

SPITFIRE

Navigating Productivity: Some thought starters

Introduction

Chapter 1: How continuous skills development will motivate your staff

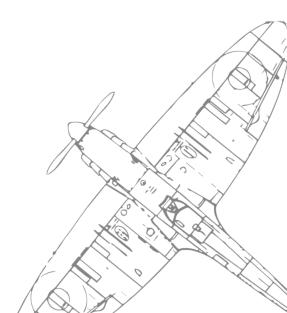
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Introduction

Times have changed, easy access to the internet, the abundance of cloud-based tools, and the shift to remote working mean that businesses are able to be more flexible. But this means that society has created an always-on mentality and everyone is expected to be productive both in and out of office hours.

So, how do you remain productive in this fast-paced working world and still manage a work/life balance?

Here at Spitfire, we've always had a remote working, always-on lifestyle so we understand this dilemma. That's why we put together this complication of tips and tool suggestions from our own experience to help you create a more productive working environment.

How continuous skills development will motivate your staff

Create a culture of learning in your company and your employees will not only be enthusiastic knowledge seekers, but also bring enthusiasm and expertise to your day to day business.

Creating a learning culture through continuous skills development offers mutual benefits to staff and business owners. By committing to a culture of learning and skills development, you'll increase innovation, productivity and staff retention in your business.

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"Learning cannot be an afterthought - it must be a core focus of any strong organization. (...) A commitment to training is seen by employees as an investment in their worth and a powerful incentive to stay at the company." - <u>Kevin Griffin</u>, Chief Information Officer at <u>GE Capital</u> <u>International</u>, in an interview with <u>CIO magazine</u>.

Retaining talented, long-standing staff on your team can reduce the need for you to hire additional resources, and in the long term, this will save you time and money.

There are, however, a few common questions and objections around the topic of learning in the workplace. Here are four frequently asked questions about creating a culture of learning in your organisation, and some insight into how to approach them:

1. How do I create a culture of learning in my company?

According to Sharon Florentine, a senior writer for CIO magazine, creating a culture of learning means "embracing new information and innovations and leveraging those into a pipeline of talent" to gain a competitive advantage. To effectively create a culture of learning, Sharon explains that businesses must fully commit to skills development programmes, promoting "continuous improvement, not just maintaining the status quo".

Spitfire Inbound's MD, Darren Leishman has long been an advocate of this - he signs off all his mails with "**Stay Curious**". As a business, Spitfire Inbound includes both soft and hard skills development in its performance measures for individuals, teams and the business. Learning goals are set as key performance indicators (KPI) in each quarter, and at the end of the each quarter, progress towards these KPIs is reviewed with new **learning goals** being set. Forbes magazine writes, "organisations are only as good as the people who work there, the people who make the brand what it is". In order to remain ahead of your competition, you need to focus on building a culture of learning in your company. "To stay relevant in today's business world," according to Forbes, "requires a fierce desire to learn, to improve and to adapt".

Jeff Boss, a Forbes contributor, identified the following:

- Assign mentors to new members of the team: Mentors are responsible for showing newbies the ropes - what's right, what's wrong and what to avoid doing at all costs. Team members that are new to the workforce sometimes lack life experience and need a little help learning how to make effective decisions in a business context.
- Allow staff room to make mistakes: Failure is an opportunity to learn, leaders must embrace failure and use it to teach junior staff members how to get it right next time.
- Review tasks as a team: Spend a few minutes analysing a project and looking at the expected outcomes vs the actual outcomes. Doing this as a team allows everyone to voice their opinions and brainstorm how to improve their work in the future.
- Don't allow error to fester: If an error is made, address the issue immediately, using constructive criticism. There's no need to make a big scene, just make it known that this was not the correct way to complete the task. It can be a costly mistake to allow staff to continually make the same error over and over.
- War-game everything: Strategise as a team. It's a good idea to include various team members who can add different perspectives. You need a group who'll ask questions and poke holes, until you're certain that you've covered all your bases.
- Avoid character flaws and ego: Skills can be taught, character can't. The only way to ensure a healthy, productive and effective team, is to make sure you hire the right kind of people. Trust, authenticity and co-operation are crucial elements to every business. Social skills are not only important for customer service. The main value of social skills is seen in relationships between your staff members. If everyone has a co-operative nature, tasks will be divided up quickly and effectively without any office politics. Happy staff are productive staff.

