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QUICK GUIDE TO LEAD GENERATION

8 tips on using social media as a lead gen tool

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Quick Guide to Lead Generation

8 tips on using social media as a lead gen tool

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TACTICS YOU CAN LEARN OVER LUNCH

Welcome to the *Quick Guide to Lead Generation* – a resource from MarketingSherpa featuring bite-sized tips for busy marketers.

In this report, we provide tips for using social media as a tool to help your lead gen efforts.

We're sure you don't need to be told how important social media is in today's marketing environment, especially when it comes to engaging your target audience. However, many businesses underestimate how valuable this channel can be for lead generation.

Our research, as illustrated by [this chart](#) from the *MarketingSherpa 2012 Lead Generation Benchmark Report* survey, shows that 72% of marketers are using social media as a lead generation tactic. Frankly, the volume your peers are using social media for lead generation is impressive, even to us.

"In particular, that 18% more respondents and fully 24% more respondents report that they are employing social media than are using the time-honored content marketing and paid search (PPC) channels, respectively, seems remarkable to me," said Bob Kemper, Senior Director, Sciences and Development, MECLABS.

In this report, we'll show you:

- Why your value proposition is an important consideration
- How your current customers can help
- Tips for combining social with content
- Ways to join online conversations without overt promotion

We know you're in a hurry, so let's begin. We're eager to share these tips on how you can take advantage of social media opportunities to find new leads.

Bobbi Dempsey
Editor, *Quick Guide to Lead Generation*

About *Quick Guide to Lead Generation*

MarketingSherpa's *Quick Guide to Lead Generation* is designed with you, the busy marketer, in mind. We provide quick, simple tips you can use right away. For each *Quick Guide*, we scour the vast MECLABS library of marketing research, from MarketingSherpa case studies and Benchmark Reports to MarketingExperiments optimization tests and analyses. We highlight tips to help improve your marketing performance right now – or at least by the time you're done with lunch.

Tactic #1. Use social media to help convey your value proposition

Lead generation relies heavily on your value proposition and how effectively you convey it. Your value proposition essentially boils down to why your ideal prospect should buy from you instead of one of your competitors.

Participating in social media – and, more specifically, listening to what your target customers say – can be extremely valuable to you in this regard. This can provide you with critical insights as to what is important to your audience, and how to best communicate with them. You can then target your messaging so as to emphasize the solutions you provide or the value you offer.

In the MarketingExperiments Blog post, "[Value Proposition: How to use social media to help discover why customers buy from you](#)," Daniel Burstein, Director of Editorial Content, MECLABS, stressed the need for marketers to discover what value they truly offer customers. He said one of the biggest untapped resources for making that discovery is social media.

While much of your social media strategy will involve taking an active and visible role, Burstein pointed out that you can also gain valuable insights by being a "lurker" and quietly observe and listen while remaining in the background.

"You can passively observe the way your potential customers talk about your overall industry, your specific business, as well as your products and marketing campaigns behind your back," Burstein said. "Before social media, most of this information was secret. Someone bragging over a new way to use your product (and thus, a new value that you never thought of) over beer at a barbecue. A dissatisfied customer complaining that your competitor doesn't serve a niche that you fill so well but rarely communicate. Social media has brought all of these conversations out into the open."

Burstein offered several suggestions on how you can listen for social media triggers:

- Set up searches for your brand and product names on Twitter – and do the same for your competitors – as well as searches about key hashtags and words customers might use to describe a problem your product solves or a category your product is in. You can do this manually in Twitter, but more easily in free programs like TweetDeck or HootSuite.
- Also note, you might want to try a few variations if your company or product name is commonly misspelled. There are no copy editors on Twitter. For example, the search query I have set up in TweetDeck for MarketingExperiments is – "Marketing Experiments OR MktgExperiments OR MarketingExperiments" ([@MktgExperiments](#) is our Twitter handle, which explains the abbreviation).
- Join LinkedIn and Facebook Groups that your ideal customers might use. How can you find these groups? Start by asking current customers what groups they are members of. Don't forget to join your competitors' groups or "like" their fan pages to see what their customers are saying.
- Don't overlook Google Alerts. You can set up alerts using the same type of keywords as you did for Twitter in the first bullet point. Pay special attention to the "Type" field. Blogs, videos and discussions can be especially helpful. But the real-time search will likely be of limited value since Google dropped Twitter from that search – which is why that first bullet point is important.

