

Five Ways to Turn Your Website into a Powerhouse Lead Generation Machine



...And the Most Common Mistakes Marketers Make When They Try

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Introduction

Do you struggle with generating high-quality leads? Is it harder to keep them engaged because your sales cycle is lengthening? If so, you are not alone. Nearly 70 percent of B2B marketers say generating high-quality leads is their number one priority. ⁱ

And their biggest challenge.

Unfortunately, the battle isn't over when you capture those leads. Longer sales cycles mean B2B marketers must work harder (and smarter) to keep leads engaged until they buy. The good news is you have a powerful tool at your fingertips that can overcome both of these challenges.

The company website.

Customer in Control

You don't need me to tell you marketing is undergoing some radical changes. The impact of technology, search and social media is still being understood. But the biggest impact is one that savvy B2B marketers will embrace quickly.

The customer is in control of the sales process.

It's not like the old days, when a salesperson walked customers through a purchase. Now customers engage in the buying process on their own. With tools like Google and Twitter they can find out which companies and products might interest them. Using social media, they can connect with peers and find out who else has their problems, what solutions they've found, and if the solution is working. And customers are researching those solutions themselves, without the help of company experts.

How?

They're using your website. And those of your competitors.

Over 60 percent of business buyers are cruising corporate websites looking for content to help them make a buying decision. And more than 70 percent of that content (brochures, white papers, case studies, etc.) is consumed pre-sale. In fact, content consumption drops the closer a buyer gets to buying. ⁱⁱ

What's this mean for your website?

It means your website is the first impression prospects have of you. And it will likely determine whether buyers engage with you. Your website must be as well-prepared as any salesperson you'd send out to a prospect. Because that's exactly what your website is – a salesperson.



Here are five ways you can turn your website into one of your strongest salespeople...and create a powerhouse lead generation machine in the process.

#1: Build Customer-Centric Content

Most of us have heard of customer-centric selling. That's when your sales process is built around the customer. Talking about their needs. Providing specific solutions. And empowering them to be successful in the buying process.



The first step for turning your website into a powerhouse lead generation machine is to fill it with customer-centric content. After all, it's a salesperson. And like any salesperson it must be able to talk about customer needs, problems and solutions for those problems.

In other words, your website has to be filled with customer-centric content. What do I mean by customer-centric content? I mean content customers *want* to find. Better yet, fill it with content buyers yearn for.

Need some examples?

MarketingSherpa research has shown there is a gap between the content customers want and the content marketers actually provide.ⁱⁱⁱ To help you get started filling your website with customer-centric content, I've reprinted the list of what content prospects value the most.

Top 7 Types of Content (ranked #1 by prospects)^{iv}

- Case study on how a company used a product to improve a business process
- New research on some aspect of your industry
- How-to guide for using a product or service to better advantage
- Top 10 list of ways to improve business
- Case study on how a company used a product to learn something new
- Interview with a top analyst on the state of the industry
- Interview with a top executive on the state of the industry

Do you know what content your customers want to see from you? Do you know which content is most popular with them now? Do you know why it's popular?

A big mistake companies make when it comes to content is creating content that is important to the company, rather than to the prospect. It may be important to your president that the history of the company be highlighted on the home page of the website, but it may not be as important to your customers.

The bottom line is this. Customers are going to your website to get information long before they want to speak with a salesperson. If they can't get what they're looking for from you, they'll keep on looking. And if your competitor has it, then they'll be more likely to engage with them.

Companies often withhold highly desired information in the hopes of pulling prospects into a buying conversation. The problem is companies are no longer in control of the process. Customers are. And if the website is their salesperson of choice, not giving that salesperson vital information is a big mistake. In fact, some studies show that customers who attempt to self-serve through their channel of choice, fail, and are forced to use another channel in are *more* likely to be disloyal.⁹

So how can you know if your content is something customers want? Ask these three questions to see if your content is something customers would be delighted to read.

- How much of the content has “we” words vs. “you” words?
- Is the content specific to a buyer and their problems?
- Is the content specific to a stage in the buying cycle?

Let's take a quick look at each one. What do I mean by “we” words? Us, we, our, company name, and product name are all examples of “we” words. Those are words that talk about you, what you do, and how you do it. And while they are the easiest, and sometimes the most fun to write, they should be a low percentage of the content you create.

“You” words on the other hand are words that talk about the customer. They include you, yours, prospect title, prospect problem, and prospect solution. They should be the majority of the content you create. After all, customers are there to see what you can do *for them*. A good rule of thumb is to keep 80 percent of what you create about the customer and no more than 20 percent about yourself. That doesn't mean you can't talk about yourself. It just means you should talk about yourself through the customer's viewpoint.

That brings us to our next question. Is the content specific? To really speak to a customer (or prospect) content needs to be specific to them. Tailor content to address what happens in their day and show them you understand their challenges. Then show them how you can make their life easier. Show them how you can solve their problems. That's what they want to know.

