

Whitepaper

## Demand generation

How to generate sales leads



Marketing for manufacturers



## Demand generation

Selling anything is tough. Even big consumer brands – Apple, BMW, Canon et al – that supposedly have products that fly off the shelf, have had to work hard over many years to reach a position where sales can be assured.

Even then, ongoing brand loyalty is never guaranteed.

In the B2B space life can be even tougher. Companies, products, solutions and services often lack true differentiation; they frequently compete in a crowded, noisy and complex multi-channel marketplace; or they may simply lack the marketing and sales resources required to build and sustain a dominant position.

Despite this, it is possible to succeed. For small and medium sized companies it's often possible to win market share from bigger, better resourced and aggressive competitors. For leading industrial brands the ability to stand out consistently from the crowd can lead to stronger margins and long term sales growth.

## Where do you start?

Clearly, having a good product or service that meets the needs of your target audience is crucial.

The challenge is to get your offering in front of potential customers and then, given that most B2B purchases have sales cycles measured in weeks, months or years, to find methods of building and nurturing a solid relationship that keeps your business at the front of the prospective customer's mind.

Ultimately, a successful long term sales process depends on the relationship that your sales team develops with each customer.

The role of marketing in this context is to help you identify and explore possible opportunities, create new leads and then to support the lead nurturing process throughout the sales cycle – essentially enabling you to maintain the dialogue while adding value to the customer experience as a means of creating differentiation, positioning and leadership.

**First, however, you need to generate the lead.**

## Inbound v outbound

Demand generation practices are normally categorised as inbound or outbound; ideally, the two should be combined to create the optimum conditions for lead generation, nurturing and sales conversion.

Inbound leads are generally driven by marketing activities such as PR, SEO and content marketing. Outbound leads typically originate from direct targeting activities, including direct mail, email, telephone marketing and hosted events. In many respects, this mirrors a traditional push-pull marketing approach, adapted for the digital age.

It's perhaps more useful to think of outbound as being a form of interruption, where you're trying to force your message onto the prospect, or attract their attention, usually while they are focusing on other things. By comparison, inbound is essentially a form of permission marketing, where your business or messaging becomes the story, being delivered in a form and across the channels that work best for your target audience.

In many respects, outbound marketing is a relatively simple process. It is, for example, easy to decide where to place an advertisement, based for example on audience profile and circulation data, in an attempt to divert the attention of your audience away from the web page they are browsing, the article they are reading or the video they are watching. This approach is, however, targeted at a broad audience, of which most may either ignore the advert or be disinterested in its message as it's reaching them at a time when they may not have a need or interest in the offer.

Inbound techniques, however, require a holistic approach, taking into consideration all of the available on- and off-line channels, the different ways in which your target audience searches, consumes and reacts to content, and the actions or interests of each individual or group of individuals. Crucially, inbound marketing depends on the target audience responding to messages and content that engage their interest, offer advice, assistance and education, and provide answers or solutions to the questions and challenges faced by each prospect.

**Although this makes the process more complex, in the long term it produces far better results, in terms of customer engagement, demand generation and ultimately, sales and brand loyalty.**

## Content is critical

An effective demand generation strategy depends on high quality, authoritative and engaging content, built around a modern, intuitive and carefully engineered web site. This acts as the hub for inbound marketing activities – as the repository for all demand generation materials – and therefore has to be easy to use, update and navigate.

In simple terms content marketing is about creating high quality, relevant content that is of value to your target audience. Often referred to as assets – think of white papers, blog posts and video as examples – and embedded in your web site, this content can help your web pages rank highly in web searches. The same content can be promoted using email, social media, PR and so on.

In many respects, content is no different to any other form of marketing. You need to know your target audience, understand their challenges, desires and frustrations and make a structured offering that satisfies these demands. Where content differs from much of what has gone before is that it is not an overt sales process – it exists to inspire, educate, inform and motivate.

**The goal is to draw each prospect along the customer journey.**







## The customer journey

At one time, not so long ago, the salesperson was in control; they had all the information, statistics, specification and pricing details and could direct the interaction with each customer. Now, it's customers who are in control of the buying process.

