BEST PRACTICES IN EMARKETING

A WHITE PAPER BY
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: BEST PRACTICES IN EMARKETING

If your company hasn't used eMarketing extensively to date, then you're probably wondering how to begin. This White Paper by online marketing consultant Andrew Sanderson, will help you get started.

Why eMarketing?

- Four characteristics for identifying the marketing activities that are worth repeating.
- eMarketing offers a unique combination of six advantages that no other media can offer.
- How eMarketing permits closed-loop communication.

Putting eMarketing in context

- Each stage of the customer lifecycle requires a distinct style of communication.
- Marketers call it "the funnel" ... but how does the sales process look to your customer?

eMarketing strategy:

- The basic building block: The information transaction
- How to structure information transactions...
- And how to optimise them.

eMarketing tactics

- How to design effective information transactions
- How to write the call to action.

Microsites for cross-selling and up-selling

- The basic design of microsites
- Advanced Microsite design
- Optimising the design of the response page
- Deciding how much resource to invest in a Microsite

Newsletters for nurturing contacts between sales

- Editorial policy: Two models for defining newsletter contents
- Writing effective newsletter articles
- Measuring results from Newsletters
- Relevance increases brand loyalty and revenue

BEST PRACTICES IN EMARKETING

If your company hasn't used eMarketing extensively to date, then you're probably wondering how to begin. In this White Paper we present Guidelines based on experiences of over 3,000 online projects that will help you get started.

WITH EMARKETING, YOU KNOW WHAT WORKS

Marketers need to know what works and what doesn't. And that means that – whatever their industry, whatever their goals or strategy – that each and every marketing activity has to match up to four basic characteristics.

- **Measurability**
  If a project is worth doing, how are the success criteria to be defined? How will they be measured in practice? If X amount of resource is put into a project, how much success do you get back?

- **Accountability**
  In the sense of cause and effect, how does any given marketing activity contribute to overall company goals? What is the impact of doing this activity? Is the scope of the activity scaled to the size / volume of the expected benefit? Which activities are most effective in absolute terms? Which activities – when compared with each other – are most cost efficient?

- **Transparency**
  Can the individual elements of the marketing strategy be summarized so that it is easy to see how they are aligned? How do they combine to create synergies and collectively drive forward to attain corporate goals? What is the relative cost and contribution of each activity?

- **Reproducibility**
  If an activity generated results today, will it have the same effect tomorrow? Has the activity been documented so that it can be shared with other members of staff? Can that success be repeated?

Increasingly, Marketing Directors are defining their strategies and implementing individual marketing activities using eMarketing because it has all these characteristics.

THE ADVANTAGES OF EMARKETING

Marketing online via email and microsites confers unique advantages that no other communications media can offer.

- **Real-time measurement**
  The response of an online audience to email and webpages is measured the moment it happens.

- **Speed**
  Responses to online marketing activities begin to come in within minutes of being switched on. Typically, an email promotion will be complete within two to five working days of send-out. This is ten times faster than traditional direct mail by post, which can take eight to ten weeks (40 to 50 working days) to generate full results.

- **Interactivity**
  Every link in an email or on a web page is measurable. Not only in the sense of counting the quantity, but also in the sense that you can accurately identify who responded and when.

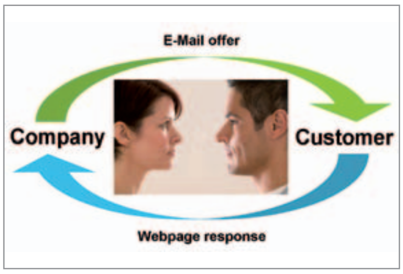
- **Granularity**
  Measurement of online response allows a finer level of granularity than any other medium. Direct mail by post allows comparison of responses to letters sent out. By contrast, email and web will enable the marketer to identify not only how many emails were sent out, but also how many were successfully delivered; how many were opened and by whom; who responded to the call to action (and who did not); who qualifies as a successful conversion and is a potential target for the next qualifying activity.

- **Reduced cycle time**
  The cycle time of a marketing activity is defined as the number of working days from initiating the project, through measurement of results, to the point where the insights gained can be used to improve the next iteration of the activity. Online marketing activities have shorter cycles than any other medium.

- **Increased competitiveness**
  Online marketing generates results faster than any other medium. As a result, the company gains insights into significant shifts in customer behaviour faster. The ability to identify and adapt to these insights confers a competitive advantage.

EMARKETING – CLOSED LOOP COMMUNICATION

When selling to people face-to-face, our communication cycles usually occur in two stages. In the first stage, we tell people something and observe their reaction. If someone is interested in what we have to say, we follow up with more detailed information and then ask a question to qualify the response and prepare for the next cycle.



eMarketing works the same way. To create an online conversation that closes the loop, we use two media: email and web pages.

