



Lead Generation

Indium Corporation's web site proudly proclaims that the company is "Obsessed with Solder Paste." That statement links to a series of videos that show, among other things, a young girl receiving a can of flux from her adoring father as a Christmas present and unceremoniously tossing it into a box of similar gifts she has clearly received from dad in the past.

The father in these videos is Rick Short, Marcom Director at Indium, a maker of specialty alloys and solders based in Utica, New York. Audiences often snicker when they hear about Indium's business. What could be more prosaic than fusible alloy? But it's the specialized nature of Indium's business that makes the 500-employee company's market so lucrative. There aren't many people who care about dipping paste and wave solder, which are essential to the manufacture of the circuit boards that go in everything from cell phones to jet aircraft. Those who do care, though, buy it by the truckload. Rick Short's job is to find those major accounts.

In 2009, Indium came up with the innovative idea of using blogs to drive search visibility and generate leads. The strategy was, in Short's words, "Convert content to contacts to cash." Marketers assumed that problem solving these days usually starts with a search engine. By launching multiple blogs tuned to the search terms engineers were likely to use, Indium could quickly climb the Google ladder in topic areas where there was little competition.

Marketers and business executives narrowed the domain down to about 85 terms and began building blogs with titles like "Copper

Indium Gallium” and “Pop Solder Paste.” The company enlisted staff volunteers to start writing entries about those topics using a defined set of keywords. In the end, Indium settled on 73 blogs crafted by 17 authors. Entries are cross-posted to multiple topical blogs as well as to a master corporate blog. The idea is to grab visitors’ attention in a context in which they’re most likely to make a buying decision.

The Indium bloggers, most of whom are engineers or product managers, deliver wisdom under the theme “From One Engineer to Another.” Visitors can register to download related white papers or get customized answers to their questions from Indium experts. Those requests become leads, but they also yield insight about what brought the visitor to the web site in the first place. “When they download a white paper, they’re ultra-specific and we know a ton about them,” Short says.

The results: Between the second and third quarters of 2009, incoming contacts grew sixfold, with the majority of those referrals coming from the blogs. What’s more, Indium’s head of sales reported that blog-driven leads were better qualified prospects because the audience was focused and usually under pressure to solve a problem. In fact, prospects often welcomed the call from the Indium salesperson because it addressed an immediate concern.

Short isn’t surprised by the program’s success. Engineers like to engage with others who share their professional interests, and it’s well known that an engineer’s career success is enhanced by an active schedule of speaking and publishing. Blogs can be an easy way to build professional credibility. Engineers also like interacting directly with their peers. That’s why Indium’s strategy is to remove sales and marketing from the front of the conversation and to let business flow naturally from the knowledge-sharing process. “We strive to get engineers talking to engineers and get everyone else out of the middle,” he says.

Get the Lead Out

Qualified lead generation is the most common business-to-business (B2B) marketing objective and the standard by which most attempts are measured. Lead generation has also spawned entire markets: vendors

in the \$10 billion+ global customer relationship management (CRM) industry compete over who can best manage leads, while B2B publishers, who are in desperate straits, are furiously repositioning themselves as lead-generation engines.

In sharp contrast to traditional outbound marketing tactics, U.S.-based B2B marketers say the most effective way to generate leads on social networks is by seeking out and participating in relevant conversations, according to a study by marketing automation vendor DemandGen. B2B marketers have always done this through trade shows, sales calls, and public relations. Those channels were expensive, however. Social networks and search can deliver much of the same benefit at far lower cost.

The art and science of lead generation has been transformed by search engines, which introduced the dynamic of self-selection. Traditional outbound marketing relied on scattershot techniques like advertising, direct mail, and events to attract prospects, but a new discipline that search marketer HubSpot calls “inbound marketing” aims to generate leads from actions that indicate a buyer is ready to make a decision. These can be in the form of search results, tweets, and other peer references. There is no need to interrupt buyers because they choose providers when they’re ready to buy.

