3k a month . And if you are saying these numbers to someone and they are looking at you like they are astronomically high then stop right there because there are one man bands out there who can do stuff cheaper. The way we are set up to deliver what we deliver we need that kind of budget and it works very well .

The other area is a fear of change, I sometimes see where when we have talked through what we are going to do with the customer , they get cold feet with the amount of change you are suggesting quickly and they need time to think about it or else just don't get ahead.

You talk to someone about their growth plans and then you ask them what is their budget for growth and they say I haven't thought about that. So their plan is to double the size of their business in 3 years, but they haven't put in any budget to do that.

Interviewer - What is the difference between Inbound Marketing and Content Marketing?

Respondent - First of all I think a lot of those phrases are used by people to mean the same thing, they talk about digital marketing, Inbound Marketing, social media marketing, content marketing, I think they are used interchangeably by a lot of people. In my opinion the whole thing has moved on now and so, back to my little business school, I used to teach about an Inbound Marketing presentation, I now call it marketing in a digital age. For me all of those names are just marketing for me and

now most marketing is done in digital. I understand where they came from historically but I think they are used interchangeably now and I think they are fairly redundant anyway.

Interviewer - and what does the marketplace say now, if you are a new prospect looking to have a conversation about their marketing, what is the typical term which is used over and above others?

Respondent - They usually say we need to do more with our website. The enquiry normally comes from one of two places - one is they don't like their website, they feel their website is not telling their story properly or they feel their website isn't being effective at generating leads.
Or it comes from a feeling that there are things they should be doing in the digital world that they are not doing, but I don't see a consistent phrase.
I don't see people coming to us saying 'we need Inbound Marketing' or ' we need content marketing' they just come with a business problem rather than a marketing problem.
It is usually led by something not working for them rather than them wanting to discuss inbound or content marketing.

Interviewer - In your opinion has the attention of the consumer shifted to any new sources of content?
To explain - in the past there have been websites, blogs, for that information search. Are there any new sources which you as an agency cannot ignore as a new source of information?

Respondent - so you cannot ignore video. Video is rapidly coming up the curve and the trend has been an even shorter attention span. People talk about the death of the blog, there are 200 million blogs out there well of course not everyone will read that stuff and a lot of it is just noise.
Aa good blog with a good point still gets read and an example of that would be Seth Godian who writes really great little short blogs that make a really great point really well.

So I think things like blogging have still got life in them if the content is good and short. I think with video you have really short 90 second, 3 minutes tops videos, that's probably the biggest area that has got potential, and it has been a surprise to people how low cost it is. You can do quite a decent video on quite a low budget and it has an intimacy that people respond to.

So new areas are video, and overriding that is short attention span

Interviewer - what part of your offering does video play, do you outsource it?

Respondent - we offer it but outsource it . We don't have a separate video unit in house but that's a live conversation, but because our developers are in Cape Town and most of our customers are in the UK we will use local video sources as if you are going to go and video the clients offices you need someone local on the ground.

We will outsource it to people in Europe. As it happens my wife's business are using one of these agencies to video in the house at the moment.

Interviewer - How do you demonstrate return on investment for your marketing services?

Respondent - Ultimately it is establishing a couple of things early on with the client. One is 'What are the metrics to measure?' and two is setting the expectation about how fast a return will come.

It is different in each business as to what metrics are going to work, but you have got to work quickly on 'how do we know what good looks like' . It's one of the first questions we ask. Is it sales, is it website visits, is it subscribers, whatever it is going to be in the first instance.

It is all about establishing what they want to get because that is how you prove that we achieved what we set out to achieve.

And the second thing about expectations is , this may not pay for itself in 1 year, but after a year you should be able to see that it is on a trajectory so it will start getting to the point where it will give a return and continue to increase giving a return going forward.

