

Filling the Funnel: Online Lead Generation Strategies and Tactics

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As the Internet becomes more and more important, it is critical to focus on how to generate new business from your website. Many businesses fail to take full advantage of the sales opportunities available via their own website. If someone comes to your company's website, how easy is it for them to become a customer? Who is your customer? How easy are you making it for them to contact you?

Online lead generation is a powerful and efficient tool if properly supported. Here are a few ideas and questions to get you thinking.

Measurement with Web Analytics

Website usage statistics, or web analytics, are a key part of any website marketing plan. This data makes up the traffic report for your site. The traffic report tells you all sorts of valuable information: who visited your site, where they live, how they got to your site, what search terms they used to find you and more. In conjunction with your online lead generation, advertising and sales, it can also show you what percentage of total visitors are converting into customers or where customers are dropping out in the process. Being able to measure traffic and usage is central to measuring your success.

If you're not currently viewing website traffic reports, talk to your webmaster today to find out how. For a free and user-friendly option, Google provides an analytics package available at: www.google.com/analytics/. It can be



installed on your website with two lines of code.

The End of the Funnel

I always advise that a company's website should be designed as the end of the funnel for all marketing and advertising initiatives. You need to build traffic to your site then add tools that allow you to convert that traffic. Most people already know this, but it bears repeating that every advertising piece should have your website address on it. In fact, everything you do should have your website address on it; every form, every business card, every flyer, invoice, etc. Once in the wild, you never know where these pieces will end up. Customers will often find

the most circuitous routes to your door. Once they find their way to you, make it easy for them to contact you.

Always think in terms of supporting and promoting your website. For example, you can offer testimonials to key vendors who will often be glad to publish your recommendation with a link back to your website. That's a win/win situation. Similarly, whenever I purchase radio or print advertising, I negotiate the pricing, then I ask whether the advertiser can provide a mention of my business with a link on their website or in their email newsletter, etc. This is often provided at no charge simply for the asking.

Collect, Store, and Use

Your company website must use some method to collect leads online. This allows you to collect leads anywhere at any time without employee involvement. The easiest way is to provide a simple online form where the customer submits their personal information. This information can then be stored in a database and used for follow-up either by direct marketing or by a member of your sales force. Any customer contact involving interest should be considered a lead. Once you've built the form and have a lead database waiting, how do you get people to sign up?

First, let's ask a few important questions. How well do you know your customers? What do they want? What are their concerns? Once you know this, you can speak to them. It turns out that every customer wants three simple

things: answers, value and solutions. If you address their concerns, you build goodwill.

Satisfy Your Customer's Needs

Satisfy the customer's desire for answers, value and solutions. Put yourself in your customer's shoes and imagine what they'd like to know and put that on your site. Publish useful information about what you do, common problems for your customers and in depth information related to your industry and business. At the end of a piece of such content, offer a link to a form where your customers can sign up to receive an email newsletter that will include additional valuable information or product specials direct to their email inbox. Other ideas include providing downloadable industry whitepapers, online seminars, podcasts, special promotions, coupons and information in any other form that would be attractive to the customer. Prior to downloading or viewing the information, simply ask for the customer's contact information and permission to get in touch with them. Many prospective customers will welcome contact with your business.

The goal is to provide several effective hooks for attracting and collecting leads online. Every promotion can be translated to your website. If you provide free samples, product demonstrations or estimates as part of your business, allow your customers to sign up online. This can be accomplished for a minimal investment, especially if you have an existing website. The same basic forms can be reused for several different purposes or promotions. The best part is that once you build these lead generating tools, they will continue to work for you at little to no continuing cost.

With a little creativity, you can make your website into your best sales person. By adding lead generation forms and incentives for customer interest, it will work tirelessly to generate new business.

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