The email delivers our message and enables us to gauge the extent of someone's interest. By looking at the open rate, we can observe whether the subject is of interest at all. The text of the email should include a clearly defined call to action which is usually presented as a link to a web page. The response rate – the number of people who click on the link – tells us who and how many people are interested in the subject and want to find out more.

The webpages of the microsite deliver the details of our message – the offer that we want to present. After describing the features, functions and the benefits for the customer or prospect, we can ask questions and get further feedback. To encourage this reaction, the text of our web pages should focus on the benefits for the reader. The call-to-action on the webpage is also presented as a link which can be measured.

The eMarketing combination of email and microsite turns the numbers game of selling around 180 degrees. Instead of chasing contacts and prospects at high cost of energy and resources via the face-to-face sales team, we can publicise the availability of our expertise cost effectively to targeted groups; then we encourage the interested contacts self-select and come to us.

"Integrating eMarketing and CRM systems ensures that the hand-over of leads from one team to the next is handled smoothly."

THE IMPACT OF THE CUSTOMER LIFECYCLE

Each stage of the customer lifecycle represents a different sales challenge and requires a distinct style of communication. The customer lifecycle identifies the issues that are relevant to a specific group of customers. This gives us an effective starting point for identifying the core messages that are relevant for specific eMarketing campaigns.

1 **acquisition and initial sale**

This is undoubtedly the toughest sale of all. We start with zero information and have to build up a picture of each contacts needs.

We have to identify people who work at the same company or location, those who are trying to resolve the same business issue and make this information available to the sales team at the right moment.

The eMarketing focus is on:

- winning new contacts and getting opt-ins and subscriptions
- qualifying which contacts are interested in what information
- identifying the contacts company
- presenting our company, its strengths and track record
- lead qualification and hand-over to sales.

2 **nurturing the relationship**

Between one sale and the next, we have to nurture the relationship by maintaining regular communication with our contacts. Newsletters are particularly effective, since they can communicate several different types of message at one time.
The eMarketing focus is on:

- Regular communication to existing contacts
- Increasing the base of contacts via new subscriptions
- Identifying shifts in customer interests
- Identifying targets for sales promotions

3 **repeat selling**

Promotions identify new sales opportunities within the customer organisation and expand the level of business as far as possible. They can be used both with regular purchases of consumables as well as the infrequent major investment purchases.
eMarketing projects typically focus on:

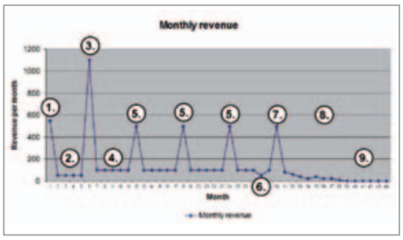
- cross-selling and up-selling offers to known contacts;
- extending the range of contacts within the company via tell-a-colleague and personal references
- cross-selling to newly identified contacts.

4 **declining relationship**

A declining business relationship often appears as decrease in average sales value over time, or as interruptions in the usual frequency of purchase. The most common causes are a change of staff at the customer organisations and / or a decline in the customers perception of satisfaction. In both cases, eMarketing retention and win-back campaigns focus on similar issues to acquisition projects:

- identifying the correct new contacts and their interests
- re-presenting our company’s strength and track record with the customer
- identifying customer dissatisfaction and corrective actions.

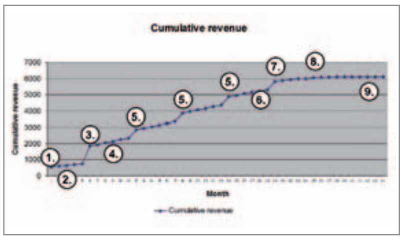
During the course of this lifecycle we learn progressively more and more about the contacts at the customer organisation. Our ability to store this information, and to share it with other colleagues within our company is greatly assisted by a Customer Relationship Management system. By examining the record of past sales in the CRM system, we can group customers according to their stage in the customer lifecycle and plan relevant marketing actions that will promote the relationship in terms of both volume and value, and customer satisfaction.



Reference for chart

This chart from the CRM system shows monthly revenue earned from a customer. In this example, the product is a machine which requires regular purchase of consumables. The following customer lifecycle story is fictitious but illustrates a pattern typical in of B2B customer relationships:

1. A test system is installed...
2. and small monthly purchases of consumables follow.
3. Installation of the full system...
4. increases the monthly purchase volume of consumables.
5. Regular purchase of add-ons (cross-sell and up-sell) follow...
6. until there is a change in the management team, when a warning downturn in consumables occurs.
7. The sale of the next add-on is successful but only after hard negotiation;
8. and the add-on sale after that falls through.
9. The volume of consumables dwindles to zero when the solution is replaced by another brand.



