



Push and Pull Marketing – Why You Need Both

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Best Direct Mail Practices in an Evolving Marketplace

By Wes Powell

Wes is TMR Direct's president and loves his Shelby Mustang more than you love yours. He frequently covers topics about integrating offline and online marketing efforts, marketing strategy and transforming businesses. Connect with Wes on [LinkedIn](#) and [Twitter](#) or at this year's Shelby Fest.

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Introduction

I attended a cocktail party recently where, in the midst of munching on shrimp and cocktail sausages, I was asked by a fellow business owner, “what is ‘pull’ marketing, and do I need to be doing it?” After hearing my explanation, he decided that he did need to be employing some pull marketing strategies and wandered away to do that, or to

just refill his drink, I’m not sure which. However, the conversation did get me thinking that others might have the same question. This paper will hopefully answer that question, as well as “what is ‘push’ marketing?” and, “do I need to do both?” Not to ruin the surprise, but the answer is “yes,” and that is because both push and pull marketing

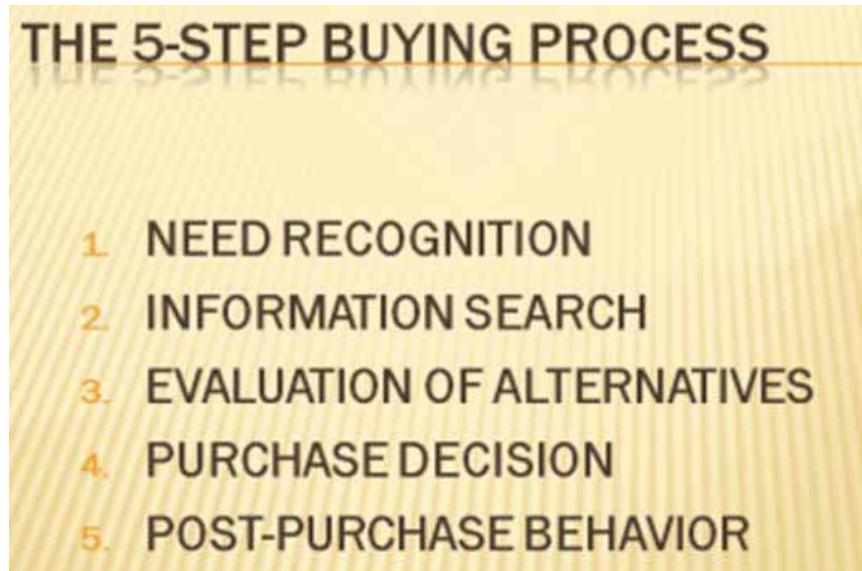
have their distinct roles to play in supporting your buyers as they move through the 5-step buying process. So, let’s start by defining the 5-step buying process that all consumers go through, then we’ll define push and pull marketing and, lastly, look at which type of marketing is most appropriate for each step in that process.

The Five-Step Buying Process

Professor Philip Kotler, one of the greatest minds in marketing, says that all buyers go through a five step process when buying a product or service.¹ The first step is that they must recognize that they have a need. Sometimes this **need recognition** is very obvious, as in “I need more toilet paper.” Sometimes it is not as obvious, as in “I need life insurance.” Marketing’s job is to help buyers recognize they have a need.

The second step is the **search for information**. This entails the consumer gathering data on how this need can be met. “What products or services are out there that can meet my need? Where can I find them? What do they cost? What features do they have and what benefit is that to me?” This step can be relatively short, as in the information search for toilet paper, or relatively long if researching life insurance.

The third step in the buying process is **evaluation of the alternatives**. Should I buy single ply or quilted? Should I get whole life or term? What are the advantages? The disadvantages? This evaluation of alternatives can be quite





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simple or very complex. As the marketer of our product or service, it is up to us to make sure the advantages are clearly communicated and the disadvantages are mitigated. And, almost more importantly, we must show how our solution to their problem is different than the competition's solution. This difference must be meaningful in the mind of the buyer and not be just a "We are blue and they are red" sort of differentiation (unless, of course, blue is the hot color at the time).

This differentiation is what allows the buyer to move to the fourth step of the process, the **purchase decision**. If the buyer can't differentiate between products and services, the purchase decision may not happen; indecision sets in due to equally appealing purchase alternatives. However, once the decision is made in your favor, the transaction should happen as soon as possible to blunt the possibility of a reversal in the decision due to the

What is Push Marketing?