By using information gained from both this covert detective work and from your more visible engagement on your own social media pages, you can gain some valuable data to help form or deliver on your value proposition.

Mandi Frishman, Marketing Manager, Make Me Social, suggested that you focus on insights related to your customers. For example, you can compile data to help you establish a comprehensive customer profile, including information like:

- Tips about their sense of humor
- Information about their lifestyle
- What they value in life, their struggles
- Their concerns
- Their expectations

She also advised you document influencers in each market and note suggested conversation topics and tactics.

Following the social market analysis of the target market, Frishman suggested you begin a competitive analysis using similar tactics. Listen for:

- Missed opportunities and niche topics that your company may be overlooking
- Identify what messaging is resonating with the audiences
- What is driving engagement
- What questions people are asking and searching for

Now that you have all of this market data, Frishman recommended that you "identify whether the existing messaging and stated value proposition align with what the market has shown."

Related Resources

[Value Proposition Development Online Certification Course Level 1](#)

[The MarketingSherpa 30 Minute Marketer to Value Proposition](#)

[Customer Value: The 4 essential levels of value propositions](#)

Tactic #2. Connect with a specific demographic

It seems like there is a specific social media platform (or group or page within that venue) for just about anything you can imagine these days. In order to get the most out of your social media efforts, you need to make sure you are using the right outlets to reach the people with whom you want to connect. This means you must find out where your prospects are hanging out.

Do some market research. Ask your current customers what social media networks they frequent, and what tactics work (or don't work) when brands want to interact with them via social media.

The MarketingSherpa case study, "[Combine SEO and Social Media to Generate Web Leads: 5 Steps](#)," explained that's what the team at Caturano and Company, an accounting and consulting firm, did when they wanted to figure out how they could best reach chief financial officers. They realized they needed to identify online venues where CFOs congregated. They wanted to join those online conversations and develop new channels to promote articles, webinars, white papers and other relevant content.

The firm's existing clients were an invaluable resource for finding the right social networks to join. They asked clients where they spent time online, and looked for their clients' profiles on social networking sites.

- LinkedIn proved to be one of the most popular sites with the team's clients and prospects. They looked for relevant discussion groups to join, and also created their own groups.
- The team encouraged partners with expertise in specific practice areas to join relevant groups. The goal was to establish individuals as thought leaders in the industry, while also demonstrating the firm's expertise with certain industries or service areas.
- Following best practices in social media engagement, participants in LinkedIn Groups did not simply post information about the firm's events and resources. Instead, they participated in online discussions as community members and provided relevant answers and opinions that weren't self-promotional. They also looked for opportunities to share notices about upcoming events or company content that were relevant to ongoing discussions.

The team also began using monitoring tools to help them broadly track conversations happening in social media channels and on other websites. They set up a monitoring service that sent real-time alerts related to specific phrases or conversations of interest, such as:

- Key services the firm offers
- Competitors' names
- Problems or questions about professional services providers

Once a team member received an alert, they examined the context to see if there was a way to join the conversation, or steer the original commenter toward a content offer. For example, if the team received an alert on a Twitter conversation about how to choose an IT consulting company, they might send a link to their IT management Rapid Assessment tool that offered a high-level analysis of a prospect's current operations and suggested areas for potential improvement.

The team also used their Web analytics tool to assess whether their social media efforts and SEO were driving prospects back to the company website to engage with content.

Related Resources

[Millennials something Snapchat something something](#)

[Marketing Research Chart: How millennials and baby boomers want to receive marketing messages on the go](#)

Tactic #3. Join online conversations

When it comes to using social media for lead generation purposes, one of your main goals needs to be establishing a visible presence and letting your target prospects feel like they "know" you and can trust you. Setting up pages or groups on popular social media outlets is a great start, but that's not enough.

You can't just create these accounts and wait for people to discover them. You also need to be visible on other peoples' pages, and join (or start) conversations related to subjects people are interested in. This gets your name and brand out there, and helps increase your brand awareness – and also motivates people to check out your pages to learn more about you.

