

Maximising B2B Lead Generation through Better Content Marketing

No matter the nature of your company or the products you sell, good quality sales leads will always be something that you can do with more of. Lead generation is the key dynamic that will drive business revenues and allow you to grow market share. There is a broad spectrum of different activities that companies can undertake to help them to generate a substantial level of leads. However, in the B2B space few companies do more than a handful of them (and even then resource pressures may mean that the activities undertaken are not always done that well).

The following white paper will examine, in detail, how improvements can be made to a company's sales lead generation strategies to deliver a boost in lead volumes.

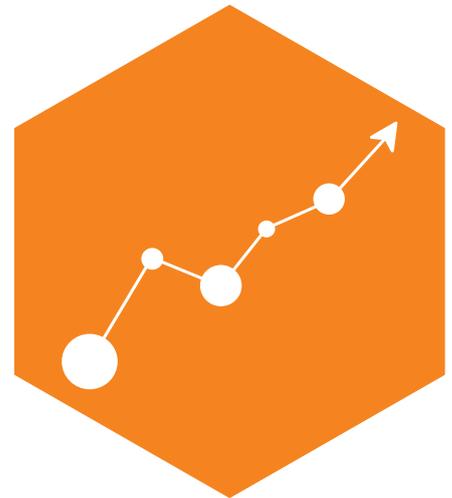
The Shopfront

For most organisations the website is effectively the 'shopfront'. And one of the fundamental dynamics that enables you to raise your company's sales is to increase the traffic that comes to the site. As we will see, there are numerous methods for doing this, each of which will be examined in turn. What is vital, before you start, is that you are fully aware of where to find your target audience, you understand their buying behaviour and you know how to get their attention. Once you have people on your website it is then a matter of ensuring you can direct them to the right places and subsequently glean information from them that will help you to nurture them from visitor to lead and, finally, to prospect.

How Lead Generation Has Changed

In the past the buying cycle had a fairly straightforward structure. Part of this cycle relied on companies using editorial and advertising in trade magazines to raise company awareness and inform potential buyers about new products they had developed. Interested readers would then send an enquiry form (usually known as a 'bingo card') back to the magazine publishers, who would subsequently pass it on to the company. The company's sales team would send out datasheets, brochures and other relevant collateral and follow up with a call around 7-10 days later. They would try to discuss the enquirers' needs and look at how they could meet these, before finally moving to close the deal. Back then, of course, companies had much more control of buying cycles. Today, when someone is after a particular product or service, they want greater immediacy. They certainly won't wait for enquiry forms to be processed and information to be sent out to them. Increasingly they won't even pick up the phone and talk to a vendor's sales staff.

The fact is that access to much greater quantities of information than was previously possible, via the Internet, has changed beyond recognition the way prospective customers approach the specifying and sourcing of products/services. Because they can learn a lot more about what is likely to be a good fit for their requirements by carrying out their own research, they are already at a later stage of the buying cycle before they have to even consider getting in touch with a possible supplier. Which means that vendors who haven't given access to enough helpful information for prospective buyers to digest, may be eliminated from the buying cycle before they have had a chance to speak to a potential customer. A company could have the best sales team in the business, but if the content that will lead new customers to them isn't good enough (or isn't readily available) their talents will simply be wasted.



Drawing in People from the Outside World

The commonly (perhaps too commonly) used analogy for describing sales lead generation is a funnel. At the top are the 'unrefined' raw leads that need to be pushed into the funnel and then progressed gradually toward fully developed prospects. If you fail to get enough people in at the top of the funnel then you are going to reduce the number of strong leads coming out the bottom that you pass onto your sales staff - and they are going to wonder what the company is employing a marketing team for. There are a plethora of actions that companies can carry out so as to draw as many relevant visitors as possible to their website, fill up the funnel and hence maximise sales lead generation. These include blogging, hosting of webinars, creation/uploading of video content, social media and techniques that deliver search engine optimisation.

