FINALIST 2013

B2B AWARDS



Category number:	**7**
Category name:	**Best use of social media**
Programme/initiative name:	**Social Selling**
Agency:	**Mason Zimbler**
Brand or client:	**IBM**
URL or microsite:	http://www.ibm.com/cloud-computing/uk/en/
Word count:	**Summary 188 words**
	Main entry 974 words (excluding headings)

Summary

IBM has broken new ground proving that socially identified leads (SILs) can make a *tangible* contribution to the sales pipeline.

It began with detailed analysis of social media activity amongst the professional IT community. This revealed that conversations regularly involve language that can be aligned with traditional BANT (Budget, Authority, Need, Timescale) criteria for sales lead qualification.

This entry looks at how 'intelligent listening' can enable SILs to be melded with BANT. It means SILs can enter the sales funnel on an equal footing with other marketing qualified leads.

The outcome is a breakthrough programmatic approach to harvesting quantifiable, quality inbound leads via social. Customer insights have been used to deliver finely-tuned strategic and creative direction that takes B2B social marketing to new level.

Results to date include:

- ✓ 11% click through rate to IBM commercial sites following social engagement
- ✓ 19 per cent of all Public Cloud Inside Sales Rep Page traffic attributed to social media activity
- ✓ **95 fully qualified social scored leads with BANT-type criteria**

This pioneering, scalable approach to handling and routing SILs provides a blueprint that could revolutionise demand generation for B2B organisations.

i. About the client company

IBM is the world's largest IT and consulting services company. It has a diverse client base and delivers innovative solutions to help solve some of the toughest business challenges.

This entry concerns social media activity to support the internal sales team for B2B products and services.

ii. Strategy – broader business objectives and how this activity relates

IT professionals increasingly use social media for product research. It is estimated that social conversations will form an integral part of the decision making process for 75 per cent of IT professionals in the future.

IBM wanted to tap in to this community via social media to support B2B inside sales.

The challenge was to find an innovative way to build enduring relationships with this exacting, technically savvy audience. Activity needed to drive sales leads and embrace IBM's culture of innovation, ideas creation, openness and trust.

This entry looks at two phases of strategic development. The first aims to generate quality sales leads via interactions on social media platforms. The second seeks to prove that socially identified leads (SILs) can make a *tangible* contribution to the sales pipeline.

iii. Objectives of the campaign

Phase one objectives:

- Generate a high quantity of good quality socially identified leads
- Efficiently progress social leads: awareness to engagement to conversion

Phase two objectives:

- Generate fully-qualified social leads in line with BANT* method of qualification
  (*lead scoring mechanism based on customers' Budget, Authority, Need, Timescales)

All activity followed a core 'listen and respond' model. The first campaign tested whether intelligently intersecting social conversations of the target audience could generate leads.

The second phase built on the success of this ad hoc activity, piloting a more sophisticated, intelligence-led, programmatic approach in a bid to generate fully BANT-qualified leads.

iv. The target audience

Professional IT managers of small to medium sized businesses are the primary audience.

However, the nature of the activity (intersecting social conversations) means any IT decision makers 'hand-raising' in the social space can be targeted. To date, this has included finance and procurement professionals, managing directors, chief executives and chief information officers.

v. Media, channels or techniques used

Media: Twitter, LinkedIn, relevant industry blogs and forums.

Rationale: IT decision makers are very active on these platforms. They increasingly use them as a sounding board or research tool when considering new products and services.

Phase 1: Listen and Respond

IBM sales reps were trained and equipped to listen and contribute to social conversations, identifying and progressing potential leads. Activity fell into three stages:

1. Monitor the social sphere to identify hot topics
    - Areas of focus included: customer questions on Twitter and LinkedIn, industry themes being discussed, challenges and pain points
    - This underpinned development of customer understanding, particularly the role of social channels in decision making
    - A social framework and toolkit were developed in line with specific customer needs, drawing on IBM's depth and breadth of expertise

2. Join social conversations (two-way dialogue – addressing customer needs)
    - Reps equipped with relevant and timely posts and links to valuable content (the social media toolkit) via HootSuite
    - Enabled them to respond to questions, join debates, make recommendations and share relevant content that went beyond sales-led messages

- Development of recommended hashtags extended reach and relevance
- Reps became ‘go-to’ points of knowledge for IT professionals

3. Drive leads to each sales rep’s personalised digital page
    - At the right moment, reps directed leads to dedicated webpages to share relevant content and information about the solution they were selling

Phase 2: Social Command Centre

These details were provided to judges in the original submission but are commercially sensitive and therefore confidential.

Image 1: sample social media posts using key indication terms



vi. Timescale of the campaign

Social toolkits: activity ran April - July 2012

Social command centre: activity began in January 2013 and is ongoing

vii. Budgets

These details were provided to judges in the original submission but are commercially sensitive and therefore confidential.

viii. Results

Phase one: Activity grew the top of the sales funnel and drove incremental traffic to IBM's Public Cloud commerce engine.

Objective	Results to date
Generate a high quantity of good quality leads via social channels	✓ 19 per cent of all Public Cloud Inside Sales Rep Page traffic attributed to social media activity ✓ **11 per cent of these visitors clicked through to commerce sites**. *A great achievement since inbound leads are more cost-effective than those attracted via paid-for media; they also convert at a higher rate*.
Efficiently progress social leads: awareness to engagement to conversion	✓ 55% increase in Twitter followers ✓ 1.5 x increase in LinkedIn connections ✓ More than 3,500 tweets and retweets compared to less than 500 at implementation ✓ More than 2K ow.ly clicks driving prospects and clients to Rep Pages

Phase two: Social Command Centre pilot

- ✓ **95 fully qualified social scored leads with BANT-type criteria delivered and accepted by sales**

Going forward, the Social Command Centre will be developed to provide a blueprint for automated social media activity that can be integrated with existing solutions e.g. CRM systems.

ix. Client testimonial

Cheryl L. Mikovch, Senior Marketing Manager, Channel Marketing Cloud Computing, Global IBM Inside Sales:

"This progressive social media strategy has led to better cohesion between sales and marketing. The first phase enabled sales reps to build stronger personal networks. They are now fully engaged and participative in online conversations of target audiences. This is leading to a tangible increase in sales directly attributed to social media conversations."