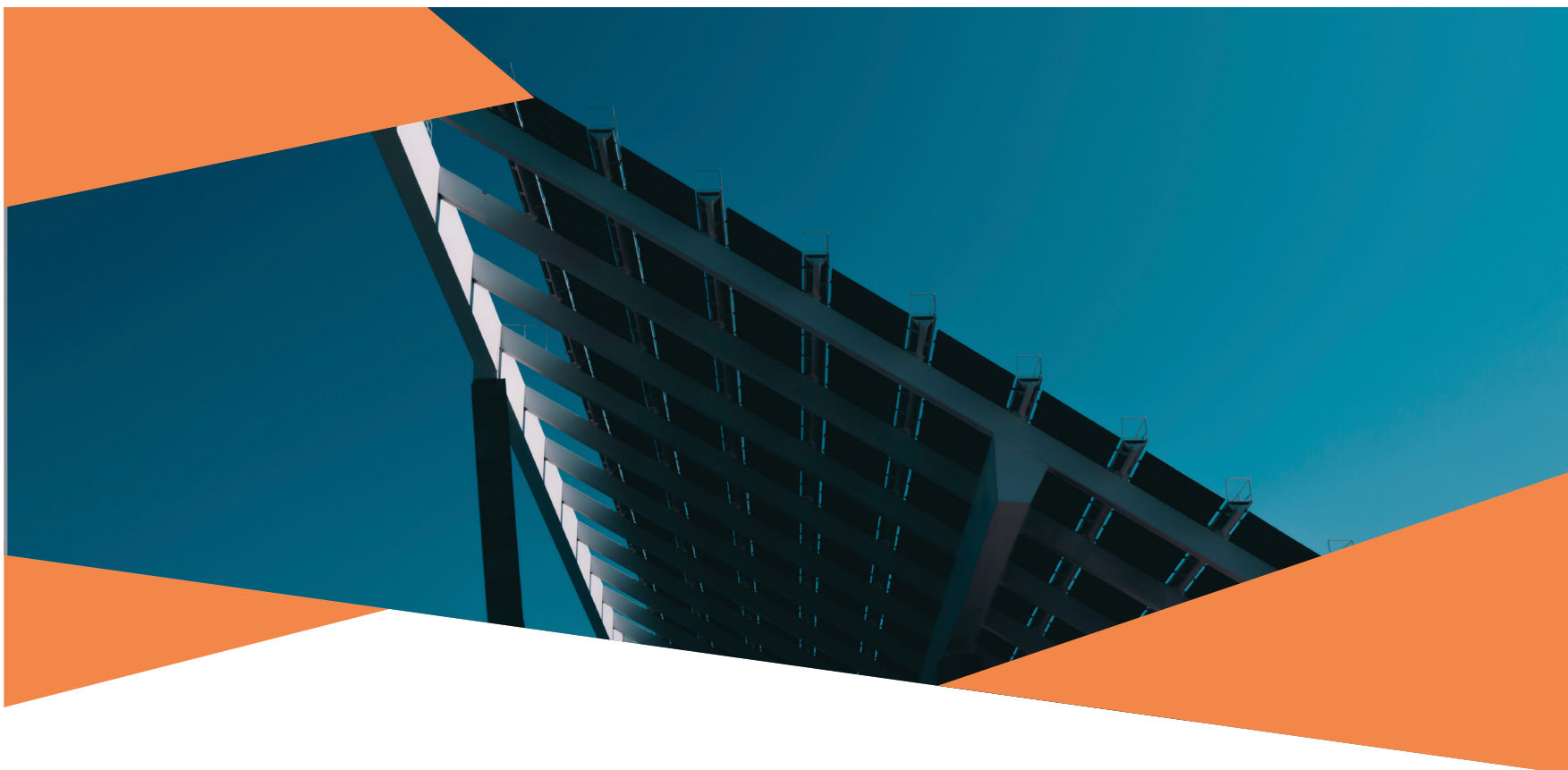


No Time For Legacy






How Clean Energy Companies Can Engage
Customer Prospects Faster in an
Attention-Scarce World

Volume II in the *Market Better*
Series by Tigercomm



This e-book is dedicated to everyone who is charged with growing their clean energy company's deal flow with a budget that's less than they'd like – and probably less than they need. You're the engine that's advancing the clean economy. Your work is often challenging. May this e-book lighten the load.

