Generate Leads NOW

By Ron Snyder

"How am I going to make my numbers this year?" many sales executives are asking.
By generating leads and filling your funnel as early as possible. This is especially true if you are involved in a complex selling process with a long sales cycle.

There is not much you can do to change the economy or the fact that budgets are getting a lot of scrutiny. However, you can create a focused lead generation plan to make the best use of your limited resources and ensure that you compete in a greater share of the business generated this year.

Here is what you need to do.

1. Agree on a "Sales-Ready" Lead spec

This is the spec that Sales and Marketing agree to- that leads must meet before they are turned over to Sales. This will ensure optimal use of Marketing time and dollars. In return, Sales commits to follow up on these leads. In order to do this, Sales and Marketing must agree on the target market, target titles and the value proposition that will motivate those people to respond.

2. Run fewer, more Focused Lead Generation Campaigns

The campaign must be focused on the target market that was the basis of the "sales-ready" spec. It may be based on who is buying your products and comparable ones. In this case, your in-house database is a good starting point; augmented to include other candidates in that segment. Alternatively, you may be targeting a neighboring market segment and will need to generate a new list. If the initial list is large, applying additional filters to narrow the list to meet critical buyer criteria creates higher-probability candidates and can greatly improve ROI.

We have found that multi-touch, multi-media programs (for example, the "triple play" of direct mail, e-mail, and telemarketing) deliver greatly enhanced response rates.

This approach makes it possible to generate more leads from fewer, focused campaigns.

3. Optimize the Lead-to-Sale Process

You must understand the buyer's process and create a clear set of paths that responds to the different questions and information requirements in each phase of the buying process. Further, there needs to be a coordination of online guides to direct buyers to the appropriate online tools and people available to answer the deeper questions that buyers cannot or choose not to answer online.

The Telemarketing, Inside and Field Sales teams and channel partners need to be informed about the program and ready to respond in a timely manner. This includes knowing who is in the target market, the needs being met, the value proposition and the selling tools available to usher potential buyers through their decision-making process.

Using Sales 2.0 Marketing/Demand Generation automation tools, such as Marketo, Genius and Eloqua, makes it possible to automate lead-ranking and campaign responses based on the buyer's behavior. Sales Force Automation tools (i.e. SalesForce.com, Siebel, etc.) enable management of contacts, leads and opportunities. Beyond that, there are products (i.e. Landslide) that enable management of the specific steps of the sales process. These tools accelerate the buying process and optimize return on resources.

4. Measure Marketing on Sales-Related Metrics

It is critical that Marketing and Sales have at least one key metric in common. In addition to the classic sales metrics, such as sales revenue, bookings, etc., consider metrics that Marketing can have more direct impact on, including:

- Number and % of leads meeting the "sales-ready" spec
- Conversion rate from sales-ready lead into sales proposal pipelines
- Conversion timeline from "sales-ready" lead to sale
- Conversion rate of "sales-ready" leads to sales

Of course, it is important to measure campaign results vs. key metrics and fine-tune.

ACT NOW! Delaying even a quarter, will require generate many more leads in the following quarter to make up for the short-fall. Further, delaying will enable your competition to get into sales opportunities and set the decision criteria; making it very challenging for you to win.

Plan 2 Win Software

Ron Snyder is President of Plan 2 Win Software.

Plan 2 Win Software was founded by sales veterans and former VP of Sales. We saw that Sales Force Automation Systems needed territory and key account planning tools.

Our sales planning software enables Salesforce.com (SFDC) users to create and manage territory and account plans right in their SFDC environment. They capture key trends in the industry, geography and vertical market. Sales execs, then, develop strategies, identify target accounts, business opportunities and partners to leverage and develop action plans to grow their business. These plans are perfect for Quarterly Business Reviews (QBRs) and strategic account reviews. This enables sales teams to fill their funnel with better prospects, make better use of their time and resources and produce better results!

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