Reference for chart

The same story, shown this time as a chart of cumulative revenue. Zero growth at 9. indicates that ongoing sales of consumables have tailed off completely. eMarketing provides cost-effective customer communication at all stages of the lifecycle:

- Contact qualification during initial acquisition (1) and the build-up to loyal customer status (2 & 3)
- Promotion of add-ons (cross-selling and up-selling) (5 & 8)
- Ongoing communication via newsletters between add-on sales, to support brand awareness and the sales of consumables (4 & 6)
- During the retention and win-back stage (after 8 & 9).

WHEN SELLING, MAKE HASTE SLOWLY

Since repeat selling is more cost effective than new customer acquisition, B2B organisations aim to develop a long term partnership with their customers. The initial sale is followed by repeat sales. Up-selling and cross-selling are typical techniques for developing frequency, volume and value of the partnership.

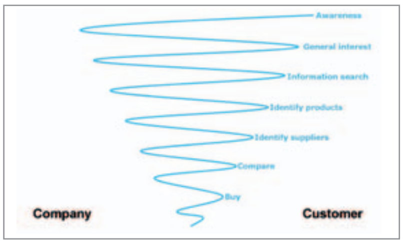
"Integrating eMarketing and CRM systems ensures that the hand-over of leads from one team to the next is handled smoothly."

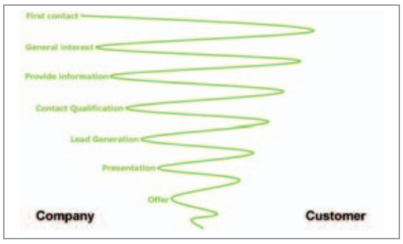
The end result of each successful sales cycle is a contract between supplier and customer. To optimize the sales cycle, we need to remember that supplier and customer start the sales cycle from different places and take different routes to get to the contract stage.

Seen from the customer's perspective, the route to the contract is a buying process:

1. the awareness that a business issue needs to be addressed creates a need for general information
2. the decision to resolve the business issue results in a search for specific solution
3. the customer compares solutions and suppliers
4. the customer chooses a supplier and negotiates the contract.

In the B2B market, the members of different departments all have to meet, discuss and agree on how the business issue will be resolved before the contract can be signed. As a result, the buying process may take anything from several weeks to several months.





Reference for diagram

For the Marketer in the supplier organisation, the stages in the selling process look like this:

1. provide general information to all prospects
2. qualify which prospects have a clearly defined business need, timeline and budget
3. demonstrate that the solution will resolve the prospects business issue
4. make a concrete offer and negotiate the contract

For B2B suppliers, the sales process also involves several teams or departments: marketing, telesales, pre-sales consulting, face to face sales teams each have role to play. The output of one team becomes the input for the next. This is why the integration of eMarketing and CRM systems is so valuable: it ensures that the hand-over of leads from one team to the next is handled smoothly.

In short, B2B selling is a process that takes time and commitment. Even with face to face selling, it is highly unlikely that a supplier-customer relationship will develop from first contact to sale in one conversation. In the same way, trying to establish contact, introduce a solution, show the benefits, and ask for the business all in one eMarketing project just doesn't work. eMarketing will not enable us to take short cuts through the customers decision process. To function effectively, eMarketing adapts to the customer's preferred way of doing business.

"Instead of chasing prospects at high cost, emarketing provides a cost effective way to encourage interested contacts come to us."

What eMarketing can do – and does extremely well – is shorten our own communications cycles and smooth the transition from one step in the sales process to the next. We can communicate with our customers at lower cost, target them more accurately, identify buying signals more effectively and respond to them more quickly.

eMarketing is most effective when it uses the same small steps as normal B2B selling, and in the same sequence that has proven to be effective in face-to-face selling. The motto is "make haste slowly".

THE SALES FUNNEL

In B2B markets, marketing and sales activities are structured so that the media with the lowest cost per contact are used first; and those with the highest cost per contact are used last and after careful qualification.

In this context, eMarketing techniques offer us a cost-effective method for qualifying contacts and leads before handing them over to the pre-sales or sales teams. The output from the eMarketing system becomes the input for the CRM.

We therefore have two objectives: to gain data about our prospects as smoothly as possible; and to make it as easy as possible for our prospects to get the information they need to reach a buying decision. We achieve this by designing our eMarketing activities as a series of information transactions. These information transactions gradually build up a relationship and establish trust with our prospect.

