

How to Grow Your Sales Pipeline

- The B2B Marketer's Guide to Content to Power Your Lead Gen Campaign



www.leadmarvels.com

> Introduction

AI-based marketing technology . . . Interactive content . . . Augmented reality ads . . . 360-degree videos. B2B marketers are subjected to a lot of buzz about the latest martech developments showing promise for some hyper-funded startup you've likely never heard of. And to be sure, the exploration of emerging digital marketing tactics is an exciting part of being a marketing professional.

But as marketing methods continue to push the virtual reality envelope, one thing does not change for B2B marketers – the need for new customers. Marketers report that generating more leads continues to be the very top priority for their company this year.¹ Indeed, a steady stream of fresh, intent-based leads that match your “ideal customer profile” flowing through your marketing pipeline is the life blood of any successful B2B company.

Accordingly, B2B marketers allocate a significant amount of time and resources for lead generation activities. They build, lease, or purchase lists of prospects to make sure they're targeting the right customers for their business. They create and optimize digital landing pages, often executing extensive a/b tests to maximize conversion rates. They'll meet with and vet lead gen providers to identify the ideal partner for their business. Countless meetings are held to discuss topics like how the marketing team will rank and nurture leads, how and when leads will be passed from marketing to sales, the trigger point for when an MQL becomes and SQL, etc.

Too often, however, marketers neglect one of the most significant and fundamental ingredients of an effective lead gen campaign – content. When the content you're using to fuel your campaign is treated as an afterthought, you place your lead gen investment in jeopardy.

> The mousetrap is only as good as the bait you use.

Content that attracts and engages a prospective customer is the heart of a successful lead gen campaign. As a marketer, you have to offer value to receive value. When you create content that appeals to potential buyers, 76 percent are willing to register and share their personal information with you.² You can perform as many a/b tests as you want to, but if your content stinks, your lead gen campaign is likely doomed.

Put simply, valuable content attracts valuable leads.

> The 3 benefits of high-quality content

It's important to remember that the audience target for B2B lead gen programs is never another company; it's the people within that company. That's because companies don't make purchase decisions; people do. When you use content to target the right kind of buyers and educate them about your solutions, you will reap the benefits in three ways:

> 1. More Leads

According to some estimates there are more than 4.6 billion pieces of content published on the web daily. And on average, each of us are exposed to 6-10k marketing messages during our waking hours.³

How do you ensure that your content rises above the noise? Quality. Attention is a currency. And good content earns attention.

When you offer prospective customers high-quality content that appeals to their informational needs and

interests, you will attract more leads and increase the ROI of your lead gen investment.

➤ 2. Higher Quality Leads

Valuable educational content helps buyers educate themselves about the scope of a particular challenge they're facing and offers them insight into the range of solutions available to them. According to Forrester, 74 percent of business buyers conduct more than half of their research online before making an offline purchase.⁴ If your prospective customer is using your content as part of their educational process, that puts your brand in an incredibly advantageous position.

And the more educated a prospect is, the further along they are on their buyer's journey, resulting in more qualified leads for you when you contact them. In other words, good content will lead to higher conversion rates. And, ultimately, you will measure the success of your lead gen campaign, not by the number of leads it generates, but by the number of those leads you are able to convert into customers.

➤ 3. Build Trust

Your content will influence your prospects' first impression of you. Strong content earns trust among prospective buyers. Nearly nine out of 10 B2B decision makers say that thought leadership content positively influences their perception of an organization. And the majority of B2B buyers say that thought leadership is a more reliable way to assess a company's trustworthiness than its product guides and marketing materials.⁵

Prospects will attribute the quality and usefulness of your content to their perception of your brand. Good content builds trust and authority among potential

Content builds relationships. Relationships are built on trust. Trust drives revenue."

— **Andrew David**

Marketing expert, keynote speaker and author

buyers and showcases your company's expertise, leading to more favorable engagements for your sales team.

It's simple really – good content positions your brand as a reliable solution provider for your prospective customers' challenges. Bad content, on the other hand, will ensure that a prospect never returns a call or an email from your sales team, which will undermine not just your campaign's ROI, but the morale of your sales staff.

