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HOW NOT TO NURTURE YOUR LEADS

Ten Mistakes Manufacturers Make in Marketing Automation

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How Not to Nurture Your Leads

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Marketing and Sales have historically worked hand-in-hand to nurture prospects into leads, and leads into buyers. The Marketing department generates qualified leads and sends them to the Sales department. The Sales department's responsibility is to convert these qualified leads into customers. In most companies, this is the defined process to convert prospects into customers.

CRM (customer relationship management) systems have been around for a number of years and are used by Sales departments to manage leads through the buying process. There has been a trend over the last few years to try to automate the marketing process – in which prospects are acquired and then nurtured into qualified leads – to make it more effective. This report will cover ten mistakes manufacturers make when implementing Marketing Automation Platforms (MAP). By learning what is not effective, and what not to do, you can apply your effort in areas that can take your MAP results to a new level of performance.

What is Marketing Automation?

“Marketing automation makes it possible to deliver the right message to the right audience at the right time”- author unknown

Marketing automation, in the broadest definition, is the process of combining, streamlining and automating the processes used by the marketing and sales teams within an organization. These are the processes that start with prospect identification and initial engagement, all the way through to purchase, and increasingly, post-purchase support.

Marketing automation involves using software (a platform) to deliver personalized and timely information and engagement to prospects to nurture them into buying customers. When done correctly, use of a MAP (Marketing Automation Platform) can increase your customer base and increase your profits. However, a lot of mistakes are made when trying to implement and use MAPs. This leads to ineffective lead nurturing, low conversion rates, and flat revenue growth.

Why Do You Need Marketing Automation?

Before we talk about the common MAP mistakes, let's discuss why it is important for manufacturers, industrial suppliers and technology-based companies to have marketing automation. It is essential for these types of companies to have marketing automation so they can be competitive and efficient in nurturing leads into buying customers. This is particularly important because the Business-to-Business (B2B) sale is usually a longer, multi-step process that may last months or years before a buying decision is made.

The goal of marketing automation is to combine marketing and sales processes to create better collaboration between both groups, so that prospects are well supported through the complete buying process regardless of which internal function (Marketing or Sales) is responsible for any given interaction.

There is a statistic from the Marketing Leadership Council that says, "57% of the purchase decision process is done before a company has first contact with a customer." Most prospects look online for information, making it imperative for a company to have an online presence. This content should be visible where people look: search engines, your website, industry hubs, etc. This also makes social media an essential marketing venue to place compelling content about your company's products and services. Marketing automation can become the informational hub between these channels, as you build your presence within your online community.

The economic climate is also a factor. With tighter marketing and sales budgets, there is increased pressure to close more sales. Sales conversion rates are directly related to how well prospects are identified, and leads qualified and nurtured.

It is well established that there are many benefits to implementing MAPs and in using marketing automation correctly. Marketing automation can deliver a greater number of customers, higher conversion rates of leads, a higher per sale revenue, and higher upsell and cross sell revenue. It can positively impact all your important financial indicators. Implemented and executed well, marketing automation can deliver significant value to manufacturing and industrial sector companies.

Marketing Automation Technology and Your Processes

Turning B2B leads into buying customers is a multi-step process that can span months or years. Before you automate the process, you must first fully understand it, document it, and – as necessary – optimize it. There is a saying, "Don't pave the cow path," that summarizes the need and opportunity for process improvements prior to the implementation of technology. In the end, automation does not take the place of a strong process, it enhances it.

From the Marketing function perspective, the process starts with identification of target segments, development of personas, determining proper marketing channels to engage with the target market, and ultimately beginning the development process with prospects identified and leads generated through one or multiple channels. A prospect is usually considered a lead at some specified point along the buying process. Then, at an agreed upon point, sufficiently along this process, the lead is passed over to Sales. The remaining leads either continue along the nurturing process, or they are eliminated. This

progression can have a lot of holes, causing leads to be over-nurtured, under-nurtured, overlooked or even lost in the process.

Sales has a different view than Marketing and frequently a point of contention is the determination of when a lead becomes “sales-ready.” This debate may lead to additional questions about who is responsible for nurturing leads, and exactly how lead nurturing is even accomplished. Marketing may focus too heavily on generating new leads, wanting little involvement once a lead has been identified. Sales, on the other hand, may not even want to work with leads that are not far enough along the buying process. This conflict may leave numerous leads in the ‘no man’s land’ between Marketing and Sales, at risk of ultimately dropping out of the process through neglect.