In the past marketing departments would roll out a campaign hoping to generate some awareness. The only time they saw a sales person was at a Christmas party but now Inbound Marketing has allowed sales and marketing to work more closely. Now we are starting to see with some of our clients from the marketing department asking sales what new challenges are coming up on sales calls and if the blog or social post will resonate with the target audience they are talking to we see with one of our clients marketing are held accountable the same way sales are .Like sales departments have revenue targets marketing departments are now been held accountable to kpis like traffic generation and lead generation

So setting the expectations right, being clear about what we are all trying to achieve together and more recently from a personal point of view, if you can do the sales enablement stuff early on, that has the most direct impact on return on investment quickly. Because if you can go to the sales team and say 'what are the bits of content that will help you do more business now? What are the 5 questions you get asked on all of your sales calls, can we create a short video or something else that helps you answer that question?' then those things have real impact quickly because the sales team are coming back straight away saying I'm really glad we have that, it's really helped. We now sit the sales team to define what a sales qualified lead looks like , is it that they request a consultation or is it that they have downloaded 4 pieces of content. If sales are part of that definition they will buy into the process more.

However sales teams are now receiving such high quality leads that it is making then lazy when it comes to calling the not so high quality leads – but all leads have a cost and need to be followed up in some way regardless

Interviewer - what part does technology play in that?

Respondent - It is vital to track - if someone does not have a technology platform to help them see what is going on with their website and their digital activity they are flying blind. The way buying has changed is that people do a lot more research online now , before they even want to talk to you they will have done a lot of research online so if your website is in the game at the start they won't even come to talk to you. That is the downside with digital, you have to be sharper with your website, sharper with your content.

The upside is that when they are landing on your website they are leaving footprints everywhere. You can start to get a picture of them, what they are interested in, where they are spending their time and what is important to them. So what a lot of businesses are doing is, they will start to have a digital approach with blogging and social media, but they are not doing the analytics bit properly and so they are flying blind.
Or even if they have an analytics platform, they are not using the data to take decisions about how to move forward. So we are really strong on saying you need a technology platform.

Interviewer - With the growing popularity of Inbound Marketing, how do you rise above the clutter?

Respondent - It is the constant battle. This digital agency world is full of agencies doing educational type stuff, there is no magic answer. I think you just have to make your content as highly educational and as highly relevant as it can be. My own view is that specialisation is the way forward. I think the more this area grows the more you have to start to specialise. Be clear about the vertical markets you address, the sectors you address and be really focused on that.

There are a lot of areas that are still fresh ground. If you pick a niche vertical and then no dominate that there is still room to do that.
 There seems to be a lot of people who focus on technology companies however I see a lot of other verticals who are not well served e.g.: there is a one man band agency in

London who is all about hotel analytics, he helps hotels improve their digital performance by driving analytics around their website.

Interviewer - have you ever rejected working with a client because their space is too competitive?

Respondent - No, we have rejected bad fit clients. If they cannot articulate what they are trying to do, if the budget is not right, if they don't want to go about it in the way we think is correct we will reject, but not ever because it was too competitive a space

Interviewer - What does the future of Inbound Marketing look like?

Respondent - I think to my point earlier - we have moved from Inbound Marketing to marketing in a digital world. The sales teams are linked in, I think it is a complete across the board philosophy about how companies touch their clients. This whole idea about loving your customer , I'm seeing a lot of that right now so you really have to use the digital tools to help you serve them better.
The only thing you can't do digitally is the human trusted emotion piece.

8.2   Interview Two

Interviewer - Why has Inbound Marketing become so popular in recent years ?

Respondent - I guess it is mainly due to the changes in consumer behaviour which was brought about by the internet. So you and I and everyone start our process buying online and especially for processes where we need to uncover some information along the way so we ask questions early on in our buying process so we can move on in our buying process.

That is where Inbound Marketing sits nicely into that.

Interviewer - In your opinion, how has the popularity of Inbound Marketing affected your business?

Respondent - I'm a bit surprised that it isn't more popular, in our country in Norway we have seen that quite a few smaller agencies have taken on inbound but the more traditional agencies haven't really tapped into this so it has brought about a segmentation.
So a lot of agencies in traditional marketing or performance marketing which is typically digital but is still outbound at its core.
None of the large actors in these areas in Norway, none of them surprisingly have gone into Inbound.

Interviewer - Why?

Respondent - I don't know, maybe they think they have it sorted in what they are doing today. Maybe they look at the surface of Inbound Marketing and think that looks like what we are doing. And in performance marketing that could appear to be the case, but what they are missing out on are the conversion strategies and the identification of leads /opportunities that you have using Inbound.

