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Nurturing Warm Leads into the Sales Funnel

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Lead generation is an effective, ROI-based approach to starting a sales conversation with a B2B prospect. But for the value of a generated lead to be realized, the next steps must encourage a sale, or ideally, an ongoing customer relationship. Sometimes the best “next step” isn’t sending the lead straight to a sales rep. It’s lead nurturing.

Lead nurturing is conducting a conversation, through marketing messaging, with a sales lead to bubble him up to warm status.

Imagine that your prospect, like most business buyers, is using online channels through every stage of his buying cycle: research, evaluation and decision. He is in an early research stage when he receives a call from your sales rep. This seems invasive to the prospect because he is just beginning his 12-month decision cycle. By referring him directly to the rep, you’ve alienated a target customer with strong potential. Plus, it wasted your rep’s time.

Nurture Through Ongoing Communications

To avoid that scenario, you should have included lead nurturing between lead generation and sales referral. A simple method of nurturing is to send ongoing communications to your prospect.

An e-newsletter works well, because you provide relevant content that keeps your brand top of mind. Always include a call to action pertinent to a later stage of the prospect’s decision so that you hit him with the right information when he’s ready for a sales conversation. This doesn’t require sophisticated, data-driven targeting. You’re still casting a fairly wide net but casting it several times to a receptive audience.

Nurture Behavior With Drip Marketing

A more sophisticated form of lead nurturing is drip marketing. This means putting timely, targeted messages in front of prospects based on behavioral data. The data includes the user’s profile – what he tells you about himself through registration forms and survey questions – and interests – what you infer from the offers that he has accessed.

Through drip marketing, you’re developing multiple paths and pushing him down the right one. If you know his industry or can serve up offers applicable to the vertical market, you benefit from better conversion rates. You also know more about his needs when you pass his profile on to sales.

Creating Reciprocal Relationships





An added advantage is that drip marketing creates a reciprocal relationship. You ask for more information as you offer additional tools and don't lose prospects by presenting long registration forms upfront. Simply removing the phone number field from one of our client's initial registration forms improved conversion rates from 3% to 17%.

Many sales force automation and customer relationship management tools can help facilitate lead nurturing. They're useful, but don't limit your program by basing it on their capabilities. Strategize the best **process** for nurturing your prospects first.

Sam Eidson is a BMA member with fourteen years of experience in interactive marketing, integrated marketing strategy and management consulting. He is co-founder of Denver-based [90octane](#), specializing in search engine marketing and online lead generation. Sam's expertise has contributed to successful marketing programs for clients ranging from international non-profit organization Heifer International to Fortune 500 company Gates Corporation.

