





## What Is a Grande Guide?

You know what the typical day is like for marketers. Between brainstorming and strategy sessions, last-minute requests and impromptu meetings, and trips to meet customers, you can barely find time to breathe—never mind keep up with the latest marketing trends. That's why Oracle Eloqua developed the Grande Guide series. The Grande Guides were developed to give you the opportunity to become proficient in a key marketing topic—in this case, lead nurturing—with a minimal investment in time.

This Grande Guide will define lead nurturing, explain why it is important to your business, and outline the steps needed to implement it in your company.

## What Is Lead Nurturing?

At its core, lead nurturing is the process of cultivating leads that are not yet ready to buy. Successful lead nurturing anticipates the needs of the buyer based on who they are (using profile characteristics like title, role, industry, and so on) and where they are in the buying process. Nurturing keeps prospects engaged by providing the most relevant content (such as white papers and webinars) for their situation.

If done well, lead nurturing can build strong brand loyalty long before a prospect is ready to buy. By cultivating latent demand, companies can increase the conversion of unqualified leads to opportunities and drive more revenue. Nurturing also helps accelerate active opportunities by giving prospective buyers the information they need to make purchasing decisions.

Lead nurturing is about helping buyers along in their educational journey. Thus, it's most effective when triggered by prospects' activity or behaviors. Lead management technologies are often used to automate such real-time marketing. This type of software makes it possible to track leads and automate content delivery while simultaneously collecting behavioral data and triggering corresponding actions.

## Why My Business Needs to Understand Lead Nurturing

Not every prospect is ready to buy now. In fact, according to research firm SiriusDecisions, of the 20 percent of leads that sales reps follow up on, 70 percent are disqualified. But it's a mistake to ignore those leads. After all, 80 percent of prospects that don't make the grade today will go on to buy from someone within the next 24 months. And when they do, you want your company to be at the top of their short list.

Once prospects are in the funnel, nurturing them with helpful, relevant content moves potential buyers through each stage of consideration at a natural pace until they're ready to be passed onto sales. Nurturing is the "safety" net for every stage of the buying cycle, helping ensure that no revenue opportunity is missed.

Lead nurturing typically focuses on converting contacts that are already in your database, not generating new inquiries. Looking at the chart in Figure 1, you can see that companies without lead nurturing processes see a huge drop-off in the number of leads they are able to generate for their sales teams. In contrast, companies that do nurture leads see their numbers increase—turning inquiries into qualified demand. Without lead nurturing, all those inquiries are nothing more than hand-raisers—they've demonstrated interest but require further profiling and cultivation before they get passed to sales.

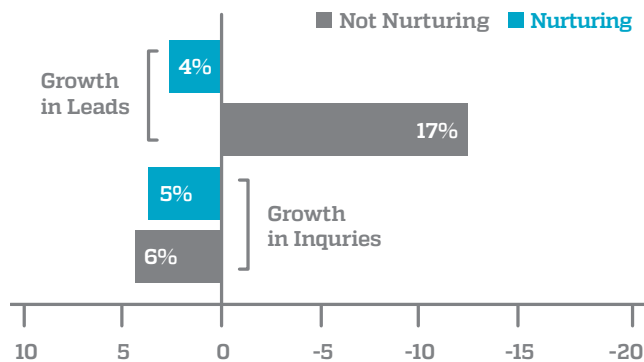


FIGURE 1. COMPANIES WITHOUT LEAD NURTURING PROCESSES SAW A HUGE DROP-OFF IN THE NUMBER OF LEADS THEY WERE ABLE TO GENERATE.

## Lead Nurturing Basics

**Marketers often mistakenly think of lead nurturing as nothing more than email communication. You should instead think of it as a workflow, or series of communications, in which each step has a clear and concise objective—whether moving someone to the next stage or driving another desirable action.**

Effective nurturing incorporates questions, which help you collect the information necessary to continually refine the relevance of your messages and move prospects through the buying cycle. Key elements of successful nurturing include the following:

### SEGMENTING

Building lasting relationships based on trust requires an extensive knowledge of your prospects. Only then can you provide them with the most relevant content, messaging, and assets. Nurturing paths should be based on unique customer profiles. Segmenting allows you to use title, role, industry, or sales stage to account for nuances in messaging. In this way, you can ensure that your content resonates with the recipients and reduce unsubscribes.

### CUSTOMER NURTURING

Nurturing isn't just for prospects. Even when you're bringing on a new customer, there are plenty of ways to nurture the relationship and drive adoption. Here, too, is an opportunity to segment based on user role. Is the customer a "champion," "power user," or "executive sponsor"? With this knowledge, you can funnel customers through onboarding programs tailored to their roles, making the transition smooth and seamless.

