

What Marketing Automation Misses: The Key to Interpersonal Engagement



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Marketing is in the midst of a love affair with technology. With the explosion of digital formats like automated email marketing and social media campaigns that reach audiences with the click of a mouse, you might believe that your company can simply sit back and let the marketing department use automated platforms to do the work necessary to increase your leads flow. You might believe that automation generates the type of leads to make the sales team jump for joy.

Technology certainly adds value to marketing. Customer relationship management (CRM) solutions allow marketing and sales teams to keep lead data organized and segmented. Automated tools provide vehicles for scheduling social media posts, email campaigns and video launches.

There's every good reason to use these tools. They free up time by relieving manual tasks and equipping teams to offer personalized content to segmented audience groups. They provide data insights for targeting specific groups with specific messages.

To achieve the quality results you wish for, consider this crucial piece we believe is being overlooked.

Companies are finding out that there is a lot that technology cannot do when it comes to lead generation and more broadly new business development efforts. Specifically, marketing automation cannot replace human interaction. Without that human interaction, you'll have a difficult time turning leads into customers.

It is easy to believe that simply delivering the right content, such as white papers, case studies or a FAQ sheet when a lead is about to decide, is all that is necessary to convert prospects to customers. While in some cases, for some products and services that may be true, more often than none it is not enough to secure sales success.

The Critical Role of Intent:

Understanding intent means tracking actions, inquiries and buying signals. Before a decision maker narrows down their choices, they often search for information online. It may be in the form of blogs, white papers, case studies, or they may take a survey or view an infographic or participate in a webinar. These actions can offer you a great deal of information about buyers' intentions, needs and interests.

Collecting intent signals digitally may offer you a great deal of information about prospects, but there is more you need to know to secure sales success. For instance, there may be additional decision-makers that favor a competitor of yours, or they may have budgetary limitations that require them to wait another year. They may have received your FAQ sheet, but the questions they have were not listed.

The Benefits of Intent Information

Intent data shows you a bigger, broader picture of a lead, equipping you to prioritize the accounts you should pursue according to their behaviors. It could also tell you which accounts are not a good match for your product or service. It offers the following advantages:

- It helps closes a gap that often occurs between the marketing department's efforts to generate leads, and the sales team's desire for prospective clients presenting them with good opportunities more likely to convert to new sales.
- Browsing, downloading and engagement activities can help figure out the timeline for a particular lead's potential purchase.
- You are better able to identify the decision makers and influencers.
- All of the above can offer your conversion rates a boost because you may be able to better identify which prospect is more likely to be in a "buy cycle."

If you really want to improve sales success, you need to integrate intent with "fit."

Intent data is most effective when it is paired with "fit." Fit is what tells you if a prospect is more likely to match your ideal customer profile.



For instance, a company may exhibit good intent, engaging in online searches and even taking a survey that relates closely to your product line. Through a fit analysis, you discover that this company's budget is too small to make your product a good match, or they aren't a good candidate for the ongoing service contract you prioritize in your business plan. When you have intent data paired with fit, you are more likely to see leads convert. It is a structured lead qualification approach that provides clear guidance to your marketing team, as well as equipping your sales team to convert actionable leads to sales.

You can gather intent data without human interaction, but to get a truly qualified actionable lead, you need that human-to-human conversation that verifies fit as well.

Five Reasons You Need People-to-People Interactions

Understanding intent is the core reason for investing in a more personal brand of marketing, but it plays out in five critical ways. Take a look at these reasons for including human interactions in your marketing plans:

Building a Relationship: In a B2B environment, the simple act of picking up the phone or setting up a Zoom meeting can be all you need to get the edge on your competitors. It is a great way to break through the noise of all the emails, social media ads and other efforts to get the attention of your prospect. A personal relationship with a vendor is becoming so unusual that your efforts to build a relationship will be a valuable asset in your growth strategy.

People used to take a prospect to a lunch meeting, or maybe even to a round of golf. Today we have to rely on technology more heavily like emails and video conferencing instead.

Is there an upside to using technology for human interaction?

Sure, time is money. but you can be creative with a delivered package of goods to replace lunch and still benefit from a face-to-face meeting using your computer. You can set-up a virtual meeting and allow a team of people with shared interests to converse about challenges and give you an opportunity to demonstrate solutions. People often feel comfortable when they know they are not alone.

