



# FUNNELS

**Which one should  
you use?**



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# Introduction

Throughout our human existence, people have looked for ways to structure and organize their surroundings. In the forever changing world known as 'marketing', many techniques and theories have come and gone.

Today, we are going to take a look at three funnels, each one varying in age, to find out if one is better than its counterparts.



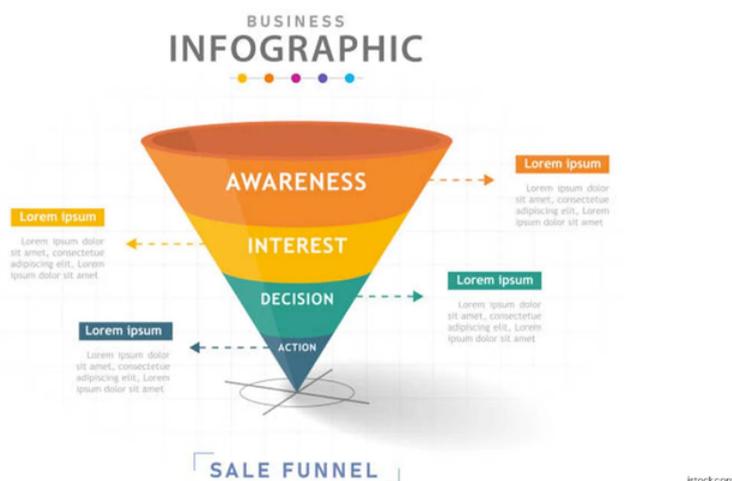
# Sales funnel

This is most definitely 'mr. Ol' Reliable' and it has been a cornerstone in marketing for over a century with its first use dating back to 1898 (Mark Ritson).

The triangular funnel has a top, middle and bottom and shows the journey potential customers go through.

When you've been around for over a hundred years, you're prone to some changes. That's why today there are several varieties, but almost all of them still include four phases:

Attention, Interest, Consideration, Purchase (or Attention, Interest, Desire, Action, also known as AIDA).



## Advantages of the sales funnel

The journey from cold prospect to lifelong client can be a long and complicated one. The sales funnel organizes it so that you can easily identify what's necessary at each stage of the funnel.

Is there a shortage of leads? Then you might want to take a look at the Attention or maybe Interest stage. Are people visiting your website or shop but aren't they buying anything? Then you should probably look at your Consideration or Purchase stage.

All in all, the sales funnel pretty straight-forward and easy to comprehend.



## Disadvantages of the sales funnel

In theory, moving people from the Awareness to Purchase stage seems like a simple enough prospect. In practice, that isn't always the case. **When using a simple funnel with four stages, identifying where the friction lies is a tough job.**

Imagine you have an online clothing store specialized in street clothing. For over a month, people have been visiting your online store but they haven't bought anything. You'll have a hard time identifying the cause because it could lie anywhere in the interest, desire or purchase stage.

The sales funnel also **doesn't include a retention and advocacy stage.** These two focus on keeping repeat customers and encouraging them to promote your brand without you even having to do anything in return.

A happy customer will gladly tell his or her friends and family about your brand or business. But sometimes, they need a little push. Retention and advocacy programs can provide the trigger. Sales funnels don't include these stages, so it's easy to overlook them, which is a pity.

### One more disadvantage. Or not?

HubSpot, one of the biggest online marketing and CRM agencies worldwide, also comments that the sales funnel does not take into account how people make decisions and doesn't reveal momentum. However, I disagree and let me explain you why:

A very vanilla sales funnel will indeed not take this into account. But it's perfectly possible to build a more elaborate sales funnel where you can track where and why people make certain decisions in your funnel.

For example, you can ask people what they think of your product a week after they pass through the Purchase stage. **It all comes down to how elaborate you build your sales funnel and how you use it.**

### Conclusion

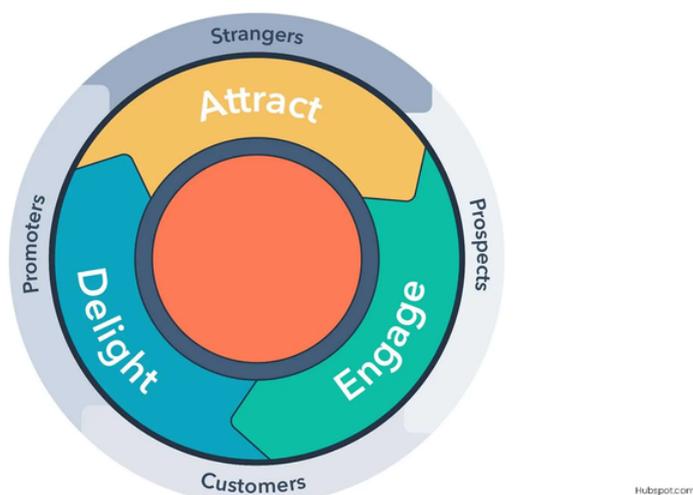
The sales funnel is a cornerstone in marketing that has proven its worth for over a century. It definitely still has some advantages, especially for **smaller businesses** who have just started and operate in a relatively **simple environment.**

However, even for these companies, the sales funnel will become irrelevant over time because, as you grow, it just doesn't provide the insights and complexity (which is actually a good thing here) that other funnels offer.



