

Busting Through the B2B Noise

Optimizing your automation investments, creating the right content and cutting through the clutter are essential for B2B lead gen success

Simply getting on prospects' radar is a major challenge in B2B lead generation today. "Every channel is so clogged with bad marketing," says Matt Heinz, president of Heinz Marketing. "We need to break through the perception that marketers don't have anything to say."

Instead of doing "random acts of marketing" to try and connect with potential prospects, Heinz recommends creating a consistent message for your target audience. No matter what delivery mechanism you use—direct mail, email, social media—concentrate on what you can give the prospect. What is in it for them? What will your solution do to make them smarter and deliver more value to their organization?

"The message has to be solid," he says. "You can't just pitch your product without providing context for the value."

The main challenges in B2B lead gen vary depending on the size of the enterprise, notes Matt Leap, senior director, marketing & analytics at B2B agency HiP.

Big companies like Oracle have the resources to create targeted content for very specific audiences, but the challenge is often finding the right prospects in smaller segments. Smaller businesses, on the other hand, might not have the resources to create content, and don't have the budget to adequately deploy marketing automation.

The key, he says, is often to take a more consultative view and approach your prospects carefully.

"If somebody downloads an asset once, that doesn't mean they're ready to buy the next day," says Leap. "You'll burn up your list and waste money [by being too aggressive]. You need to lay the groundwork."

Smaller companies need to make the most of their resources—content can be repurposed in multiple ways to reach different segments at different points in the funnel, he notes.

B2B marketers also need to use predictive data to make their campaigns smarter, carefully watching both how customers engage not only with your brand but the competition as well. "You need to tie all these pieces together," Leap says.

"The biggest challenge right now is cutting through the clutter, because there is so much noise on the web and in social media," says Andrew Stanten, president, Altitude Marketing. "Marketers can now do things that they couldn't even have imagined five, 10, 15 years ago,

and SEO and paid search has become hyper competitive."

Marketers need to articulate their position and know the marketplace. "When you're talking to prospects, what makes you different? If you say no one else is doing what you do, you're wearing blinders," he says.



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WHERE DID THIS COME FROM? ACCURATE ATTRIBUTION STILL VEXES MANY B2B MARKETERS

Attribution continues to be a major challenge in B2B lead gen, especially in multichannel campaigns for products with long sales cycles. The tools to bridge the cross-channel gap are improving, but marketers also need to look beyond pure leads to generating solid sales opportunities.

"I like a marketer who thinks about sales numbers," says Matt Heinz, president of Heinz Marketing. "To be successful in B2B marketing, you have to work with your sales counterparts and agree on a common set of metrics and definitions about what is a qualified lead or opportunity. When you have the same goals, you're able to work more coherently."

"Attribution is still a challenge in lead gen, agrees Ray Kemper, CMO of marketing/sales solution provider Televerde. "Most CRM systems recognize first or last touch conversion, but being able to show influence touches along the way is the biggest current challenge. It can be a struggle to get that layered view and see how a customer converted, what event we connected with them at and if they ended up closing at a [particular] touch."

When it comes to gauging ROI, a big pain point for many marketers is still the issue of having data spread across disparate sources, says Bill Muller, CMO, Visual IQ.

"An ad agency controls the data collected in some channels, while a department on the other side of the country has data for others," he says. "What they're aching to do is get all of that data in the same place at the same time, and deduplicate it to create a common currency across channels. Marketers need to get their houses in order."

"Marketers set up reports and then discover broken pro-



cesses," notes Kevin Joyce, vice president, strategy services, The Pedowitz Group. "Lead source isn't the full answer, you need to have marketing attribution, and know how well all your programs are working in the pipeline."

People want to know the value of their media spend across all channels, and sometimes think technology alone will solve all their problems, he says. "You need to have well-defined lead management processes and you need to train people [to use your systems]."

"You want to create reports that will help you execute better," Joyce adds. "You want to weave reporting into everyone's regular job descriptions and make it part of the daily routine."
—BNV

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MEDIA MATTERS

In B2B, the decision often isn't a quick "buy now," Stanten says. "Buyers need to do due diligence and marketers need to stay in front of them throughout the buying cycle."

Email is effective throughout the cycle if you have a good content marketing strategy in place, Stanten notes. "If they've volunteered to give you their email address, they're already warmed up."

Good content is sharable and speaks to buyers' pain points. "If people read something and it is good, they will share it—and that adds credibility," he says. "You need a thought-out editorial calendar that is timely and relevant."

Measurement and attribution is vital, as is testing, Stanten says, noting that one of his clients saw the same piece of content's effectiveness jump by four performance points just by naming it an "ebook,"

rather than a "guide."

Live events can still be a significant generator of new leads, he says. Marketers should think of trade shows beyond the event itself. Thought leadership pieces online can get you in line to become a speaker at the event, and make your name (and your company's name) come up in searches related to the event. Your involvement can be promoted via activities, banner ads and other initiatives to get the most out of your event investment.

"The days of thinking about a trade show as a three day event where you set up a booth and then just walk away are gone," he says. "You need to have a plan to follow up on all the contacts you made at a show and get them into a marketing automation funnel—thank them for stopping by the booth, offer them links relevant to the show. Extend the life of that investment."

Direct mail has made comeback in some sectors,

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particularly for big ticket products and solutions with complex sales cycles, Heinz says. It can help marketers get past the gatekeeper to the c-suite. Some B2B companies have been successful actually targeting the executive assistant with mailings—the assistant know their boss’s agenda and what they need to be focused on, and can be invaluable in cutting through the clutter to make that introduction.

TECH CHOICES

Of course, the smartest campaigns are omnichannel. Multiple impressions will increase the chances of your prospect responding and opening a dialogue. “You need to focus on the bottom and middle of the pipeline, and not just the top,” he says.

