New Tactics, Tools, and Techniques to Compete in the **Digital Economy**

THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO B2B MARKETING

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You also should be able to report on each stage of the prospect life cycle to understand how prospects are moving through the conversion funnel and to get a better sense of the buyer journey. Because your platform will be able to track everything, you'll be able to report on everything in the pipeline:

- Number of net new leads
- Number of opportunities in the pipeline
- Pipeline velocity—days that it took for leads to progress through the pipeline
- Lead-to-close ratio and any other stage-to-stage ratios to understand what percentage of leads make it through the pipeline
- Campaign results and ROI from each channel

Lead Management

Your marketing automation platform will help you understand the quality of leads in your pipeline via scoring and grading, track prospect activity, and also report on which companies have visited your website.

Scoring and Grading

One of the ways to ensure you are passing the most appropriate leads to your sales team is to score and grade them. A score is a measure of prospect activity; a grade is a measure of whether they're a good fit as a customer for your company based on their demographic information. Think of scoring as a measure of your prospect's interest in your company and grading as a measure of your interest in the prospect.

Marketing automation enables you to automatically score, grade, and segment your prospects such that you follow up with only the ones that are the best pattern match to your ideal buyer profile. Scoring and grading is an important step in qualifying prospects for sales follow-up, while less-qualified leads stay in marketing for nurturing.

Lead scoring is very easy; you decide how much each prospect action counts, based on a point value. For every action a prospect takes, they are automatically scored and that score is aggregated. For example, viewing the pricing page, downloading a whitepaper, or attending a webinar each adds points to a prospect's score. You can set the score for each activity. Let's say your prospect signed up for a webinar worth 50 points, but then did not attend, which subtracts 25 points. They now have only 25 points, whereas a prospect who registered for a webinar worth 50 points and then attended for 50 points now has a score of 100 points.

Pay attention to the most important buying signals on your website, and consider the following behavior worthy of higher point values when scoring leads:

- Landing on your website via a search phrase that signals buying intent; for example: "XYZ vendor comparison"
- Viewing the pricing page
- Requesting a demo

Work with your sales team to decide which actions are more important than others in qualifying prospects. Sales reps should prioritize follow-up based on score and grade, which makes sense because they want to deal only with leads that are likely to turn into new business. You can set up automation rules so that leads that don't meet the minimum score threshold stay in marketing until their scores increase.

Lead grading is also important in qualifying leads, but is not based on behavior. Grades are derived from how well a prospect matches your ideal customer profile based on industry, company size, location, and job title, for example. You can set up automation rules to grade your prospect database as well as adjust grades based on the quality of the pattern match; for example, moving a half grade up or down. Grading works only if you have the information; you might not have enough complete data to accurately grade the database, and will have to either (1) not grade, (2) append the information, and/or (3) do progressive profiling, in order to accurately grade leads.

Anonymous Visitor Identification

Your website might get thousands, hundreds of thousands, or millions of visits every month, and chances are that most of those visits will be from anonymous traffic. The percentage of visitors you can actually identify is related to your conversion rate. So if your conversion rate is somewhere between 2% and 5%, that's how much of your audience is known to you.

The good news is that when you implement marketing automation software, it will conduct anonymous visitor tracking to help identify who is coming to your website. It does this by recording the IP address of the visitor, conducting a reverse DNS lookup to identify a hostname, and then also performing a WHOIS lookup for the IP address to see who owns it in order to further identify the organization and where it is located. This can be particularly helpful to the sales team to know that accounts they are targeting are active on the website, regardless of whether a contact at that account has ever downloaded anything.

Lead Activity Insight

Your marketing automation software will track and record the behavior of both anonymous visitors and known prospects. What's interesting is when an anonymous visitor finally registers and all of his or her previous activity becomes associated with the contact record. You'll have a fully formed picture of a brand-new prospect, including history on the following data:

- Keywords searched on
- Ads clicked
- Pages visited
- Website links clicked
- Files downloaded
- E-mails received, opened, and links clicked
- Webinars registered for and/or attended
- Events registered for and/or attended
- Forms filled out
- Content consumed (such as videos, whitepapers, e-books)
- Site searches completed

One of the things to be aware of is that tracking all of this activity history consumes data storage space in your CRM, and over time you will likely need to increase the size of your CRM database to accommodate all of this new information.

Bi-synchronous Integration with CRM

Some B2B marketers use their marketing automation platform as their CRM, but most often, you'll already have a CRM in place beforehand. You'll want to make sure that leads coming into either system get synchronized with the other system in order to keep everything up-to-date. Having said that, for list uploads, it can be easier to import them into both systems manually so that they can be added to a specific list in the marketing automation platform. If that's not important, just upload in one place and let the synchronization happen. Either way, you'll want to make sure you have lead routing rules in place in one of the two systems—for example, your CRM's automatic lead assignment rule based on geography to assign leads.