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Executive Summary:

Across clean economy sectors, sales and marketing teams we talk to share a growing frustration: It's gotten harder to get customer prospects to engage. They're all too familiar with sending that seventh "touch base" email to a prospect they've connected with at the trade show and hearing nothing back.

This experience has three main sources: what we're calling the "VAR Phenomenon" (Volume, Attention, Relevance), which is increasingly becoming a challenge in the smartphone age.

It's gotten harder to get customer prospects to engage.



Volume

Your customers are exposed to an enormous volume of electronic content – which grows by 50 percent each year. Americans now spend roughly [10 hours a day](#) in front of computers, smartphones, tablets and other devices.



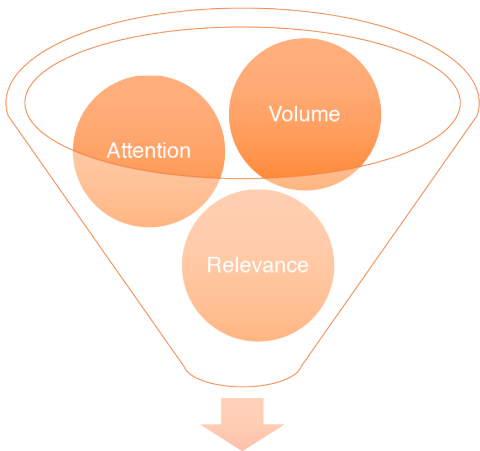
Attention

The sheer weight of all that content has drastically shortened attention spans, by at least 20 percent since the mobile revolution. According to a study by Microsoft, people now have an eight-second attention span, less than a goldfish, which can manage to focus on something for roughly nine seconds.



Relevance

Shrinking attention spans mean that to attract a sales prospect's attention, content must be relevant to their needs at the moment they recognize they have that need. The fact that someone searched for and selected your story or website is a strong indicator of relevance.



Change in buyer behavior

The VAR Phenomenon has enormously changed how people buy things, including the complex products and services offered by cleantech companies. Specifically:

- 1. Buyers expect to find answers to all their questions online and at their fingertips – including how to buy your services/products when they're ready to purchase.
- 2. Buyers want to be educated and informed before they talk to your sales team. They want to do their initial research on their own time.

Look at your own experience: When you decide to buy anything over \$100, what's the first thing you'll do? You'll Google it (or ask Siri). And then you search through the reviews.

When my (Sarah's) fiancé went to purchase a car recently, I was on the web looking at comparison sheets while talking to the salesperson on the phone. I Googled before I went to the dealership. While I was in the showroom, I Googled (on my phone) for things such as, "How to evaluate safety when buying a new car" and for the resale values of different models. The results on Google set the stage for the dealership's sales success or failure – even before the sales rep had a chance to engage us.

How Americans buy things has fundamentally changed, extending all the way to purchase decisions for a commercial solar project or contract to service a wind farm.



Digital-Social Criticality Scale

It's digital or die for B2C companies that sell online (far left) and the sales process is 100% focused on the online user experience, whereas the B2B Industrial companies (far right) need digital products that align and enhance the sales experience. Previously published in: [Why Wind and Cleantech Companies Have Left Digital-Social Marketing Power On Idle - And Why They Should Stop](#) ([link](#)).

