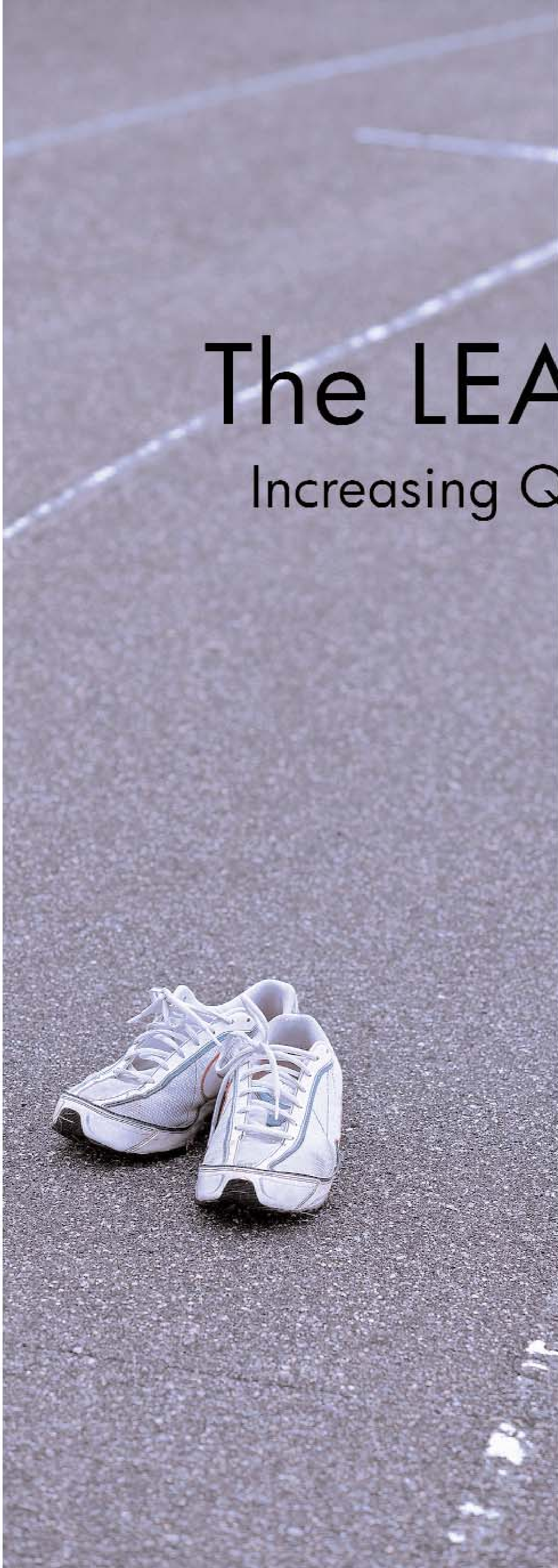


The LEADing Edge

Increasing Qualified Leads Online

futurenow
MARKET BETTER

Business-to-business marketers want to generate leads. Sales wants marketing to generate leads, too. Except, sales wants leads they stand a chance of turning into buyers. Picky, picky! However, in the end, no one wins when marketing simply plays a numbers game. You can generate mountains of leads, but if only the tiniest fraction conclude a sale, your inefficiency has compromised your company's potential.

The trick is to send sales qualified leads. Qualified leads are far more likely to become buyers. Qualified leads allow sales to do the job they do best.

An increasingly important tool for marketers and sales teams in their business-to-business arsenal is a lead-generation Web site. Current research indicates decision-makers turn to a lead-generation site as a source of information 51 percent of the time; this is over twice as often as they turn to television, radio, magazines and newspapers for the same information.[1] And yet, IDC reports that business sites lose "50% of their potential sales due to inadequate online information."[2] This whitepaper will provide an overview of why careful attention to this piece of the marketing-sales mix can make a huge difference.

Building Trust

As with any form of transaction, establishing mutual trust is critical. Marketers nurture prospect trust by carefully constructing messaging and content support, and by creating process steps - for example, a form - that persuade rather than irritate. Sales takes the preliminary trust built in the lead-generation process and expands on it.