Savvy B2B marketers try to anticipate a prospect’s needs and place messages that will reach people at each stage of the buying process (see Figure 12.1). The goal is to get in front of qualified buyers when they’re making a purchasing decision. This approach can be far more productive than traditional advertising and direct mail, which rely on reach and frequency to hit the buyer at the right time. The Internet is persistent and always searchable. Success is more a function of actual product demand than chance.

Today, “It’s entirely possible to build a community to draw those potential leads to you by having the right location, the right mix of tools and the right content to attract the right folks,” wrote Paul Greenberg in *CRM at the Speed of Light*, Fourth Edition.

But this change of direction requires a change in mind-set, one that is far more dependent on listening than talking. Traditional marketing



Figure 12.1 Content Along the Buying Cycle.

Source: Nowspeed Marketing, Inc.

presented a clear cause-and-effect scenario: a campaign delivered a measurable number of prospects within a defined period, which made performance reasonably easy to measure. Social marketing, though, builds on relationships and dialogs that may not generate results for months or even years. Search engines care less about time than they do about relevance, so the blog entry you posted back in 2007 may draw a qualified lead today if the content is still on the mark. This archival quality is one reason social marketing is difficult to measure. The impact is cumulative and effectiveness improves with time and persistence.

Despite these shortcomings, inbound marketing has yielded some notable lead-generation success stories. One of them is EmployeeScreen, a Cleveland-based services company that does employee background checks. Its market includes more than 1,000 competitors, many of them specialized boutiques. Gaining visibility is a constant challenge. EmployeeScreen has thrived, however, due in part to a diversified set of social media programs that deliver education and insight.

A section of the company's web site, dubbed "EmployeeScreen University," features scores of articles, white papers, and podcast interviews that step human resources (HR) pros through the legal and practical issues of hiring and employment law. The university actually began as a search optimization project. Managers were pleased to discover that they were able to climb into the top 10 Google results for some key terms within just a few months by posting topical articles on a company blog. A little creative packaging transformed posts into a curriculum.

Between 5,000 and 7,000 people visit EmployeeScreen University each month. One quarter of them click through to the business web site, delivering a constant stream of leads. The value of such organic traffic "is far greater than traditional advertising," says chief marketing officer (CMO) Nick Fishman.

The success has enabled EmployeeScreen to reduce its dependence on advertising and to engage with prospects at a deeper level. It's also demonstrated a greater truth, says Fishman. "One small guy can make very big waves."

The Social Funnel

Social marketing requires a complete inversion of conventional tactics. The focus must be on the buying process rather than the sales cycle. Traditional marketing is push; social marketing is pull. Traditional marketing is message; social marketing is conversation. Leads may come quickly, particularly when a buyer is toward the end of the buying process and a solution is matched to the right keywords, but they may also require lengthy cultivation and a lot of giving on the seller's part as he leads an early-stage buyer carefully toward a decision.

Social marketing also shifts more responsibility for managing leads up the funnel. "A lot of the sales cycle has moved back into marketing," observes Jeff Ogden, a technology marketing veteran who now runs Find New Customers, a lead-generation consultancy. He notes that the sales organization has traditionally played an important educational role in customer engagements, but "now prospects look up information online and avoid contact with sales people." Marketing

is usually the department that curates that information. If you buy Ogden's premise, marketers should be growing their budgets at the expense of sales departments.

The B2B buying process is typically thought to consist of between five and nine stages, beginning with recognition of need and leading to conversion. Sellers need to start one step earlier than the recognition stage by first figuring out who has the need so that content can be pegged to individuals rather than the broad needs of an entire market. Each stage demands a different social marketing strategy. The traditional tools of marketing are still valid and effective, but they are being complemented of by a new breed of online channels that present new alternatives for engaging and sustaining relationships. Barbara Bix of BB Marketing Plus, a Massachusetts-based B2B marketing consulting firm, believes that the buying process and marketing strategy have not changed fundamentally but that the implementation has. Success depends on listening to small groups directly rather than segmenting large markets.