For instance, it has been shown that companies who regularly blog and post on social media will be able to double (even treble) the number of sales leads they generate thanks to greater website traffic. It is clear, therefore, that any company that is not willing to invest time and effort into the good quality content needed for this activity is going to lose out to its competitors. As we said the, wealth of information now available online means that conventional buyer/vendor relationships are becoming less and less applicable. The rules of the game have changed and it is the companies that are quickest to adapt that will gain a competitive edge over their rivals. Your company's content must stand out from the crowd.

Using Social Media

Social media, in particular, is becoming an ever larger part of sales lead generation process. The wider the 'reach' of your social media operation, the greater your web traffic and the larger the number of sales leads you will be able to generate. If handled correctly the relationship really can be that clear cut.

Proper use of social media is critical in driving visitors to your company's website (and in particular the landing pages you will set up - which we will discuss later). However, too few B2B companies manage to master successful social media. Just having some sort of nominal presence on these platforms is simply not going to be enough. To get the desired sales leads, real interaction with the target audience is needed. This will be achieved only by creating insightful, compelling and informative content.

Furthermore, your marketing team needs to understand the nuances of each specific social media platform. Key considerations include:

- Which social media platforms to concentrate on in order to reach the target audience
- What kind of content is best suited to each platform
- What times of day and how regularly posts should be made to get the best results



Figure 1: Different Content Options

For most platforms, making your posts over-promotional can prove to be counterproductive. Your marketing team should think of how their posts come across from the perspective of those reading them (if they just apply their normal corporate mind set they could miss the mark completely). The target audience is going to be put off, for example, if they are continuously bombarded with sales-orientated posts. At best they might treat this as background noise and blank it out; at worst they may decide to unfollow/unlike your company - thus taking them completely out of your sphere of influence. Conversely, they are going to be willing to engage with you if they can see a clear benefit for them within the content you are posting. This is why getting your content right is so important. It really is the foundation to the whole lead generation process. By imparting information to your audience that they perceive as being useful to them, they will be more open to approaching you.

This is where 'thought leadership' can play an important role. Using tweets and other posts you can get people's attention by putting forward opinions and comments on business trends, new legislative measures, emerging standards and such like - this is far more valuable than just continuously broadcasting company-oriented material. Also you should incorporate some form of call to action (CTA) in your tweets, posts and blogs as frequently as possible.

Any CTA has to be easy to understand, highly visible and possess genuine appeal if it is to have maximum effect. In addition, you should mix things up as much as possible by sharing/retweeting relevant material from other people (this will again make your social media presence look less company-centric and more customer-centric). Such material may come from partners, industry bodies, distributors, journalists, market analysts and standards consortiums. As a rule of thumb, try to share a third party post/tweet for every three company related posts that you make. Via this posted/tweeted content look to continue to build your engagement with the individuals that have been responsive and usher them towards parts of your website that are most likely to be of interest.

PPC & Email Shots

Activities such as pay per click (PPC) advertising, direct mailing to your company's established contact database, or email shots to a database bought in from a relevant media outlet (or other third party) can be particularly effective ways of directly engaging with the target audience. Here the same rules still apply; the better the quality of the content used in the ad or mailing, the more likely it is going to arouse the reader's attention. There are certain approaches that are best to take with respect to how email shots are carried out (for example - how often they are sent, how many items each one contains) that will allow both their opening and click-through rates to be maximised.



Figure 2: Channels for Content Propagation

Your marketing team needs to be cognisant of the following:

- It must make sure that email shots also use compelling content
- It should use an optimal number of content items in each email shot to get higher opening and click-through figures
- It should ensure that it has the best third party lists for its email shots (if the marketing team can't discern their quality they need to get advice from experienced industry professionals)

As with blogs and tweets, the regularity of email shots can be critical, but in this particular case less is more - the team should not over use its mailing list - by sending out material too often (or mailing substandard content) - as this will result in unsubscribes or a lowering of open rates.



Figure 3: Schematic Showing The Content Marketing Process - Creating Content, Distributing Content, Gleaning Information & Adjusting Strategy Based on Findings

Landing Pages to Capture Leads

The CTAs embedded within your tweets, blog posts, LinkedIn discussions, email shots and PPC advertising can shepherd interested individuals to purpose-built landing pages on your website that cover the specific topic they are interested in.