At each stage through the buying process, we will offer the information that our prospects need. They start with a need for general information about a business issue. As and when they find information that is relevant, they will progress to asking for specific information about products and solutions. This in turn will lead to more detailed questions: What case studies are available? Who are the reference customers? How does it work exactly? And so on.

As we guide our prospect through this process, they will tell us something about themselves. First by the information offers that they respond to and the choice of information that they request; and additionally via the questions that we ask and the answers that we receive through microsites.

"Emarketing enables us to identify buying signals more effectively and respond to them more quickly."

Each of these "give and take" interactions is a separate information transaction. By creating a sequence of transactions, we'll have plenty of opportunities for asking qualifying questions and gathering all sorts of valuable information. When a transaction is concluded, we can store a summary of the outcome (eg qualified / not qualified / did not respond) in the CRM where it can be used and re-used. This approach will enable us to qualify our prospects as they move through the sales funnel and identify the hot leads effectively.

Once we've broken the sales process down into a series of information transactions, we can look at ways to optimize the overall structure of the transactions and the design of the individual interactions.

STRUCTURING THE INFORMATION TRANSACTIONS

The next step is to outline the separate information transactions that are needed in the sales qualification process.

Here is a plan of work to get you started:

- define the types of information that the sales team considers to be essential for a "qualified lead"
- make a pile of every printed and online piece of collateral that you currently have available e.g. white papers, case studies, product brochures, etc
- identify what you learn about the contact when they say: "I want that collateral piece"
- group them according to the type of information that you learn about the contact
- experiment with sequences to find a natural flow for the qualification process
- design transactions that offer specific collateral pieces in return for each type of qualifying information
- now identify the gaps: what lead-qualifying information do you need to gather, that cannot be met using existing collateral?
- design the information transactions that will gather the information that you need and add the new collateral requests to the marketing plan.

Some examples:

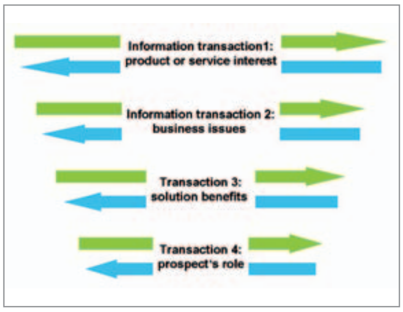
- Offer brochures, white papers, technical descriptions to qualify the contacts product interest
- If your solutions are customised by industry sector then offering a choice of information about industry-specific solutions will qualify this aspect of the contacts interest.

If you offer information aimed at different groups of people within the target organisation, then this collateral can be used to identify the role of the contact more closely. For example:

- strategic product summaries for executives
- overviews and feature / function / benefit brochures for management
- reference stories and case studies for project managers
- data sheets for technical experts
- details of pricing / leasing/ financial practices for buyers, contract negotiators and the finance department.

SEQUENCING THE INFORMATION TRANSACTIONS

Talk with experienced members of your sales team and they will probably tell you that sales conversations (for example at a trade show stand) start with general questions about your solutions, before the contact starts to describe the business issue that they are trying to resolve. This may be followed by a request for examples of case studies and reference sites. Then come the specific questions about how your solution works in practice.



Use a sequence of information transactions to acquire the information that is required for lead generation and qualification. Follow the same social conventions as face to face selling by moving gently from general to specific subjects; from the anonymous to the personal.

If – initially – the contact prefers to be anonymous, it's best to respect this. It's just part of human nature and the psychology of successful selling. The sales conversations at a trade show typically run for 20 to 30 minutes before business cards are exchanged and the contact reveals their identity.

Effective sales qualification by eMarketing follows exactly the same social conventions as face to face selling. So the sequence for gathering information from contacts, for identifying whether they are serious prospects, for generating leads, is optimised when we move gently from the general to the specific, from the anonymous to the personal:

- product or service interest
- the business issue and the prospect company's needs
- the solution and the benefits that address this need
- the professional role of the prospect in the buying decision

Once they are confident that there is a match between your solution and their needs, the contact will feel comfortable about telling you who they are.

OPTIMIZE EACH INFORMATION TRANSACTION

The idea of exchanging information about our solutions in return for information about the prospect sounds easy, but we have to be careful how we implement it in practice. The old computing adage "rubbish in, rubbish out" has never been truer. The moment we allow contacts to put rubbish data into our CRM, it starts to lose effectiveness. From there on, it's a downward spiral.

Instead of spending huge amounts of time and effort in data clean-ups, we can fix the whole problem by taking a simple decision right at the start of the eMarketing design process: we won't give contacts any opportunity or reason to put rubbish data into our CRM.

The principle for collecting accurate data in eMarketing information transactions is this: only ask contacts to provide data that is relevant to the current information transaction.

