



## Nurturing Promising Prospects Until They're Ready

I worked as a sales professional for 12 years before becoming a full-time freelancer. I loved sales! But one thing I always seemed to lack was a steady stream of good leads.

When you're a salesperson, leads are your lifeblood. A constant flow of good leads keeps you from having to spend a lot of time making cold calls (yuck!). And if your job hinges on meeting your sales quota every quarter, you need new leads all the time.

Unfortunately, in every company I worked, the marketing department didn't seem to have the same urgency I did. The leads they would give me were—well, worthless! So it wasn't long before I realized that if I wanted to put food on the table, I had to find my own leads. So I began to send warm emails and write and send sales letters to prospects at my own expense. And within a few short weeks, I had more sales leads than I could handle—and my sales shot through the roof!

But as I studied my results, I found an interesting pattern. I noticed that only about 10 percent of the leads I was generating were actually ready or willing to talk with me about my product. That was no surprise. But what shocked me was how many of the other 90 percent (the ones who weren't ready when they first contacted me) bought from me 3, 6, or 12 months later—as long as I stayed in touch in a low-key, value-added way!

In fact, at one point, one third of all my new business was coming from this group of "not ready yet" leads!

By staying on their radar screen in a nonthreatening way, I was the first person they thought of when the timing was right. As a result, the cost of my mailing efforts began to drop (I no longer needed to generate as many leads to make one sale). And I quickly rose to the top sales position in my division. Since then, I've implemented this same "staying in touch" strategy in my freelance business.

In fact, I've found that much of the difference between just "getting by" and earning an executive-level income as a freelance professional lies in what you do with prospects who are not ready to hire you today.

## **Timing Is Everything!**

According to Brian Carroll, CEO of InTouch, Inc., and author of the popular book *Lead Generation for the Complex Sale*, at any given point, only about 5 to 15 percent of prospects for your services are either actively looking for or considering what you offer. But Carroll notes that as many as half of the remaining 85 to 95 percent of leads will typically buy the services you provide—either from you or from one of your competitors—over the following 18 to 24 months.

That's huge!

More recent research points to the same conclusion. According to a recent report from Forrester Research, companies that excel at lead nurturing generate 50% more sales-ready leads ... at 33% lower cost per lead. And even though that research was done at the corporate level, my experience has been that the numbers can be even more dramatic for freelancers. In other words, the upside and the impact of staying in touch until the prospect is ready can be even greater.

## **Create a Simple Lead Nurturing System**

What does this all have to do with warm email prospecting? Well, lead nurturing is important because even when you start dialogue with a prospect, there's a very good chance that they won't have a direct need that very moment. So if you don't have a way to stay in touch in a low-key, value-added way, you risk not having the prospect remember you when they DO have a need in your area of expertise.

How do you solve this dilemma? By creating a simple lead nurturing system that enables you to stay in touch in a relevant and nonthreatening way over the course of 6, 12, 18, or even 24 months until they ARE ready to engage you.

## **The 4 Components of a Simple Lead Nurturing System**

Keep this process simple. It doesn't need to turn into a complex chore.

### **#1: Develop or compile an information library**

- Articles you've written
- Reports or white papers you've authored for this purpose

- Success stories
- Third-party content (articles, reports, white papers, stats, etc.)
- Books (no one throws away a book!)
- News articles or news releases.

## **#2: Use multiple forms of media**

- Don't just use email. Use snail-mail and phone!
- Vary the medium
- And leave good voicemail messages!

## **#3: Leverage the power of frequency**

Sending something about every one to three months is about right, depending on what you know about the prospect and their timing (or the reason for leaking out of your sales funnel).

Above all, keep your messages and information relevant. It's OK to send the same thing to a few different prospects, but just make sure it's relevant to that prospect.

## **#4: Implement a simple contact management system**

A simple spreadsheet will do. But if you want to use a contact management system, here are three good choices:

- Highrise
- Contactually (coupon code "freelancersacademy" gets you 20% off)
- Zoho.com/crm

Carve out time every week or every other week for this activity (I like to do this on Thursday or Friday afternoons for a couple of hours).

Finally create a sequence for each prospect, either formally in their contact record or informally as you go about your lead nurturing follow up every few weeks.

Here's an example:

Date	Action/Deliverable
Month 1	Mail article of interest
Month 3	"Touch base" with a phone call/voicemail
Month 5	E-mail URL of results from an industry survey
Month 7	Mail client success story with a personal note
Month 9	"Touch base" with a phone call/voicemail
Month 11	Mail report or white paper with a Post-it note attached
Month 13	E-mail URL of helpful checklist or self-assessment quiz
Month 15	Call to invite them to download a podcast
Month 17	Mail article of interest with a personal note
Month 19	E-mail URL of a relevant online video
Month 21	"Touch base" with a phone call/voicemail
Month 23	Mail article of interest with a Post-it note attached
Month 25	E-mail URL of results summary from some sort of survey

### Common Questions:

How long do you keep someone in your nurturing list? 12 – 18 months, and then assess if more is necessary.

Can you automate this? No, resist the temptation. Keep it personalized and as organic as possible.

Does your newsletter count as a touch point? Yes, but I would do this *on top of* your newsletter. It adds a personal touch to the dialogue.

This stuff works!

**From:** Stephanie  
**Subject:** Re: .  
**Date:** November 18, 2013 3:07:46 PM EST  
**To:** Ed Gandia <ed@internationalfreelancersacademy.com>

[Hide](#)  
1 Duplicate

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Thanks for the email Ed! I totally get it!

A quick success story for your warm email strategy. I met the owner of a healthcare IT firm about 4 yrs ago when we were both working for the largest health care comp. in the Washington DC metro area. Kept in touch, sent holiday cards, warm email with an article of interest every now and then. Fast forward to Sept., they called, saying they though of me first when they needed help promoting a health IT product. It's my biggest project to date, over \$200,000 .... Besides convincing them of our knowledge when we met I'm sure they though of us because I just kept them on my list!

This stuff works, but you know that already!

S.

## Want to Learn More About Lead Nurturing?

Check out the PDF excerpt of my book, [The Wealthy Freelancer](#), included in this lesson. It's the entire chapter I wrote on this concept, and it goes much deeper into each component of this strategy.