

USE CONTENT INTELLIGENCE TO DRIVE PIPELINE MOMENTUM



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YOU can't go anywhere today as a B2B marketer without hearing the battle cry, "Content is King." That may be so, but it takes more to achieve success with content marketing than just publishing content. For your marketing content to play a tangible role in driving pipeline momentum, you've got to have a strategy to gather and use content intelligence. **Content intelligence is the information you need to determine how to connect with prospects at the right time with the right message.**

Marketing automation is the platform that powers the ability to harness content intelligence and act upon it to increase relevance for prospects. The ways in which your prospects interact with your marketing content can tell you where prospects are in their buying process and help you know how to respond appropriately to encourage them to take the next steps. Prospects' content activity provides the feedback to enhance lead scoring accuracy, improve the relevance and resonance of lead nurturing programs and escalate conversions to salespeople. It's critical to know when prospects hit the tipping point to move from online interactions to in-person conversations and to ensure that transition happens without a loss in momentum.

Take a look at three ways content intelligence can help marketing drive pipeline momentum:

Right Message, Right Time.

Delivering the right message at the right time is easier done when marketers map their content to the buying process of specific profiles or personas. The more targeted your segments, the tighter the connection. A content strategy is not just about developing an editorial calendar based on a theme. It's about designing content to help you gather intelligence about prospects based on which information they engage with and what you can learn by their patterns of their activity over time.

Marketers need to step into their prospects' shoes in order to do this well. Consider what happens when you need to purchase something you may have never purchased in the past, or not for a long time – a car, for example. What's the first thing you do? You probably think about what kind of car you want. You've likely been eyeing a particular car when you pass it on the road, or you've been captivated by a commercial enough to want to know more. Next, you probably do an Internet search.

A similar path is true for your prospects in relation to a problem they need to solve. When they turn to a search engine, the question they type is likely influenced by something someone said, something they read or heard about, or the nature of the problem they're dealing with (e.g., low employee morale, higher lead volume, product design efficiency).

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About the Author

Ardath Albee, author of eMarketing Strategies for the Complex Sale, is CEO and B2B marketing strategist for her consulting firm Marketing Interactions, Inc. She taps over 20 years of business management and marketing experience to help her clients create customer-focused eMarketing strategies. Writing the noted Marketing Interactions blog involves her in substantial industry and customer conversations, deepening her knowledge of what companies can achieve while verifying many of her principles. Her blog posts are referred to often by other industry leaders and her blog is syndicated on community websites such as Junta42, The Customer Collective and My Venture Pad. Her articles have been used for university ezines, published by Rain Today Special Reports, CRM Today, Selling Power and Enterprise CRM News.

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The truth of the matter is that problems have escalated in complexity. The more integrated a company has become, the more moving parts that are affected by even the smallest of changes. This means that prospects need to learn a lot before they become confident enough to have a discussion about how to solve their problems. Educating them at each step is the imperative for B2B marketers.

To map content to the buying process, make a list of all the questions your prospects will need to answer in order to build a business case and justify return on investment. Think about this in steps. Their initial questions are not about which companies or solutions to consider. Your prospects are concerned about why they should care, what they need to know and how the issue is impacting their industry and their competitors. Every question you come up with in regards to those areas of concern has an answer that can become a content resource. String them together appropriately and you have a content map.

Marketing automation comes into play by showing you how your prospects interact with both nurturing content not publicly available as well as the content on your website or blog that they can choose to interact with whenever the desire strikes. Because you can track what they view, you can see whether their interest was brief or extended. If they are prompted by a nurturing email to read an article, for example, but they also click on your carefully placed

related links to other content, the storyline builds and you can see that extension. If, instead, they click on the link to the article and then leave, ignoring the related links, they may not be as interested.

Without marketing automation, you'd never know the difference. When you know that a prospect is reading a content article about why they should care about solving the problem, you now have the intelligence to know that they're not likely to be ready for content that discusses the value of your offering. With marketing automation, you can make intelligent choices about each step you take with your prospects, working in parallel with them by providing the right message at the right time.

