



The Manufacturer's Marketing Playbook

How to drive growth at manufacturing companies



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Welcome

Industry and economic watchers predict the United States manufacturing market will hit record numbers over the next decade.

Experts say that manufacturing companies focused on high-tech offerings for the defense, aerospace, medical, and nuclear power sectors will grow rapidly, driven by increased global demand.

Many companies prepared for this opportunity by investing in new equipment, improving plant infrastructure, and upskilling their workforce.

The most forward-looking are launching aggressive marketing campaigns to capture the greatest market share.

We developed this Playbook to help manufacturing companies across the country, regardless of size or specialty, uncover new customers with proven strategies and tactics.

You'll find answers to questions around effective marketing strategies, budgets, the KPIs that matter, and the state of manufacturing marketing.



The State of Marketing for Manufacturers

02

Marketing for manufacturers is a dynamic, multi-tactic effort that extends beyond the classic trade-show and cold-call moves of yesteryear. Successful manufacturing companies treat marketing as an essential part of their business, recognizing that it is imperative to maintain a solid digital footprint, engage in regular communication, and establish multiple points of contact.

But why? Modern manufacturing decision-makers – engineers, project managers, sourcing managers, and buyers – do their homework online. In fact, research shows that 90% of all new vendor investigations are done before engaging with a salesperson. So, being seen in the digital world – on websites, organic social media, and pay-per-click advertising – is essential.

Further, it is common for a vendor to stick with an existing manufacturer (even after a negative experience) because they don't know what other options are available. Outbound marketing and communications are crucial to introduce your company to new opportunities.

Given the current state of information gathering, clients and marketers must prepare for and produce content for LLMs that are stealing search engine and website traffic. In fact, agencies must pivot to producing content for LLMs and a "search everywhere optimization" strategy.

With the help of a forward-looking, nimble, and full-service marketing agency, manufacturers will see increased opportunities from new customers and increased loyalty from current customers. Any agency should be able to offer a multifaceted and integrated approach to marketing. If not, take a second look at who manages your campaigns.

Effective Tactics and Platforms for Manufacturers' Marketing

03

Increased opportunities across the manufacturing sector equal increased competition, so any company looking to grow must be strategic, clear, consistent, and engaging.

The good news is that digital marketing tools and tactics make it less daunting (and less expensive) to reach new customers and maintain regular contact with existing customers, building deeper relationships and selling more solutions.

While tried-and-true efforts like trade shows, print collateral, and cold calls can still be effective, modern manufacturing companies need to ensure their digital presence is informative, engaging, and convincing.

It is essential to pay attention to ideal customer profiles – Who are we talking to? What do they need to hear? – to create content and visual assets that speak directly to the target audience.

Why are websites so foundational to today's marketing plan? Industry watchers report that 69% of new leads come from online queries. Plus, research shows that 81% of B2B buyers research products and suppliers online before making a decision, with 60% relying on search engines as their entry point. If a manufacturer's website fails to capture attention, the buyer will simply move on to the next available alternative.

Just two years ago, getting those buyers to a company's website relied on search engine optimization, where keywords and long-tail phrases attracted the attention of Google, Bing, and other search engines.

Today, we must account for LLMs like ChatGPT, Perplexity, Copilot, and Gemini, and rethink the types of content we add to websites and our content marketing strategies. Our practical experience shows that LLMs are pulling in webpages and blog posts, which drives readers to client websites and inspires RFQ form fills.

For example, rather than optimizing for phrases (like "sheet metal forming"), we must focus on answering questions potential buyers would type into an LLM (like "What are precision sheet metal techniques for the aerospace market?").

Knowing how people are getting new information and finding new solutions – thanks, ChatGPT – leads us to say that content marketing strategy and execution are vital. Create a content calendar, find a writer who can marry technical information with readable articles, and ensure you are using both keywords and answering questions likely to be typed into LLMs.

Pro Tip: remember who you're writing blog articles for – engineers who need technical data and buyers who need confidence that your company can deliver.