My thinking is that there must be some champions inside these agencies who understand inbound but my guess is that it doesn't come up to decision making level yet.

Interviewer -Do you see that as an opportunity for you or is it a negative aspect where there are not enough agencies doing it in Norway to rise the movement?

Respondent - It could be looked at both ways. I think it more of an opportunity for us, we are seen as a solid and respected company whereas if 5 or 10 companies were to go into this big time we would be more of a marginal player. So it has helped us create and reinforce the position we are in in Norway at the moment.

Interviewer - In your opinion, has the popularity of Inbound Marketing forced an agency like yours to get better at your own marketing. If so, why?

Respondent - Yes absolutely. The beauty of the methodology is that it is very systematic and very stepwise and it forces you to think through your own marketing both in strategic terms but most of all in operational terms. You do execute the strategy if you want to succeed in inbound.
It was challenging for us at the start, today is it in our blood.

Interviewer - Outside of delivering Inbound Marketing as a service to your customers, has it brought any additional revenue streams?

Respondent - We do deliver Inbound Marketing services on a retainer basis. We already did google AdWords on a retainer basis and it has reinforced that and brings us into retainer based relationships with our customers in terms of Facebook advertising and other online advertising. We already did integrations before and it now brings new integrations and it has changed the way we sell. Now we want to sell a customer on Inbound Marketing first and then services like website second. Also it has changed in the opposite direction before we started inbound we were happy to take on new clients on a project basis, we don't do that anymore.
If you want to be a customer of ours now it has to involve a long term agreement/retainer.
It is also bringing us into Sales services and CRM services.

Interviewer - Why did you change from offering design service first and inbound services second to now offering inbound first and design second?

Respondent - We immediately recognised inbound as a huge opportunity for us . We had some methodology and established thinking before and it was an incredibly attractive fit for us, it directly plugged into our existing thoughts but we didn't have a system so it offered us now a system. And then the moment we recognised this we knew it could be huge, in August 2014. So we were late to the game in European terms but early to the game in Norwegian terms .

We saw that basically every company and information based buying process should be doing marketing this way. And given that the market offerings were limited in Norway at that time and we saw we were in a position to go after the biggest clients. The biggest agency actors I mentioned before who didn't go into Inbound, usually a bigger company wouldn't buy services from a 2 - 5 man agency, they would look for someone bigger, with more experienced personnel. We saw we were in a position to become that player in our market.

We wanted to target larger clients and that made it natural for us to go into retainers. That changed everything for us, and since then most of our business is retainer based.

Interviewer - what does the change from offering design service first and inbound services second to now offering inbound first and design second allow you to do? Does it allow you to create multiple designs on an ongoing basis or what else?

In terms of delivering a website the word design is much too limited so instead of simply designing and delivering a website we look at what roles that website should play in terms of marketing.

We were continuously updating websites, functionality. Maybe Inbound has not changed our approach to designing websites too much but it has given us a systematic approach to conversion , being able to have email be a part of it, ads, search, blogging, to a much larger extent.

We still have a lot to do in terms of having growth design as website deals are not on a retainer the way inbound deals are.

Interviewer - How has Inbound Marketing allowed you to understand your customers?

Respondent - It definitely has made us a lot more personas aware, While we were familiar with the concept of personas and had done it for our customers, we hadn't done it for ourselves. Our sales and marketing was outbound and referral based , it wasn't structured and systematic. We really had not thought through our own messaging, how it differed to talking to a CEO to a marketing director, to a sales director, to a marketing coordinator, or a business owner and also we now engage directly with the sales team. One sales rep even fed back to marketing that they believed they could convert a lead that read this one piece of content into a customer every time.

Those personas are very well defined now as is our messaging to each of those personas.

And I think that is the biggest impact it has had on our marketing. The awareness of personas and the life cycle and it has led us to launching three separate books over time so today we are running a blog targeting CEO , sales directors and marketing directors.

Interviewer - What is the difference between Inbound Marketing and Content Marketing?

Respondent - The easy part is Inbound Marketing = content marketing + conversion strategy. Think of it as fishing with bait.

With content marketing you find bait and throw it in the water and hope that you get a fish.