According to research carried out by a number of leading business management consultants, customers will travel some way - typically around 60% - along the journey from initial need to final purchase, before they contact potential suppliers; indeed, they will probably have produced a shortlist of suppliers without direct contact with any of them.

It's also important to recognise that the customer decision journey is no longer linear.

Customers now regularly research, evaluate, select and even share experiences about products and suppliers using multiple sources and channels, ranging from web sites and social media, to videos, webinars, trade, technical and business media, exhibitions and events. Add to this matrix the inevitable disruption effect caused by your competitors and you have a fluid, complex and distinctly non-linear customer decision journey.

Also, bear in mind that there are increasing numbers of people involved both in the immediate purchasing decision and in influencing the path taken to reach a decision; and that this number grows as the value of the purchase or the length of the sales cycle increases.

To make sense of this it is nonetheless useful to think of the customer decision journey as a process that starts with a need, a problem or a challenge.

It may be as simple as requiring a new source of office supplies, or as broad as designing, building and operating a new process plant. In each case, the same fundamental techniques can be applied to guide the customer from discovery of the options and solutions to a point where they are comfortable making an initial enquiry.

It's often been said that people buy from people that they respect and trust. The same applies to the companies that they choose to work with.

The challenge is moving your business to this position of trust, where it is recognised as an expert and thought leader, and known for its skills, knowledge and experience by both existing and prospective customers alike. This includes customers who may not have yet contacted you, or may not yet know that they have a need for your products or services.

**Content marketing, often in conjunction with other sales and marketing tools, plays a key role in this process. In essence, by creating a solid body of material that educates, informs, inspires and motivates, content marketing guides your customer along the decision journey.**



## Creating exceptional content

The key to successful content marketing, as a means of generating inbound demand, is to fully understand your customer, their needs, challenges, desires and goals. Above all, never forget that they are humans and will react in the same way as any consumer.

In many respects, the goal of an inbound marketing strategy is to bridge the gap between the information that the prospect is searching for and the message that a supplier wants to promote.

If content comes across as sales copy, or if it does not address their interest or need, then prospects will quickly switch off. Once disengaged, they can be hard to reengage.

One of the failings of much content – and broader marketing messaging – is that it focuses only on explicit messages: reduce production costs, improve quality, boost uptime and so on. It often ignores implicit messaging – in other words, the emotional factors that can ultimately sway any decision.

Martin Lindstrom, the author of *Buyology*, believes that, '85% of the decisions we make are made by the unconscious part of the brain'. This part of the brain is essentially driven by what we otherwise call emotion, with decisions being made extremely quickly, based on feelings rather than facts. The conscious part of the brain will then post-rationalise the decision, using data, statistics and other 'factual' materials.

Although no two people are the same, the point here is that content should ideally deliver both implicit and explicit messages, while at the same time being informative, educational and stimulating, to appeal to both conscious and unconscious decision making processes.

It should also be recognised that many people will naturally go for the easy or safe choice; this is one reason why a strong, trustworthy brand is so important; there's a lot of truth in the old adage that 'nobody ever got fired for buying IBM'!

Content therefore has to be:

- Personalised and corporate
- Informative and interesting
- Work at both an emotional and rational level for each individual.

In addition, content has to appeal to all those involved in the purchasing process, as decision makers, specifiers or influencers. For example, in the process of buying a new item of capital equipment it is important to reach:

- The factory manager to explain how the new machine will help them meet their production targets
- Training staff and line operators to talk about how simple and safe the new machine is to use
- Engineering teams to stress ease of installation and low maintenance costs
- Finance and procurement to discuss leasing options, payback and resale values
- Board level or business owners to emphasise the overall value to their company

To identify the correct messages for each group it can be useful to create a persona, or character profile, for each target job function. This persona generally includes a description of the typical person in each role – their age, interests, preferred methods of communication and so on – together with a list of the factors that drive them in their job and in their wider business function. These can be the things that keep them awake at night or make them get out of bed every morning and might be as simple as: I want to impress my boss, or I want to purchase products and services that make me look good and deliver real improvement to my business.

