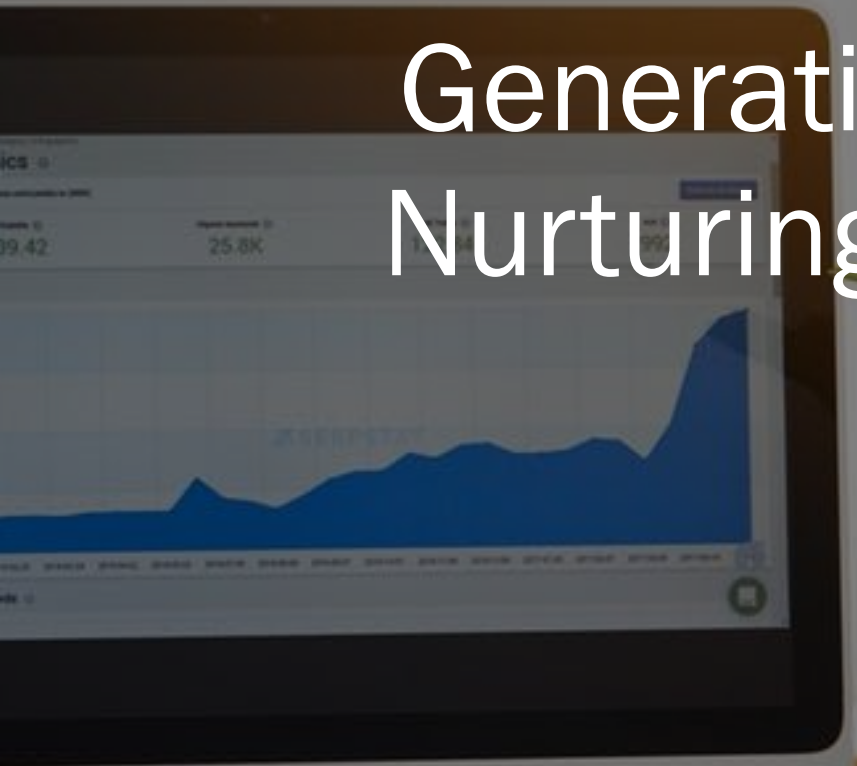


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Leads 101: Defining, Generating and Nurturing Leads



Introduction

While continuously gaining new customers is essential for growth, 65% of businesses say generating traffic and leads is their biggest marketing challenge. This disconnect between functional practices and desired results often comes from the confusion surrounding leads—the entire business should have an understanding of the leads process, but not everyone speaks marketing lingo.

This guide was created for IT Solution Provider Marketing Leaders or Practice Managers, as a best practice reference guide to support the lead definition, generation and nurturing process through a sales funnel.

Components at a Glance

1. Defining Leads
2. Generating Leads
3. The Sales Funnel
4. Nurturing Leads
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Defining Leads

Let's start with the basics: what exactly is a lead?

A lead is a potential sales contact who has expressed some interest in your business and provided you with their contact information. It's important to differentiate between B2B and B2C leads—as a B2B business, your leads will be other businesses, while B2C leads are typically individuals.

A lead isn't your customer just yet, but you know they're already in the market for or curious about a product or service like yours. It's worth spending additional time and resources to find and repeatedly engage with them, because at least some intent to buy exists. Rather than wasting your marketing budget targeting as many businesses as you can, many of which aren't interested in what you have to offer, high-quality leads enable you to focus in on those more likely to convert to actual customers.

In order to better define leads, there needs to also be alignment between sales and marketing as to what counts as a good lead.

Below are some suggestions on how marketing can align with sales to be able to drive better results for both.

Meet with Sales Stakeholders

Schedule time to meet with any sales stakeholders and key marketing representatives to better understand their goals, needs and any other elements, as well as the type of leads they will be receiving.

In example:

- Marketing Qualified Lead: A contact that showed interest in a product/offering by downloading content in exchange for their contact information.
- Scheduled Appointment: A lead with a specified date and time for follow – up.
- Remarketing Lead: A lead that was previously disqualified, but reactivated by re-engagement.

Gather Insight

Ask as many questions as possible, in example:

- Who would they want to engage with?
- Who would be a good target based on the solution, product or service?
- Who will own lead follow up?
- What is the follow up timeline?

Set a Base Level

Mutually agree on what will be considered a good lead to pass on to sales.

Communicate Constantly

Meet on a regular basis to review the criteria, results and work on any impediments. Needs and offerings change, so it's good to review as the company evolves and priorities change.

Generating Leads

Now that you know have a better understanding of what leads are, you're ready for the next step: lead generation. Unfortunately, leads don't typically come knocking at your door—you have to go out and find them. A company's marketing department is typically responsible for this part of the process. Here's three strategies B2B businesses can leverage to generate high-quality leads:

1. Content Marketing

When it comes to content marketing, 93% of B2B companies say this helps to generates more leads than traditional marketing strategies. Attract businesses in your target market by creating content that is valuable to them, such as blogs, eNewsletters, case studies, videos, infographics, or webinars that provide learning opportunities, tell an inspiring story, or present a new way to approach a common problem. This content should link back to a landing page on your site, which is where you'll gather that contact information.

Invite the reader to fill out a form including their name, email, company, and position, as well as any other information you think would be relevant to your sales team. Once you have this information, you can continue to send them additional content tailored to their specific needs. This will familiarize them with your brand and its value, keeping them coming back for more and increasing their chances of ultimately making a purchase.