Other inbound – meaning we are connecting with people looking for us, rather than outbound, where we are introducing ourselves to new customers – tactics that are successful for manufacturer companies include:

Pay-Per-Click Advertising (also known as SEM) – running dynamic search ads or remarketing ads on Google and Bing. Setting appropriate budgets and conducting consistent campaign analysis are crucial to successful PPC campaigns, ensuring you spend money on keywords that drive conversions.

Search Everywhere Optimization – this used to be called search engine optimization, but with the proliferation of LLMs and the way people are learning on platforms like YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, and Reddit, plus the dozens of industry directories (think Yelp, ThomasNet, Clutch) that consistently rank higher than business pages, people are now searching in dozens of different places. So, you must be where they are searching, and that happens by optimizing your web pages to be found.

Email Campaigns – there's an old adage that it takes three times as much work to cultivate a new lead than to sell more to an existing lead. By staying in contact with your existing customers, you can let them know easily about new capabilities, skills, equipment, and ways you are looking out for them. Semi-regular (beware of oversaturating your audience) email cadences can be a great way to do that and offer sales teams opportunities to reach out once a reader opens an email or clicks a link.

Social Media – Experience shows that one of the steps a potential customer takes before filling out an RFQ form or calling is verifying a company via social media. These customers are looking to see that you are who you say you are, show a track record of success, and that you know what you're talking about. Manufacturing companies can and should leverage LinkedIn.

The List – People Who Know of Us Marketing Tactics

1. Content Marketing written to appear in LLMs
2. Pay-Per-Click Advertising
3. Search Everywhere Optimization
4. Email Campaigns
5. Social Media

Successful marketing combines the inbound tactics listed above with an active number of outbound marketing methods. The easiest example of an outbound effort is a billboard on the side of the road. The goal is to let potential buyers know you exist and then rely on inbound or sales to close the deal.

It is **essential** (Note the bold. We mean it.) to understand exactly who your target audience is before launching any outbound marketing campaign. Get granular on industry, company size, revenue, number of employees, location, pain points, and growth indicators. Knowing that information will help you target the right companies, communicate how your solutions fix their problems, and help unseat the existing provider.

Let's look at three outbound strategies favored by leading manufacturers:

Account-Based Marketing – ABM focuses on identifying and targeting high-value companies with precise and direct tactics, rather than casting a wide net to attract a broad audience. Activities within an ABM campaign include defining the ideal customer profile, sourcing audiences via tools like Apollo.io, conducting research, creating creative assets (advertising, eBooks, landing pages, social media, etc.), launching digital advertising, and reaching out via email and LinkedIn Messenger. It's a robust, effective strategy for attracting new customers.

Advertising – Manufacturing companies have a number of advertising channels, including digital (Google Display, LinkedIn, Reddit, banner ads on trade websites, etc), print (trade show publications, trade magazines, business journals, etc.), social (video spots on YouTube before a related piece of content, highly targeted ads on the Meta platform, etc.), and even broadcast (pre-recorded or host read ads during related podcasts, for example.)

Trade Shows – Gone are the days when a booth, some business cards, and cocktail parties are how people perform at trade shows. Today, modern manufacturing companies should integrate email marketing campaigns, digital advertising, and collateral materials into their trade show plans. The goal is to introduce and extend their reach to ensure the investment in travel, space, and time pays off. And, yes, you need an engaging booth design to bring people in.

These are just a few ways manufacturing companies are marketing to new and existing customers. As with all marketing efforts, think strategically to maximize your budget and effectiveness.

But First, Pause for Strategy

04

Just as a smart manufacturing company uses prototyping to validate designs, marketers need to pause for strategy. Use the time to question assumptions, clarify your company's positioning and messaging, and create executable plans.

Taking this vital step will help you with:

Defining Your Ideal Customer Profile – the person most likely to purchase your solution. You're looking to determine where they work, identify their titles, clarify their pain points, and what job they need you to do. Get as granular as possible to hone the content you develop so it resonates with them and makes your advertising spend as effective as possible.