In many respects, personas mirror the type of information that any good salesperson would build up in their head about their customer, as they develop empathy.

The difference is that, in this context, personas are being used as the basis for crafting the messages and content to attract and engage with the target audience. Once you have a clear understanding of your customer group or groups then it becomes much easier to develop content assets.

To repeat an earlier point: these must be focused on what interests your customers, not on directly promoting your business. Your goal is to create materials that educate and inform, as a means of building credibility, trust and reputation, from which the sales process can subsequently be driven.

**The types of material that work best vary from market to market, campaign to campaign and company to company, but normally include:**

- White papers
- Videos
- Webinars
- Articles
- Blogs
- News stories
- FAQs
- Case studies
- Reports
- How to E-books
- Infographics
- Tweets & posts







## Compelling Content

Content has to be compelling! Of course, this is often easier said than done, as there are probably limited numbers of truly thought provoking, imaginative or innovative things that can be said or shown to capture the interest of your target audience.

This should not, however, be a constraint, as one of the key elements to successful content marketing is to extract maximum value from each asset.

For example, if you've created a great white paper on a key aspect of your market then its content can subsequently be repurposed in many different forms and channels: blog entries, news stories, video, executive comments, tweets and posts, email and so on.

Depending on your market sector it may be practical to create one outstanding piece of content each quarter, exploring in detail a specific market or customer issue.

This asset can then be exploited as widely as possible before moving on to the next quarter, where a different topic is explored.

Over time, this builds a solid core of high quality and relevant content on your web site and online channels, linked to external sources such as news portals or independent blogs and which ranks highly with relevant web searches. Most importantly, this attracts new traffic to your web site and offers assets of value to your prospects that they are prepared to exchange for their contact details. This begins the process of lead nurturing, where an initial expression of interest can subsequently be developed using a combination of email, new assets and, at a later stage as the level of interest intensifies, telephone marketing or sales.

**For large organisations, or where larger volumes of enquiries are involved, lead nurturing is best achieved using one of the many marketing automation tools available. These allow the process to be managed efficiently and to maximise the opportunities by integrating the content marketing, marketing and sales functions to create a cohesive and cost effective customer-facing entity.**

## Outbound lead generation

Unlike inbound lead generation, where prospective customers find your business, outbound lead generation uses techniques such as telephone and email marketing to target known customer groups.

Although face to face selling will almost always be the most effective method of generating new orders in the B2B space, it is followed closely by the use of the telephone as a key sales tool.

Telephone marketing is a particular skill, which requires considerable experience to be truly effective. In any situation you have a short period of time to engage with the prospect and need quickly to build a degree of empathy, so that the prospect gives you permission to continue the dialogue.

Careful targeting and timing is critical. Given the long sales cycles of many B2B operations it is often a matter simply of maintaining contact until the time is right for the direct sales process to begin.

This is where the use of appropriate content assets can play a valuable role, providing an opportunity to re-establish contact with the prospect without it appearing that the telephone call or email is actively soliciting the prospect's business.