Imagine this dialogue for the initial contact between supplier and prospect:

Supplier:	do you want an overview brochure about our solutions?
Prospect:	yes please
Supplier:	which email address should we send it to?

This information transaction tells you the email address of a prospect who wants general information. Any attempt to gather further information at this stage is probably irrelevant. Worse still, forcing the contact to give information via obligatory data fields will only fill the database with rubbish.

CLARIFY THE SUCCESS CRITERIA FOR EACH INFORMATION TRANSACTION

Each and every information transaction can – and should be – a carefully designed component in the qualification process within the sales funnel.

In practice, this means setting limited goals within a clearly defined context.
It means knowing exactly how each individual action contributes to the big picture.
When designing an information transaction we therefore need to consider:

1 what information transactions have already taken place and what we have learned from them
2 the objectives and success criteria for the transaction we are currently planning
3 what the follow-on transaction will be.

In other words, the target group for each information transaction can be defined as the contacts who have successfully responded to the previous qualifying stages in the sales funnel. At the same time, the contacts who successfully respond to this eMarketing transaction will become the target group for the information transactions in the next stage of the sales funnel.

With this context in mind, we can now define the key questions that must be asked and answered to make our information transaction effective.

1 how is the target group defined (status within the funnel) ?
2 what is the objective of this information transaction?
3 what information do we need to gather in this transaction that we are planning, to prepare for the follow-on transaction ?

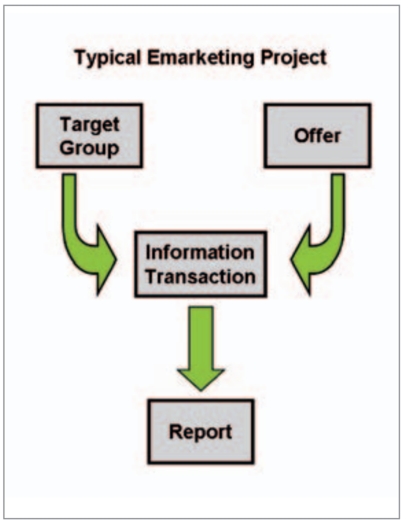
The more clearly we clarify and define the answers to these questions, the easier it becomes to focus on the essential issues in our information transaction.

Ultimately, our sequence of information transactions will result in a level of qualification that means the contact is now ready to be passed on to other marketing teams such as telesales, direct sales, etc. When your eMarketing system is integrated with the CRM system, this process becomes seamless.

PLAN EACH INFORMATION TRANSACTION PROJECT WITH THE END RESULT IN MIND

The process for implementing each individual information transaction within the sales funnel can be briefly summarised as follows.

- Select a target group
- Identify an offer that is relevant for that group
- Combine the two into an eMarketing Project; test it and execute it
- Then produce a report on the results.



This sequence is fine for implementation. But if you're serious about making your eMarketing projects really effective, the best method is to plan them in reverse order.

Start by getting a clear picture of the result that you want:

- How do you define a successful result?
- Why is this important?
- How many successful results do you want?
- What are you going to do with these results?
- What will happen next?

Now put yourself in the position of a contact in the target group.

- Is this offer really relevant for this target group?
- Is the estimated response rate realistic?
- Is it easy to respond to the offer?
- Does everything work smoothly?
- Can you make it simpler?

When planning the Offer, try asking yourself these questions:

- Is there a clear, concise call to action?
- Is this Offer legal, honest and truthful?
- When and how will we fulfil our Offer?

And last but not least, check these points about the Target Group:

- How many email addresses will bounce or be undeliverable?
- How many email addresses will you really need to achieve the target?
- Do the selection criteria really maximise the relevance of the Offer for this Target Group?

Once the planning is clear, you can implement the eMarketing project in the usual sequence.

THE CALL TO ACTION

Given that our offer is relevant to the target group, the next major factor in the success of our information transaction is the call to action that we use.

What is the best way to phrase the call to action so that we get the result we want?

One option is to be totally direct. The text of our email could conclude with a call to action such as: "do you want to speak to our telesales staff about scheduling your implementation of product X?" There is a lot to be said for this style: it's honest and straightforward. But experience shows that, as a way to promote sales, response rates to this offer will probably be very low.

A better approach is to structure the texts of our email and microsite to lead the contact through the sales arguments in a way that makes them feel comfortable. Within any information transaction, we have at least three opportunities for doing this:

1. the title line of the email
2. the call-to-action in the email
3. the call-to-action in the microsite

To be effective, each of these calls-to-action should have a single, very limited objective. Each should identify the benefit for the contact of moving on to the next stage. Taken together, the calls to action gradually lead up to the qualifying offer.

