



LEAD GENERATION:

STEPS TO TARGET THE
SELF-DIRECTED BUYER

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the old days, it was marketing's job to blanket prospects with advertising in hopes that they would eventually reach out for your product or service. Today's buyers are different. They've become very good at ignoring messages they didn't solicit. Dubbed the "self-directed buyer," these prospects have a plethora of online information at their fingertips and are accustomed to finding what they want when they want it, on their own terms. As a result, they tend to know a lot about a product or service long before they speak to a sales person. Where are they doing their research? Online, of course. In fact, according to Forrester Research, buyers are anywhere from two-thirds to 90 percent of the way through their buying journey before they even contact a vendor¹.

Savvy marketers understand that to reach these new customers, they must develop thoughtful, engaging, and helpful content that enables today's prospects to find them. Once they've been discovered by prospects, they must skillfully nurture relationships with them. This approach is known as content—or inbound—marketing, and it's become crucial in today's marketplace. Marketo defines inbound marketing as "the process of helping potential customers find your company—often before they are even looking to make a purchase—and then turning that early awareness into brand preference, and ultimately, into leads and revenue.¹" However, not all content has this effect—only content that reflects thought leadership or helps the prospect in some way. In other words, content that helps you become a trusted advisor to your prospects.

While understanding the value of content is the first step in the process (and often the easiest), getting your content in front of your target prospects is the far more difficult proposition. Organic traffic, paid search, expensive display ads, email, and a host of other methods are used by organizations to get as many people as possible to their website, in hopes that they see and consume the content you've provided. But how to reach the infinitely larger audience of people who don't visit your website? How can you find prospects in need of a solution in your industry—prospects that don't necessarily know or trust you (yet)? This is where content syndication is invaluable. Examples of content syndication include white paper downloads, webinar registrations, free trial registrations, software downloads, case study downloads, and live event registrations. By syndicating your content via a trusted content syndication partner, you give your content the ability to influence an audience far beyond your existing reach.

Content syndication gives marketers an online presence beyond their own channels. It empowers them to build viral awareness and create meaningful customer engagement. A B2B network-based content syndication partner uses sophisticated data analytics to find your target audience online and offer the content they want when they are already searching for similar content. By delivering content at the point of interest, your content and your brand offers immediate value to the target prospect wherever they may be searching for information. Your content syndication partner will then deliver these qualified prospects to you as agreed according to your campaign plan.

A carefully planned lead generation strategy takes all of this into account to help you get the attention of your target audience and build trust. It also helps ensure that your sales team receives only qualified leads that bear fruit. Following are eight areas you need to focus on when using content syndication to generate leads.

70%

Most customers prefer to know a company through their content rather than ads.

CONSIDER...

1

Great Content

Whether you choose to syndicate or not, you still need to produce content that is helpful, original, and compelling—content that will help readers make sound decisions based on data. The days of self-promotion are long over. Readers are seeking something new—thought leadership pieces that describe trends rather than product information. Remember, your readers are already researching your industry and products and may know quite a lot already. Aim for a relevant mix of informative and entertaining content that builds a meaningful relationship with your audience and drives sharing. Map content to specific personas and the stages viewers are at in the buying cycle. Include an appropriate call to action telling the reader what you want them to do or think about next. Read “Content Marketing: 11 Steps To Engage, Entertain, and Inform” for more on how to create impactful content.

2

Great Packaging

Via syndication, your valuable content will appear on thousands of relevant sites where your target audience is browsing for information about your niche. Now that your prospects have discovered you, make sure they take the next step and click on your offering. To ensure this, a compelling graphic, cover, image, or abstract is vital. Once you decide where you’d like your content to appear, you’ll have a better idea of what kind of design would be appropriate. A good content syndication partner has cutting edge tools that enable you or them to quickly integrate your content into their web properties. But it’s up to you to make it look good and capture attention.

3X

...more leads
are generated
with content
per dollar than
advertising.

43%

...marketers
aren't reaching
the right deci-
sion makers

48%

...marketers
suffer from
budget
limitations to
create content
with impact.

TRY OUT...

3

A Quality B2B Content Syndication Partner

Once you have a content piece you're happy with and it looks sharp, you need to make sure it gets in front of your prospects where it can do its work. Content syndication moves your content beyond your own site and social media channels to multiple trusted destinations and sources, including peer-driven communities and organizations. However, not all content syndicators are equal. Your job is to choose a one that can connect you to the customers you want. The best content syndicators have a large, multichannel network and partnerships to ensure your message gets in front of your audience just when they are searching for information related to your products or services. A content syndication partner that specializes in the B2B market can run lead generation campaigns across a vast network. One that has been around a while is more likely to have built an extensive and organic network. Ask how much traffic is net-new to ensure you're not reaching the same individuals over and over. Many content syndicators boast a large audience, but every static audience will eventually suffer from 'content fatigue' and will no longer download your content. A dynamic network on the other hand provides a large, ever-changing audience that dramatically increases the lifespan of your content, and the quality of the leads you receive. You'll also want to make sure your syndicator has an established reputation. The best syndicators monitor their network and data for fraud regularly, preferably weekly. Make sure they verify all content details and have filters in place to recognize false information. They should partner closely with you, helping you understand where your target prospects live on the web, what they like, and how to reach them most effectively. Finally, make sure they are fully on board when it comes to providing mobile access to content, as more and more browsers use smart phones and tablets to access B2B content.