And finally, remember your website is your first (and hopefully best) salesperson. There should be content for each stage of the buying cycle. Prospects will be coming to your site looking for everything from general industry information to specific case studies that show how your solution solved a particular problem for a particular person in a particular job. Match



content to the stages of the buying cycle, and your website will be ready to help nurture leads and keep them engaged until they decide to buy.

#2: Pass the Three-Second Rule

It may sound silly, but be obvious. How obvious? What you would consider to be painfully obvious is probably about the right level. And it's harder than it sounds.



To be obvious you have to pass the three-second rule with flying colors. Here's how the three-second rule works. Can someone who doesn't know your company or industry arrive at your website and figure out in three seconds or less:

- Who you are
- What you do
- Who you do it for
- How you can help them
- How they can contact you

Whew! That's a tall order, but some websites do it well. I'll pick on AWeber since I'm familiar with them and they provide services for many B2B companies. On their homepage they say:

"Create profitable customer relationships for your business! AWeber's email marketing tools make it easy for you to create professional signup forms for your website, build your email list and stay in touch with prospects."

Right away you know who they are, what they do, and what's in it for you as a customer. And they tell you in simple terms. There are no "flexible, scalable, efficient" solutions here. But there are large buttons to learn more information or to sign up. Pricing is featured as a main menu item. So is support.

Of course, no website is perfect and there are things I would change about this one. But it does its job. Like any great salesperson it has introduced me to the company and its offerings. It's told me how the company can help me. It's given me a way to find additional information, and has even asked me for the order!

Websites that excel at lead generation pass the three-second rule. Great ones get the job done in less than two.

You'll have a good idea of whether your site passes the three-second rule by talking to your sales and support teams. Do your sales people have to walk prospects through the site for them to be able to use it? How many support calls are generated because someone wanted to find something on the site and couldn't? Wanted to order but thought it was too complicated?

If you know that you can't pass the three-second rule, don't feel alone. A MarketingSherpa survey shows a mere 35 percent of marketers feel their website messaging is clear and compelling.^{vi} You can use the three-second rule to help generate some clarity.

#3: Tell Prospects What to Do

All of your SEO and SEM efforts have paid off. A prospect has arrived at your site.

Now what? Do you tell them what to do next?

Most websites don't. In fact, only 29 percent of marketers report their site is clearly focused on moving visitors to take action.^{vii} This is a major mistake. Even if you are selling something that costs thousands of dollars which would never be purchased over the web, you always want the prospect to do something. So tell them what you want them to do!

Every web page should have a clear call to action. Remember AWeber's homepage? It had two clear calls to action. One to find out more information and another to order.

Prospects *want* to be told what to do. Websites can be confusing, and time-stressed prospects don't want to wonder what to do next. Your goal is to capture them as a qualified lead, so send them somewhere you can do that.

Have a newsletter? Ask them to sign up. Are you a thought-leader in your space? Point them to your white papers and case studies. Have a free demo or other useful tool on your site? Show them where it is.

At a minimum you want to pull them deeper into your site. Tell them where to go to find support information. Or more information on specific solutions. Or more information about the company and its management.

If you are concerned about the calls to action on your website and feel overwhelmed at the thought of updates, start small. Your homepage and your top landing pages can be given a quick rewrite that includes a strong call to action. As a bonus, by starting with a limited number of pages you can test the results and see which calls to action work best.

#4: Create a Hub

There are those who say social media has diminished the usefulness of a corporate website. I disagree.

And I'm not alone.



A survey conducted by RainToday.com shows that 97% of buying decisions are influenced by corporate websites. Nearly 75 percent of buyers say company websites hold at least “some influence” over their decision, and that number has increased by 23 percentage points since 2005.^{viii}

A social media site is a place for community and interaction. But it is fundamentally not your space. It is not owned by you, nor supported by you. Companies still need a space that they own and support to discuss their industry and solutions. Even better, prospects want them to have that space and value using it.

While it may seem intuitive to say social media has diminished the need for a company website, the reverse is actually true. Social media has *increased* the importance of the company website. And here’s why.

Before social media it was possible to put up a company website “just to have an online presence.” In fact, many companies regarded their websites as little more than online brochures. Content was created, posted, and forgotten.

Those days are over.

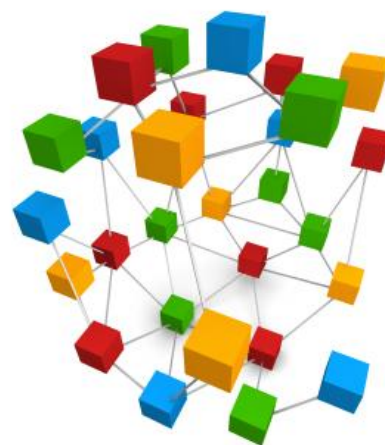
According to the book Inbound Marketing, “You want your website to be a large dot that’s connected to many other websites – in other words, a hub.” A hub for what? For all your online activities.

Newsletter content invites readers to click and be taken to content on the website. Direct mail promotions or email campaigns point to landing pages on the website. Comments on blogs and industry forums pull prospects and industry peers to the website. Blog posts, both on your own site and on industry blogs, invite prospects to come and see what else you have to say. Website content is shared (and promoted) via Twitter and Facebook.

