B2B Marketers Focus On Content And Cadence To Boost Later-Stage **Lead Nurturing**

Over the past several years, B2B marketers have been expanding the role of lead nurturing as a key element of their marketing initiatives. In *Demand Gen Report's* 2014 **_Lead Nurturing Benchmarking Study_**, 71% of respondents reported that they are using lead nurturing as part of their demand generation activities, and another 19% plan to within the next 12 months.

A sizeable number of B2B marketers are new to lead nurturing, with 40% of respondents to the DGR survey noting that they have been doing lead nurturing for less than a year. "While most marketers understand the value of lead nurturing, it is often the component of lead management that takes the longest to implement," said Missy Heilman, Senior Strategy Consultant at **BlueBird Strategies**, a marketing consulting firm. "The reason being that great care is required to develop effective nurture strategies."

While lead nurturing programs have traditionally focused on generating leads at the top of the funnel, progressive B2B marketers are developing lead nurturing strategies to drive demand in the later stages of the buyer's journey.

"We're starting to see more lead generation efforts being focused on the later stages of the funnel," said Aaron Bolshaw, Group Manager of Database Marketing at **Act-On Software**. "For us, the focus is very much on that bottom stack — that bottom part of the funnel where marketing can help generate as much revenue, and conversions, as we can."

The interest in later-stage demand generation is being driven by marketing's increased accountability for lead performance throughout the buying cycle.

"With more and more B2B marketers being held accountable for, and incentivized against, pipeline contribution, they cannot afford for leads to fall out of the funnel without attempting to recycle that demand," said Jason Hekl, VP and Group Director, Demand, for **SiriusDecisions**. "Later-stage nurture strategies are essential to maximizing waterfall or funnel throughput."

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LATE-STAGE CONTENT SHOULD SUPPORT THE DECISION

One of the challenges that marketers face is developing the right content to draw prospects through the funnel. In the *Lead Nurturing Benchmarking Study*, two thirds (66%) of the B2B marketers surveyed pointed to developing content for all stages of the buying cycle, making content the most-cited hurdle to effective lead nurturing.

Understanding the buyers that are involved in the process is critical to developing effective lead nurturing content, according to Cari Baldwin, Founder and President at Bluebird Strategies. "Marketers need to understand at what point buyers are involved in the process and what types of pain that they're experiencing. Then they will be able to create content pieces that will better resonate for buyers based on where they are in the journey."

Because sales teams can be wary of marketing's involvement later in the sales cycle, there needs to be alignment with marketing about the content being shared with prospects at this stage.

"With upfront coordination with sales, marketers should pivot the content toward customer testimonials, relevant use-cases and ROI, versus the typical top-of-funnel educational content," said Jon Russo, Founder of the **B2B Fusion Group**, a demand generation consulting firm. "The content should be specific to the member of the buying committee — executive content should be much different from that of the user content, and here is where specificity counts most."

At the middle stage of the funnel, the content should be supporting the decision-making process. "At this stage in the game, they've raised their hand, so it is not a matter of educating them on the topic," said Justin Gray, CEO of **LeadMD**, a marketing consultancy. "This is the time to be sharing buyer preparation content, such as product comparisons that put your product against competitors, worksheets and checklists for migration, and calculators."

Calculators are particularly effective for lead nurturing at this stage, according to Bolshaw. "We've got to be able to express the ROI to prospects at this stage."

Buyers evaluate later-stage nurture content by how well it answers the questions they need resolved before moving forward in the buying process, according to Hekl. "So it's less about which content assets convert at a higher rate, and more about how well the content helps buyers navigate inflection points in their evaluation process. Success is measured by progress in the waterfall, versus asset-specific response metrics."

Look beyond the asset types and review the overall messaging to ensure that your lead nurturing approach is appropriate to the buying stage, Baldwin noted. "It's really the bigger picture of understanding the messaging, the different personas, what their needs are, and then creating conversation tracks around that."

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FINDING THE RIGHT CADENCE AND CHANNELS

Nearly half (45%) of respondents to the *Lead Nurturing Benchmark Study* cited developing the right timing and workflows as a challenge they face when putting together a lead nurturing strategy.

Contact with buyers at the later stages of the decision-making process is often less frequent than lead nurturing at the early stages of engagement.

Cadence should be determined by buyer interest, which should be monitored closely so the deal doesn't slip away, according to David Raab, Principal of marketing consultancy **Raab Associates**. "Many buying processes are 'bursty' in the sense of moving in quick steps separated by periods of inactivity. So when someone is actually moving, you need to react quickly."

While a weekly email might work at the top of the funnel, the timing may become a little less frequent at the later stages, according to Bolshaw. "While we try to do campaigns weekly at the top of the funnel, we may slow down the cadence a little bit in the middle of the funnel depending on any buyer behaviors we've observed."
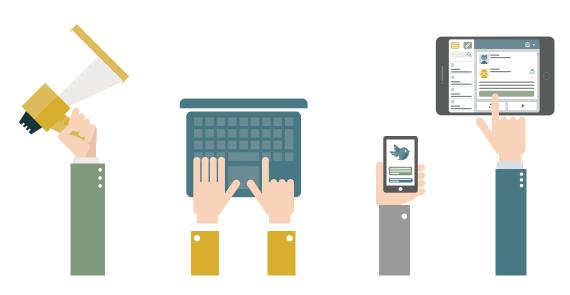
Although email is the primary channel for later-stage lead nurturing, social can play a role, too, observers noted.

"We don't see email going away anytime soon, but there is no arguing that other communication channels and engagement mechanisms have emerged, including social," Hekl noted. "The real challenge for marketers is to leverage the intelligence they have on their prospects to provide a consistent experience across those channels, in a manner that satisfies the organization's nurture goals and the expectations of prospects."

