

Help and advice



Leo Aspden on marketing in a weak economy

How to get more from your sales leads

THIS may appear like fighting talk when all around budgets and staff are being stretched more thinly than many may be able to remember! For those proactive marketing and sales teams out there, this is the perfect time to focus on improving the quality and the cost of sales leads.

Managing ongoing lead generation is crucial to any successful business. A clear strategy, which identifies objectives, target audience and consistently promotes the improvement of lead quality and cost per conversion is key. Below are four steps to achieving this in your business.

1. Be clear who your target audience is: If quality is what you seek, then from the start you must be clear on whom to target. Understand why you are targeting this audience, what is it you can offer, and why is it of relevance to them. This can mean smaller, yet more effective campaigns because your audience is more responsive. Poorly targeted campaigns don't achieve poor results, they often achieve no results at all.

2. Focus on conversion not response: Although the objective of the campaign may be response, perhaps for example, to join a mailing list, or attend a product launch, the quality of

leads will always be improved if the success of your campaigns is measured in terms of cost per conversion from prospect to customer and not simply on cost per response. Avoid the temptation to pursue quantity over quality. Why would you want to spend more money, or any money on leads that are of no value? As above, be clear on your targeting and focus on conversion to ensure improved quality.

3. Get sales input from the outset: The people closest to the market are often your own sales team. Marketing and sales should work closely together throughout all stages, not only to ensure buy-in and ownership, but also to agree the focus, levels, type and quality of leads required. Do this and you can achieve a positive effect and improvement in the cultivation of the resultant leads. The opposite is true where the sales team feel a campaign has been forced upon them which is simply off the mark and unmanageable in terms of follow up.

3. Create manageable campaigns: Once again, this comes back to focus and when points 1 to 3 above have been observed the emphasis will be on quality and not quantity. Often the attraction of low cost per response may encourage the mass influx of large volumes

of sales leads without clear thought and strategy about how these will be effectively managed and followed up. Consider what appears to be a tremendously successful campaign response only to be dashed by the lack of follow up or delays in follow up caused by the excessive burden placed on in-house and external sales teams. This can result in a generalisation of large quantities of the leads being characterised as poor fit and it won't take long for the sales team to be convinced that all the leads are poor quality and therefore not worth following up.

Follow the above four steps and the whole focus of your campaigns should become clearer, more targeted and ultimately achieving a higher quality of lead, improved conversion to customer levels and a positive effect on the all important ROI.

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Dids MacDonald on protecting your intellectual property



Beware of unscrupulous ex-employees

MUCH has been made in the media recently about theft of personal data, but confidential data stolen from your business can also cause untold damage.

Most employees are not unscrupulous; but a few are and won't hesitate to steal confidential information belonging to your business and use it for their own benefit, regardless of the damage it may cause your business.

ACID accredited lawyer Sarah Birmbeck from DMH Stallard recently worked on a case which highlighted just how much damage this type of action could potentially have done, had the employer not acted swiftly to put a stop to it.

Case history: John worked for a successful recruitment agency for several years but had no written contract of employment. The agency had just never got around to formalising the paper work.

The agency's biggest asset was its database costing thousands to which John had access.

John had become unhappy and, unbeknown to his bosses, plotted to set up in competition, using confidential information and copying a large part of the database giving him the unfair advantage of the agency's assets

to damage the agency.

John didn't realise that even though he had no formal contract, he was subject to implied duties, for example to act at all times towards the employer with good faith and fidelity and implied duties of confidentiality.

Employers can rely on the law to protect confidential information if obtained during the course of employment. It doesn't have to be a trade secret!

Following John's resignation a routine check of his computer post-termination, revealed system and data irregularities.

The agency acted quickly. John's new business was traced and forensic experts were drafted in and provided persuasive evidence.

A court order was obtained resulting in the discovery of memory sticks containing the agency's database at John's new premises. In light of the case against him, the matter settled shortly thereafter and John's new business were held to account for profits as a result of the misuse of the confidential information.

Confidential information is an extremely important business asset. Investing in its protection is 'a no-brainer!'

ACID guidelines:

- Ensure there are properly drafted employment or service contracts which address the issue of ownership of intellectual property rights and confidential information, the boundaries of use and the return of information, documentation or property upon termination.
- Confirm the position with regards ownership of IP rights (with some specific exceptions) in that in the absence of any agreement to the contrary, works created during the course of employment belong to the employer.
- Spell out what you expect the position to be, thus to focus employees' minds to make it easier to pursue infringement.
- Ensure that all employees value and protect your intellectual property rights.
- Confirm that access to confidential information is a privilege at an appropriately senior level with sufficient safeguards.
- Do not leave confidential documents lying around or fail to password protect them.
- Ensure your policy includes that exits are managed properly, all property belonging to the business whether in soft or hard

copy is returned and signed for prior to the employee leaving.

■ Check (but do not potentially corrupt by trying to investigate further) the contents of laptops, blackberries, mobile phones to confirm that all is as it should be!

■ If you uncover anything unusual seek expert advice immediately. Tackling potential damage sooner gives the legal team a better chance of recovery.

■ Finally stolen data through electronic means by an employee will usually be traced. Partly this is because the methods used are often surprisingly unsophisticated – emails sent to a hotmail account with client lists attached are not unusual.

But even for the more 'sophisticated' of fenders – covering tracks is difficult when experts have access to the sort of technology used by police to investigate the most serious sorts of crimes like internet child pornography is not easy. **CFJ**

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