Stage in Buying Process	Traditional Media Tools	Social Media Tools
Has need	Database analysis Interview	Search analysis Twitter Online communities
Recognize need	Public relations (PR) Speaking placements Case studies	Blogging Word-of-mouth marketing Search analysis
Establish urgency	Direct marketing Offers Publicize competitors' activity	Twitter Postings to forums Blogging case studies Search marketing
Create company awareness	Advertising/PR/ sponsorship	Blogging/ Twitter Online product placements in YouTube and other venues "Share This" widgets
Create product awareness	Direct marketing	Blogging/ Twitter Search engine optimization (SEO)

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Stage in Buying Process	Traditional Media Tools	Social Media Tools
Maintain visibility	Direct marketing PR White papers Reprints	Messaging to follower/friend lists Blogging Informational webcasts
Have the right product	Market research Focus groups Prototyping Usability testing	Social media monitoring Customer communities Crowdsourcing Open beta/usability testing
Make it easy to buy	Toll-free number One-click ordering	Twitter Widgets Affiliate marketing
Continue relationship	Newsletters Events	Blogging Twitter Customer communities Affiliate programs

Experts agree on a few key success factors that are common to every stage, which are discussed next.

Content is king.

The way to attract visitors and followers and to make connections is by providing useful information. That means resisting the urge to sell and focusing instead on delivering genuine value, even if it means recommending a lower-cost or competitive solution. It also means giving away expertise that you may have sold or kept secret in the past. There is really no choice, though. Buyers are flooded with information. They gravitate to those vendors that offer the most value before the sale is made. If scarcity is not an issue, they also freely share the advice they receive with each other. In the past, we might have called this stealing, but “Today’s business model requires that people steal your content in order for you to be successful,” says Maggie Fox, chief executive officer (CEO) of Toronto-based Social Media Group.

Quality content and search engine performance go hand in hand. Search engines are programmed to deliver results that their complex algorithms determine to be useful. That's why magazine articles, blogs, and Wikipedia entries float to the top of Google pages while product listings and catalogs sink. As of this writing, if you type "personal computer" into Google, the organic search results yield 19 definitions and news articles before the first vendor product page. Good content also tends to find audiences, which spread the word with very little intervention on the creator's part.

Sales-speak is death.

Useful content is that which addresses customer needs in as helpful and impartial a manner as possible. Sales pitches don't go over well online, particularly with knowledgeable B2B buyers. Customers are enjoying their new market influence and their freedom to associate with one another. They respond with disdain or even hostility to messages that are cloaked as advice. "An online interaction that morphs into a sales pitch is likely to send all but your latest-stage leads running in the other direction," writes Ardath Albee in *The Essential Marketing Automation Handbook*. People want to hear from others like themselves. Ask questions, but without the type of solicitous phrasing we've come to expect in advertising.

Span the buying cycle.

This step is particularly important for B2B marketers because prospects enter the funnel at different stages of the buying process. Share your expertise far and wide, using the keywords that customers use, and create a portfolio of content that meets the needs of different kinds of prospects. Build a library of content that matches buyer interests at each stage, and use intelligence gleaned from your web analytics to position individual items appropriately. For example, a visitor who arrives on your web site by searching for your company name

is probably much farther down the sales funnel than one who arrives from searching a more general industry term. The content premiums they find on that landing page should match their stage in the funnel.

Success takes time.

Search visibility is unquestionably enhanced with age and volume. The more content you publish and the more frequently you publish it, the more search visibility you achieve. This means adopting new expectations of success. Your blogging “campaign” will pay few dividends during the first six months but will provide handsome returns after a year, if you post useful content frequently. Once you reach a critical mass of content and search performance, traffic becomes almost self-sustaining. In community settings, the tipping point arrives when participants begin creating and sustaining their own conversations without prompting.

