

THE 10 BEST WAYS

TO GENERATE LEADS FOR YOUR BUSINESS

To any savvy business, it's well known that all leads are not created equal. Leads from certain sources provide returns at a much greater ratio than leads from other sources. Some lead sources bring more "ready to purchase" opportunities while others generate tips from prospects in the early stages of exploring their purchasing options.

The following is a definitive list of ten proven ways to develop leads in today's online focused purchasing process:

1- Natural Search:

As Web users have become more sophisticated, the value of high ranking natural search results are by far the best overall opportunities that you can receive into your sales pipeline. Prospects that have found your site via a natural search or direct visit to your website are the most vetted and ideal prospect you can receive. They have brand recognition of your company and often times are the most “ready to purchase.” The caveat, of course, is that natural search rankings are very difficult to achieve and ranking algorithms are evolving quickly to provide more localized and customized returns. With that said, developing a strategy to build a strong Web presence to drive opportunity through natural search is one of the best drivers of ROI in your lead generation efforts.

2- Referrals:

A tried and true process and one that always delivers a high return. However, the best way to go about obtaining referrals is certainly up for debate. Back in the old days, people would openly refer you to any business they had built a strong relationship with. Now, it seems those days are over and the more likely scenario has been people referring you to businesses they have a strong relationship with that involves some mutual financial gain.

While the referral process has evolved, the fact that someone else speaks highly of your business will always be a strong component of discovering “hot” opportunities. One way to increase this sort of activity is to build out a very refined and transparent partnership referral process. This scenario enables you to recruit potential partners that have areas of influence to refer more opportunity to your business. Yes, of course, the biggest factor is the compensation associated with that referral. But at the end of the day, the more referrals you can get, the better positioned you will be.

3- Third Party Reference Sites:

In a time when companies do more and more due diligence to find the right vendor to work with online, the aspect of third party reference sites play heavily in developing lead channels. You could make a case that sites like Angie's List are basically referral sources for companies with a great overall rating on their site. Other networks that "rate" and "rank" vendors are advantageous to the companies that place highly amongst their overall rankings.

Of course in today's world, there is more and more scrutiny on these sorts of sites and their motivation to rank certain companies over another. Make no mistake, there are networks out there that end up basing their rankings off a "pay for play" type of process, but there are also a lot of other networks that are reputable. If the credibility of a site is strong, achieving high rankings on reputable third party site can become a very strong driver of high converting opportunities.

4- Custom Analytical Platforms:

One relatively new concept in lead generation that has proven to be highly effective in developing strong prospects has been the creation of an “analysis” platform. These platforms provide potential prospects with the opportunity to further research and investigate a certain topic area. The “analysis” platform offers prospects in the stages of understanding the needs for their company to further evaluate the specific service offerings that they intend to purchase.

Mortgage calculators that are operated by mortgage companies and offer prospects certain incentives to enter in their contact information are some of the best examples of “analysis” platforms. Prospects engage the calculator and then enter their contact information for a free quote or a deeper overview. This process is highly beneficial when it comes to locating prospects that are more research focused who can be integrated directly in to your sales pipeline.

5- Paid Search:

While paid search has certainly seen a decline over the past few years, it is still one of the most immediately impactful ways of generating leads. Competition for premium positioning around generic terms can be extremely costly and poorly managed campaigns can waste a budget quickly on untargeted and low converting keywords. Developing a lead through paid search is more a function of less is more. Driving towards a narrower offering as well as targeting more specific keywords lowers your overall visibility but reduces overall costs and intensifies conversion rates.

Controlling cost in paid search is an aspect of driving the actual value of the leads that are generated. Paid search leads tend to be a bit more fickle in their conversion as some savvy Web users avoid paid search advertisements.. In any event, a lead campaign that is looking for quick and intense return will need to include paid search as a function to achieve its goal.

6- White Papers/Content Distribution:

White papers and detailed content are also integral aspects of developing a strong sales pipeline. Typically, prospects that engage via whitepapers are often in the early stages of exploring their options. It's likely they are reading before even beginning to identify potential vendors, but if nurtured correctly, many of these prospects bloom in to true sales opportunities as they advance through your sales funnel.

The key to any whitepaper is creating strong and decisive commentary on a specific subject. Well-written whitepapers that offer true takeaways from their message add value and credibility to your brand. The best result a whitepaper can deliver is impressing readers in the early stages of their research process to the point that they don't even consider looking into other vendors when they enter the purchasing stage.

7- Social Media:

While Social Media is not always the strongest driver of true opportunity, it is an excellent way for pass-through objectives and branding. One of the largest drivers of leads via social media occurs through some level of engagement on social media sites that drive the prospect back directly to your website. This sort of “push” process then places a qualified prospect on your site which ultimately intensifies conversion.

Social Media as a lead generator is perceived to have better aspects of success in the Business to Consumer market. However, the B2B space has seen a large increase in this area as platforms like LinkedIn have become more prominent and, in essence, the B2B Social platform.

8- Third Party Lead Generation Sites:

While not nearly as effective or impactful as they once were, lead generation platforms that offer catchy headlines like “Get 5 Free Quotes” still possess value. Different prospects engage differently when searching for the right vendor. Some prefer to go directly to each vendor and vet them on an individual basis, while others prefer to place one request and receive multiple offers from prospective vendors.

Costs for such leads are often reasonably priced because they are sold to multiple vendors and do offer value. When developing a meaningful sales pipeline, leads that come from third party lead generation sites are often more “ready to purchase” than other aspects, but traditionally are very cost driven and looking for the best quote they can garner. In any event, it’s still a worthwhile compliment to other lead generation efforts.

9- Feeder Sites:

For companies that offer various service offerings, the development of feeder sites that are narrowly focused around one specific offering can be extremely important in creating opportunity around that specific niche. This process has worked exceedingly well for companies that are looking to grow in certain verticals within their product offerings. By refining the scope that appears on a feeder site, all of the effort and function can be placed in to deliver opportunity back to that site. The feeder site option has even been leveraged into ecommerce, where savvy retailers break apart their brands to market specific products under certain brand headings to eliminate brand confusion. Some people like to shop at Wal-Mart, some like to shop at a specialty store, but either way, your goal should always be to cover and convert from each mentality.

10- Email Marketing:

Once a large opportunity driver, email marketing has fallen down in the ranks of the best ways to drive leads for your company. SPAM filters and a growing resistance to opening mass emails has hurt digital marketers who rely solely on email marketing. The best way to approach email marketing in today's climate is to formulate a strategy that recognizes prospects that open emails delivered to them and respond to them very quickly via phone and a personalized email regardless of whether or not they have inquired further. The thought is that if someone opened the delivered email, there is some level of interest in the described content.

This more refined process of email marketing has been effective and can be a very solid feature in furthering follow-up efforts to prospects that continue to be re-marketed via your messaging.

The more you utilize the components of the list above, the more dynamic your lead generation efforts will be. By working on diversifying your lead generation strategy, you should start to see steady flow of prosperous leads for your business.