The key is to have a consistency of messaging regardless of channel. "Email may trigger a prospect to visit your web site or an industry site, or search social channels by a relevant hashtag, or perhaps even engage via a web-based chat session," Hekl said.

While social is still used more prevalently for top-of-funnel engagement, social can have a role in later-stage lead nurturing. "It's a very good way of understanding the buyer's current level of engagement and speed of movement," Raab said. "You can certainly also send some messages via social, but that must be done carefully to avoid appearing to stalk them. But social is great for user recommendations, etc., so at a minimum you want to make sure those are available on your social channels — such as your LinkedIn home page."

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> **-DAVID RAAB, RAAB ASSOCIATES**

HOW LEGO EDUCATION BUILT A SOLID MARKETING AUTOMATION STRATEGY

LEGO Education North America is part of The LEGO Group, the world's third-largest manufacturer of play materials. With more than 10,000 employees, this family-owned company based in Denmark provides toys, experiences, and teaching materials for children in over 130 countries around the world. For more than 30 years, LEGO Education North America has been working with teachers and educational specialists to provide solutions and resources that are used in the classroom to bring subjects to life and make learning fun.

Like the creative structures students put together in classrooms every day, LEGO Education North America has continued to grow at a rapid pace. However, their email marketing tools weren't keeping up with their rate of expansion.

GRADUATING FROM MARKETING BASICS

Brandee Johnson, Senior Marketing Manager at LEGO Education North America, recognized the challenge of trying to improve results using only a very basic email solution. "Some of the issues we were facing were scalability," she said. "We didn't have a system that allowed us to really launch scalable marketing campaigns. We were lacking automation, and we didn't have the internal capacity to manually execute all of the email marketing that we wanted to accomplish."

The marketing team at LEGO Education North America searched for a marketing automation solution that could send automated emails, report results, and handle list management. But they quickly discovered that they needed more than that.

A lack of visibility into the sales funnel meant leads would drop into a black hole, and marketing campaigns were one-size-fits-all with no customization.

By implementing Act-On marketing automation, LEGO Education North America has gained visibility into the sales funnel, customized campaigns, and optimized the marketing and sales process.

RESULTS: SEVEN TIMES MORE EMAIL CAMPAIGNS

Using automation and lead scoring, the marketing team is sending seven times as many email campaigns per year, including triggered and drip campaigns.

They've tripled the number of leads in their marketing pipeline, and seen revenue increase for the products promoted in their email campaigns.

"We have reached unprecedented levels of prospects through email marketing campaigns," added Johnson.

FROM BLACK HOLE TO TOTAL VISIBILITY

One of the biggest challenges LEGO Education North America faced was lack of visibility into the sales process. "We never really knew how our touch points were driving leads down our buyer's funnel into our marketing funnel," Johnson said. "What was effectively moving them, and which ones were staying stagnant? It was like a black hole for us." Another challenge was the fact that the marketing team didn't have a way to direct the customer journey based on behaviors or personas.

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>
> **-BRANDEE JOHNSON, LEGO EDUCATION NORTH AMERICA**

Marketing automation helped LEGO Education North America solve these challenges and more. By implementing Act-On Software, they have visibility into the status of leads in the funnel. They can see where leads are, how they're progressing, and also drill in to find out what's working and what's not to progress those leads through the funnel.

"Since the implementation of marketing automation, we have transformed our marketing communication strategy – campaigns are now the central core to our activities," Johnson said. "This has enabled us to more than triple the number of leads in our marketing pipeline."

TARGETED CAMPAIGNS GET RESULTS

Marketing automation also made it possible for the team to direct the customer journey. "With Act-On, we're able to do a variety of different things that speak to our customers and our target audience in a very personalized and customized way. We're running multiple campaigns: Some are trigger campaigns, some are drip campaigns, and some are a combination of both. They allow us to make sure that we're sending the appropriate message to our customers based on their interactions with us," she said.

Before implementing Act-On solutions, the marketing team at LEGO Education North America was able to execute only one or two campaigns a year. This year, they're running 14 different campaigns, and next year they plan to run even more. Each campaign is customized to the individual based on their title, previous behavior and activity, web pages visited, or a combination of all of these variables. As a result, the emails delivered are more relevant – and more effective.

"Now, we're getting more leads, and we're able to nurture those leads in a better and faster way, which then shortens the sales cycle," Johnson added. "We're able to hand over hot leads to our sales team to generate sales more quickly." This level of marketing efficiency has optimized use of their sales force, as well. Rather than calling on cold leads, they're able to prioritize on calling the abundance of nurtured leads they receive from the marketing team.

"We have reached unprecedented levels of prospects through email marketing campaigns," she said. This kind of volume and targeted approach has led to a 29% prospect-to-lead conversion rate. As a result of the two largest email marketing campaigns, LEGO Education North America experienced an increase in revenue for the products directly associated with those campaigns.

ABOUT ACT-ON SOFTWARE

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Act-On Software delivers cloud-based integrated marketing automation software. Marketers can manage all their online marketing efforts from a single dashboard that can be seamlessly integrated with CRM, giving sales access into various marketing functions. Act-On's fresh approach to marketing automation gives its users full functionality without the complexity other systems impose, and makes campaign creation and program execution easier and faster.

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Demand Gen Report is a targeted e-media publication spotlighting the strategies and solutions that help companies better align their sales and marketing organizations, and ultimately drive growth. A key component of the publication's editorial coverage focuses on the sales and marketing automation tools that enable companies to better measure and manage their multichannel demand generation efforts.