When investing in tech for B2B lead generation needs, Heinz says the first step is making sure that sexy new tech you want actually fits into your strategy.

“Look at the obstacles that are keeping you from being successful and then focus on the tools for that,” he says. “Then, make sure you have the resources to implement those tools.”

“The case for investing in marketing automation is strong but a lot of people aren’t getting the most out of their investment,” says Ray Kemper, CMO of marketing/sales solution provider Televerde. “It requires a whole engineering of your processes, and an alignment of data between various systems to get what you want out of the reporting and analytics.”

A lot of companies will jump into marketing automation and get excited that it enables them to personalize things at scale, which it does,” he notes. “But then, they try to do what they’ve always been doing, instead of fully adapting their strategies to what the tool enables to fundamentally change.”

Another component to implementing automation is having both the right people and the right content. “You can’t under estimate the amount of human resources needed to fully utilize marketing automation,” Kemper adds. “Optimization is a big pain point across the board. You need strong partners to help administer and set up automation platforms.”

CASE HISTORY: XIRRUS

Improved marketing automation helped wireless network provider Xirrus create a better lead nurturing track both for new prospects and existing customers.

Xirrus provides Wi-Fi solutions for large public venues, specializing in high-density events such as the Olympics and the PGA Tour or locals like The O2 or Wembley Stadium in London. The company is also big in the education market.

The sales cycle for small to medium businesses



Xirrus provides WiFi solutions for large public venues.

averages three to six months, while bigger venues can be a year to 18 months. A typical implementation might run \$30,000 to \$50,000, but installations for larger venues can top \$1 million.

Different segments require specific messaging, says Jillian Mansolf, CMO, noting that when she joined Xirrus two years ago the company was struggling to implement marketing automation. “The product we were working with was hard to use and it was hard to [track] customer journeys at the speed we needed,” says Mansolf. “We had one nurturing track for everybody—a coffee shop was taken on the same journey as a large public venue.”

The company started working with Salesforce to create different nurturing tracks for different types of prospects, as well as tracks to nurture ongoing customer relationships, because repeat customers compromise a large portion of Xirrus’s business.

Today, the company has five different buyer nurturing programs. In education, for example, one size does not fit all. Higher education institutions have different needs than elementary schools, and those particular journeys vary by region and country, especially when it comes to the terminology they use about their business.

“We wanted to not just architect great journeys but implement and measure them, and then be able to change and tweak them going forward,” says Mansolf. In the small to medium sized business market, for example, Xirrus doesn’t always know what market prospects are in when they first pop on the radar. Obtaining that information quickly allows the company to be more nimble in putting them on the right nurturing path.

The majority of Xirrus’s marketing is digital, with a heavy focus on content. “Obviously, people are searching WiFi, so we want to be where they are

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searching,” she says, noting lead scoring is done with Pardot. “We don’t have to educate people on what our product is, but rather the challenge it so make sure our product is top of mind and that we’re in the right spots [they’re searching].”

A number of different metrics are tracked, including the number of dollars booked and the number of new customers. Every campaign is tracked to

see where people came in the funnel, and sales opportunities are tracked closely by quarter.



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ENGINEERING IMPROVEMENT AUTOMATION HELPS R.M. HOFFMAN IMPROVE LEAD NURTURING AND EMAIL PROCESSES

Marketing automation has helped engineering component provider R.M. Hoffman tailor its lead nurturing activities and grow sales leads year-over-year by 33%.

R.M. Hoffman’s primary customers are design engineers at large manufacturing facilities. The company provides resources ranging from components used in motion control and other functions to a specialty lubricant used in robotics.

The length of the sales cycle depends on the purchase—a customized solution for engineers can be anywhere from three months to a year, while a simple purchase of the robot grease or other standard components would typically ship out same day.

In the past, the operation was very analog/paper driven. No bulk emails were being sent out, and there was no CRM system in place to track customer relationships, let alone a marketing automation solution. “We were following a very traditional marketing program that companies like ours had used for decades,” says Peter Hoffman, vice president of sales and marketing, whose father founded the company. “We weren’t tapping into the power of digital marketing.”

Before starting to work with Act-On in the spring of 2015, traffic to the company’s site was primarily driven by an Ad Words program. R.M. Hoffman had a strong pay per click presence, but unless a customer made direct contact via email or phone, leads couldn’t be easily followed up on.

To begin improving its email communications, the company did a lot of what Hoffman calls “internal consulting” to better understand its target audience and know what they cared about. “We wanted to be super clear about our customer and our messaging, so we spent a lot of time up front,” he says. “This helped us craft emails for specific target audiences, so we weren’t trying to talk to everyone as if they cared about the same thing.”

The company now has about 10 subcategories of industries that their customers fall into, he says. Each has its own schedule of topics and timing—the motion control customers, for example, don’t want a ton of emails so R.M. Hoffman



R.M. Hoffman provides a variety of motion component and robotic lubrication solutions for engineers.

only emails them once a month.

Some emails focus on things like very technical solutions the company created for customers and how these solutions solved a particular problem, while others might highlight new products if they are deemed “news worthy” enough.

Of course, says Hoffman, connecting with engineers can be challenging because many are insular in nature.

“The nature of an engineer is that if they have a problem, they dive in to the Internet and they want to solve it themselves,” he notes, adding in the past prospects actually had to talk to sales people to get information. “Digital has transformed the nature of our company. [In messaging,] we need to create a value proposition for our company.”

In terms of metrics for email, the company looks at clicks and open rates, to see what types of messages people are responding to. “We try to look at that information as quickly as possible and adapt,” he says.

—BNV

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