

# Driving Revenue in the Channel

## Demand and Lead Generation Playbook

# 65% of businesses describe generating traffic and leads as their biggest marketing challenge

Source: Hubspot

Of course, this is no different in the channel, where we're often asked by vendors, distributors and partners to help grow their pipeline, generate net new business and ultimately increase revenue.

Step-by-step (although the path is rarely straight) this guide will walk you through how to:

- Generate demand by raising awareness of a problem and creating interest in your product or service as a solution.
- Nurture and convert leads by turning initial interest into specific actions and conversations.
- Build loyalty and retain customers, bringing them back to the start of the buyer journey to address another challenge.

Although we'll cover other tactics including paid advertising and SEO, we'll focus for the most part on content marketing.

While face-to-face events are making a welcome return since the Covid-19 pandemic, 93% of B2B companies say their content marketing generates more leads than traditional marketing strategies (Marketo).

Regularly sharing fresh, high-quality content that addresses buyer needs and challenges promotes awareness, engagement, and trust. As a result, they'll be more likely to buy from you. Done properly and in tandem with other tactics, content marketing provides a fantastic return on investment for channel businesses.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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*Heading up the digital and content team at Purechannels, Daren has 25 years industry experience and oversees the lead and demand generation for clients including Carasoft, Proofpoint, AWS, 8x8, Arrow and Dell.*

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# Before you start...

## Understand the buyer journey – from awareness to consideration to decision

There are many different models used by marketers to break down a buyer's journey, but no matter how complicated the process gets - what websites they check, how many options they compare, or who they ask for advice - all prospects will reach the same three milestones:

1. Awareness
2. Consideration
3. Decision

We'll delve into these in more detail below, as well as looking at which types of content and tactics work best at each stage for typical channel audiences.

## Build buyer personas – understand and segment your target market

Before you create any new content, you need to know your ideal customer and that means building a buyer persona, or often multiple buyer personas.

How can you market your product or service if you don't know who will be buying it or why? We sometimes hear, 'all businesses will benefit from our offering', and that may be the case, but not all businesses will be interested in it, not all businesses will have the budget, and not all employees of all businesses will be responsible for solving the problem your offering addresses.

In most organisations, you will be dealing with more than one person. There could be a business decision-maker who holds the purse strings, but an IT decision-maker might be the gatekeeper responsible for recommending and implementing new technology, repeat purchases and renewals.

Buyer personas help you understand the points of view of your ideal customer and create content that's focused on their needs and objectives. The questions we set out below at each of the three stages – Awareness, Consideration, Decision – should help you formulate strong personas.

## Position your business – understand your competitors and your USP

Building on the point around buyer personas, positioning your business and your offering depends on understanding your target market and your competitors. If you think you don't have any competitors, it means there is no market for your product or service, or that the market isn't developed yet.

Competition is inevitable, so you need to be proactive in pinpointing your unique selling proposition (USP) and using

it to guide your marketing and sales strategies. Prospects should quickly be able to see what sets your offering apart. What do you do that your competitors don't or can't?

## Audit your content and be strategic

Before you start creating, list all the existing assets in your content library. What do you already have? What could be repurposed? What's missing? You don't always need to start from scratch. If you've hosted a webinar or podcast, use it as the basis for a series of blog posts or a whitepaper that you can gate access to and promote on your social media channels.

Research the types of content your competitors are producing. Maybe you could do a better job or fill in their gaps? Talk to your colleagues, especially in sales, as they're engaging with prospects every day and should have some good ideas for content that will support their conversations.

## Calls to action

A call to action (CTA) is a short phrase that encourages readers of online content to take some desired action (like subscribing, downloading gated content, or getting in touch). Clicking on your call to action should seem like the next logical step to take after reading your content.

To be effective, a CTA needs to be visible, easily understood, and inspire your audience to act. Consider using A/B testing to try out multiple CTAs and keep the one that's most effective.

## Setting objectives for content marketing

According to SEMrush, 67% of companies use lead generation as the sole metric to determine content success. Although your overall end goal may always be converting leads to customers to bring in revenue, your objectives for your content should and will differ depending which part of the buyer journey a given piece is targeting.

Work out what you want the audience to do after watching, reading, or listening to your piece of content. This is the basis for the CTA, and the CTA is the basis for how you measure the success of that content. Don't expect to have audience data right at the start, but when you do get it further down the funnel you may be able to track back through their previous actions and engagement. For example, someone reads several free blogs before signing up to receive a gated whitepaper – now you have their information you can see which blogs led them to this point.

Aligning your content marketing goals to the wider marketing funnel will also help define the different content types that will support your goals, as we'll discuss.

