NURTURING AND OFFER DEVELOPMENT

PCo **POV**

Support the pipeline with more sales-ready leads

It's becoming ever-harder to find, attract, and convert new prospects to fuel revenue growth. Nurturing is critical to stay in front of prospects who aren't actively looking but will become buyers eventually—and if you don't act quickly, your competitor could snag them first.

Yet care must be taken to avoid alienating buyers with an aggressive approach. If you've ever been the target of an over eager store clerk, then you know how the average prospect feels when being pursued by pushy marketers and sales reps. To engage with early-stage prospects, you must create compelling interactions that build relationship and stimulate consideration without heavy-handed tactics.

Apply these principles to craft nurturing campaigns that create a positive association with your brand and products:

- **Catch interest** with messages that establish relevance and create a sense of urgency by speaking to your prospect's current goal or pain. Talk about issues, not products, that appeal to their aspirations as business leaders and individuals.
- **Demonstrate immediate value** with insights about how to address the issues on their agenda. Avoid cumbersome forms or intrusive questions that assume a level of intimacy you haven't yet earned.
- **Build trust** by adopting the posture of an advisor who has the prospect's best interests at heart. Earn respect and the right to engage further with consistently valuable insights, and honor their preferences for interaction type, frequency, and format.

Choosing the bait

To convert prospects into sales-ready leads, you must educate them while subtly setting up your criteria for brand evaluation. Provide relevant information over time to build credibility and create a trusted relationship until the prospect is ready to see a salesperson.

Creating a steady stream of offers is key to maintaining ongoing dialogue with prospects. However, offer effectiveness depends on where your prospects are in their mind-set and buying process—stay relevant and in tune with them by creating a portfolio of offers by audience and buying cycle stage. Topics of most interest include: business trends, technology trends, peer perspective, best practices, and case studies.

"80% of B2B technology customers believe they found the vendor, rather than the vendor finding them."

—"Business Technology Benchmark Guide," *Marketing Sherpa, 2007*

3 THINGS YOU CAN DO NOW

1. **Inventory existing content assets.** Scour internal and external sources for possible offers. Focus on high-value, educational content—not thinly veiled product pitches.

2. **Segment your base.** Analyze your database to identify likely candidates for nurturing. Pick a segment that sales is least likely to spend time working on and build a campaign to experiment with tactics that might move that group from cool to hot.

3. **Watch and learn.** Put mechanisms in place to track the effectiveness of every touch in the pilot program. Look for patterns in prospect behavior and the frequency and format of touches based on response.

Top-performing offers

- Books and white papers
- Success stories
- Analyst reports and surveys
- Webcasts and podcasts
- Online demos and peer polls
- Sweeteners such as T-shirts or premium items

Packaging offers

Keep convenience and usability in mind. For instance, take a half-hour webcast and turn it into five 6-minute podcasts. Or to capture more registrants for webcasts, teleconferences, or other events, create a transcript after the fact that prospects can download and read on their own time.

Nurturing and Offer Development

Making contact

Use multi-touch, event-driven and behavior-based vehicles to deliver the right content and/or offers at the right moment and intersperse a variety of touches including email, direct mail, and telemarketing. Touches may be triggered by prospect actions (e.g. follow-up email after web registration or a call after attending an event) or by a pre-determined sequence of marketing paths (e.g. direct mail with offer to gain permission, second touch to non-respondents, etc.). Other possible triggers include:

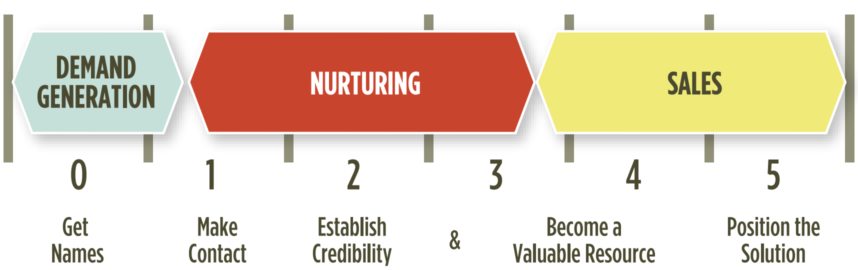
- Inbound call
- Inbound web visit
- Attended an event or webcast
- Downloaded a podcast or PDF

Each of these interactions indicates a different level of interest or intention on the part of the prospect, so they need to be touched differently.

Measuring results

It's important to have tight integration with the field's selling motion and to get alignment on lead scoring criteria. Scoring criteria can be based on Budget Authority Need Timeline (BANT), demographics, or activity history (number of meaningful interactions) or a combination of all three.

Putting closed-loop tracking and reporting in place provides real-time information about where prospects are in the flow and enables you to iterate more quickly to move them along the path or switch them to a different track for best results. Use progressive profiling and feedback mechanisms such as peer polls to gather insight about the prospect's mind-set and buying stage that you can use to tailor subsequent touches for greater relevance and impact.



"70–80% of inquiries have 'latent' demand and therefore go uncalled on by the sales team."

—Rock Annand Group, 2007

Relevance and timing are keys to success

The first 7 to 10 days after initial response are critical because prospects in the consideration stage are very likely looking at your competitors as well as you. Early stage leads typically require from 8 to 12 meaningful touches before they are sales-ready.

—Brian Harrigan, Accelerating IT Sales, *2007*

"95% of all leads are green bananas. Too many are digging for the 5% and abandoning the treasure in the remaining 95%."

—Brian Carroll, Lead Generation for the Complex Sale, *2006*

No green bananas

Avoid turning bananas over to the field too early, or too late. In-person and telephone discussions can be powerful tools for engaging with customers but may have an adverse effect on prospects—aggressive selling by an overzealous rep may in fact hinder the sale.

—Brian Carroll, Lead Generation for the Complex Sale, *2006*

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