

Scientific publishing is inbound marketing
(800 words)
Russell Hanson
Feb 17, 2010

Companies like HubSpot provide tools and services for companies to market themselves and measure how well they are marketing themselves online. Some of the major tools that are used for inbound marketing are forms of online publishing including blogging, micro-blogging, and posting content to social network sites. Inbound marketing is the practice of providing content that attracts people, be it customers, potential customers, or anyone with a certain level of interest, to the source of that information be it a website, a business, a person, or a research lab or institute. In the words of Brian Halligan and Dharmesh Shah in the book *Inbound Marketing* it is defined, “Inbound marketing is about getting found online, through search engines [like Google] and on sites like Facebook and YouTube and Twitter -- sites that hundreds of millions of people use to find answers each day.”

This article is addressed to both scientists who may not be aware of some trends in inbound marketing and to other marketers who may not be aware of the activity in scientific publishing. Both camps have something they can learn from each other for their respective goals. In some sense, scientists, writers, and scholars have known about inbound marketing all along. Their papers, books, and lectures all provide a message that attracts people who are interested in that message to read their papers, buy their books, and attend their lectures. As individuals or small groups, they have never had access to large broadcast media, or production companies to promote their messages via expensive TV spots, trade show exhibits, or billboards -- but through their publishing interested parties access their message, and find them online. Daniel Grushkin of DIYBio NYC recently asked at a ScienceHouse event if there was an equivalent to a “viral video” in the YouTube sense in scientific publishing. The traditional answer is the number of citations a paper receives, as tracked by science citation indexes. The difference here is the number of *views* vs. the number of *citations*.

For marketers, press releases and blog posts -- publications -- are made in order to get information about their products in the hands of their consumers, and for scientists and research institutes it is to get exposure for their research work, their workers, and to bring in more research funds and also to perhaps increase the rate at which research work is transferred to the private sector. The readership of scientific results outside the scientific community is extremely limited and the job of communicating between the communities often left to science journalists.

Traditional business marketers can benefit greatly by taking note of some of the conventions used in academic publishing. The better the message marketers distribute or publish, just as the higher quality academic papers receive higher readership and affect the market for grant dollars, the higher conversion rates or brand recognition the marketer can achieve.

One of the metrics that is most often used to judge the popularity of a scientific article is the number of times it had been cited. The practice of exhaustively or enumeratively

listing all influences on a business blog or web listing of press releases does not make sense to publicists, marketing directors, and public relations professionals. It is rather the incoming links and traffic that matter. Not just is it incoming web links and web traffic: it is incoming lead generation and conversion rates. Businesses are not *only* in the business of getting information about their products out via social media and their web publicity portal, they are trying to generate business, retain customers, and field questions and support issues regarding their products and services.

Scientific publishing is going through many of the same challenges and transitions that other forms of media are going through. It is cheap and sometimes free to get your message out via the web. Starting a new electronic journal is a relatively inexpensive process. New media such as web video is being increasingly used to convey specific scientific protocols using video. JoVE.com – the Journal of Visual Experiments is a web 2.0 science start-up whose goal is to bring the rapid YouTube-style of broadcasting and media dissemination to research laboratory protocols. Many businesses that were not traditionally involved in regularly publishing multimedia content are seeing much value in providing high quality video and audio streams.

Businesses are seeing the value of inbound marketing both for its relative inexpensiveness and are pressured into adopting it in some form because everyone else is doing it. Many companies are setting up community social networks or bulletin boards of the form *community.company.com*: Communities.Intel.com and Community.Dell.com being notable examples. Innovators in inbound marketing for both science and business will no doubt see their investment pay off.