Search Traffic

Search is the great equalizer of social marketing, and Google is the universal home page. If Google ranks your web site highly, it almost doesn't matter how big your competitor's marketing budget is. In fact, successful search marketing programs can quickly pay for themselves through cost savings on traditional channels. “Our hope of competing in any way with SAP and Oracle depends on our keyword performance,” says Kirsten Watson, director of corporate marketing at Kinaxis, a small software company that has used social programs to gain a foothold in what many people thought was an inaccessible market.

Search engine optimization (SEO) is a huge topic that fills books larger than this one. It involves the strategic use of keywords, page titles, tags, headlines, and other textual components combined with inbound links from credible sources. We provided a quick primer on this topic in Chapter 7. If you want to know more, pick up *Inbound Marketing* by Brian Halligan and Dharmesh Shah for an introduction

and *Search Engine Marketing, Inc.* by Mike Moran and Bill Hunt for a deeper dive. Search engines typically deliver 20 to 40 percent of a business web site's traffic, which can be of high quality if the terms are matched to a buying decision.

You'll want to handle incoming traffic differently, depending on whether it's driven by search or links. In the case of search results, there are three important pieces of information you need to know: search terms, entry pages, and bounce rates.

The *search term* tells you what keywords are bringing people to your site. Chances are that a small number of keywords are driving most of your traffic. Double down on these words. Make sure you use them on every relevant page (and we stress relevant; inserting successful keywords into places they don't belong frustrates visitors), include them in page titles, and list them in meta tags. Also look for opportunities to include them in press releases, product names and other official company information. Maximize the visibility of your site to the search engines for these important terms.

Most people don't arrive at your site via the home page. They search Google and come to whatever page has the information for which they're looking. The point of entry is called the *entry page*, and your web statistics will show you which ones are most popular. Study your top entry pages carefully because they're the ones that are working. Use them as indicators of what type of content is pulling best with your audience. Apply what you learn to your other pages, but more importantly, maximize the opportunity of these high-traffic web pages to establish a persistent connection with the visitor through e-mail, RSS, Twitter, or Facebook. Offer invitations to subscribe to newsletters, attend webcasts, download white papers, and follow you on Twitter. Use content premiums like white papers and sample downloads to match the likely stage of the visitor in the buying cycle.

Bounce rate is the percentage of visitors that land on a page and leave without exploring further. While a high bounce rate is fine in some situations, you want this number to be as low as possible for lead gen purposes because this is the percentage of people who are probably unfulfilled by your web site. Whatever it is they think they're going there for, they don't seem to be finding it.

Experiment with tactics like links to related content or downloads to draw visitors deeper into your site. Duplicate whatever works to other popular entry pages.

Link Traffic

For links coming in from other sources, you need a different strategy because you're trying to understand motivations of a human who posted the link rather than of a machine. Look at these factors:

A *referral link* is a link that sends traffic to you from somewhere else on the Internet. You want to know where this link lives and why it's linking to you. The author may be a potential ally or adversary. Find out by looking at the *anchor text*, or the blue underlined text that contains the link. It tells you why people are visiting and the reasons can vary greatly. For example, the anchor text "world's greatest tool company" will bring a completely different kind of visitor than "avoid this tool company." Knowing why a visitor arrives is critical to knowing what message to craft.

Another metric to understand is *bounce rate*. This can be a tricky factor in evaluating inbound links because if the link describes your content incorrectly, your bounce rate may be high, and there's little you can do about it. You want to know of any terms that yield a low bounce rate, though. These are the ones that engage visitors and keep them clicking through to other areas of your site. They're probably important to your search optimization strategy. At the very least, they tell you how others describe you.

What's the Diff?

The difference between search and web site links is that you must build influence with web site owners to see results. People who generate a lot of inbound traffic to your site may be as valuable as paying customers, even if they buy nothing. Companies in the building trades will tell you that even though architects don't buy their products,

they are more important than the contractors who pay the bills because architects specify vendors and brands. Many companies are now incorporating influencer relations programs into their marketing and public relations efforts. SAP, for example, has an active program to nurture relationships with technology and business bloggers. The software giant even hosts an annual conference for them. Research determined that “the combined channels that the industry and influencer relations team manages has a \$40 billion impact on purchase decisions worldwide,” says Don Bullmer, vice president of global communications at the software giant. As the information technology (IT) trade media has waned, influencers have acquired even more weight at SAP.

