

# The Marketing Flywheel:

## How Automation Creates Sustained Growth

BY SEAN COFFEY

In today's competitive fireplace industry, hearth retailers need a marketing strategy that not only drives traffic but also sustains growth year-round. Whether your showroom is buzzing or in a quieter season, the key to continuous success lies in the "marketing flywheel"—a concept that involves investing in marketing automation and making sustained efforts to keep momentum going to generate consistent returns. At Regency, we've implemented this concept both globally and locally—applying it to grow our business and helping our dealers build smaller, self-propellant flywheels of their own.

### WHAT'S THE MARKETING FLY-WHEEL?

I was first introduced to the marketing flywheel by Rand Fishkin, the founder of the marketing company MOZ. While Rand used it to discuss content marketing, I took that concept and morphed it into more of a philosophy around an entire marketing department.

That said, the marketing flywheel is a way to visualize business growth as a cycle that gains speed over time, with each element of your strategy building on the last. Picture a flywheel that is difficult to push at first but becomes

faster and more efficient with each turn. For retailers, this flywheel can be powered by tools like marketing automation, SEO, paid search, social media, and email marketing—all of which build momentum to keep new customers coming in or old customers coming back, even during slower seasons.

By investing time and resources upfront and maintaining consistent effort, the flywheel builds momentum that delivers greater returns month after month.

### MODERN SALES FUNNELS

Fifteen years ago, the online sales funnel was pretty basic. Someone would Google "fireplace store near me," then call the store or visit the showroom. Back then, the goal was just visibility.

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But that's no longer the case.

Today, much of the buying process happens virtually, requiring hearth retailers to engage and educate potential customers long before speaking with them. Our data shows it takes eight to 10 digital touchpoints to prepare a lead to visit a showroom—and another three touchpoints to convert the sale. Notably, this doesn't include any in-store activities; instead, it's just the effort to move cold leads into the funnel.

Modern customers often start on Instagram or Pinterest for inspiration, then head to manufacturer or dealer websites to begin researching different products. They often go to two, three, or maybe even four different sites, downloading product guides or accessing configurator tools along the way. Several days later, they receive follow-up emails, re-engage with websites, and narrow their options. When they feel like they're ready to buy (or at least start that conversation), they finally search "fireplace store near me."

These customers now have way more information than those from 15 years ago. They know the look they want, which manufacturers suit their needs, and even which products they're considering.

As a hearth dealer, how do you fit into this customer journey? How do you add value to the pre-sale process?

Well, the more information you can give customers up front, the less they have to go elsewhere to seek it. This means that more of those touchpoints are yours, which increases the trust in your brand—and that makes customers more likely to work with you, regardless of the products they choose.

If you're ready to create a marketing flywheel that achieves these types of results, here are four steps to get you started.

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## STEP 1: IDENTIFY YOUR CHANNELS

The first step in building your marketing flywheel is understanding the key channels that will drive momentum. With that in mind, here's a brief explanation of four popular channels, along with some tips for leveraging each one effectively.

### Channel 1: Search Engine Optimization

1

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) forms the foundation of a strong digital presence. When potential customers search online for fireplaces, stoves, or inserts, your business needs to appear near the top of search results. Investing in SEO can bring a steady flow of traffic to your website long after the initial work is done.

As you're investing in SEO, keep the following tips in mind:

- Optimize product descriptions for keywords like "fireplace store near me" or "best wood stove."
- Ensure your website is mobile-friendly and fast, as these are key ranking signals for Google.
- Create helpful blog posts that answer common questions customers might have (e.g., "How do you choose the right fireplace for your home?")
- Remember that making ongoing investments in SEO helps keep your showroom in mind, even when customers aren't actively buying.

In short, SEO is a great way to introduce people to your company and start them down the funnel. By making sure that you rank for a wide range of terms, you can cast your net far and bring people into your ecosystem.

## Channel 2: Pay-Per-Click Advertising

# 2

While SEO is a long-term strategy, paid ads provide immediate results. Paid search and display campaigns on platforms like Google, Bing, and Meta allow you to target specific keywords and audiences, driving instant traffic to your website. You can also use custom retargeting campaigns to show ads to people who have already visited your site and create the required number of impressions.

For fireplace retailers, significant investment in lead generation is worthwhile during peak seasons like fall and winter, but it's also crucial to maintain a presence in other seasons with ongoing retargeting campaigns. This keeps the flywheel moving by generating more impressions with potential customers.

## Channel 3: Email Marketing

# 3

Email marketing remains one of the most cost-effective ways to stay connected with your customers. With a solid email list, you can regularly inform potential buyers about new products, special promotions, and industry trends. The key to a successful email marketing campaign is to ensure you're providing valuable content. When writing emails, consider the following questions: What's in it for your audience? How are you making their lives easier with this email? Are you educating them, offering them something, or showcasing your expertise? Every email you send should have a purpose—not just a sales pitch about why you're the best fireplace dealer in town.

The sooner you can get potential customers into your email lists, the better. Not only is it the most cost-effective way to reach customers, but it's also one of the most engaging and trackable. You can also segment your email list to send targeted offers. For example, send homeowners who recently purchased a wood stove an email about chimney cleaning services or maintenance tips. This builds trust and ensures your customers keep returning for additional products and services.

