Enhance Your B2B Sales Pipeline Using Search Engine Marketing

While there is no way of knowing exactly how many additional search-generated leads you could be capturing, remember this: If you're not getting those leads, your competitors are! If your marketing and sales departments are looking for more qualified leads, then search engine marketing is an inexpensive way to find them. In recent years, search engine marketing has grown in popularity as a cost effective tool used to generate additional sales leads. What was once little more than an afterthought in the website design process has become the best kept secret of savvy B2B marketers. This article provides a five step process that will help fill your pipeline with a steady flow of sales leads. In the article, I'll also share some secrets of how to coordinate search engine marketing efforts with other sales and marketing tools. If you are responsible for B2B sales, marketing, or your company's website, then you should assess your current pipeline and determine how many leads (or how much revenue) can be directly attributed to traffic referred to your site from search engines. While there is no way of knowing exactly how many additional search-generated leads you could be capturing, remember this: If you're not getting those leads, your competitors are! Quick Primer For anyone who isn't familiar with search engine marketing, it's simply the art and science of ensuring that your website appears prominently in the results of search engines, such as Google and Yahoo!, when people look for products and services similar to the ones you sell. Step One: Make Sure You Can Be Found! These web surfers and potential customers will never get into your pipeline if they can't find you! There are dozens of phrases that a qualified prospect might use for a search that, ideally, should lead straight to you. At an absolute minimum, you want your company name and the trade names of your product or service to be represented on the search engines, but think bigger! You also want to be found for the product or service category and phrases related to your products or services. In addition, be sure to include phrases related to the problems or issues that your product or service addresses before your prospect has a solution in mind. Not all of your prospects are at the tail end of the buying cycle! Capture them early in the process and you'll have your foot in the door. Determining and then prioritizing the list of search phrases that would yield the highest quality and quantity of sales leads is critical to your overall success and should not be taken lightly. Once you've compiled this list, your website needs to go through a process called "search engine optimization". During this process, the entire website, including the source code and content are reworked (or "optimized") so that your site is preferred by search engines for the key phrases you have selected. Step Two: Hook Them or Lose Them If you've done a good job of optimizing your website, then your search engine positions will gradually improve, and within six months the site will start appearing frequently near the top of search engine results for your chosen phrases. At this point, it would be easy to sit back and relax, but your pipeline won't get filled by merely improving your website's search positions! The next challenge is to hook the visitor and reel them into your website. Once a search visitor hits your site, you have about five seconds to convince them that you can satisfy their needs. After all, remember that this is a search visitor. They are looking for something and won't think twice about hitting the back button if you don't give them a reason to stay. For this reason, it is critical to make sure that all of your traditional sales and marketing principles are being utilized effectively on your web pages. Clearly communicating your unique selling proposition, or simply why they should stay, is necessary if you want to ensure that your hard work in step one wasn't in vain. You'll lose a lot of visitors regardless of what you say or do, and that's fine. We're only focusing on your true prospects. Let the rest of them go because they'll just clog up your pipeline anyway! Step Three: Offer Something for Everyone That's Interested In step one, you attracted lots of relevant traffic. In step two, you targeted your message to ideal prospects and weeded out the rest. In step three, it's time to get generous. Create two offers and promote them throughout your website. The first offer is a teaser giveaway that your true prospects will find of value. It could be a whitepaper, free information guide, case study, self assessment quiz, etc. This offer is for prospects in the early stages of the buying cycle that are not yet ready or willing to engage in a dialog. Don't require anything more than an e-mail address in exchange, so you don't scare them away. You'll be amazed how many C-level executives request these sorts of offers from home with their personal e-mail accounts. The second offer is for something more substantial that requires significant information and indicates a serious interest on the part of the prospect. This offer may be a consultation, onsite demo, trial offer, etc. Depending on your sales team's bandwidth and the health of your pipeline, you can raise or lower the number of fields you require. This change helps you to control the number of leads the offer generates. Step Four: Manage the Entire Pipeline! It would astonish you if you knew how many companies follow steps one through three only to let most of their "first offer" leads slip away into oblivion while spending the majority of their time with the "second offer" leads. While this strategy may produce greater short term gains, it neglects a much bigger lead pool that could become a group of serious buyers in the long term. Many B2B sales departments have learned that their highest win rate is with prospects that are still early in the buying process. If you ignore them, then they'll seek help in the arms of your competition. That's why it's a good idea to come up with a lead management strategy to handle, sort, and respond to all of the inquiries. There are many software solutions that will automate this process with incredible flexibility and efficiency. Step Five: Measure, Adjust, and Improve. Each step in this process can be easily measured, analyzed, and improved. Make sure that you have measurement tools in place and continually improve the step that is your weakest link. Perhaps it's your search engine positions. Maybe it's your message and design. It could be your offers, or the manner in which you handle the leads. Regardless, continuous small improvements in one or more areas will make your website pipeline more efficient and lucrative. Surprise! This Process Works Equally Well in Reverse You can reverse the order of these five steps and the process would be just as effective. Maybe even more so! If your company has done a good job of offline sales, then you probably already have the foundations for the latter steps in place. If so, you're way ahead of the game. The most interesting thing about getting more targeted traffic to your website is that it only magnifies the strengths and weaknesses in your site design, message, offer, and selling process. Follow these five steps and you'll overcome your weaknesses, leverage your strengths, and fill that pipeline!

About the Author

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