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Ten Tips for Accelerating Your Pipeline

Shorten the sales cycle and bring in more revenue — no additional headcount required.

INTRODUCTION

Why choose marketing automation?

The average sales cycle length has increased 22% over the past five years due to more decision makers being involved in the buying process (SiriusDecisions). And with over 25% of B2B sales cycles taking seven months or more to close (according to research done by Harvard University), anything that marketing and sales teams can do accelerate speed through the pipeline is worth the extra effort.

Contrary to popular belief, marketing is just as responsible for the health of the sales cycle as the sales team. Marketers have far more power over the pace of the sales process than in the past, meaning that when it comes to speeding up (or slowing down) the length of time it takes for a prospect to pass through the sales funnel, both teams should be held accountable.

This accountability may sound daunting, but it doesn't have to mean more work for your marketing and sales teams. In fact, many recent marketing technologies have been designed to help you shorten the length of your sales cycle. Tools like marketing automation, which traditionally sync with a CRM, can automate many of the marketing and sales tasks that slow your teams down. And with more time on their hands, marketing can focus on sourcing and nurturing the right leads, and sales can concentrate on closing deals.

This white paper will walk you through ten ways that marketing automation can help you shorten the length of your sales cycle — without the additional investment in time and resources. Take a look through the following pages to see how you can drive sales and accelerate your funnel with automated lead qualification, lead nurturing, detailed prospect tracking, automated follow-ups, and more.

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Efficient Lead Management

1. Save time with automated lead qualification.

Blended lead scoring and grading ensure that only the most qualified leads get passed on to sales (a lead score measures the amount of interest that a prospect has shown in your company while a lead grade determines how good of a fit they are for your product or service). Using both a score and a grade helps marketing and sales teams find common ground when it comes to defining a qualified lead.

Companies throw away huge portions of their marketing budgets generating and qualifying leads that will never buy. If you're operating under a tight budget, like many marketers, putting your dollars where they can make the most impact is essential to business success.

2. Save even more time with automated lead assignment.

Blended lead scoring and grading also make it easier for leads to be assigned once they've reached a threshold score and grade, keeping sales from wasting time on leads who aren't good matches for their product. This can be a huge timesaver for both marketing and sales — marketing doesn't waste time feeding sales low-quality leads, and sales only follows up with the leads who are more likely to close. By focusing on the quality of leads, rather than the quantity, you can invest your time and resources in the leads who are more likely to move all the way through the sales funnel.

61% of B2B marketers send all leads directly to sales; **however, only 27% of those leads will be qualified.**

-MarketingSherpa

3. Take advantage of detailed prospect tracking.

Marketing automation's scoring and grading capabilities are powered by detailed prospect tracking and analytics, which provide the prospect activity data needed to fine-tune your lead qualification process. With marketing automation, your prospect's location in the sales cycle is never a mystery. Real-time alerts delivered straight to your sales reps' desktops or phones give them detailed information about which types of content their prospects have engaged with, what actions they've been taking on your website, and what their interests and pain points might be. This makes it possible for your reps to respond quickly with relevant information, increasing the effectiveness of sales calls and improving your chances of a lead turning into a closed deal somewhere down the line.

Better Follow-Up

4. Build 1:1 relationships with your prospects.

Accelerating your funnel isn't just about better lead qualification and assignment. It's also about continuing to build relationships with your prospects throughout the length of the sales cycle — without all of the manual work that relationship-building normally requires. With the ability to automate 1:1 communications and tedious follow-ups, your sales reps can move prospects through the sales cycle with minimal time and effort.

77% of buyers want different content **at each stage of their research.** -Pardot *State of Demand Generation Report*

5. Nurture leads actively participating in the research process.

According to Pardot's State of Demand Generation study, 77% of buyers want different content at each stage of their research. Using lead nurturing, sales and marketing teams can cater to these preferences by "dripping" appropriate content depending on where they are in the sales cycle. Content can then be adjusted accordingly based on prospect responses.

When buyers have completed their research and start reaching out to sales reps, they'll already be educated, meaning that sales won't have to waste time guessing at their pain points and needs.

