

# Why Build a “Maze”? (What’s wrong with a funnel?)

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So why a maze? Why do we suggest building your marketing nurture systems as a maze, not a funnel?

“The maze” isn’t intended to mean a trap or complexity, but rather a path to a sale that's **not linear**. That is the point. It's spatial. Which is the opposite of the classic online marketing funnel paradigm, where you do something online and you hope you directly get a sale or a lead or a customer.

Up until relatively recently, funnels have worked quite well. And still do, in cases where there is a short sales cycle. But if you need to nurture customers for a period of time, the funnel fails to recognise the multi-device, multi-channel world we live in. In the cases where a funnel does work well, it usually comes from what we call the direct response school of thought, where an ad, landing page and email series is tested over time. Which is admirable.

But today and really for the last three or four years, consumers online have come to be very burned out by that paradigm. They are now so used to clicking an ad and being immediately asked for their email address that they’re guarding their personal information much more closely.

In the old days, entering your email was new and novel. It was interesting and people would happily give their primary email address. Nowadays they don't. Or they're giving their spam address, their spare Yahoo or AOL address that they never check any more, because really they're just annoyed by you asking for their details. They want to get past it and see the next thing on the other side.

So if that no longer works well; if the average consumer is jaded, what are we going to do to draw them closer to a sale?

Part of the maze concept is this is not all just about sales. It's about trying to actually **help** and **serve** your customers and realizing that some content and some understanding is going to have to pass between us all before we can really help somebody. To various degrees, but we're not just going to be able to jump right in and close a deal.

So I'll give another example. What if you went to the doctor, who took one look at you and said, "Oh yeah. You need this surgery, right here." You'd be like, "Something is a little odd here. Don't you want to look at my knee? Don't you want to run an x-ray? Don't you want to ask me why I showed up in your office in the first place?" So there's a little bit of this going on in marketing too, even if the knee surgery is genuinely what you need. But nobody buys from a doctor who immediately wields a scalpel in your face.

## Give People The Tour...

So there's a million ways we can hit this up, but that is, in short, that's what the maze is all about. So rather than try and just grab a hold of somebody and yank them through the door, you want to give them some value up front. Maybe you could compare it to a tour of the office before you ask someone to sign a contract.

So really it's a model building a relationship with someone that isn't just squeezing their email address out of their brain. Or pushing them to a 17 page sales letter. You may still have a 17 page sales letter, but it's not the first point of contact any more. Or probably the second, third or fourth. Driving cold ads to long online sales letters is largely a thing of the past.

## Build Awareness

The basis of this is that someone has to first be aware of you before they'll opt in to your email list, but something from you, or whatever. If they've never heard of you, never seen you, never seen anything, then for them you **don't exist**. So first, you have to come into existence so to speak. They have to see your name, your offer, your brand, your whatever. They have to see you and see your stuff. We're really leveraging the power of retargeting as a form of micro-branding.

Sometimes this is a very quick process. Other times it may take years. So once they are aware of you, they may stop and actually give a little bit of their time. Which if you think about it, time is valuable for everybody. Because even if they're bored and have nothing to do, there's at least some other form of entertainment they could be looking at instead of reading your ad, your post, your blog, your page, your video, or whatever.

So the first thing is that they give you a little bit of their time and attention. And then they may give more. They may click, they may visit your site, they may read one article. They may read five articles. They understand a bit more about your perspective on things. You exist as a thing in their head.

Sooner or later, something may happen to where they do give you their email address. At some point, they may also give you their physical address, their mailing address, or their phone number. A phone number is specifically something that is considered very close to home. So if you think about it, the average person is going to guard their phone number far more than they would their email. Email is disposable, they can kind of ignore their inbox, or unsubscribe if your spam shows up in their box. But everybody has a gut instinct that if they hand out their phone number, it better be someone they want to hear from, because nobody wants their phone rung up by a spammer.

(Rob) I sort of half agree. I mean, it depends on what email address it is. If it's your old Yahoo address, you just hand that out to anyone. But if it's your real business email, where you read every email that comes in, then you think twice about it.

But I think it's interesting what you said about the level of attention. This level of attention is always going up or down. In deciding whether to engage with something we're always asking: 'how recently have you provided me with value?' Based on how valuable the last interaction was, it increases or decreases the chance of me engaging with you next time you appear in my email inbox, or on social media or whatever.

## The Maze is a Robust, Multi-Channel Approach

Picture the maze as a journey. The journey may take some time, and it may take a lot of touchpoints. Along that journey, it helps if people are able to see and hear from you in different ways. There's learning modalities, there's a format and channel modalities.