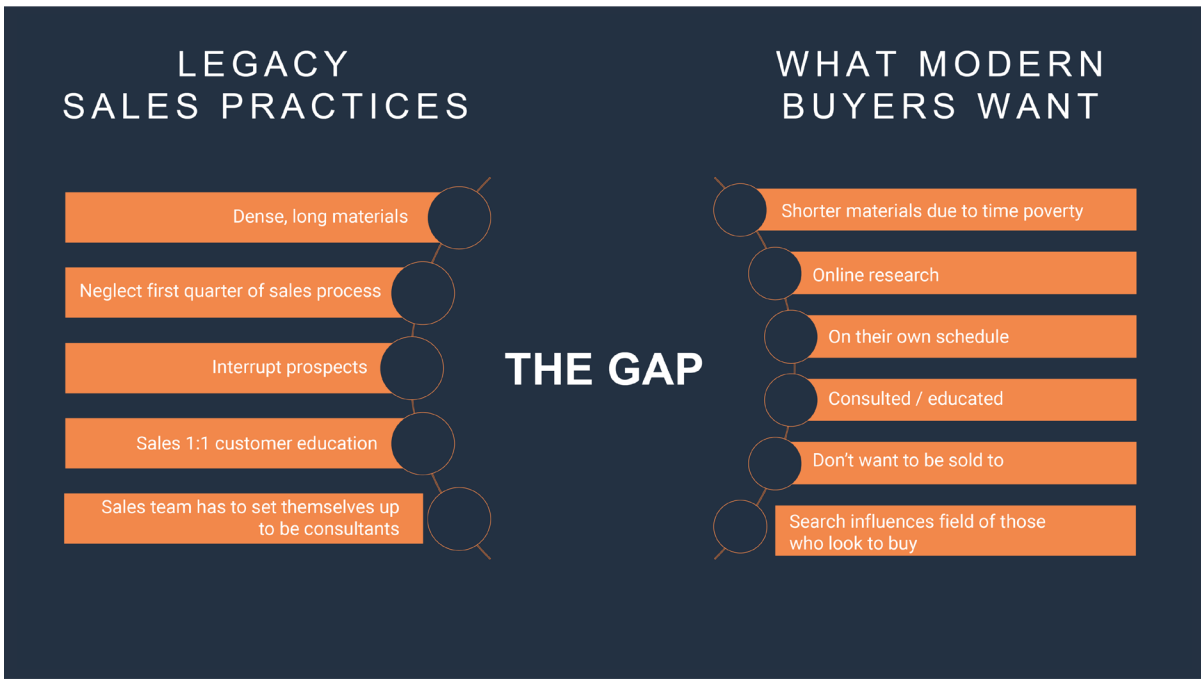
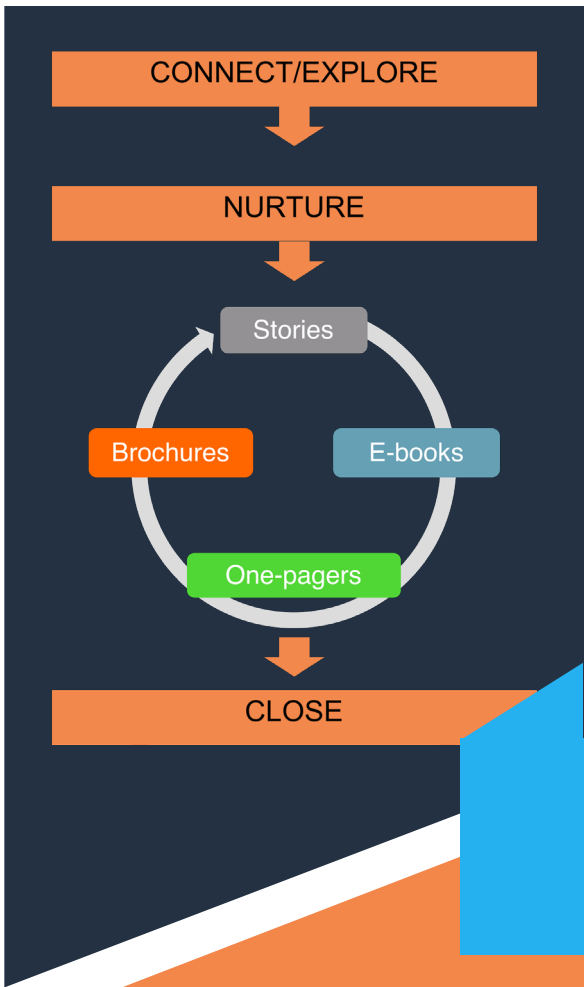


Marketing research literature is increasingly firm on this point: On average, up to [60 percent of B2B purchase decisions](#) are made by buyers before they take or make seller contact. It's tempting for clean energy companies to discount these findings because their sales are different given the long-lead times and high amounts of due diligence. But while there has not been research done to date looking only at buying patterns of cleantech B2B industrial service customers, is it really safe to assume these customers are immune to the wholesale changes occurring in the American economy?

