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The Lead Generation Strategy Guide

Introduction

We have come a long way in the lead generation game. Digital processes have replaced old marketing tactics like endless ads and cold calls that interrupt dinnertime to help and educate prospects instead of overwhelming them. The process of wooing new customers is now more organic, leading to genuinely interested buyers who are in it for the long haul.

But there's an art to this second stage of the inbound marketing process (between attracting audiences and converting them to pass to sales). It takes regular education, relevant content, and genuine relationship–building to convert today's savvy consumers. Through careful planning, trial and error, marketing automation, and results analysis, marketing teams can fill the funnel with more qualified leads that eventually close.

This guide explores the concept of lead generation, the tools and tactics that make it easier, and how to establish sound strategies that ensure more qualified buyers from the start.

What is Lead Generation?

Lead generation is the process of attracting new prospects to your business and driving them to become a customer through regular nurturing (via email, organic search, or social media marketing). In the past, marketing would identify potential leads and pass them to sales, who then scheduled demos to educate leads about products and services, hopefully leading to new business.

Today, lead generation is mainly consumer-driven. Prospects decide when to research, which companies to compare, and when they're ready to convert—bypassing generic advertisements and email blasts along the way. Instead, they act on online content such as paid advertisements, organic search engine results, content marketing, and referrals uniquely tailored to their needs.

This is why educating, preparing, and qualifying prospects through lead nurturing is so important. However, assembling a dedicated team that's well-versed in lead generation and nurturing strategy can help tremendously. This team is typically composed of members of both sales and marketing who hold specific roles. It's marketing's job to plan, produce, monitor, and evaluate the best lead generation content, tools, and channels. After the leads reach a predetermined qualification threshold, it's sales' job to close the buying cycle and convert the engaged leads into customers.

Creating a Lead Generation Model

Working closely with sales, you must establish a detailed roadmap of how prospects will move from an anonymous website visitor to a satisfied customer and valuable brand advocate. Sales professionals are an excellent resource for developing a lead generation strategy because they understand what appeals to buyers, how to respond to their objections, and what hurdles they must overcome before purchasing. Collaborate on the most realistic and beneficial sales cycle to arrive at both teams' achievable lead generation roadmap. Don't forget to discuss possible roadblocks and workarounds before challenges arise.

Once you plan your roadmap, create a lead generation model that helps you identify where your most qualified leads are coming from and what types of content they're consuming. Consider the following questions:

- Who is your audience?
- What does your audience want?
- What keywords are bringing them to your site?
- What keywords are you missing?

Successful teams review these questions multiple times per year as technology, business practices, and even your average customer evolve.

Once you've established these guidelines, score each lead based on their website browsing behavior. The longer they explore, visit pages, and return to the site, the higher their score will be. Present leads with opportunities to learn more and begin capturing their information through lead forms that include fields such as name, email address, business role, and company. With their information and consent to receive emails, you can build a lead generation campaign that brings them into the funnel.

Consider adopting these lead generation best practices as well:

- **Create a lead generation website.** Whether this is your company's entire online presence or a sister site for education about your industry, have a platform where all content is created with the buyer in mind. Post articles about your industry, infographics, interactive surveys, and animated videos demoing your product. Provide offers that promote early bird deals for event registration or giveaways for webinar attendees.

- **Initiate an email campaign.** Email lead generation is an effective way to drum up new business made even easier with marketing automation. Prospects and website visitors can opt into weekly or monthly newsletters featuring your best, most relevant content, eventually leading to conversion. Segmenting recipients helps tailor emails even further with the most relevant send times and information tailored to their industry. Be sure to keep your subject line concise and catchy while being honest with your offer.

- **Consider outsourcing lead generation**. Outsourcing lead generation can save your team time and sanity. Search for a reputable agency that displays a long and trustworthy list of clients with proven results. Ensure the agency is highly specialized with writers, strategists, and designers who demonstrate a deep understanding of lead generation strategy.

