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Demand Generation Best Practices: Key Considerations for Optimization and Efficiency

IT BUSINESS EDGE
YOUR TECHNOLOGY INTELLIGENCE AGENT

Demand Generation Best Practices: Key Considerations for Optimization and Efficiency

Executive Summary

This white paper outlines some key considerations and best practices that you can use to refine and enhance your demand-generation strategies. It focuses on areas such as content selection, registration page optimization, campaign analysis, lead nurturing and demographic targeting. Although the emphasis of this paper is on demand-generation programs in third-party publishing channels, the tips presented here also can be applied to your internal e-mail and search engine marketing efforts.

Introduction

Inquiries. Prospects. Engagements. Acquisitions. Opportunities. Registrations. Leads. There are a lot of opinions about what marketers should call the outcome of offer-driven marketing efforts. Some argue that a respondent to a white-paper promotion cannot be called a *lead* until the individual passes through an internal review and qualification process. Others insist that any record that enters the database is a valid *inquiry* but, if certain criteria or profiles are met, *prospect* is the acceptable description.

While semantics may differ between organizations, the basic objectives and challenges that business technology marketers face in planning and executing their offer-driven marketing initiatives are the same. Competition is fierce. Marketing investments are increasingly scrutinized and held to measurable standards such as ROI by upper management. The sales team is increasingly picky. And, not that this is news to anyone, there's simply not enough time in the day to keep the pipeline full, search for ways to optimize demand-generation programs, *and* keep the entire line of business informed and convinced of your best efforts.

The Client Marketing Team at IT Business Edge derived the tips offered in this white paper from experience developing and implementing customized demand-generation programs for hundreds of business technology companies like yours. These guidelines will help you optimize programs that promote your marketing assets through third-party publishers, as well as other external and internal source channels.

And just to clarify, in the context of this best-practices document, the term *lead* will be used to describe a respondent to an offer-driven promotion.

Choose Your Weapon …Wisely

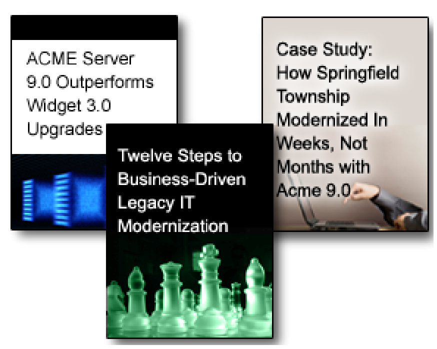
Without the benefit of reading any of the documents in question, which one of the following white- paper titles do you think would generate the most interest from an audience of busy business technology executives with purchasing authority?

- Acme Server 9.0 Outperforms Widget 3.0 Upgrades
- Twelve Steps to Business-Driven Legacy IT Modernization
- Case Study: How Springfield Township Modernized In Weeks, Not Months with Acme 9.0

The answer is actually a no-brainer. *Twelve Steps to Business-Driven Legacy IT Modernization* is the title to pick. The other two resources may include rich content and deliver the same fundamental marketing message. They may even provide more detailed information about the product or service being marketed. But their titles do not promise potential readers useful information that will apply to their business needs.

The most effective white papers — and white paper titles — are principle-driven. They offer explanations of important technology trends, best practices, and essential methods. And they a promise results either by helping a company advance its goals or avoid common pitfalls.

In the winning example, notice how the title promises *steps* that lead to a *business-driven* outcome. These two details indicate that 1) the reader will get actionable advice



2) the advice will be business-centric and not just focused on the advent or implementation of a particular technology. Advertising the product or service is completely acceptable, but it needs to follow the main focus on principles and best practices.

The fundamental flaw of the first resource is that it's too product centric. The title suggests that it will provide nothing more than an outline of the merits of Acme's product compared against its Widget competitor. While there's certainly an audience for this kind of resource, such a document really belongs in the hands — or on the screen — of someone who is at a higher level of engagement with Acme.

As for the third title, case studies tend to be too product- or service-centric as well. Also, readers are likely to question whether content about a specific company's use of a specific technology will apply to their own businesses. A case study can be an acceptable marketing resource. The point here is that it's not likely to stand apart from what will be most effective in a busy publishing channel: a principle-based white paper.