Cut the 60 percent average for all B2B customers to 25 percent for

those buying clean energy project development, equipment and asset management. That's still a full quarter of the decision process made online through search and content. It's worth noting this is the first quarter of the decision making, in which cleantech customers will likely develop their list of competing solution providers they'll take a pitch from, or contact proactively.

Legacy marketing approaches neglect that critical first look by your customers.



The Sales Burden of Legacy Marketing

LEAD NURTURING

Sales teams in B2B or high-tech industries often have long sales cycles. Instead of sending that 3rd “just checking in” email, nurture your leads with informative, valuable content best delivered in digital platforms and URLs like blogs, videos, one-pagers, white papers, microsites, news articles and webinars. Move to a customized email along the lines of “We believe this will be interesting to you because you mentioned ____.” We call this “lead nurturing.”

Every cleantech company we know has ambitious growth goals and limits on their marketing budgets. Regardless of how many resources you’ve got to work with, a buyer still needs to know these three things before purchasing from you:

- a) Your company exists.
- b) It solves the problems buyers think they have.
- c) Your company is a trusted advisor with a proven ability to meet their needs.

Establishing a, b and c is essential; they are key elements to the essence of marketing communications.

Our firm’s research to date ([here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)) shows that cleantech companies have historically underinvested in marketing communications. This approach leaves sales teams to work all three components, and imposes three opportunity costs:

1. Customers’ decision making gets neglected in the critical, first quarter of the process.
2. Sales teams then attempt to carry the entire burden of customer education instead of being freed to engage in the expert consulting that business buyers most value.
3. Sales teams are left to position themselves as trusted advisors, instead of being set up for that role through the company’s content, website and automated systems that start the

process. Perhaps Sales Force’s [research last year](#) on selling trends said it best:

“79% of business buyers say it’s absolutely critical or very important to interact with a salesperson who is a trusted advisor – not just a sales rep – who adds value to their business. Customers demand smarter sales experiences, and they want sales reps who are personal consultants that help them address their challenges instead of treating them like another lead in the pipe.”

Changes in today’s marketing communications landscape create an opportunity for companies to use digital tools and compelling content to meet customers where they are. It allows companies to integrate marketing and sales in a highly effective combination. Marketing teams draw from the sales team’s insights into customers’ preferences and needs. Marketers then convert those insights into content that builds the early part of the sales process – creating awareness, producing more educated buyers and qualifying prospects much more effectively.

This more updated approach frees sales staff to focus on later stages of the process, which only they can do effectively in high-ticket, long lead-time B2B industrial sales.



Stepping Around Market Clutter With Great Content

Got a lot of spare time on your hands? Not likely if you're reading this. You're perpetually underwater electronically, and with good reason. The sheer volume of content on the Internet has exploded:

- > **Every minute, 300 hours of video gets added to YouTube.**
- > **350,000 tweets are sent per minute, 500 million tweets are sent per day.**
- > **Every day, 2.5 million new blog posts are written.**

To break through this flood of information, you must connect with buyers through compelling content that shows how you're uniquely positioned to understand and solve their problems.

On top of shorter attention spans, we are seeing people tightly screening out what isn't immediately useful – and one way to reach them is publishing easy-to-skim, concise and compelling content. We found this

especially true in our survey last year of CEOs and top-level executives across cleantech industries ([read survey](#)). This means several things for your program:

Regardless of its form – blog posts, white papers, taped conference presentations, surveys and eBooks – great content talks to your customers about their needs, trends in their industry and leads them to a central entry-point in your company. Given how buyers purchase, the trail most likely leads next to your website (where they can find help). That's where you can display competence and position your expertise by being useful to customers when they're searching for solutions to their problem.