In the MarketingSherpa article, "[Generate Leads with Social Media Strategy: 6 Steps to Fill Up Sales Funnel](#)," Pam O'Neal, Vice President of Marketing, BreakingPoint, said she and her team wanted to supplement traditional PR, events and demand-generation campaigns with a social media strategy that created strong relationships with hard-to-find prospects. But the team wanted to make sure those efforts were reaching the right audience and turning them into leads.

First, the team set up an online monitoring system that scanned the Web, the blogosphere, online forums and communities to find conversations relevant to BreakingPoint's industry and technical audience. The results were consolidated into an RSS feed that a team member could review each morning.

When the scanning tools found a relevant conversation, such as a blog post about the cost of network equipment testing tools, a team member would join that conversation. They would comment on the blog post and point readers to content on the same topic at the BreakingPoint blog.

The team also used their blog to break stories with the potential to go viral. For example, the company's security research team published tests and research related to "clickjacking" – a recently discovered security flaw within websites that takes clickers from a legitimate-appearing button to an illegitimate site. Those stories generated links from other industry blogs and articles in major trade publications.

The team supplemented their blog with a company Twitter account. It allowed them to post shorter, more frequent updates to their niche audience.

Company tweets included:

- Notices of new blog posts, webinars
- Fun entries (e.g., trivia questions, quizzes)
- Informal focus group questions (e.g., a poll of Twitter followers about potential names for the company newsletter)

The team used their scanning tools to find and participate in Twitter conversations relevant to their industry. They were particularly interested in community members asking for advice about equipment testing, so they set up alerts to find key terms, such as:

- "Bake off," an industry term for a head-to-head equipment test
- "Test methodology"
- Competitors' names

"People are complaining a lot more on Twitter than in the blogosphere," O'Neal said. "It's a place people go to vent, as well as search for solutions."

They also retweeted relevant information found through their scans, such as reports about equipment testing results or interesting industry news.

"It gives us a reason to stay in front of our followers and stimulate conversations," she concluded.

Related Resources

[Inbound Marketing 2016: How marketers connected with millennials and built trust in the marketplace](#)

[Marketing Charts: The channels your customers are most \(and least\) likely to disengage with](#)

Tactic #4. Get current customers to share on your behalf

As we noted in the previous tactic, it's important to establish your brand as a recognized name that your prospects can trust. This then paves the way for your lead generation efforts, which will likely be much easier once you've established a positive image.

Your current customers can serve as unofficial brand ambassadors for you. We all know how valuable word-of-mouth publicity can be. This tactic increases the trust factor – people tend to place more weight on something that comes recommended by someone whose opinion they value.

Social media provides a quick and easy way for people to rave about your brand in a way that seems natural.

One of the keys to using this tactic effectively is to provide a way for your customers and followers to mention your brand in a way that's interesting, useful or fun.

For example, creating a promotion that involves user-generated content is a great option because people naturally want to share videos or other content they have made. This is a strategy that Diamond Candles has used successfully.

Its results with word-of-mouth advertising are impressive: The company's average customer tells at least three people about the brand. One way it enabled this – as described in the MarketingSherpa case study, "[Social Media Marketing: How a small e-commerce site attracted 293,000 Facebook fans](#)," by Adam Sutton, Senior Reporter, MECLABS – is by hiding jewelry in the form of rings inside its products. Customers are then encouraged to share their "ring reveal" photos online.

To help enable people to easily do this, the company includes "share your photo" buttons on many pages of its website.

Diamond Candles has user-generated photos almost everywhere. Its pages on Facebook, Pinterest, Instagram and the company website heavily emphasize these photos. This turns the company's social profiles into pseudo product catalogs with proof that customers love the experience.

The photos also help create an impression that snapping and sharing a photo is part of buying a Diamond Candle. Anyone who comes across the brand online is likely to see a customer photo or a photo-based giveaway. Even the product label encourages people to share.

"One of the first things we tried was, rather than telling people to do it, we would frequently repost photos that people had posted and say, 'Hey, this is what Sally found in her candle,'" said Justin Winter, Co-founder and CEO, Diamond Candles. "So to a degree, we're setting an unspoken expectation that this is kind of what you do. This is the product experience."