Push marketing is also known as **outbound marketing**. Many of the typical marketing channels fit into this category: **television, radio, newspaper, direct mail, catalogs, email, public relations** and **direct sales**. The commonality across all of these channels is that the buyer being targeted may not be aware of the product or service until the information about it is pushed at them through the marketing channel. To use an example from the non-profit world, a potential donor may not know of the need

potential introduction of new information or alternatives. The buyer's decision or intention to buy can be adversely affected by the attitudes of others or a sudden change in their situation.

The last step in the buying process actually occurs after the purchase and it is how the buyer behaves after having consumed or experienced the product. The buyer is either satisfied or unsatisfied, meaning that their expectations were either met or not met. Do they suffer from buyer's remorse? Or do they recommend your product or service to friends? As marketers, there are several things we can do to influence this **post-purchase behavior**.

Now that we have looked at the buying process, let's define push marketing and pull marketing and then see which is more appropriate for each of the five steps just discussed.

for hunger relief in a particular area until informed by a television or radio spot or a direct mail piece. Typically, the marketer will know what the potential customer looks like demographically, geographically and/or psycho-graphically and is simply looking to stimulate overall demand or create brand awareness with the intended audience through the use of the outbound channels determined to be the most effective in getting in front of that audience.

Outbound Marketing Examples:

- television
- radio
- newspaper
- direct mail
- catalogs
- email
- publication relations
- direct sales

Inbound Marketing Examples:

- Company and marketing websites
- Search engine optimization (SEO)
- Search engine marketing (SEM)
- Blogging
- Pay-Per-Click (PPC)
- Email Nurturing



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What is Pull Marketing?

Pull marketing is also known as **inbound marketing**. Many of the newer marketing channels fit into this category: **company and marketing websites**, **search engine optimization (SEO)** and **search engine marketing (SEM)**, **blogging**, **pay-per-click (PPC)** and **email nurturing**. The commonality across these channels is that the buyer being targeted is aware of at least the TYPE of product or service that they are interested in, though they may not be aware of your specific product or brand. For instance, if I am interested in life insurance, I may hop on Google and search “life-insurance” and end up reading a blog

about life insurance options written and published by a local insurance broker, or visiting the website of a major carrier, or clicking on a paid ad that appears at the top of my search results. In many cases, the company who is employing pull or inbound marketing may not know the profile of the buyer initially, but will develop it over time as they see who is attracted to their content. This may mean gathering little bits of buyer data over time as the buyer interacts with the company on the web.

Applying Push and Pull Marketing To the Five-Step Buying Process

Now that we have an overview of how the various marketing channels fit into push (outbound) and pull (inbound) marketing, let's see how these apply to each step of the buying process. It is important to remember that everyone goes through these five steps, even if some of the steps have been tightened up to be almost imperceptible.

Need Recognition. Recognizing a need or creating a need in the buyer typically is best accomplished through the use of outbound channels. If you think about it, if the buyer is unaware that they have a need, having great content on your website or blog about how to fulfill that need is futile; the buyer will not be searching for a solution. Therefore, if you have a new product or service, and are creating a market, it will be important to incorporate outbound channels into your strategy to stimulate the demand and agitate the need. Outbound channels can be very good at creating emotion, a very necessary element in need creation. For instance, many buyers were unaware that they had a need for a personal music player until

they saw an ad for the iPod on TV and observed what a great time the users in the ad were having with their iPods. Direct mail and catalogs are also good for creating recognition of need. Many times I have received a catalog pushing aftermarket parts for my Mustang, parts I never knew I needed until I looked at the catalog, but after reading the catalog realized I couldn't live without.

Information Search. Providing relevant information to potential buyers who have recognized a need is where inbound or pull marketing really shines. The web allows companies to post unlimited information about products and services on their website. This information is easy for the buyer to find if the company has done a good job of search engine optimization. In addition, frequent blogging allows companies to put out fresh, relevant content on a monthly, weekly, daily or even hourly basis, all searchable on the web. The top two sources of information for buyers is the web and “family and friends.” While marketers can't be a friend to all of their buyers, they can provide the next best thing, which is access to customer reviews and testimonials. Buyers



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view online reviews as being as credible or almost as credible as friends and family, especially if there are a lot of reviews for a particular product or service. Company supported forums also allow for a free flow of information that provide unbiased discussion relevant to the buyer's decision making process. Remember, buyers buy on emotion, but justify the decision to buy with facts. These facts are provided through pull marketing channels. Google has pronounced information search on the web as the "Zero Moment of Truth" for the consumer, the moment that influences their decision BEFORE they get to the store.²

Charts and graphs, pictures and video, all come into play in showing the buyer what is uniquely differentiating about your product or service.