The online environment creates, by nature, a more depersonalized experience for all parties, especially for the sales/lead relationship. Sales no longer enjoys the same degree of face to face communication that allows them to read and respond to the prospect's non-verbal signals. It becomes increasingly important for marketing and sales to work together to construct as full a picture as possible of the individuals they hope to convert into buyers. Marketers can help flesh out these pictures of prospect needs, intentions, buying styles and propensity to purchase - information without which sales can't hope to do its job effectively.

It is then incumbent on sales to reinforce the work of marketers by affirming the marketing message and leading prospects deeper into the conversion funnel. None of this waiting seven days - or even seven hours - to get back in touch with a lead. Interest and trust decline exponentially the longer sales fails to follow through. Contact in the first hour is six times more effective than contact initiated after the first hour![3] OUCH! Let's restate that for emphasis if the potency of reaching out to the lead in the first hour was 100 points then after the first hour it is under 17 points. This is a serious problem that undermines any lead-generation effort. Omniture and InsideSales.com conducted a study of sales response times and nurturing strategies and found:

Average email response time: 19 hours, 31 minutes. Optimum response time should be within the first hour.

Average phone response time: 36 hours, 57 minutes. Optimum phone response time should be within the first five minutes

How many companies even responded? Only 47.3 percent responded via email, and just 7.5 percent responded via phone![4]

Obviously, this is a huge pink elephant standing in the middle of the sales room. Marketers have potential customers who indicated interest and at least some level of qualification to buy and then sales people practically refuse to respond.

There is little reason to expect prospects to trust you or apprehend your value when you treat them so. If concluding a sale isn't important to you, you can't fault your prospects for assuming your company isn't interested in providing them stellar service. And the consequences reverberate far beyond one dissatisfied lead.

The larger issue business-to-business companies need to address in their Web sites in order to build trust, confidence and value is transparency. With prospects increasingly in control of their experiences and the information they can gather, you can't hide your downsides. And every company has its limitations. Prospects are turning in larger numbers to third-party evaluations of your products and services as well as reviews of the way you do business; they are adding their voices to the chorus as well.

Transparency [is all about] how much of your business you reveal to your audience .... The experience economy of today requires you to commit to a fairly high level of transparency. It's critical. To feel confident, customers need and want information, and if they cannot get it from you, they'll get it from someone else. It's beneficial to you to acknowledge the substance of what is available, even the negatives, so you can communicate and position it in the proper light.[5]

Acknowledging openly what you can and can't do helps prospects feel you aren't shooting from the hip; that you've thought about what your business can offer and are honest about what it can't. Mining these reviews also helps you identify issues you might want to address to improve a prospect's ability to trust you, develop confidence in you and determine your value to them.

To help build trust, you might try some of the following ideas:

- Include information about what it's like to work with your company. Let them know when you will contact them. Assure them you will only help them determine their needs and not pressure them and mean it.

- Ramp up your About Us page. Tell them about your company and its people - its what the page was meant for and what visitors to it expect. So say less about the CEO's hobbies and more about the sales and customer service people a prospect will interact with by email or phone.

- Ask as few questions as possible in your lead form. Don't ask them to give you all types information or endure a stack of intimidating drop downs or you will lose qualified prospects.

- Include short, friendly lead forms in several places on the site (not just your Contact Us page). This will help you track where they filled out the form and better inform you what they might be interested in.

- Tell them exactly what will happen when they send their info; tell them how soon they will be hearing from you and stick to it. If possible give them a choice of how and when they prefer you to contact them.

- Some visitors like to be prepared for the call. Provide a checklist of information they might need to have handy when they speak with you.

- Some visitors prefer to call. Provide the phone number near the lead form.

Content: The Centerpiece in Lead-Generation

The centerpiece of a good lead-generation site is content. Content that identifies your prospects' needs. Content that answers their questions. Content that reinforces relevance and value to your prospects and builds trust. Content that nurtures leads by prioritizing their decision processes, focusing on benefits and individual goals.

Prospects fail to convert to leads for three critical reasons:

1. They don't understand the value they get in exchange for giving their information.

2. They are informationally challenged and collect too little, too much, or incorrect information.

3. You haven't established trust and set proper expectations of what to expect when doing business with you.[6]

To even begin creating targeted content, you need to understand a prospect's experience in sales and/or customer service. Certain questions can help you identify sticking points for prospects, which you can then address on your lead-generation site.