➤ The 7 ½ commandments for creating effective lead gen content

Content is a great tool for building brand awareness. Heck, it might be the greatest tool in your marketing arsenal for doing so. But an effective content marketing strategy is, at its core, a sales strategy. Companies who are the most successful at content marketing – and we're defining "success" here as bottom-line impact – are significantly more likely than the least successful marketers to use their

content marketing for activities deeper into the sales funnel than awareness – activities like lead gen and lead nurturing.⁶

If you are able to create great content to support your lead gen campaign, the reward will be significant. According to Gartner, customers who find the information your company creates to be helpful in doing their job are 2.8 times more likely to experience a high degree of purchase ease and three times more likely to buy a bigger deal from your company with less regret.⁷

If you want to create the kind of content that will propel you to lead gen success, follow these seven(ish) commandments:

➤ **Commandment 1:** **Know thy audience**

The first commandment for creating content that attracts and engages is to understand the informational needs and aspirations of your target prospects. Every individual in every profession is struggling on some level with a challenge. Figure out what that challenge is, show how you can help solve it through your content, and win a customer.

Every individual in every profession is also aspiring to reach a new level of success, both individual success within their profession as well as success for their company. Once you know what your customers' goals are, create content that appeals to their aspirations and instructs them how to attain them.

The key to creating great lead gen content is to find out what these challenges and aspirations are and then offer educational content to help your prospective customers overcome that challenge to reach the next level of success – as they would define



7 ways to burn a lead

If you are using the wrong kind of content asset to support your lead gen program, you're flushing your marketing dollars down the proverbial toilet. If quality leads are vital to your business's growth, don't be caught guilty of these seven marketing sins.

- 1 Snooze-inducing content** – Dull, uninspired content is a highly effective way to kill your prospect's interest in your company and its solutions. Bore your reader, and it's hasta la vista to a potential customer.
- 2 Stale content** – Instead of weary, worn-out content you've repurposed 100 times (or even half a dozen), give your prospects fresh, energetic content that will inspire them and motivate action.
- 3 Self-promotional content** – Your prospects don't want to share their contact information with you just to be exposed to a commercial about how great your company is.
- 4 Lack of expertise** – Deep, thoughtful content targeted to your prospect's interests always wins over superficial, general information that lacks subject-matter expertise. Your prospective customers are experts in their field. Demonstrate expertise in yours.
- 5 Clickbait** – A catchy headline may inspire downloads, but if the content does not deliver on the headline's promise, your prospects will walk.
- 6 Writing for robots** – SEO-optimized content is fine as long you prioritize your human audience above the sacred algorithm.
- 7 Cheap content** – Content creation is not an area where you want to cut costs. Your prospects can smell low-quality content a mile away. Want to be perceived as the expert in your field? Then invest more in your content than your competitors do.

it. This is an important point. Your content needs to meet your prospective customer at their point of need in order to fully engage them.

➤ **Commandment 2:** **Align the topic**

Your customers have goals and aspirations. Your company sells solutions. The overlap between these two areas is the target-rich zone for your content programming.

Think in terms of a Boolean diagram. You can create great content that helps your customers solve challenges but that has nothing to do with the solutions and services your company offers. Conversely, you can create great content about a

service area within your company but has little to do with a customer segment you may be targeting. In both scenarios, you're wasting your resources and will not move the revenue needle, not even a twitch.

The topics you focus on in your content should fall into that area of overlap between your customers' needs and your solution set. This is the area where you will find the themes for your content. Focus on them relentlessly, and be very disciplined about it.

➤ **Commandment 3:** **Harness your superpower**

Your company's superpower is knowledge. It took knowledge to create the products and services your company offers. It takes knowledge to run your



Not all leads are equal

When determining how much to invest in your content development, it's essential to remember that most of your customers' buyer's journey takes place online before your sales team ever communicates with them.

Put bad content in front of an otherwise good lead . . . well, don't expect a return call. Good content, on the other hand, nurtures your leads, influences their perception of your brand, and educates them about your solutions, making them more predisposed to a favorable purchase decision.