- **Develop a lead generation partnership.** Boost your lead generation sales by teaming up with another company in your industry to promote each other's content (comarketing) and even co-host events and webinars. Partnerships open up your audience by taking advantage of their CRM contacts and social media followers.
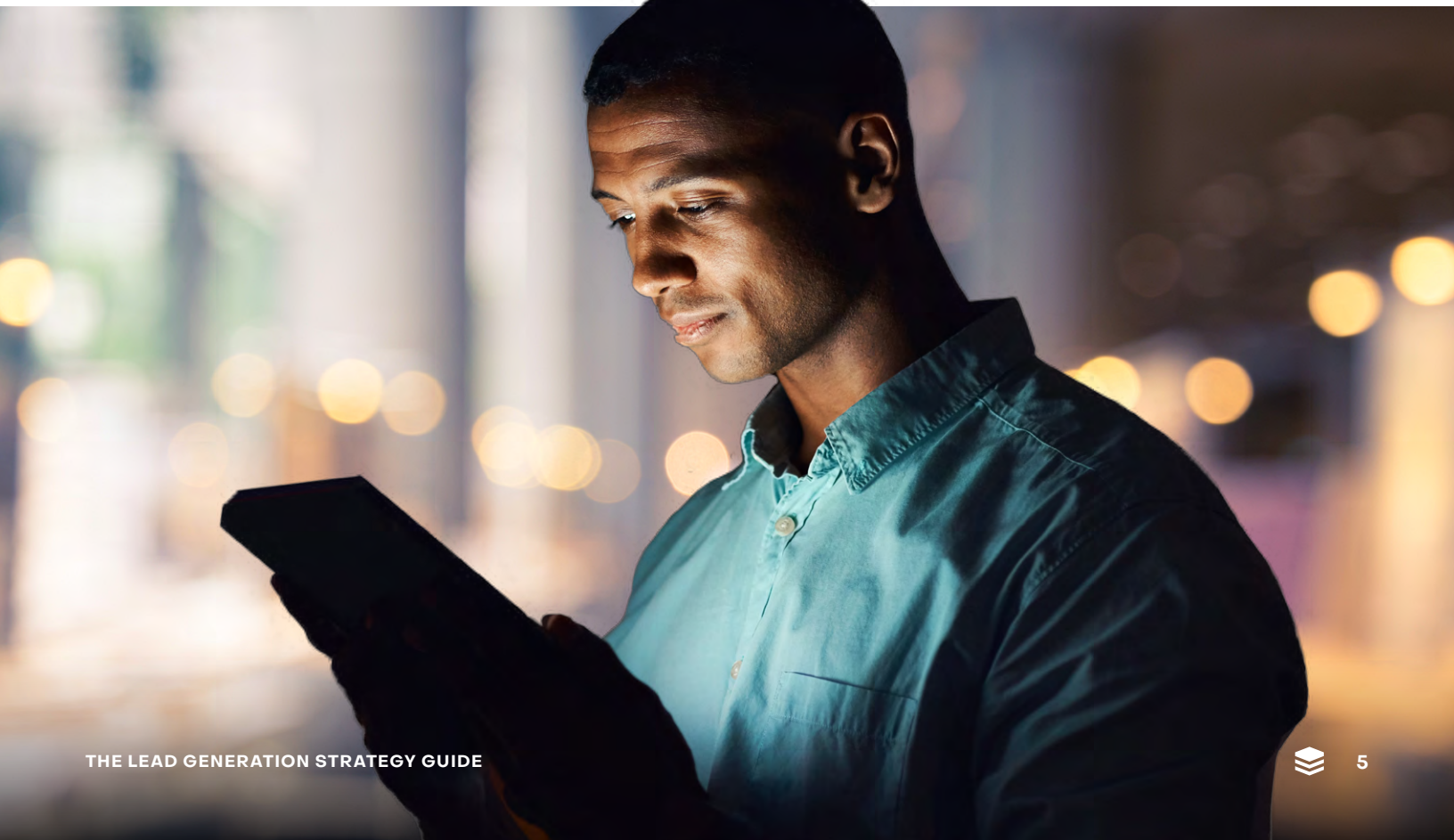
Ensuring Qualified Leads

There are several ways to bring leads into the funnel, but not all will result in prospects who are a good fit for your company. It is neither efficient nor productive to attract anyone and everyone, as different prospects are searching for different things. It is better to disqualify leads early who can't afford your product or won't use it in a way that will be beneficial for their size and industry.

Qualified lead generation ensures your buyers are the right customer for your company. Not only does lead qualification ensure a smoother conversion process, but it promotes greater customer knowledge and satisfaction long–term. Passing off marketing qualified leads (MQLs) is the process of feeding sales fewer, yet higher qualified leads.