Influencer programs attempt to build awareness by encouraging referrals from people who are respected authorities in their communities. You can't control what these people say, of course, but you can bring them into the loop, which almost always improves relationships. The currency of influencer programs is information, not money. By conferring insider status on these influential people, you give them the opportunity to raise their status and visibility in their own communities. Although we believe online influencers should be treated the same as media contacts, the nature of the engagement is more along the lines of grassroots community relations than press relations. They may not know an “exclusive” from an “embargo,” but bloggers are more likely than reporters to be experts in your product or category and to have a deep level of technical knowledge. They're also more likely to be collegial than competitive. While reporters tend to be driven by scoops, bloggers are motivated by understanding. They're more inclined to share with each other so that everyone understands an issue better. Be prepared to marshal your internal domain experts to respond to their challenging questions.

Of course, you can also generate your own inbound links. Traffic from LinkedIn Groups to which you belong, comments on other blog posts, visual essays on SlideShare, and links posted on Facebook can be useful resources for testing messages and building traffic. Apply the same discipline to your own links that you would to those created by others.

Test different variations of anchor text to see what performs best. Use this insight to fine-tune all the links you post on external sources.

Lead Management

Once a prospect is in your sales funnel, the task turns to qualifying, scoring, and nurturing the lead. The first two processes involve assessing each person's ability to buy and the urgency of the decision. Nurturing is about guiding prospects down the decision path so that they reach their own conclusions and are more invested.

All three tasks can be tackled together. If you nurture leads properly with content premiums like worksheets, white papers, and webcasts that match their stage in the buying cycle, you can qualify and score them at the same time. For example, a visitor who downloads a white paper about your industry is at an earlier stage in the cycle than one who uses your return on investment (ROI) calculator. This yields important insight into the buyer's interests and the urgency of his or her decision.

The tools that marketers have at their disposal during the nurturing process have changed little over the past few years. They include webcasts, white papers, free trials, analyst reports, specification sheets, ROI calculators, and case studies. What has changed is our ability to self-publish this content and match it to buyer profiles.

Just 5 years ago, marketers had limited capacity to match content to intent and thus were forced to resort to long qualification forms to understand their prospects. We all hate filling out those multiscreen web forms. The historically high abandonment rates for webinar registrations testifies to their inefficiency. Today, you can learn much about prospective customers from the type of content that they consume and, in turn, avoid annoying them with questions. However, this requires you to understand content and integrate information about prospecting it into back-end CRM systems. It also means communicating this information to your sales force.

Figure 12.2 shows an example of what a content-driven interaction might look like.

We can safely assume that this person should go to the top of your prospect list. Without giving us anything more than an e-mail address

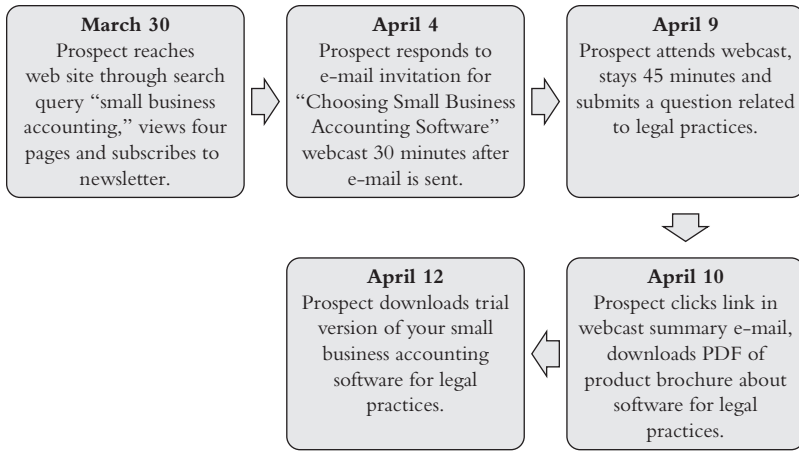


Figure 12.2 Prospect Flow Chart.