In other words, the quality of your content will heavily influence your conversion rates. You've already decided to invest in a lead gen program. Successful B2B marketers understand that poor content can undermine the integrity of your lead gen investment. Invest accordingly.



company on a day-to-day basis. Your salespeople are on the phones every day speaking to prospective customers, getting hung up on, hearing objections, and, when things are going well, closing deals.

When creating content for your lead gen campaigns, find ways to tap into the collective institutional knowledge of your organization and distill that knowledge into the words and virtual pages of your content. Interview your own salespeople. Find out what prospective customers are saying, the concerns they're expressing, the reasons they buy, the reasons they don't. Use this information to guide the direction of your content. Quote your executives within your content to position them as thought leaders. It lends credibility to your content, your brand, and your solutions.

Another way to gather knowledge is through a formal research process. Some content agencies offer research capabilities that you can leverage to create research reports. And research is the gift that keeps on giving. Reports, ebooks, long-form content, blogs, social posts, infographics – the possibilities for how to leverage research-based content are limitless.

Plus, an added benefit of research is that it supercharges your organization's industry cred. Imagine the industry authority you'd establish by publishing "Your Brand's 3rd Annual Report on [insert topic] Trends." Competitors can step off!

➤ **Commandment 4:** **Be a thought leader**

Be a thought leader. Sounds easy, right? It's not. That's why there are so few thought leaders, even though everyone wants to be one. A lot of self-proclaimed thought leaders talk a lot. And when they're talking, they tend to talk a lot about



6 effective content formats for B2B lead gen campaigns

The content for your lead gen campaign must be perceived as valuable enough by your prospects that they're willing to provide their contact information by filling out a registration form to access it. Here are six different content formats to put behind your landing page:

1

White paper – A B2B lead gen staple, a white paper is an in-depth report about a complex topic or issue customers and prospects are struggling with, offering the issuing company's solution to the problem.

2

E-book – Typically more design intensive, e-books offer a more interactive educational overview of a topic that is usually broader in scope.

3

Guide – An educational guide instructs customers and prospects how to address a specific problem and positions the issuing company as an expert.

4

Research report – Original research conducted on topics important to your prospective customers can be a highly effective way to create demand, while making your brand look like a champ in the process.

5

Checklist or cheat sheet – Shorter in nature, checklists and cheat sheets offer streamlined insights for prospects on how to accomplish short tasks. Make them useful, and your prospects will return to them again and again.

6

Kits – A kit typically involves multiple content pieces (e.g., a guide, a checklist, and an infographic), all sharing a unifying theme that is typically "how to" in nature.

themselves. Generally, this is not a great recipe for thought leadership.

Genuine thought leaders have one thing in common – influence. Thought leaders, whether individuals or brands (yes, brands can be thought leaders, too) are influential. Their words shape direction and invoke change. Thought leaders are persuasive, and thought leadership content will favorably influence your buyers' purchase decisions.

But how do you gain influence? First, and perhaps most importantly, you remember that it's not about you. Stephen Covey's fifth habit applies here: "Seek first to understand, then to be understood."⁸ That is the path to influence and, ultimately, thought leadership.

This applies to your content development. Influential content – thought leadership content – focuses more on your audience of prospective buyers than it does on you and your brand. Focus your content on your customers' needs and concerns. The reward for doing so is not hypothetical.

B2B decision makers report that they award business to organizations that are effective at creating thought-leadership content. They increase the amount of business they will do with an organization, and they will purchase new products and services from organizations that they had not previously considered buying from – all because of influential, thought-leadership content.⁹

➤ **Commandment 5:** **Quality above all else**

If you are in a digital marketing arms race with a competitor, there's only one thing to do – Win! But how do you get an advantage over the competition? Easy. All things being equal, high-quality content

always wins the day. The reason for this is because your audience will develop their perceptions of your brand through your content. High quality content creates favorable perceptions. Favorable perceptions influence purchase decisions.

But remember, quality content is not just about grammatical coherence and error-free copy. Yes, your content needs to be polished and professional, both in terms of the copy and the design presentation. But high-quality content is high-demand content. It's content that your prospective customers need. That's what drives lead gen success.

