LEAD FOLLOW UP GUIDE



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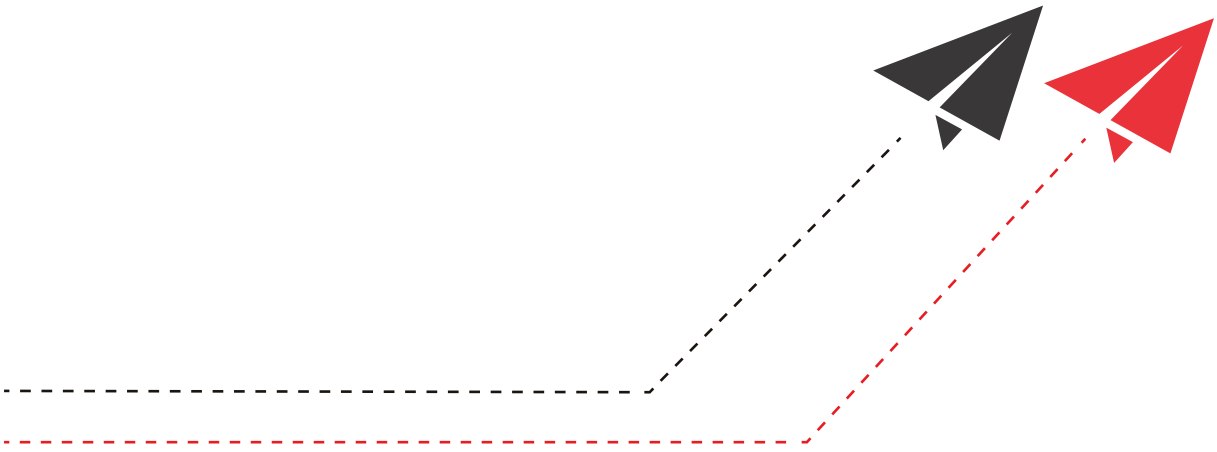
THE FUEL DRIVING YOUR ENGINE

If you are a B2B business, leads are the fuel driving your sales engine, and it's now well understood that content marketing is the most effective method for generating them. In fact, content marketing has been proven to cost 62% less than traditional marketing and generate about three times as many leads.[1] However, a batch of content-driven leads shouldn't be mistaken for guaranteed sales. Sales and marketing teams that can boast of high-conversion rates can do so because of their lead follow up strategy. This guide will help you develop your lead follow up strategy to ensure you get the most out of your lead generation campaigns. It will explain how successful lead follow up relies on a thorough understanding of your new contacts, a rigorous lead scoring and nurturing program, and deep collaboration with your sales team.

First it's important to define exactly what a lead is and, crucially, what a lead isn't.

- A lead is someone who has expressed interest in your content, but not necessarily your company and products
- A lead is involved in the buying process for their business, but it is likely only one part of a larger buying team
- A lead's business may have need of your product, but isn't necessarily ready to buy

What you can know for sure is that a lead is someone who fits your target persona, has shown an interest in your content and therefore the subject matter, and is happy to be contacted with more information. Assuming any more about your leads beyond that could set your sales team up for failure.



1 https://www.forbes.com/sites/steveolenski/2016/10/11/the-ups-and-downs-of-b2b-content-marketing/#10576fda6023

DEFINING YOUR LEAD PERSONA

Before you kick of any lead generation campaign, you'll need to define the lead persona you'll be targeting. It can understandably be tempting to target executive-level or bottom of the funnel decision-makers with your lead generation efforts but filtering your leads too soon can often be counter-productive. Below are some considerations to take into account when defining your ideal lead persona.



HIGHER ISN'T NECESSARILY BETTER

While you might see high level executives as the best people to talk to about purchasing decisions, you'll likely find them incredibly difficult to contact. They are often time-poor and less willing to field sales calls than other leads. However, considering that there are estimated to be 6.8 people involved in B2B buying decisions,[2] you might see better return broadening your persona scope, and talking to those who can influence executive purchasing decisions.

6.8 PEOPLE ARE INVOLVED IN B2B BUYING DECISIONS



PLAN FOR THE FUTURE

Likewise, excluding leads that aren't currently looking to purchase right away could see you throwing away potential future opportunities. Placing these leads into a nurture program gives them time to grow accustomed to your brand, so that you become the go-to option when the time to buy comes around. This long-sighted approach should provide your sales team with healthy pipeline for quarters to come.



