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ARE YOU TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THE HIDDEN SALES CYCLE?

Leading businesses track customers' online movements to predict their buying behaviour. It's easier than you think...



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WHAT IS THE HIDDEN SALES CYCLE?

The hidden sales cycle has emerged over the past decade as the world has moved online. Before, the only way customers and prospects could get information about your products and services was by talking to you. Today, talking to you is the last thing they do. By the time they finally get in touch, most of them will have made their decisions.

The reason? They are much better informed than they used to be. Social media forums and networks, specialist peer groups, company websites, industry media and analysts all provide customers with more than enough information for them to move through the research and evaluation phases of the buying cycle without ever directly speaking to a provider of the product or service they are looking to buy.

Many sales teams will not even be aware of this 'hidden sales cycle'.

It's likely that your company's sales teams are not using social media to find new business... Your challenge is to ensure that prospects find your company during the online research stage.

READING 'DIGITAL BODY LANGUAGE'

Leading companies track where prospective customers are looking online to predict their buying behaviour. With the right software, analysing this 'digital body language' is easy. You can find out where each prospect has been online - what content they've read on your blog, for example, or which of your emails and webpages they've opened.

Lead management is easy to integrate with your CRM, giving your whole team a comprehensive view of your customers. You can then measure if they're ready to buy before you make that crucial sales call.

FOUR STEPS TO DISCOVER THE HIDDEN SALES CYCLE

With so much content online and so many companies offering the same products and services, how do you make sure that you get on your prospects' radars during the crucial research stage?

Follow these simple steps and you can make sure that it's you they find rather than your competitors...

STEP 1: KNOW WHO THEY ARE

If you're going to provide the information that lets customers know you are the provider for them, you need to know exactly what your target audience is:

1. **What is their job role?**
2. **What business pains do they need to resolve?**
3. **What does a day in their life look like?**
4. **What do they want to achieve by investing in your products or services?**

Work with the marketing team to develop 'target personas'. Once you know who you're trying to speak to, getting them engaged will be much easier. Get help on developing personas here.

STEP 2: KNOW WHERE THEY'RE LOOKING FOR INFORMATION

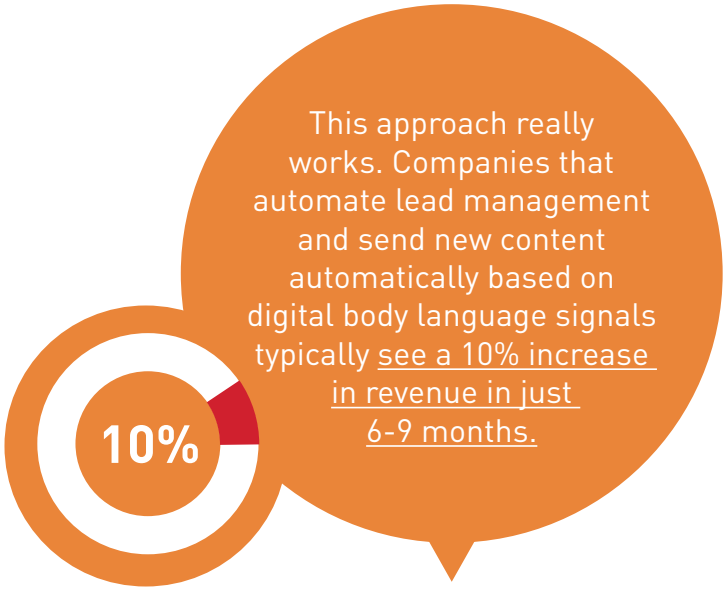
With so many possible places they could be hanging out online, where do you start? Well, in the B2B world the most common places people go to get feedback, help and information are:

- **Twitter**
- **Facebook**
- **XING**
- **LinkedIn groups and forums**
- **Industry analyst websites**
- **Trade magazine and association websites**

Once you've found what social media networks they are active in, you should join the conversation through social selling. But don't just go in there with a hard sell - talk to people and start developing your reputation for knowledge and adding value. These tips from Social Media Examiner will help you get started on LinkedIn.

STEP 3: DEVELOP THE CONTENT THAT WILL ATTRACT THEIR ATTENTION AND SEND IT AUTOMATICALLY

Work with your marketing colleagues to develop educational and engaging content that shows your prospects how they can become more effective and efficient, without ever telling them they need your products and services to do so. A lead management system can send emails automatically to whoever you choose - for instance, prospects who have looked at a certain product page on your website could be emailed a certain eGuide. Messages need to be useful and customer-centric or your content just won't get read.



STEP 4: START THINKING REAL-TIME

Once you've established your social networking presence by interacting with people and developing your reputation for being a thought leader in your industry, you can start pointing people to your blog or website content while you're having conversations with them online. You can also leverage the real-time reporting functions in your lead management system to see which customers are currently online; then make that call or send that text there and then. **Find out more about real-time marketing here.**

TAKEAWAYS

To start making the most of the opportunities in the hidden sales cycle, you need to:



Identify exactly who you're targeting and know what their business pains are, what they want to achieve and how they plan to achieve it.



Get online and start developing relationships in forums and groups to grow your reputation as a value-adder and thought leader.



Work with your marketing team to develop the content that your prospects need and want and use lead management solutions to deliver content and move prospects along the buying cycle until they are ready to talk to you.



Use the real-time reporting functionality of your lead management system to see how your prospects are interacting with your emails, website and web content so you can engage with them at the right time.

If you follow these steps, you will net more customers and convert more leads into sales.

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Are you taking advantage of the hidden sales cycle?

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