With Inbound Marketing you attach the bait to a hook, a line, a rod and you make sure you bring as many fish as possible into the boat.

They are both focused on getting fish but the difference is the systematic approach and tools that you have for conversion. I still think content marketers don't get it.

What term resonates more for the Norwegian market? Inbound or content?

Hard to say - content was there before Inbound. A lot of people use the term inbound without full understanding it. They think it is the forms on the website but miss out on the conversion strategy. So fairly equal use in Norway.

Interviewer -In your opinion has the attention of the consumer shifted to any new sources of content?

Respondent - Video of course, I cannot see anyone answering that question without mentioning video.

Interactive questionnaires, guides to help someone understand their need.

Anything with R at the end, virtual reality , augmented reality will be big in some sectors, anything to do with presenting and experiencing without being in person will be important and can also be connected to inbound.

Travel, Home, Rentals, cars, a lot of experienced based stuff could have pre-experience something.

Interviewer -Is video something you are delivering as a service?

Respondent - Yes - delivered in-house for simpler videos, a conversation or location. Conceptual we typically outsource.

Interviewer - How do you demonstrate return on investment for your marketing services?

Respondent - Typically we agree a goal and we measure on those goals all the way through/.

How can we increase visits, leads, sales?

Sales have been harder to demonstrate as most companies will have some sort of X Factor between a sales qualified lead and a customer if they are online businesses we can measure directly but typically they are B2B, there is a sales man in there or they have some indirect distribution and when we get a lead it gets handed to a 3rd party for closing so in those cases we measure increases in traffic and increases in qualified leads and if you don't use a technology to demonstrate roi you will lose clients"

Sales have always used bad quality leads as an excuse for missed numbers without being specific as to why they weren't any good so the new relationship between marketing and sales is key.

Interviewer - With the growing popularity of Inbound Marketing, how do you rise above the clutter?

Respondent - I think our positioning in Norway is to be senior guys. We have a lot of older aged people so we can talk to management with credibility. We can go into a boardroom and deliver a presentation and be regarded as an equal. This is something that a lot of the other agencies in Norway cannot do as they are simply younger.

We are simply business people first with marketing experience whereas other agencies are marketing specialists first.

Also in terms of creating our own content it is important that senior people create content too. If you only put the 25 year olds creating content you typically end up talking to the marketing coordinator.
You cannot communicate credibly to CEOs and marketing directors. So we put a lot of effort into our senior people creating content and that works. And the more personal you get the more experience sharing the better, especially if we share our mistakes and reflections around mistakes, it resonates well.

Interviewer - What does the future of Inbound Marketing look like?

Respondent - I think it will be more and more integrated into everything else.
The fact that you can build information models on leads and customers and use this to be more effective in marketing sales and service that drives the entire ecosystem into interactions. It will be connected to the rest of the transaction systems and sharing data. With GDPR you need to be mindful how you do that but that is the way I am certain it will go. It will also move up , today we see a lot of SMB doing this, but Inbound is so attractive it is bound to be picked up by larger businesses. Then you run into large business problems integrating data across channels, languages, sites so Inbound will move to the forefront of large companies.

It will be the way of doing marketing in industries where the buying process is information based.

8.3   Interview Three

Interviewer - Why has Inbound Marketing become so popular in recent years ?

Respondent - Buyer behaviour has changed, I see this in how they brought post the 2008 economic crash to how they buy now.
How I would go to market then is very different to how I would go to market now.
The tools that worked before then were not working after then, or becoming less effective,
And Inbound Marketing seemed to separate itself as a philosophy and a means of going to market which resonated with how buyers are buying.

Interviewer - and what has that popularity meant for your own agency?

Respondent - So my agency was built to take advantage of that change in buyer behaviour and is aligned to that Inbound philosophy, we hold that at the core of our go to market.
We do use other digital tools and methods to enhance and accelerate results for our clients as needed, but Inbound is still the core philosophy of the business.

Interviewer - In your opinion, has the popularity of Inbound Marketing forced an agency like yours to get better at your own marketing. If so, why?

Respondent- It has, although we were set up to be inbound from the beginning, But we have had to evolve as Inbound Marketing has evolved. So we are constantly adapting and changing because buyer behaviour is evolving and changing still today.

