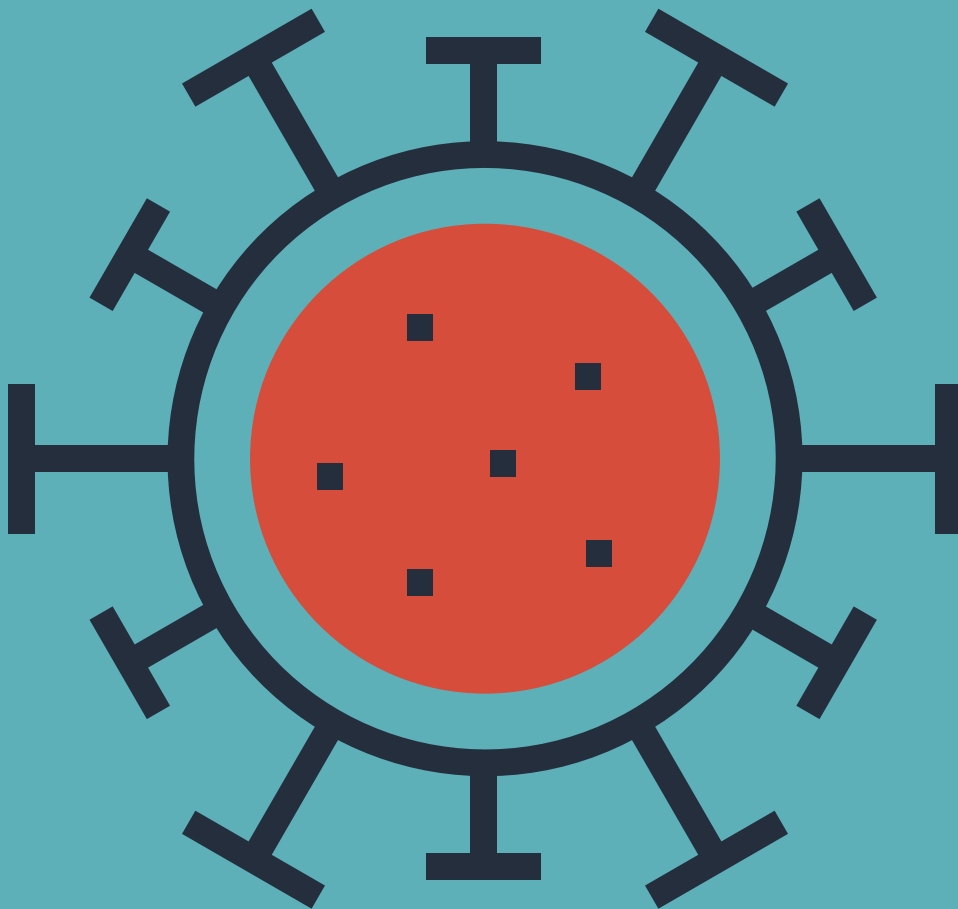


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How Martech Companies Can
Maintain and Grow Pipeline





ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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**LONDON
RESEARCH**

ABOUT LONDON RESEARCH

London Research is focused on producing research-based content for B2B audiences. We are based in London, but our approach and outlook are very much international.

We work predominantly, but not exclusively, with marketing technology (martech) vendors and agencies seeking to tell a compelling story based on robust research and insightful data points.

As part of Communitize Ltd, we work closely with our sister companies Digital Doughnut (a global community of more than 1.5 million marketers) and Demand Exchange (a lead generation platform), both to syndicate our research and generate high-quality leads.

For more information, visit
www.londonresearch.com

**DEMAND
EXCHANGE**

ABOUT DEMAND EXCHANGE

Demand Exchange, also part of Communitize Ltd, is an advanced lead generation platform that helps B2B companies increase revenues and reduce costs, removing the headaches faced by organisations at different stages of the lead generation process.

Our proprietary technology enables you to distribute content assets across a network of vertical websites that align to your industry. We help you generate opted-in sales leads in a way that complies with increasingly stringent data legislation.

Born out of technology originally developed to capture leads from content syndicated exclusively to Digital Doughnut's 1.5m-strong community of marketers, our platform helps companies drive high-quality leads at scale.

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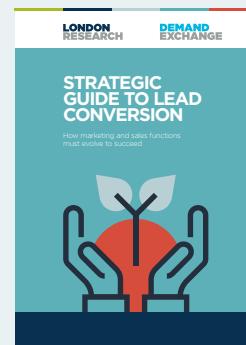
Introduction

As the COVID-19 crisis has worsened, London Research has published a series of articles on sister website Digital Doughnut aimed at helping martech companies keep their sales and marketing pipelines healthy. Based on interviews with senior sales and marketing executives, the articles focus on the importance of content marketing and lead generation in a world where meeting prospects at physical events and tradeshows has become impossible.

