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Demand Generation for Interesting Times

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For marketers in sales-driven organizations, three things are important in any economy: producing, measuring, and optimizing results. In 2009, realizing these goals is more critical than ever.

Marketers have a lot on their shoulders. They are being tasked with helping sales meet top-line goals with demand slowing and sales cycles lengthening—all on a reduced budget. That's why response-driven demand generation is garnering a larger share of a smaller pie. It's getting personal: Mass-market branding initiatives are giving way to individual targeting. This year, the marketer's toolset will be designed to generate a lead, close a sale, and create a profitable relationship...with one promising customer at a time.

Below are some of the tactics marketers should be seriously considering. These come in two categories: leveraging existing resources and testing new tactics.

Leverage What You Have

1. Lead nurturing. If you have built up some assets, now is the time to pull every ounce of value out of them. The lowest hanging fruit is the database of leads you have already generated, but have not yet converted to sales. Lead generation is cost effective, but as a standalone activity, a successful campaign only converts 30 percent of its promising leads. Passing unqualified leads to sales is not the answer.

When prospects who aren't ready to buy get sales calls, the results are unanswered voicemails, costly wasted sales time and an unsatisfactory brand experience. Through lead nurturing, you can optimize sales conversion through intelligence-driven marketing tactics, targeted to individuals.

Lead nurturing is an effective tool in any economy, but it is especially important now. 2009 could be the year to focus on converting on the database you already have, without spending media dollars. Once the economy turns around, you can recommit the dollars to ramp the prospecting back up and continue nurturing.

2. Converting on SEO and PPC. That search marketing campaign you launched for brand visibility can and should be moving you much further down the ROI path. This year, move beyond visibility. Optimize and measure your search program for target audience traffic and conversion. Add calls to action to popularly ranked pages, and get visitors to become leads. Use tools such as Google Analytics to measure the conversions.

Consider getting more targeted with your organic and paid search efforts. Search is becoming more personalized and localized. Use these enhancements to target your prospects.

3. Using "free media." Some of the most conversion-effective media doesn't cost a cent, because you own it. Your house database is an example, and implementing a lead nurturing plan will put that to good use. In addition, consider your corporate Website. It is naturally designed to let all of your audiences





browse the way they choose, but you can create some more directed lead funnels for target segments. Think of the process flows these individuals use to visit your site, and put valuable calls to action in highly visible locations, focusing on offers that will help them do their job and make purchase decisions relating to your products and services. Direct them to landing pages with simple registration.

PR is another "free media" area to leverage. You can gain excellent leads by adding popular keywords to your press releases, incorporating a landing page link, and distributing them online.

Test New Tactics

Believe it or not, this is an excellent time not only to leverage the tools you have, but also to add new ones. Marketers who engage in new demand generation tactics will see three silver linings to the current economy. First, media costs will be elastic. Second, with many competitors retrenching, marketers who engage in new tactics will stand out more than usual.

The first two advantages—lower cost and greater competitive prominence—will yield the most important advantage: more cost-effective conversions. Organizations that successfully harness the advantages of a slowdown historically see sustainable competitive momentum when the economy turns around.

In 2009, consider incorporating these two tactics in your demand generation program:

1. Social media marketing. Facebook, LinkedIn, blogs, and other social media outlets are quickly becoming relevant to demand generation. There are three ways to participate. In order to gain useful links for SEO and engage prospects in an open conversation, consider putting your corporate voice into these channels...but study them first. Social media users are savvy and skeptical, and they work hard to maintain the individual focus of these forums. Setting up a profile for your company may only be appropriate if your brand uniquely hits the target.

On the other hand, there are most certainly individuals within your organization participating in social sites. In fact, they're online now discussing their role in your organization. Work with them to represent your brand. Of course, you'll need to be careful about corporate versus individual tone. Don't be disingenuous or misleading.

The second way to participate in social channels is through advertising. Facebook and LinkedIn now offer very targeted advertising, presenting your message to individuals based on their detailed profiles. These are clearly presented marketing messages, so the tone concern doesn't exist. In considering these new ad channels, realize that you will have all the advantages and disadvantages of being seen as a pioneer.

The third way to participate in social media is to listen. Monitor and measure what the "unfiltered market" is saying about you. Use this frank feedback to sharpen your offerings and messaging.

2. Mobile marketing. Your audience is engaged in media more than ever before, including when they're in motion. Consider SMS (text messaging) and IMM (instant message marketing). These activities don't need to be invasive, and they definitely don't have to be expensive. In fact, with a minimal investment you can use these channels to turn your existing buys into direct response ads. Simply direct users interested in an offer to text a specific message to a prearranged code using their mobile device. You receive their offer request and cell phone number, and the user doesn't have to complete a registration form.

As Web-compatible mobile devices proliferate, advertising space is emerging. Learning how to integrate these and other channels could be the key to cost effectively rising above your competition and generating direct response-and this could be just the time to do it.





Sam Eidson is a partner in [90octane](http://90octane.com), a conversion-driven marketing agency. For qualified organizations, 90octane is offering a free copy of "Online and Qualified," a best practices resource on lead generation, lead nurturing, and search engine marketing. Email sameidson@90octane.com for more information.

