7 Tips to Get the Most from Your Sales and Marketing Databases

Consolidate, Clean, Capture & Polish…

Now more than ever it is important to get your databases right and ready to get the most from your marketing initiatives. Accurate prospect information including proper name and title, content they viewed on your website, and when they viewed it, all provide valuable clues as to how best to move them to the next phase of the buying process. Whether that's reaching out with a targeted email from marketing or having a salesperson call, it's important to make sure the right team is focused on the right audience, at the right time. And of course this all depends on having accurate information readily available in the tools that help sales and marketing get their jobs done.

Tending to databases is an often ignored part of the sales and marketing process. Whether you're using an automated marketing platform and CRM system, or still have customer, tradeshow and individual sales rep lists strewn across your organization, it's probably time to take a closer look at how you manage your database moving forward. Here are seven simple data management tips we hope will help you improve the effectiveness of your sales and marketing programs.

7 Tips to Get the Most from Your Sales and Marketing Databases

1. Consolidate! Prospects, Leads & Customers

There's a difference between Prospects, Leads and Customers, and they should be treated differently. An automated demand-generation platform is an ideal way to consolidate and manage all of your contact information. Keeping a complete "digital biography" of every email sent, opened, and every web page viewed keeps sales and marketing communications on time and on target.

With assigned distinctions like "prospect" "lead" or "customer," marketing and sales efforts can be appropriately targeted based on status and how far along they are in the sales process. By keeping a master list, which is a superset of your CRM and other lists, your organization can effectively market, measure, and optimize ALL communications efforts, leading to stronger relationships and a more effective sales process. And don't forget those valued customers when it comes to marketing. Cross-selling and up-selling opportunities are often missed when you're not tracking what your current customers are viewing on your website.

2. Clean up the CRM Clutter that Clogs

Keep your CRM system clean and let your automated marketing platform work for you. If you're effectively targeting your Served Available Market (SAM), you likely have considerably more prospects in your database than your sales team could ever begin to address. And, more importantly, where do they start? Non sales-ready prospects should be nurtured by marketing with an effective, ongoing automated demand generation program until they are ready for sales interaction and only then should they be transferred to your CRM system.

Once a prospect is in your CRM system, make sure that data critical to the sales process is automatically synchronized with your marketing automation system. With a complete prospect profile including detailed tracking information, cold calls are a thing of the past. Sales can focus on the warm leads that have digitally raised their hand by engaging with your website. Burdening your sales team with an avalanche of non sales-ready leads is not only a distraction and a costly waste of a sales rep's time, but can quickly demoralize a sales team by making their calls no more than a shot in the dark. Avoid clutter and keep your CRM system and your sales team focused on driving sales – and let your marketing platform automate the rest.

3. Normalize

Keeping database content consistent is an ongoing challenge – especially when you're working with a variety of data sources. Insertion, update, and deletion anomalies add uncertainty to your marketing efforts. Whether you're segmenting your prospects for a particular campaign or using a specific piece of data to trigger an automated email, bad data can yield inaccurate and embarrassing results.

Normalizing data on an automatic basis goes a long way to keeping a tidy database. Having a system that replaces all "VP", "V.P.", and "Vice Pres." with "Vice President" for example, makes communications more professional and assures that database searches yield accurate results. Setting up normalization parameters on the critical fields in your demand generation platform lets your system do the work for you making sure all existing and new records added to your database are clean and consistent.

4. Only Ask for What You Really Need

New relationships are delicate and sometimes the enthusiasm to capture information from prospects hinders the marketing and sales process. As you engage with prospects via your website, only request the information you really need to effectively market to each prospect. If you know your database includes a lot of bad physical addresses – but you don't run traditional direct-mail campaigns – you probably don't need that information until you're further along in your relationship.

Capture and rank prospects based on need and timing. Title or geography may be most important, or, if you have diverse product lines, you may want to get that information early for more targeted marketing campaigns. Acquiring information one piece at a time is less invasive and helps improve the quality of the information a prospect ultimately provides. Registration for premium content – including white papers, webinars, etc. – can be an effective way to start tracking visitors to your website, but don't forget that asking for too much information too early can turn good prospects away, prompt them to enter inaccurate information just to complete a form, or opt out of your communications all together.

5. Polish Your Data

Prospect information is more fluid than ever. Nearly 10% of all businesses relocate every year. In addition, changing positions, phone numbers and e-mail accounts means up to 70% of your records will have some type of change on a yearly basis. Keeping information up-to-date is key to making a good impression. The goal is to communicate with, not insult, a prospective customer. Sending multiple copies of an email to a single prospect – or addressing them with a three-year-old title – doesn't make you or your company look professional.

Purchasing an updated list or appending your current data can help avoid embarrassing mistakes. Establish a regular maintenance program, because it's too easy to let things slide until a prospect let's you know there is a problem. There are a variety of data-hygiene specialists with on-line services that can help keep your mailing list clean, targeted and profitable.

6. Use Your Database to Sort, Segment, and Target

Maximize the value of the information prospects provide – you can bet your competition will. Every piece of prospect information should be closely considered, to see if you can better segment your database based on the metrics that drive your potential customers to purchase. Segmentation clearly depends on your specific market and customer base. Everything from job title to the type of content an individual prospect prefers can be used to give you a competitive advantage.

To provide some perspective, a recent report by KnowledgeStorm claims 82% of technology-buyers prefer information targeted to their industry – 67% say content targeted to their specific job function is more valuable. When it comes to IT buyers, for example, a CMO Council study showed case studies had a 75% rate of effectiveness. You can glean similar preferences for information from prospect activity on your website. They say the devil is in the details – make sure you're using every prospect detail you have to leverage marketing and sales efforts.

7. Review and Optimize

Just as you constantly review and update your marketing campaigns, you should also review the level of detail and the structure of your database. For example, asking for too much detail can be costly when purchasing lists; not enough can yield miss-targeted marketing messages. Your potential customers businesses aren't static, so as you change your strategies to cope with a changing market, make sure your database keeps pace.

Get the Most from Your Data

If you're finding it a challenge to get the most out of your marketing and sales databases, the process begins with an automated demand generation system that efficiently tracks, nurtures, and identifies interested prospects over time and puts that data in the hands of sales and marketing to close more sales faster.

P.S. The time to maximize the value of your data is NOW. Get the most out of these 7 tips by learning more about how eTrigue's "Intelligent Demand Generation" platform can help you market more effectively and sell faster!

If you already have a simple email-blast system with limited contact development and tracking capabilities, it's time to take your marketing campaigns to the next level with an automated demand-generation system like eTrigue.