2. How can I identify someone's ability to learn?

The Economist magazine published a special report on Learning and Earning, in their January 2017 edition (also available online). This report covers various aspects of skills development in the workplace, such as why lifelong learning has become an economic imperative, how employers can encourage low-skilled and older workers to retrain and what effect technology will have on our jobs, as we enter the age of automation.

Learning and Earning identified two frequently asked questions about hiring for a culture of learning:

How can I identify curiosity in staff or candidates?

With the movement towards continued learning as a corporate priority, employers are wanting to know how they can screen applicants for curiosity. At present, there's no definitive way to test, but data-driven tests are in their trial phases, such as the app Knack which is a "gamified psychological test" to determine a person's strengths and weaknesses.

A rough indicator of a growth mindset, and ability to learn, is whether or not a candidate has completed university. This is why many businesses add a degree as a requirement on all of their job descriptions, even those which might not actually require one.

Is it possible to train people to learn?

At present, it's unknown whether or not curiosity is a trait that can be taught. However, there are ways to teach people how to be more effective learners. This involves making them aware of their own thought patterns while they're learning, so that they're more likely to continue acquiring new skills.

When it comes to older employees, learning new skills in a familiar field shouldn't pose a problem. In fact, Timothy Salthouse, director of the Cognitive aging Laboratory at the University of Virginia, says that "if learning can be assimilated into an existing knowledge base, advantage tilts to the old". As we get older, we accumulate knowledge (crystalised intelligence) which compensates for our declining cognitive speed (fluid intelligence).

3. What if my staff leave after I've invested in them?

One of the most common objections to skills development programmes, is that staff might leave after a costly training programme, taking their newly acquired skills to the competition.

Whilst you have no real guarantee that this isn't going to happen, Gail Jackson, vice president of human resources at United Technologies (UTC), reassures employers in The Economist, that it's "better to train and have them leave, than not to train and have them stay". Gail says UTC wants "people who are intellectually curious", this curiosity indicates an aptitude for continuous learning.

This attitude is common amongst large corporations. Satya Nadella, Microsoft CEO, has amended the company's performance review criteria to include learning outcomes, pushing the company's culture towards a culture of learning.

4. How do I measure the ROI of a skills development programme?

Another reason why businesses may be reluctant to initiate skills development programmes is that there's not an obvious, immediate payback. Whilst ROI might be hard to measure, it's not impossible. PayScale, an online salary, compensation and benefits information provider, reports that there are a few metrics that businesses can track, to measure the effectiveness of their skills programmes.

These metrics are:

- Outcome measurement: The impact the training is expected to have on the company's most important goals so, for example, sales training could be intended to contribute 20% to the company's goal of increasing sales by 10%.
- Effectiveness measurement: Indicates how well skills development programmes contribute to the overall organisational outcomes. This is a quality measurement.
- Efficiency measurement: Indicates the level of a company's activity and investment in skills development for example, the number of learners in the programmes and what percentage they represent of the total staff, the costs of training (including time) and how this training is applied following the completion of the programme.

Tracking these metric will give you an accurate gauge of the ROI of your skills development programme. A culture of learning is about more than just the skills your team will develop; it encourages curiosity and engenders loyalty in your staff too.

And remember...



5 practical productivity apps for your team

From managing your workflow to scheduling meetings and even fitting in some exercise, these new productivity apps will help you achieve your daily goals, without the added stress.

Creating a learning culture through continuous skills development offers mutual benefits to staff and business owners. By committing to a culture of learning and skills development,Let's face it, today's workplace is competitive. With the ever-increasing demands to perform and to impress the 'powers that be' on a daily, weekly and monthly basis... we could all do with a little helping hand to boost our performance and productivity.

We've rounded up five excellent (and easy-to-use) apps that can supercharge your productivity, ensuring you make the most of your time, increase efficiency and get more done.

1. SLACK

It's not a new kid on the block, but this app is certainly one I recommend for business use. It allows for collaboration between teams and individuals, and can keep those pesky mail trails at bay. The beauty of slack is that you can make it fit to your lifestyle and preferences. If you only want to use the app during work hours, have the desktop app loaded and on when you're at your laptop "check in" with your team and let them know you're online. There's also a great mobile app for both Android and IOS, so you can ensure FOMO never get its grip on you. you'll increase innovation, productivity and staff retention in your business.