Once this process has been fully defined, functional ownership can be assigned, and each step of the process from identification of target segments all the way to the sale, and beyond, will be clearly understood. After the gaps are identified and addressed, a strong process will emerge. This is the time to automate with a Marketing Automation Platform, which will enable you to reach even higher levels of efficiency and effectiveness than possible if done manually.

Mistakes to Avoid When Implementing a Marketing Automation Platform

As great as Marketing Automation Platforms may be, there are a number of mistakes B2B companies can make that will negatively impact your level of success. Below are the ten faux pas you’ll do well to avoid.

#1. Trying To Automate a Process That Doesn’t Exist

Companies commonly try to automate a process that doesn’t exist. Spending time and money to invest in software to automate marketing and sales efforts is a waste of time and money if the lead management process isn’t well defined or doesn’t exist. If you don’t have a good process in place to generate prospects and turn them into leads, then you can’t effectively automate the process.

You must first understand the lead generation process. While there are various lead generation models, in the simplest terms it follows these steps: 1) capturing the lead, 2) nurturing the lead, 3) “scoring” the lead to determine things like possibility of a sale or size of a potential sale and 4) handing off the lead to sales. It is critical for you to understand your specific process of lead generation for your company.

If you don’t have a clear path for nurturing leads, you can’t automate the process. You can’t fix a bad process by automating it. If you try to automate a process that doesn’t exist, all you have done is spent a lot of time and money building a big database. The holes in the process will still exist and will frequently be amplified during the automation process.

Marketing automation is only as good as the process you are trying to automate. The old saying, “Garbage in, Garbage out” applies to marketing automation.

#2. Not Understanding Your Client's Buying Cycle

Another problem that may occur is when a company has not taken the time to fully understand their general customer buying cycle. If you don't understand your customer's buying cycle, several issues can occur.

You could erroneously assume all prospects engage with you at exactly the same point in the buying cycle. You must match your actions with the phase of the buying cycle they are in or you will waste your marketing efforts and budget. Many companies eventually gain a quite sophisticated understanding of their customers' purchasing process. At the highest or most generic level, a buying cycle will include at least these steps:

- 1) The prospect becomes aware they have a need and your product might benefit them.
- 2) The prospect evaluates how your product and your competitors' product might help solve their need.
- 3) The customer makes a purchasing decision.
- 4) The customer might make additional purchases from your company.

It is critical that you match the phase with the right marketing materials. A prospect in the beginning phase will want content with details at the higher levels with less details, "How is this important to me? How will this help me solve my problems?" While a buyer in the decision marketing phase will want all the details, (size, price, delivery dates). As the potential purchase progresses into the later stages, prospects will need sales content instead of marketing content.

There are several implications of making this mistake of not understanding your customer buying cycle. You can completely "turn off" the potential customer by giving them the wrong information at the wrong time. The client could also delay making a buying decision because they are overwhelmed with too much or have too little information for their current stage of the purchase process. Even worse, if they are given the wrong or incomplete information, they may incorrectly assume that your product won't solve their need, and eliminate you completely as an option.

Your Marketing Automation Platform can help you to identify which prospects, based on their behaviors or actions, to send the needed content at the right time to facilitate the next step in the purchase process.

#3. Long Landing Page Forms Make the Users Not Want To Give All the Information

Landing page forms are an essential tool for capturing lead information that kicks off the process in your marketing automation system, but the form design and structure itself can be a hurdle to getting information. There is a balancing act between trying to get as much information as possible and how much information the prospect is willing to provide. You can turn off your visitors by having a very long form, by having too many required fields, making it difficult to complete, or by asking for too much personal information.

A landing page is a stand-alone webpage that is frequently used to promote 'free' content in exchange for capturing visitor information to be used for marketing purposes. So in its essence, there is an exchange of information that occurs. The webpage visitor gets something that they value, (coupon, eBook, whitepaper), in exchange for giving up their personal information. An effective landing page is targeted to a particular campaign or stream of traffic, such as for email campaigns or in conjunction with

social media campaigns. In this way, the landing page content can be positioned to be more persuasive for just that target market, in an attempt to attain a higher conversion rate.