Great content aimed towards prospective customers is rarely about your company – its culture, latest hire or a significant new business win. As marketing agency trends expert, David Baker says: "No one is reading your newsletter."



The role of news media attention – long the mainstay of business public relations – has changed. It serves as a validator and a high-credibility explainer, not something that delivers eyeballs by itself. It's what's done with a news story, not the audience that organically comes with it, that matters now. This validating, "second bounce" role for news stories is different than the still-common notion of "just getting it out there," a concept that came from a pre-digital era with far less content volume and much more crude audience targeting.

The Role of Media



There are four fundamental principles to keep in mind when creating relevant content.

Four Principles:



Don't just be interesting, be compelling

There's a time when the client decides they need something, they go looking, and you – if you've taken our advice here – will be near the top of their search returns. Be sure your content educates in simple, skimmable and brief formats.



Informing is about them and their problems; blathering is about you

Follow the 80/20 ratio for how much you should talk about customers (the 80 percent) versus yourself (the 20 percent).



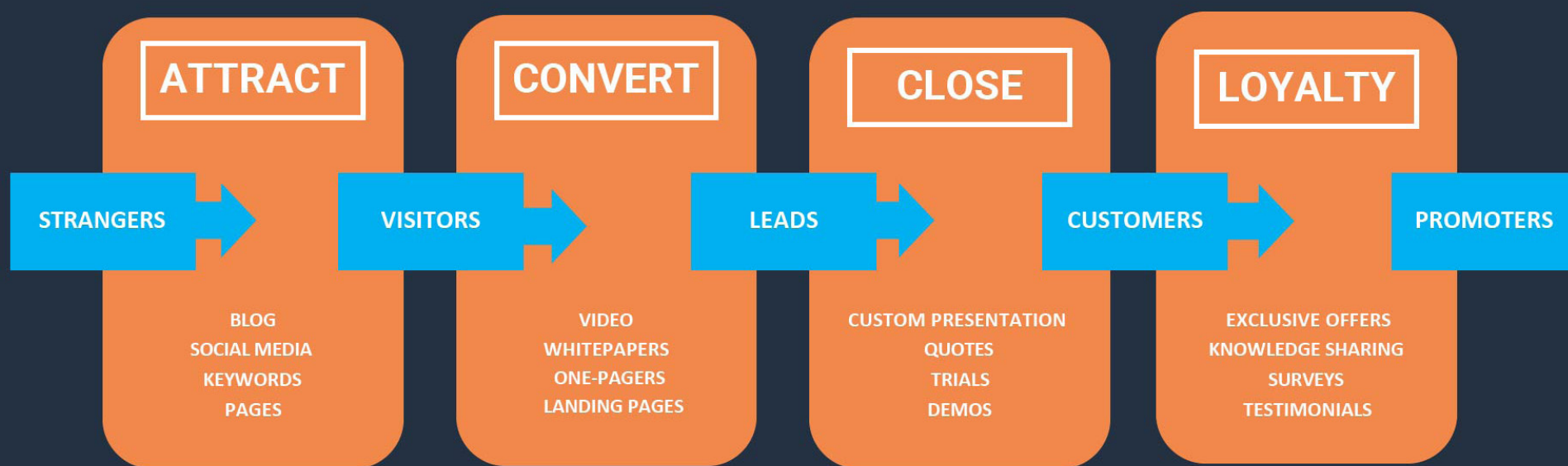
Always. Be. Framing.

Build your company messaging around one positioning statement or framework that helps magnify your unique ability to solve the customer challenges. Ensure that messaging is in plain language, it speaks to customer's values, needs and self-interests. It should minimize industry jargon and acronyms. Use your messaging to frame every piece of content.



Use news media for validation

There's still a vital role for media coverage, also known as "earned media," because it's coverage you've earned by being interesting to a media outlet's reporters and readers. But this coverage has a different role in cleantech marketing now. News coverage by itself generates limited customer or investor interest because of the sheer volume of content available to them. At the same time, media coverage can be a good validator for a company with a website that shares, explains and amplifies that coverage. Be sure you use your website accordingly.



