

# Clearing The Path To Business Growth

*A True Inbound Marketing Success Story*



Stargazer  
DIGITAL

## About the author

Kevin has the daily pleasure of working with some of the most talented inbound marketers on the planet. He enjoys working with businesses and helping them grow, but Kevin's true passion is the people he works with. Your success is the ultimate prize, and your business goals keep him striving for more.



# 1

## Introduction

Good stories can be powerful, and stories about success can spark inspiration, hope, and a new-founded belief in readers where previously there was none.

In my 20+ years of experience as a marketer, I know that inbound isn't for everyone. But when you commit, stick to a plan and watch everything come together piece-by-piece, it can seem almost magical. Even too good to be true, despite seeing the figures right in front of you - surely there's a catch?

That's why I had to share this story, because if I didn't... well, that's what you might think, too.

This is a story about inbound marketing... but also, it isn't. It's a story about an Edinburgh company, and how its owner, John Carmichael, managed to get those magical (but attainable) results by working together with me and my team to achieve goal after goal.

So, let's get this tale started, shall we? I hope you'll join me for the ride...

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## Initial meetings

When John first approached me, I didn't personally see him as being a good fit for inbound. Nor was I sure quite how serious he was about adopting an inbound marketing methodology. Let me tell you why.

His company (Superwarm) sold boilers, which I immediately saw as **ecommerce**; not the best fit for inbound.

Think of it as when you need a new jacket, or a pair of shoes. You see something you like and then you buy it, don't you? There's not a lot of nurturing involved, because you don't sit down and do hours of research for those purchases.

My thinking was that people will clearly know they need a boiler, so they'll simply buy one. It wasn't until I started speaking with John about the **challenges, concerns** and sheer **amount of research** his customers face before buying a new boiler, that the lightbulb started to switch on for me; John was actually **a perfect fit!**

Another good thing about John was this; whether he was serious or not (I didn't know at that point), he got the **concept of inbound** from day one, which made a massive difference to the process. You see, I can tell people what inbound is and how it works, but if something doesn't click, they don't get on-board with the methodology.

They have to understand that inbound isn't just a short-term sales tactic you can try to get fast results, and then abandon. It's something you have to fully **commit to, adopt and believe in** - and even then, **you won't see results for the first few months.**

That's why managing expectations from the start is so important with any new client for me.

However, before we brought John on-board, we still had to **fully understand his business**, as we'd only just scratched the surface. Understanding his **buyer's journey** was crucial; what **questions** people had when they bought a new boiler, their **concerns**, and **the information** they needed to make a purchase decision.

We also had to look closely at the **figures**, and whether or not we could make inbound work to **increase John's sales and revenue**. I had to think about whether we got on personally, and whether I thought he had a good business model; it turned out that yes, he did.

After all that, we finally got to the matter of **cost**, and our very first hurdle. Just like many potential clients, John initially thought the cost was **too expensive** for something he wasn't even sure would work - and I didn't blame him. It's a fear that anyone has when there's money and risk involved.

I thought about this carefully, and I said: "Look John, I know it might seem expensive, but how about I take you on a process of education, and at the end of that process I can show you the value for that cost, by demonstrating the **typical return** you can expect. Would you take me up on that?"

It turned out, he did - and thankfully, he liked what he heard or I wouldn't be here writing this story today.

Like many businesses, John was also using **PPC** to bring in most of his leads and sales. I remembered thinking to myself, if I had told him that **in just over 18 months**, he would ditch his PPC completely having **increased his sales by nearly £1 million in revenue**, he wouldn't believe me.

But nevertheless, I knew that inbound could make it happen.

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## Getting started

To get the ball rolling, we first had to create an initial **4-month content marketing strategy** that **complemented, mirrored and reinforced** John's sales process. After all, we knew that his offline sales process worked, but online it's a very different matter.

People are doing more and more of their own research now, so we had to think about creating content that **established his ideal buyer's trust, addressed their pushbacks, and answered their key questions** so that they'd be armed with all the right knowledge to make a purchase decision.

This also meant addressing a few elephants in the room, including touching on subjects John's competitors were too afraid to answer, such as **price, competition**, and sharing **in-depth industry knowledge** about the different boiler makes and models available - these were the kind of things his customers really wanted to know.