If someone only ever sees or hears of you in exactly one format (e.g. email), you aren't getting as much attention as you might with a multi-channel approach. But when people begin to see and hear from you in many different ways: you show up in a little ad on the side a webpage, you show up in their Facebook feed, you show up when they're watching videos on YouTube, you show up in a podcast, you show up in their inbox, maybe in the physical postal mailbox as well. It takes them on a much longer journey that creates more of a spatial relationship about your company in their mind. It adds layers of depth to the relationship.

## Prioritize Decision Points by Recency

To me, (Rob) the maze analogy also implies decision points. So someone enters your maze at some point by seeing something that you put out there, whether that's a lead magnet or a product. So then the question

is, which way are we going to go in the maze? So are we going to show them another content piece? Are we going to show them an offer? Are we going to try to spread them over other forms of media? Then I probably want to ask questions about recency too: how recently have they been on our website, for example.

If somebody isn't interested, there's no point in blasting them with your message. You would turn your volume up and down, so to speak, based on how recently they've engaged and how frequently they've engaged. You don't want somebody to just barely get to the edge of your world and then blast them with endless offers, and keep on blasting as they run away.

Recency is the most important metric in your maze system. How recently somebody clicked on an ad is a good indicator of how likely they are to buy, regardless of how much they've spent in the past. I (Rob) have various audiences defined in my email system. I have audiences of people who have clicked in the last seven days, clicked in the last 30 days, clicked in the last 60 days and so on. Then as time passes, people get removed from those audiences.

It means I can prioritise my ad spend on people who have been active very recently. I'm going to send those people more content, more offers and more love. Maybe send them postcards, letters and surprise things in the mail, if I have a mailing address. I'm not going to do this to my entire database, only people who have most recently engaged in some way.

Most pay per click platforms on social media are expensive for cold traffic (people who don't already know you). Click prices are not going down. You might as well prioritize your efforts based on behavior, and recency is the place to start.

The maze analogy comes from Perry Marshall, who originally introduced it as an email marketing methodology, where over time you send more emails to the people who click on stuff. If someone never clicks on anything, never opens anything, then eventually they get one email every two months or so.

Because people are spending less time looking at their email, and email is not the only way to stay in contact with people any more, you have to expand this. We now have things like messenger bots. We have direct mail. We have a million social platforms. So it's using the same model but expanding it out.

And that's part of that spatial idea. There's a much bigger scope of what people experience throughout the day. The email inbox is just one way to access them. One narrow little space in their day, in their activities in their minds.

I (Rob) think we really want to see ads from people and companies we know and like. My biggest frustration with Facebook is that I hate most of the ads in my newsfeed. I would like to see ads from people I'm opted in to or bought from in the past. But I mostly don't. Mostly it's people with some annoying aspirational message offering me five secrets to change my life. In exchange for my email address, of course...

The parts of your list that are most likely to buy again are probably the people who have bought in the past, rather than a cold person who's just come in. Most of marketing focuses on cold people, instead of warm. The Maze reverses this process.

## **Complexity...**

The downside is the maze it does add more technical complexity than just having an opt-in form, email series, and 17-page order form. It IS more complicated, because we also have re-marketing, and then we have different things circling around it that we add people to. You can't really get away from the issue of

making it more complicated. But increasing the complexity makes it impossible to copy, because your competitors can't see your strategy. And it makes it more robust because if a prospect stops reading your emails, they might still engage with you on a different channel.

So it does mean that you have more work to do. This isn't a short-term hack. You're building a three legged stool instead of a one legged staff to lean on.

## Content Production and Ordering

If you're producing regular content anyway often you can just repurpose that, and plug it into your remarketing ads. The whole maze system is carefully engineered to put these bits of content out in front of people in a certain order, over a certain amount of time. And no, everybody is not seeing everything at once. It has a sequential order to it.

I (Rob) actually do a combination of the two. I run a daily email so I have the ongoing production aspect, but then I repurpose my best emails into Facebook ads, books and other maze-worthy content. I only do this with emails that get the highest engagement (click through rate).

To put it another way, it's almost like the ongoing content production is a prospective exercise for coming up with content that could plug into your maze at a later point. There is nearly always gold in your archives of previous emails.

If I were to adopt a more linear approach and rely heavily on email, my email open rate is about 25% or 30%. People don't read every email. And they never will. And they won't read every ad, either. So I think it's a mistake to assume that just because you've run an email in the past, it's a mistake to assume you can't send it again, or repurpose it into a different format.

A lot of efficiency comes from repurposing content. When you create a content piece that resonates with your audience, you want to leverage it and reuse it in as many places as you can.

