

A Beginner's Guide to Lead Generation

In modern marketing, lead generation (or lead gen) has become a great way for companies to compete for business. But what is lead gen and what is the most effective way to accomplish it? Well let's start at the beginning:

What is a lead?

A lead is a person who indicates interest in your company's product or service that you can follow up with to **lead** them down the sales funnel (lead... get it?). Basically, instead of having to cold call a person and start from scratch, they've already had their first (or second, third, fourth, etc.) contact with you and a communication line has been opened. These leads are often put into a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) tool to organize them and keep track of their path to purchase. If you've ever provided your name, email address, or phone number to a company to sign up for something – you are likely in their CRM as a lead.

What is lead gen?

The process of attracting and converting people into leads is lead generation. Essentially, it's getting a target audience naturally interested in your product or service until they want to hear from a company to make a purchase.

Lead gen requires a cohesive approach from both marketing and sales, where marketing initiates the interest and then sends the warm leads to sales to nurture them and eventually close the deal. While the end game is pretty defined (sales, Sales, SALES!), the lead gen process requires a that defines the channels, tactics, players, and communication plans to be most effective.

Build a lead gen strategy

If you want to bring people to your doorstep, you need to give them something of value in return. Quality content directed at a clearly defined and targeted audience will be the foundation of any great inbound lead generation effort. Once you have high-value content – which could include everything from written content like ebooks and whitepapers, to visual content like infographics and videos – you need to start the distribution. Based on your audience and your company's capacity, decide what channels will be most effective and efficient to distribute your quality content and reach your intended audience. Reaching your targeted audience with this content begins a relationship with them and they begin to trust your company and consider you an expert in your industry.

Distribute quality content across channels

SEO: Before even distributing the content, you need to make sure that search engines will recognize the quality of your content and connect it with the keywords you want to focus on. Check out [this blog](#) for more tips on how to optimize content for search engines and create high-quality content that is built around keywords and key phrases.

Website: For most companies, a well-built website will be the home-base where content lives. Short-form content like blogs and videos should be offered to clients

easily on the website, while long-form, high-value content would likely be housed on a gated landing page.

Landing Page: In its purest form, a landing page is really any web page that a visitor “lands” on. For marketers, landing pages are pages that are distinct from a main website (often without global website navigation) that are used towards an objective. Basically – visitors that have landed on a landing page should only be able to perform one action that you’ve intended. Landing pages are useful for lead gen because they can be used to collect information on the visitor. So – visitors fill a form that is housed on the landing page, and your company gets that information. Of course, people are more likely to fill the forms if they are offered something in return – which is where your high value content comes in.

Blog: Your blog is where your company can store short articles that portray your expertise in your industry and keep people updated on news and events. Blogging increases web traffic, gives your site an SEO boost, establishes your company as a thought-leader, and acts as a storage facility for content that can be used for social and email distribution. You can also use your blog as a lead gen tool. Once people are done reading your blog, offer them additional content through a call-to-action that leads them to a landing page where they can fill out a form and get additional content.

Social Media: Once you’ve established your foundation of content and your gated landing pages, it’s time to let people know about what is available through social channels. Post links to your gated landing pages on your social networks to reach more people that may be interested in your content. One warning – due to the various algorithms that social media networks run, it is often difficult to generate a significant amount of leads without running paid advertising. The plus side? Social media audience targeting continues to get more and more sophisticated – which means you will reach the right people.

Email: Of course, distribute your high-value content to the people in your email list that would find it valuable. A compelling subject line and a valuable content offer behind a form will help leads move down the funnel toward conversion. You don’t want your emails to seem like they’re mass produced, but at the same time, you need your email campaigns to be scalable for a large list. Marketing automation software can not only help you scale your emails for lead gen, they also help track potential customers as they move down the funnel. With automation software, you can create and schedule emails in advance, and create drip campaigns that are automatically activated when someone takes an action. So, for example, if someone downloads a whitepaper through your email, the automation software automatically sends a thank you note with the download attached. You can set it up to automatically forward the lead to a particular person on your team for follow-up, or to send a second email a week later with another offer for your potential customer. Essentially, it automatically initiates a relationship with the lead and nurtures them down the funnel towards conversion.

Measure your results

Of course, all these efforts should be continuously observed, measured, and tweaked throughout the process. Lead generation is a continuous campaign that needs a solidly built strategy that is easily malleable as changes are needed. Stay tuned for Part II of our Lead Generation series: [Tips for Gaining Better Leads](#)