For example:

1 the title line of the email should explain why the reader should open the email
2 the email should explain the benefits of clicking on the link to the microsite
3 the microsite should explain the benefits of responding to the offer

Each of these small steps is an opportunity to build trust with our customer. When we make an offer or promise in an email subject line or call-to-action link, we must be sure that we fulfil that offer in the content of email and the microsite.

The email title line and email call-to-action are simply preparation. Save the qualifying call-to-action for the response page of the microsite.

OFFERS – USE SWEEPSTAKES AND PRIZES WITH CARE

Among professional contacts in B2B markets, the offer of detailed and relevant information about a solution to a pressing business issue is usually its own reward.

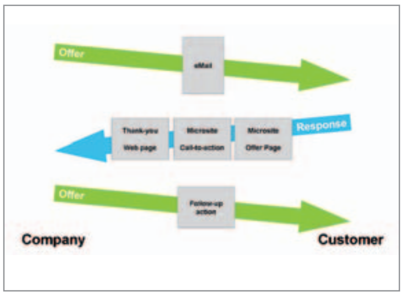
The use of sweepstakes and free gifts can have both positive and negative effects.

- the promise of a give-away will increase the cost of your offer
- the volume of responses may increase, but this is not guaranteed
- the quality of responses may go down.

The only way to find out whether the increase in the response rate will justify the increase in costs is to run the promotion and measure the results.

In addition to measuring the quantity of responses, we also have to keep an eye on the quality of the results. Did the contacts respond because they genuinely wanted to know about your product? Or did they respond because they wanted the give-away? The value of these contacts for lead generation still has to be proven. To do this, compare the conversion rate (leads to actual sales) for promotions with and without give-aways.

For the most part, sweepstakes identify people who are primarily interested in a free gift. The greater the perceived value of the free gift, the more questionable is the value of the responses for lead generation and sales purposes.



DESIGNING MICROSITES

The basic sequence for the web pages in a Microsite is:

- a landing page that contains details of the offer;
- the response page;
- a thank-you page.

The landing page of the microsite contains two elements:

- the features, functions and benefits of the product we are offering;
- and the benefits of responding to the offer (the link to the response page).

On the response page of the microsite, we gather the information that we will need for the next stage of the sales funnel. If for example the purpose of this information transaction is to qualify leads ready for hand over to the telesales team, then this is the appropriate moment to ask for the contacts telephone number.

On the thank-you page of the Microsite, we confirm that the transaction has been completed and what the follow-up action will be.

THE OFFER OR LANDING PAGE

The focus of our Microsite is the landing page where we tell the full story about our offer. In B2B selling, where the key concepts for sophisticated products require explanation, we may well need to dedicate several additional web pages to describe the features, functions and benefits adequately.

The "star" structure shown below is a simple model for doing this. The reader jumps from the link in the email to arrive at the primary landing page. Here, the essentials are immediately visible. In addition, further links in the side bars of the landing page clearly indicate that additional information is available.

By using a consistent visual design, we can ensure that the reader knows what they are looking at, and how to get further details if needed. As a final point, the call-to-action that takes the reader to the response page is visually emphasised. To simplify matters for our readers and ensure that they know what action we want them to take, the link to the response page is consistently positioned on every web page of the star model.

This fictitious microsite for Raindrop Industrial Water Filters illustrates the "star" model of Microsite design: each page provides additional detail on the issues identified on the landing page and includes a consistently positioned link to the response page

HOW MUCH EFFORT TO PUT INTO A MICROSITE

When deciding how much effort or resources to devote to a Microsite, the key factor is the frequency of re-use. To optimise the resources required to set up a microsite, increase the re-usability. Treat the microsite as an up-front investment in the qualification methods for the sales funnel. Build the microsite to deliver all the information that the prospect needs. Then amortise the effort by promoting the Microsite via email several times during the course of a year.

The email becomes a way of directing contacts to your Microsite; at each re-use, the target group for the emailing is the contacts who have completed all the prior qualification steps and are now ready for this particular information transaction.

GATHERING CONTACT DATA VIA RESPONSE PAGES

Is there an optimal design for a response page? What questions should we ask and what data should we capture?

There are very few cases where it is a good idea to ask for all the information that is printed on a business card in one go. When listed as a series of form fields the amount of data to be entered puts the contact off. It is best to avoid this, as it simply reduces the response rates.

For maximum success, restrict the data gathering to the data that is relevant to the offer. Aim to collect data in small increments. If the contact is genuinely interested, there will be plenty of other opportunities to ask more qualifying questions later.

In the early stages of the sales cycle, information transactions should be as brief and as simple as possible and the amount of data you request on the response page of the Microsite should be cut to a minimum. Requests for more extensive or detailed information, or requests for information that the prospect may consider “personal” – like their title or role in the buying process – are best left for later stages of the qualification process and the sales funnel.