INBOUND: A New Marketing Approach for A New Sales Landscape

The term “inbound” used to describe a call center where customers called to get help or seek information. Digital marketers adopted the term to describe marketing efforts designed to draw buyers in(bound) to contact sellers, instead of sellers pushing their messages out(bound) to the buyer.

Outbound marketing relies heavily on tactics that interrupt what a person is doing – getting someone to stop at a booth while walking through a trade show or advertising to someone watching a video on YouTube – to deliver a message. Outbound marketing still has its place, but it’s a smaller role in the face of increased buyer resistance to being interrupted in the first place.

Inbound marketing is a term coined by Brian Halligan, CEO of HubSpot, and is synonymous with the concept of *Permission Marketing*, a 1999 book by Seth Godin. David Meerman Scott explains inbound as a way to “earn their way” into a prospect’s awareness rather than invading (read more [here](#)).

For cleantech companies marketing to hundreds or a few thousand people, digital inbound tools can inform and improve sales team efforts in a uniquely powerful way. Advanced Customer Relationship Management programs (CRMs), such as HubSpot (Disclaimer: We’re a partner) can flag sales teams when a customer is active on your company’s website, including which content was viewed and when.

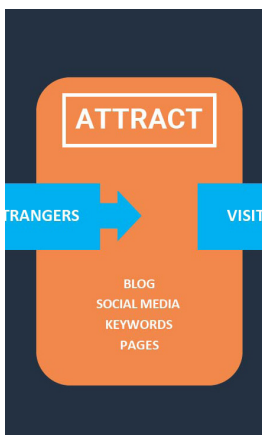
Taking an inbound approach breaks the buyer’s journey into four phases:

1. **Attract,**
2. **Convert,**
3. **Close, and**
4. **Foster loyalty.**

It’s important to generate content that speaks to the buyer’s experience at each of these stages. That’s content timing.

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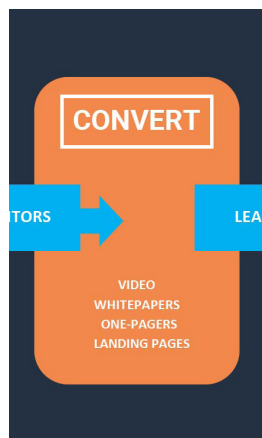
Mapping Content to the Buyer's Journey



I. Attract – The Awareness Phase

> Potential buyers are beginning to understand they might have a problem to solve, and they start researching to learn more. That research kicks off online, and your company's placement in search terms is crucial to getting picked as part of the list of vendors your buyer will select.

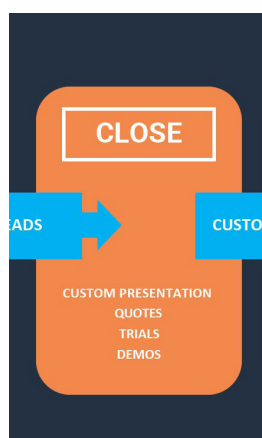
> **Content match:** Search engines, social media ([read volume I of the Market Better series by Tigercomm](#), [Social Wind: Social Media for the Wind Industry](#)), earned media, third-party sites (professional organizations, directories, associations), analyst reports and speaking events.



II. Convert – The Consideration Phase

> Prospects know their problem, and they feel some urgency to solve it. They are considering options from an initial list of vendors. Your company begins to make the case for your solution, but not (yet) selling your company as the one to provide it.

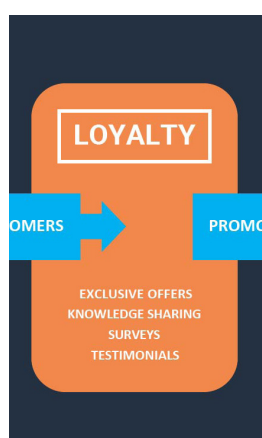
> **Content match:** Expert guides, video, whitepapers, competitor sheets, product brochures, one-pagers and e-books. Put this content behind a form requiring visitors to give you basic contact information before accessing "Convert Phase" content (ensure it is mobile friendly). With the right website software, collecting this information allows your company to track future visits and to time follow-up sales contact.