(we assume the user's browser accepts cookies so we can track activity beyond the first visit), the prospect has told us that he or she:

- Probably works for a law firm.
- Is highly interested in the topic and feels some urgency about making a decision. This is indicated by the speed of response to the webcast promotion, attentiveness during the webinar, and frequency of web site visits.
- Is late in the buying cycle, judging by post-webcast activity.
- Has a high level of interest in your product, judging by the large amount of information collected and the download of the free trial.

If you were able to capture any more information, perhaps during the webinar registration, you could research this prospect even further. For example, a personal or company name might unearth a web site or Twitter account with valuable background information. It may also point to the prospect's profile on LinkedIn. If you use LinkedIn's premium services, you can generate leads by sending messages directly to other users. Following that reasoning a little further, you may discover that the person heads the Denver chapter of a professional association. This makes the prospect a particularly valuable lead, because a group leaders is in a position to influence others.

Whoever is sent in to close the sale should be made aware of this information. But that doesn't necessarily mean that the rep should disclose that knowledge to the prospect. The creepiness factor is an important consideration in sales contacts these days because it's possible to scare a prospect away if you reveal having too much background knowledge. People-finder services like ZoomInfo, Spokeo, Wink, and Jigsaw, which assemble background and contact information through a variety of both public and private means, enable sales professionals to compile an unprecedented amount of information about prospects.

Having this information in your back pocket can be useful. For example, if you discover that a member of the Denver professional association is one of your customers, you could use that information to drop a name during a conversation with the prospect. If the prospect is active online, postings in blogs and forums might give you insight into other opportunities in the company. LinkedIn company profiles reveal common connections you may have or names of other prospects within the company.

However, be judicious in how much of this information you reveal. There can be a fine line between prospecting and stalking, and most customers don't want to be isolated in making a decision. "One-to-one marketing was supposed to be the holy grail of customer relationship management. The problem is that we are hyper-social beings who prefer to operate within our tribes," write Francois Gossieaux and Ed Moran in their 2010 book *The Hyper-Social Organization*. "We do not want to be isolated from our group so that salespeople who know more about us than we feel comfortable with can give us the hard sell."

Prospecting 2.0

Up until now we've focused mainly on inbound prospecting, which is about building content that attracts people who are looking for solutions. However, social media has also revolutionized traditional prospecting. People use online channels to post requests for information or share frustrations with products they're now

using. These mini-requests for information are a veritable treasure trove of new business.

The tools and tactics you use for outbound marketing are very different from the ones we just discussed. Primarily, they consist of listening. In Chapter 6, we provided guidance on how to build a listening dashboard.

Blogs are considered the most effective social network for B2B prospecting, followed by LinkedIn, then Facebook, then Twitter, with YouTube coming in last, according to a *B-to-B* magazine survey. (Figure 12.3).

On a cost-per-interaction basis, Twitter is definitely the the mother lode of prospecting because it is so easy to use. Create a complex search query at search.twitter.com along the lines of a Google query, but also search for additional terms like “anybody know,” “looking for,” and “recommend,” which match the type of casual terms people use to tweet for advice. We tried a Twitter search on the phrase “does anyone know” followed by an assortment of product categories and found requests for advice on printers, e-mail service providers, consultants, trainers, and accounting software packages.

