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Make Lead Nurturing Effective in 2007



By Freda Byrne

Follow this guide laid out by a Groove 11 Account Executive to better connect Sales and Marketing, and reel in your prospects.

When I first got into the demand generation business 10 years ago we were happy if a person accurately completed our form. A completed form equaled a lead. If the name was associated with a targeted company or carried an impressive title, we thought we had struck gold. We were all thrilled. When the boss passed us in the hall, we would be the first to say, "Guess who responded to our offer? Mr. Nifty from Big Target USA!"

Our happiness was often short-lived, however, because once this precious lead was passed over to Sales it was anybody's guess if it would actually amount to anything. The expectation of Sales was that a lead was "someone ready to buy." The expectation of Marketing was a lead was "someone who, with nurturing, could possibly buy." Hence a rift was created. Sales wanted sales leads. Marketing was delivering marketing leads.

How do we bridge the gulf? By doing proper lead nurturing. By following these guiding concepts we can build relationships with prospects that stand a better chance of their buying, ultimately making for more satisfied and engaged customers in 2007 and beyond:

Step One: Understand where they are in the process

Every customer or prospect with whom you engage is at some point of the customer purchase funnel. Recognition of the phases within the funnel is a good place to start. The phases include:

- Awareness
- Consideration
- Preference
- Purchase
- Loyalty

The challenge is to create a climate of true lead nurturing that aligns with this funnel and encourages a buying cycle. For each of our organizations this is slightly different. Working with Sales -- and directly with customers -- is the shortest route to finding out exactly what that funnel looks like from the buyer's perspective. It can be a very eye-opening experience.

Once we have identified the steps and roadblocks within each of the phases a customer has to go through to actually buy our products or services, we can begin to build the right communications scenario for delivery at the most optimal time. Typically this means a series of letters, emails, articles, buying tools and even webcasts timed across a sales cycle.

It is often the case that your target will need to "sell" the idea internally to others in his or her organization or even, in the case of a consumer, to someone else in their family. Arm them with the right tools. Entice and excite them with meaningful information that addresses their issues over time.

During the Consideration phase, the issue of cost savings often enters the decision-making process. That's a good time for sending an ROI calculator along with a case study. As they move towards the Preference phase, a competitive analysis would be ideal.

By taking the time to better understand customers' motivations and internal obstacles -- and their place in the funnel -- it can be much easier to move people forward toward a positive purchase decision.

Step Two: Develop and stick to a nurturing plan

Clients too often go to market without having a nurturing plan in place. Their expectation is that a mere ad will result in people knocking on their door immediately. We all know it takes eight to nine touches for people to actually "get" you. Your ability to have a continuing, integrated marketing approach, whether you're a little guy or a big guy, is where you'll make a real difference.

The key is thinking long-term and making efforts to avoid the traditional trap: taking a so-called warm lead and entering it into the black hole of a sales or callback database, only to lose the personal connection by burying the target in collateral.

A good nurturing plan should call for repeat, targeted outreach, making sure the customer sees a different side of you every time. Rather than just blanketing them with your latest white paper and walking away, think about what comes next. What knowledge do you want them to have or which change do you expect them to think about after having read the paper? Follow up with a handwritten letter or card. Do a small amount of tailored, digital printing to address a finite set of concerns or motivations. After they get their second card, keep in mind what you'd like them to be thinking at that next point in the process. And it may take some time. Even if you have to compress a sales cycle due to time or budget constraints remember there's no shortcut to reaching the bottom of the funnel.

Making it all work for you

Like any successful New Year's resolution, the bottom line to a good nurturing effort is having a mindset that these campaigns are longer-term commitments. And remember you're not the only marketing voice out there. Many of us in the end are going after pretty finite markets filled with exhausted buyers being hit by the same competition over and over again. The key to succeeding is to have a better plan than anyone else. You'll stand a much better chance at landing Mr. Nifty, as well as connecting your Sales and Marketing teams in more meaningful ways than ever before.

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About Freda Byrne

Marketing strategist Freda Byrne is an Account Executive at Groove 11 (www.groove11.com), an experiential creative agency in the San Francisco Bay Area, working with clients Citrix, Cisco Systems, Citrix, Kaiser Permanente, and Digitec Medical. Over the years she has she planned and executed demand-generation programs for clients including Citrix, Verisign, Hyperion, NetIQ, Red Dot, Juniper Networks and others.

Prior to joining Groove in January 2006, she was VP of Media Strategy at Nethawk Interactive.