



Don't get me started on...

Contact nurturing

Marketing: "We've done so much for you, delivered so many leads, why haven't you done anything with them? "

Sales: "All those leads are just tyre kickers, if I'm going to reach my target I've got to speak to buyers."



Marketing: "We've spoken to them, they're just the right sort of people for us and they're asking for more information"

Sales: "Well, they aren't going to buy anything yet so I can't waste any time on them, they're not leads as far as I'm concerned"

How often have you heard this conversation or one like it? Marketing and Sales enjoying some "cognitive dissonance"?

They can both be right, often contacts are interested but they're just not ready to buy right now, they could be in a few months time.

So what happens? They end up in the bin, the round file. Marketing effort is wasted, Sales have to scabble around to make the numbers. There is a better way...

The "Keep Warm" Queue

Smart companies recognise that there can be a time lag between a lead surfacing and the moment when it's appropriate for a salesman to get in touch. They put in place a process that sits between sales and marketing to trap what that otherwise would go to waste. They systematically develop interest and keep their name in the mind of the prospect so that when the time to buy comes they're on the list, hopefully near the top.

Permission, and the responsibilities that go with it

You're in a privileged position if someone has said they don't mind you keeping in contact. They've said it's ok to send e-mails and the occasional call so don't over do it or you'll regret it. The line between informing and annoying is a very fine one. Best practise when it comes to e-mail etiquette is a must not a luxury.

Content that keeps them coming back for more

Telling them all about your wonderful company and the new features you've added to your product may make you feel good but it's more likely to cause the recipient to reach for the junk button. Put yourself in their world, think what would they like to see, what would be of value to them? It's more likely to be new ideas, success stories or industry comment. Keep it light, keep it brief, you want them to tempt them into a conversation not overwhelm them.

Make it easy to say "yes"

Some sort of response, any response, shows interest. Split the content between your mailer and a landing site, so the e-mail can be read in the preview pane and you know if they've read your content. Make an offer, make it simple to accept; with today's technology your landing page should know who the visitor is, they should only have to click a button to accept, not fill in contact details.

Develop a conversation in easy stages

Tyre kickers are researching the market, they want to find out about what's out there; they may know very little about you. At this point the last thing they want to do is to be talked at by a sales person; to turn them into buyers you need to explain what you do, why you're great (for them). Wait patiently, tempt them into a call by telling them enough to gain interest, enough to want to call but not so much that they don't need to call.

It's a great idea, I'll get sales on to it...

Sales should own many of the contacts that need nurturing but what happens when a major deal comes along if they're doing it? Closing a big deal is a full time job, that's why they often go from feast to famine. Contact nurturing is a simple process, but it has to be done well; it doesn't really matter where it fits, sales operations, marketing anywhere, but don't leave it to sales alone!

Practising what we preach...

We think contact nurturing is a fundamental part of the sales pipeline and the bridge between marketing and sales.

We do it ourselves with the "Adara Update" and make it part of our business development plans for our clients

"Good" to us, has:

- A well thought through communications strategy with really interesting content, not just ad-hoc news items
- Mailers that are brief, don't look mass-produced, go to an interesting landing site and can be responded to with a single mouse click
- Telemarketing follow up is usually by the same caller perhaps a couple of days a week, so they build up relationships and background knowledge.
- Enough quality "active contacts" in the pot to feed sales (taking into account the sales cycle and time spent tyre kicking)

It may not be easy but it can (and should) be done...