

Demand Generation Automation for B-to-B Marketers

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Over the last few years, hosted campaign management tools have become more prevalent for b-to-b marketing organizations. These tools provide marketers with a platform for planning and executing campaigns across all customer touch-points, from Google AdWords to email, print, and web interactions. By automating marketing campaigns, marketers can better optimize programs, measure marketing ROI and deliver higher-quality leads to the sales organization. This article will give you an overview of the benefits of automation, seven common features, key vendors, price ranges and precautions.

Benefits of automation

Marketers know that establishing an ongoing, relevant dialog with prospects and customers as they move through their buying cycle will increase conversion rates and revenue. However, delivering the right message at the right time to the right audience has often been logistically difficult. But now, with demand generation platforms, marketers are finding that they can automate communications with prospects and customers, nurturing them until they are ready to interact with sales. In addition, marketers are under more and more pressure to deliver ROI on their marketing programs. Marketing automation helps close the loop so marketers can measure the impact of their programs on the sales pipeline and revenue.

Seven Common Capabilities

Here are seven of the most common features of demand generation tools:

1. Build and manage lists
 - Dynamic lists can be developed which segment prospects based on both demographics *and behavior*. Prospects can be added to an automated campaign based on what offers they have responded to, how often they have visited your website, and what information they have provided about their purchase intentions. The prospect can then receive the most relevant content, offers and follow-up based on his or her stage in the buying process.
 - Bi-directional synchronization with CRM systems such as Salesforce.com keeps both systems clean and up-to-date and allows sales reps to view real-time information about their prospects' interest and intent.
2. Design creative content
 - Marketers can design HTML and text emails, forms and landing pages without having to be graphic designers or HTML experts, but it is best to have a template professionally created with your company's logo, design elements, etc. that you can reuse for consistency and speedy execution.
 - Many vendors enable personalization of content and dynamic images on emails and landing pages. Messages can be tailored to specific verticals and buyer types (economic, business or technical) to improve conversion rates.
3. Design and deploy forms
 - Pre-populated forms based on earlier inputs make it easy for prospects to click through to offers. In addition, prospects can update their contact information in

these forms which boosts data integrity. Repeat visitors can simply enter their email address rather than fill out another form before downloading content. This convenience increases the likelihood that prospects will peruse your site for the information they need.

- Surveys can also be easily created and deployed. Results are viewable in graphical format and can be easily downloaded to Excel for further analysis.

4. Deliver and track emails

- Vendors work hard to make sure that their email address is “white-listed” so that emails can be delivered through the major email ISPs. They also offer spam checkers and best practices tips for increasing delivery and click-throughs. Emails are delivered without any platform branding, so they appear to be sent directly from your company.

5. Monitor online advertising results and web activity

- By viewing dashboard reports, marketers can evaluate click-throughs and conversions from Google AdWords and banner ads placed on websites and in industry newsletters.
- View activity on your website, including pages viewed, number of visits, unique visitors, etc. Web visitors who meet certain criteria as defined by lead scoring rules can be routed to sales reps for follow-up.

6. Score, nurture and route leads

- Based on prospect demographics and campaign or web behavior, leads are scored and either entered into another campaign for nurturing or routed to sales for follow-up. For example, if a prospect downloaded a white paper, indicated on a form that they had an active project and visited the website twice within a 2 week period, they could be tagged as “hot” and routed to sales for immediate follow-up.

7. Measure performance and campaign ROI

- a. Marketers can view real-time graphical dashboards of leads generated, response and conversion rates by offer and media, form and survey statistics and overall campaign performance.
- b. Campaign reports show the number of opportunities influenced by a campaign, revenue from closed deals and revenue pending in the pipeline. Comparing results of multiple campaigns and tests of offers and media allow marketers to increase investment in programs that are performing best. This optimization will improve marketing ROI.

Key Vendors & Pricing

There are several vendors in the hosted campaign automation space. These include Eloqua, Manticore, Market2Lead, Marketbright, and Vtrenz. Capabilities vary from vendor to vendor, so it's important to assess each one based on your company's unique business requirements.

As with any software-as-a-service (SAAS) offering, pricing is based on an annual subscription basis. Pricing ranges from \$20,000 to \$60,000 or more per year and may fluctuate based on the number of records in the database, number of active campaigns, email volume, number of users, CRM integration, training and support services. First year subscriptions are often higher due to implementation fees. Implementation timelines vary, but are typically 2-6 weeks.

Precautions

Companies need to work through and document their campaign management processes prior to installation of a marketing automation tool. As with any CRM project, build the processes first that support your business, then automate. According to SiriusDecisions “...customers should create process flows of all of their marketing campaign components (including all touchpoints with sales)

to determine any gaps that need to be remedied before implementing and applying a technology solution.” *Source: Vtrenz Vendor Profile, SiriusDecisions.* For best success, start simple with one or two campaigns and a few segments. You can expand functionality over time as you optimize list segmentation, business rules for lead scoring and campaign components.

Measuring campaign ROI can be tricky. If a marketing-sourced lead is not converted to an opportunity, but a sales rep creates a new opportunity from scratch, any campaign history may be lost. So even though marketing influenced the opportunity, it may not be reflected in the ROI analysis. In this case, marketers may want to work backwards. Review the current pipeline and trace back to determine if any leads or contacts from that account were touched by a marketing campaign.

Summary

Hosted marketing automation tools are becoming more robust and cost-effective for small, medium and large B-to-B marketing organizations. These tools provide a single platform for segmenting and managing a database of prospects and customers, planning and executing automated campaigns, and analyzing and reporting results. These tools can help marketing and sales organizations align more closely and build a robust and sustainable sales pipeline.

About the Author

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