Prospect Engagement

Automate to Dominate

QuantaCRM™

Introduction

Whether you are launching a business or taking the necessary steps to grow and diversify an established one, you are looking to pull in new clients and customers. The overarching label for this effort is business development. But that doesn't get to the down and dirty.

Business development starts with an honest appraisal of what you are able to deliver—product, service, or promise of one to come (for those looking for investors)—and at what capacity to which you are able to deliver to a hopefully clamoring crowd. And that honest appraisal starts with the definition of the people that make up your clamoring crowd.

Definitions

Lead - We define a "lead" as "a potential customer or client, someone who has raised their hand for more information." Leads may have attended a webinar or downloaded a white paper, and, in so doing, provided contact details and indicated that they are a potential sales opportunity for you.

Prospect - We define a "prospect" as "a qualified and interested individual who, through two-way interaction, has demonstrated that they are preparing to make a purchase decision." A prospect is further down the funnel than a lead.

Lead Nurturing - Forrester Research defines "lead nurturing" as "a sustained relationship with influencers and decision makers in a potential customer, through which relevant and valuable insight is delivered through integrated channels in a coordinated process, in exchange for increasing intimacy and influence." Lead nurturing is how a lead becomes a prospect.

What Is a Lead?

A lead is a potential customer or client. Depending on your business and the maturity of your industry, you may already know who your leads are. They may be your competitors' clients. They may be other businesses within your immediate geography. Or you may have to conduct professional market research to determine who you should pursue.

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With digital marketing and social media, you can enter a market poised to sell without having a call list. Successful marketing campaigns deliver qualified leads to the sales team. You can engage with potential clients through content offerings (webinars, videos, white papers, hosted live events, LinkedIn posts, company blogs, and online communities) or promotional marketing (discounts, giveaways, or contests).

Use of CRM tools provide visibility into lead activity online—website visits, duration of those visits, URLs of pages viewed, as well as click-throughs on email. This data enables lead scoring or ranking, which helps sales conversion rates. In fact, much of the functionality baked into a CRM solution can maximize sales productivity, not only as you capture and track leads, but once you convert them and throughout their customer lifecycle.

As long as you are waiting for a business to communicate purchase intent, it is a lead. Once you receive indication of purchase plans, a lead becomes a prospect and moves deeper into your sales funnel.

Initial hand-raising or inquiry from a lead enters that company into the wide end of your sales funnel where folks may not be decision makers or even influencers. They may not have the budget to buy from you nor intent to purchase anything in the marketplace.

Here is where your work begins—moving a lead's inquiry into a prospect's decision; moving inquiries through the sales funnel by qualifying that they intend to and have the ability to purchase, even if not immediately. This happens through prospect engagement, first in the form of lead nurturing. Determining the actual promise of business to come takes committed communications and marketing finesse.

What Is Lead Nurturing?

According to Forrester Research, companies that excel at lead nurturing generate 50% more sales at a 33% lower cost than their less sophisticated peers.

In the simplest terms, lead nurturing is education. It is the act of talking about your products or services as solutions to each lead's challenges. This education can and should take many forms. It should use layman's terms, not jargon, and include scenarios that will be familiar to your sales targets and come from authentic company experience. There is no requirement that these be actual case studies or even anecdotes. However, your educational messages should be relevant enough to keep the conversation going so that marketing builds demand and passes active leads and prospects along to sales.

Lead nurturing is a documented success driver. Forrester Research's 2014 lead management evaluation found companies that excel at lead nurturing generate 50% more sales at a 33% lower cost than their less sophisticated peers.

To nurture a lead, you want to sustain two-way communications that succeed in furthering education about your company and solutions while learning about the lead's company culture and challenges. When the education pivots and your sales team takes a lead from marketing and begins to learn more about them, consider assigning a sales representative to remain with the lead, for consistency and personalization, all the way through the funnel.