Understand the Industry – throw every assumption out the window and take a clear-eyed look at your industry, carefully identifying the trends that will define your opportunity.

Clarify the Competition – it's hard to beat another company when you don't know who they are or what they're offering your potential customers. Plus, it's good to uncover the types of content they create, estimate their advertising budgets, and find out what trade shows they are attending so you can counterprogram their efforts.

Looking Holistically – any well-defined strategic effort helps companies see their entire marketing program and how connecting each effort maximizes the program's success. Many companies create a calendar of events and trade shows they're attending to determine when to launch email campaigns, advertising efforts, blogs, and social media content. The intent is to flood the market with information so it's easier for a potential buyer to find you.

A marketing research process will ensure that you're speaking to the right people at the right time with the right message.

Oftentimes, it's beneficial to have an outside point of view to develop a strategy that avoids old thinking that may have led to stale growth. Make sure to give that team access to senior management, past marketing efforts, sales data, and customer lists.

The process should take two weeks to a month, depending on the size of your company and your industry. Skipping competitive analysis, asking too many questions in surveys, ignoring quick wins, discounting qualitative data, and failing to update ICPs are common mistakes to avoid.

What Numbers are Important?

05

The boom in marketing data and analytics tools provides companies with an abundance of numbers to help them understand the efficiency and effectiveness of their marketing efforts. All those numbers, though, can become overwhelming and contribute to decisions that hurt rather than help.

Let's take a look at the metrics that will help you understand if your marketing efforts and budgets are worth it.

Marketing agencies spent years (and many still do) tracking user activity – website visits, impressions, and social likes. While still important because they can offer a perspective on interest and intent, value metrics—key performance indicators (KPIs) tied to pipeline, revenue, and business impact—can be more valuable.

An essential KPI framework includes metrics on:

Lead Generation Metrics

- Track Marketing Qualified Leads (MQLs) that are warm leads who have shown interest by engaging with your content, filling out forms, or attending webinars, and Sales Qualified Leads (SQLs) that are the leads your sales team pursues. Watching those two metrics indicates the quality of the marketing and will help increase SQL velocity.
- Use Cost Per Lead (CPL) data as a budget check to determine which campaigns are generating leads and eliminate those that are too expensive or ineffective. As an aside, benchmark data shows that the average CPL in manufacturing is \$263 for B2C and \$377 for B2B. In high-value sectors, CPL may exceed \$500.

Conversion Metrics

- Conversion Rate (CVR) shows the percentage of website visitors who take key actions, such as filling out a form, sending an email from the website, downloading a topic paper or eBook, or purchasing a product. Track where those conversions come from (organic/SEO, PPC, social, email) and look for efficiencies.
- Sales Cycle Length, typically long in manufacturing, is important to gauge and then test if marketing or email campaigns help shorten it. If yes, then double down.

Attribution and ROI Metrics

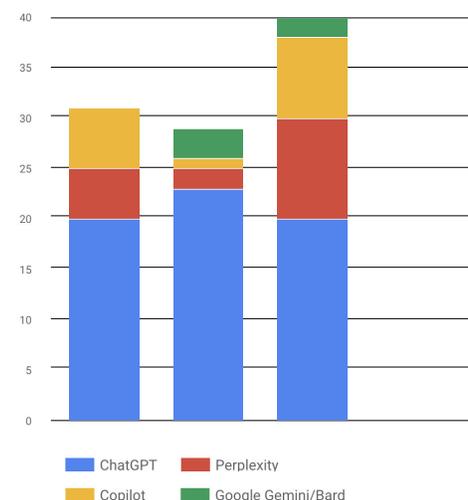
The holy grail of all metrics is ROI – defined as Sales Growth-Marketing Cost divided by Marketing Cost. Industry-leading agencies achieve a 5:1 ratio, while the standard is 3:1.