- Do you know exactly what your sales team considers a qualified lead?

- Do you know exactly how the lead-to-customer sales process unfolds?

- Are you aware of the obstacles prospects might face when they research their options?

- Could you list the questions your prospects ask as they go about making their decisions? (Amazingly, not all of these will be the questions you think they should be asking.)

- What sorts of questions arise in different stages of the buying decision process? Think of those seemingly tangential questions you hear from prospective customers and try to understand how they find them valuable.

- What specific information do special interest parties (for example, a CEO, CFO or CMO) require?

You can't generate and nurture qualified leads without answers to these questions. But you don't have to come up with the answers by yourself. The sales team and customer service representatives deal with the implications of these questions every day. They'll be more than happy to share information that will help you help your prospects evaluate your company.

Benefits and Perceived Value

Every decision has an emotional component - prospects must be able to visualize themselves reaping the benefits of their decision, and they must feel good about the decision. Content that answers these emotional needs is far more persuasive than content that approaches rewards from a more clinical perspective.

> *As an expert in your industry, you see your service far more intellectually than does your potential client. Your client only sees what your service might allow her to accomplish. You want your words to illuminate exactly those hopes.*
>
> *Yet most service companies only describe what their services [are]. Be smarter than that and vividly describe what your services have allowed your clients to go on and do.*
>
> *Example: say your SEO services moved your client up from #15 to #4 in Google's search rankings. Congratulations, but proclaiming that in your web copy won't necessarily cause a potential client to pull the trigger on an engagement. It's meaningful to you, but it may or may not be emotionally stirring to the client.*
>
> *And people have a much easier time imagining personal rewards from a lustrous and intense depiction of kicking butt than they do from a clinical description of how you normally measure success.*[7]

Using your content to paint the picture of enjoying the benefits of your product or service tips the trust and value equation in your favor.

Target Your Content to Personas

Content on a lead-generation site that addresses the needs of prospects through the stages of their buying decision process (from early to late) gives you a simple filter for targeting your content to individual needs. Targeting content to the ways in which different people approach the buying decision process and gather information puts you in the upper echelon and maximizes your efforts.

Each prospect makes a buying decision in different ways. They ask different questions. They require different sorts of information. We call these “buying modalities,” and they parallel long-standing research that identifies four dominant temperament categories.

Simply put, individuals make their decisions slowly or quickly; they also differ in the extent to which they prefer a presentation that favors logic or emotion.

	Logic	Emotion
Fast	Competitive	Spontaneous
Slow	Methodical	Humanistic

These two aspects of how individuals make decisions – evaluation speed and presentation preference - give us four dominant buying modalities, which we call Competitive, Spontaneous, Methodical and Humanistic. No one fits always and completely into one of these categories; yet there are established behavior patterns. When we make decisions, we do strongly favor one of the above styles.

Methodical decision makers. Most B2B sales efforts are designed for these people. They're concerned with how things work, organization, rules, and methods. They can be too rigid. They're practical, analytical, and conservative, and they devour information. We all know decision makers like this. From their need to make an educated choice and devour information, Methodicals usually read through to the bottom of the page.

Spontaneous decision makers. These folks are high-energy, poised business people. They're concerned with activity, flexibility, and authenticity. Often, they're too impatient. They're adventure seekers. They are responsive and seek individual expression and attention. Spontaneous decision makers want to know about the experience they'll have with your product or service.

Humanistic decision makers. These are people-oriented business people. These folks are concerned with relationships, harmony, principles, and big-picture outlooks. They can be perfectionists and slow to make decisions. They're listeners, creative types, and easy going. They seek possibilities and meaning in their work. The humanist values people and relationships above all, wanting to know who your product or service helps. Client testimonials are the best way to communicate a product's or service's value.