To define MQLs, pay special attention to:

- **Fit.** Proper fit can hinge on the prospect's intended product usage, industry, size, and location. Make a list of your best customers (including those that closed their sales cycles quickly and easily), and compare their similarities. Are they in the same industry, size category, or location? What were their behaviors like as leads?
- **Data.** Working with your sales department, determine every possible interaction a lead can have with your company before becoming a customer. This may include resource downloads, demo requests, and website page views. Then, analyze which interactions have the highest close rates.
- **Close rates.** Determine close rates for individual resources (e.g., whitepapers or data sheets) or actions (e.g., conversations at events or webinars) and compare which ones are more likely to lead to conversion.

Properly qualifying leads examines a prospect's implicit and explicit data, including who they are, their website browsing behavior, and their engagement with marketing materials, indicating significant interest that may lead to conversion.

- **Explicit data** — a lead's industry, title, company size, location, etc.
- **Implicit data** — a lead's website activity, downloads, email engagement, opens and clicks, etc.

Yet, there's no longer a formal "handoff" where marketing passes names and phone numbers to sales to close the deal in modern lead generation marketing. Instead, sales reps must periodically check in on leads, even as the prospect continues researching, engaging with content, and exploring your services. As a marketing team, work with sales to define when they should reach out to qualified leads (e.g., after downloading an asset or engaging with multiple emails) while continuing the nurturing process.

Lead Generation Tools and Best Practices

There are countless best practices and guides available to aid your lead generation process. But don't overlook more traditional tactics that should still be an integral part of your strategy, including:

- In-person networking events, such as lunch and learns or happy hours
- A basic elevator pitch delivered along with your business card
- Industry-based LinkedIn groups and discussions
- Customer-led referrals

Even as digital lead generation strategies evolve, person-to-person interactions like these will make buyers feel they are interacting with people who care about their business instead of sales funnel machines.
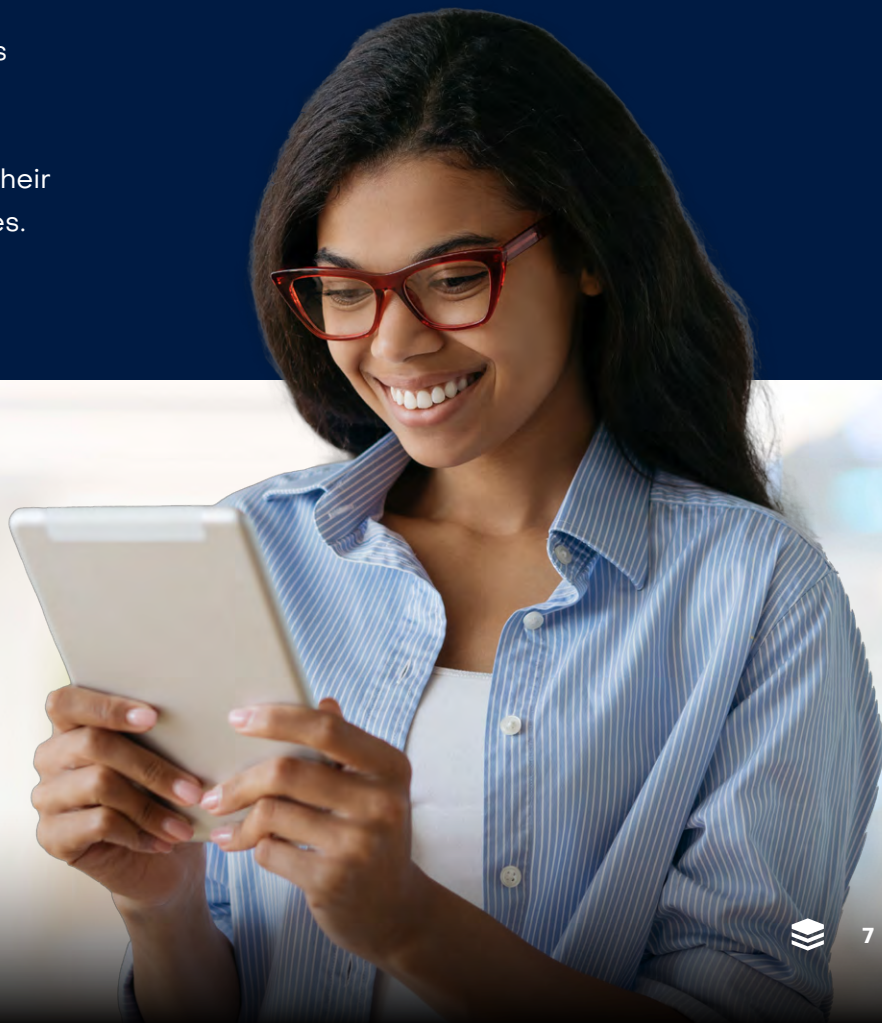
Online Advertising