As important as your content approach and positioning is, the format you use to deliver your message is also a critical variable in developing offer-driven campaigns. This paper has deliberately focused on white papers because they've proven to be the most effective in publisher channels. Webcasts, podcasts, product demos, free trials and other resources certainly have a place in your mix of promotional materials, but consider the results of a study conducted by KnowledgeStorm, Inc. and MarketingSherpa:

"Nearly 80% of technology buyers will register for a white paper, which is also the top content type marketers deem as worth requiring registration. By contrast, only 38 percent of buyers will register for a demo and 31 percent for a Webcast..." [1]

'Rather than pushing prospects away with aggressive questions...ask targeted questions about their existing situations or pain points.'

To get the most out of your marketing assets, you should maintain a diversified stable of resources for different levels of engagement with a prospect. For generating new leads, your focus should be on principle-based white papers.

But not all white papers are created equal. If you promote a group of resources through a business-technology publisher and hope to achieve even distribution of response across all the assets, you're sure to be disappointed. Some titles simply resonate better with an audience than others. Rather than letting clients fight that current, the IT Business Edge practice is to help them identify the most promising resources so they can optimize their campaigns and get quality leads into the pipeline as efficiently as possible.

Registration Considerations

The advice for registration pages is straightforward: Use your publishing partner's registration system. Many publishers, including IT Business Edge, pre-populate subscriber data, making it a quick process for someone previously registered on the site to complete a registration form. What's more, this pre-population acts as a kind of data integrity control because leads don't have to retype information they've already entered, and publishers often implement logic into their registration platforms designed to minimize errant keystrokes or deliberate entry of bogus registration information.

Using a publisher's registration system also increases response. Subscribers and registered users of a publisher's site become accustomed to the publisher's privacy policy and practices in sharing their information. They tend to more readily submit their accurate personal information based on credibility and trust the publisher has developed over time.

But We've Only Just Met

An often-overlooked impediment to the success of an offer-driven lead-generation campaign is the type of custom questions implemented on the registration form. In general, standard business card information is pre-populated when using the publisher's registration system, but most publishers allow a certain

[1] http://www.centerformediaresearch.com/cfmr_brief.cfm?fnl=070605

number of customized questions commensurate with the price and terms of the program. Custom questions provide opportunities to find out more about a lead's project plans, existing infrastructure or intent to purchase a technology or service in a certain timeframe. However, ill-conceived custom questions can gather useless information or even scare off potential leads by asking too much too fast.

Questions like: "Would you like to set up appointment with Acme Inc. today?" or "Would you like to receive a risk-free 30-day trial now?" are too hasty for a potential lead downloading a white paper. In most cases, it's unrealistic to believe that a prospect is willing to commit to an in-person appointment or a software trial before he or she has even read the white paper that motivated them to register in the first place.

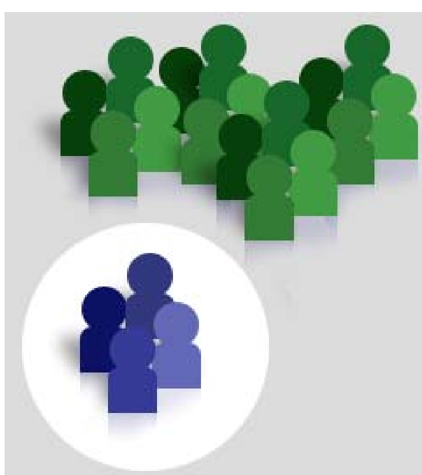
When deciding on custom questions, you should consider the context of the experience that your incoming leads go through with publishers or other lead sources. It's possible that some of these contacts have never heard of your company and do not recognize it as a player in the market space in which you're competing. They've clearly indicated that they're interested in that market space by obtaining your white paper, so let them take the first step of learning the useful information it contains and get acquainted with you in the process.

Rather than pushing prospects away with aggressive questions that aren't likely to elicit the answers you and your sales team want (requests for appointments or trials), ask targeted questions about the prospects' existing situations or pain points. Then you can use the provided intelligence to shape a strategy for engaging these leads and guiding them to those trials, appointments, and *sales*.

The Problem — Make that Opportunity — of Duplicate Leads

The supply chain through which leads must travel to get from a third-party publisher to your sales team can be long and complex. If you require specific formatting for lead reports or if you have to manipulate data in a certain way to facilitate input into a CRM system, duplicate leads (the same prospect downloading multiple content items from you) can be a problem. However, any barriers preventing the delivery of duplicate leads into your system, technological or otherwise, can lead to missed opportunities and insights.