### GIVE TO GET

At two points in the buying cycle, you have prime opportunities to gather information about a contact: when someone is new to your organization and when someone decides to become a customer (or to transact new business with you). During these times, you can increase the frequency and number of touches.

### CUSTOMER FOCUS

Use personalization whenever possible, calling the customer by name or mentioning the company name. Provide assets relevant to the customer's industry and ensure that every communication is matched to that buyer's need at that point in time. Each communication should be designed to answer a specific question. If you can't answer the question "What's in it for the buyer?" the messaging probably isn't valuable in your nurturing program.

### PROGRESSIVE PROFILING

Requiring registration in exchange for an offer is called gating. However, because lead nurturing typically applies to contacts that already exist in your database, it's not necessary to put forms in front of every offer. Still, there are always gaps in contact records. Progressive profiling—which incrementally asks contacts for additional information—can help you build a rich, actionable data set on each prospect. With progressive profiling, each time a prospect clicks through on an offer, the system asks for just one or two pieces of information.

For example, one Oracle Eloqua nurturing program first provides high-level thought leadership content with no registration requirement. Then, it offers a case study in exchange for information. And finally, it points prospects to a demo—which they can access without registering.



# Five Steps to Lead Nurturing Success

**Before you define your lead nurturing program, you need to lay the groundwork. In so doing, you'll gain valuable insights and maximize revenue potential.**

## 1 UNDERSTAND YOUR BUYER

Prospects go through stages. You need to understand those stages and know what content assets best apply to each. Interview your customers—as well as those that did not buy from you—to define your ideal customer profile and develop buyer personas. What are your customers' pains? What purchase process do they follow? Why should they be interested in your product? Define what messages are most appropriate at each stage of the buying cycle and who is responsible for delivering each communication. Good alignment between marketing and sales will keep branding, voice, messaging, and experience consistent.

## 2 PINPOINT WHAT MOTIVATES YOUR BUYERS

Analyze your past marketing campaigns and determine how they contributed to revenue. Look at the percentage of responses to campaigns and determine how many leads moved through all stages, and the messages and content offered at each stage.

## 3 WHITEBOARD THE IDEAL USER EXPERIENCE

Come up with a lead nurturing structure that best reflects your buying process, then troubleshoot to see where it might be difficult to put into practice. Consider personalizing the experience based on what you know about the prospective buyer. Then modify the flow of communication based on that person's behavior and engagement with your content. Start out with the final

goal in mind and create a blueprint. Develop a structure that makes the most sense for your business and try to anticipate any roadblocks to implementing and make revisions. Once your plan is locked down, document it so that you can share it and so you'll remember why you made certain decisions.

## 4 DEFINE YOUR LEAD NURTURING PROGRAM

Determine the campaign goal, message flow, content offers, communication channels (for example, perhaps e-mail works better than the phone in one stage), and overall cadence based on previous interactions. All of this planning helps define the timing in your automated program. Be sure to think through all possible scenarios. If the objective is to send six emails and make three phone calls over eight weeks, what happens if you don't get the intended response? What happens once someone "expires" from a nurture program? How do you keep that prospect engaged, and who owns the relationship?

## 5 AUTOMATE COMMUNICATIONS

An automated "welcome campaign" is a great place to get started. Set up automated communications to greet those who enter your database and start delivering educational information. What are the three most important things you want them to know? And what more do you want to know about them?



## Lead Nurturing Best Practices

**If you're ready to join the industry leaders and begin a lead nurturing program, you can increase your chances of success by adopting the following best practices.**

### START SIMPLY

Focus on a specific segment of your database with a simple call to action; see how you perform against your goals; and then make adjustments. Once you've done this, you can slowly add paths based on buyer persona or sales stage, and personalize content as you learn what does and does not work.

The key to all of this is a focus on incremental steps. For example, a welcome program for new leads can be a simple one-to-three-touch program that provides new contacts with helpful information about the problems your product or service solves, the kinds of companies you help, and where to find additional information (for example, pointing them to your most popular downloads). Because you likely don't know much about the contact, keep your communications generic to start. For instance, send the same three pieces of information to everyone. Then, as contacts consume your content and spend time on your site, factor in "digital body language" (online behaviors that signal intent to businesses) to personalize future communications.