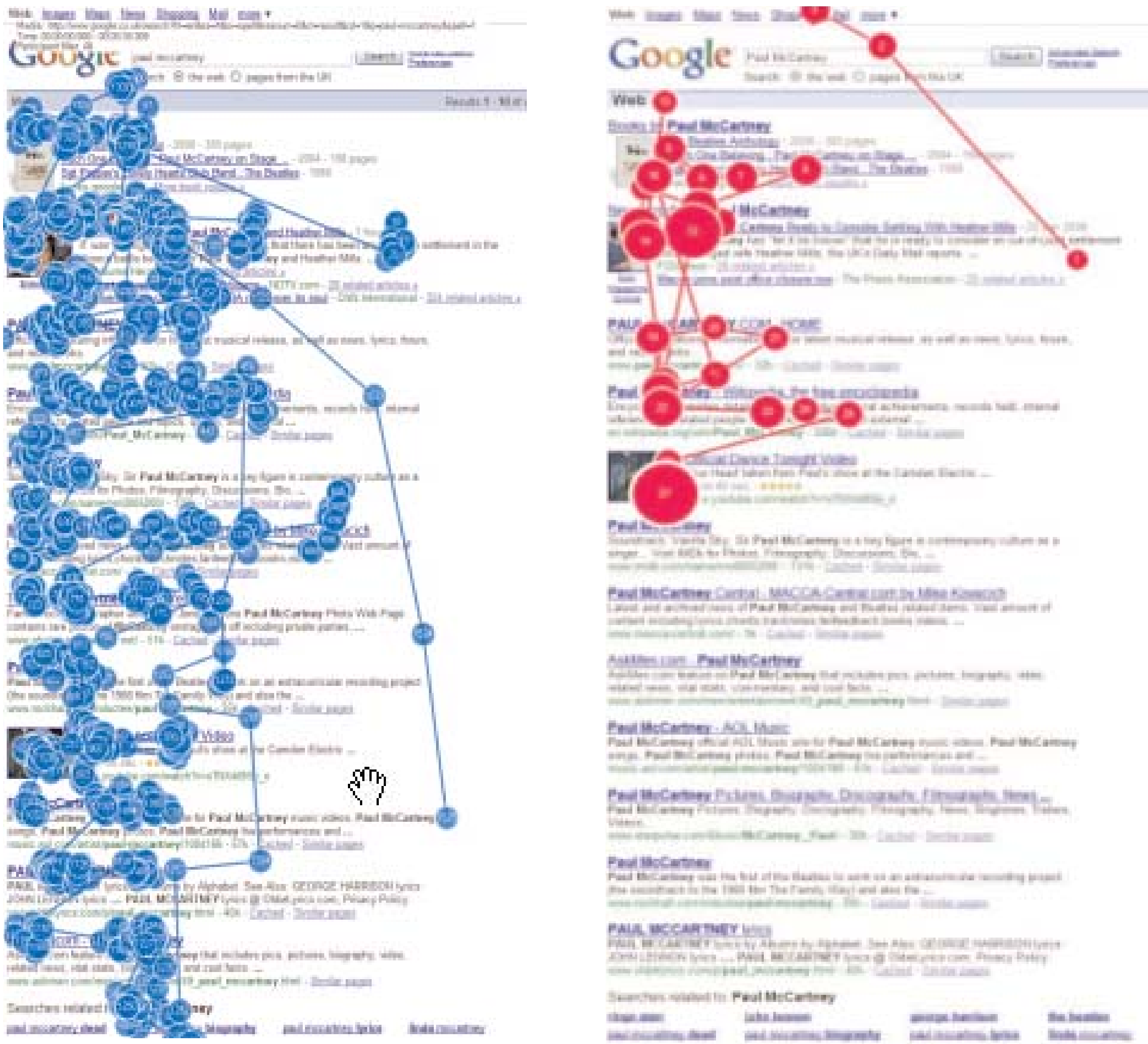
Competitive decision makers. The driven, success-oriented business people. They're independent, enthusiastic, and controlling. They are willing to take risks and can be a dominating. They're logical, seek competence, set higher goals, have clear visions, and make quick, smart decisions. Competitive decision makers are aggressive. The only thing that excites them more than getting something done is getting more done. And they're particularly easy to lose if you "sell past the close."

Using these frameworks, you flesh out personas, archetypes of actual customers complete with motivations, needs, expectations and questions specific to their style of decision making. Once you have created personas, you create narratives for how they progress through their decision process, so you are able to present information that answers their questions when they ask them and provides conversion steps when they are ready to make them.