➤ **Commandment 6:** **Hire an expert**

Do you have a talented, professional-level writer on your staff who is an expert on the audience you're targeting? Most small and mid-size B2B companies do not. For that matter, most large companies do not. If you don't, then don't fall into the trap of trying to create content internally. The internet is cluttered with content that companies attempted to create on their own. Like space junk orbiting the planet, this content does nothing. It just hovers around our virtual world accomplishing nothing, engaging no one, cluttering the atmosphere.

Content for a lead gen campaign must target the psyche of your audience. It must speak to their professional challenges. It must awaken their aspirations and motivate them to act. And it must be of a level of quality that impresses an audience and builds their trust in your brand.

To accomplish all of that, in most cases, you need to hire a professional content creator or agency with subject matter expertise in your industry. (*Refer to page 8.*)

Continues on page 9



Freelance writer vs. content agency



When thinking about outsourcing your content – and to be frank, you should think about outsourcing your content – you have the option to go with a freelance writer or an agency. It's fine to hire a writer for a quick job with fully defined parameters but, generally, a reputable content agency offers several advantages that individual freelance writers do not.



Agencies are talent managers.

Agencies that specialize in B2B content marketing have established networks of writers who have been vetted for both their writing chops and their subject matter expertise. For B2B content development, it's not enough to have just one or the other. You need both.

If the agency does not have a writer in your industry, that's usually fine because they have an established process for quickly recruiting, vetting, and onboarding writers. Be wary of agencies assigning generalists to your project. In fact, run in the opposite direction. The result may look professional, but your prospects are experts in their respective fields and will not be fooled.



Agencies are orchestra conductors.

Freelance writers are focused on task completion. That's not a bad thing. But when you outsource your content needs you want to make sure you're working with someone who understands how a specific project aligns with and supports your overarching marketing strategy.

A good agency will keep all of the individual aspects of your marketing strategy in alignment and pointed to your overall marketing objectives.



Agencies are business partners.

A good agency is an advocate for your business. An agency should take the time to understand your business and what you're trying to accomplish. Even if you're simply hiring an

agency to create a single white paper on your behalf, an agency should take the time to understand how it will fit within your overall digital marketing strategy.

Beyond simple content creation, agencies should serve as collaborators and advisors, offering you strategic guidance when needed.



Agencies are air-traffic controllers.

Agencies know how to work with creatives, and they know how to bring a project with multiple moving parts to fruition. They wouldn't be in business otherwise. Do you and your staff have the time and expertise to develop content briefs, manage one or more writers, review and offer insightful feedback on multiple drafts at each stage of the creative process, coordinate the design aspect of the program, and make sure the project supports your big-picture marketing strategy – all while keeping the project on a strict timeline to meet a deadline? Probably not.

An agency should have excellent editorial management skills. For the benefit of your employee attrition rates, it's a good idea not to inflict these tasks on your already hard working staff by asking them to manage independent freelance writers.



Agencies are explorers.

Agencies tend to sail in a lot of different waters, meaning they usually have multiple clients in multiple industries. As a result, they can bring fresh ideas to the table based on what they've seen work in other industries. You and your staff are likely to be laser focused on your specific business niche, and rightfully so. Agencies bring a broad perspective to the table that you can leverage for your strategic brainstorming sessions.

Continued from page 7

➤ **Commandment 7:** **Create an experience**

When creating a content asset that you can tuck behind a registration wall for your lead gen campaign, it's tempting to take a one-and-done approach. But your gated content asset is merely the lead actor. It needs a supporting cast. That cast should include the other content pieces that will funnel prospects toward the main piece, such as an article or blog series that offers readers a smaller sample of and teases the downloadable content. You should create a series of social posts that do the same thing.

And what kind of content are you going to use to nurture your leads after they've downloaded the main asset. When someone registers to download your content, that's the beginning of your content-mediated relationship with them, not the end of it. And you need content to nurture that relationship because you need to . . .