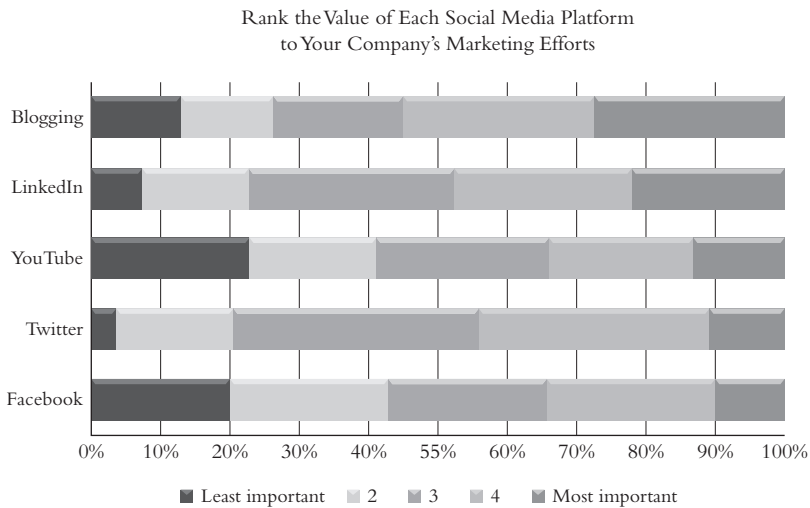


Figure 12.3 Rank the Value of Each Platform.

Source: *B-to-B* magazine.

Save your searches as RSS feeds so that every time you open your feed reader, they're updated with the latest information. You can also try a Twitter list site like Listorious or TweepML to look for people in industries or professions that matter to you. There are hundreds of lists of tweeting lawyers, for example.

LinkedIn groups, LinkedIn Answers, discussion boards, and Yahoo! Answers can also yield prospects. We tried searching the Boardreader forum search engine for the phrase "does anyone know" followed by "lawyer" and came up with nearly 750 requests over the past 3 months.

Reaching out to questioners requires a light touch. Often it's best simply to answer the question, create a follower, and lay the groundwork for further conversation. If you think the solution is your product, follow that user and invite him or her to send you a direct message so you can set up a phone call. Keep your public persona helpful and save the sales pitch for the one-on-one. "LinkedIn Answers are a great way for you to demonstrate your interests, expertise and problem-solving capabilities to entire networks of people, which can indirectly drive interest in your company and new business," wrote marketing automation firm Marketo in its "Definitive Guide to B2B Social Media" workbook.

Be Helpful

Social media prospecting works best when experts get involved. This is particularly true in technical areas where questions are often complex and the people asking them want to speak to the gurus. Look for the natural communicators in the ranks of your technical staff and recruit them to help. As we noted earlier, engineers love to speak to other engineers.

Experts are your best brand ambassadors, but we recommend you give them the latitude to act like experts, even if that means recommending solutions that aren't your own. This really works. Francois Gossieaux, the founder of Human 1.0 whose book we referenced earlier, tells of one major technology firm that contracted

with two database management experts to monitor online forums and help solve problems. The experts were instructed to recommend any products they thought were right for the job, even if the products came from competitors. It didn't matter that other companies may have picked up some incremental business from this activity; within 3 months, the two experts had built so much credibility that they were the single largest generator of new leads for the contractor.

Marketo, a marketing automation software company founded in 2006, does this really well. In growing from a few founders to a staff of more than 100 in a generally abysmal business climate, it has demonstrated the power of being helpful. "Content is how you market in today's B2B world," says Jon Miller, a Marketo co-founder. Marketo practices what it preaches and it packages creatively. For example, the company partnered with JellyVision, maker of the popular "You Don't Know Jack" trivia game, for "You Don't Know Jack About Online Marketing," a fast-paced and fun takeoff that gently reminds players of what they still need to learn about their discipline. And, by the way, Marketo can help.

It favors easy-to-read e-books over often ponderous white papers. Multifaceted resources called "kits" combine already available content like blog entries and checklists into one downloadable unit. "Cheat sheets" are tip lists that the company prints and laminates for distribution at trade shows. "They go like hotcakes," Miller says. The B2B Sales and Marketing Book Club is a minor stroke of genius. Authors donate sample chapters for free download in exchange for visibility. "We probably have more people dedicated to content than any other company of our size," Miller says.

