

Special Bonus: *Lead Nurturing Workbook* to help you optimize your content and stop losing leads.

Creating Great Content: A Guide for Business Owners & Marketing Professionals

Free! The Marketing Pro's Guide to Creating Great Content



Introduction

Let's start off with a little math.

First, enter your company's revenue in the past year. _____

Now, multiply that number by 5. $x \quad 5 =$ _____

Your total is how much revenue your company *could be* losing if you aren't nurturing your long term leads. Of course, you probably aren't losing *all* of your sales from long-term leads, this figure simply reflects the *potential* leads that could be lost at some point during the sales cycle.

"Long-term leads can represent as much as 80% of your sales," says lead generation expert, Brian Carroll, in his book [Lead Generation for the Complex Sale](#)ⁱ. And, if you aren't nurturing your leads with meaningful contact throughout the buying cycle, these are sales you could be losing to your competitors.

Now, while that figure may sound alarming. What it really represents is an amazing opportunity.

Why? Because the majority of your competitors —59% of companies according to Marketing Sherpa's [2012 Lead Generation Benchmark Report](#)ⁱⁱ— still don't have lead nurturing programs. So, by reading this report, and acting on the advice within, you could be well ahead of the game.

Just imagine what it could mean for you, as a marketing professional, and for your company as a whole, if you implemented a lead nurturing program (or improved your existing one) that enabled you to retain those leads until they were finally ready to buy?

So, whether you're starting from scratch, or your program just needs a few tweaks to make it more effective, this report aims to give you information you need to stop losing those sales and start nurturing your long term leads.

Ready?

Then let's get started.

The Keys to Lead Nurturing Success

Why is lead nurturing so important?

First of all, it keeps prospects engaged with information they really care about, which can help them make the best purchasing decision. **Lead nurturing is a gradual process that guides prospects from where they're at right now, to where you want them to be in the buying cycle.**

Another benefit is that the information you provide can serve as the “proof” your prospect needs to persuade other decision makers within their organization that yours is the solution to buy.

And what is the number one tool for nurturing your long-term leads throughout the buying cycle?

Content.

If you want to ensure these future customers remain in your funnel, you must have a relevant, consistent conversation with them. This means engaging them with information — content like articles, newsletters, whitepapers, and videos — that they're eager to read, share, and act on.

So, what defines useful content?

First, let's discuss what it is *not*:

- Talking about your company, how great you are, and describing product features...
- Hard sales, strong calls to action, “buy me now” statements...
- New product or service “announcements”

What good content *should* do is offer information that helps solve a major problem your buyers have. For example, if you sell accounting software, you might offer a white paper that explains what to look for when purchasing accounting software.

Remember to offer a general solution – focused on the buyer's problems, and talking about general business issues and market trends – rather than pushing your company, product or service.

It's also important to keep in mind that leads are people, and that your goal in building a successful lead nurturing program is to build a relationship with them, with useful content.

The *only* question you should be asking to determine content worthiness:

“Can my prospect benefit from this information, regardless of whether or not they choose to buy from me?”

The goal when creating content is never to sell, but rather to support a conversation. The questions you should be asking when creating your content are, “Is this helpful” and “Is this relevant?”

By creating valuable content, you’ll also be giving your sales people tools to support their conversations with customers, giving them something helpful and relevant to offer and discuss.

Key Benefit #1: By giving your prospective buyer genuinely helpful information, you are helping to position yourself as a trusted advisor — and someone he will likely look to for a solution when he finally is ready to buy.

Navigating the buyer’s journey

In addition to providing quality content, you need to align your content with the buyer’s journey. This means you can’t keep hitting your prospects with the same message again and again. You need to identify the information they seek at different points in their journey, and match that with the appropriate content.

1) Stage 1 - Education

In this stage, your content should focus on introducing a problem, and then connecting that problem to critical business issues. It should create a sense of urgency for a target to take action...action that should eventually lead them to consider a solution that you offer.

Your goal here is to establish thought leadership through content, such as: published articles, social media, white papers, and blogs. You’ll also want to demonstrate solution knowledge through events, webinars and analyst reports.

2) Stage 2 – Finding Solutions

In stage two, your target has committed to solving a problem. Therefore, your content should be built to help them pinpoint their needs in relation to that problem. Your goal here is to create a value story and solution validation through business oriented case studies, competitive tools and executive briefings.

Next, comes the process of matching needs against a range of solution options in order to find the type of solution that is the best fit, which has unique content requirements of its own.

3) Stage 3 – Choosing a Vendor

In the final stage of the buyer’s journey, your content should focus on helping buyers differentiate vendors that offer the ideal solution, and arm them with the information they need to address the

questions and concerns of other influencers. Your goals here are to clearly communicate features and functionality, demonstrate return on investment and total cost of ownership, and share details around service.