A landing page form is where the visitor enters their personal information. If landing page forms are designed correctly, visitors will fill these forms out, and you may use the information to begin the marketing process.

If your landing page forms are not designed correctly to maximize form completions, you are missing an opportunity to convert website visitors to prospects. After all, you may be spending a lot of money using different methods to get visitors to your landing pages. For instance, you might be using social media, Pay per Click, emails and online advertising. This means if you don't optimize on the landing page forms properly, then all that effort, time, and money is lost.

A good landing form should be easy to fill in, easy to use and not ask for any more information than is absolutely necessary. The goal is to capture as much information as possible from the visitor, but every single field must be vetted as important to be included. If the form is too long or is difficult to use then visitors won't fill in their information. To have a good form you need to decide how much information is *really* needed and how much information you would *like* to have. Only require the visitor to fill out the information you really need and make the fields you would like to have optional. This will narrow down the number of fields required for the user to fill in. Following these steps will increase the chances of obtaining more information from the webpage visitors.

Landing page forms are a critical component in the lead generation process. If they are created and used correctly, you can increase the quantity of good leads generated by your landing page forms. This will increase the efficiency of your online marketing efforts by converting more visitors to prospects.

#4. Not Aligning Marketing and Sales Use of a CRM

A CRM (customer relationship management) system is a very flexible and powerful tool that is used to store and manage customer information. However powerful they are for management of customer data, oftentimes there is no coordination between marketing and sales about what information is stored in the CRM.

While CRM systems have been around for years, it is only in the last few years that marketing automation has gained popularity. CRM systems have generally been used to automate sales, customer service, telemarketing and technical support functions. Marketing information that captures the whole lead development process has often been missing. The data stored in CRMs is frequently compartmentalized and not tied to specific processes that support the complete customer buying cycle. Many companies that are implementing MAPs expect to continue using a CRM. However, a CRM system is only as good as the processes it automates, and clearly sales and marketing must be aligned on those processes. So if the MAP automates the process up till leads become 'sales-ready,' then the CRM must be able to effectively support the process from that point up until a sale has been made.

It is important to establish and communicate clear guidelines around how automation will accomplish the goals of *sales and marketing*. If this is not done, there will be a breakdown between the two functions and leads/prospect information will be lost during or after the transition from marketing to sales. By fully utilizing the CRM to monitor the entire lead management process, tracking information that is important to both marketing and sales, you can assure there will be no disconnect in the process which will lead to lower conversion rates.

#5. Assuming That All Customers Want (Or Are Ready) To Buy

People buy when they are ready to buy, not when you want to sell. Making an assumption that all customers either want to buy your product or they are ready to buy the product right now is a mistake. This is a catalyst for making errors in the marketing automation process. Manufacturers sometimes fall into the trap of using the same marketing materials for all prospects.

You won't convert your prospects if you assume that everyone is ready to purchase your product right now. You can't jump the gun on prospects if they aren't ready to purchase or are still in the discovery/investigation phase. This approach will turn away many prospects. A better approach is to understand both the interest and the "hot buttons" of your potential buyers. It's about building the relationships, not making the immediate sale. Personalizing the marketing materials to match the audience will optimize the marketing automation process.

The goal is to provide content that help solve their problems, build a relationship and follow up until they are ready to buy. If you build the relationship and don't consistently pressure them to buy they will let you know when they are ready to buy. Marketing automation will help this process because it is possible to track and monitor thousands of prospects every month. You can keep track of what follow up needs to be done so the leads don't fall through the cracks.

#6. Only Using Email and Not Including Digital Media

Sending plain canned emails simply doesn't work. To get people to open your emails, you must get their interest. Lead nurturing must be like a conversation between you and your prospective customer. This is accomplished by using personalization, a variety of formats and by incorporating digital media into your campaign.

Rarely will you find that sales come from the content inside email. Instead, you should think of an inbox as a gateway that leads the prospect to other digital media. This may include white papers, podcasts, blog posts or webinars. Incorporating these items makes you more interactive with your prospects, which will lead to more engagement that will build a better relationship.

