

The 19 Channels You Can Use to Get Traction



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The book “Traction” by Gabriel Weinberg is an excellent look into the options for growing your business. The book goes through 19 customer acquisition channels you can use to get traction. Here is a summary



Search Engine Marketing

Search engine marketing (SEM) refers to placing advertisements on search engines like Google where online marketers spend more a LOT *each day*.

Social and Display Ads

Display ads are the banner ads that you see on Web sites all over the Internet. Social ads are the ads on social sites, like those in our near your Facebook and Twitter timelines.

Offline Ads

Even today, advertisers spend more on offline ads than they do on online. There are many kinds of offline ads—TV, radio, magazines, newspapers, yellow pages, billboards, and direct mail. All of these can utilized at almost any scale, from local campaigns to national ones.

Few businesses use this channel, which means there's less competition for many of these audiences. We talked with Jason Cohen, founder of WP Engine and Smart Bear Software, about the offline ads he's used to acquire customers.

Search Engine Optimization

Almost all Internet users turn to search engines for answers. Search engine optimization (SEO) is the process of improving your ranking in search engines in order to get more people to your site.



Content Marketing

Think back to the last few Web sites you've used and take a look at their blogs. In all likelihood, they're infrequently updated and have few comments, or worse, are frequently updated and an avalanche of boring.

Compare that experience to reading a well-known company blog like those of Moz, Unbounce, or OkCupid. They write posts that receive hundreds of comments, lead to major publicity, and result in thousands of shares. This massive engagement leads to massive growth.

Email Marketing

Email marketing is one of the best ways to convert prospects while retaining and monetizing existing customers.

Email marketing is a personal channel. Messages from your company sit next to email updates from friends and family. As such, email marketing works best when it is personalized. Email can be tailored to individual customer actions such that every email communication is relevant.



Viral Marketing

Viral marketing consists of growing your customer base by encouraging your customers to refer other customers. We interviewed Andrew Chen, a viral marketing expert and mentor at 500 Startups, for common viral techniques and the factors that have led to viral adoption in major startups.

In the context of startups, literally “going viral” means that every user you acquire brings in *at least one other user*. That new user then invites at least one other user, and so on. This creates true exponential growth. Though difficult to sustain, it’s been the driving force behind the explosive growth of consumer startups like Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp.

Engineering as Marketing

Your team’s engineering skills can get your startup traction directly by building tools and resources that reach more people. You make useful tools like calculators, widgets, and educational microsites to get your company in front of potential customers.

These tools generate leads and expand your customer base. Companies like HubSpot, Moz, and RJMetrics have successfully used this underutilized channel for rapid growth.

Speaking Engagements

This channel works well wherever there is a group of people in a room that—if you pitched them right—would move the needle for your business.



Targeting Blogs

Targeting blogs prospective customers read is one of the most effective ways to get your first wave of customers. Popular startups like Codecademy, Mint, and reddit all got their start by targeting blogs.

Publicity

Publicity is the art of getting your name out there via traditional media outlets like news outlets, newspapers, magazines, and TV.

Unconventional PR

There are two different types of unconventional PR. You're probably familiar with the first type: the publicity stunt. A publicity stunt is anything that is engineered to get media coverage.

The second type of unconventional PR is customer appreciation: smaller, more scalable actions (like holding contests or sending handwritten notes to customers) that both increase goodwill as well as generate press coverage.



Business Development

Business development (BD) is the process of creating strategic relationships that benefit both your business and your partner. It's like sales with one key distinction: With sales, you're selling directly to a customer. With business development, you're partnering to reach customers in a way that benefits both parties.

Sales

Sales is focused primarily on creating processes to directly exchange product for dollars. Sometimes hand-holding prospects can be necessary to turn them into real customers.

Affiliate Programs

An affiliate program is an arrangement where you pay people or companies for performing certain actions like making a sale or getting a qualified lead. We interviewed Kristopher Jones, founder of the Pepperjam affiliate network, to learn how a business can leverage this channel.

Companies like Amazon, Zappos, eBay, Orbitz, and Netflix use affiliate programs to drive significant portions of their revenue. In fact, affiliate programs are the core traction channel for many e-commerce stores, information products, and membership programs.



Existing Platforms

Existing platforms are Web sites, apps, or networks with huge numbers of users — sometimes in the hundreds of millions — that you can potentially leverage to get traction. Major platforms include the Apple and Android App Stores, Mozilla and Chrome browser extensions, social platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest, as well as newer platforms that are growing rapidly (Tumblr, Snapchat, etc.).

Focusing on existing platforms means focusing your growth efforts on one of these megaplatforms, and getting some of their hundreds of millions of users to use your product.

Trade Shows

Trade shows offer you the opportunity to showcase your products in person. These events are often exclusive to industry insiders, and are designed to foster interactions between vendors and their prospects.

Early on, you can use this traction channel to build interest in what you're building. As you get more established, you can use trade shows as an opportunity to make a major announcement, sell big clients, seal a partnership, or as an integral part of your sales funnel.



Offline Events

Sponsoring or running offline events—from small meetups to large conferences—can be a primary way to get traction.

Offline events give you the opportunity to engage directly with potential customers about their problems. Such events are especially important when your target customers do not respond well to online advertising and do not have a natural place to congregate online. Attracting these customers to one location or going to a place where they meet in person can be the most effective way to reach them.

Community Building

Community building involves investing in the connections among your customers, fostering those relationships and helping them bring more people into your business circle.

Companies like Wikipedia and Stack Exchange have grown by forming passionate communities around their products.



Advice

When considering these 19 traction channels, try your best not to dismiss them as irrelevant for your company. Each traction channel has worked.



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