People are still not engaging in the exact same two years ago as they are today. I think that also is to do with how we as an agency have evolved , we have grown out our skills in the business which may allow us to do more.

Interviewer - since the inception of the agency what are the milestones along the way.

The agency started with one person and now is 20, so driver for our own growth.
It has enabled us to open offices in cape town, building teams in those offices.
The way inbound has changed has also allowed us to change on how we deliver our business and deliver Inbound to our customers.

Turnover milestones, from 100k to 500k turnover was a big milestone.

Have you seen any changes in the consumer side in how they do things differently?

Yes - we are constantly looking at our service to help customers reach their audience as attention spans are getting shorter in terms of what they want to consume from a content perspective. So we want to use sound and video more effectively. So while some people will want to read an article, others will want to watch one, or listen to it.

Specifically from a media delivery , we are shifting in how we deliver that content. Where previously we would share eBook with long content now we deliver e-books with short to the point messaging.

The other thing we have found is there is a time and place for long form content, if we think of pillar page concept, there is a consumer out there who wants to consume that lengthy content but in smaller pieces.
It has to be visual, stimulating and bite sized pieces of content they can consume readily.

Interviewer - Outside of delivering Inbound Marketing as a service to your customers, has it brought any additional revenue streams?

Respondent - We do have a strong design and development side to what we do, we can actually build the platforms that help people get found. Building websites are important to us, also selling as a reseller for our chosen technology company.
Long term strategy of the business, being a strong Inbound agency will help us be acquired or merge with someone in the future. As a CEO of an agency being acquired is my ultimate goal.

Interviewer - How has Inbound Marketing allowed you to understand your customers?

Respondent - I think our Inbound philosophy starts from a position of help , you have to understand your personas and your customer to give them what they are looking for. So you are starting from that mindset from the start . Companies over the past few years have gained a lot of knowledge about their customers through social media interactions , blog visits ,subscriptions and unless companies use this information to align their sales and marketing themes to better serve their customers they will fail, only customer centric organisations will prosper.
Dan Tyer wrote a book about the Inbound organisation and how it flows through to areas like customer service. That comes with Inbound I think , that 'always be helping' approach and I think if you are doing that then you will attract a certain type of business who likes to be served in that kind of way.

Interviewer - How do you keep on top of the needs and challenges your buyer persona will face

Respondent - While we use personas as the starting point in everything we do, we are getting smarter in how we use them. Sometimes it's less about that persona itself and more about the context around that persona when they are looking for something. There is a bit more detail on the persona, but we have started to play around with this piece. We stay on top of them talking to the personas themselves making sure we understand them to give the salespeople insight on how the personas found them. In

doing this we build a map of the personas and every quarter to 6 months we come back to them and say is this still resonating , has anything shifted in the market that were trying to target and does this all still make sense, so we check in.

Interviewer - when you are checking the persona profile do you do that to a sample?

Respondent - very often it depends, most of our clients don't have the budget to do proper research like that so you are basing it off conversations with people in their organisation, what do they see? What are they hearing?
A lot of the time you have to do your own research and sometimes you don't get to talk to the persona and that's usually a budgetary thing.

Interviewer - is this due to the company not buying into the research process? Where is the reluctance?

Respondent - a proper exercise to research properly would cost more than the monthly service retainer alone so they won't spend a full months retainer on that.
A lot of our clients will come to us because we already understand client personas which is the other side of it, because we work with these personas day in and day out, a lot of our customers will share the same personas so we have that insight. So we have that profile and replicate.
We will look at what is different so it's more specific.

Interviewer - What is the difference between Inbound Marketing and Content Marketing?

Respondent - I see content marketing as a subset of Inbound Marketing.
Where you need to create content to attract, convert and close that is content marketing,

Inbound Marketing I see as spanning SEO, it is more strategic go to market.

Interviewer - What is resonating in the market more, the term content marketing or Inbound Marketing?

Respondent - The term content marketing resonates more , all mature digital companies will know the term content marketing , Inbound , most do but if you saw which terms are being used then content outweighs inbound significantly.

Interviewer - are there any other terms which are similar that are used even more so?