Infrastructure

Some of the technical aspects of your marketing automation platform are also important to consider; these include management of your database, integration with your website, email deliverability, and automation functionality, among other things. Let's take a look.

Database

When you procure your marketing automation platform, you will likely do so based on the size of your database of mailable prospects. This is an important reason to keep your database clean—up to one-third of B2B contacts can become obsolete over the course of a year, and if you aren't cleaning up your system on a regular basis, you probably have many out-of-date e-mail addresses. That's a challenge, because it can affect not only your e-mail sending reputation, but also your productivity—you don't want to be e-mailing a bunch of prospects who are no longer in a position to do business with your company nor do you want to be paying for them by including obsolete contacts in your database.

Website Integration

There are a few things to consider here:

- **Tracking Code—**Inserting a line of JavaScript into the footer of every page or global include to track and report on which pages and content your anonymous visitors and known prospects visit
- **Tracker Domain—**Creating a tracker subdomain (CNAME) so that your marketing automation-generated URLs appear that they are from your company; for example: info.*companyname*.com or go.*companyname*.com or www2.*companyname*.com
- **Custom Fonts—**Granting permission so that your marketing automation platform can use any custom fonts used on your website on your new forms and landing pages

Also, because your landing pages will be built and hosted within your marketing automation platform, you might want to use a testing tool to swap the content onto your regular domain so that your prospects see www.*company*.com/*landingpage* instead of info.*company*.com/*landingpage* (or whatever tracker subdomain you choose).

User Management

Make sure you choose a platform that enables you to customize permissions based on user roles to manage what other users can see and what they can change within the platform. Only administrators should have access to account settings. Don't underestimate the time it will take to set up new users, help them create their signatures (or create them yourself), and educate them on how the platform works. You'll have granted them user permissions based on their role, and because of that, they likely won't have all the privileges that you do as an administrator or marketing user. But they should still be able to send trackable e-mails, see results, view known prospects and unknown visitors, and receive lead activity alerts, among other things.

Based on company policy, standard operating procedures, or philosophy, decide how much flexibility other users should have. Should they be able to send e-mails to a list of thousands, or is that something only marketing should be able to do? Either way, agree to the accessible functionality and then hold a kick-off meeting with the team for initial training. Point them to the various training resources your marketing automation platform vendor provides, including tips, hacks, and best practices. (And keep reminding them—often when another department cannot accomplish something with a system or platform officially "owned" by another department, the owner department becomes the de facto help desk for that platform, which is usually an unforeseen and unintended consequence of adopting technology in the first place. Decide ahead of time how you want to handle that situation.)

E-mail Deliverability

You'll need to verify your marketing automation platform in order to send e-mails via your own domain, and to do this, you'll likely have to work with your IT department, which will help authenticate e-mails through Sender Policy Framework (SPF) and DomainKeys Identified Mail (DKIM). ISPs and corporate spam filters check for authentication, so you'll want to make sure this step is complete before using the platform for sending e-mail.

Something I learned from working with Pardot is that if you are doing e-mail marketing in earnest for the first time, you will want to "warm up" your IP address by sending several smaller blasts before larger ones. The idea is to send fewer than 5,000 e-mails per day for the first week to your most accurate lists to build your sender reputation.

Testing

As you read in Chapter 4, "Experimentation and Optimization," it's as important to test your e-mail marketing as it is to test your web and mobile sites and apps. Make sure your vendor supports this kind of testing on e-mails, forms, landing pages, and any other activities you'll be conducting. It's fun to see the kinds of subject lines, offers, sender identification, and calls to action that move the needle in behavior, and this kind of testing should be easy to accomplish within a marketing automation platform.

Automation Functionality

Lastly, before you select a platform, understand the breadth and depth of the automation functionality available to you. At a minimum, the platform should:

- Create dynamic lists based on selected criteria
- Trigger autoresponders and thank-you pages
- Trigger actions based on activity on pages, forms, files, e-mails, and links, such as add to CRM campaign, add to a specific list, or adjust lead score
- Trigger notifications based on activity
- Be able to create automated lead nurturing/drip marketing programs

Implementation

Before you get started in implementing a marketing automation platform, make sure you have the appropriate resources. At the very least, you will need the help of your webmaster/web developer(s), IT department, sales operations/CRM administrator, and marketing and creative teams to help you with setting up the technical and creative infrastructure.

The setting-up activity includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Website integration.
- Database creation—including importing prospects, customers, and previous unsubscribes, as well as creating segmented lists.
- Campaign creation to associate prospect sources.
- Content library creation, including uploading files, and creating forms and landing pages.
- Automation rules, page action triggers, and form completion actions.