By allowing you to imagine their concerns, reactions and questions, personas allow you to better plan marketing interactions and messaging. Personas are critical to lead-generation Web sites, specifically those that want to engage their suspects and prospects in a sales dialogue online and offline.[8]

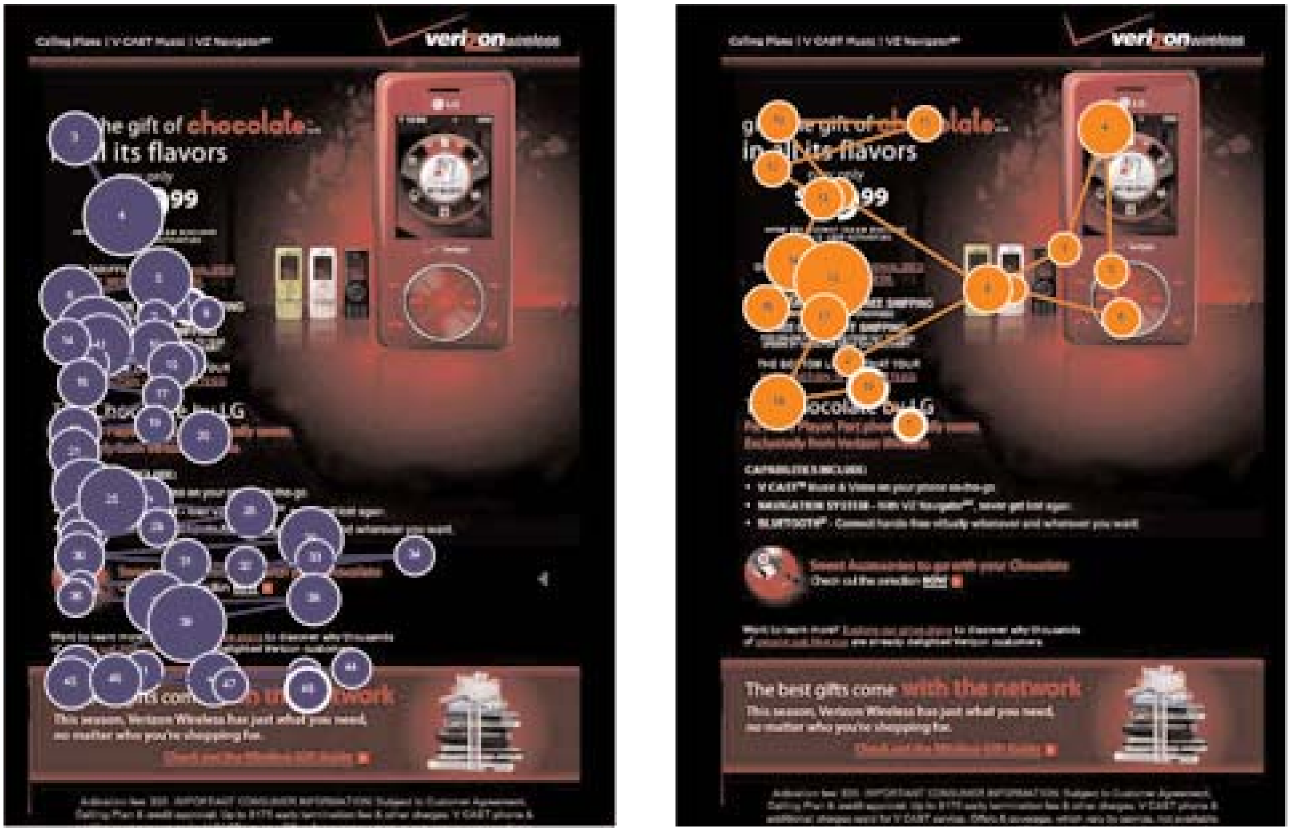
Do individuals really interact with Web sites and content differently? There are a number of ways this has been demonstrated experimentally. An easy way to see such buying modality differences is with a Heat Map, a recording of eye movement across a computer screen. Heat Maps reveal surprisingly consistent results.

Let's examine two different Heat Map examples that demonstrate a marked difference between how the Methodical prospect and the Spontaneous prospect interact with the content on a full Web page. Methodical individuals make decisions slowly and favor a logical approach in the presentation of information. They are exhaustive when gathering information, leaving very few stones unturned. In contrast, a Spontaneous individual makes decisions quickly and prefers an approach that satisfies a need for attention to the emotional aspects of the task.