This white paper, produced in partnership with Demand Exchange, collates those five articles into a single report. While much of the advice is relevant for a pre- and post-COVID world, we believe that the report as a whole is a valuable reference point for marketing teams struggling to navigate the choppy waters of the current business environment.

While the report is aimed primarily at martech and adtech companies, it is relevant for any B2B-focused organisation seeking to bolster its pipeline during these challenging times.

For further reading we recommend two other London Research reports, The Strategic Guide to Lead Conversion¹, also produced in partnership with Demand Exchange, and The State of B2B Lead Generation Report².



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Courtney Wylie, VP of Product and Marketing, Mention Me

1

Cancelled Events Put the Lead Generation Spotlight on Compelling Content

A key question for martech executives in the current economic climate is how they are keeping their pipelines healthy in the wake of so many cancelled conferences. Cancelled events are prompting martech and adtech companies to redouble webinar efforts by creating compelling content they will subsequently use to fuel lead generation.

The list of events cancelled over coronavirus just keeps growing. Mobile World Congress was one of the first, soon to be followed by just about every sizeable gathering for martech and adtech executives in the calendar. It was no surprise when Cannes Lions 2020 was also cancelled.

Some conferences, including Ad Week Europe, have been postponed. Others, such as Facebook's F8 and Adobe Summit Europe have gone online only. Many companies had extended foreign travel bans to encourage home working even before home working became a necessity in many countries.

Put bluntly, the chance to press the flesh at industry events is all but gone for the next few months and opportunities to grab a coffee with a prospect have been curtailed. This raises the question, how are companies going to keep their pipeline healthy? While eMarketer figures³ show that trade shows are rated third by US marketers for engagement, behind email and websites, they are actually top of the chart for conversions.

Around the time of publication of this white paper, the International Monetary Fund said the world would 'very likely' experience the worst recession since the 1930s, although some industries will clearly be hit harder than others. Despite the gloomy outlook, martech companies need to focus on the positives and ensure that they continue to build for the future.

Marketers can no longer rely on events such as Cannes Lions to build their sales pipeline.





Webinars are a more efficient use of your time but they do take a lot of effort to get together some compelling content.

Peter Simpson

Global Head of Partnerships, Trustpilot

Event ROI not clear

Peter Simpson, Trustpilot's Global Head of Partnerships, was on his way to fly to a conference in Dublin when he heard the company had asked employees to cancel all overseas work trips. Like many martech execs, in one call, a route to keeping the sales pipeline healthy was seriously diminished, although he's not entirely sure how much of an impact it will have.

"Conferences are useful because they help add new people to the top of the sales funnel and push existing contacts towards converting at the bottom of the funnel," he says.

"You meet people at a conference and then follow up later or you already have warm prospects who want to meet up and chat at an event before they sign up. It's hard to work out the precise ROI, though, because with big events you may get a lot of leads but they're not always high-quality and with small events you talk to people you already know. They're definitely a central part of keeping a healthy pipeline, though."

Webinars need great content

Like many other execs, the route forward for Simpson to add and win over prospects is looking likely to be ramping up webinars. It's here that there could be a knock-on effect as crafted content, designed to earn and maintain attention during an online presentation, could open up new avenues for content distribution.

"Webinars are a more efficient use of your time but they do take a lot of effort to get together some compelling content," he says.

"Ideally, you need to conduct research before you put a webinar together, which also means you then have some great additional content for reports and blogs. We do quite a lot of this already and I can see us doing more.

"It's too early to say what's going to happen to budgets but there could be a time later this year or next year when we say we're saving money on travel at the same time as webinars and content are turning out to be great for lead generation. So, we may end up saying, let's put more budget there."

Conferences missed, but not that much

Courtney Wylie, VP of Product and Marketing at Mention Me, is similar to many other martech execs who have had to recently grapple with turning, in her case, a breakfast sales event into a webinar. While she will miss meeting up with prospects and clients in real life, she believes missing larger industry events will have less of an impact on lead generation than would have been the case just a couple of years ago.

"We're not overly worried about relying more heavily on webinars because we find that with big events, you don't get the contact details for people who have come to your presentation any more, due to GDPR," she says.

"You used to get a couple of hundred potential leads from the organiser in return for sponsoring a stream but now you probably only get to arrange a coffee with, say, three interesting leads. For us, conferences are now mainly about brand building or second-touch, because people are already aware of us through our digital marketing; we focus a lot on SEO and PPC."