Prospect engagement is not only necessary to move qualified buyers to place an order, but to keep interested parties engaged with your brand, informed about your offerings, and in place when their budgets open up or their purchase decisions are made. Marketing should care for warm leads to prevent them from eliminating your company from their consideration set, sealing them in the sales funnel and fostering a relationship with value-added content. In addition, leads who make it to the middle of your sales funnel, hopefully becoming prospects in the process, need continued time and attention to drive them further down the funnel to a sale.

This sales-marketing split of responsibility for revenue is the cost-effective choice, too. Even with tools that measure the effectiveness of and return on marketing investments, the sales team runs up against much greater pressures to make quotas and bring in contracts or orders. Thus the marketing department can help sales reps focus on prospects in the final stages of closing while educating the bulk of leads—those in the top of the sales funnel.

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Nurturing establishes a rhythm of contact. Communications will comprise a spectrum of emails and value-added assets (videos, infographics, white papers, event invitations, phone calls) that may look spontaneous but actually follow a well-crafted calendar informed by prior lead or prospect engagement behavior. Your CRM system and marketing automation tool run the back end of such scheduled spontaneity.

Consider adopting progressive profiling practices that allow you to collect a little more information about leads each time they engage. Start with basic contact information, then gather more—about needs, budgets, and timelines—as the lead engages with your brand. If you rank or score leads by their time to decision/length of sales cycle, this buildup of data may elicit new rankings that are ultimately helpful in making sales more efficient and driving the best ROI on each nurturing effort.

How Does CRM Help with Lead Nurturing and Prospect Engagement?

Do you remember your company's entrepreneurial start? Even necessary partnerships and purchases—those critical to your company's launch and day-to-day functionality—were made with intelligent due diligence. Your mid-funnel prospects are following this process, and to the extent that your marketers communicate industry expertise, trustworthiness, and reliability, your company positions itself for the eventual sale.

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The majority (some estimates are as high at 80%) of your competitors will not keep slow movers in their sales funnels, despite the trend of longer sales cycles across industries and increasing numbers of stakeholders in each purchase decision. Thus adopting even a simple nurturing program can give you a significant competitive advantage. Plus, keeping leads and prospects in the funnel and nurturing them reduces cost per aquisition, increasing your return on investment.

Customer relationship management (CRM) solutions can pitch in as early as lead capture. If your awareness communications, such as webinars, require online registration, you have data with which to begin building a relationship, as well as the first mapping of specific communication to a point in the customer lifecycle.

Your marketing team will handle digital touchpoints while creating a record to which your sales reps can contribute their later interactions with leads or prospects. The aggregation of these messages in a broad application like CRM makes it easier to collect, analyze, and use important insights about leads and prospects to increase relevance in marketing and sales campaigns. This ensures a consistent, compelling experience, no matter which department is driving the conversation.

Reps gain insight they can use to personalize their pitches by content format, channel, and problem-solving language, each of which encourages leads to take the next step in the sales process. If the rep shows that he understands the buyer's concerns, it increases the chances that the buyer will move forward. According to one study on the state of marketing, 86% of senior-level marketers say personalization is absolutely critical or very important to creating a cohesive customer journey.

After the sale, customer support will extract intelligence from the CRM system to manage even tough conversations. The feedback they contribute to the customer record will flesh out the client's journey, help predict future sales, and estimate overall account value.

A record of each engagement attempt—email campaign, seminar invitation, demonstration video, etc.—and lead response enables marketing to determine which leads are moving through your funnel, and which may have moved onto greater engagement with a competitor or have decided against a purchase in the near future. When a lead doesn't use your communications, they may be indicating that they are not a viable opportunity or that their timing for a purchase has changed.

As a central repository of marketing communications and sales resources, a CRM system reduces the errors inherent in manually inputting call notes, price quotes, and discounts. Each prospect engagement and lead nurturing history item is logged and available for comparison with that of other customers with similar size or territory, or with similar challenges.