It will be outside of the inbox where you can flesh out the problem, the benefits, and offers that are compelling enough to make people pick up the phone or complete the forms request. By making your content more educational and entertaining, you will increase your response rate, since people like reading interesting content that helps them solve their problems. Using digital media is a powerful way to get your emails to be more effective, and may even encourage anticipation of your future emails.

#7. Relying Only On Automated Processes

Some people narrowly view marketing automation as just plugging in the information and letting the software do the rest. This is an ineffective approach if you are trying to maximize qualified leads. Canned or robotic materials are overlooked by people or viewed as spam, and can actually hurt your reputation and marketing efforts. Marketing automation allows a shift away from mechanical automation to one that allows for mass customization and personalization.

One of your most important marketing goals is to personalize your marketing material to your target audience. This can be done in a variety of ways. For example, an easy but effective method is to use people's names in emails, tailoring the message/content to their interests, or using catchy, personalized subject lines. Another effective method is to make your emails read like a story and by tailoring the narrative to the needs of the prospects. Open with a problem, introduce your solution, and then explain why yours is the best choice.

What is powerful within most MAPs is that you can develop sequences of automated communications, highly personalized, and sequenced based on prospect behavior. Done correctly, these customized communications are not only timely to each individual prospect, but they are also highly personalized to each prospect's unique situation.

Automation is a great way to keep in touch, segment and nurture your leads in a leveraged way. Once all this is in place, you can then layer on additional elements such as broadcast emails or email campaigns based on current or public events, (think holidays or current events). You can identify touch points where the sales team might manually follow-up with prospects to further the sale or gather additional information that can be used to further drive the automated process.

Marketing automation is extremely powerful but it is not a magical solution and it certainly is not just a way to automate marketing. In its most effective implementation, it will provide a powerfully effective sequence of automated communications and manual activity triggers that are customized and personalized to each individual prospect in such a way that maximizes sales.

#8. Not Testing the Processes

Marketing automation isn't a linear process. Often the systems are put in place and are forgotten. It is the, "If it isn't broken, don't fix it" mentality. To be effective you must understand what is working and what isn't, and to expect to optimize effectiveness over time. Your marketing automation processes should be ever-evolving. Test, refine, optimize and repeat.

To start with, you must know what success means for your company. In other words, what do you want to accomplish in terms of the lead nurturing process, and what are your specific goals? You need to know what you're optimizing for before you can begin optimizing, unless you are willing to waste both time and money. You'll want to define your goals in terms that can be measured. For example, how many prospects do you want turned into leads for a specific campaign? Or what increase in visits to a landing page is expected for another email campaign? For maximum effectiveness, you must choose the right metrics, know your overall goals, make sure your goals are measurable, and to iterate and optimize over time based on learning what works and what does not work.

When you are testing, it is important to have a test plan that allows you to test the whole process and in sequence. You'll want to make sure you understand the details of what isn't working and where it fits

into the overall process. For example, if you discover that your emails are driving traffic to your website but you aren't converting the traffic into leads, you will take a different action than if your emails drive traffic that converts to leads that are not highly qualified. Once you identify where the problems are occurring, develop the solutions, make needed adjustments, then you must keep monitoring and refining. Remember also that you may test several solutions to see which one works best.

In terms of what to measure, be sure to include a mix of high level and detailed level metrics. And you will want to measure for each step of the process, as well as financial measures. Bottom line, if you don't test and refine your marketing automation programs, you will not be effective as you could be otherwise, and you will not maximize your ROI for the investment.

#9. Taking a One Size Fits All Approach

Different customers require different content. Differences could be based on the role of the participant in the purchasing process, the problems that they are seeking solutions for, or even the stage of the process the prospect or lead falls within. For this reason, you can't take a one size fits all approach to lead generation and nurturing. Bottom line: A generic blueprint won't convert leads into customers.

A lot of time and money will be wasted if you do generic lead nurturing. Understanding your customers and their problems or needs is imperative. You need to take off your company hat and put yourself in the place of your customer. See your product from their point of view and understand their needs. Try to understand what your customers' problems are, what they need help with, and when they need it.