Examples of content you may wish to create here, include: ROI tools, client testimonials, and product spec sheets. Once the prospect has committed to your solution, you would then want to continue to nurture that relationship by offering on-boarding materials, such as a welcome kit and training materials, and maintaining contact through a customer newsletter.

Remember: It's all about your buyer's journey...aligning your content to their journey will enable you to deliver the right content to the right audience at the right time.

Evaluating Your Content

Like many companies, you probably have a great deal of content already. However, it may be scattered throughout your organization. If this is true for you, one of your first steps should be to conduct a content audit to evaluate the information you already have, and identify gaps that need to be filled.

To begin your content audit, you may wish to establish a content committee and invite content owners from across your organization to attend. Personnel you may wish to consider include those from product marketing, solution marketing, programs marketing, and your company's web and media teams.

Once your committee has gathered all of your company's content assets together, your next step is to evaluate the content you have against these standards:

1. **Quality:** Does the content meet the same quality standards you set for your products and services?
2. **Value:** How thoroughly does it address a customer pain point? What content pieces should be made freely available to Web site visitors, and which should be gated?
3. **Relevance:** Does the content meet the information needs of the buyer's journey? Is it relevant for the designated persona?
4. **Influence:** Does the content influence buyer perceptions? Does it best emphasize specific issues, risks, inefficiencies or opportunities that an offering is tied to?

Bonus: To help you get started on your content audit, I've included a content auditing worksheet in the handouts at the end of this report.

So, how much content is enough?

According to the [2013 B2B Content Marketing Benchmarks, Budgets & Trends-North America](#)ⁱⁱⁱ producing enough content is the biggest challenge B2B marketers face (64%), followed by producing the kind of content that engages their audience (the top challenge reported in last year's study).

Ideally, you want to create enough content to fill a content calendar, aligned with your buyer's persona, that gently leads your prospect through the stages of the buying process.

In the early stages of the buying process, your content would be focused on helping to answer basic questions. Toward the end, as you prepare to handoff the lead to Sales, content might include invitations to events, such as webinars, where the prospect will commit more of their time and energy to your offerings.

According to Brandon Stamschor, Senior Director of Operations for the Leads Group at MECLABS, the general rule-of-thumb for a lead nurturing content calendar is to have 10 pieces going out, one at a time about every three weeks or so^{iv}. If your sales cycle is particularly long, 10 pieces won't be enough, so adjust the amount of content you need accordingly.

Four steps to creating lead-nurturing content:

So, how do you go about creating content that engages your prospects, and offers them genuinely helpful information that fulfills their needs?

1. First, get to know your prospects:

- Go to your customer databases and comb them for demographics, such as titles and industries. (But don't stop there, gather everything you find that will help you better understand your prospect.)
- Talk to your sales and support team to find insights gained from their interactions with customers.
- Review your analytics for data on your prospect's common behaviors, such as how they first engaged with you and why. (Was it through a blog post, an email, a phone call? Did they download a white paper, request a product demo, attend a webinar you hosted?)
- Using the information gathered through these sources, develop detailed customer personas to represent each of your various customer types.

2. Second, talk to your customers to identify their pains. Questions to ask, include:

- What issues keep them up at night?
- What resources do they look to for solutions?
- What would make their lives easier?
- What information do they need to make a buying decision?
- And don't forget to think about the other motivating force – pleasure. What drives your customer? What are they hoping to gain by using your product or service?

3. Identify potential deal breakers:

- What might cause your prospect to falter on their way to purchase? Will they be off put by your pricing or terms? Will they be enticed by your competitor's offerings? Are there questions about the implementation process? Or is their need just not strong enough yet? Try to identify potential stumbling blocks for your prospects.
- Address these concerns directly in your content to help your prospects over their sales hurdles *before* they reach them.

4. And finally, provide information that helps to solve your customer's pain:

- Find or create content that will help them with the above issues, without trying to sell them on your product or service. Email this information to them at regular intervals.
- Focus on what your customer needs, not on your offerings. Avoid promoting what your company does, or preaching how great your product or service is. Turn the features you want to discuss into benefits. Write in the form of questions or "you" statements.

The Bottom Line Benefits of Lead Nurturing

So, is all of this effort really going to pay off? The answer is a resounding "Yes", according to MarketingSherpa's [2012 Lead Generation Benchmark Report](#)^v, which finds that lead nurturing companies report a 125% return on lead generation investment, compared to a mere 86% for companies that don't bother with it.

That's because it is very difficult to keep leads flowing smoothly throughout your sales and marketing funnel. With all of the competing noise and distractions they encounter along the way, they are more likely to leave your funnel if your company is without a rigorous lead nurturing program.