III. Close - The Decision Phase

> Buyers have settled on the best solution, and they are now choosing the vendor to provide it. They are comparing value and budget.

> **Content match:** Quotes, trials, demos, case studies and customized proposals and presentations that address their specific needs.



IV. Loyalty – The Value Building Phase

> Prospects have become customers, and they are now best positioned to make referrals to others. Your company's job is to ensure they have a positive customer experience, so they become loyal brand advocates.

> **Content match:** Collect customer feedback, surveys, testimonials, case studies and referral incentives. Consider video testimonials and case studies. Add value to their experience through exclusive offers or knowledge sharing.

Checklist

For Digital Marketing Success

Too many marketers spend the bulk of their time on messaging (*what* to say to customer prospects) and channels (*how* to say it). That's the fun, creative part, but going to the fun stuff first steps into the pit of inefficient marketing spending.

It's important to first take the time to clarify your business objectives and key milestones you want

marketing to support, and to focus on customer personas (see, ["What is a customer persona?"](#)). These planning components are typically far less developed than executive teams assume. Getting execs to focus on these foundational choices often strikes them as insisting on eating broccoli before enjoying the ice cream.

But after 110 clients, we've repeatedly seen

how customer needs and business goals fundamentally shape creative messaging in ways that no one could have predicted.

Ready to align your marketing and sales program to what prospects are buying? Ready to align your marketing technology to how prospects are buying?

Communications Flow



Our communications planning process works backwards through a causal chain. It starts with the client's top outcome, sharply defines the most important audience, builds messaging and then designs tactics to reach that audience with the best messengers.

Using this checklist will guide your company to a better, more aligned marketing program that generates more qualified leads and greater business success in today's attention-challenged digital marketing fishbowl. -->

OUTCOME



Business Goal

These typically fall into one or more of three categories: profitability, gross revenue or risk reduction.



Marketing Campaign Goal(s)

Perform an internal audit of assets and external metrics to set baselines and determine where you need to focus your efforts. Make your goals SMART (see [“What are SMART goals?”](#)) and prioritize them. An example of a specific, measurable goal: 20 percent increase in leads generated through the website.

AUDIENCE



Audience targeting & persona development

Perform interviews or surveys where needed and determine things like where your target audience gets their information, what topics do they read about and what their pain points are. Use that to build target lists.



Map the buyer’s journey

What steps do your prospects take to make a purchase decision? If you don’t know, try taking an informal survey at the next trade show. Then get your sales staff’s input to identify the trigger(s) for each of those phases. Design content that speaks to those triggers, and ensure your website is structured to match the flow of your customers’ decision making.

MESSAGE



Company and product messaging

It’s striking how similar the language is that’s used by fiercely competitive cleantech companies. The more distinctively (and better) the company is positioned, the easier it is to distinguish and differentiate its products and services – and reduce pressure on price alone. Are tone and language choices getting at the core advantages of your company and its solutions – and they being used consistently?



Campaign or offer messaging

Within your inbound marketing program, are your individual marketing campaigns emphasizing a different set of competitive advantages your company has? Together, the messages for each campaign should be varied enough to be different and interesting, but interlock to frame your company’s brand message.

CHANNELS

We discuss this in a previous section, but it’s critical to offer your customer prospects the type of content that matches where they’re at in the purchase decision. Identify the channels that most effectively reach your prospects at each stage of the purchase decision.



Attract Phase

While much of your content should be on your site so it can be found through search engines, it’s also important at this early stage to thoughtfully put your educational or problem-based content on third-party sites. For example, your podcast should be on iTunes, as well as on your website. Your CEO’s bylined piece about industry trends can be at Forbes, with a follow-up piece in a trade publication.



Close

This is the Phase for using company-based content, customized to the buyer’s needs, such as relevant case studies and testimonials, demos, custom proposals or presentations.



Loyalty

Now it’s time for service-based content, such as surveys, educational emails, blog posts or other perks to make referrals easy and build loyalty among your existing customers.