Getting our content out there is a good way of showing thought leadership, which is only going to become more important if there aren't events taking place where we can speak at.

Courtney Wylie

VP of Product and Marketing, Mention Me

Great webinars create compelling content

The big opportunity Wylie sees is that to hold webinars, the company is going out and pre-recording keynote speakers and during the event they will record the stream of panellists answering questions. This, she feels, is going to give the company some content to distribute as video and podcasts.

This could serve as a lead generation tactic, particularly as Mention Me already relies heavily on thought leadership content to help boost its SEO performance. While Wylie is not clear yet what budgetary impact cancelled events will have, she's confident it will lead to the company relying more on content to boost its thought leadership credentials.

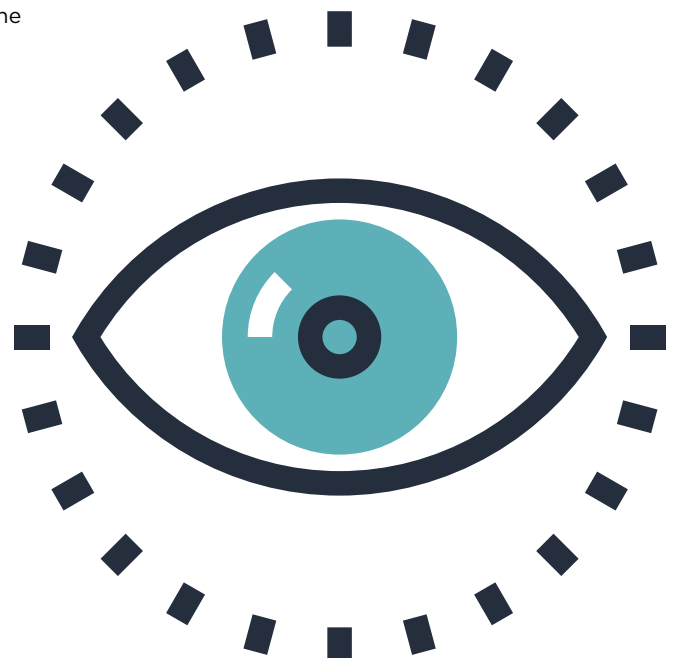
"It's too early to say if we're going to, say, double our content production, but we're likely to increase it through video, podcasts, reports and articles," she says.

"Getting our content out there is a good way of showing thought leadership, which is only going to become more important if there aren't events taking place where we can speak at."

Distributing content to new eyes

It would appear, then, that the route of replacing live events with webinars is about to heighten interest in creating compelling content that shows thought leadership on a range of topics. The goal will be to grab the attention of prospects and existing customers on their laptop rather than in an exhibition hall.

Martech companies will have their own properties to highlight this new raft of engaging content to existing prospects. However, to turn new content into fresh leads, from people who are not already visiting a company's website, the likelihood is many may consider looking further afield to distribution partners.



2

Tailoring Content to Each Stage of the Sales Funnel

In this section, senior marketers reveal lead generation success comes from crafting content which answers concerns prospects will have as they move from the top, to the middle and then the bottom of the sales funnel.

The spring conferences that have been cancelled across the world are traditionally a sure-fire way of putting potential leads into the top of the sales funnel. Marketing teams typically then focus on pushing contacts made in Q1 and Q2 towards the sharper end of the funnel, so they might be ready to commit when conference season lands again in the autumn.

So, what now? In the previous section, we've seen how senior marketers are switching to filling up the top of the funnel through webinars and then ramping up content marketing.

It begs the question: what sort of content works best to introduce potential leads to the top of the funnel? Subsequently, what type of content is best suited to reaching out and aiding their progress through to the middle and, finally, the bottom of the pipeline?

