



MARKETING RESOURCES

Lead Generation



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What is Lead Generation?

Lead generation is basically what it sounds like: the process by which we attempt to turn visitors into leads. More specifically, we want to catch them between the consideration and decision phases of the buyer's journey.

A quick recap: the buyer's journey goes from awareness to consideration to decision. At the top of the funnel are strangers — everyone in the world who hasn't heard of you and has no interest in buying from you.

Once they become aware of you, click on a social post or search result, read a blog, etc., they become visitors. They're now aware of you, they're learning more about you, and they're moving in the direction of wanting to buy from you. This is the point where they might become leads, if you play your cards right.

The lead (or potential lead) already knows what the problem is that they're trying to solve. The tricky part is convincing them that you're the right company or product for the job. How do you do that? By offering them the right solutions at the right time. It sounds simple, but there's a lot more to it. Let's jump in.

Chapter One: The Buyer's Journey

Any lead generation strategy has to keep the buyer's journey in mind. This isn't the first time we've talked about the buyer's journey and it certainly won't be the last, but let's go through it one more time.

Awareness

Sure, lead generation means turning visitors into leads, but you have to get those visitors in the first place — you can't just splash your product in front of strangers and expect them to respond positively.

The fact is, without a strong focus on the awareness phase, you won't have

visitors to convert at all. You need to use blogs, social media, whitepapers, videos, and so on to draw people in before you can sell to them.

In the awareness phase, you're not trying to get anyone to make a purchase — yet. You don't even want them to get a quote or meet with one of your sales team. You're just trying to provide genuinely helpful, relevant, timely information to whoever's looking for it.

Consideration

This is where lead generation really kicks off. At this point, the potential customer has determined that they have a problem, knows what it is, and is ready to look for a solution.

Remember, “problem” in this sense doesn't have to be anything serious. Maybe their problem is that the little disposable cups for their coffee maker are too expensive and they feel guilty about the amount of trash they generate. You, as a maker of fancy pour over coffee paraphernalia, have the solution to that problem.

At this point, you've provided the visitor with all kinds of helpful information about how pourover coffee saves on waste — especially with reusable stainless steel filters, which you happen to sell — tastes better, is cheaper, and so on. You've started an interesting conversation with a visitor who might not have even known there was a difference, and their curiosity is piqued.

Now — not sooner — is the time to start talking about you. This is the part where you start to deliver content about yourself, your product, and your company as the obvious solution to their problem.

Expert guides, webinars, and videos will show them how it's not any harder to make pour over coffee. Handy infographics can show them how much plastic they're saving. Consumer testimonials can tell them how much better it tastes.

Decision

Now that you've successfully courted a visitor, they become a lead — someone who's interested in the particular type of product that you sell (pour over coffee accessories) and ready to buy. Your job is not over yet.

This is the point where you start to serve your leads with case studies, trial offers, and quotes. Not all of these content types apply to our coffee example, but they're all useful for different types of business.

Note that you're just now offering things like audits, trial offers, appraisals, and quotes. Let's say you run a house painting business, and one of your big selling points is that you'll come to the house and offer a free appraisal and guaranteed quote. That's a great offer, but it's no use to someone who hasn't decided they need their house painted. That's why the hard numbers and financial incentives have to wait until the decision phase.

For our coffee example, this is the part where you tell them about your prices, your warranty, your trial offers, and your coupons for first-time buyers. If you make multiple models, offer to help them decide which is best for their needs, or even build a comparison table to show them their options.

And of course, set up your CTAs to direct to a purchase page so that when they do decide to buy, the process is easy, quick, and frictionless. The last thing you want is for someone to decide that they want your product, only to discover that it's only sold in certain brick-and-mortar stores and there aren't any in their town. That's a lost sale every time.

Your work isn't done when your visitor becomes a customer. Follow up with a survey, ask them how they're liking it, or send them a link to how best to clean and care for their new coffee maker. If you sell relevant accessories to go with what they purchased, suggest them!

Customers become repeat customers, and they attract more customers, so you need to make sure they're happy. The happier they are, the more likely that they'll tell their friends about their great experience with you and your company.