➤ **Keep going!** **(Commandment 7 ½)**

Forget one and done. Lead gen is not a linear process. Yes, you might get a lead who fills out a form on your website to download your white paper, but is that lead ready to take your phone call and make a purchase? In most cases, no.

One of the greatest distinctions between companies that identify themselves as successful in their content marketing versus those who are the least successful has to do with how they treat their leads. Successful content marketers are nearly twice as likely to nurture their leads with content.¹⁰



Expert tip: **The Quality Litmus Test**

If you were in your prospective customer's shoes, would you share your content with your boss?

If the answer is no, your content is not ready for prime time. Do not pass Go. You will not convert your leads.



A form submission is the midpoint in your lead gen campaign, not the end of it. Continue to nurture your leads with a steady stream of content-based touch points to influence your customers' buyer's journey. Target your content's subject matter to the specific stage of the decision-making process your prospective customer is in, building a closer relationship with them as they move through each stage.

➤ **Final thought:** **Content is (still) king in B2B digital marketing**

When planning your lead gen campaign, your content should not be an afterthought. It should be a primary consideration. The quality of your content will, to a great extent, determine the success of your lead gen strategy. Lead gen is not about form submissions. It's about building relationships. And your prospects will come to know your brand and build a relationship with it (or not!) through your content.

Ultimately, the mouse trap is only as good as the bait.

> About Lead Marvels

Lead Marvels is a lead generation and content syndication company serving associations, publishers, and B2B marketers. We offer customized, scalable solutions for our customers to help them build a pipeline of new, qualified leads to increase their customer base and grow revenue. Our unique funnel-based platforms, fully managed by our team of experienced demand gen experts, are built using proprietary technology that makes our system completely turnkey for our customers.

We partner with associations and publishers to provide incremental, non-dues revenue streams. And, for B2B marketers, our solutions amplify their voices among

targeted audiences by syndicating thought leadership content to generate and nurture high-quality, intent-based leads.

Our founders have been in the lead generation business for over two decades, generating an estimated 2,000,000 leads to accelerate the growth of some of the largest, most successful brands in the country.

If you need content created to support your lead gen program, Lead Marvels can manage that for you as well.

For more information or to request a free demo, visit www.LeadMarvels.com and follow [#LeadGenMadeEasy](https://twitter.com/LeadGenMadeEasy).

> References

1. Hubspot, "Not Another State of Marketing Report," <https://www.hubspot.com/hubfs/State-of-Marketing-V2.pdf>
2. Intercom, "The top marketing statistics for 2018 and why they matter," <https://www.intercom.com/blog/the-top-2018-marketing-statistics-and-why-they-matter/>
3. LinkedIn, "Attention is a currency," <https://business.linkedin.com/content/dam/me/business/en-us/marketing-solutions/cx/2016/pdfs/gapingvoid-attention-is-a-currency.pdf>
4. Forrester, "Myth Busting 101: Insights into the B2B Buyer Journey," https://go.forrester.com/blogs/15-05-25-myth_busting_101_insights_into_the_b2b_buyer_journey/
5. Edelman, "2020 B2B Thought Leadership Impact Study," <https://www.edelman.com/research/2020-b2b-thought-leadership-impact-study>
6. Content Marketing Institute, "11th Annual B2B Content Marketing Benchmarks, Budgets and Trends," <https://contentmarketinginstitute.com/2020/09/b2b-industry-benchmarks-budgets-trends-research/>
7. Gartner, "The Future of the B2B Buying Journey," <https://www.gartner.com/en/sales/insights/b2b-buying-journey>
8. Franklin Covey, "The Fifth Habit," <https://www.franklincovey.com/habit-5/>
9. Edelman, "2020 B2B Thought Leadership Impact Study," <https://www.edelman.com/research/2020-b2b-thought-leadership-impact-study>
10. Content Marketing Institute, "11th Annual B2B Content Marketing Benchmarks, Budgets and Trends," <https://contentmarketinginstitute.com/2020/09/b2b-industry-benchmarks-budgets-trends-research/>



Contact Us

928 Main Street, Suite 4-245
Fishkill, NY 12524
(877) 827-5638

www.leadmarvels.com