CONSIDER THE COSTS

Remember that with higher qualification comes greater cost and a lower volume of leads, as those leads become to harder to generate. Following a broader scope and effectively nurturing top-of-the-funnel leads can often provider far superior ROI in the long run.

2 https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesagencycouncil/2018/05/22/have-you-adjusted-to-these-three-changes-in-the-b2b-buying-process/#314e4bd7c445

COLLABORATE WITH SALES

Your sales team can contribute front-line insight into past lead performance so it is wise to include them at this stage. By collaborating now, both parties can enter the campaign with clear expectations and you'll be offering your sales colleagues a valuable head start in preparing their pitches. Remember, companies with aligned sales and marketing generate a whopping 208% more revenue from marketing.[3]

COMPANIES WITH ALIGNED SALES AND MARKETING GENERATE **208% MORE REVENUE** FROM MARKETING

FIRST STEPS WITH FRESH LEADS

When it comes to following up with leads, speed is of the essence; one now-famous MIT study found that 50% of buyers will choose the vendor that contacts them first.[4] In today's competitive climate, success can be as simple as being the fastest to the phone. With an average of 27% of B2B leads being deemed sales-ready,[5] this can represent a sizeable pot for sales teams.

50% OF BUYERS WILL CHOOSE THE VENDOR THAT **CONTACTS THEM FIRST**

However, don't make the mistake of forgetting your remaining leads. While they might not be quite ready to commit to a purchase, they've already demonstrated enough interest in your content to show that they're open to persuasion. Once the initial follow-up call from your sales team is over, make sure any leads that are yet to convert are returned to marketing, ready to be entered into the next stage of the process – lead nurturing.

The goal of a nurture stream is two-fold.

3 https://pages.ghagency.com/abm-statistics-to-ease-account-based-marketing-doubts

4 https://www.onecavo.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/MIT-InsideSales.com_Lead-Response-Management.pdf

5 https://sherpablog.marketingsherpa.com/email-marketing/b2b-lead-nurturing-importance/



SCORE YOUR LEADS

Firstly, you gain the chance to further profile your leads and score them to determine their sales-readiness. If you determine they're nearly ready to buy, then you can create a timeframe for passing them back to sales, who can focus their efforts on the most relevant leads. If you determine that they are not ready, then they can be entered into your nurture stream until such time as they are. Scoring leads in this way has been proven to improve lead generation ROI by 77%.[6]



PREPARE FOR SALES

The second goal is to enhance their perception of your organisation, educate them about your products or services, and ultimately push leads further down the sales funnel. A healthy stream of quality content is a key element in successful nurturing (don't just bombard leads with sales brochures), so make sure your library covers every level of the sales funnel and you're nurturing leads with content that is relevant to them. Ultimately, sales will reap the rewards of your nurturing, as it's been proven that organisations with nurture programs are typically able to increase their pool of sales-ready leads by as much as 50%.[7]

LEAD FOLLOW UP

Before your sales team start contacting leads, it's important that they know what to expect. The following tips should help to ensure that sales get the most from your leads.



BE PREPARED

Your leads will behave far differently to inbound leads that will have sought out your business, and it's vital that you tailor your tactics to reflect that. They'll likely require a softer sell and will expect a personalised sales approach in exchange for their time. 89% of buyers disengage if a sales professional doesn't have insights into or knowledge about their business,[8] so make sure you do your homework and be prepared to spend some time cultivating your relationship.

6 https://sherpablog.marketingsherpa.com/b2b-marketing/lead-gen/lead-scoring-tips/

7 Calculating the REAL ROI from Lead Nurturing, Marketo

8 https://business.linkedin.com/sales-solutions/blog/h/how-b2b-buyers-perceive-sales-professionals

KEEP ON CALLING

Persistence is key in lead follow up. Different studies have found that the average number of calls required to reach leads vary from 6[9] to 18.[10]

REACHING LEADS CAN TAKE BETWEEN **6 AND 18 CALLS**

TAKE THE "FIVE NOES" STRATEGY

Once you do get through to a lead, there are any number of reasons why they might be unwilling to chat: they could be short of time, needing to do more research or even just having a bad day. It's easy to give up at this stage, in fact 44% of sales people do concede after receiving a single "no",[11] but perseverance eventually pays off. 80% of prospects say "no" four times before they say "yes",[12] so adopting a "five noes" strategy will ensure that you won't miss out on potential sales.