Online advertising ensures quality lead generation because only those interested will engage with your content. There are three main types of lead generation advertising, including:

1. Cost Per Impression

Your company is charged for the number of times the ad is viewed and whether it led to clicks.

2. Cost (or pay) Per Click (PPC)

Your company is charged only when potential leads click on the advertisement.

3. Cost Per Action

Your company is only charged when an action results in the viewer becoming a lead.

These online lead generation tools help you expand your audience and should be part of your marketing budget. Start small to see how your ads perform and increase over time. Paid online advertising ensures targeted lead generation, especially on LinkedIn and Facebook, where you can control recipient details, such as industry, professional title, location, and even age.

Social media advertising is a fast and hyper–direct way to reach new audiences. Different platforms appeal to different demographics, allowing you to tailor your messages. Twitter offers lead generation cards, enabling users to share their email addresses with brands securely without leaving the platform. With just one click, users can respond to promoted brand tweets, allowing you to collect leads, build email subscription lists, and support existing marketing campaigns.

Lead Generation Software

Lead generation software automates the lead scoring process throughout the buying cycle. Marketers assign a score to specific actions like clicking a link, opening an email, or downloading a whitepaper while considering the activity's likelihood to convert new prospects. This high-ranking content may include niche whitepapers and product pages. Once a prospect interacts with one of the assets, the software predicts the lead's likelihood to convert using AI, flagging it for marketing to prioritize. And with integrated CRM, MQLs are quickly and seamlessly passed to sales.

Lead Source ROI

Context is everything in lead generation. Identifying lead sources informs your lead nurture strategy, subsequent discussions with prospects, and ROI reporting. A primary source is the first channel a lead visited your site through. This may be from various sources, including a search engine, referral, tweet, or third-party website, among others.

Lead generation software needs to be flexible, allowing other points of engagement along the journey to take credit for the lead as subsequent sources. By keeping primary and subsequent lead sources connected and recording each change between the pair, you can easily report on individual sources' impacts over time.

The Cost (and ROI) of Lead Generation

Lead generation can be an expensive (though essential) line item in your budget. However, it's also an investment—and you get what you pay for. It may take time, multiple campaigns, and continued adjustments to realize a solid return. Try these tips for getting the most out of your lead generation efforts while keeping costs reasonable:

1. Start Small

Experiment with lower-cost paid social promotions, and see how they perform using the content and target audience you choose.

2. Optimize for Mobile

Design email campaigns for smartphone and tablet viewing, and include calls to action at the top before viewers begin scrolling.

3. Target with PPC

When potential customers enter keywords and questions into a search engine, they're looking for an answer to their problems. Pay per click (PPC) advertising ensures your answer is at the top of the results. Link your ads to various pages on your website, including demos, blogs, and lead capture forms instead of just your homepage.

4. Encourage Social Media Networking

Potential customers value the word of your employees—and lead generation agencies can't mimic internal advocacy. When team members (from interns to c-suite executives) post positively about your brand on social media, it speaks volumes to your company's character and trustworthiness.

When you're up against tight budgets and manager rejections for more funding, consider appealing to the cost of your lead generation efforts as they currently stand.

### Highlight lost time for sales

Translate wasted sales time into dollars spent. Research how much time sales reps spend identifying opportunities, and uncover how much money is lost. Automated lead generation frees sales up to focus on nurturing qualified leads and closing opportunities to increase revenue.

Broaden your vision

If your CEO focuses on spending less while increasing ROI, promote your lead generation tools as an upfront investment that ties back to company-wide goals. Demonstrate how funded lead generation methods will aid corporate objectives.