What we love	The integrations into platforms like Google Drive and HubSpot
IOS	Yes
Android	Yes
Paid version?	Yes

2. Basecamp

To do lists coming out of your ears and can't remember where you put that pesky piece of paper with that very important thing to do that you just can't remember on it? Be gone with those days! Basecamp is an effective collaboration tool for teams and clients alike. We love it because it enables clear information sharing between individuals and teams alike in our agency. As a manager, I know exactly where projects are in their timeline, and which to-dos are overdue or need my input. Picture this tool as your to-do list on the go... on steroids. If you're in a meeting, simply capture your to-dos there and then, and when you're back at your desk, fine tune them with the finer details such as descriptions and deadlines. This also means that if anyone picks up a project you're working on, they know exactly where tasks are in the pipeline. It also has the nifty feature of being able to add clients, but only to things that you want them to see.

What we love	The client collaboration features The app Ease of use - this app is intuitive
IOS	Yes
Android	Yes
Paid version?	Yes - \$89 per month

3. WorkflowMax

This one is for companies specifically - it will revolutionise the way you monitor monthly job and task progress across clients, as well as their related costs, resource allocation, and profitability. The beauty of WorkflowMax is that it also has the full financial capabilities you require to run a business, through its sister program Xero. From quoting, through to job creation, timesheets and invoicing, as well as purchase orders and so much more, this app will enable you as a manager to make sure your business is ticking, and help identify any loopholes in the financial and resource allocation components of the business.

What we love	The timer - log your timesheets on the go as you start a task and press "start" on the app. The reporting - build any report you like, from profitability of a job task, through to total productive hours in the business
IOS	Yes
Android	Yes
Paid version?	Yes - user number dependant

4. Google G Suite

Ok, I know this one isn't a productivity app per-say, but it's important to feature because being cloud based as a business is crucial to efficiency, safety, and collaboration. The G Suite offers an array of apps and features, but our favourite is the Google Drive, It enables swift and easy collaboration both internally and externally with clients. Even as an individual, this app will revolutionise the way you store your personal documents.

What we love	The use of Google Sheets, Slides and Docs
IOS	Yes - all apps in the suite
Android	Yes - all apps in the suite
Paid version?	Yes

5. Apple watch workout

Keeping fit, especially in current times, is vital to the health of your body and mind. That's why many of us have an Apple Watch to monitor our progress during the day... and remind us to get up from time to time. It has an array of apps to choose from in the App Store when it comes to workouts, however my firm favourite remains the standard Apple app that monitors your fitness. Apple is forever expanding the list of exercises to log your workout as, so you can make sure you're monitoring your fitness as accurately as possible.

What we love	The tracking! Things like water intake, workouts, and steps.
IOS	Yes
Android	No - there are multiple fitness trackers available. Try Strava as a good alternative
Paid version?	N/A

Of course, there are many apps out there such as Strava and Nike Run, but I'm a sucker for anything Apple, and despite having a Garmin Fitness Watch in the past, you just can't beat the challenging notifications that appear on your apple watch. Eg. "Hey, you're much further behind in your progress today than you were this time yesterday, try a little harder".

Change the way you work with the Pomodoro Technique and our useful tips

Find the time to do the things you love when you maximise your productivity with our handy productivity tips and methods.

The 'traditional' 9 to 5 approach may be something of the past to many people, and making your work-life balance work may seem impossible some days. While there isn't an exact one-size-fits-all approach to getting the most out of your workday, we have some great productivity tips and tricks to help you breeze through your day AND getting to do the things you love.

Equip yourself with the best tools and techniques to manage your time and get the most out of your day.

Our top tip? Make the time to plan your day.

Whether you do this as your day winds down, and you plan your next day, or you plan out your day first thing in the morning, find the best time for you, and write down what's happening work-wise, and how you can tackle it. This way, you can exercise some control over your workday and how it will play out.

Then, prioritise your Most Important Tasks (or MITs, fancy)

Mark Twain once said, "If it's your job to eat a frog, it's best to do it first thing in the morning. And If it's your job to eat two frogs, it's best to eat the biggest one first."

While eating a frog might seem daunting to most people, he had a good point. Maybe tackle the most daunting or biggest task first thing in the morning to set yourself up for success and sail through the rest of the day. Not a fan of tackling the big task first? Sweat through the small stuff first to curb the niggling anxiety, then move onto the rest and achieve bliss.

It's all up to you.

Do you find that the small stuff makes you sweat?