- Customer Acquisition Cost (CAC) includes all costs incurred to land a new customer, including creative services and media spend fees. Track CAC with Customer Lifetime Value (CLV) for margin forecasting.
- Customer Lifetime Value (CLV) is the projected gross margin for each customer. It's important to include retention, upsell, and repeat business in addition to the initial sale.

Digital Engagement and Performance Metrics

- Website Performance is the number of unique visitors that come to your website (important to track with engagement metrics), bounce rate, average session duration, and pages per session. This information helps with Lead Scoring when qualifying a new contact and understanding which information engages your potential customers.
- Inbound and outbound marketing campaigns drive traffic to Landing Pages. Track the performance of these pages and optimize regularly.
- Cost Per Click (CPC) tells you how much each click costs, helping you track cost efficiency and effectiveness.

Where is our content landing on LLMs?



Content and Campaign Health

- Content Engagement metrics detail page views, downloads, video completion rates, email open/click rates, and webinar attendance if you're using this tactic. Use this information to optimize your content for maximum engagement.
- Social Metrics are helpful as a directional signal, letting you know whether your audience finds your posts informative and helpful. Look at the number of followers, shares, saves, and engagement rates. Big note here: social media companies are constantly changing their algorithm, and social media managers are only human.

The key is to collaborate with your marketing team or agency to get the metrics that make the most sense to you. While monitoring spend is obviously important, take as much time as you need to understand the value each lead and closed sale brings to your company. Be wary of using these analytics to be pound foolish.

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A Look at Realistic Marketing Budgets

06

Modern manufacturing companies positioned for growth view marketing budgets differently. In the past, marketing was an expense that (some said) did not return any revenue. Today, with the advent and use of marketing analytics (see the previous chapter), C-suite executives can see exactly where their money is going and how the investment in marketing contributes to the company's bottom line.

The question is how much, then, to invest. Industry watchers and analysts (not marketing agencies) see that most manufacturing companies invest between 5% and 10% of annual revenue toward marketing. Recent industry surveys confirm that B2B manufacturers, in particular, hover around the 6-7% mark, with leaders aiming even higher when growth is the priority.

Why has that number risen? Competition is greater than ever, and companies are leveraging the power of digital marketing, social media, and content marketing to reach broader audiences across the globe.

Three Questions When thinking about your annual marketing budget, ask these questions:

1. How aggressive are our growth goals?
 - Any company looking to increase its market share, roll out a new product or service, or expand its geographic footprint generally needs to spend between 7 and 10% of revenue. Companies with strong reputations and a defensible niche can drop that percentage to 5% of revenue.
2. How long and complicated is our sales cycle?
 - Manufacturing companies, especially those working in highly regulated sectors, face a long sales cycle in which potential customers need to be informed and nurtured through marketing and communications that validate the company's expertise. Longer journeys mean more content, more follow-up, and often, larger budget requirements.
3. How competitive is our market?
 - In saturated sectors, manufacturers must out-communicate as much as out-innovate their competition. Even a best-in-class product can languish without the marketing fuel to cut through industry noise.

What should a budget cover?

Here is a list of things that a marketing investment typically covers:

- Strategy
- Branding
- Advertising
- Website
- Content Marketing
- Search Everywhere Optimization
- Collateral Materials
- Digital Marketing
- Digital Advertising on LinkedIn, Google, and additional networks
- Trade Shows
- Events
- CRM (HubSpot is an amazing option)
- Marketing Automation Software
- Marketing Analytics Tools

There's often a question around balancing digital versus traditional spend. There are no hard-and-fast rules here. Invest money in the tactics that net the most significant opportunities while spending a percentage on experiments in an effort to uncover additional possibilities.

How to set a budget

The most straightforward answer is to align your company's marketing investment strategy to business goals, using historical data to help understand how much investment returns revenue.

Research consistently shows that a healthy marketing budget returns \$5 to \$7 for every \$1 spent when deployed strategically and measured rigorously.

While that number is often set in the October before the fiscal year, audit marketing performance and ROI, and adjust accordingly. Keep an unallocated pool of funds available to allow experimentation with new tactics or respond to market changes.