Lead Generation is a Process

Lead generation best practices call for careful planning, automated tools, and a little bit of spunk. Don't be afraid to try new things to see what works, and be sure to capture metrics along the way for supporting regular iteration. Remember, the best lead generation programs are those tailored to your business. They relate to the work you do, the specific products and services you offer, and the ideal customer you're searching for.
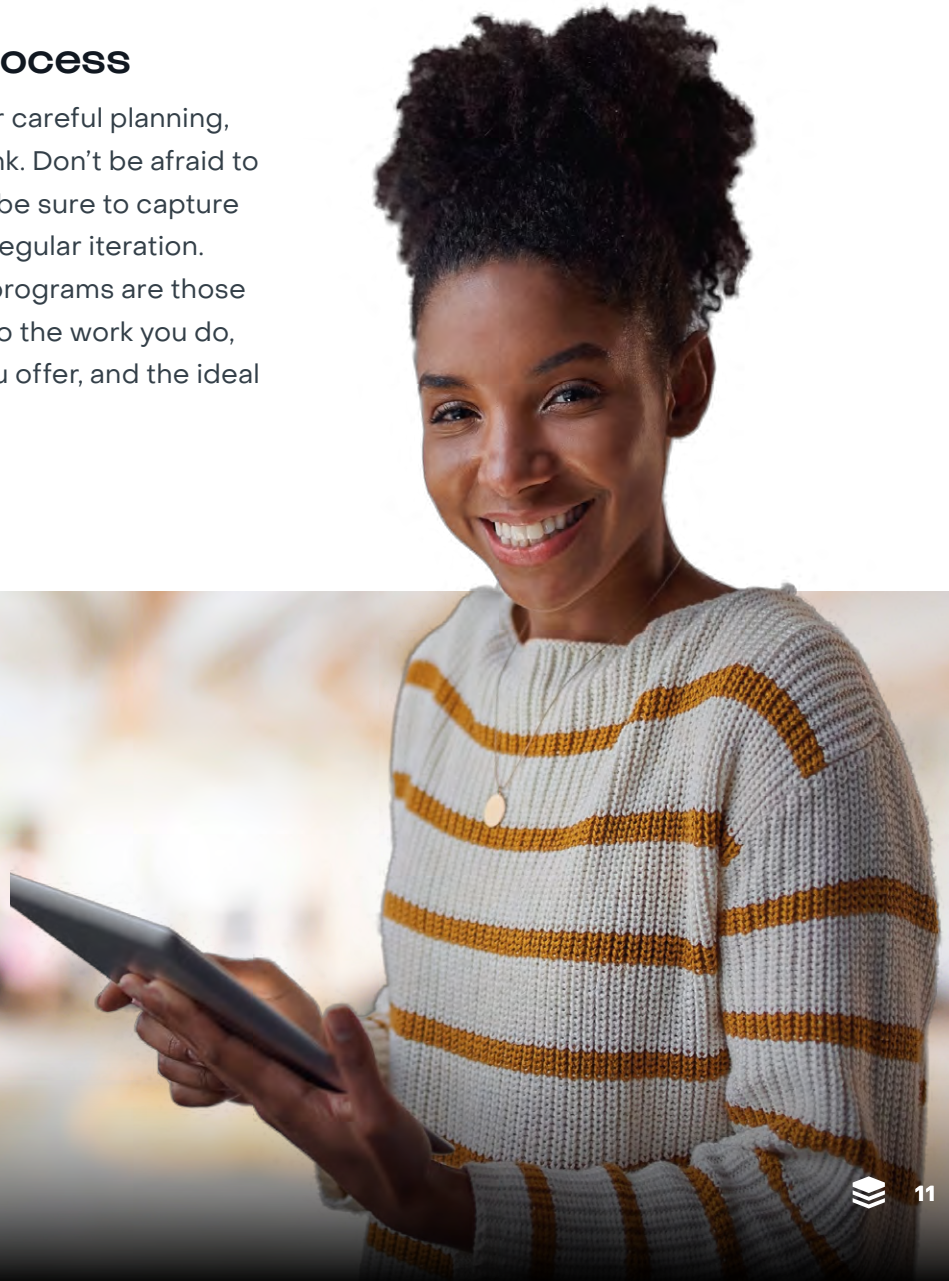
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About SugarCRM

SugarCRM is how marketing, sales, and service teams finally get a clear picture of each customer to help businesses reach new levels of performance and predictability. Sugar is the CRM platform that makes the hard things easier.

Thousands of companies in over 120 countries rely on Sugar to achieve high-definition CX by letting the platform do the work. Headquartered in Silicon Valley, Sugar is backed by Accel-KKR.

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