How about grouping smaller, similar tasks together instead of jumping around between tasks? If you have work that is related or need the same mind space, try grouping them and doing them in batches. When you do this, your brain isn't continually switching gears and you can, indeed, get more done, improving your productivity. For example, **set up email response times during the day** (and stick to them).

Reaching inbox zero may be nirvana to some. But according to Campaign Monitor, "experts generally agree that 121 business emails are sent and received each day" (and that was before 2019!). So, in reality, inbox zero may be a pipe dream for many business people out there.

We recommend setting up a triage system in your inbox and then setting up specific times during the day where you actively check and respond to your emails.

Here's how a triage system could play out:

- Critical emails emails that require quick response or actions (you may normally expect these based on projects).
- **Urgent emails** emails that require response or actions on the same day.Important emails emails that require a response or actions in the same workday.
- Normal emails emails that warrant a response in a workday.
- Team emails emails that warrant a response in 24 hours.
- The rest marketing emails, notifications and the rest of the emails that you can respond to when you have time.

Filter your emails according to your triage system when it is time to check in on your mails and prioritise your responses.

You can also **manage email response time expectations** with an appropriate away message when you are not available for prolonged amounts of time (like when you're sitting in that strategy session). For example, ask people to contact you via phone or text when a matter is urgent, else respond as soon as you're back!

While our next tip seems very obvious, it is one that many people feel isn't needed. But you need to **take breaks**.

There are many apps and methodologies out there that can help you manage your time and break more often, you may feel like you do not have the luxury of taking a break. Fear not! Not only to frequent breaks help you keep your mental, emotional and physical health at peak levels, you'll find that you also are more productive.

Here are our favourite time management techniques:

- The Pomodoro technique: focus for 25 minutes, break for five
- The 52/17 rule: focus for 52 minutes, and break for 17

These methodologies will help you to set your focus time and break time and perform more optimally. To help you stick to these, there are a variety of apps and plugins available to help you form your new productivity habit.

While managing your time and productivity is important, we do strongly recommend looking after yourself. Have you thought about creating some buffer time between meetings?

While you may feel most productive and wanted in back-to-back meetings, your brain wasn't built for that. You need time between meetings to decompress, gather your thoughts, file some thoughts and mentally (and physically) prepare for your next meeting.

Buffer time can also help you be on-time for your next meeting if the other runs late. Remember, without that break, it's more difficult to stay focused and motivated throughout the day. Think about it, do you need five minutes or maybe 10 between meetings to capture meeting notes, grab a beverage or have a bathroom break?

While you're thinking about that buffer time, how about using that time to just breathe?

Filling your day to the brim with tasks and meetings may seem like the best use for your time, right? Wrong. When you take the time to plan your day, also schedule in some buffer time.

We believe that you need to leave some breathing room in your day. Whether it is finding inspiration for a new campaign, meditation, going for a walk, or just decompressing. You can even use this time to dazzle clients with an urgent task! How about booking a lunch break, AND sticking to it?

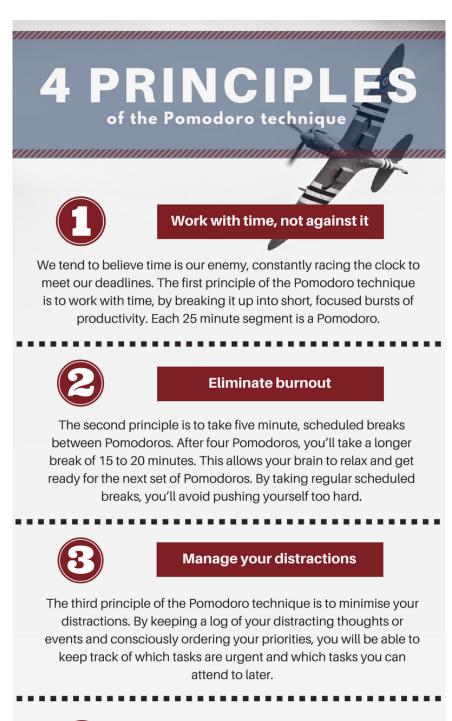


"To do two things at once is to do neither." - Publilius Syrus

While we may feel like masters of the universe when multitasking, the human brain isn't wired for that. Which is why we recommend approaching each task mindfully. Be present and do the task at hand to the best of your ability, without quickly checking your emails, or Facebook or Instagram, or answering that text. As a result, you're making considered decisions and add more value while completing the task at hand. That's a win in our books.