4

Targeting Capabilities.

Effective lead generation today requires powerful and nuanced data analytics. As a B2B marketer, you need to tap into online behavioral intelligence to recognize buying patterns and develop a multi-channel program. Sophisticated technology can help you understand where the buyer is in their journey and serve up content that matches their buying stage. Social metrics like engagement, number of comments made, number of times shared, and reach, all help to anticipate needs, making it more likely you will delight this customer. A good syndicator also uses analytics to produce weekly reports on what content has been consumed and what kind of leads your content generated for you. You can also run multiple pieces and compare how different types of content perform. Finally, make sure your syndicator offers the ability to track leads from creation through sales, a vital part of determining ROI. Some vendors even provide information about content types that are working well for other vendors in your industry.

INVEST IN...

5

Accurate Filtering and Targeting.

When planning and executing your lead generation campaign, make sure your syndicator has advanced filters in place for in-depth audience targeting. Buyer intelligence data helps you find businesses that match the profiles of those already in your sales funnel. You'll want to identify industry, company size, job title or function, and geographic location, to start. Recent studies have shown that decision makers are no longer just at the C-level. More and more employees are taking part in decision-making and sharing content across multiple layers in their companies, and good content tends to trickle up to the top. Therefore, include a variety of job roles and functions. Casting a broader net will help you get the attention you need from the people looking for your product or service. Take a look at the recent research by the CMO Council (in conjunction with NetLine), on how content is consumed and shared within an organization. Read here for more details on this important attribute of content.

6

Reasonable Cost Per Lead.

Cost Per Lead, or CPL, is the way content syndicators charge you. In this online pricing model, you pay for the contact information (usually an email address) of targeted prospects interested in your product or service. Since the customer voluntarily fills out the sign-up form, they are typically a more qualified lead and more valuable to you. If the visitor does not complete the sign-up form, you're not charged. For example, a content syndicator may place a banner ad for another site on a blog. If a visitor clicks on the advertisement link, they are directed to the advertiser's website, where they will be invited to sign up for a special offer. If the visitor chooses to sign up, the syndicator is paid a certain amount based on the agreed Cost Per Lead. You'll want to be sure to find a content syndicator with a reasonable CPL price. In addition, be sure the syndicator does not resell your leads to other advertisers. CPL prices that seem too good to be true often are – in a recent test performed a single download of content from a vendor led to 6 different companies reaching out to a lead. The chances of success when immediately competing with 5 other competitors for a lead's attention are slim – making sure the lead is unique to your organization will greatly help your chances of success.

7**Multichannel Delivery.**

Tried and true marketing best practices are more important than ever in today's complex digital marketing environment. Marketing must understand exactly what kind of leads sales wants. Pricing and goals must be figured out ahead of time. Brand positioning and messaging must be carefully determined. What's different in the digital world is that a growing number of digital channels are competing for mindshare. Figure out which channels you want to focus on—web sites, customer communities, social media, online business networks? What about Internet forums? Blogs, podcasts, video portals, mobile devices, email, or web conferences? Use and develop best practices for traditional marketing functions such as strategy, messaging, and platform development. But also think about content origination, distribution, reach, and response. Finally, the best syndicators will qualify and scrub leads and deliver them seamlessly to your sales team in real time. As always, make sure marketing and sales are tightly synched so follow through occurs in a timely fashion after a prospect has expressed interest in your offering. A great resource for information on sales and marketing alignment is Sirius Decisions.

8**Lead Nurturing**

Not all of your prospects will be ready to buy when they first encounter your content. Your job is to get their attention and get them thinking. Provide something provocative, and then create a nurturing campaign so the lead can have future value. This is where analytics come in as well—a good syndicator will test and optimize their process to ensure they always reach your customers with the right message at the right time whenever they are online so that you can attend to every level of the sales funnel. Make sure the syndicator offers ways to connect with unresponsive leads that may have connected and disappeared in the past. It is possible to gently nurture leads that have opted out of marketing automation programs in a way that is sensitive and authentic. Take a multi-channel approach to carefully increase your brand's awareness.

In the digital world where people are turning to the Internet to research everything and anything before making a decision, content is terrifically important. In fact, 88 percent of business buyers say that online content has played a major to moderate role in vendor selection³. But that doesn't mean it's prudent to begin churning the stuff out willy-nilly. Marketers today must carefully consider not only the content itself, but also the distribution channels and the audience. They need to know how potential prospects prefer to consume content. For example, third party research, analyst reports, and trusted editorial coverage is deemed trust-worthy. Only a dismal nine percent feel that vendor content can be trusted. The good news is, there are many exciting and effective ways to reach potential customers in the digital world. Content syndication is one important way to make sure your brand or offering gets in front of the right people at the right time.

If you'd like to learn more about how to improve your lead generation strategy, feel free to send us a note at b2bleads@netline.com, or you can also reach us at 408.340.2200.