You can no longer assume your homepage is the only, or even primary, way prospects are arriving at your site. For many companies, their blog is now outpacing their homepage for key metrics such as time spent on site and number of pages viewed. In short, the blog is becoming a new storefront.^{ix} And regardless of where prospects land, you want them to stay and look around.

How? Turn your website into a hub.

Like any busy metropolitan hub you want signs telling people where to go to find what they want. Make it easy for them to get there. You also want to offer activities that appeal to a range of buyers. Encourage them to stick around and browse, even if they aren’t ready to buy. Even if they aren’t ready to talk to a person yet.



Remember, you want them to enjoy the experience enough that they'll tell others about you and come back...hopefully bringing some of their peers the next time.

A clean design, customer-centric content and well-planned architecture provides all these things. You can even use social media programs to promote your hub and encourage traffic. By creating a space prospects like and are comfortable revisiting, you'll build a lead-generation hub.

#5: Use Forms Wisely

There's been some controversy around the use of forms in the last few years. Folks like David Meerman Scott believe that all content should be free^x. No questions. No forms of any kind. Even Seth Godin agrees.^{xi}

This presents a conundrum for B2B marketers who have the responsibility of generating leads for their companies. After all, what good is it to generate website traffic if you can't follow up with anyone to close a sales conversation?

The problem is most marketers swing too far in the other direction. They put every piece of content behind a form and use the same form for every piece of content.

This is a mistake.

MarketingSherpa research shows that as many as 98 percent of prospects hit their back button when delivered to a landing page that requires a form to be completed.^{xii} The longer the form, the higher the dropout rate.

Of those that complete the form, you can count on nearly half lying. MarketingSherpa research shows the name is correct about 70 percent of the time. Other typical information such as email, industry and company information have lower accuracy rates, with phone number coming in at under 40 percent.^{xiii}

Why all the lying?

It's simple. They aren't ready to talk to a salesperson yet. And they know if they tell you too much they will be. It's waste of their time, and frankly, it's a waste of your salespeople's time as well.

So what to do?

Consider what you are trying to achieve with the content. If the goal is to provide thought leadership, educate the market or "go viral" a registration barrier will hamper your efforts. Also consider where you are in the sales cycle. Content that is the equivalent of a first date should not require registration. Those folks are just getting to know you; they aren't interested in pursuing a relationship with you yet.



How to nurture those folks along? Use a strong call to action in the content that's free and point to deeper content that's gated. For example if a prospect downloads a company brochure that means they don't know you. That should be free. But have a call to action in that brochure that points them to the case studies on your site. Those may require registration. Just make sure you've given the prospect enough time to get to know you and your solution in a relaxed way before you begin asking for registration.

The other rule of thumb is to keep your forms simple and appropriate to where you are in the sales cycle. Going back to our previous example, if the case studies are the first step after free content download, don't ask for every personal detail. A name and email address is enough. If they are then pointed to a white paper you can add on the company name and a phone number. Your content has built the relationship enough you can do that.

Using the same form for every piece of content means you are treating every prospect the same. And great salespeople don't do that. They tailor their interactions to what the prospect needs, and how long they've been engaged. Your website needs to do that as well.

Summary

So there you have it. I've just showed you five ways you can turn your website into a powerhouse lead generation machine and some of the most common mistakes marketers make when they try.

They are:

#1: Build Customer-Centric Content

Common Mistakes:

- Creating content important to the company rather than the customer
- Withholding highly desired information
- Not building content specific to buyers and stages of the buying cycle

#2: Pass the Three Second Rule

Common Mistakes:

- Not clearly stating who you are, what you do and who you serve
- Not talking to sales and support to see where customers get lost on your site

#3: Tell Prospects What to Do

Common Mistakes:

- No calls to action on each and every web page
- Confusing or vague calls to action

#4: Create a Hub

Common Mistakes:

- Treating your website as an “online brochure”
- Not using other offline and online channels to drive traffic to your site
- Having a website with poor architecture/usability

#5: Use Forms Wisely

Common Mistakes:

- Using forms for every piece of content
 - Using the same form for every piece of content
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About Kristina Stiffler



Kristina Stiffler, principal at Commercial Writing Solutions, is an experienced B2B copywriter and marketing strategist. She combines her real-world business experience with proven copywriting techniques to create content that speaks to prospects and moves them to take action.

Kristina specializes in helping B2B companies with a variety of marketing projects. Services include lead generation campaigns, website copywriting and SEO strategy, white papers, case studies, and other traditional marketing communications. She also enjoys training staff in effective copywriting techniques.

Kristina is the author of the blog, [The Agile B2B Copywriter](#), which was named one of the top B2B blogs in 2010. She also publishes a monthly newsletter for marketers called *The Agile B2B Marketer*. To sign up for her newsletter or learn more about working with Kristina, visit her website, <http://www.commercialwritingsolutions.com/>, send her an [e-mail](#) or call 614-870-0988.

You can also get to know Kristina through social media. You can view Kristina's profile on [LinkedIn](#), follow her on [Twitter](#), or check out her fan page on [Facebook](#).



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