Technology brings additional benefits to meetings like eliminating the complications of time zone differences and traffic delays. You have a chance to chat about life and preliminary plans only, but you can, with one click, also choose to move to a full-blown demonstration of your product or service. Place and time are no longer a barrier to what you can achieve during your remote meeting. You can have a one-on-one meeting or bring in the whole support team (no matter where they are in the world).

Answering Questions: Your content strategy is amazing; it's perfectly tailored to each stage of your buyer's journey and practically walks them to the "confirm order" step of your process. Except when it doesn't. Personal conversations not only help you answer questions, but gain a better understanding of the information your audiences are looking for when making a decision.

Identifying Decision-Makers and the Decision-Making Process: Nowadays it is quite common for decisions to be made by a team of stakeholders. Digital marketing cannot help you figure it out, but a quality conversation may reveal that it is not your contact that is making the final decision, but rather his or her supervisor, or you may find that it is a whole team or committee that is tasked with choosing a supplier.

Only with a real person-to-person engagement will you be able to find out more about the decision-making process, from budget to timeline and ways to achieve buy-in from the decision-making team.

Understanding Obstacles: From budgetary limits to specific features of your product, a conversation can give you insight into the objections a potential buyer may have about your company's product or service. It gives you the opportunity to understand and respond to those objections. Even if they go on to buy from a competitor, you have a better understanding of what stands in the way of conversions to do better next time.

You Provide That All-Important Nudge:

A marketing automation tool does a lot of cool things, but it is never going to replace the intuition a marketer or sales professional has for recognizing when a prospect needs one more engagement, one more encouragement to get the sale done. The subtle nuances that tell you when a lead is ready to buy or the difference between what a person needs and wants cannot be programmed. For that you need personal contact.

Last but not least, a person-to-person conversation speeds up the sales process. It is quite common for prospects to be busy with everyday activities and fires they are responsible to handle. When people meet, when they talk, priorities change.

What Your Customers (Really) Want

If you have been impressed by marketing automation tools, you may be reluctant to go adopt a more personal approach, but there are some great reasons to implement a relationship-based method:

- 82% say they have accepted in-person sales meetings after a series of contacts that were initiated with a cold call.
- 51% of business owners say they prefer a phone call to any other form of contact, including email, fax, drop-in visits and other methods of making connections.
- 69% of buyers said they accepted at least one cold call in 2019.

Finding Fit in the Post-COVID-19 Era

Even in the best possible set of circumstances, it's likely that COVID-19 will keep many people working from home until mid-2021, if not longer. It is more important than ever that your company look for ways to connect in personal ways with your B2B prospects.

These relationships are critical in helping you connect with the people most likely to invest in your product or service. The connections happen best through personal relationships, and during a pandemic, those personal relationships can happen through phone or video conferences scheduled with qualified prospects. You can also achieve connection through webinars, controlled for a relatively small number of invitees to preserve the intimacy necessary for building personal relationships.



Finding Fit in the Post-COVID-19 Era

Consider outsourcing the all-important and challenging lead qualification process. Let our experts at Blue Valley Marketing (BVM) partner with your company to help identify your prospect's business needs, intent and fit. Let BVM connect your sales representatives only with those who represent the best fit for your growth strategies. We can do this in a number of ways:

- A targeted campaign that helps identify the leads most likely to convert, making note of factors like their product or service needs, decision-making process and timeline, budget and the decision-makers involved in the process.
- Qualified leads invited to phone or a video conferences to provide your sales team an opportunity to present in detail the value and benefits your company's product or service presents. Your sales reps can also answer questions, overcome objections, and provide the needed motivation to place an order or move the prospect forward down your sales process.
- Our reps can also sign prospects to webinars in which small groups (or large) are assembled for product or service presentations, optimizing your opportunity for lead nurturing and conversion.

Technology plays a key role in marketing, but it can never replace human-to-human interactions for understanding a lead's intent and fit for your product. In a time when simply picking up the phone can differentiate your brand from your competitors, contact us at Blue Valley Marketing to help you make the most of your best asset: personal connection.



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