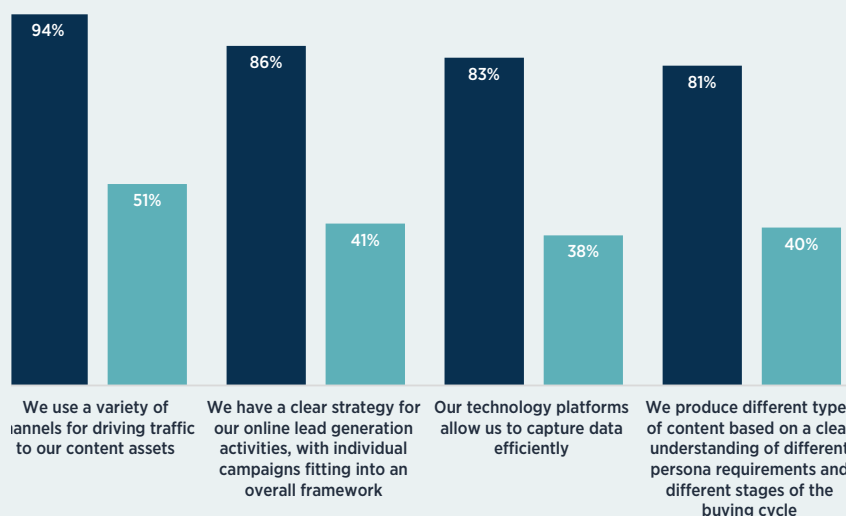
The State of B2B Lead Generation Report showed that 81% of lead generation leaders produce different types of content to suit the different stages of the buying cycle. Mainstream companies are only half as likely to build content around where a prospect is in their buying cycle.

Target changing pain points

So, success comes from finding the right type of content and then applying it to prospects to help them work their way through wherever they are in a sales funnel. For Christelle Fraysse, CMO at CRM software company Workbooks, this means going

FIGURE 1
Proportion of respondents agreeing ('strongly' or 'somewhat') with these statements relating to their lead generation activities

Source: London Research / ON24
State of B2B Lead Generation 2019

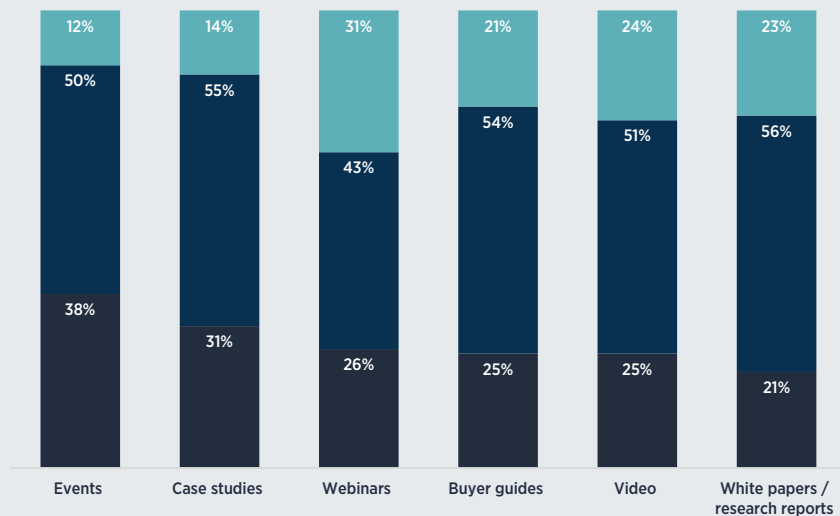


Organisations defined as lead generation leaders are twice as likely as their peers to produce different types of content based on a clear understanding of personas and different stages of the buying cycle.

● Leaders
● Mainstream

FIGURE 2
Effectiveness of
content assets for
driving good-quality
leads

Source: London
Research / ON24
State of B2B Lead
Generation 2019



77% of marketers regard white papers and reports as 'effective' for driving good-quality leads.

● Very effective
● Quite effective
● Not effective

beyond just emailing people and putting up social media posts, because everybody is doing that. Potential customers are feeling bombarded.

Instead, she argues, marketers need to think of content that identifies the pain points to get people in at the top of the funnel and then tell them why your solution is the right answer in the middle of the funnel. At the conversion end, it's all about reassurance and a more one-to-one conversation.

"At the top of the funnel, where you're identifying pain points, white papers, newsletters, ebooks, blogs and thought leadership are all great," she says.

"In the middle, where you want to show you know what the answers are likely to be, we find focused white papers and webinars are very useful, with some personalised email campaigns too.

"Nearer conversion, we move to case studies and true one-to-one emails. We let those case studies come alive by getting people who are close to signing to chat with existing companies on small-group webinars. We have a selection of clients who are willing to come online and answer questions."

Throughout this process, Fraysse's guiding principle is for content to avoid being too generic but rather focused on how it can be helpful in addressing questions a lead is likely to have at each stage of the sales funnel.

The State of B2B Lead Generation report found that more than three in four marketers revealed they find white papers and research reports 'quite' or 'very useful' for generating leads. Nearly nine in ten (86%) found the same for case studies.