Have you seen a technique or two that you'd like to try to increase your productivity? Remember that it takes 21 days to form a habit, and 90 days to make it a permanent lifestyle change. While you may not see immediate results when trying our productivity tips, you will be benefiting yourself in the long run and soon become a time management master.

How does the Pomodoro technique work?





Create a better work-life balance

Finally, the Pomodoro technique forces you to overcome procrastination, one of the biggest culprits of stress. Creating an effective timetable and sticking to it will help you to be productive when you need to be, but it will also help you enjoy your down time more. You'll be able to enjoy your leave, without that report you're avoiding weighing on your conscience.

Three applications of the Pareto Principle to boost your productivity

Discovered in 1906, the Pareto Principle continues to fascinate economists and mathematicians with the frequency of the 80/20 ratio in all areas of life.

The 80/20 rule seems to pop up everywhere, but what makes this ratio so special? We see it used in various different contexts, from politics to health and safety, science, software and sports; but most commonly, we see the Pareto Principle appear over and over again in business.

Our team has discussed the significance of the 80/20 ratio on many occasions. The most recent one? A discussion about web design during a webinar with Luke Summerfield from HubSpot at a Joburg HubSpot User Group session. After the webinar, I decided to take a trip down the rabbit hole and see what else I could find out about this fascinating number.

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Curiouser and curiouser!" Cried Alice (she was so much surprised, that for the moment she quite forgot how to speak good English). — Lewis Carroll, Alice's Adventures in Wonderland

In the late 1800's, Vilfredo Pareto, an Italian economist, became interested in the distribution of wealth amongst the Italian population. Upon investigation he found that 80% of the country's land was owned by a mere 20% of the population. He performed further investigation into the wealth distribution in other countries and, to his surprise, Vilfredo found the same 80/20 ratio applied. This phenomenon became known mathematically as Pareto Distribution, but is more simply described as the Pareto Principle.

You'll come across the Pareto Principle in various forms in business, such as:

IDENTIFY THE 20% WHICH WILL AFFECT 80% OF YOUR RESULTS



At its core, the 80/20 rule explains the phenomenon whereby approximately 80% of effects are derived from 20% of causes.

As a productivity tool, the 80/20 rule suggests that we focus our time and energy on the 20% which will deliver 80% of our results. The following three applications of the Pareto Principle can be used to boost your team's productivity:

1. The Pareto Principle and automation

Pairing automation with the Pareto Principle means that things won't fall through the cracks. When developing your strategy for automation, it needs to focus on the 20% of the task that you do the most frequently. Remember that until you have done an action several times, it is not ready for automation. The tasks that require the majority of your time can be automated through workflows and templates, which then allows you to spend that crucial 20% of your time on focusing, allowing you to optimise and gain insights from the reporting. This in turn allows you to improve your marketing and sales efforts and decrease the time spent on getting the best results.

Including automation in our process has allowed phone calls and meetings to be decreased. Since implementing automation in certain areas, the need for follow-up conversations for certain production actions was no longer needed. For example, in our content team, a social media task is automatically created in HubSpot once the content has been internally reviewed and moved to the correct pipeline. We were also able to set up automation that removed the friction from content production through to publication, allowing the relevant people involved in the process to be notified of their required actions, with deadlines. It also means that reports on our operation efficiency is readily available. However, human intervention is still important. Quality control and managing personal priorities cannot be easily automated, and in order to keep projects on track it is important that the team moves projects through the relevant pipelines accordingly.

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What to find out more about inbound strategy? <u>Click here</u> to download our guide to inbound strategy.

2. The Pareto Principle and your to-do list

If your diary looks anything like mine, and you have deadlines coming out of your ears, you can use the Pareto Principle to simplify your to-do list.

The Awesome Life, a motivational YouTube channel, shared a great video explaining how the 80/20 rule can revolutionise the way you tackle your workload. By identifying the which tasks fall into the most urgent 20%, you can focus 80% of your effort during your day on completing these tasks. This means that even if you don't get to the other 80% of your list, you've ticked off the most important items.

By combining the Pomodoro Technique with the Pareto Principle, you're bound to see an improvement in the number of tasks you're able to complete in a shorter, more productive period of time. The best part of getting your time management under control is that you'll quickly see your stress levels decrease, leaving you more time to enjoy the things you love.