As we saw earlier, the guideline for collecting personal data – like Mr. / Ms., Firstname, Lastname – is that the contact will be most willing to tell you who they are once they are confident that there is a match between your solution and their needs. Asking for personal information before that point will tend to fill the database with rubbish.

An additional example reinforces the above points. There is only one good reason for your contact to tell you the postal address of their company: you offer them something that will be delivered by post. If you really want to know the contact’s postal address, create an offer that justifies this request for information by promising fulfilment by post. And since mailing information by post requires resources and costs money, it is appropriate that this information transaction takes place after the contact has already proved that their enquiry is serious. In other words, after they have completed information transactions that qualify their product interest, their industry sector and so on.

Another element of collecting data is preparing for the follow-on action. What will happen next in the sales funnel? What is the next step in the process of contact qualification and lead generation ... and what data do we need to ask for now in order to prepare for that follow-on stage?

Three examples will highlight this approach:

- If the goal of our eMarketing action is to generate leads for follow-up by the telesales team, then the sequence of preparations should include the offer of free support and advice by telephone on request, plus provide an opportunity for the contact to give us their telephone number.
- If we are participating in a trade show with the goal of generating qualified leads for face-to-face conversations with the sales team, then the promotion of our trade stand can include the option to “reserve an interview appointment with our sales consultants”.

- If our goal is to drive traffic to a web site that offers online purchasing (for example, repeat sales of industrial consumables among existing B2B customers), then we need to consider how the data from the online transaction will flow into the downstream information systems such as order fulfilment, shipping and invoicing. In this context, we would consider capturing data elements such as a customer number, verification of the delivery address, or the customer's VAT number.

NURTURING CONTACTS BETWEEN SALES CYCLES VIA NEWSLETTERS

In between sales cycles we need to maintain contact with customers. eMarketing newsletters are a cost effective and flexible method for nurturing the business relationship.

We can make offers of information, promote products and services, and identify the contacts who find these offers relevant by monitoring their responses. Prospects become leads through self-selection. An important aspect of this process is to allow contacts to respond at their own pace, in their own time.

The key to defining the optimal content for emarketing newsletters is to make sure that each issue contains a something for everyone. Once again, there are two context dimensions that help us to define this content: the life cycle and the funnel.

If we use the lifecycle model, then we can structure each issue of our newsletter to contain an article that is specifically written for each stage:

- the new prospect (customer acquisition)
- the repeat customer (up-sell and cross-sell)
- the win-back / retention candidate (declining sales and / or customer satisfaction)

An alternative is to structure each issue of the newsletter so that it contains an article for each of the major stages of the sales funnel:

- general information search – the business issues
- specific information search – benefits of products and solutions
- how solutions work – case studies and references
- generating leads for the next team in the sales funnel

By using one of these models to define article placeholders for each issue of the newsletter, we ensure that there is something for everyone.

WRITING EFFECTIVE NEWSLETTER ARTICLES

Individual newsletter articles should be brief. The sole purpose of a newsletter article is to grab the reader's interest so that they click on the link and read the full text. (It's the same principle that we used earlier when writing the title for an email.) Generally speaking, three to four lines of text should be enough to get your message across.

To get a clearer idea of how to write articles for emarketing newsletters, pick up a daily newspaper and a monthly magazine. In the newspaper, the first paragraph is usually a concise summary; the text that follows expands on the summary and provides further detail. In a magazine article, the first paragraph is a teaser, designed to draw you in to a longer piece.

In emarketing newsletters, the newspaper style of article just doesn't work. There is no reason to read more, because the key facts have already been presented. So when writing for an emarketing newsletter, the most effective model to follow is the magazine style. Write a teaser: grab the reader's attention; tell them what they will get when they read the full text – but don't give the game away entirely. Give them a reason to click on the link. Effective newsletter articles don't tell the story, they sell the story.

"WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?"

As always, our guiding question is what happens next? With a newsletter, the reader clicks on the link to the full article. If you want, you can provide a link to an existing page of your public website. The advantage of this method is that it will minimise the resources you need to publish each issue of the newsletter. The limitation is this: although you can count the number of people who have shown interest in that subject, detailed tracking of what they do next on your website can be hard to trace. Their responses can get lost among the general traffic through your website and the value for lead generation may be limited.

Another method is to create a new web page for the full text of each article. This approach will require more resources to publish the newsletter, but offers better traceability for any lead generation articles.

An alternative is to lead your readers to web pages with the full text of the article – and then to immediately follow-up with links to the microsites that you have developed for each of the stages of the sales funnel or the customer lifecycle.