# Demand generation

**Demand generation focuses on the start of the buyer journey – the top of the buying funnel. It increases brand awareness, plays a vital role in educating your target audience, and builds trust in your brand.**

Here, the goal is to highlight a problem that potential buyers are experiencing, show them that a solution exists, and that you have it. This will spark an interest in your product or service.

It's all about awareness: awareness of their pain point, challenge or opportunity, awareness of the possible solutions that are out there, and awareness of the vendors and partners that can deliver those solutions.

Content targeting the awareness stage should aim to educate, define, contextualise, clarify, and inform. The best way to draw visitors into your funnel is with content that helps them understand their problem and prepares them for the next step: searching for a solution.

..... **TOP TIP** .....

*Some of the most effective content is based around a Q&A, answering a question your prospects have, but also opening up a conversation.*

*It can help to engage with past and existing customers as well as prospects to build content that answers their questions. For example, if you have a shortlist of prospects, reach out on LinkedIn to ask for their thoughts, opinions and ideas on a relevant topic. Use the responses you get to pull together an infographic or blog post which you can then share, not only with them but to reach a wider pool of prospects.*

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## What else can you do to help generate demand?

### Increase your online visibility with SEO

SEO and content marketing go hand-in-hand. To reach the right segment of your target audience, you need to optimise your website to ensure they come across your content online. In the channel, SEO tends to focus on targeting the specific keywords used in searches by B2B tech buyers.

If you optimise a piece of content for the phrase 'endpoint security', you're more likely to be found by someone at the start of the buyer journey. But if you optimise content for 'endpoint security company', you're more likely to be found by someone at the consideration or decision end of the funnel. You can also create and optimise pages on your website for specific products or services.

### Questions to consider for awareness content

1. What's the buyer's biggest goal?
2. What's the biggest obstacle in the way of that goal?
3. Where does your buyer go to troubleshoot their challenges?
4. What are the consequences of inaction?
5. What are the common misconceptions buyers have?
6. How do buyers decide on their priorities?

### Content types that work well in the awareness stage

**Blog posts:** Establish your company as a trusted source of information

**Videos:** Discuss relevant topics in an objective way and share your industry insights

**Infographics:** Share relevant facts and stats to highlight shared pain points

**Podcasts:** Invite industry influencers and tackle topics that matter to your target audience

**How-to guides:** Work through common challenges step-by-step

**Checklists:** Help leads manage their responsibilities

**Social media posts:** Help to start and build long-term relationships with potential customers

**Social media ads:** Instead of promoting products or services, boost content that informs and educates

### Target your audience with display advertising

Display images or videos advertising your business on relevant websites or in the trade press.

• **Google Display Network:** Google Display Network targeting allows you to set where or when your ad is shown based on features of your ideal audience. This means your ad can show up on sites related to your business, or to users who match the specific criteria that you've specified.

• **Trade press:** The audience for online B2B IT magazines, for example, is usually very specific. You may be able to buy advertising space on these websites without going through an ad agency.

# Lead generation & nurture

**Research by Marketo indicates 96% of your website visitors aren't yet ready to buy. So while demand generation is a necessary starting point to draw visitors to your website, lead nurture is a hugely important next step in the process that cannot be overlooked.**

Now you've reached your target audience and sparked their interest your goal is to encourage them to move to the evaluation and purchase stages of the funnel. In the consideration stage, potential buyers better understand the cause of their problem and are now researching various kinds of solutions. How and where they search depends on the information they received and the vocabulary they developed in the awareness stage, which is why that stage is so critical.

While still not ready to make a purchase, the buyer is eager to give things a try. Content in this stage should encourage users to start free trials, request product demos, or download solution-oriented offerings like eBooks and white papers. These conversions allow you to showcase the benefits of your product while also gathering prospects' contact details.

Content targeting the consideration stage should aim to explain and even demonstrate how your product or service will effectively solve the specific problem the buyer identified in the awareness stage – and ideally get them to try it out themselves.

## Questions to think about for consideration content

1. Where does your buyer go to find and compare solutions?
2. What information does your buyer need to compare solutions (e.g., pricing)?
3. How does the buyer weigh the pros and cons for solutions?
4. How does the buyer digest information the best?
5. What are the buyer's deal-breakers?