Be specific, then go one-to-one

One point to bear in mind, according to Laura McHenry, Senior Director of Marketing for EMEA

at Tealium, is that many companies are sitting on content they were expecting to present at events which are now cancelled. Arranging webinars is an obvious way to get that content working hard while conferences are closed down, but there are a lot of companies doing the same thing. 'Death by webinar' could become an issue.

"Everyone's going to be missing out on hundreds of leads from events this spring so you need great content that works well for SEO," she says.

"We're all going to need to ramp up paid search activity as well and make sure landing pages are as engaging as possible to get people in at the top of the funnel. The content has to be targeted; you can't just blast out generic content to everyone. This isn't a time to cut and paste content from a webinar, you've got to really look at where people are in the funnel and make sure you've got the content there to support them.

"This is a time where sales and marketing need to work together better than at any time before. After marketing has pushed people from the middle to the bottom of the funnel, work with the really strong key prospects on truly bespoke, personal emails which put together content that addresses their individual concerns and helps get them over the line."

Senior marketers are agreed, then, that lead generation success comes from producing and marketing content which becomes more granular and targeted as prospects are eased through the sales funnel. Rather like a conversation in real life, the mood shifts from general introductions to more detail before becoming personal.

How these messages are put out into the market, which channels work best for which type of content and each stage of the funnel will be covered in the next section.

3

Content Syndication, Email and LinkedIn

In this section, we look at how senior marketers are using content syndication to boost email and social content discovery.

The feedback from the martech and adtech industries is very clear. With events cancelled, businesses are having to be far more creative in how they make up for hundreds, or even thousands, of leads that attending conferences would have earned.

The focus now is on webinars and content marketing to populate the top end of their sales funnels. As discussed in the previous section, vendors are feeding the middle of the funnel with more granular content to show they understand the issues felt in a particular industry or job role. At the bottom of the funnel, it's still a case of moving to a more personal conversation over email and one-to-one demonstrations (albeit via video conferences or mini webinars).

Martech companies such as BlueVenn use LinkedIn to push out white papers and other types of content.



The question remains then, when seeking to populate the top of the funnel, which channels work best? Speaking to leading industry experts, there appears to be a consensus that email and social, most notably LinkedIn, are the best combination alongside amplifying content to reach new audiences via a content aggregator.

Email and LinkedIn

For Anthony Botibol, VP of Marketing at BlueVenn, SEO is far and away the best channel for inbound lead generation because a visitor is actively looking for information about the company's platform. Of course, for SEO to lead potential buyers to your site, rather than a rival's, you need to have engaging content.





I've never seen any real commercial return from Twitter. I think we could quite happily turn it off and never notice.

Anthony Botibol
VP Marketing, BlueVenn

For getting this great content out to people who are not actively searching for it, he believes many companies may not always be fully exploiting their own email database. His experience is that email and social work particularly well together, although brands will normally need to put money behind posts to amplify their reach to the correct audience.

"We use LinkedIn to put out white papers, thought leadership, blogs and ebooks," he says.

"I've never seen any real commercial return from Twitter. I think we could quite happily turn it off and never notice. LinkedIn's far better for leads, although they're not always the best quality.

"Email and LinkedIn are also a good way to promote webinars which are a good source of leads. We work on a general presentation initially which then leads to one-to-one demonstrations."

Awareness through syndication

Botibol believes there is little point in investing in creating quality content if it is not amplified by a content syndicator which can help a company reach people they are not connected to on social or through email.

"We're big fans of content syndication, although you have to make sure you work with a reputable company because there are some cowboys out there," he says.

"We do a lot of work with [B2B lead generation platform] Demand Exchange, which works really well for us. It allows us to put our content out to a wide variety of its partner publishers. We turned it off for a couple of weeks to see if there was a difference and, to be blunt, leads went down significantly so we turned it back on again.





When a lead downloads content they pass over their contact details so you don't just get added reach and awareness, you get good-quality lead data.

John Horsley
Founder, Demand Exchange

"Content syndication is a great way of not just getting your name out there but also building up an email database you can carry on a conversation with and send content to directly. It's more about awareness to get people into the top of the funnel, rather than driving up sales in the short term."

For John Horsley, Founder of Demand Exchange, there are several benefits of amplifying content but the most obvious is technology vendors reaching people beyond their own sites.

"There's been a trend for tech companies to put their details about their technology and thought leadership in a 'resources' section of their website," he says.

"The problem with that is it obviously only reaches people that already know enough about the brand to be on its website and it's unlikely they will hand over their contact details. With a content aggregator, such as Demand Exchange, your content can be added to resource centres placed across multiple B2B marketing and advertising industry sites."

This not only opens up substantial new audiences, beyond a brand's own website, it can also help bring in useful contact data for follow-up emails or calls.