MEASURING RESULTS FROM NEWSLETTERS

When deciding whether to invest time and effort in setting up an emarketing newsletter, its important to have realistic expectations of the results that are likely. In B2B emarketing newsletters, the criteria for measuring the success of a newsletter are the proportion of active readers (% of unique readers who click on any article in a newsletter) and the intensity of readership (how many article links the average reader clicks on).

The typical responses from B2B eMarketing newsletters look like this:

- 8% to 12% of unique readers click on one or more article links
- the average active reader clicks on 2 to 4 article links

Newsletter name:	**Customer Focus**	
Issue:	**March**	
	Number	**%**
• eMails sent:	2,350	103%
• Bounced:	69	3%
• E-Mail successfully delivered:	2,281	100%
• Count of article click-throughs:	539	
• Count of unique active readers:	213	9%
• Average articles per active reader:	2.6	

A typical newsletter report measure two key indicators of success: the number of unique active readers (expressed as a percentage of newsletters successfully delivered); and the average number of articles read per active reader (the total number of article click-throughs divided by the number of unique active readers). Note that by using “successfully delivered newsletters” as the 100% baseline, we improve the reliability of the active reader indicator. The lower the bounce rate (%), the better the quality of the subscription list.

An active readership rate of eight to twelve percent may not sound very high. In fact, you may even find yourself asking if a newsletter is worth the effort. However, these active readers of your newsletter are small but vitally important minority. These active readers identify the organisations that are actively searching for information about solutions to business issues at this particular point in time. Following up on their interest is an excellent way to keep the sales funnel filled with leads at different stages of qualification.

“Effective newsletter articles don’t tell the story, they sell the story.”

Integration between the emarketing database and the CRM system not only ensures that this interest is captured, but is available for actual use. The follow-up to a newsletter article might, for example, be a promotional emailing where the target group is defined as “active readers who have demonstrated their interest by clicking on an article link about this product”.

Bear in mind also, that the identity of your active readers will shift over time. This is as it should be: new contacts will start at the acquisition stage of the customer lifecycle (where they are searching for information about a solution to their specific business issue). Although they will initially learn about the features functions and benefits of your solution online, they will later move through the sales funnel to the stage where they need face to face contact with the sales team. Similarly, existing customers, who are satisfied and inactive readers today can quite easily become prospects for repeat sales offers (such as cross-sell and up-sell) in three or six months time.

Only by maintaining regular contact with all the contacts in your customer base can you maintain your corporate and brand presence. In this context, the eMarketing newsletter is not only a cost effective method of communication, it also ensures that you can identify the changing pattern of response as it occurs.

Over the long term, you will also be able to identify the small hard core of background enthusiasts who are the product champions at your customer sites – the loyal contacts who are active readers of every issue. These are the people who know your products as well as your own engineers and whose opinions can be tapped when testing new products.

RELEVANCE INCREASES BRAND LOYALTY AND REVENUE

This brings us full circle; back to the idea of optimising newsletter content that we introduced at the beginning of this section. At any given point in time, our newsletter audience is composed of readers who are each at a different stage of the buying cycle. The most effective way to meet their needs and interests, is to offer a selection of news items, each of which is focused on a specific stage of the sales cycle: first purchase, repeat sales of consumables, cross-sell and up-sell, the declining relationship, and so on.

Regular contact will enable us to maintain our presence and demonstrate a commitment to an ongoing dialogue with our customers. But to generate loyalty to the brand, we have to go one step further: the content must be relevant to the needs and interests of the individual. Advanced emarketing techniques, such as customised content, not only enable us to deliver specific messages to selected groups; they also enable us to omit the messages that are irrelevant. By improving the relevance of our communications we actively demonstrate that we are a supplier who can listen and respond effectively. This is the type of behaviour which generates greater loyalty – and leads to increased trust and higher spend.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

As online marketing consultant to leading B2B organisations in the UK and Europe Andrew Sanderson says that the most exciting challenge is "making the sales curve go up".

In consulting projects, he provides both strategic guidance and operational tactics for sales issues such as: new customer acquisition, cross-selling, up-selling, and customer retention. When addressing these issues, he advises on external communications strategy and IT infrastructure, as well as offering pragmatic guidance on internal business and management processes.

Mr. Sanderson's insights into effective online marketing techniques have been acknowledged with 'Best Paper' awards from peers at European conferences. These insights result from his breadth of experience in "B2B marketing with both words and numbers". His career in B2B marketing includes hands-on knowledge of: econometrics and market research, marketing campaign strategy, public relations, customer communications, executive information systems, data mining, management reporting and marketing process design.

Born in England in 1958, Mr. Sanderson moved to Heidelberg, Germany in 1989.

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