Tactic #5. Combine your content marketing and social media strategies

The MarketingSherpa article, "[B2B Lead Generation: 6 social media tactics from 7 experts](#)," by David Kirkpatrick, Manager of Editorial Content, MECLABS, asked industry experts for their suggestions as to the best way to use social media for lead generation. Jonathan Gebauer, Product Manager, Co-founder and CEO, exploreB2B, stressed the value of bringing social media marketing into a content marketing strategy.

"In my experience, this is the most effective way to generate leads via social media," he explained. "It is the best way to provide valuable and helpful content for people within a target group. Content ranges from articles, videos and infographics to white papers."

The goal with this strategy is to position yourself as a thought leader in your field. He said if you can position yourself as an expert in your market, the incentive for people to follow you and listen to your social media output increases.

"Content can effectively be posted and spread via social media. It is very important to connect your different channels. An infographic on Pinterest can link to an article. A guest post on a blog can link to a video on YouTube," Gebauer said.

Shama Kabani, CEO, The Marketing Zen Group, echoed that advice, "Create compelling content. Solid content should be the cornerstone of any good B2B online marketing plan. An education webinar for current clients and prospects can be a great lead generating and referral source. For example, The Trade Group, a full-service trade show exhibit provider, holds quarterly webinars for their clients as a way to educate and retain them."

She added that part of the content strategy should be creating and distributing online videos across platforms.

Kabani said, "Online videos are still consistently underutilized by B2B companies – even though they can allow you to reach prospects, and increase visibility."

Frank Dale, President and CEO, Compendium, also agreed that combining content marketing with an overall social media strategy is the best way to generate leads.

"In a sense, content marketing is the purest form of marketing because it allows companies and their customers to tell stories that are true and to educate prospects so they can make a choice," he said. "This approach works well for B2B marketing because it focuses on knowing the customer, understanding the pain points and developing good information that answers questions."

Dale offered three points on how to use content marketing in order to generate leads:

- Develop varied and useful content that will draw individuals to lead generating mechanisms on your website. Mix up your content to include written material like white papers and case studies, graphical information like photos and infographics, and interactive material such as videos, podcasts and webinars.
- Use keywords and strong calls-to-action. Make sure content is loaded with keywords to attract prospects, and then draw them to lead generation mechanisms through clear calls-to-action. These can be contact forms, RFP forms or email opt-in lists.

- Share and distribute content on all of your channels: blogs, social media, email marketing. Use a content marketing platform to make social sharing easier.

Dale also provided an example of a company leveraging its blog to generate leads through content marketing.

"Widen, a Madison, Wis.,-based digital asset management (DAM) software provider, implemented this process to spur inbound marketing," he said. "Today, more than a third of Web referral leads come from its blog. The company's content marketing program focused on educating its audience about the existence of DAM software and drawing individuals toward lead-generating materials, such as webinars, white papers and requests for pricing and demos. As a result, Widen's blog is the top referrer of sales leads to Widen.com, and has helped make Widen.com and its landing pages some of the highest ranked in the DAM industry for key search terms."

Related Resources

[Inbound Marketing: How PoliticalBank used paid and grassroots content efforts to grow web traffic 400%](#)

[Cutting Through The Noise: How Ebates integrated compelling content into its seasonal campaigns and earned a 11.7% conversion rate and a leg up on the competition](#)

[How HomeAdvisor Tested More Relevant Content to Better Tap into Subscribers' Motivations and Increased Conversion by 85%](#)

Tactic #6. Use a three-pronged approach

In the article from Tactic #5, Jenny Vance, President, LeadJen, said monitoring social media for negative mentions of competitors or for prospects expressing a need are both opportunities to generate leads.

She also provided a three-point plan for lead generation through social media:

- **Monitor.** Listen to your target audience by carefully selecting and monitoring keywords. Look for additional terms people are using that you can capitalize on.
- **Respond.** Develop messages and test them. In social media, companies can send either branded messages from the company or non-branded messages from individuals. In either case, the messages should point recipients to additional content: a landing page, an offer, an article or other content. Test these elements in various combinations (branded vs. non-branded, offer vs. landing page, etc.) to see which drives the best results.
- **Convert.** Social media messages combined with links provide a wonderful way to engage people and convert the conversation into a sale. Include in your strategy ways to foster conversions with messages encouraging recipients to like you on Facebook and join your email list. Measure your success by following the click all the way through the sales funnel to determine if the program is driving leads and sales, and what the value of the sale is.