6. Then, nurture leads who aren't yet ready to buy.

Lead nurturing is an equally powerful tool for buyers who aren't actively participating in the research process. According to Gleanster, 50% of leads are qualified but not yet ready to buy. Without a way to nurture these leads to a sales-ready state and keep your company top of mind, you risk letting them fall through the cracks, increasing the chances that they'll be won over by a competitor. Steadily communicating with these prospects by delivering helpful content ensures that sales reps never neglect leads who might eventually turn into opportunities, or even closed deals.

For many marketing departments, lead and prospect databases represent one of the largest monetary investments of the entire department. Don't lose the leads (and potential revenue!) in your funnel to neglect, or even worse, to your competitors.

57% of B2B companies identify **"converting qualified leads into paying customers" as top funnel priority.** -Marketing Sherpa

7. Have your sales team automate their follow-ups.

When follow-up isn't automated, it can be easy to forget. While your sales and marketing teams may recognize the importance of a prompt follow-up when trying to close deals, they're often too busy to make it a priority. Instead of wasting time covering their tracks and rebuilding relationships, they could be using marketing automation to define appropriate follow-ups for specific situations. These messages can then be automated and personalized so that sales reps get regular touch points with each of their prospects, reducing time spent on manual tasks and freeing them up to focus on closing deals.

By automating follow-ups, it's much less likely that prospects will be neglected by sales reps, reducing the chance that they'll be lost to a competitor. And with regular touch points, reps can stay with their prospects all the way through the sales cycle.

Improved Reporting

8. Start reporting.

Not only can marketing automation help marketers and sales reps report on what they're doing well, it can also pinpoint areas of improvement, like where prospects are getting stuck in the funnel or where conversion rates might be suffering. With reports to help diagnose sales funnel health and provide insight into each stage of the sales funnel, your marketing and sales teams have the tools they need at their disposal to optimize the pace of the sales cycle and focus their time where they need to.

9. Use sales funnel reports to diagnose the health of your sales pipeline.

Sales Funnel (Lifecycle) reports, which combine all of your marketing and sales reports into one dashboard, can help diagnose the health of your sales funnel, give you a glimpse into detailed opportunity data, and show where your prospects are in the sales cycle — including areas where prospects are stalling and areas where they are moving at an optimum pace. Metrics collected by the Lifecycle report include net new prospects, new opportunities, won opportunities, and percentage change over time. Having this detailed insight, along with data like the average amount of time spent in each stage and the total revenue of all won opportunities, gives sales reps the information they need to manage their time and ensure maximum speed through the pipeline.

10. Report on campaigns, too.

To really be able to accelerate your pipeline, you should be reporting on more than just your sales funnel. You should also be looking at your marketing campaigns, drip programs, conversion rates — anything that can give you a glimpse into all of the various touchpoints you have with prospects. Use these reporting features to look at patterns and trends, regularly revisit and reassess your scoring and grading models to make sure your lead qualification process is running as smoothly as possible, and evaluate your conversion rates to see where you might be losing potential new leads. With marketing automation, you can gain insight into all of the stages of the buyer's journey, from before a lead enters the sales cycle to closed deals and beyond.

With detailed reporting in place, you'll always know which campaigns are performing — and which are not. Use the data at your fingertips to decide which programs to pull the plug on, and which deserve more of your time and money. This will keep your pipeline functioning as smoothly as possible.

Conclusion

The shorter your sales cycle, the sooner you can bring in new clients and customers (read: revenue). And when revenue is at stake, why not do everything in your power to ensure that your sales cycle is as optimized as possible?

More and more companies are making the transition to marketing automation to help them with this optimization process. With capabilities like lead nurturing, lead scoring and grading, and sales funnel reporting, marketing automation has become the smart choice for marketing and sales teams that are looking to shorten their sales cycles and bring in even more revenue — without having to invest in additional headcount.

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Pardot is B2B marketing automation by Salesforce.

Your customers are smarter, more capable, and better-informed than ever before. This new breed of consumer demands a better breed of marketing, and the Pardot platform has the capabilities to get you there.

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