This kind of data can come in handy, not only in pre-sales lead nurturing, but post-sales too. It makes clear many of the cross-sell and upsell opportunities a new customer may represent. If Company A and Company B are of similar size and serve complementary markets, the products you sold to Company A may be equally valuable to Company B.

Recommendations of Content for Every Stage of the Sales Cycle

- **Awareness: Topical webinars, blog articles, thought-leader pieces, e-books, LinkedIn updates, Twitter tweets.**

  These do not need to address your company or its specific offerings.

- **Interest: Events, videos, PowerPoint decks, podcasts, white papers, how-to tips.**

  Content should discuss engaged prospects' common challenges and the benefits of solving them.

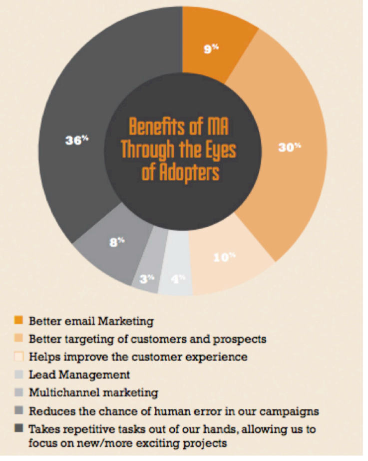
- **Consideration: Testimonials/case studies, product demos, e-books, on-demand videos, phone calls/ Google Hangouts, ROI calculator.**

  Introduce steps toward solving the challenges, including needs assessment and relevant stakeholders.

- **Close and Follow-Up: Proposals, FAQs.**

  The sales team is assisting prospects in choosing the right solution for each new customer.

- **Renew: Product updates, annual conferences, customer workshops, executive announcements, password-protected online communities or message centers.**



Marketers that have adopted marketing automation technology say the main benefits are:

- **Taking repetitive tasks out of marketers' hands, allowing focus on new/more exciting projects (36%)**
- **Better targeting of customers and prospects (30%)**
- **Improving the customer experience (10%)**
- **Better email marketing (9%)**
- **Reduction of human error in campaigns (8%)**
- **Lead management (4%)**
- **Multichannel marketing (3%)**

Source: Redeye and TFM&A Insights, "The Marketing Automation Report" (2014)

Additionally, engagement through automated or otherwise routine communications means speedy, multichannel delivery of messages, the success of which can be measured at the overall campaign level, the distribution channel level, the lead or prospect list level, all the way down to the individual lead or prospect level. At its most granular, the data generated by and captured in your CRM system may point to your influence on a single buyer's purchase criteria.

You can gauge your success with particular marketing content or sales tactics by using your CRM system to test different messages or channels. As you improve efficient content creation and distribution, the measurable success of each message and channel becomes more important. Which content is converting or prompting customers to buy, and which is not? Which distribution method gets the most attention from leads and the greatest response?

This insight improves marketing's ability to connect to the desired market segments and increases the likelihood that your message will be well received, inspiring leads to engage in the process of becoming your customers.

Next Steps

CRM technologies can deliver valuable, actionable insights on leads', prospects', and customers' propensity to buy, in what time frame, by which decision makers, influenced by which internal and external voices, and requiring what type of customization. However, in order to be selected as the problem solver, you need to follow the buyer journey, providing expert, trusted support along the way.

CRM tools help you qualify leads, discern interest levels, further tailor and improve your sales approach to individual leads, and archive contacts that have dropped off in the dialogue you established, but who may be re-engaged at a later date.

We are here to help. Speak with our experts about a realistic timeframe in which you may see positive lead generation, product or service demand, and stunning sales results from your CRM implementation.

We can help you develop a dynamic marketing database that collects the information you need to position your company for stronger, smarter sales, increased conversion rates, and a measurable return on your CRM investment.

Contact us for more information. Visit www.quantacrm.com to learn more, register for one of our monthly webinars, or request a one-on-one personalized demonstration. We are also happy to answer your questions by phone at 844.244.6310.

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