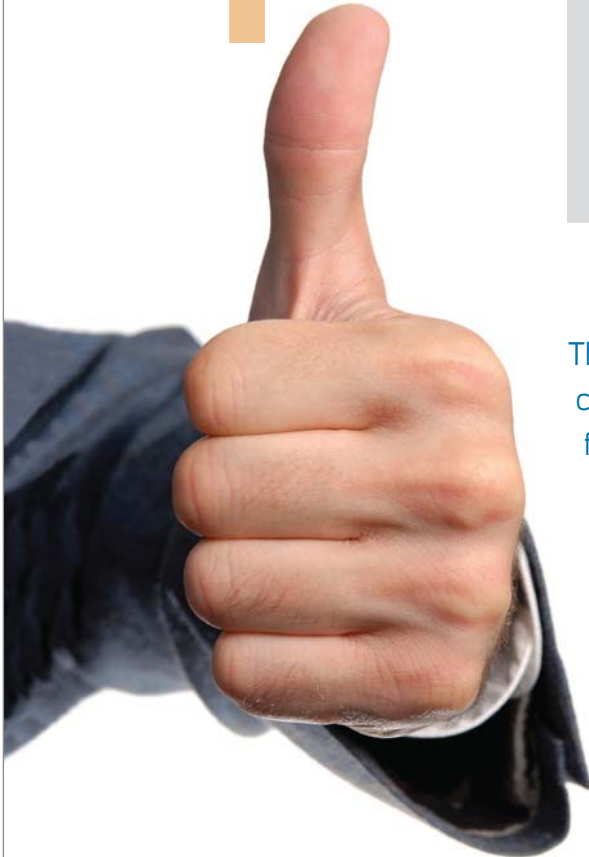


successful techniques for

qualified leads



BY YAEL K. PENN

The Web is the single most used tool for one-to-one and group communication. Millions of people rely on its aggregated resources for research and to make purchase decisions every day. Therefore, it's certainly logical that some of the most effective lead generation techniques can be seen online.

When an in-house database is grown correctly, detailed profiles of your most qualified and responsive leads are an invaluable resource to your business. A forward-thinking strategy helps to develop leads that are not only interested in your products or services, but will make purchases, sign up to your website and become lifetime customers.

Develop Customer Profiles

The first step to developing a lead-generation campaign is to create a descriptive profile of your ideal customer. In addition to considerations such as age, gender, hobbies and job function, recognize their interactive habits. Consider the websites they visit, the social networks they may belong to, the type of information they download from the Web, and even the type of information they are prone to forward to a friend. This information is crucial as you formulate your marketing messages, methods of delivery and any promotions or give-aways to help spread the word.

Know Your Competition

As with any successful business strategy, you must analyze the competition:

1. Set up Web alerts for your competitors so you can follow them closely (e.g. Google Alerts).
2. If the competition has an e-newsletter or weblog, subscribe to it via e-mail or RSS.
3. Research your competitors' websites:
 - a. Find out what keywords they value by reviewing their meta data (right-click to choose 'view page source').
 - b. Conduct keyword searches for these words to find any existing pay-per-click (PPC) campaigns. If they are running a campaign, make note of what the ads say and what their corresponding landing pages look like.
 - c. Find out what websites are linking to your competitors' sites (use Yahoo! Site Explorer tool).
 - d. Pay attention to the information they are capturing in their online forms and the lead generation techniques they are using. Are they offering whitepapers or webinars in exchange for information? What demographic information are they collecting?

4. Research how they use social media. Do they have a blog? Do they use Twitter? What social networks do they belong to? What are they talking about in these forums?

The goal of this research is not to copy your competition. But staying aware of their strategies can help you formulate your own and gives an idea of how your target audience is interacting — where they are most active and most responsive to a business presence. This research helps to develop targeted offers. Your offer needs to be valuable to users in order for them to willingly share their personal and contact information.