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## Channel 4: Social Media

# 4

Unpaid social media is a fantastic way to build your community, showcase your products, and expose your brand to customers at the very top level of the funnel. Think of it as a way to capture people and pull them into your flywheel. You can do that by using platforms like Instagram and Facebook to share authentic content, such as reviews, before-and-after photos, and inspirational designs.

To build value into your flywheel, there needs to be a strategy and a consistent cadence coming from your social media. What type of content are you publishing? How often are you posting? Are you aspirational, or do you want to be relevant and jump on trends through a fireplace lens? No matter how you answer these questions and others like them, tailor your message to the platform and the audience you're trying to reach, such as using direct marketing calls to action on Facebook but going more generic and indirect on Instagram or TikTok. It all depends on the platform and who you're trying to reach.



STEP 2: BUILD AN IMPRESSION MODEL

A well-executed flywheel comes down to basic math. The more people you can get to automatically engage with your brand and your content, the better. To move more people through the funnel and spin the flywheel faster, you need to build it so that it automatically generates the required number of digital touchpoints to drive someone into your showroom.

So, how do you do this? What does the math look like?

Take each channel you are working on, and find the engagement number for that channel. If you're looking at your marketing emails, for example, what's the Open Rate? If you're looking at SEO, what's your Search Impression Share? If you're looking at paid ads, what's your Impression Rate? Once you know the answers to these types of questions, you can layer in some cost data and create Expected Engagements (xE) for each channel. To demonstrate this, let's plug some sample numbers into the chart below.

Channel	Engagement Rate	Expected Engagement (xE)
Email	25%	0.25
SEO	35%	0.35
Paid Ads	25%	0.25
Social Media	10%	0.1

Now you can take this information and build out our flywheel, combining the total number of interactions to hit your magic number. How many emails do you need to send potential customers? How many different marketing messages do they need to see from you? And how will they see these messages (search, ads, social, etc.)?

Channel	Engagement Rate	Potential Touchpoints	Expected Engagement (xE)
Email	25%	12	3.0
SEO	35%	6	2.1
Paid Ads	25%	10	2.5
Social Media	10%	8	0.8

In this example, the average person needs to receive 12 emails, see your company in search six times, be exposed to 10 ads, and view up to eight social media posts. That's a lot of potential touchpoints, and most people likely won't be exposed to all of them. But we need to build an ecosystem where it's possible—and where it's mathematically likely that they reach the desired eight to 10 touchpoints. Building this automated ecosystem that's designed to hit your magic number is what the flywheel is all about.

On a final note, you can create a cost model for your flywheel if you layer cost data with each of your xE. Extend that out to include your funnel conversion rate, and you can get a full understanding of what your marketing budget needs to be to hit your sales target each year.

STEP 3: CREATE CONTENT

Central to this entire process is content. Given that, a robust website that's full of useful information and emails that speak to customers' needs are both essential. It's how you add value to each customer's day and show your expertise. Without killer content, your flywheel won't spin.

As a busy business owner, what can you do? If you don't have an in-house marketing team, you can hire one. You can hire writers and give them all the ideas for the content you need. You can use ChatGPT and other AI tools to create drafts for you, and then either edit these yourself or have someone on your staff do it. Simply put, there are lots of options available to you, but all of them will require significant time and investment in the creation and publication of high-quality content.



## STEP 4: AUTOMATE YOUR MARKETING

Automation is essential to the marketing flywheel. By automating tasks like email follow-ups and audience ad targeting, you can ensure that everyone who interacts with your company gets a seamless message and that your marketing efforts are consistent without overburdening your team. Marketing automation tools (such as HubSpot or Mailchimp) allow you to enroll potential customers into your pre-built sequences that ensure they are being exposed to the right number of emails, ads, and website pages. As they move through the funnel and closer to a buyer, you can enroll them in follow-up sequences.

A typical lead funnel may look something like this: New Lead → Open Lead → In Progress → Closed.

When you're setting up your marketing automation, you'll want to segment leads by each (i.e., New Lead vs. Open Lead vs. In Progress). As leads move through the funnel, they are added to new email sequences and advertising lists with specific messaging for that phase of the journey (and removed from old lists so they don't get excessive or mixed messages).

For example, when potential customers browse gas fireplaces, you can set up an automated email sequence that sends them more information on gas fireplaces, special promotions, or reviews. They can then be added to a marketing audience list, which shows them ads about the top gas fireplace brands you sell. This personalized approach increases the likelihood of conversion and helps sustain engagement with your customers.



## SUSTAINED GROWTH: THE PAYOFF OF CONSISTENT INVESTMENT

At Regency, we have seen tremendous success implementing this for our dealers. We have seen a 3x return on investment and an average of +10% increase in sales for dealers participating in our programs.

When done right, the marketing flywheel ensures that your business keeps growing, regardless of market fluctuations. By investing in automation, content, SEO, paid search, and recurring marketing efforts, you can build momentum that drives traffic year-round. Each of these channels feeds into the other, and they're all working to pull new customers into your funnel—even before they become "leads" or fill out forms on your website.

By embracing a strategy of consistent investment and automation, fireplace retailers can future-proof their businesses and create a steady stream of ready-to-buy customers.

Whether you're new to automation or looking to enhance your existing efforts, there's never been a better time to start spinning your own marketing flywheel.

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