Contacts are much more likely to share information about themselves during the first 30 days they're engaged with you. If you can, automate touch points and use a layered form—or progressive profiling (a process of collecting prospect information incrementally and unobtrusively)—to gather information. As contacts engage move further along the path, you can adjust this strategy.

Finally, don't overdesign your communications. A simple text-based email with a relevant signature (perhaps the CEO for the first email and sales rep on subsequent emails) can be just as effective as a fancy HTML email.

### LOOK FOR OPPORTUNITIES TO AUTOMATE

Identify a behavior trigger (such as welcome, shopping cart abandonment, or contract renewal) and enter contacts into an automated sequence where either an action or a date stamp triggers the process.

### NURTURE BY STAGE

Using automation, it's easy to move prospects into nurturing paths based on changes in lead stage. Through CRM integration, sales reps can see where prospects are in the nurturing journey.

Build and send a progression of messages that leads prospects from awareness to education to validation. Contacts in the "interest stage" should be directed to a program that "warms up" leads, and information should be collected with each communication to ensure the relevance of future messages.

Once prospects are ready to evaluate their options, they should be placed in a nurturing program focused on education. As they spend more time at your site consuming your content, prospects should be added into an "accelerator program" designed to move them to the next stage in the buying cycle. If prospects haven't interacted with your company for some time, place them into a re-engagement program that helps determine whether they should remain in your database. Understand when people enter and exit the program. Because you're communicating with leads that are not in the active sales cycle, determine how you'll exclude them from lead nurturing once they enter the decision phase. Conversely, if they're not ready to buy, determine how to re-introduce them to your nurture program.

Once prospects are further down the funnel, carefully manage exclusions. You don't want to send automated emails that duplicate your sales reps' efforts.

## MEASURE EFFECTIVENESS

Once you've rolled out your nurture program, monitor it for effectiveness by comparing your goals to the right metrics. By defining your program's purpose, you'll come to understand which key performance indicators (KPIs) you need to track.

The easiest place to start is by assessing engagement, such as e-mail open and click-through rates. If these numbers are low, tweak your messages, timing, and frequency until you see improvement.

If the goal is to move leads from one stage to the next, track and measure how many are making that jump and how long it takes on average. If the goal is to accelerate movement through the pipeline, measure the days it takes to progress through the sales cycle. Consistently analyze and continually adjust your program to account for changes in the market, customer behavior, and even your organization.

## Customer Nurturing

Once sales opportunities convert to customers, enter them in nurture programs that build loyalty and drive adoption.

- **New customer onboarding program.** You can likely automate some portion of the onboarding experience to drive consistency and increase adoption and usage of your product or service.
- **Product adoption program.** When an account dips in terms of landing pages created or emails sent, you can enter the customer into a low-usage nurture program. Those customers are then sent emails asking: Has anything changed in your organization? Has your "power user" moved on? Do you need more training? You can then make them aware of resources to drive adoption.
- **Contract renewal program.** Ninety days from contract renewal, send an email saying, "Your contract renewal is coming up. Do you have any questions?" At 60 days, send an email saying, "Here's your sales rep's contact information and details about your renewal." Thirty days out from renewal, send an email saying, "We'll be contacting you soon about your contract." This program warms up your customers so they aren't surprised when the sales rep calls.



	<b>Welcome Campaign</b>	<b>Education Campaign</b>	<b>Why Us Campaign</b>	<b>Accelerate Campaign</b>	<b>New Customer Onboarding</b>	<b>Customer Loyalty/Retention</b>
<b>GOAL</b>	Welcome new subscribers	Get them ready to talk to Sales	Overlay your solution on top of their need	Remove roadblocks, speed purchase decision	Welcome new customers	Retain and develop
<b>DESCRIPTION</b>	<p>Introduce brand</p> <p>Reiterate subscription benefits</p> <p>Spell out next steps</p> <p>Opt-in to something else</p>	<p>Engage to further profile prospect</p> <p>Educate about value prop</p>	<p>Differentiate your brand from competitors</p> <p>Reiterate value prop</p> <p>Include relevant case studies, testimonials</p>	<p>Provide decision tools</p>	<p>Thank them</p> <p>Identify next steps</p>	<p>Reiterate purchase/relationship benefit</p> <p>Seek feedback</p> <p>Tips/tricks to get the most out of product</p>

FIGURE 2. SIX TYPES OF LEAD NURTURING ARE OUTLINED HERE





# Advanced Practices for Lead Nurturing

If you're ready to take your lead nurturing to the next level, try adopting the following practices:

## 1 BUILD A TRULY INTEGRATED CAMPAIGN

Tap into the powerful combination of human interaction and automation by integrating e-mail, follow-up phone calls, and reminders triggered in your CRM system.