Chapter Two: Buyer Personas

Now that you have a rough idea of how to generate leads at each stage along the buyer's journey, it's a good time to take a look at buyer personas.

What's a buyer persona? A buyer persona is a fictional buyer with all the characteristics of your perfect customer. Which characteristics are most relevant will depend on your exact business, but in any case, a buyer persona is an important thing to keep in mind.

How To Create Buyer Personas

To create your buyer persona or personas, think about the broad categories first. Things like age, location, gender, and income level will help you narrow down who your ideal buyer is. Picture the average customer at Home Depot versus the average customer at Bed Bath & Beyond. Are they the same person? Probably not.

Once you've narrowed down the broad-strokes categories, think about more specific things. What kind of car does your buyer drive? What do they watch on TV? What are their hobbies? What are their interests?

Don't forget about characteristics that are specific to your product or service. If you make pour over coffee makers, your buyers' coffee-drinking habits are a major factor in whether they might buy from you or not. If you run a house-painting business, you can probably ignore any potential customer who doesn't own a house.

[For more on how to set up \(and start using\) your buyer personas, check out our blog!](#)

Why Are Buyer Personas Important?

Buyer personas are important because they inform your entire content marketing strategy. Everything you create will be tailor-made for a certain audience, so it's imperative that you know who that audience is.

How much technical language or industry jargon are they familiar with? What's their sense of humor like? The answers to those questions can make for drastic differences in the types of content you put out — and the success of that content.

[Your branding will be built around your buyer persona too.](#) From colors and fonts to which Instagram filters you use and what your Facebook links look like, your whole brand should be created to appeal to the particular subset of people who you want buying your product.

Don't forget, the whole point of an inbound marketing approach is to provide potential customers with useful, relevant content to the people who need it. No more cold-calling, no more national ads, no more interrupting family dinner or your favorite TV shows. Everything you make should be written, designed, placed, and published with your perfect customer in mind. All of it is tailored to them.

Chapter Three: Lead Nurturing Tactics

Your visitors won't just go straight from leads to customers. They might need a little help along the way. In this section, we'll talk about how to give your leads the extra nudge they need to make a purchase — and feel good about it.

Don't Sleep On Web Design

Just because your primary focus is content doesn't mean that presentation falls by the wayside. Your website is the hub of all your marketing efforts, and it's the one part of the web you can really control, so it's worth the effort to make sure it's as good as it can be.

Make sure your CTAs are located above the fold — high enough on the page that you don't have to scroll to see them. The location of "the fold" can be hard to predict, given the variety of devices and browsers in use these days, but the idea is not to bury the CTA — that's what guides visitors down the funnel to making a purchase.

Be judicious with your CTAs — both in quantity and placement. The buyer's journey tells us not to push a sale on someone who's still in the awareness phase, just looking for information. For each piece of content, think about what stage of the buyer's journey the viewer is likely to be in at that moment.

If they're reading a broad, informational blog like "How to Hack Your Morning Coffee," a link to another blog or a whitepaper might be appropriate. If they're looking at your prices, product pages, or comparisons with your competitors, your CTA can be more direct in pointing them toward a purchase.

Finally, make sure your site is well-designed, fast, and efficient. Page load times can have a huge effect on conversions, and burying information in a maze of menus and links is a good way to frustrate and lose visitors.

Make sure your images are crunched and optimized for everywhere they appear, whether it's thumbnails or mobile browsers. Contact information should be up to date and easy to find. [Don't lose leads to bad or confusing web design.](#)

Reports of Email's Death are Greatly Exaggerated

Your email campaign can help out your lead generation and nurturing strategies, too.

Subject lines should be catchy and relevant to encourage opens. The best-designed emails won't do you any good if no one is reading them, so really put some thought into your subject lines.

In the body of the email, remember your CTAs. CTAs should be worded similarly to the subject of the email to encourage the association in the reader's mind — if your email subject says "5 Secrets to Better Coffee," your CTA shouldn't just say "Learn More," it should say "Learn the 5 Secrets to Better Coffee."