# Flywheel

The Flywheel is a circular type of funnel introduced by HubSpot in 2018. They presented it as the modern-day solution to the sales funnel. Let's see if their promise holds up.



## What is the Flywheel

The circle-shaped funnel shows where you **gain or lose momentum**, helping you to align your business around delivering a remarkable customer experience (HubSpot).

Your Flywheel spins either slow, intermediate or fast and it stores energy at several levels. This all seems very complicated, but it actually makes sense when you think about it.

The whole point of the Flywheel is to **attract new customers and offer them an outstanding experience**, prompting them to promote your business themselves.

If you're constantly pouring efforts into attracting, engaging and delighting your customers, your wheel will spin very fast. Happy clients will constantly bring in new clients through their testimonials and as long as you keep delighting new customers, your wheel will keep spinning.

Well, I hope your head is not spinning after reading all that. If it still doesn't make any sense, you can check out [this helpful video](#):



## Advantages of the Flywheel

The Flywheel seems to be a **customer-experience-oriented** funnel that doesn't necessarily treat customers as just an output. It helps you visualize how you can use momentum of happy customers to drive referrals and (repeat) sales.

If your wheel is 'slowing down', meaning you're not driving as much referrals or sales as before, you have living proof that there's friction in one of the phases which you should eliminate. Seeing as there are only **three phases that are different from each other** (attract, engage and delight), you can identify the areas where there's friction rather easily.

You attract new customers in the Attract phase, you engage with them by opening and nurturing the relationship and delight them by not only providing an excellent product or service, but by helping, supporting and even empowering your customers to reach success or solving a problem by using your product or service.

### That all sounds great, but...

Before we go through the disadvantages, I'd like to say something about the Flywheel. In theory, it's great. And it has the possibility to be great in practice as well. If implemented right, it can tie branches together as they are all contributing in some way to the velocity of which the Flywheel spins.

**That being said, it is definitely the most complicated funnel out there.** And that alone is enough to slow down your marketing operation. And even though we talked about the stages being different from each other and that helping you to identify where there's friction, this still requires thorough analysis and decent interpretation. Doing this wrong can slow down your Flywheel, even though you seem to be doing everything the right way, theoretically.

## Disadvantages of the Flywheel

The Flywheel might only be relevant for **really large companies**. Let's say you own a local bookstore. Do you really want to spend a large chunk of your time implementing the Flywheel and following up on everything that is associated with it? Most small and even medium businesses don't have the time and resources to do this.

The question also rises **how you would measure metrics such as "momentum" and "friction"?** And where would you put them on the Flywheel? HubSpot doesn't explain this, so that leaves us wondering.





The Flywheel also suggests that every customer is a repeat customer and that the process is circular. And while I agree with that mindset partially, there are also customers who go through the linear journey of seeing your business somewhere, doing some research, considering a purchase and then actually buying the product. I don't think someone who buys an Audi or BMW is looking to become a repeat customer in the next 5-7 years. A regular funnel could actually work better in these cases.

Last but not least, there are, as of right now, not a lot of cases where companies other than HubSpot have had great success with the Flywheel. Surely, there are companies who have had successful cases, but how much credit can we actually contribute to the Flywheel? Are the people involved, the tools they use, the experience they have and other factors not equally, if not more important?

### **Conclusion**

The Flywheel is still young compared to other funnels. There are a lot of opportunities for it to grow and become a useful tool in the future.

**As of right now, I don't think its relevant to use just yet unless you are a big corporation that sells products like (online) subscriptions where repeat customers and momentum are important, because you need to delight and engage your subscribers in order for them to stay subscribed.**

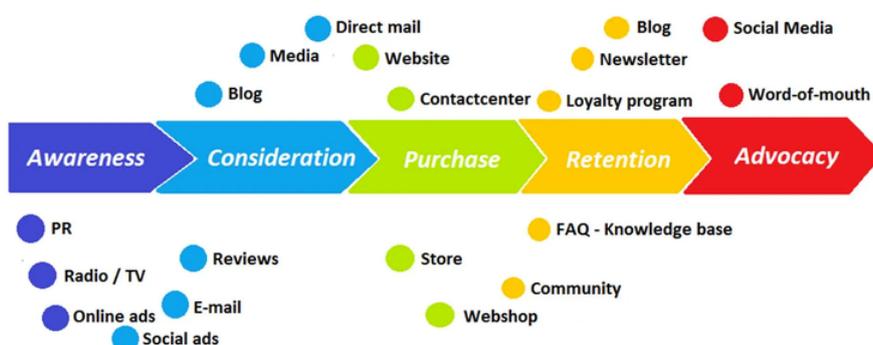
And the entire business model of HubSpot is based on subscriptions. So, I can see how this works for them. Hell, it works great. But there's still room for improvement and the Flywheel needs to be adapted and further evolved in order for it to be useful for different companies, both small and large and anywhere in between.