## Content types that work well in the consideration stage

**eBooks, reports and whitepapers:** Provide in-depth analysis, insights, data, and solutions

**Customer stories and case studies:** Demonstrate social proof and inspire potential customers to act on their problems. TIP: Include at least ballpark pricing wherever possible, as this is almost always going to be a factor for the buyer

**Templates and toolkits:** Provide the buyer with something useful that will keep you top of mind

**Guides:** Set out the specific information they'll be looking for clearly and concisely, in one place

**Webinars:** Invite prospects to a live product webinar where they can ask questions and have them answered there and then

**Cheat sheets:** A one-page summary of the main features of your product/service and the benefits of working with you

**Lists of resources:** Show you have knowledge and are helpful by sharing relevant resources

**Assessments and audits:** Offer added value in the form of a free, no-obligation assessment or audit

# Lead generation & nurture

During the decision stage, the potential buyer has a handful of products or services they're investigating in depth. They know what key features they want in a solution, and they're looking for the one that best fulfills their criteria. At the end of this stage, the buyer will likely make a purchase.

Content targeting the decision phase should aim to give evidence of expected results and persuade prospects that your solution is the best choice among many.

## What else can you do to help generate and nurture leads?

### Be up front with search engine advertising

With such a competitive channel environment, there can be real competition for the first place in relevant search results. If someone is searching for 'cloud security automation tools', they're clearly already aware of their pain points and they're looking for a solution provider. Search engine advertising displays your business at the very moment the potential customers is searching for your products or services.

### Stay front of mind with retargeting

Retargeting is another opportunity to put your business in front of people who are familiar with your brand and have already visited your website. Retargeting displays your advertising to these leads on the websites or platforms they use the most, increasing your business' visibility.

### Build your relationship with email marketing

Email marketing helps maintain relationships with your contacts by sending them new and exclusive content, invitations to events, or news about your products or services. By sharing relevant, insightful content you'll get greater engagement which should lead to more conversions and, ultimately, greater sales revenue.

### Personalise content with marketing automation

Marketing automation can help turn contacts into leads by sharing content to inform and nurture them through the buyer journey. Once a lead is on your list of contacts, you can regularly feed them personalised content until they are hot enough to be passed to your sales team. This nurture process is especially important in the channel where potential customers need to trust you before making a purchase.

## Questions to consider for decision content

1. Do buyers need to prepare to implement the solution (eg make an implementation plan)?
2. Is your buyer more likely to make a decision if they can try the product first?
3. What questions does the buyer have about implementing your solution?
4. What are the most important criteria for your buyer's decision-making process?
5. What are the buyer's expectations for engaging with your solution before they make a final decision?
6. Who else is involved in the decision-making process? How do their perspectives differ?
7. How does the buyer digest information best?
8. What are the buyer's deal-breakers?

## Content types that work well in the decision stage

**Competitive comparisons:** Highlight the strengths of your solution and gaps in competitor solutions

**Awards showcase:** Demonstrate proof of your success and industry recognition

**Testimonials:** Establish your business' credibility using testimonials that show results rather than focusing on features

**Detail specifications:** Get to the nitty gritty and ensure buyers know exactly what you have to offer

**Free trials:** Book meetings halfway through the trial to answer questions and the end of the trial to get feedback

**Free consultations:** Offer your time and expertise to leads who have shown strong intent

**A short product demo:** Highlights the main features of your solution in an easily shareable pre-recorded demo

# Passing on and converting a lead

## Sales and marketing must work in tandem

The first sales conversation should only happen when the lead is good and ready – that will almost always require a lot of patience. It's no good, for example, sending a well-crafted, personalized, awareness-raising LinkedIn InMail message to a prospect who then receives a hard sales pitch as soon as they respond. You wouldn't marry someone on your second date, so why would a completely cold prospect want to buy your solution or service at their second point of contact?

## Qualifying questions

If it's possible to grade the urgency of the buyer's requirement before escalating to a sales call, then do so. Don't assume because they engaged with decision stage content that they're ready to buy.

## Respect the buyer's knowledge

When the first sales conversation does happen, it's important to bear in mind the journey that's got the buyer to this point. They are likely very well-informed by now – about their problem, possible solutions, vendors and even other partners. They've done their research, so they probably don't want or need the hard sell or for the salesperson to explain everything again.

Listen, validate their thinking where appropriate, let them ask questions, and fill in any gaps. Be prepared to define what sets you apart from the competition. If they have unanswered questions, feed that back to the marketing team to become the basis for a new piece of content – no doubt other prospects will be looking for the answer too.

## Beyond the deal

Would you believe only 29% of brands report nurturing existing customers beyond their initial purchase?

Nurturing your leads shouldn't end with a sale. When you've worked hard and invested time and money to acquire new customers, it makes good business sense to put in the effort to retain them: an effort which is normally cheaper and more effective than generating net new leads. Lead nurture is something your business should commit to for the duration of your engagement with a customer.

**If you would like to know more or are looking for support with your lead and demand generation then please get in touch.**

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