Evaluation of Alternatives. Like the buyer's information search, their evaluation of purchase alternatives is supported well by inbound marketing channels. Because of the ability of the web to display large amounts of information, it is easier for marketers to show side-by-side comparisons between their product or service and the competition's. Charts and graphs, pictures and video, all come into play in showing the buyer what is uniquely differentiating about your product or service. That is not to say that a company can't use outbound channels to show the difference and superiority of their product compared to the competition: they can. However, valuable dollars are being wasted exposing that particular differentiating message to those who may still be unaware that they even have a need. It is better to use the outbound channel for need stimulation.

Purchase Decision. Both outbound and inbound channels can help stimulate the purchase decision. Typically, there needs to be a trigger to overcome the inertia of the buyer; they have completed the evaluation of alternatives and have a favored brand, but that doesn't mean that they will buy unless some stimulus is added to the equation. This is where scarcity ("we might run out") or a deal ("2 for 1 for the next 3 days only") can help push the decision. These types of messages can be delivered in a number of different ways. For instance, I had been researching flooring for my garage. I had visited all the websites and evaluated my alternatives. I was partial to one particular brand, but I had not pulled the trigger. I received an email ("push") with new information about a Black Friday sale for one day only. I did not know that they would be having a sale, but once I knew about it, my natural inclination to get "a deal" made the purchase decision easy and quick.

Post-Purchase Behavior. After the purchase is made, we want buyers to feel good about their decision. Most buyers, even those happy with the purchase, feel a little bit of a let-down after the purchase is made. As marketers, we want to mitigate this. In fact, we want to make sure that the buyer is exceptionally happy so they will either purchase from us again or so that they will recommend us. Buyer post-purchase follow up will happen most typically with outbound channels: email, phone or in person. However, inbound channels can help support that the buyer has made the right decision. Access to client forums, product and service updates on the website, and subscription newsletters all help build the connection with the brand and reinforce that the buyer acted correctly.

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The Dangers Of Using Only Push Or Only Pull Marketing

What are the dangers of using only pull or push marketing strategies in today's interconnected world? Let's look at both sides of the coin. If you use only push strategies, you risk creating need and awareness, but not being able to back that need up with the facts that today's buyer needs to make a decision. Let me give you an example. In our town there was a flooring and countertop store that advertised on the local TV channel during the morning news. Their spot showed beautiful counters and floors and really did a good job of creating an emotional desire to upgrade the kitchen in the typical homeowner who owned an older home. However, when you went on the web to find out more, you couldn't find them. Searches around countertops and flooring brought up search results for other companies. So what is the issue? Simply this: demand that has been created must be met. The other companies were the happy beneficiaries of the demand created by the TV spots. I imagine that the owner of the flooring store thought his or her ads didn't work very well, when probably the reverse was true. On the flip side, employing only inbound or pull strategies leaves the door open to never being found due to insufficient demand generation activities. Prospects may not know to look for you if need awareness hasn't been stimulated. If any part of the five-step buying process isn't addressed by either a push or pull strategy, your marketing plan is incomplete and will either fail or not be as effective as it could be. Remember, push and pull marketing—you need both.



SOURCES

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About TMR Direct

Overview

TMR Direct is a direct mail and inbound marketing company that's been in Colorado Springs for nearly 40 years. Founded by Gerry Amber on the principles of honesty, integrity and putting clients first, our clients' success has been our success—and we want to keep it that way for another 40 years.

TMR Direct Partnerships

We strongly believe that marketing campaigns are never “one hit wonders.” Rather, they're long-term plans that are thought-out, well planned and well executed. If you're looking for the cheapest marketing solution out there, we likely won't be a good fit for you. But if you're looking for someone who will take your business seriously, take the time to understand your needs, provide you with excellent service and work with you to improve over time, then consider working with us.

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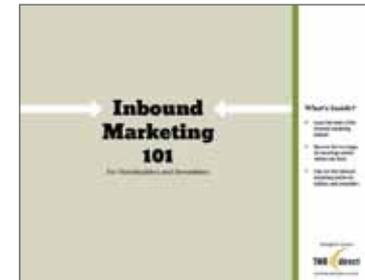
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