During this time, John and I were also slowly building up a relationship based on trust of our own - something which is especially important in inbound. I personally come from a **construction background**, and know that clients such as John are typically 'average joes' who've worked hard to **build up a business** - just like I have.

Because of this early understanding, John was able to **listen, take on-board our guidance, and trust** that me and my team knew what we were doing. In exchange, we were receiving his **time and expert knowledge** to help create **helpful, valuable content** in the form of ebooks, blog posts and more. It was an ideal partnership.

Saying that, it wasn't all plain sailing. Just like when any new client comes on-board, John would start to answer a lot of our questions with **very specific examples** about his own business, rather than answering in more general terms.

So, for example, when asking the **main options** a customer might look at for buying their next boiler, and their **biggest concerns** when faced with such a decision, he would start to say 'Well, Superwarm offers this and this...'

We had to explain to John that he had to think of things a little differently, and to look at things more from a **customer's perspective**. They don't want to be sold to, and to be frank, they're not interested in your business; they're only interested in **solutions to their problems**.

Finding those solutions and **answering their questions** helpfully and impartially **without pushing for sales** is what establishes their trust and makes them go on to become leads. No hidden agendas.

So, that's exactly what we did, by creating **detailed, premium content** (such as ebooks) and then matching that content with helpful, informative blog posts **that helped draw in traffic** to attract the right kind of people to John's website.

Some of the blog content we covered addressed '**The Big Five**' - these are the **hot topics** customers want to know about, and the same topics companies are most likely to shy away from. What's more, they are **universal across all industries**.

Talking about these topics was one surefire way to set John apart from the competition, and **draw more customers in**.

According to leading authority on content marketing, Marcus Sheridan, The Big Five are:

1. **Cost-based content** (such as the cost of a new boiler/installation)
2. **Problems associated with your solution** (such as common problems when buying a new boiler)
3. **Product and competitor comparisons** (such as comparing other boiler brands)
4. **Impartial product and competitor reviews** (such as a specific boiler review)
5. What's **'the best'**? (such as how to find the best boiler for you)

Many companies shy away from these topics because they're scared that **addressing them upfront will scare customers off**. At first, John also had reservations, particularly when discussing the issue of cost and talking directly about his competitors.

We had to explain that people **want to know how much his boilers cost**, they **want to know what his competitors are offering**, and they're going to do that research **whether he provides the answers or not** - so it's better they discover the information on his website than to go elsewhere.

At the bottom of these blog posts, the featured premium content would then direct new visitors to a **specially tailored page** encouraging them to fill out a form in exchange for their download. That's how people would become leads, before being **nurtured with emails** to help them further along their **buyer's journey**.

It was all starting to take shape, and we had high hopes. However, I knew that it would take a while before things really started to happen.

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## Full steam ahead

For the first five or six months, and as I'd predicted, not a lot happened with John's inbound marketing campaign. In this time, I knew I needed to find some way to grab some **low-hanging fruit** that meant he'd benefit from **more leads and sales** while he waited for our inbound efforts to mature.

Because John had been managing his own **PPC campaign**, it was agreed from the start that I'd take over his PPC account for him, and manage it using my own marketing expertise. His leads soon **increased dramatically**, and because of such promising results, around **month five** John decided to **double his PPC budget**.

However, around the same time, the amount of leads and sales John was receiving from **inbound marketing** started to snowball, **increasing month after month**. The number of sales from customers who had come in from **search engines** just got bigger and bigger, while the percentage of his PPC leads was **gradually decreasing**.

You see, PPC is like renting a house, whereas inbound marketing is more like buying. When you create quality content, you're creating **marketing assets** with **compound interest**, which builds on top of itself month after month.

A blog post can get you leads for the **next 10 years**, whereas PPC is simply gone as soon as you turn it off. Luckily, John understood that, and as he saw the numbers grow, his confidence in inbound marketing increased. He had developed quite a rapport with our content manager and writer, and he knew the formula worked.

At this point, we sat down together and had a meeting about our next steps. I wanted to set some [SMART goals](#), and with the data behind us to help understand what people did when visiting his website, and the conversion rates we now had, we understood how we could **increase John's revenue to a million and a half**.

By presenting all the data to him, and telling him the promising news that we'd already managed to **increased his business by 187%** at this point, getting John to agree to **double his inbound marketing budget** wasn't really much of a hard sell.