80% OF PROSPECTS SAY "NO" FOUR TIMES BEFORE THEY SAY "YES"

REFERENCE THE CONTENT NOT YOUR COMPANY

You've managed to make an impact and capture your lead's attention with your content but at this stage they may still be fairly new to your business and its products. Assuming that they're well versed in your offerings and willing to discuss them could be detrimental. Instead, when contacting leads it's best to reference the title of the content they accessed and suggest a discussion around it. After all, your content is establishing your expertise and it's been proven that 92% of buyers only engage with sales professionals if their business is a known industry thought leader.[13]

9 ibid
10 https://blog.topohq.com/sales-development-technology-the-stack-emerges/
11 https://www.marketingdonut.co.uk/sales/sales-techniques-and-negotiations/why-you-must-follow-up-leads
12 ibid
13 https://business.linkedin.com/sales-solutions/blog/h/how-b2b-buyers-perceive-sales-professionals



SEND LEADS BACK FOR NURTURING

If you find that a lead simply isn't ready to buy, don't write them off. A time may yet come where they choose to revaluate their provider, so pass them back to marketing for further nurturing until the time is right. 20% of leads take more than 12 months to buy,[14] so don't give up.

20% OF LEADS TAKE **MORE THAN 12 MONTHS** TO BUY

POST-CAMPAIGN

Once your campaign is complete and your leads have either been contacted by sales or placed in a nurture program, it's time to start evaluating your successes and failures.



INITIAL FOLLOW UP STRUCK THE WRONG CHORD

Your sales team are the first point of contact for every new lead. If your sales team consistently return disgruntled leads that are unwilling to engage further, it's worth investigating what might have gone wrong. Host a roundtable with your sales team to discuss sales tactics and tones. Are pitches too pushy or follow-up calls too frequent? It may be that together you can identify areas for adjustment that will ensure greater levels of success with future leads.



YOUR CONTENT FAILED TO RESONATE WITH LEADS

If leads were failing to recall your content when contacted, or were unsubscribing from your marketing emails, it could be indicative of a flawed content strategy. It's worth asking your lead generation provider for feedback on the quality of your content. They likely promote hundreds of pieces on a daily basis and can provide expert advice on how to make your content more impactful and memorable. Alternatively, the problem might not be with your content itself but with the variety of content you have available. Do you have content mapped to every level of the marketing funnel or have you only focused on certain areas?

14 https://www.marketingdonut.co.uk/sales/sales-techniques-and-negotiations/why-you-must-follow-up-leads



YOUR TARGETING WAS TOO NICHE OR TOO BROAD

Defining your ideal target persona takes a certain amount of fine tuning. If your small batch of highly targeted leads were impossible to get on the phone it could indicate that you need to widen your lead gen net. Whereas if your sales team frequently found their calls being redirected or turned away, it could be a sign that your efforts need to be more focused.

With your leads either well on their way to purchasing or enjoying the benefits of your nurture-stream, and your campaign strategy evaluated and fine-tuned, there's only one thing left to do – prepare for your next campaign. emedia's other offerings, such as account-based marketing, industry surveys and content creation, can help you to expand your lead generation endeavours, reach new audiences and improve lead engagement.

CONCLUSION

Connecting with your leads is more of an art than a science, and finding an approach that works for your brand, products and employees is part of the learning process. However, by following the advice in this guide and continually working to improve your lead generation, nurturing and sales strategies, you'll enjoy far more worthwhile relationships with your leads, and ultimately, see far superior ROI from your campaigns.

CONNECTING WITH LEADS IS MORE OF AN ART THAN A SCIENCE

About emedia

With two decades of experience in lead generation services, emedia today delivers news, content and advice to an audience numbering over 55 million contacts worldwide and consisting of prominent industry influencers and buyers.

Benefitting from our expertly curated calender of sector-specific bulletins, emedia is able to offer unique insight into what makes an effective content marketing campaign, equipping us with the tools required to take your campaign seamlessly from content creation through to syndication.

Get in touch to find out how emedia's content creation and lead generation services can assist you in meeting the changing expectations of B2B buyers.

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