

Top Five Lead Generation Mistakes *(and how you can avoid making them)*

All companies face sales and marketing challenges. All companies look for a yearly increase in sales revenue, and almost all require a flow of fresh sales prospects into their pipeline to achieve that goal.

But in the struggle to generate leads on a consistent basis, there are many, many options and few clear paths. There are so many elements that can be utilized in marketing programs designed to generate leads: there's direct mail, e-mail, telemarketing, database-population, advertising, search engine optimization, trade shows . . . the list goes on.

It's impossible to determine the right tactics for everyone – it depends on your company, your industry and the marketplace. Still, there are some common problems we're encountered over and over again that keep companies from achieving the business development goals they desire. Here are five big opportunities for improvement.

Mistake #1: Lack of a consistent message

When you're building a brand, a company name or any sort of identity, you need to be repetitive. People don't see your message and automatically remember it. They need to see it many times and, preferably, in many ways.

The goal of your marketing campaigns is to be the "company known as -----." If you flip flop on your tagline, your value proposition or your general messaging from one communication to the next, you lose the opportunity to make that all-important impression on your audience.

On a related note, too frequently companies "water down" their message to try to appeal to anyone and everyone. Along with your message being consistent, it's important to be strong and decisive; not all things to all people.

Mistake #2: Inconsistent efforts

Lots of people fall prey to this problem and, I admit, it's tempting to do so. They try one technique, don't get immediate results, then switch to something else.

Management expects results. If you've launched a campaign that yields little in the initial phases, it's difficult to get the backing from higher-ups to fund ongoing efforts. The knee-jerk reaction is the switch to a new technique or, frequently, to a new message (as above) to get better results.

The truth, though, is that lead generation is a *process*, and it's long-term. While there are a few techniques that can yield some immediate results, most programs are designed to generate a more consistent flow of new business opportunities over a period of time. Ideally, you should get the buy-in of all key parties – sales, marketing, management – select your programs and stick with them.

Then, after monitoring the program for at least several months, make modifications – tweaks – to the campaign to improve results.

Mistake #3: Unfocused audience

I can't tell you how many times executives of small and mid-sized B-to-B companies tell me their target audience is "everyone." Almost everyone, they claim, is a potential user of their product; therefore their target audience consists of tens of thousands of contacts at thousands of companies in countless industries.

Try putting that mailing list together.

It's important to focus your lead campaigns on smaller, like-minded audiences. First, who can possibly afford to communicate with that many people? To be effective, we're already noted that you need a consistent message, presented consistently. Very few companies can manage to populate and contact a monumental database on an ongoing basis.

Second, effective promotions are concise and direct. They speak directly to the needs (benefits) of the recipient. That's difficult when you have a small, like-minded audience; it's impossible when you're trying to relate to "everyone."

The moral of the story: Pick one or two groups and focus on them. Your selection can be based on industry, on region, on geography, on your strongest areas or your weakest. But for a lead generation campaign should focus on a smaller, manageable and similar-thinking audience segment.

Mistake #4: Leads are not acted upon

Do you have a drawer full of business cards you collected at your last trade show? Most of us do. Do you carefully log all of your RFIs, and chase your website visitors until you speak with them? Me neither.

Let's face it; a lot of the leads that come into your company are not qualified. A percentage of them will simply fall by the wayside, and it's difficult to devote your limited resources to such unproductive activities.

Still, it's one of the biggest mistakes made by sales and marketing organizations. You've spent the money to exhibit at the trade show, send out a mailing, advertise in a publication, etc.; it's absolutely critical that all the leads generated through those activities be followed up on.

The key: there should be a *process* implemented in all companies for lead follow-up; a procedure for leads generated through the website, for phone-in leads, for trade show leads, etc. there needs to be people responsible (and held accountable) for following up, and a path for lead information to flow once they are qualified/not qualified.

Mistake #5: Lack of commitment and resources

This is a tough one to fight, but it's the most prevalent mistake companies in all industries make. Lead generation is a specialized area that falls somewhere in the middle of Marketing and Sales. Frequently, there is no one person responsible for these activities, therefore there is no one spearheading the efforts.

At the same time, lead generation activities are often the most under-funded in the organization. The human and financial resources required to keep these programs running and often devoted to other, more immediate activities.

Effective lead development requires a real understanding throughout the organization, and at least one internal champion to implement the programs and track the results of key campaigns.

Avoid the mistakes

How can these mistakes be avoided? In general terms, companies with an understanding of – and respect for – lead development activities can easily avoid these pitfalls.

Effective lead programs are ones that are organized, thought-out and long-term in nature. They have clear objectives, clear accountabilities and results that are measurable and monitored.

Knowing your audience, your message and your plan of action will help you keep these mistakes to a minimum, and maximize your flow of incoming leads.

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