By having multiple landing pages website visitors can be directed to the page (or pages) that are likely to prove most beneficial to them. This more focused approach ensures that, rather than just roaming around a website aimlessly (with little chance of you being able to engage with them), visitors are guided in the right direction. It means that the odds of them being converted into a qualified lead will be greater. Once they are on the landing page your company has the opportunity to offer material that will be of value to them (for example a white paper, an application note, or access to a webinar) in return for them registering (completing a short form giving some basic contact information). Studies have shown the buyers' guides, case studies, application tips and industry research are all likely to prove very beneficial when looking to get the attention of potential customers. What's more, if the item that you are offering has a limited time/quantity associated with it then it is likely to be perceived to have a greater value.

The way that the landing page is set out is important. It is advised not to make your landing pages too complex and busy. The look and feel needs to be make sure that the visiting/registering ratio is a strong one. To avoid visitor confusion (and reduce the possibility that once people arrive at the page they leave again without imparting any information) it is crucial that the content on the landing page (title and following text) should closely mirror what was on the blog post, LinkedIn group discussion, tweet or other content that brought them to this page. To further ensure that clarity and consistency is maintained, the graphics that have been incorporated should match too. There are other items that can be placed on the landing page that will help encourage visitors to register - common examples include bullet points underlining the value proposition to those registering, a short informative video, a few select customer endorsements, or possibly a simple-to-understand infographic.

Each landing page should be focused solely on the specific area that the visitors have expressed an interest in - links to other parts of the site can present themselves as a distraction and you don't want them to go off before providing the contact information you desire. You already have them in a position where they are interested in a particular subject; if you distract them with other things they might go off to another part of your website and not end up coming back to this page - and the opportunity has been lost. You may want to, as a precautionary measure, just place a couple of buttons to your main social media channels at the bottom of the landing page. This will mean that if they feel they are not quite ready to give you their contact details they may still decide to follow you on Twitter or LinkedIn (allowing them to see more of your content in the future).



With regard to landing pages, here are some of the things your marketing team should be conscious of:

- Having a large number of focused landing pages can be of real benefit to sales lead generation
- Through landing pages it is possible to direct visitors to specifically targeted areas that deal with a topic they are particularly interested in
- Keep consistency between the original content used to draw people in and the landing page itself
- Don't overcrowd your landing pages with too much content - a minimalistic approach is likely to be advantageous on most occasions
- Links to other website pages will only serve as distraction (and should be avoided), as they reduce the number of sign ups



Getting the Content Right

The creation of good content, regularly, is a major challenge for any modern B2B technology organisation. There are a couple of key factors that contribute to this. Firstly, there might simply not be enough resources available to do this work on an ongoing basis (it is not unusual for output to be maintained for a short period but then fairly quickly tail off). Secondly, and something that happens far more frequently than you might expect, is the marketing team lacks the skill-set necessary to create content of a good enough standard (or doesn't know how to correctly re-purpose existing content to suit the specific requirements).

Your marketing team should:

- Compile a comprehensive content calendar
- Decide on where content is to be placed
- Rework the content it has created so that it can be used for a multitude of different purposes
- Learn to work with the sales teams on this - they will know the customer base and will therefore have a better idea than anyone what sort of content is going to be most likely to interest to would-be clients
- Identify the resources or expertise to create/re-purpose the large quantity of content needed (if these resources aren't available internally then steps should be taken to outsource to specialists)

By collaborating with an experienced technical content marketing agency your marketing team will be far better placed to create and disseminate the sort of absorbing content that will fuel your sales lead generation strategy.

Publitek is already working with some of the world's most recognisable brands in the electronics and industrial engineering sectors on extensive content marketing and social media campaigns. These campaigns are enabling ever-closer customer-vendor relationships to be forged and leads to be captured at a much higher rate.

Why not find out how Publitek can help your company to do the same?



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