After all, when he started he was only getting roughly **1,000 visits** to his website per month; we were now at **over 24,000**. John was probably the most visited heating engineer website in the UK, and fast becoming the biggest authority in that industry because he was doing what no-one else was.

He was actually starting to see this reflected in his **day-to-day interactions** with customers. For example, he'd often show up at someone's door and they'd already feel like they knew him and trusted him. Not only that, but they were armed with all of the information they needed, and were pretty much ready to just buy a boiler.

I remember him telling me the story of when a customer wanted a twin-flue installed, and was quoted **£10,000** by British Gas. However, he'd read John's blog post about **Baxi's twin-flues**, and the relevant boiler review, and decided to call Superwarm. He actually thought it was some **massive international company**, not a local boiler installer.

John quoted a much more reasonable price of around **£3,645** and instantly won the job. In fact, he was now spending **a lot less time** on quotes in general, as he had a guide to send his customers before a visit that detailed exactly what to expect beforehand from his services, so he didn't have to answer as many questions.

It meant he was in and out of jobs in no time, as customers were more or less **ready to buy** and were a lot warmer, having felt like they knew him already.

By December, John felt so **confident in the results** he was seeing from inbound, that he was finally able to turn off his PPC campaign for the first time in years.

## 5 Hurdles along the way

Just like anything worth doing, there are always going to be **challenges along the way**. In the beginning, one of the biggest challenges for most of my clients is **fear**, and John was no different. Fear that his investment **wasn't going to pay off**, and that the process would have been a **waste of time**.

Like I mentioned before, one of the most important things for me to do at the start of any inbound campaign is to **manage clients' expectations**, as I know this can go a long way to alleviating any fear and anxiety they might have. In fact, that's why I've written a blog post about [exactly what to expect from inbound in the first six months](#).

Getting John over that initial five or six month hurdle was a **slow process**, and especially from his side, it felt like crawling through mud. He was **worried that leads weren't coming in**, that he **wasn't getting enough sales**, and although I'd told him what to expect, he still had that fear.

That's why I did what I could early on to grab some low hanging fruit and get better results from John's PPC campaign. But no matter how difficult things felt, we **always stuck to the plan**. This is so important, because as soon as you **deviate from your strategy**, you won't see those **long-awaited results** you've been hoping for.

I know from experience that **sticking to a solid strategy, and believing in it** - no matter how tough things get - is the only way you're going to **see results**, and I was **confident throughout the process** that Superwarm's efforts were going to pay off.

Another big challenge was that John is a very busy man, running a small team of heating engineers that install and service boilers all over Edinburgh. This meant that he **didn't always have the time** to contribute to content as much as he liked, as he would be called to an emergency or a customer who needed a new boiler right away.

As John's inbound marketing really began to take off, meeting deadlines became **more of a challenge**, as he was getting so many new customers that he couldn't always keep meetings. Something had to give, so we worked closely with him to change the way we produced content, so he could contribute more **in his own time**.

You see, the secret sauce that goes into creating Superwarm's content is John's **industry expertise and knowledge**, along with a **talented writer** to put it all together. It was a bit of a dream team, although it did mean **conducting interviews** to get all the information we needed to make the content shine.

So, to make life easier, we not only started sending John the interview questions **at least a week in advance**, we also gave him the opportunity to **write down his answers in his own time** - so he could fit it in around his busy schedule.

And you know what? It worked.

I'm not going to lie and say that John achieved his success without any hard work; the reason he's so successful is that he can and does put the work in.

Sure, it's only **a couple of hours a week**, and that may not seem like a lot, but when you've got a business to run and very little time, it can feel **nigh-on impossible to meet deadlines**. If that happens and you start to struggle, you will **lose momentum**, and that's when things can fall apart.

Luckily, in those times, we made the necessary adjustments and kept on swimming.

## 6

## When hard work pays off

In my years as an inbound marketer, I know there's nothing ever as **satisfying** as seeing all that **hard work and effort pay off**. I knew that as one of my best clients, and from all that hard graft, John **deserved to see amazing results**, and so I was over the moon when our inbound efforts finally came together.

The biggest reason I believe that inbound marketing worked so well for Superwarm is that John **believed wholeheartedly in the process**. He put a lot of faith in inbound - and in us - and was able to work with us here at Stargazer every step of the way, instead of trying to pull us in different directions.