If prospects do successfully make it to the end of your sales funnel ready to make a purchase, they've likely overcome much resistance to do so. When you have a strong lead nurturing program in place, you can help smooth the path for them and make the buyer's journey a much easier one.

In summary, the days are long gone when marketing's job was simply to generate leads that were turned immediately over to Sales. If this is how your marketing and sales process operates, you're likely losing a majority of your long term leads before they are ready to close the deal. Lead nurturing can ensure the best return on your lead generating investment by helping to give your Sales team quality leads that are ready and willing to buy.

Next Steps

Research clearly shows that your customers want you to provide them with a variety of content that speaks both to their needs and to their stage in the buying cycle. If you don't have compelling and educational content to support your online marketing efforts, your leads will not move into the final stages of your sales cycle.

If you need assistance developing lead-nurturing website content or other B2B marketing collateral, contact me at (970) 556-1294 or email: Katie@kdcopyandcontent.com.

About the Author



Katie Henriksen is an award-winning marketing copywriter specializing in creating compelling content for B2B, software and technology clients. She helps marketing professionals clearly communicate complex messages and nurture their long-term leads throughout the buying cycle, turning more leads into sales and proving marketing's value to the bottom line.

If you found the information in this report helpful, you can also visit <http://kdcopycontent.com> to check out other FREE B2B marketing resources, see what's new on the ***Content Writing Tips & Trends Blog*** or subscribe to the ***Web Content Writing: Tips, Trends & Best Practices*** e-newsletter.

You can also follow me on Twitter at www.twitter.com/kdcopycontent, where I share the latest B2B trends, content marketing tips and advice on how to effectively use social media for content marketing.

ⁱ Carroll, Brian. *Lead Generation for the Complex Sale*. McGraw-Hill; 1 edition (May 17, 2006). Print.

ⁱⁱ *2012 Lead Generation Benchmark Report*. MarketingSherpa, May 2012. Web.

ⁱⁱⁱ *B2B Content Marketing: 2013 Benchmarks, Budgets & Trends Rep*. Content Marketing Institute and MarketingProfs, Nov. 2012. Web. Feb. 2013.

^{iv} Kirkpatrick, David. *Lead Nurturing: How much content is enough?* MarketingSherpa Blog, Nov. 17, 2011. Web.

^v *2012 Lead Generation Benchmark Report*. MarketingSherpa, May 2012. Web.

Content Marketing Workbook

Tools to help you optimize your content & stop losing leads.

Persona Worksheet

Think about your target audiences. Gather the information (psychographics and demographics) you've collected about your customers through interviews, reviewing customer databases, market research, and talking to Sales. What is their greatest pain or pleasure (what motivates them)? Now, create as detailed a biography for each of your customer personas below.

Persona 1:

Persona 2:

Persona 3:

Persona 4:

Content Auditing Worksheet

First, gather your content auditing committee and have them bring to the table all of the content assets they have. Use the worksheet below to record what you have and identify where there are information gaps that need to be filled.

In the first column, enter the title and/or content type (white paper, webinar, case study, etc.). Next, enter the persona or personas this content best fits; third, identify the buying stage this content would fit into (education, solution, vendor selection). And finally, record any notes about the content: Does it need to be tweaked or updated before reusing? Could the information be easily retooled to create another content format? Should the piece be scrapped?

If you have any data on the popularity of the content with your customers, you will want to add that as well to guide you in creating future content.

<u>Existing Content</u>	<u>Target Persona(s)</u>	<u>Buying Stage</u>	<u>Notes</u>
1)			
2)			
3)			
4)			
5)			
6)			
7)			
8)			
9)			
10)			
11)			
12)			

Content Brainstorm Worksheet

Now that you have identified the gaps in your content, brainstorm ideas for topics and also the format (whitepaper, case study, video, webinar) using this worksheet. Record the persona this piece is targeting, the buying stage (education, solution, vendor selection), the content type (see list below for ideas) and assign a person to create it (internal staff or freelance writer, outside agency, etc.).

	Persona	Buying Stage	Content Theme or Working Title	Content Type	Creator (Writer, Designer)
1)					
2)					
3)					
4)					
5)					

Some content types to consider:

- Blog post
- Guest post
- eBook
- White Paper
- eNewsletter
- Curated piece
- Interview
- Video
- Webinar
- Survey
- Slideshare
- Infographic
- Print
- Article
- Live Event

Editorial Calendar

Once you have identified the gaps in your information, use this calendar to schedule the production of content you need. Enter the type of content and possibly a theme or working title on the left and check one month for production start date, and a second month for the target delivery/publication date.

2013 Editorial Calendar

Content	Jan	Feb	Mar	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
A)												
B)												
C)												
D)												
E)												
F)												
G)												
H)												
I)												
J)												