Respondent - it becomes generic then, like digital marketing. Inbound is a subset of Digital, content is a subset of Inbound,
Content marketing alone is too niche for us as it does not talk about the design and production skills for us.
Inbound Marketing is still a good umbrella term.
Growth marketing is a term which will be used more also.

Interviewer -In your opinion has the attention of the consumer shifted to any new sources of content?

Respondent - Pillar content -multimedia content, which traditionally were blogs are now podcasts or videos with transcriptions. They are still blogs very often but the nature of the blog is becoming more dynamic.

Interviewer - Do you outsource video creation or create Inhouse?

Respondent - It depends, in-house video is quite difficult, I don't know many who have managed to solve that yet.

Interviewer - Do you deliver video and written content together?

Respondent - The way we use video is we encourage to customers to create their own videos, we just can't offer it at this time because most of our production takes place in cape town it's hard to take part unless it is web-based. We tend to use webinars as it is hard to go onsite in Europe.

Interviewer - How do you demonstrate return on investment for your marketing services?

Respondent - Traditionally reporting is reporting plus engagement.
We have to go back to explore with the sales team to understand what is working and converting and also using a marketing technology to also analyse conversion rates to demonstrate the return.
Campaign tool helps us also show return very quickly.

Interviewer - With the growing popularity of Inbound Marketing, content marketing is now a highly competitive area, how do you rise above the clutter and make your content for your customers stand out?

Respondent - What we found is fit is an important part of being successful for our clients. Whilst we might have clients from specific tech backgrounds they don't compete with each other.
They are typically established but have something quite difficult to talk about and quite dry, and as such the industry is quite hard to talk about so if we are able to make some significant gains at all they will rise above quite quickly. So where we find a good fit and success is where the technology the company is selling is very dry, their competition is struggling to articulate it also and the industry is typically not using any inbound techniques, that is where we can help a company rise above and be successful. We are now starting to see now where sales would push back on bad quality leads , inbound gave the opportunity for the marketer to use feedback to make their marketing more effective.

Interviewer - What does the future of Inbound Marketing look like?

Respondent - I think it is changing all the time, just staying with it and what's happening is hard enough so really hard to predict. I disagree with some of the AI type things going around as I don't think the technology is there to deliver a service and be that intelligent as of yet.

8.4   Interview Four

Interviewer - Why has Inbound Marketing become so popular in recent years ?

Respondent - It has become really important because people are recognising that interruption marketing doesn't work. They also recognise that content is king and content is at the heart of inbound and I think there has been a good job to position it. Because there has been such an emphasis on people to do business with people they like and trust so how to build up trust and likeability or recognition. In order to be a person or brand that people trust, it is around what your pitch is, what you position is and content and inbound play a big part of that.
People recognise that it works.

Interviewer - In your opinion, has the popularity of Inbound Marketing forced an agency like yours to get better at your own marketing. If so, why?

Respondent - What it means for agencies is the ability to have a framework around what you do. In the past there was too much reliance on organic and so there is a need for paid social as well as organic. We are using the technology companies framework to help structure the experience our customers go through and how and when we interact with them.

Interviewer - Have you done any analysis on how to hold onto a customer for a period because of the inbound services you are offering?

Respondent - No but I think there is a real correlation between having a structured monthly retained type service as opposed to an ad hoc service offering.

Interviewer - In your opinion, has the popularity of Inbound Marketing forced an agency like yours to get better at your own marketing. If so, why?

Respondent - It has although I have not been my own best vase reference. You should practice what you preach and it shows you examples of work to provide.

Interviewer - what does it mean if you are not practicing what you preach, what is the impact to business?

Respondent - for businesses smart enough to dig around to get a sense of it they will call it out, for those who are aren't it means nothing to them.

Interviewer - Outside of delivering Inbound Marketing as a service to your customers, has it brought any additional revenue streams?

Respondent - We work with a technology company who pay us commission as a reseller of their product and whilst that's a nice little revenue stream and we do see the value in a partnership but still want to maintain our identity as an agency and what we stand for. Besides that, it's more made us think about what additional collateral we could be offering such as video production, podcast production, PPC advertising, that hasn't had a huge impact on me as I am already spread thin, but in theory would be great.
Built with an outsourced team as in we work with a lot of freelancers anyway.