I've found that companies who are ready to **listen, trust, and put in the time and effort** are the ones who see the most success, and John is a **prime example** of that.

But hey, that's enough of that. I'm sure you want to hear some of the actual results now, don't you?

Well, as of now, we've managed to increase John's sales by a remarkable 200%.

John's website traffic from **month one**, back in September 2014, was just **1,302 visits**. Fast forward to February 2016 and he's getting **24,406 per month** - and that's still increasing. We're now **aiming for 100,000**.

In September 2014, John was getting around **12 leads per month**. Now, in February 2016, that's reached **123 monthly leads** and counting.

You may be thinking, website visitors and leads may be impressive, but as you know, that only tells part of the story.

Want to what's even more remarkable? John is now **closing 75% of his business.**

However, we're not going to stop there. We're continually setting **new goals** with Superwarm and working towards them the best way we can - there's also plans to introduce a new [customer centric web design](#) into the equation, so the possibilities in future could be limitless!

## 7

# My final thoughts

By now, you're probably getting the message that inbound marketing works best when it's a **team effort**. For me, that usually means that a client is working with me towards **the same, set goals** - not struggling against me and questioning every decision we make.

The reason why I decided to tell you this story is that if I didn't, you probably wouldn't believe what's possible. And really, I want to help show that, especially in areas such as construction and manufacturing, inbound can really work.

In fact, inbound is a surprisingly good fit for most industries, as you'll find buyer behaviour is the same across the board. What I'm trying to say is, at the end of the day, business is business and if your customers are doing research before buying your products, you could benefit from an inbound approach.

Think about John as an example. From something so simple as buying a boiler, **24,000 people** are visiting his blog posts every month, and reading about **hundreds of topics**. His most popular blog has had over **1,000 visits**. What's more? We haven't even scratched the surface of what's possible.

There were many times along the way where John **questioned the content** he was writing about, such as 'Is it really necessary to write about what to do with your pets when getting a boiler installed?'. Months down the line, he'd discover it was, when **one customer had exactly that question** and he was able to direct her to the blog.

And with **so much content** under their belts, Superwarm are now so far in front of the competition with inbound marketing - and continuing to **build on that lead** - that their competitors will never be able to catch up.

Want to hear the really exciting part? I know that could happen for you, too.

## 8 John's side of the story

We couldn't end this story without including the star of the show himself, John Carmichael.

Here's what John had to say:



"I knew I needed to get double the amount of leads, and I knew people were out there buying boilers, but I just couldn't seem to engage with customers. Blanket marketing and paid for ads didn't seem to be working, so how could I do it? Then I realised that inbound marketing was this great, untapped source.

"I read a blog by Stargazer recommending the top four digital marketers in Edinburgh. I was intrigued by the person who wrote this but did not recommend their own service, so I went straight to Stargazer's website. After doing this, I was pretty convinced I wanted to use them.

"After speaking to Kevin and doing some research I did some calculations; as there was no minimum contract, I could trial this for six months to a year.

"I liked Kevin's approach, transparency and most of all, honesty. He explained I would not see results for at least 4-6 months. I was willing to take this calculated gamble, as having discussed Kevin's experience, I reckoned if things did not work out, I would not lose a tremendous amount of money, however I could gain vastly.

"We've now got more than double the amount of work and over double the amount of leads we had this time last year. What we have now is almost like a rolling juggernaut, in that every single day, we know that

leads are coming in. Every single day there's people visiting our website looking for what we're offering.

"This becomes a bit addictive. Kevin was excited when we got 10,000 visits a month, but we are now over 20,000. It's not just about visits though, it's all about leads and new business. We now don't have to use Google Adwords, and get more leads than we ever have. For the future, sky is the limit, we are only scratching the surface.

"Our goal immediately is to install 10 boilers a week and break the £1m barrier. I can see that by the end of this year."

So, what would John say to anyone else considering inbound marketing?

"Well, I wouldn't tell anyone in my industry (laughs). Okay, it's like this: the market's changed, the world has changed, and people have now got information at their fingertips.

"Everyone, whether they're buying a washing machine, double glazing, an extension, or a new kitchen, basically researches all the information online first. Buyers are very, very savvy now, so businesses like mine need a solution that fits. This is what Stargazer has done for me."

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