Channels for Effective Lead Generation

Consider as many channels relevant to your audience as possible to capture the best leads. This might include banner ads on relevant websites, PPC campaigns, e-mail campaigns and partner opt-in lists. In all of these examples, the prospect is already showing a committed interest in your industry, either by a purposeful click or a sign-up.

Approach websites linking to your competition and ask them to link to your site, or search for synergistic partners (not competitors) then leverage each other's databases to gain qualified leads. Also, starting a weblog or e-newsletter are two great lead generation strategies if you have the time to dedicate towards creating editorial content. These visitors and readers are already highly-qualified prospects.

Controlling and Capturing Leads

As you roll-out your campaign, each initiative should have a separate landing page — one that mirrors the look, feel and message of whatever is linking to it. If you are offering a complimentary premium in exchange for contact information, include a lead capture form in the landing page. If you can't include a form directly in the landing page, link to one.

If you do not currently have a way to capture leads, an easy way to do this is through your e-mail service provider (ESP). Most ESPs will provide both the lead capture form and a database to house the acquired leads. They will also manage opt-outs for you.

Most people don't like to fill out forms, so the shorter the better. But make sure to capture the information that matters most to your business or campaign. Other than name and e-mail address, consider including one or two other demographic questions. These questions should be carefully crafted to provide information you can leverage for future campaigns. Your form should also include a check box giving people the option to opt-in to receive information about your company and future promotions. According to the CAN-SPAM Act, if people do not explicitly say they would like to receive content from you, it is unlawful to send them commercial marketing e-mails.

Testing different landing page layouts, images, image placement and copy is extremely important. Simple things can make a huge difference — use tools like Google Website Optimizer for this type of A/B testing. Creating a landing page is an art and it could mean the difference between capturing a lead or a high bounce rate.

Track Lead Gen Initiatives

By tracking your lead generation efforts, you can pinpoint the initiatives that are working the best and focus more of your energy on them.

Easy ways to track your initiatives are:

1. **Web Analytics:** Use your current analytics software or sign up for a free Google Analytics account. This will enable you to track from which campaign user visits originated.
2. **Landing Pages:** If possible, create a separate landing page for each marketing initiative. By doing this, you will be able to mirror the message, look and feel of each e-mail, banner or PPC ad. This increases response rates and helps track your campaign.
3. **Dedicated 800 numbers:** Services will provide you with a range of 800 numbers that redirect to your main phone number. Including a dedicated 800 number on each landing page enables you to associate each call with a specific campaign. Some services even offer integration with your analytics software.

4. **In your lead capture form,** include one question asking people how they heard about you, with a drop down menu where customers can select from a list of your current marketing initiatives.

5. **If you have access to a developer,** you can also develop your own tracking mechanism by writing a script to capture a source code to embed in your URL. This code will pass through to a specific field in your database if the person who clicked on the URL fills out a form.

Every lead generation goal begins with capturing prospects that fit a particular profile. By incorporating some of the above techniques into your lead generation program, you increase your response rates and have the ability to pinpoint exactly what works and doesn't work. Be sure to spend enough time discovering who your best customer really is and tailoring your messages and offers specifically to this audience. Also, don't forget that even if you are accurately targeting your best customer, your campaign will only be a success if your message is relevant and your offer is tempting enough to get prospects to act.

Finally, remember that lead generation is a process that needs great attention to detail. Consumer preferences constantly change — so must your lead generation methods. ■

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WYSIWYG Online Form Creation

The more information you collect, the more valuable your customer list becomes. Even though you've clearly expressed the value proposition and convinced the user to share their information, acquiring and storing customer data is where most website owners falter. Fortunately, without even knowing the basics of HTML, creating a form is simple with the use of automated online form builders. Here are a few favorites of the Website Magazine Editorial Staff:

- »» VisitorContact.com
- »» FormSpring.com
- »» PHPform.org
- »» Formsite.com
- »» Kontakt.com
- »» Jotform.com
- »» Wufoo.com
- »» Frevvo.com
- »» Jotform.com