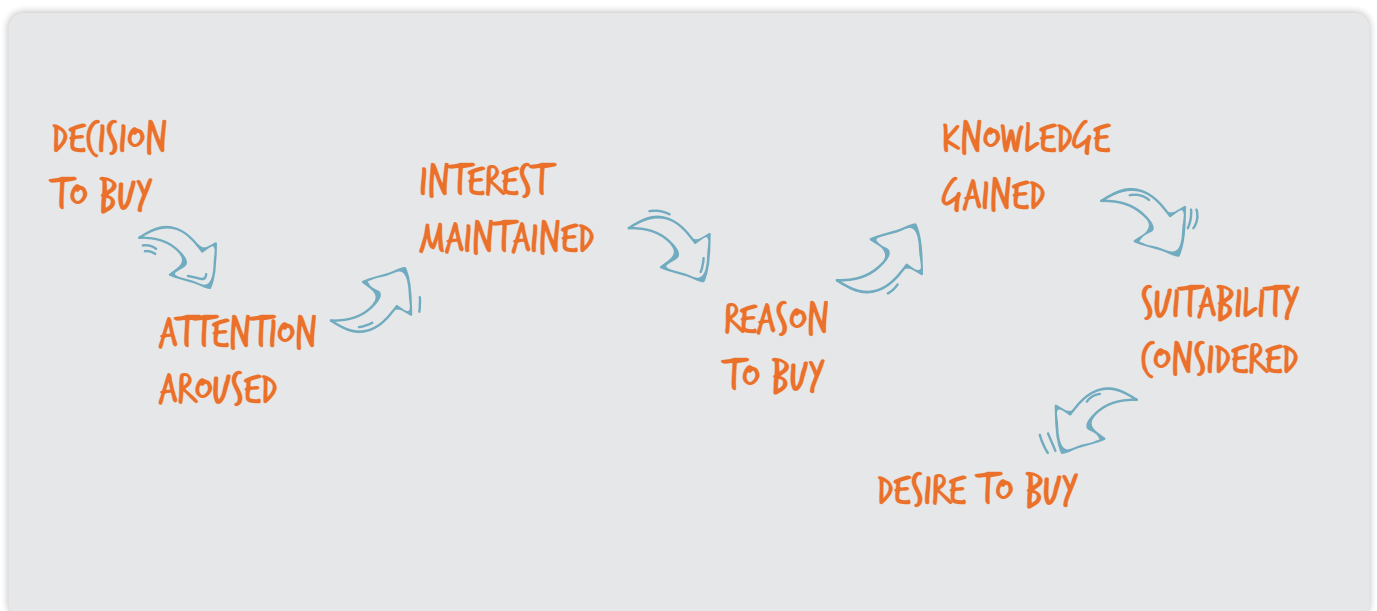
In many respects, the early stages of telephone marketing are essentially an information gathering exercise. This involves confirming that the contact details are correct, understanding what role the contact has in the decision making process, clarifying if others in the business are involved as influencers or decision makers, defining the pain, needs or challenges and establishing the time scales involved.

It may therefore be that from the initial prospecting call the most appropriate action is to follow up with a sequence of emailed or posted content assets, rather than sales materials, linked to an occasional telephone call to maintain a dialogue, until the time is right for a sales meeting to be arranged.

An important point to understand is that a professional telephone marketing call is not a sales call but what can best be described as a smart call: one that engages with the prospect at both an emotional and rational level – in much the same way that content marketing works.

Bear in mind that the initial call is simply the first step on a journey of discovery designed to build a long term relationship with the prospect – a journey that is developed stage by stage by subsequent contact and that consists not of a simple yes-no decision, but instead of a long series of micro-yesses, that eventually build up to your name on a purchase order.

In simple terms this involves:







## No quick fix

Content marketing and telephone marketing can deliver outstanding results, as a means of driving inbound and outbound demand.

Note that although these techniques are not a quick fix and require investment in terms of time, effort and money, especially if external agencies are required, they can offer an excellent return on investment.

Ultimately, ROI is calculated by sales revenues. This can, however, be a long process so in the meantime ensure that you are making maximum use of your online monitoring and analytical tools. As a minimum, these should include Google Analytics and an IP tracking code to identify changes in web traffic and visitor behaviour and the individual companies visiting your web site.

These can be supplemented by marketing automation and monitoring tools for social, trade and business media. When combined with other traditional sales and marketing techniques content and telephone marketing will play a crucial role in positioning your business as a thought leader, to build market share, help you penetrate new markets and generate sales.

**If you would like to discuss how these techniques can help your business grow still further then please contact us for an initial meeting – there's no commitment other than an hour or so of your time.**

# Contact us

For advice, insight and a results driven approach to your marketing communications please get in touch.



Marketing for manufacturers

Milton Keynes Challenge House Sherwood Drive Bletchley Milton Keynes MK3 6DP

T +44 (0)1908 533253 | E [info@4cm.co.uk](mailto:info@4cm.co.uk) | W [4cm.co.uk](http://4cm.co.uk)