"When a lead downloads content they pass over their contact details so you don't just get added reach and awareness, you get good-quality lead data," Horsley says.

"We find we can get far better-quality data because we background check telephone numbers and email addresses. So, unlike most brands' sites or other publishers, you don't get a bunch of downloads from Mickey Mouse at a personal email address."

At a time when marketers were expecting the top of their sales funnels to be filled by now-postponed conferences, the channels of choice for generating new leads are clearly email, LinkedIn and content syndication.

Sadly, one probably has to accept there are going to be fewer Holy Grail customers who are in-market and actively searching for relevant keywords for an imminent investment in their next martech platform.

This makes it all the more important to get engaging content in front of a new audience to enrich email databases, reach more contacts on LinkedIn and generate awareness with new leads through content syndication.

4

Getting Granular with Content

In this section, marketing experts reveal the power of taking a big content idea and then refining it to appeal to verticals and job roles. With industry events continuing to be cancelled into the summer, we have seen how martech and adtech businesses are turning to webinars and content marketing to get leads entered into the top of their sales funnel.

This is what marketers contacted by London Research have told us. It raises two huge questions, though.

How do you stand out enough when every other marketer is doubling down on content marketing? Also, how do you go from beyond getting initial interest into developing leads and turning them into prospects?

According to Wilson Raj, Global Director at SAS, the best strategy is to start off with a big idea and then break it down into smaller, granular pieces of content that focus on issues which a potential type of customer may be facing.

For example, he explains the big idea at SAS for 2020 was 'The Future of Marketing', for which a major piece of research was conducted. This acts as a top-level piece of thought leadership which then feeds into a sequence of ebooks and webinars on more focused topics.

"We start off with the big idea, which is basically our anchor text," Raj explains. "We then break it down into business issues which marketers are facing, such as loyalty, privacy and customer experience. We can then further refine content and webinars to apply those issues to different industries, such as retail or personal finance."





We have a lot of data on the journeys existing customers have taken and so we can build up models of lookalike customers and see what has worked in the past.

Wilson Raj
Global Director, SAS

For Raj, this means the brand can populate the top of its sales funnel with a major piece of thought leadership. Then, to encourage people to move through to the middle of the funnel, content is focused to provide expert voices answering the issues each industry faces. The goal is to then move a prospect towards the end of the funnel, where the conversation goes one-to-one.

Data-driven content choices

To help leads through the funnel, SAS does not rely on gut instinct and experience alone. As one might imagine, a CRM database sits at the centre of all decisions, allowing the content marketing function to put the right content asset in front of the right person at the right time depending on what their job is, what concerns they have, and where they are in the sales funnel.

"We use a lot of propensity modelling to understand what content will work best to reach out to a lead with," Raj explains.

"We have a lot of data on the journeys existing customers have taken and so we can build up models of lookalike customers and see what has worked in the past. We use this propensity modelling to score a lead and then to rank the piece of content they should be shown next, typically over email. If that content isn't engaged with, then we know what other content was next in line, and we'll try that."

Targeting job roles, as well as verticals

The need to gear content around different types of readers cannot be stressed too highly, agrees Fraysse at Workbooks. For her, getting granular is just a case of marketers practising what they preach and segmenting their audiences, just as they advise clients to.

She ensures content marketing strategy always uses a key message which is distilled into verticals. However, where she thinks some businesses let themselves down is in not further refining content to job roles within each industry.

"As you move through the sales funnel you have to personalise content to smaller segments," Fraysse says. "You can bring people in at the top of the funnel with ebooks and blogs talking about the pain points you solve. However, you've got to then segment and get under the skin of different categories of customers."

"We do this by building white papers around different industries and what is important to their vertical. We then further refine content down by job title and what pain point someone in an industry is having according to their role. This can change between someone in marketing, sales, finance or customer services. You can really get granular with their concerns."

Partner up to syndicate, and be kind

Pure360 CEO Mark Ash reveals the email marketing platform is not only going granular with its content. Where possible, it is going a stage further. Once marketers have identified verticals their technology is used in, his advice is it's time to get an industry-relevant partner to help with syndicating content to get a message amplified.

"We've been doing some work with travel trade association ABTA because obviously travel companies have huge concerns at the moment," he says. "We've been looking at the day-to-day challenges that the industry faces. We've also had our annual email tracking research which we work with the DMA on, that gives us huge additional reach with the content to hit marketers."



It's a great time to be looking at different industries and various positions within companies, and offering hints and tips each audience will find truly beneficial.

