

Making Marketing Automation Work



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Every successful demand generation strategy integrates [marketing automation](#) at some point in the buyer's process. And while implementing marketing automation is rarely the first step—nor should it be—it *is* an integral one that should receive a lot of time, attention and strategic planning.

The use of marketing automation has been difficult to quantify for many organizations, according to [ANNUITAS' 2015 study](#) of B2B enterprise demand generation marketers. The majority of organizations surveyed (65%) report being somewhat effective in their use of automation. This is positive indication for the industry and for B2B organizations, but only 20% report being very effective while 15% say marketing automation hasn't delivered the expected ROI. This indicates that despite increased investment in marketing technology, many marketers are still struggling with determining how to best manage these systems.

How can more companies improve their results? Unfortunately, there simply isn't a cookie-cutter solution when it comes to marketing automation, because no two companies are alike and no two demand generation strategies should be alike, either. That's why it's important to take the time needed to develop a strategy that meets *your* needs and *your* goals. And then choose a marketing automation platform (MAP) that supports the

realistic results you hope to achieve. For example, marketing automation platform HubSpot and MailChimp are some of the most popular software used by businesses today.

What are your options?

Knowing what you want from your demand generation strategy will help you to plan for the road ahead. Think about building a house; you're going to want to start with a solid foundation. That same mentality applies to your marketing automation implementation and overall demand generation strategy. Before beginning any sort of implementation, ask yourself these questions:

- Will you sync all leads over to your CRM or wait until they have reached a desired lead qualification stage?
- Will other systems be integrated into your marketing automation platform, like a webinar or data enrichment vendor?
- How will you handle contacts that come into your demand generation program that do not fit your ideal buyer persona?

The answers to these questions will help dictate what you're looking for in an MAP and guide you in building a solid foundation.

Where do you start?

All good demand generation strategies start with your buyers, not with technology (including marketing automation). To get the best result for your business, it's important to align your content strategy with your buyers' journey. This means understanding your buyers' purchasing process, developing the content for each stage of their buying journey and establishing a qualification model that aligns to their buying process.

The most common way to do this is to implement marketing

automation in the “nurture” phase of the buyer’s journey. Nurture content continues the dialogue with buyers. It should still be about them and their pain points, but at this stage, you should use some branding. Show how your company can solve their business challenges by pointing to a particular branded solution from your company, thus building trust and interest. And according to our research, nurtured leads make 47% larger purchases than non-nurtured leads.

How does marketing automation fit in this strategy?

Two ways that marketing automation can be integrated into your nurturing content are through drip and blast strategies.

- *Blast campaigns:* Businesses can schedule email blasts featuring nurture content to automatically deploy to targeted parties
- *Drip campaigns:* A series of emails that get sent based only on time. This method is designed to keep your business on the minds of potential buyers

These strategies build relationships, which in turn, build revenue. If you’re deploying your marketing automation strategy toward existing customers, nurturing content should be used to create brand advocates.

Once you implement your marketing automation strategy, be sure to document the processes and decisions along the way. If a change needs to be made six weeks or six months down the road, you’ll have a clear understanding of the impact and what may be affected.

Finally, pay attention to measurement and key performance indicators. The increased use of technology in demand generation strategy allows marketers to tie performance to revenue more effectively than ever. Even so, our research indicates that marketers still focus on KPIs related to lead volume and traffic rather than revenue and pipeline. To really measure the success of your demand generation program, track

content effectiveness and conversions throughout the buyer's journey.

***About the Author:** Sarah Shelnut-Rossborough is Director of Strategy at [ANNUITAS](#), a Demand Generation Strategy and Change Management firm that helps enterprises transform their sales and leads and drive revenue. With more than 10 years of industry experience, Shelnut-Rossborough is both Marketo and Hubspot Inbound Marketing certified, is a Marketo Champion, and has been named one of the top US Influencers and Brands in B2B Marketing by Onalytica. Additional honors and awards include: winner of a Marketo Revvie Award in the "Hot Rod" Category for dramatic career growth; winner of a 2014 Killer Content Award for Web Content Strategy; nominee for the 2014 Sales Lead Management Association's "20 Women to Watch" List; finalist for 2014 Best Marketing Campaign of the Year at the Technology Association of Georgia's (TAG) Marketing Awards; and a TAG Excalibur Award Finalist in 2014. She can be contacted via Twitter @SarahShelnut.*