

We have all heard and probably used the expression “it’s just a means to an end,” when we’re describing an intermediate step or building block to get us a desired end result. This phrase suggests the means are not as important as the end results, which is deadly wrong. The corollary is equally true, the means are just as important as the end result.

**In fact, there is no end without the means.**

Anything worth doing, that is built to last, is not built overnight. It takes years of hard work and sacrifice to lay the bricks one-at-a-time to construct the foundation. The intermediate work is the means to an end. It’s usually not glamorous, and it’s often difficult to find motivation for it.

The idea of consistent effort is nothing new in the world of sports. For example, us sports fans, have often heard the athletes and coaches say, “one game at a time” because the way to win a championship is to win your next game, every week. In contrast, reading about “overnight success” make it seem possible to skip the intermediate work, which in reality is nothing but a myth and click bait. Here is a good Huffington Post article on this topic if you need convincing:

([https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/09/08/the-illusion-of-overnight\\_n\\_5759966.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/09/08/the-illusion-of-overnight_n_5759966.html))

So what are the means to an end for marketers? Sales and marketing professionals are under tremendous pressure to produce quick results and can end up resorting to one short-term project after another to jump start a sales pipeline. While there is nothing wrong in trying to get results as quickly as we can, I have also seen many marketing teams get so bogged down with short term projects, they don’t have time to build anything lasting. Worse yet, are the teams that execute on short-term fixes that actually cause long-term harm. For example, buying low quality lead lists and “dialing-for-dollars” with poorly trained inside sales teams.

I was recently talking to the CMO of a mid-size security technology company, discussing how the Openprise product could help her team and also picking her brain about her keys to success. Today, this company has an inbound marketing machine that most CMOs would kill for. They are currently handling:

- 300 new customers every month from inbound leads
- 3,000 new inbound leads every week
- No outbound cold calls or cold emails
- The sales team is 100% inside sales and all they do is follow up on marketing leads and close

I asked for her secret sauce and silver bullet. There is none. These impressive achievements are the results of five years of unwavering commitment to develop an inbound marketing machine using some tried and true building blocks, including:

- Content
- Community
- Marketing automation

When she took over as the CMO 5 years ago, this company had just raised its Series A round funding and had an open-source product with good community traction, but little commercial success. This CMO focused on building quality content, fostering community engagement, and making the company into a trusted source of knowledge for security professionals. At the same time, she started laying down the technology infrastructure for marketing automation. Although the technology initially appeared to be an overkill, it became critical for scaling the inbound operation once the content, community, and brand was established enough to move the needle on inbound lead flow.

This CMO knew the end result that she wanted to achieve and she also knew the means required to get it. She is now onto the next chapter with a new end in sight — scaling the magnitude and efficiency of the inbound marketing machine with a focus on data.

We've all heard the expression; "Rome was not built in a day," and this phrase definitely applies to data quality. Your sales and marketing data is

probably not in very good shape today. Most companies' data is not. To get your database cleaned, normalized, segmented, and correlated is not easy. It takes commitment to get started and maintaining a data management/ data quality program takes long term planning and multi-year unwavering commitment.

**If you look at what end result you would like to achieve with your marketing program within the next two to five years, ask yourself if you can get there with your current data? The answer is almost certainly no.**

It is easy to get enticed by various “ends” type offering including shiny objects like business intelligence, predictive analytics, and account based marketing, thinking that they are the silver bullets to fix whatever marketing ills you may have. The truth is while these are all powerful technologies that every marketing team should have; they are severely limited by the quality of your data. Cleansing and segmenting your database is not as “sexy” as these new marketing technologies, but if you want to build a lasting inbound marketing machine, you cannot forget about the basics and skip building a foundation of high-quality data. Otherwise you are building a house of cards and will be disappointed when the shining new solution did not deliver the expected return on investment because it was fed poor data.

No one works on data for the sake of working on data, so data quality and data management are the means to an end, the end being a high-performing inbound marketing machine. Just remember, there is no end without the means. So if you want to build the next version of demand generation and marketing operations machine for your company, make sure you do not overlook or even underestimate the importance of getting your data house in order.