A Lead's Score is Not Just a Number

One of the biggest benefits provided by marketing automation is the ability to create a lead scoring model to help you prioritize prospects based on the accumulation of points awarded for specific online behavior, demographic fit and recency of interest. When creating a lead scoring model, the objective is for the changes in scoring intervals to help define how you choose to interact with a prospect to further their engagement. This said, you must realize that a lead's score is more than a number. For example, all leads with a score of 40 are not expressing the same levels of interest. The difference is in what makes up the score.

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Let’s take a look at an example focused only on activity scoring for simplicity.

Prospect A is passively engaged. She is willing to spend some time with your content when prompted, but not showing any urgency in pursuing additional information. Prospect B explored related content after reading the content accessed via the links in nurturing emails. Prospect B also gave you an hour of his time to attend the webinar. Based on how the scoring interval for Prospect B changed during one month, it would be prudent to trigger personalized outreach to find out just how interested they are. In fact, if the lead scoring example above included fit and recency points, this Prospect B would be prioritized in your dashboard for follow-up activities.

When you monitor lead scoring for interval increases, your focus is directed to the leads whose activity warrants further response. Based on the content the prospect is viewing, you have the intelligence to make additional high-relevance offers to further engage your most interested prospects. Because you can view their activity history, you know which business priority the prospect is working to address.

Consider the difference in how you’d follow-up with a prospect engaged with specific customer success stories versus a prospect engaging with educational information about industry trends. The ability to make every interaction count can be enhanced by the intelligence gleaned from the content prospects

Prospect A: Activity Score = 40

- ✔ Viewed 10 content articles after clicking on 10 email links over the period of 5 months.
- ✔ Downloaded a white paper 2 last week after clicking on an email link.
- ✔ Has never visited your website without being prompted.

Prospect B: Activity Score = 40

- ✔ Viewed 2 articles after clicking on two email links over the period of 1 month.
- ✔ With each visit, the prospect also clicked on links to additional related content.
- ✔ This equates to reading a total of 5 articles in one month.
- ✔ Registered for and attended a webinar you hosted 1 week ago.

viewed, how recently they did so and how long it held their attention. Lead scoring also enables prospects to self-qualify with scoring intervals that can be used as an alert system. This is critical to enabling marketing and sales to take the appropriate actions at the time they’ll be best received.

The Sales Handoff is Not the End

The beauty of marketing automation is that it can provide continuous end-to-end intelligence about the entire lifecycle from prospect through customer. With integration into CRM systems, marketing can

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prompt the transfer of a prospect to the sales team and then enable sales to return them for continued lead nurturing or for insertion into a customer nurturing program. This ensures that no one is ever dropped or ignored, regardless of whether they remain a prospect or have become a customer.

After handoff to the sales team, marketing can provide end-stage content for sales to use that keeps up the momentum. Based on the content the prospect engages with during their time with sales, marketing can now gain intelligence about the effectiveness of content across the entirety of the buying process. With closed-loop feedback from salespeople in conversation with prospects, marketing can learn about questions salespeople were asked and test answering them with content to learn whether getting that information to prospects earlier in the nurturing process can speed time to sales readiness.

Additionally, marketers need to start thinking post sale. Create a “lead” scoring model for customers. Customer nurturing can play a critical role in helping your company expand from a foot-in-the-door opportunity into bigger projects. Based on the offering your customer purchased, nurturing programs

should be designed to help them take next steps to move up a level or add on to their initial purchase with services or support options. Once again, by providing the right message at the right time and watching for scoring interval changes, marketing can reconnect salespeople with customers when the time is right to maximize up-sell or cross-sell opportunities.

Visibility and Intelligence Drive Marketing Effectiveness

Marketing strategies are driven by content. But content without the visibility provided by marketing automation lacks the intelligence to enable you to demonstrate measureable impact to revenue generation. Maximizing the value of content intelligence requires that content be designed to tell you as much about prospects as it tells prospects about how to solve their problems. As a marketer, you need those insights provided by technology to continuously raise your game and deliver the relevant interactions buyers are demanding—now and into the future.