Experience shows that smart investments in technology, help from an agency, and tools will yield positive results, with the caveat that the cheapest option is never the best. Pay for quality, but cut when the results don't appear.

Getting Started

07

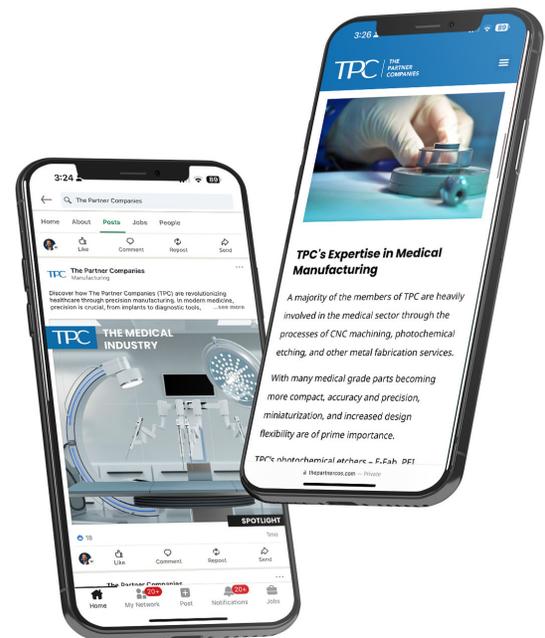
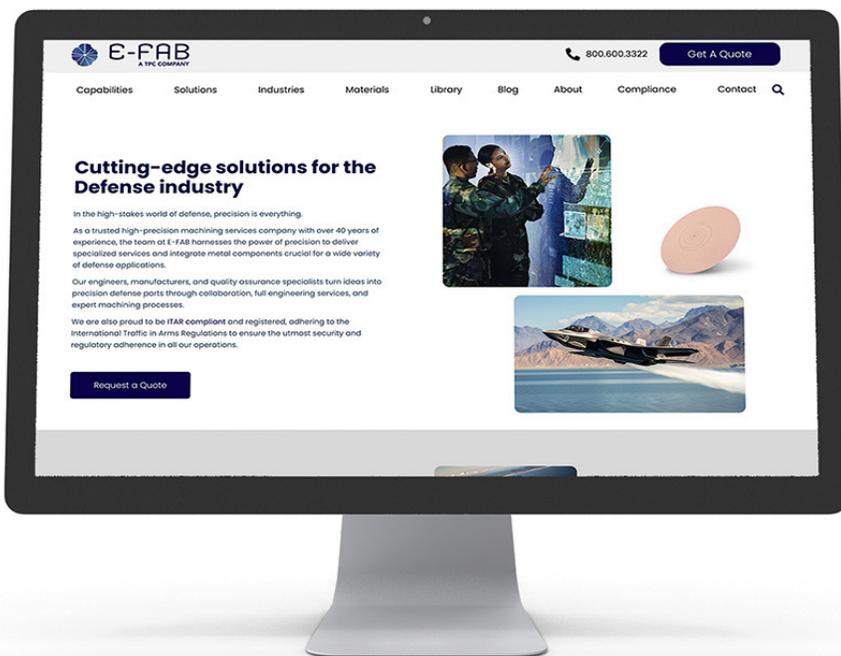
Understanding and managing marketing strategies and tactics can be daunting, especially given the ever-shifting marketing landscape and the high stakes of successful execution.

If you're having trouble deciding where and how to invest, we can help.

The team at Farinella – we like to think of ourselves as Big Thinkers & Ass Kickers – features decades of experience in branding, marketing, advertising, and communications.

We've leveraged our 35-plus years of experience to help leading manufacturing companies find new opportunities and grow their businesses. We've created new logos, launched websites, executed marketing campaigns across digital and traditional channels, and built communities across B2B social media networks.

We're here to make marketing a verb. Anything else is fancy words on pretty pictures.



We invite you to learn more about us at farinella.com or contact us directly at [510] 339-9922 or info@farinella.com.