## 2 COMBINE GENERIC AND PERSONALIZED COMMUNICATIONS

For example, assume leads are stuck in a certain phase of the cycle—there's been no activity for 60 days and no active buying opportunity—but you want to stay in touch: Send email every two weeks, perhaps about your services or about a certain topic. Intermingle this communication with automated emails that replicate the experience with the sales rep: "Are you ready to talk? We'd love to work with you because ..."

## 3 INTEGRATE EMAIL AND OUTBOUND TELEPROSPECTING

One medium is seldom enough to close a deal.

## 4 RE-ENGAGE LOST DEALS/ NO DECISION

If you capture deals you've lost to the competition or that were disqualified during the sales process, automate a periodic "touch base" communication to check in. See if these leads remain satisfied with their vendor or are ready to re-engage with your company. For a personalized touch, send the email on behalf of the sales rep that managed the relationship.

## 5 EMPOWER SALES REPS

As sales reps add names to your contact database, empower them to add those names to a nurturing program as well. This way, they feel confident that contacts are being warmed up instantly.



## Lead Nurturing Tools and Technologies

**Tap into the following tools and technologies to streamline your path to lead nurturing success:**

- **Marketing automation.** Automation empowers you to reproduce the intimacy of one-to-one communications on a much grander scale. With it, you can programmatically manage a dialogue with many people simultaneously—complete with natural pauses and behavioral signals necessary for a productive conversation. Automation also allows you to monitor a prospect’s activity and trigger the most appropriate response.
- **Cloud connectors.** If you’re nurturing an individual in a B2B account, use marketing automation and connectors (plug-ins that allow other marketing applications—such as webinar management tools and social media monitoring systems—to integrate into your marketing automation platform). In this way you can improve efficiency and gather information about others who may be interested in your offering.

Other things you can do to improve lead nurturing include getting information (such as the prospect organization’s technology solution) and appending it to your record, and pushing tasks through CRM to remind sales to call. For example, alert a sales rep when someone reaches a certain stage or reads a certain asset, and delegate them to click to trigger a “touch,” or correspondence.

Once a recipient opens your e-mail, that action could trigger a voicemail or SMS message from your company. The key here is to remember that e-mail is only one method of communication. Mobile, voice, and social media are all compelling options as well.

# Lead Nurturing in Action

Wondering how all of these concepts, best practices, and technologies come together? Read on to learn how Taleo<sup>1</sup> developed a lead nurturing strategy that delivered big results for its talent management solutions.

## OBJECTIVE

Taleo wanted to use nurturing to drive conversion at every stage of the marketing and sales cycle, and to improve deal velocity, pipeline acceleration, sales effectiveness, and capacity.

## STRATEGY

Taleo's nurturing strategy—revolving around more than 30 nurture programs that run daily—provides targeted content to the right person at the right moment during the sales cycle. Each nurture program has a focused objective. For example:

- **Discovery nurture** attempts to “discover” missing qualification data at the top of the funnel.
- **Seed nurture** sends educational content to qualified prospects that are not yet sales-ready—the goal being to move them to the next level.
- **Cultivate nurture** delivers targeted content to all marketing-qualified leads (MQLs)—the goal being to convert them to the next stage.
- **Harvest nurture** touches all sales-qualified leads (SQLs) with proof points on why they should buy from Taleo.
- **Customer welcome and up-sell nurtures** are activated once someone becomes a customer.
- **Re-engagement nurture** is triggered for lost deals.

## APPROACH

Taleo appointed a task force made up of inside sales, field sales, marketing stakeholders, sales management, and marketing management to:

- Define what constitutes a lead
- Construct service level agreements for each lead stage
- Identify who controls the conversation at each point in the buyer's journey
- Determine message type and call to action for each stage
- Secure buy-in across all constituents

The company then built a matrix to map the buyer's journey to its sales cycle. It used this matrix to determine the right content for each touch point. Taleo's scoring program uses explicit and implicit data to determine the lead rating. Used to segment leads into suspects, MQLs, and SQLs, this rating ultimately defines ownership, action, and nurture.

## IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

Taleo began with two simple nurture programs three years ago; today, it runs more than 30 nurtures daily. As it improves segmentation and targeting, Taleo plans to add more nurture programs, such as vertically focused ones and additional tracks for different title levels and functions (leveraging a sophisticated title normalization program it has developed).

While Taleo architected the strategy, content, and blueprint for its nurtures, it partnered with DemandGen for program design and implementation.