3. The Pareto Principle and problem solving

Another way you can apply the Pareto Principle, is to conduct a Pareto Analysis to assist with problem solving. A Pareto analysis is used to identify which issues are causing you the most problems.

There are **four steps** to a Pareto Analysis:

• Analyse cause and effects: During this step you will need to clearly define the problem and brainstorm a list of possible causes. This step is commonly referred to as a root cause analysis.

- Assign a score to each possible cause: During this step you need to score each possible cause relative to its impact on the problem at hand. For example, if the problem is that your staff are constantly missing deadlines, you could list each possible cause by the amount of time it wastes. Your list could look something like this:
 - No internet: 10 minutes
 - Computer crashes: 8 minutes
 - Bathroom breaks: 5 minutes
 - Phone calls: 120 minutes
 - Social media: 12 minutes
 - Broken elevator: 6 minutes
 - Meetings: 180 minutes
 - Coffee breaks: 15 minutes
 - Errands: 20 minutes
 - Office distractions: 20 minutes
- Create a Pareto chart: It's fairly easy to see that, in the example above, phone calls and meetings are the leading causes of time delays. This means that you should start by focusing on minimising the length and frequency of meetings and phone calls in order to free up time to work on meeting deadlines more efficiently. If you're working on a more complex problem, you would create a pie chart to help you determine the top 20% of the causes.
- Translate the chart into a Pareto Graph: The final step is to turn your chart into a graph which can be presented to the business' decision makers (this step is optional).

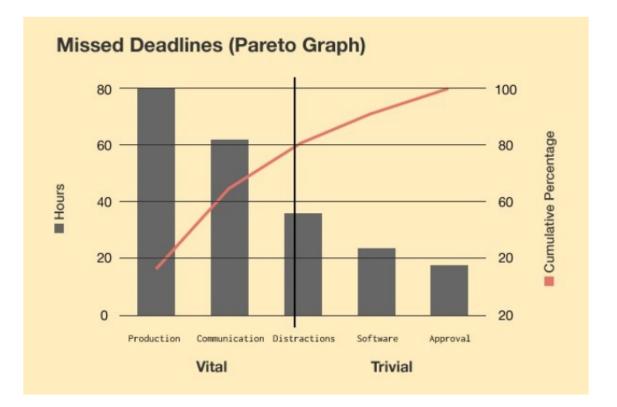


Image source: Envato

4. The Pareto Principle and Growth Driven Design (GDD) for Website optimisation

Luke says that we should use the Pareto Principle when designing our websites in order to increase our ROI for our client. We can see consistent value throughout the GDD methodology implementation. By identifying which pages on our website are most likely to add value for users (and ultimately drive conversions), we can focus our efforts on perfecting those pages first, before moving on to less important areas on the website.

This principle should be applied across all areas of business. We need to identify which activities fall into the 20% that produce 80% of the value for both client and agency in terms of income and ROI. Once we have pinpointed the critical 20%, we can then focus our time, energy and resources on those activities.

Applying the Pareto Principle to your goals or tasks can provide an excellent framework to work from, but remember that it's a guideline and not an exact science. The 80/20 rule is a great yardstick for how we should be analysing efforts and outcomes, and should be included as part of a holistic strategy when looking to improve your company's performance.

This principal is all about optimising your productivity and in order to do just that you should always plan ahead, especially for your marketing efforts.



Do you want to plan for your yearly marketing efforts... a year in advance? <u>Click here to Download our marketing calendar</u>.

Meet the Authors





Alison Leishman

Alison studied Occupational Therapy and worked in the field for over 20 years in various capacities. She's been involved full time in the marketing world for the last couple of years in a number of roles - content creation, data analyst, researcher and strategist.

Her key focus at Spitfire Inbound is understanding the client and their prospective customer. In particular, she looks at their behaviour and the motives behind their behaviour; translating these insights into an effective and unique inbound strategy.

Louisa Du Toit

Louisa has a unique knowledge of a wide variety of industries having worked in Financial Services, Travel, and the Automotive industry. With experience in project management, marketing consulting, and content, she brings her own style to the Spitfire team. Louisa was drawn to Inbound because she likes helping people solve their problems with content, and nudging them along the way to purchase or sign up without throwing loud products in their faces. In her free time, Louisa enjoys cooking, knitting, crocheting, sewing, reading, board games, and computer games. Basically, she's just another Spitfire nerd.

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