Look at all of the emails you've sent, and sort them by open rate, for example. Or pick out the ones that you have the most replies to. If you send out an email and you get a flurry of replies to it, then set that email up as a Facebook ad in your maze, as another way of nurturing your hottest, most recently engaged audience. You're not doing this with every email you send out. You're just looking back at data and cherry picking certain ones, and you're reusing stuff that you've already done.

So it's not like you'll create 12 pieces of content and leave it forever. You always want to be trying to improve those 12 pieces. You look at your stats and you go, "You know what, the first three are great, and the fourth one, nobody ever clicks on that thing, so let's try swapping it out for another one." So there is always some work and new content to be produced. You can't completely automate this. Plus you still need to get people into the maze to begin with.

(Rob) When you're planning these things out, do you map out what the pathways are going to look like, or do you let it evolve over time?

(Jonathan) To a degree you have to let it evolve. But you have to proactively plan it out too – you can't just wing it.

## Where to Begin

There's a handful of places that most people should start. So obviously email's the big one. Facebook is a big one. All three arms of Google. So search, Google Display and YouTube. And then depending on who your audience is maybe Twitter, and maybe LinkedIn also. It depends who you're selling to.

Nobody can do all of this all at once. If you count them all, there are hundreds of platforms. That's too much work. You need to pick at least three, maybe four and focus on those. It's best if there is some variety within it. So email and Facebook gives you a place to write some text, for the people who want to read. Google Display and Facebook give you a place to display an image for the people who are visual and are going to look at something you've got to show them. YouTube and Facebook then show video, and obviously there's the audio component of the video as well. People actually watch YouTube videos just for the audio.

So that gives people at least four different ways to absorb your message. Potentially, if you do those exact ones I just named, that's a very wide scope and people are going to see you all over the place. Especially when you add the Google Display Network in, those ads show up on other sites all over the internet. So you end up looking like you are everywhere. When we build this, our clients will often say, "Oh, I've had people contact me and say, 'Hey, I'm seeing your ads everywhere. You must be spending a fortune!'"

Assisted conversions are a real thing on Google Display. (An assisted conversion is where somebody *sees* your ad, doesn't click on it, and converts later from a different message.) It might be a Facebook ads or an email that gets people to actually buy, but it was the fact that they saw you quite a lot around the internet that set the groundwork for that sale. I think we shouldn't underestimate that as well.

(Rob) So someone's listening to this, and it's like, okay, the maze is great in principle. I'm going to identify three places to start. So say Facebook, email, and YouTube. Does that sound like a sensible starting point?

(Jonathan) Yeah and again, nobody can really build this out in a day. You do need to strategize. Be aware of the fact that you're going to have to build this over time. I've actually see people try to over strategize. They'll be like, "Here's my funnel map." And it's 16 feet wide and has 700 lines on it. I mean, go ahead if you want to, but that's going to kill most people. It's going to kill your creativity, too.

## Only Sell to Warm Contacts

The beginning of a maze is often about somewhere between 7 and 12 pieces of content. There's a hundred ways to look at this, but you're going to give value or nurture first, which simply means that the first few things that they're going to see from you are **not selling**. You're delivering content and exceptional value up front. You have to plug excellent content into the maze - that is the point.

When we say "nurture" or "give value", you may be teaching, you may be funny, you may be talking about current news or something else of interest to them. You're helping them get a new insight or learn about a new tool, or find a new way to do something. You're helping to clear something up, dispel a misconception, or solve an immediate problem. But you're not going to give a sales pitch in the first pieces of content somebody sees from you.

If you want to pick ONE place to start, then start with Facebook. Facebook is a great place to nurture cold prospects before asking them to do something, and you can build audiences of people who watch your videos. Maybe the first three pieces of content build engagement and the fourth one asks for their email address.

Once it's going well, copy it to another platform. Add in Google Display or YouTube. Build these things **one platform at a time**. Otherwise it will feel too confusing, and too overwhelming.

When we say “ad”, probably most people immediately think of this little thing that's got a little sales pitch inside it. So in this case, an “ad” simply is a message, or a bit of content, in any format that we are paying the ad network to distribute.

Unlike what most people probably think of as a classic ad, it is not a sales pitch at first. It's just a good message to build up trust, position us as an authority, and help those people get to know you before you ever give any kind of pitch.

Your responsibility when you're putting ads is first and foremost to the audience. Consider the reader first, and think about what he or she is interested in right now. I (Rob) sometimes like to quote Howard Gossage, who in the 1960's said “people read wherever they want to read, and sometimes that's an ad.”

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