If you've allocated more than one resource for a lead-generation program, someone may respond to more than one of your offers. When faced with the task of sifting through leads and formulating a follow-up strategy, knowing how many resources a lead has obtained from your program is a useful indicator of engagement with your marketing assets and, by extension, your brand.



Even the most cursory lead report in an Excel worksheet allows for this kind of prioritization. If you can sort multiple respondents to the top, you can make sure your organization contacts those multi-touch — and highly engaged — leads first.

IT Business Edge believes in the value of duplicate leads enough to offer customized programs designed to maximize the number of offers an individual lead is presented over a period of time. Our comprehensive lead-generation, nurturing, and assessment program delivers leads who experience a custom remarketing campaign designed to quantify individual levels of interest and assert a vendor's thought leadership in a certain topic area. The result: an extended marketing dollar and an enriched set of leads that should, as a result of the incubation and assessment process, provide a better return on investment.

Peripheral Leads, Hidden Potential

Publishers are just as sensitive to list fatigue and attrition when managing their subscriber list as you are with your own marketing database. As such, it's in every publisher's interest to fulfill its clients' lead-generation programs as efficiently as possible, minimizing promotions to unqualified prospects. However, in the process of generating your leads, every publisher is sure to end up producing some leads who do not meet your qualification criteria.

Tapping into those leads who fall just outside your criteria can provide valuable sales opportunities at bargain prices.

If, for example, a client has chosen to target North American prospects in companies of a certain size, a savvy publisher will do its best to target only those prospects that fit the defined profile. However, depending on the publisher's promotional mix, there likely will be response from readers outside of the established demographic target. In a publisher's channel, some site-based activity or e-mail newsletter response can certainly result in lead profiles that may fall within the geographic target of a program, but miss the company size mark. At IT Business Edge, we call these types of responders *peripheral leads* and encourage clients not to ignore them.

Consider one past client who sells and leases an expensive hardware appliance used primarily by large companies. In its initial program with IT Business Edge, the company sought North American leads for companies with a minimum of 1,000 employees. After the program finished, the company was surprised to learn that there had been considerable response to its offers in companies below its employee-size threshold. Curious but circumspect about what these leads might mean for its sales group, the company negotiated a reduced cost-per-lead and entered the leads into its follow-up cycle.

The leads were good and made sense for the client. In fact, based on what the client learned from tapping into these peripheral leads, the company adjusted some of its messaging and white-paper content. The company now supports a two-pronged approach to its demand-generation strategy (and sales tactics) based on two distinct customer profiles where there previously had been only one.

Conclusion

While by no means an exhaustive list, the best practices and considerations outlined here should get you thinking about how to optimize your lead-generation programs. Through careful selection of principle-driven marketing assets, watchful attention to registration pages, tight focus on lead engagement levels, and an open mind about what could be happening in the periphery of your preconceived lead profile, you should be armed with the perspective to create programs that can be easily justified and embraced by all parties in your organization.

About the Authors

Jeff Yocom is vice president of marketing at IT Business Edge. During Jeff's 15 years in technology publishing, he has worked in virtually every aspect of the industry. He was editor in chief and group publisher at The Cobb Group, and served as senior vice president of content development at TechRepublic.

John Connell is senior marketing manager at IT Business Edge. He has held editorial, product management, and marketing management positions at InterActiveCorp/IAC, CNET Networks, and TechRepublic. He is a graduate of Hanover College and holds an MBA from the University of Louisville.

Jeff, John, and their veteran team of marketers at IT Business Edge design, implement, and optimize custom advertising programs for business technology vendors of all sizes.

About IT Business Edge

IT Business Edge delivers the information, analysis and context business technology decision makers need to maximize their return on IT investments and align IT initiatives with business objectives. As a technology intelligence agent, IT Business Edge provides content different from that of any IT publisher, news service or research company. Our editors monitor all these sources — plus many others — for critical IT information, then they translate it into actionable advice for high-level IT professionals and business managers. Subscribers access our practical content and useful decision-making tools through a rich Web site, targeted e-mail newsletters and varied RSS feeds. All these media feature our business-focused blogs, exclusive interviews with industry insiders and field experts, and our database of more than 25,000 abstracts summarizing content from more than 2,500 Web sources.

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