Google search Heat Map images for Methodical (left) and Spontaneous (right)

The Methodical Heat Map appears on the left; the Spontaneous on the right. Given these Google search results, the Methodical will peruse with comprehensive attention. The Spontaneous, however, focuses on the top-most rankings, spends far less time with each and never makes it to the bottom of the page. Notice, too, the Spontaneous spends a significant portion of time near imagery before moving to the associated link. In contrast, the Methodical preference is to seek out supporting words and details for the images before moving further down the list.



Verizon Chocolate Heat Map images for Methodical (left) and Spontaneous (right)

The results on a product page for Verizon's Chocolate mobile telephone are similar. The Methodical combs the copy, spending significant time with every piece, and doesn't even bother with what the phone actually looks like. The Spontaneous cares what the phone looks like and doesn't bother with copy that could be perceived as feature-like or fine print.

Not only does this awareness allow you to create the content that appeals to different buying modalities, it helps you understand where this content needs to appear on your site.

The number of personas you create depends on your target audience. Sometimes you may simply need to address the four buying modalities or even a subset of these. However, if there are other members on the decision-making team with specific concerns - a CEO, CFO or perhaps CMO - you will want to create personas that target these perspectives with appropriate information.

Refine Your Content Through Content Tagging

A recent development in monitoring the effectiveness of your presentation and the paths prospects take through your site is content tagging. Content tagging allows you to score which content performs well based on the persona scenario for which you have created it simply by tagging individual pieces and evaluating prospect interaction with them.

> *[T]he next frontier is to read and respond to the "Digital Body Language" of their prospects. This new body language is invisible to the sales team, yet is a better indicator of real buying interest than anything else in the salesperson's toolkit. It is revealed through online activities such as website visits, white paper downloads, and email responses. Tracking this behavior can help companies quickly identify the buyers that are "raising their hands" to show interest in their solution.*
>
> *… Buyers each take different paths to purchasing a product or solution. Along the way, their information needs and behaviors change as they progress through the buying cycle.*[9]

For example, at the consideration phase a prospect may download a white paper examining relevant industry trends. Further down in the sales funnel, a prospect may be tackling the technical specifications and implementation issues around a particular solution.

In creating any Web site, businesses need to continually ask and answer three questions. These are the essential questions that allow you to persuade to the best of your ability; they are the questions that define FutureNow's proprietary Persuasion Architecture® process.

1. Whom are we trying to persuade to take the action?

2. What is the action we want someone to take?

3. What does that person need in order to feel confident taking that action?

The actions you hope prospects take should not be limited to the end conversion goal of actually generating the lead. That's only what you want; it's necessary, but not enough on its own. You also need to consider each step the prospect takes along the way as a conversion. When you understand the content you need to supply for each of these steps, you are in a position start determining its effectiveness.

Lead Qualification Strategies

Review your lead-generation forms

Include more than one lead form

Don't ask for the lead too early

Reinforce your message throughout the process

Aggressively optimize your process

Discover where your traffic comes from

Experiment with offers

How can you best persuade your prospects? You always persuade more effectively when you speak to your prospects' personal and business needs. The key thing to remember is that prospects have their own goals. Their business goals are not the same as your business goals.

Important prospect goals for a simpler lead-generation site might include downloading a whitepaper or spec sheet. For something like this, a simple landing page - linked to a process that directs them to completing a form - may be all you need.

In more complex lead-generation efforts, you may find you need different landing pages that speak to each of your personas and lead them to content-specific information designed to provide information in a presentation they prefer.

Content tagging should become an important component in your measuring and optimizing strategies. This is an excellent way to help you achieve better results with less effort! A number of tools are on the market, some of them free, with which you can start testing such strategies.

Tips for Solving Your Lead Qualification Problem

Creating and refining content is a central part of solving the issue of generating qualified leads. What other strategies might you try?