Interviewer - How has Inbound Marketing allowed you to understand your customers?

Respondent - By understanding personas, by understanding what the persona pain points would be , by understanding genuinely what content works and what doesn't, I think it forces you to get to grips what the pain points of a specific customer are and what content is going to have impact.
Helped us to understand customers better on that basis.
Also looking at the different areas of a campaign so things like advertising and building out banners, social, organic search. You are really getting submerged in the needs of the customer instead of purely being someone who makes videos for a company but not understanding the nuances and subtleties so I feel I know the businesses I am working with very deeply and part of that would have benefited from working through each of the channels and understanding them.

Interviewer - You mentioned personas - how deep do you get in the persona exercises?

Respondent - We will go deep - strategy of 2 - 3 weeks where we will map out different elements to get clarity on who the customers are. We will spend a couple of weeks researching that. I'd say pretty deep.
We will spend anything between 10 and 20 hours, asking lots of questions directly, carrying out our own research, looking at competitors, people are always open.
No-one ever holds back, they love it because when you start they think they know everything about their customers and then when you start mapping it out they realise don't know everything and that always makes a difference.
I'd say we get a really good handle on and a really good openness and engagement from them.

Interviewer - What is the difference between Inbound Marketing and Content Marketing?

Respondent - Inbound is more of a broader methodology and content is a part of that. You can push content out through social but are not necessarily thinking about what the pain points are, or what piece of the content will be good.

Inbound Marketing is not the holy grail, there are flaws in how it is communicated and perceived.

In the past there is way too much emphasis on organic. Also there is not a good thought on the execution in connecting marketing and sales together to understand the customer journey.

Interviewer - In your opinion has the attention of the consumer shifted to any new sources of content?

Respondent - Scorecards are definitely a big feature for us. When people are answering certain questions off the back of that the rules we set up give them a score.

Video is crucial is another area. Podcasts are another area.

Paid advertising is more important to me now than organic.

Interviewer - How do you demonstrate return on investment for your marketing services?

Respondent - This is tricky in that in the past it would have been easy to show this many leads, this much traffic.

Aa customer I lost just today was because they didn't see a return on investment. We created 70 blogs for them which had brought in negligible amounts and the stuff that was getting a return was us doing outbound outreach through LinkedIn to build up a relationship that way. Once they met you they were happy to get on the newsletter . The frustrating part is that when they (customers) don't see results after you have won their trust to buy the technology, they lose faith in us as an. Generally speaking it is about how much new business is coming in or are you setting up the business and plugging in the gaps which are currently broken and that might be 'here is a marketing asset, some collateral'.

In some ways I try to steer away from the measurement of 'here is the number of leads you will get through' because it's harder to do that without paid advertising, as soon as you start doing paid advertising then you are eating into your budget in a significant way so I focus on getting collateral and assets in place and let's get a campaign going with paid advertising.

Rather than organic leads we actually get more leads from events, which is painful. Hot topic, GDPR, we will create an event then book in a load of one to one consultations, the journey is quicker. Pay Facebook advertising which is not that expensive.
The beginning of that journey to the end of that journey is so much quicker than the blog post process of downloading an eBook and over time contacting to generate a lead.
It is so much quicker.

Interviewer - With the growing popularity of Inbound Marketing, how do you rise above the clutter?

Respondent - If I am really honest, unless you have a big budget you cannot rise above anything that is remotely viable.
You need a lot of channels outside of your website. You need an engagement happy way to get in front of people so LinkedIn has always worked quite well for us.
And you need high quality content which shows an authority, the bar has been so lifted that they do just expect high quality content so you either come up with something quite quirky, more personalised or I think Facebook communities will be a big play, we are seeing that with our customers, they have an engaged and active community.

Interviewer - What does the future of Inbound Marketing look like?

Respondent - I don't think Inbound resounds in the same way. The people I respect, there is way more the emphasis on getting published on other publications that getting people to my website . I'd be way happier getting my client in doing regular stuff with TechCrunch than putting a whole load of content on one channel.

It's about choosing one channel and throwing all of your eggs in one basket and doing really well.

Blogs and over emphasis on generating leads, not that it doesn't work anymore but scorecards and chat bots.