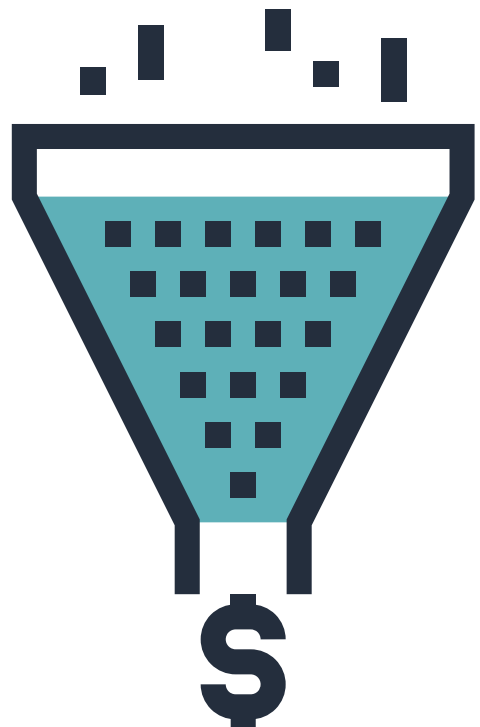
Mark Ash
CEO, Pure360

Something Ash is very keen to point out, though, is that whether it is your own email list or you are syndicating granular content through partner organisations, there is a need to consider tone of voice. Right now, people are less likely to be in-market to buy. They are far more likely to be very concerned about their company's future and their role within it. It means content should get to the pain points each industry and job role is facing but it should do so in a caring way.

"It's a time to be more helpful than salesy," he says. "It's a great time to be looking at different industries and various positions within companies, and offering hints and tips each audience will find truly beneficial. People want to know what they need to be thinking about to survive. They need a platform's support more than a sales message."

"We're combining this approach of putting help above sales messages with following up with interested customers and prospects, and offering free one-to-one advice on strategies and campaigns."

So, the experts are agreed. At this highly unusual time, granular content is a great way to get people in the funnel and ease them through towards the sales end. However, with so few people in-market to buy right now, one way of keeping interest could be to simply offer help and advice in a move that will see a brand remembered fondly when we get back to normal and people start to make platform investment decisions again.



5

Produce Killer Webinars by Concentrating on Audiences

We've also talked to a leading webinar expert on how to deliver great experiences that produce the best leads.

As events are cancelled, postponed or taken online, marketers are looking to fill the top end of their sales funnels with a combination of webinars and content marketing. The assumption is that great webinars need great content which can subsequently be repurposed and shared with a target audience through social, email and content syndication.

As they are tasked with creating compelling webinars, many marketers will be left with just one question – how exactly do we do that? We conclude this white paper with key insights from Mark Bornstein, VP of Marketing at webinar platform and content hub provider ON24.

His first message to businesses is to not lament cancelled events for too long but rather embrace webinars for two very simple reasons. More people turn up to webinars than events and you get to find out more about them.

Marketing leaders back webinars

ON24 partnered with London Research to produce The State of B2B Lead Generation report which found striking differences between marketers at the top of their webinar game and the chasing pack.

When it comes to the best possible quality leads, 60% of lead generation leaders say webinars perform better than any other kind of content asset, compared to 26% of execs from mainstream businesses. Furthermore, three in four leaders revealed webinars are effective in driving high-quality leads, compared to only two in three at mainstream companies.

Six top tips for webinar success

So, what are the leaders getting right? For Bornstein there are some very clear tips for webinar success.



Be conversational, avoid death by PowerPoint

Nobody wants to give up an hour of their time to watch talking slides delivered by what Bornstein refers to as 'the headless voice'.

There is nothing wrong with some slides if they truly get over some valuable information, such as a chart or a statistic you want people to remember. However, they should be kept to a bare minimum and a lot of webinars now don't feature any charts.

"The best webinars are more like conversations than presentations," says Bornstein. "They're more like an interview over a coffee than someone running through a bunch of slides. Charles Schwab is great at this. They just talk to experts and interview customers about investments. It makes it far more real."



Multiple presenters

Nobody would tune into a TV show where they only listen to one person for 30 or 40 minutes, or even an hour. So, Bornstein suggests you shouldn't assume that's what webinar attendees would like to do either.

"You need to avoid relying on the same presenter," he says.

"Where possible, consider having presenters from different parts of the organisation joining in and taking over for a part of the webinar. Have customers and experts you want to be part of the webinar join in, regardless of where they are, just get them on the screen too."



Audience participation = Great data

Far too often marketers fret about getting the right people to attend a webinar before they do something very odd – virtually ignore them.