Tactic #7. Don't limit yourself to your own social media

While your own social media pages and accounts will likely be the main focus of your efforts, don't underestimate the value of participating in others' accounts, as well. In fact, this can be a great way to expose a whole new crowd to your brand, because your messaging is now seen by all of that source's followers and customers.

The MarketingSherpa case study, "[Social Media Marketing: Video campaign increased demo leads 63%, website traffic grew by 450,000 visitors](#)," by Kirkpatrick, illustrated the benefits of taking advantage of the extended audience you can reach through the networks of your partners or connections.

Wasp Barcode wanted to use video as a lead generation tool, and looked to blogs to help promote this content. But it didn't just focus on its own blog, said Jeremy Vest, Senior SEM and Online Manager, Wasp Barcode.

Along with the video ads, Vest said a goal for the campaign was to get "good back links" and to get conversations started about Wasp Barcode videos. He added that having videos embedded in popular blogs also signaled to YouTube that the video was valuable, which improved SEO.

To get Wasp Barcode videos in popular blogs, Vest said the team used human capital in the form of existing relationships that he, and other Wasp Barcode employees, had with influential bloggers.

Another aspect was creating videos with an angle and a particular audience in mind while still providing valuable information.

"I think what we have done really well is finding an angle for an audience versus just emailing the blogs up and saying, 'Hey, can you please talk about my video?'" he said.

To provide an example, Vest said Wasp Barcode has two videos on an influential marketing site because the team provided actionable information on its own success with video marketing, and the site offered Wasp Barcode the opportunity for a guest post.

Tactic #8. Use social media for lead nurturing

Getting a lead is important, of course, but that's only half the battle. You must then maintain that relationship by continuing the dialogue with that lead. Social media is a great asset to help you strengthen your relationships with customers and prospects. That's a point that was stressed by participants in one of our recent events, as noted in "[MarketingSherpa Lead Gen Summit 2013 Wrap-Up: Top 7 lead capture, qualification and nurturing takeaways](#)," by Kirkpatrick.

For an Industry Perspective session at MarketingSherpa Lead Gen Summit 2013, Francois Gossieaux, Co-president, Human 1.0, a boutique marketing innovation strategy firm, offered an interesting view of social media. At one time, all business was "social" in the sense that positive or negative word-of-mouth was the major influence on how a business was perceived.

As businesses became larger and began scaling, that social aspect became lost, according to Gossieaux. Through marketing and advertising bad habits such as interrupting and segmenting people, and treating employees like cogs in a wheel, these behaviors became ingrained.

He said the Internet and social media have shifted that equation because people are hardwired to be social.

The takeaway is businesses are becoming social again, by choice or not. The audience is no longer listening to business, exemplified by a data point that 80% of buying decisions are being made without your company's involvement, according to Gossieaux.

To address social media and lead nurturing, Todd Wilms, Head of Social Strategy, and Adriel Sanchez, Vice President, Demand Generation Northern and Southern Latin America, both of SAP, presented how the company utilized social media for ongoing lead nurturing.

An important aspect of this overall marketing strategy was recognizing that buying habits are changing – people are entering the funnel at different stages and now lead nurturing is happening outside of traditional systems.

Wilms and Sanchez explained social media has three key roles in lead nurturing:

- Listening for what people aren't telling you directly by following accounts and also filtering keywords for lead-relevant activity.
- Seeding the social conversation with what you want to talk about with a "programmatic approach," rewarding top contributors and using an enterprise-wide advocacy management tool.
- Engaging judiciously and in the right context to utilize social media, leveraging call centers and bringing customers and prospects together in social channels.

Related Resources

[B2B Marketing 2016: How marketers used data and testing to nurture prospects through relevancy](#)

[Inbound Marketing: How a pet portrait site grew its audience cross-channel using content and social media](#)

[B2B Marketing: How an accounting solutions firm uses a daily digest newsletter with industry content to build trust with audience](#)

Useful Links and Resources:

[MarketingSherpa Article – Using LinkedIn for Lead Generation: 6 Lessons](#)

[MarketingSherpa Article – Lead Gen with Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and Blogging: 6 Key Takeaways](#)

[MarketingSherpa Blog – 4 Simple Steps to Calculate Social Media ROI](#)

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