Don't focus on getting organic traffic unless you have crazy levels of budget, focus on scorecards and chat bots, put a bit of money into the technology that helps get that traffic through, don't think that people are going to come through on a nice SEO blog and then click on the Call to action, it's a long winded way now.

8.5 Interview Five

Interviewer - Why has Inbound Marketing become so popular in recent years ?

Respondent - Because of the research people do on the internet, a couple of years ago they tried to get information by researching themselves.
Inbound gives you the ability to tell you how to get in touch with these people at the right time.

Interviewer - What has the popularity of Inbound Marketing done for your business?

Respondent - It has educated the IT companies to work in the Inbound way , getting in touch with the right buyers by the sales and marketing people.
The IT companies now have the opportunity to educate their leads on the best solution for them by providing blogs, ROI calculators etc

Interviewer - In your opinion, has the popularity of Inbound Marketing forced an agency like yours to get better at your own marketing. If so, why?

Respondent - Yes, if you don't provide content for your own company and have a process to implement Inbound with your clients then you are not successful, You have to live Inbound for yourself to provide these services to your clients.

Interviewer - How do you make time for your own marketing as a small business?

Respondent - We have 2 people who work on Inbound for our own agency so we dedicate resources to support our marketing strategy,

Interviewer - Outside of delivering Inbound Marketing as a service to your customers, has it brought any additional revenue streams?

Respondent - We call it essentials, it means that we offer the full growth stack service offering. Not only do we deliver marketing but also we have inhouse sales coaches that help clients coach their sales teams in an Inbound way.

Interviewer - How has Inbound Marketing allowed you to understand your customers?

Respondent - Well if you don't listen to your customers you cannot deliver the right service. We originally tried to market to everyone using Inbound Marketing but we found that it was too broad and we had little success.
Now we solely target internet security companies and manufacturing companies and all of our content addresses personas in those given industries.

Interviewer - What is the difference between Inbound Marketing and Content Marketing?

Respondent - Inbound Marketing involves the technology to help you measure the effectiveness of your content marketing. So content marketing is one subset of Inbound Marketing where you focus on your awareness stage of the sales funnel.

Interviewer -In your opinion has the attention of the consumer shifted to any new sources of content?

Respondent - Yes consumers attention spans are getting shorter and because of this agency need to be clever about getting their attention in a shorter period of time. So the area of short videos, podcasts are becoming a lot more important to hit a target audience.

Interviewer - How do you demonstrate return on investment for your marketing services?

Respondent - We understand the customers goals and metrics for success which typically will be around website traffic and lead generation and we measure this through a variety of marketing technology tools as well as research into the sales teams to uncover the pain points of their particular sales process.

Interviewer - With the growing popularity of Inbound Marketing, how do you rise above the clutter?

Respondent - It's a difficult question to answer and been our biggest challenge in the last 12 months . For me it comes back to been the best at content and that involves getting deeper understandings of buyer personas and revisiting them on a regular basis not annually .1/4ly or even monthly . There is a lot of fake news that is out there now and its becoming harder maybe after your research is done you can come back and give me the answer.

Interviewer - What does the future of Inbound Marketing look like?

Respondent - For my business we move from an inbound agency to a change agency . Inbound Marketing is changing and how we go to market is to change the way of thinking of the client . We can change the mind-set of marketing but now we need to

be able to change the way of thinking of the sales and now the services . Moving from a content at the core to change at the core. Inbound is not just a way of doing marketing it's a way of doing business . Companies need to sell in now in an inbound way they need to service in an inbound way. We now grow with the direction of the technology , now it offers sales functionality so we offer sales service , soon it will offer customer service functionality so now we need to think about how do we service a customer. We believe the technology solves for the customer so we must evolve to be more than just a marketing agency

Interviewer : What exactly do you mean by that ?

Respondent : Partnering has allowed us to gain insight from other partners how they overcame problems as an agency and what they did to scale their agency Companies need to constantly be educating customers from all departments and in the future only customer centric companies will survive and on that If sales and marketing don't talk it's going to create a bad experience for the customer . I like it when someone thinks of me if I'm a client and you've personalised my experience imp going to keep coming back and we gain that knowledge from conversations with other partners