Another of our favorite examples of a "be-helpful" strategy is Clickable, a New York-based search engine marketing firm. Facing a crowded market and a weak economy in 2008, the fledgling company recruited several of its experts to go forth and answer questions posted online by the company's target audience of search advertisers, small and mid-sized business owners and agencies. They did so in the communities and forums those prospects were already using, inviting people back to the Clickable site only when appropriate. This group,

which came to be known as the Clickable Gurus, was given nine core principles to uphold. Note that none of them mention selling:

Clickable Gurus' Core Principles

1. Be a trusted advisor.
 2. Engage authentically.
 3. Maintain a steady rhythm of good deeds.
 4. Help marketers at all skill levels.
 5. Offer simple solutions and objective advice.
 6. Use real, personal profiles.
 7. Always disclose affiliation with Clickable.
 8. Never shill, but welcome newcomers to Clickable when appropriate.
 9. Channel learning to help improve Clickable.
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Clickable used the information these experts gathered and dispensed in several ways. Their advice was used to populate discussion topics in the company's forums and captured in regular blog entries. The Gurus also became valuable internal sources of advice on Clickable's products and strategy. The experts clearly identified their company affiliation in public forums, both to promote transparency and to drive brand awareness.

For Clickable, the program was a gusher of new business. Within a year, the Gurus and the community platform were generating more than half of all new customers, leading to a 400 percent increase in new monthly billable advertising. Monthly visitors to Clickable.com jumped from less than 5,000 in July 2008 to nearly 100,000 a year later.

The idea of giving away expertise for free may sound counter-intuitive, but in the information-saturated world of web 2.0, it's the only way to attract attention. In their 2009 book *Trust Agents*, Chris Brogan and Julien Smith repeatedly emphasize this point. "Being helpful in full view of others helps guide you into being a trust agent, and that gives you the opportunity to do more business," they wrote. "Unlike conspicuously making an effort to be nice because other people will see, the Web just displays it naturally, because everything is in public view. Being helpful becomes not only a great thing to do,

but also a good strategic move.” The social web just naturally rewards generosity. It turns customer service into public relations.

When you think of it, being helpful is the essence of good human relationships. A couple of years ago, Paul needed repairs to a clothes dryer that wasn't drying. He called a local sales and service organization ready to write a check for \$300 but was surprised when the technician on the phone offered to walk him through the process of fixing the machine himself. That small business has since received every dollar Paul has spent on appliances. It seems that trust isn't just common sense; it's pretty good business practice, too.



PROSPECTING WITH TWEETS

Boutique digital marketing agency Soweb Inc. has an innovative approach to using Twitter to generate sales leads. The Ft. Lauderdale-based firm treats new Twitter followers as prospects and applies an informal discovery process to qualify them. Sales reps examine the profiles of new followers and conduct web searches to see if they are potential clients. If so, their activity is monitored in a special tweet stream.

When prospects tweet about topics that could generate business for Soweb, sales reps respond with links to helpful advice. The agency follows the Twitter guideline known as the “70:20:10 rule”; 70 percent of its tweets link to external sources unrelated to the company, 20 percent are about personal or nonbusiness issues, and the other 10 percent are promotional. It's considered obnoxious to aggressively promote yourself on Twitter.

“Companies don't like to be sold to,” says principal Ernesto Sosa. “We deliver value with the goal of encouraging followers to seek more information and contact us directly.” As relationships grow, so does Soweb's opportunity to pitch for new business at the appropriate time. The company generates 15 percent of its new business through Twitter, so the strategy is working.

The firm also takes advantage of an optional Twitter feature that enables users to reveal their location. Prospects in southern Florida are considered especially attractive, so nearby followers get special attention.

Soweb's Twitter following is a modest 1,400, but Sosa says lead generation on Twitter doesn't have to be a numbers game. “You need clearly defined goals, processes, responsibilities and metrics,” he says. “Have tight collaboration between your marketing and sales people. And be patient.”