"You've got to get the audience involved, it's a golden rule," reminds Bornstein. "It's so important I always ensure I've asked the audience a question before we even start to say our introductions."

Audience participation does not only get an audience more involved, it delivers what a marketer wants more than anything else from a great webinar – lots of detailed data.

"If someone turns up at an event, you may know they picked up their badge but you might not know which talks they went to, which topics they found interesting and what questions they may have asked," Bornstein continues.

"At a webinar you can do all this. You can ask leading questions to get people involved about what issues they face, how they feel about a topic, what timeframe they are looking at for their next digital marketing investment.

"Polls are a great way to solicit data but so too are Q&A opportunities and encouraging people to tweet about the presentation they're participating in. Put all this together and you get some great leads you know way more about than if they'd attended a road show or watched one of your presentations at an industry event."



Brand it

It is very easy for a martech or adtech webinar to look as if it is coming from their webinar platform provider. So, make sure your branding is in there and is clear.



Make it focused

If you need to remember one thing about webinars it is Bornstein's mantra – 'never boil the ocean'. A deep and narrow dive into a particular topic, issue or pain point is always far more valuable than going wide and shallow.

Health business Red Whale is his top tip to watch out for here because their webinars are always about a particular ailment or issue, they never deal with more than one condition.

Follow this strategy and you will need to accept what at first appears to be a counterintuitive proposition. Bornstein's advice is that you are always better off running a series of webinars with focused, engaged audiences than one massive one. A series of five webinars with 50 viewers each is far better than getting all 250 people on the same webinar because many will not be fully engaged in a topic that is too all-encompassing.



Personalise for ABM

Account-based marketing (ABM) will often see execs pore over a list of key accounts they would dearly love to get talking to. Here, Bornstein believes, the power of the webinar comes into its own, so long as you are content with a small, highly-defined audience.

"You can do some great things by making webinars so focused, they're actually personalised," he says. "If you're involved in account-based marketing, you may have some top-priority companies you really want to get in front of but you're getting no traction.

"So, what you can do is take a webinar and then fit it around the company you're trying to talk to. If you have a dozen email contacts or so at the company and just two or three watch the webinar, that's two or three people you've started a conversation with that you wouldn't have had a chance to otherwise."

Above all else, Bornstein's advice is to focus on the audience. Give them a great experience that picks out a particular discussion point and make sure to gather lots of data to follow up on.

Conclusion – Action Points

With live events and meetings cancelled across the globe, it is clear that many brands are now having to rely more heavily on a mix of webinar and content marketing to keep on feeding their sales funnels with leads.

COVID-19 did not create the need to use these channels, they have always been important. It did, however, make it necessary to double down on them to keep sales funnels populated with new leads.

If you are planning to increase webinar and content marketing activity, here are five action points to focus on.



1

Have a big content idea to feed the sales funnel

The best webinar and content marketing programmes start with a macro idea. You need a significant piece of thought leadership, a major question to ask. It might start off with a piece of research or a series of blog posts and opinion articles on a big topic.

2

Get granular to turn leads into prospects

Take this major piece of blue-sky thinking, this posing of a big question, and then hone it down so it fits into different verticals and different roles within a vertical.

Use this more granular content to help push people from being a potential lead to qualifying as a prospect. In the middle of the sales funnel, use content that speaks to a decision maker's industry issues and the problems they find in their particular role.

3

Distribute wisely

Going from the macro to the micro should generate a lot of audio, video, blog, thought leadership and white paper content. To put this to the best use, most marketers find social channels, particularly LinkedIn, and email work well in combination.

To reach people you do not already know, though, be prepared to boost posts on LinkedIn, and to syndicate content to reputable publishers through a provider who can offer new viewers but also accurate lead data.

4

Great webinars = Audience focus = Great lead data

Focus on the audience or risk losing their attention. That is the greatest lesson webinars teach marketers. Involve participants as much and as early on as possible.

Ask leading questions, solicit replies, encourage enquiries, set audience polls and surveys, and encourage people to post on social media channels. All these interactions add up to more data about each attendee than you would have ever gained at a conference. There may be fewer leads coming in, but they will almost certainly be better thanks to the additional understanding you have about them.

5

Use the data to build a picture

Content marketing and webinars will provide a lot of very useful data. At the very simplest level, they will provide a larger email database for sharing content and flagging up webinars.

However, the really clever marketer will start to build a model for what content resonates best with each type of industry and job role. By looking at successful conversions, marketers can build models of lookalike customers which improve their understanding of not just who converts, but what prompted them to.

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