MESSENGERS



Internal

Is there someone at your company who should be the face and voice of customer education for the firm? Should that be the head of sales or an in-house analyst?



External

Are there third-party organizations, customer evangelists or influencers whom you want to speak on your company’s behalf?



See how it worked for one cleantech company



Challenge

One of the wind industry's fastest-growing IPPs was looking for a way to get ahead of an emerging market – corporate buyers of renewable energy. While this market is less than utility purchasers, it is growing at an incredible rate. In 2017, corporate and other non-utility purchasers accounted for [40% of total wind](#) energy capacity contracted through PPAs. The company sales team was interested in having bilateral conversations to change the paradigm and value proposition with customers unfamiliar with the energy business.



Solution

We created a ground-up inbound marketing program designed to attract corporate buyers of renewable energy. We developed five detailed customer personas of the decision-makers they needed to target, designed and launched new web pages for them with original content, and created a thought leadership program for their CEO, including speaking appearances and LinkedIn article publishing and amplification.



Result

In six months, the company went from no marcom program to having the industry's best:

- > Designed industry-leading website featuring 11 new pages to educate market and capture leads.
- > Built CEO LinkedIn profile from zero to become an industry thought leader with 3,200+ followers, tens of thousands of views regularly.
- > Guided the asset management team into a clearer articulation of their value, with a real web presence and an impressive presentation.
- > Launched a landmark corporate buyer's survey at the biggest corporate sustainability event of the year – VERGE – generating 11 original earned media stories, and **260 sales leads via their website.**
- > Supported productive sales conversations at WINDPOWER with original content and speaker trainings.
- > Trumpeted their pioneering accomplishment at Fort Hood with self-generated and earned content, driving 15 articles with a potential audience of 4.37 million readers.

“Clean energy solutions and the needs of energy consumers are rapidly evolving. Yet, clean energy companies often rely on traditional communication strategies to build customer relationships. Tigercomm’s approach shows how to strategically leverage the digital marketing revolution to build one-on-one relationships on a scale unimaginable a few years ago.”



- Chris Murray, Senior Business Development Manager at WGL Energy

About Tigercomm

Tigercomm is the leading cleantech communications firm helping companies win with customers, policymakers and markets. For more than a decade, we’ve led the innovations at the intersection of communications and clean economy trends. Top companies choose us as their strategic partner because of our unrivaled industry expertise, sound strategies and ability to drive business objectives.

Learn more about Tigercomm’s Inbound Marketing Services [here](#).

About the Authors



Sarah Lippincott
Director of Marketing & Digital

At Tigercomm, Sarah designs and manages integrated marketing strategies for clients. They blend extensive market research, social media campaign development, engagement media relations and website design to produce client results and clear ROI. She also leads the inbound marketing strategy for the company.

Prior to joining Tigercomm, Sarah was the digital manager of a national public relations firm, where she led social media, design and digital advertising accounts for Fortune 100 companies and national associations. Sarah was the Chief of Marketing and Operations for a weekly newspaper, leading its conversion to an online publishing platform. Sarah has also judged the Stevie Awards for Women in Business and was accepted into NASA’s exclusive social media program for the Orbital-1 Antares Launch.

Sarah is a finalist for the 2018 Washington Women in Public Relations (WWPR) Emerging Leaders Award.



Mike Casey
President

Mike is a top U.S. innovator and strategist on cleantech marketing and communications. He has presented at more than a dozen major conferences, and he writes frequently on clean economy topics at ScalingClean and Renewable Energy World.

Mike has trained more than 2,000 people on interview techniques, message development and public relations management. Before Tigercomm, he built winning communications programs for the National Environmental Trust and the Environmental Working Group, which he helped make “... dollar for dollar, demonstrably one of the most effective groups in Washington” (National Journal, 2/02). He is also a communications veteran of the U.S. Senate, House of Representatives and two presidential campaigns.



Phone
HQ: 1(703) 302-8387
CA: 1(424) 208-3558

Web & Email
www.tigercomm.us
info@tigercomm.us
OR [click here](#)

HQ
Washington D.C. Area:
1(703) 302-8387

California
1(424) 208-3558