*1. Taleo was acquired by Oracle in June 2012.*



## MEASURABLE RESULTS

Taleo achieved the following benefits from its lead nurturing programs:

- Improved conversion rates at every stage of the demand waterfall—and most significantly at the top of the funnel.
- Nearly eliminated “unrated” leads in its database as a result of the discovery nurture.
- Increased suspect-to-MQL conversion rate from 8 to 11 percent on net new leads entering the system.
- Saw an additional 30 percent of “suspects” (new visitors) convert to MQLs over time due to its seed nurture.
- Drove a 64 percent increase in SQL productivity from corporate sales development through cultivate nurtures.
- Increased the number of opportunities entering the pipeline by 118 percent.

## SOFT BENEFITS

Taleo’s sophisticated marketing and nurture programs serve as a huge differentiator for the company. They enable it to generate demand comparable to the competition with a significantly smaller budget and a much smaller sales team. In fact, Taleo’s lead management infrastructure—which has nurturing at its core—has had a direct positive impact on the company’s operating margins, which are some of the best in the software-as-a-service market.

FIGURE 4. DUN & BRADSTREET ACHIEVED BIG STRIDES AND QUICK WINS WITH LEAD NURTURING.

Teams at the company that adopted the lead nurture program experienced a 3-11 percent lift in new business pipeline. In fact, the year over year opportunity change for the nurtured customers after 6 months was significantly higher (by 14 percent) than for the customers in a control group. The results show the clear advantages afforded by lead nurturing.

Baseline Measurement	Difference vs. Control
Pipeline Value	+19%
Number of Opportunities	+14%
Average Opportunity Size	+3%
Opportunities Won	+25%

## What's Next in Lead Nurturing?

The concepts, best practices, and tools covered in this guide will help you begin improving lead nurturing today. But you still need to be prepared for what's to come. Here's what Oracle Eloqua sees on the horizon for lead nurturing:

- **Delivering customized experience via your website or social media.** Marketers need to nurture people in the channels they prefer, delivering the same types of content and information they'd typically deliver via automated emails. These channels will increasingly include social media and the company's website.
- **Catering to how people buy.** Using known information about buyer behavior, marketers will start to predict whether different combinations or types of communications will influence response.
- **Impacting the conversation by including more data sources.** The more you know, the more relevant your conversation will be. This in turn means you will have a better chance of converting your prospect to the next stage. Going forward, marketers will start aggregating insights from various sources—including CRM, LinkedIn, and marketing automation systems—to elevate the level of conversation.
- **Automating the relationship throughout the buying cycle.** As marketers adopt marketing automation, CRM, and granular measurements—and grow more adept at tracking buying-cycle stages—they will become better able to target the right message to the right person at all stages of the buying cycle.
- **Better integrating social media and demand generation.** Marketers can reward people for engagement in social channels. For example, B2B marketers could add prospects to a VIP program once they've reached a certain threshold of engagement.



## Conclusion

With the vast majority of leads failing to convert to sales, companies can't afford to simply abandon prospects when they fail to become buyers within a designated time frame. Particularly in today's buyer-driven marketplace, where they are empowered to make informed business decisions more quickly than ever, marketers must cultivate a role in the discussion in a way that's meaningful to their audiences.

By nurturing these leads—or anticipating prospects' needs and providing them with the right information based on who they are and where they are in the buying process—marketers can improve their processes. By implementing a formal strategy for lead nurturing, instituting nurturing programs, and following the best practices outlined here, you can begin reaping the benefits of lead nurturing today.

## Appendix/Resources

**The B2B Lead Blog:** Delivers real-world, practical B2B sales and marketing tips to help you capture more qualified buyers and convert them into profitable customer relationships.

**Bulldog Blog:** Perspective and insights on all things related to B2B demand generation.

**Marketing Interactions:** B2B marketing strategist and author of *eMarketing Strategies for the Complex Sale* Ardath Albee takes a no-holds-barred approach to sharing her ideas and opinions on what it takes to make every online interaction count.

**Savvy B2B Marketing:** Founded by six independent marketing consultants, this blog offers inspirational ideas and practical strategies on all things related to B2B marketing.

**SiriusDecisions:** Leading source for business-to-business sales and marketing best-practice research and data.

### **Lead Nurturing Best Practice Toolkit**

**Topliners:** Eloqua's online community connects tens of thousands of global users with other marketing and sales professionals looking to better understand marketing automation and topics including revenue performance management, lead nurturing, campaign analytics, sales enablement, and everything in between.

