

The **ABCs** of Getting Noticed (A Marketing Primer)

A Audience. To effectively market a product or service, you need to build a relevant audience. How do you do that on a tight budget? Two words: Organic search. To get started, make a list of all the problems your prospects are trying to solve (their pain points) and the questions they might ask. Then, create content around those topics in the form of blog articles, social media posts or infographics—or whichever tool is most likely to be seen by your target audience. Keep publishing, checking analytics to see which pieces of content your audience engages with the most. You'll need to be patient, and consistent, but pretty soon you'll build an audience, they'll share your content with others, and you'll see compounding results.

B Buyer personas. Creating buyer personas—fictional, humanized sketches of your ideal customers—may sound silly, but personas are terrifically useful for keeping all of the marketing materials you develop consistent. They're also great for helping you convey the emotional benefits of what you're selling, because you'll have your ideal customer in mind (and his or her pain points) when you're writing. Not sure how to create a persona? [Get started here.](#)

C Content. Content, as they say in marketing, is king. That's because the Internet has profoundly changed the way we shop. According to a recent Forrester survey, 74 percent of business buyers said they conduct more than half of their research online before making a purchase. If you don't have a voice in some of that research, your competition will have the advantage. Produce relevant content that will show up in the search engines. It works. According to Aberdeen, year-over-year growth in unique site traffic is 7.8 times higher for content marketing leaders than followers. From strategy to metrics, learn all you need to know about creating content [here.](#)

D Design. Good design is the backbone of good branding. Invest in it. And make sure you have a brand guideline document that spells out your colors, the way your logo can (and can't) be used and other rules to keep your look consistent. Refer to it often, so that everything you produce, from PowerPoint slides to trade-show handouts, is recognizably yours. (Consistency is critical to ensure that your target market will quickly associate your company with everything you produce.)

E Emotions. As a copywriter, I learned early on that writing about a product's or service's features wasn't convincing my prospects to buy. Indeed, it wasn't until I focused on benefits that my marketing materials really became effective. Even more effective? Focusing on the benefit of the benefits, aka the emotion of what the product or service delivers. As Harvard Business School professor Theodore Levitt said, "People don't want a quarter-inch drill, they want a quarter-inch hole." Talk about the hole and you'll win every time. Talk about the satisfaction that comes from drilling the perfect hole, and you've got marketing gold.

F Frequency. Building an audience for your brand requires consistency. Don't make the mistake of posting to your blog once every few months, or do the opposite and inundate your fans' Facebook feed. Research articles on the best social media posting frequencies, and check your analytics to see what's working. (Always be testing.) It's a good idea to commit to a schedule for consistency and to post when you have something to say. And remember, it's better to pick one platform and post consistently than to try to be everywhere, which will dilute your impact.

G **Grammarly.** Even the most diligent writers occasionally type “your” when they mean “you’re.” Install the free version of [this tool](#), and you’ll publish with confidence.

H **Headlines.** You can have a great email marketing strategy, and you can write the most perfectly crafted offer, but if your headline’s a snore, no one will ever know. Study the headlines that come into your inbox. See which ones compel you to click. I’m guessing they use words like “You,” or employ scare tactics like “Three Marketing Mistakes You’re Making,” or incite urgency, like “Five days left to register.” Be a student of the headlines you click. They’re terrifically informative.

I **Intuitiveness.** Make sure your site has it. Not sure? Recruit a few people and watch as you ask them to complete simple tasks, like filling out a contact form, searching for a product or adding it to their cart. Make sure your website elements are where people expect them to be (search box in the upper-right corner, for example). If your site is intuitive, people won’t get frustrated, and they’ll tend to stick around.

J **Journey (of your customer).** As I mentioned earlier, you need to create content so that your prospects can find you on the web. But you also need a plan. Map the content to your customer’s journey, and you’ve got one. Say, for example, that you have a five-month sales cycle. Think about your prospect’s decision-making process along the way, and group it into a few key steps. What questions might customers have as they move from “I’ve got a problem” to “Your company is the right one for me”? Who might they need to get buy-in from? Are there myriad considerations? Consider creating a handy checklist that can be filled in to compare products. If a customer needs to get IT to weigh in, create a slide deck he or she can present to the IT department. Creating content that addresses your prospects’ questions along the way will help keep them engaged, give you a valid reason to contact them and, best of all, shorten the sales cycle so you can close more deals faster.

K **Kissmetrics.** Great blog. [Read it.](#)

L **Lead generation.** It’s the goal of your marketing strategy, and there are numerous ways to accomplish it, depending on the skill of your team, the resources at your disposal and your budget. Automated marketing software company Marketo has good information on this topic (and many others).