# Customer Journey

What is the Customer Journey? Well, you almost won't believe it, but it maps out the journey of potential customers. You see, there's no need to make things hard or complicated in marketing.

The customer journey is what I call 'semi-linear'. It goes in a straight line, but also takes retention and advocacy into account. So, it does what the Flywheel does, but in a much simpler way.



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## Advantages of Customer Journey

When building the Customer Journey, you **look at your business through the eyes of a potential customer**. This is a huge advantage, because, in the end, it will be the customer who decides whether or not you're worth their time. Looking at your business from their perspective can really open things up for your business.

The Customer Journey identifies what clients are looking for, where they're looking, how they're feeling,... That means you know what to say to them, where to say it, what words to use, etc.

The Customer Journey can also help you **predict what potential customers might want**. When looking at your business from their perspective, you can identify little extras that would fit in really well with what you're already offering. This can pleasantly surprise customers, encouraging retention and advocacy.



This funnel was created in the late 1990's, so it's not as young as the Flywheel but still relatively young compared to the traditional sales funnel. It's at that fine age where it's been around long enough to have proven results over time, but is still young enough so that it's not rusted into old (and wrong) habits.

But it's been around for over a quarter century though, and that means that inevitably there will be different variations and spins on it. But, throughout the years, most versions will include these **five stages**:

- **Awareness**
- **Consideration**
- **Purchase**
- **Retention**
- **Advocacy**

You've made it through this research so far (congratulations to you!) so you're familiar with what these stages mean right now.

What I like about the Customer Journey, is that it's relatively simple to assign certain things to them. For example, you know that a loyalty program belongs in the Retention phase and that an ad explaining the benefits of your product belongs in the Consideration phase.

### **Disadvantages of the Customer Journey**

You've probably noticed that I've been pretty positive about the Customer Journey. It's by far my most favorite funnel to use, so that might explain it. However, there still are some disadvantages that you should be aware of.

For starters, it's great that you can look at your company through the eyes of your potential customer, **but how well do you really know them?** Is it always safe to assume you know exactly who they are and what they want?

In order for you to make the right assumptions, you need to do **a lot of preparation and research** and, best case, actively include customers in helping you map out the journey.





You won't always have the time or resources to do this, however, leading to the fact that sometimes you have to make assumptions and guess what they want. This is obviously not recommended, but if you've got enough experience and knowledge about your customers and your product or services, a little calculated guess can do little to no harm. It's still not ideal, however.

But this guesswork can also be found at stages of the Flywheel and the Sales Funnel, so it's not exclusively linked to the Customer Journey.

You should also know that the "journey" isn't always a straight line. People can go from almost buying your product to changing their mind at the last minute and not consider a purchase again for over a year. There's little to nothing you can do about that.

It also is in danger of becoming too complex because there are just so many touchpoints today. A touchpoint is any time a potential customer or customer comes in contact with your business.

Today, there are about a dozen social media, television, steaming services, e-books, magazines, newspapers, books, road sings, billboards, celebrity and influencer endorsements,... Trying to fit them all in your Customer Journey can be overwhelming.

### **Conclusion**

Even though it can be challenging to view your business through the eyes of a customer, there are enough tools and even some happy customers who can help you do this.

**The Customer Journey is not too complicated, but still offers more than enough insights to make a well-thought-out decision about how you should proceed with your marketing and communication.**

It can, however, require some time and commitment. You will need to dedicate time and resources if you want to reap all the benefits of correctly building and implementing a Customer Journey. But even with limited resources, **I believe the Customer Journey is the best solution for small and large businesses.** Simply because it offers what the Sales Funnel doesn't, without making it as complex as the Flywheel.





## Also important

Your customers aren't all alike. I get it, though. We as marketers sometimes have to think in stereotypes in order to have a demographic to target.

However, it can benefit you to **build multiple funnels** that are tailored to a certain audience or segment in your target audience. This, of course, requires even more time and resources, but it's definitely worth it because you will inevitably see better results.

Let's say you have a store that sells vintage furniture. Today, half of the clients that visited you were 24-year-olds looking for vintage couches for their new apartment. The other half were 55-year-old looking for a classic table just like the one they had at their parent's house back in the day.

Do you think the touchpoints for these two types of customers are the same? In some cases, like when you're advertising with let's say a poster on a bus stop, that could be the case. But when launching an online campaign, you might want to create a short, attention-grabbing video on TikTok or Instagram for the youngsters, while having a more explanatory and easy-going ad on Facebook for the seniors.

**THERE'S ONLY ONE THING LEFT TO SAY THEN**

I wish you the best of luck with implementing whatever funnel you choose!

## Sources

Mark Ritson: If you think the sales funnel is dead, you've mistaken tactics for strategy

How the flywheel drives business growth and customer delight - Hubspot

What is the best sales funnel - Boelet





# Everything Marketing University

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