Once you understand the needs of your customers, then you can then consider how your solution will help them. You need to tailor your marketing material towards their problems and how your offerings comprise a solution. For instance, your product might be a solution for different industries or problems. You need to tailor the material for the customer. What may work for the medical manufacturing industry may not work for the furniture industry. Don't have generic content that focuses on your products features and details. Tie the content into how your product is a solution for your customer's problems.

Segmentation can help with this step. Prospects commonly share buying characteristics with each other. Break down your prospects into segments based on similar characteristics or interests, then create marketing content specific to those segments. This will result in higher conversions and more qualified leads.

Taking a one size fits all approach will only lead to wasted resources in lead nurturing. You need to customize your content to match the needs and problems of your customers. This will increase your efficiency in your lead nurturing efforts.

#10. Making Too Many Offers or Not Making Enough Offers

Making too many or not enough offers will hamper the lead nurturing process. The goal is to lead your prospects to the next level of the buying process. You need to make sure your offers are well placed and frequent enough to be effective but not so frequent you alienate a prospect.

This is a two-fold problem. First, if you send too many offers to the prospects they will start to view your materials as spam and completely ignore them. Second, if you don't make an offer often enough you risk not taking the prospect to the next level. You need to find the right balance between too many offers and not enough. Scoring prospects can help you decide how often you need to make an offer. Prospects should be scored and graded, allowing sales reps to prioritize their leads. This will determine which prospects need a stronger or more frequent offer to buy and which ones need more cultivating.

Your materials should always provide value and include a call to action. This doesn't mean all material should include a sales pitch. There are two types of content: educational, which is commonly used by marketing, and content with a sales pitch, which is generally used by sales. Educational material is different from a sales pitch because it focuses on the prospect and not your company. It sells, (often without a hard sells pitch) and positions you as an expert. Think about this: does your physician need to tell you how many degrees she has or how competent she is? Or does she focus on your problems, diagnose your symptoms and offer solutions?

Some content will focus on how great the company is and how the product can solve the prospects problems. This is known as a sales pitch and its purpose is to position the company and the company's product(s). This type of content is important to close the sale but it should not be used before the customer is ready. Remember, the primary goal is to nurture the prospect until they are ready to purchase. In summary, education-based marketing emails and sales materials should be sent to the right people at the right time.

You need frequent communications with your prospects and all material should include a next step, an offer or a call to action. Content should focus on how you can help your prospects instead of about closing the sale. If you focus on guiding your prospects to the next step, you will avoid making too many or not enough offers.

Why You Don't Want to Make These Mistakes

We have covered ten mistakes that you would do well to avoid in the marketing automation process. These gaffes will cause a higher number of leads to fall out of the process and lower your conversion rates for the leads that do not drop out. The goal of lead development and nurturing is to acquire, develop and convert as many prospects into buying customers as possible. If you have a solid, well-defined process, backed up by good marketing automation support, you will earn higher revenues a better return on your investment.

Marketing Automation Software

Marketing automation software is becoming increasingly popular as companies try to adapt to the changing customer behavior and to improve their marketing and sales effectiveness.

There are dozens of these platforms on the market. Selection of the best software for your company is a complex decision.

As you start the selection process, it is important to identify your goals and requirements. It is of crucial importance to gather the needs from all stakeholders that will use the new software. Also, it is important

to find software that supports *your* processes, instead of trying to change your processes to match the software. Additionally, you'll want to consider the compatibility between your current systems, (CRM, Email Campaign Manager, etc.) and the solutions you are evaluating. You want to make sure that old systems you intend to maintain work well with the new software. After you understand your (prioritized) requirements, then take time to research all the different solutions that might be a good fit. This process will help you make a good purchasing decision.

There are a lot different marketing automation software solutions and you want to make sure to select the one that meets the need of your organization. You don't want to use a jackhammer if a hammer will do the job. Picking the right marketing automation software is complex but is easier if you understand your needs, your goals and take the time to identify and evaluation your options.

Conclusion

Marketing automation - when implemented effectively - can make a huge difference in your company's ability to identify, acquire, nurture, and convert prospects into customers. This report has covered ten mistakes to avoid when implementing marketing automation. By heeding this advice, you will gain greater financial reward for your hard work, and your Marketing, Sales and Customer Service functions will deliver a more seamless experience to your customers. In the end, it boils down to this simple adage: marketing automation is about "delivering the right content to the right people at the right time!"