Review Your Lead Generation Forms

Typically lead-gen site forms fail in two major areas: Many lead-gen sites simply copy forms from a site they like, giving little thought to the nuances and the difference between their business goals and the site they copied. The result can lead to a slew of unqualified leads, or low conversion to lead. Other companies make their complex lead scoring requirements the visitor's job. Avoid creating such a complex lead scoring system composed of an intimidating lead form with a dozen intrusive questions and several drop downs with more than 20 choices. The obvious result is a troublesome high form abandonment rate. Only the most determined of leads would actually complete the entire form. As these were prospects who were more likely to convert anyway, you've gained nothing.

To solve both of the above problems, there's one successful approach: use a two-part lead form.

On the first page, where each field is a required field, ask the minimum amount of questions possible for a visitor to become a lead. The absolute minimum! Ask for the contact information and little else.

On the second page, ask several more optional questions that will help you better qualify the lead. Above the form, explain that the more information the prospect provides, the better you can prepare for a conversation with them. The prospect may or may not give you the optional information, but you at least have contact information the sales team can use for follow-up. Make sure in between the first form page and the second you actually save the lead's info permanently, as the second page is focused on optional information – you should be able to happily service the lead's request from the info you derive on the first page.

Include More Than One Lead Form

Many sites still link to one lead form on the site. Consider placing lead forms in several places on the site. Providing lead forms on each product/service pages and on other key pages allows you to track where the lead form was filled out and provides a helpful nugget of data for the sales team as they contact that lead.

Avoid Asking for the Lead Too Early

Don't require prospects to fill out a form before they have had an opportunity to see your content. Many prospects early in the buying decision process aren't ready to commit yet by filling out a lead form before they determine the value of doing so. Many prospects bail when faced with this tactic; it feels "spammy" to them.

Reinforce the Message Along the Way

It's a good idea when speaking to a persona to keep reinforcing the message from landing page to site to pages within the site that target a specific persona. If a prospect clicks on a link from content that is relational (Humanistic), maintain this content attribute further into the conversion process.

Aggressively Optimize Your Lead-Generation Process

Many e-commerce sites pour time and resources into improving their checkout process. Lead-generation sites don't seem to have the same commitment to testing and optimizing their process. If you're a lead-generation site, your lead-generation process is your checkout process

— it's just as critical to your business as a shopping cart is to an e-commerce site.

Discover Where Your Traffic Comes From

Identify which sources of traffic generation are creating improved qualification rates and maximal close rates. You need to have the analytics and a CRM / sales workflow system that helps you close the loop from marketing all the way through the close of the sale.

Experiment with Offers

Identify which types of offers improve qualification rates and close rates. Understand your personas and what actually matters to them. Spend time testing and refining offers and generating additional content that you can prove matters to your prospects. Some of your offers will do better with one type of persona than another, so compare offers on a persona basis as well as in the aggregate.

Content - information within a structure that supports the needs of your prospects as it persuades - drives your lead-generation efforts. When you begin with an understanding of what your sales team considers a qualified lead, you are in a much better position to start creating a process that supplies those leads. Personas and content tagging will allow you to refine the content you create so that you maximize not only your conversion rates, but also your return on investment.

Now go start generating some leads!

ENDNOTES

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ABOUT FUTURENOW

FutureNow(OTCBB: FUTR.OB) is the provider of OnTarget™. OnTarget monitors your website 24/7, uncovers the reasons your visitors fail to buy, register, or become a lead, and then provides specific expert recommendations you can implement to keep your goals on target. FutureNow has been helping businesses generate more engagements, leads, subscriptions, and sales with its unique framework, Persuasion Architecture®, since 1998.

Jeffrey & Bryan Eisenberg are the founders of FutureNow and with John Quarto-vonTivadar the inventors of Persuasion Architecture. They are also the co-authors of the *Wall Street Journal*, *Business Week*, *USA Today* and *New York Times* bestselling books *Call to Action*, *Always Be Testing* and *Waiting For Your Cat to Bark?*. They write the popular marketing optimization blog *GrokDotCom.com* and are frequent keynote speakers at events such as CMA, AMA, DMA, Search Engine Strategies,, Shop.org, UIE, NAB and ad:tech.

FutureNow's clients, who include HP, NBC Universal, GE, WebEx, Overstock and Dell, as well as many others who have consistently enjoyed dramatic improvement in lead generation, subscriptions and sales using FutureNow's Persuasion Architecture framework that is now available to everyone with FutureNow's OnTarget software-as-a-service.