Remember, email isn't an afterthought! It's inexpensive and brings high conversion rates — after all, everyone that signed up to be on your email list is

already interested — and has an [average ROI of \\$38 earned per dollar spent](#). It's also mobile-friendly, so you can reach people on the go and while they're already on their phones.

CRM Software Is Your Friend

CRM stands for Customer Resource Management, and it's an integral cog in the content marketing machine. Their main job is to help you keep track of your visitors and leads in an organized, easy-to-sort way.

For example, you can tell where your visitors came from, and which pieces of your content — blog, social, email — they've already read or made contact with. You can keep track of who's reached out to them from your end, how recently, and how many times. You'll know which pieces they've downloaded and which emails they've been sent.

The upshot of this is that you can create workflows — pre-designed plans for guiding them through the funnel. If your readers are coming to you through social media, offer them a particular blog post. If they read that blog post, suggest a download, or to sign up for your email. If they fill out a contact form, give them a call. These workflows can even be automated, triggered by filling out a form, downloading a whitepaper, or liking a social post.

All of this can be planned ahead to make sure that you're not sending duplicate emails or content, nor are you being too aggressive or too timid. But it's not a set-and-forget solution. You'll need to be keeping a close eye on your conversion rates to see what's working and what needs tweaking.

Make sure you're segmenting your lists, leads, personas, visitors ... everyone. There is no one-size-fits-all solution, so you'll need to tailor your content to the exact person seeing it and their situation.

Send Follow-up Emails

Less intensive than a workflow, you can just send a quick follow-up email to the leads you garner through your site. It's quick, free, easy to automate, and

as simple as “thanks for signing up/downloading that thing you downloaded!” But that’s it. Don’t push for a sale, don’t ask for more info, don’t try to have them sit down for a phone call with an advisor. It’s a nudge, not a shove.

For higher-level content and interactions, your follow-up emails can be more in-depth. You wouldn’t go on a second date with someone who never got in touch with you or expressed any interest after the first date, and neither will your customers.

If you talked to someone on the phone or in person or gave them a quote they asked for, you need to follow up with them. Make sure they know you’re there, ready to help if needed, and that you can be their point of contact if they need anything. Feel free to throw in a piece of content you think they might find relevant as well!

Don’t Get Crazy

A quick addendum to all the above: don’t overdo it. If you are too annoying, you will repel customers and sales. People don’t want to be bugged. You’ll need to be able to read the room when a potential customer says “not right now” or “we don’t have the budget for that.” Either you’ve pushed them too far or they weren’t the right person to pursue in the first place.

That’s okay! Not every visitor will become a lead, and not every lead will become a customer. It takes practice to figure out when to push, when to back off, and when to give up and focus your attention on other leads. Keep track of the patterns you notice for what works and what doesn’t.

Chapter Four: Why It Matters For Inbound Marketing

In the old days of marketing, where messages were essentially carpet-bombed on every channel you could afford in the hopes that someone would notice and like it, lead generation was as simple as spreading blanket messages and waiting for something to come up.

Now, lead generation is about meeting your customers where they are, being

able and willing to solve their problems, and being genuinely useful and helpful in the process.

A good lead generation and nurturing strategy will help guarantee that you're meeting the right customers in the right place and at the right time. By avoiding the annoying, abrasive, out-of-the-blue strategies of the old model, you start a conversation with your customers rather than just yelling.

Chapter Five: Measuring Effectiveness

Once you've started to implement these strategies, you'll want to know if they're working. That's where all your data and analytics will come into the picture. Monitor everything, then work out what's the most useful later. You don't want to discover that a particular KPI is important only to realize that you weren't keeping track of it.

On a basic level, you'll know that your lead generation strategy is working when you have more customers. On a granular level, that means more clicks to your site from social media posts and email.

Once your visitors are coming to your site, you should be getting more downloads on your content, more clicks on CTAs, and more page views per visit, as people browse from one blog to the next.

Finally, people should be filling out forms more, asking for emails, phone calls, and consultations. All of this adds up to a more robust pipeline for visitors to become leads, which means more customers and more money!