M **Marketing.** What the heck is marketing, anyway? Simply put, it’s the act of warming up leads so they’re ready to engage with your sales team. And the marketing funnel is simply the whittling down of all those folks who may be interested in your product or service to those who, after consideration, are ready to buy your product or service. Kissmetrics, once again, does a great job of [explaining the funnel](#).

N **Negativity.** Your product is incredible, right? You know it’ll be a market leader. So don’t let negativity creep into your marketing messages. Leaders don’t do that, because they’re untouchable. Don’t compare your product or service to others’ and never, ever trash the competition. It puts you in a negative light with your prospects.

O **Opinion (as in have one).** Want an easy way to come up with a topic for your next blog article? Looking to convince a trade magazine to give you some ink? Take something that’s been making headlines in your industry and have a contrary point of view. Of course you’ll actually have to believe it—don’t go being controversial just to get attention. But if you truly disagree with a new trend or opinion, say so. Readers love tension and conflict, and so do editors.

P **Public relations.** PR is a great way to get your company's name in front of a large number of prospects. The benefits of earned, rather than paid, media are twofold: first (obviously), you don't have to pay for PR, and second, since the message comes from a third party, prospects perceive it as more credible than if you were to say it yourself. In fact, a 2014 Nielsen study on the role of content in the consumer decision-making process concluded that PR is almost 90 percent more effective than advertising. With advertising, you tell people how great you are. With publicity, others sing your praises. Learn how to [reach out to the media](#).

Q **Questions (as in "frequently asked").** If a prospect or customer asks you or your team a question more than once, that should be your trigger to create content around the topic, in the form of a blog post, a frequently asked questions page or, in the case of a longer topic, perhaps an article or white paper. Remember, you're creating content to solve your prospects' problems, so let them guide your editorial.

R **Repurposing.** Creating content is hard—not to mention time consuming. Make sure you squeeze every drop out of each piece you create by repurposing it. See if you can turn your article into a blog post, a few tweets or maybe an infographic. Don't waste your content on one format; use it over and over when you can. Bundling is a great idea: Package your five most popular blog posts, or all the content you have on a particular trend, for example.

S **Storytelling.** The human brain is wired to prefer stories to facts, and can recall far more information when it is incorporated into a narrative rather than presented as straight fact. That's because, through a process scientists call neural coupling, stories activate parts of the brain that allow us to turn the speaker's story into our own experience. And when we "live" an experience, with all the attending emotions, it's much easier to remember and recall the information presented.

T **Twitter chats.** Looking to grow your audience on a tight budget? Consider hosting a Twitter chat. These discussions, which take place on, well, Twitter, center around a predetermined topic and are held at a set time. Plenty of people have written about how to do it well. Here's [Buffer's](#) take.

U **Uniqueness.** A company I work with, a market leader and one of the first to break into its industry, is very data-driven, and touts that fact heavily in its marketing materials. Seems like a smart move, because data-driven decisions are very important to the company's customers and prospects. The problem is, this company's competitors, which were non-existent when the company started but now number in the dozens, also claim to be data-driven. If you and all of your competitors tout the same benefits, your prospects are going to choose based on price. No one wants that. Stay unique.

V **Value.** This one seems like a no-brainer, but there are plenty of examples of marketing where the product's or service's value isn't clearly spelled out for the prospect. Does your product save time? Money? Do something better than anything else on the market? Say so!

W **We We Calculator.** Are you talking about you and your business more than you're talking about your customers and all the ways your company can solve their challenges? Find out for sure with the [Customer Focus Calculator](#), a free online tool. Simply enter your URL and your company name, and instantly receive your We We Score. If you find you're talking about your company far more than you're talking about your prospects, make some adjustments to your copy. (Hint: Sprinkle the word "you" liberally throughout your prose.)

X X. Strike meaningless buzzwords from your copy. For example, you don't sell "solutions," you sell something that you can describe. Do so in plain English, and your prospects, customers and the search engines will thank you for it. One way to tell if your company description is full of jargon: If you replace your company's name with a competitor's name and the description still fits, you need to keep writing.

Y You. One of the most powerful words in the English language is "you." Think about that when you're writing or approving copy, particularly headlines, cold emails and "About Us" sections. Would you rather read that Abra Company makes software for doctors, or "As a busy medical professional juggling multiple patients, you don't have time for paper files or outdated software. Abra Company builds virtual office systems for busy doctors like you..." Much better, right?

Z C'mon, there is no "Z" in marketing. Even we aren't that creative.



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