2. Social Media

The simplest way to generate leads on social media is to optimize your business page profiles: ensure your contact information and website link are clear and accessible, compelling calls-to-action are used, and your business value is obvious to anyone browsing your accounts. Share that valuable content you created on your social media platforms to increase reach and engagement.

You can also consider promoting gated content, which readers must provide some contact information in order to access. While someone who is mildly interested may click away, anyone truly interested will give their information to get to the content—just like that, you've qualified a high priority lead. Make sure your business continuously participates in “social listening,” or monitoring the social media activity of other businesses and customers in your industry. This can help your business gain valuable insights and speed up the process of lead generation. Rather than waiting for a business to seek you out, you can be proactive about joining conversations, making recommendations, and guiding prospects towards the solutions you can offer through your content and website so you can get them to those landing pages.

3. Networking

For many B2B businesses, especially in the tech industry, in-person networking at events such as seminars, trade shows, or conferences can be a very effective way to generate leads. However, just talking to someone at an event will most likely result in you never hearing from them again—be sure every prospect leaves with something tangible like a pamphlet, flyer, or guide that provides a link back to a landing page. Place a sign-up sheet for your email list at your booth or give away freebies with your logo for subscribing to your blog or following your social media accounts. This way, interested businesses won't forget about you and can be easily contacted by your sales team.

The Sales Funnel

Now that you've generated some leads and have a massive list of contact information, what's next? After a lead has been identified, you need to move them through the sales funnel. The sales funnel is a way to look at the process it takes consumers to filter down from a broad group of strangers at the widest part of the funnel to customers pouring out the bottom, until they become a loyal brand promoter. Before you can nurture a lead through the sales funnel, you need a solid understanding of each step of the process.

Suspects: Suspects are situated at the very top of the funnel—this is the largest group of businesses that could possibly have any interest in what you have to offer. At this stage they're the least likely to move through the funnel, so your goal here is narrowing your scope in order to expose your content and value to businesses that may actually want it, not just anyone.

Prospects: As you move into the second stage of the funnel, you'll find the businesses that have shown some initial interest in what you have to offer. They're more likely to filter down through the funnel because they've already interacted with you in some way, such as engaging with your social media post or visiting your site—but haven't yet given their contact information. This is the time to repeatedly engage with them and send very targeted content, so that they're eventually driven to give over that information and become leads.

Leads: Prospects move down into the third stage of the funnel and turn into leads once they've given you their contact information. Now is the time to heavily nurture the lead. They're the most likely to make a purchase, so you should continue to show them your value until they're ready to buy.

Customers: Congrats! Once a business has actually bought what you have to offer, they're gone through the entire sales funnel and become a customer. But you can't stop there—you don't want a one-time customer, you want a long-term one that will promote your brand to others. You must continue to nurture the lead, after even after that initial purchase.

Nurturing Leads

A list of leads won't result in any sales if you don't continue to nurture the relationship. In fact, companies that actively nurture leads gain about 50% more sales and spend about a third less time acquiring new leads compared to companies who don't. Here's three ways B2B businesses can effectively nurture leads.

Targeted Content

Before you can send targeted content, you must break your potential and current customers into various segments and understand what kind of content they're looking for. Clearly define each group's unique buyer persona, then create an assortment of content specifically designed to nurture them based on things such as their interests, goals, business size, or industry. The content you send to the C-Suite will look very different than what you send to their company's IT team. When you can show a business you already know what their needs are and have specific content ready to help them, not just generalized information, they'll be more likely to come to you rather than searching for it elsewhere.

Multi-channel Interaction

It's necessary to think beyond the inbox—simply sending emails or only being present on one platform won't get you the exposure and interaction you need to turn leads into customers and keep current customers engaged. You want to have as many touch-points with them as possible, and should be leveraging multiple platforms such as email, social media, paid media, website content, and direct sales outreach to do so. To execute this effectively, be sure your sales and marketing teams are working cohesively to present a uniform message and voice across channels.

Timely and Personalized Follow-ups

When you make a timely call to a lead and have personalized information ready to share with them, it's far more effective than any amount of cold calling. If you know they just made a search about a particular topic you can provide help with, send them those resources immediately. When you're aware of what their needs are, what their specific role is within the organization, and what kind of content they've interacted with online, you can tailor the conversation and information you share with them to match. This shows them your value quickly, which saves time for you both and can convert into a sale faster. When a current customer makes a purchase, send them a follow-up survey, other related content they may find useful, or a personalized thank you note. All of these small touches can go a long way into converting a lead into a customer, and more importantly, keeping them as one.

Now that you know what a lead is, strategies for generating them, and how to effectively move them through the sales funnel, you're ready to start turning strangers into loyal customers. The key: generating and nurturing leads with purpose and showcasing your company's value throughout the entire process.

Check out the additional resources section, or also provide sales with another SmartGuide focused around developing customer relationships.

Additional Resources

- [2018 Marketing Statistics](#)
- [The Definitive Guide to Lead Generation](#)
- [7 Effective Lead Nurturing Tactics](#)

For any questions
or additional assistance,
please contact our team.

cloudpracticebuilder@techdatacloud.com.au
1300 362 525
www.techdatacloud.com.au