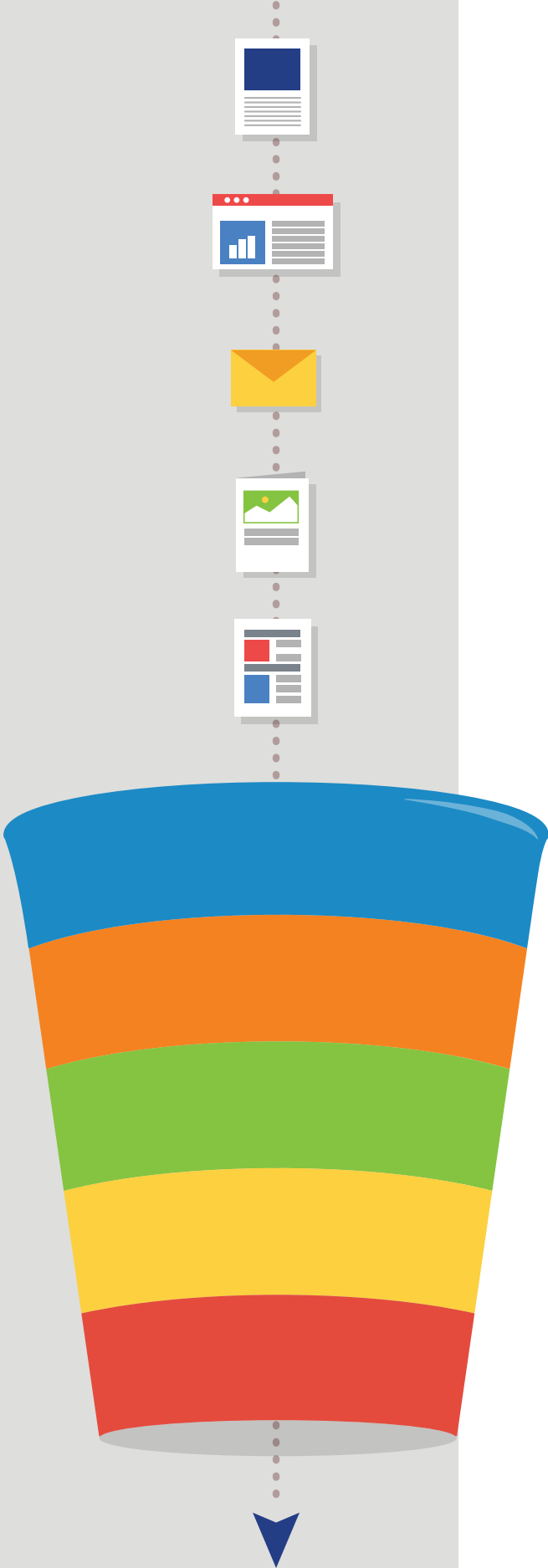


ACCELERATE LEAD GENERATION WITH CONTENT

How to use
your content
to fuel your funnel
and land
high-quality leads.

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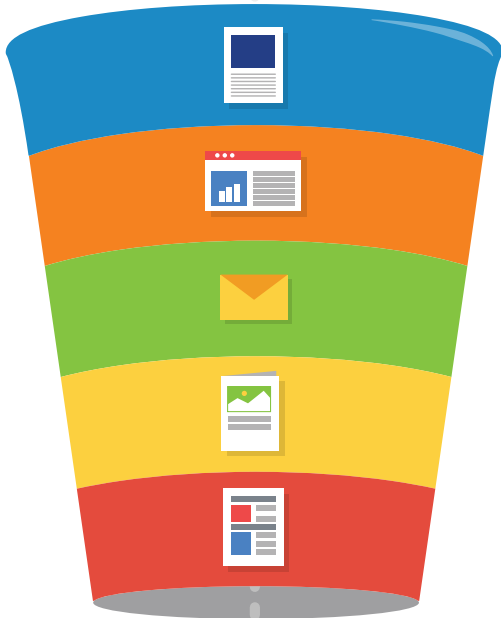
While website traffic has been the most common success metric for B2B marketers in the last several years, a Content Marketing Institute and MarketingProfs study conducted late last year suggests the most important content marketing metric these days is **sales lead quality.**

Generating quality leads has always been a goal for B2B marketers and can be an extremely effective way to identify the relevancy of your messaging. But, the more we dig into this concept, the more it looks like lead generation may be the most valuable concept you can use to grow your business.

Let's look at why.

WHAT'S A LEAD?

Generally speaking, a lead is someone who is likely to value the products or services your company offers based on a set of predetermined characteristics. Some of the characteristics might include:



- **Title:** The person has a job title that indicates decision-making power in an area relevant to your product or service. In our case, someone with a job title of Director of Marketing might be a better lead than a graphic designer.
- **Company size:** The characteristics of a small business might fit your unique offerings better than those of an enterprise corporation, or vice versa.
- **Industry:** Perhaps your products or services are geared toward a specific industry or group of industries.
- **Company revenue:** You might find the most success working with organizations with a certain annual revenue.

A BETTER WAY TO NURTURE

Cold calling, once the workhorse of the sales process, is beginning to lose its luster. At best, according to sales and marketing expert Toby Marshall, the effectiveness of cold calling has been stagnant over the last five years. At worst, it's seen a moderate decrease with no sign of making a strong comeback.

While cold calling is still an important part of many organizations' process (it certainly is for ours), it's becoming a less effective way to start the conversation.

Lead generation is a prospect-nurturing tactic that's becoming more and more common, and for good reason. A finely tuned lead generation and qualification practice allows your marketing team, working in tandem with your sales team, to turn distant prospects into a more qualified lead through quality content. This means your sales team can use phone calls to have more meaningful conversations earlier in the sales process instead of trying to warm up cold leads.

Pro-tip:

Take this opportunity to find out what's really valuable to the lead development and sales teams. They can help you create more relevant content and you can help make their jobs easier.

WHAT'S A QUALIFIED LEAD?

A qualified lead is someone who has both a desirable profile based on the criteria above AND expressed interest in your organization's products or services through measurable interaction with your sales and marketing content.

There are two steps to this process:

Marketing-qualified lead (MQL): An individual who meets the criteria above and has engaged with enough top-of-the-funnel content to be considered a prospect and passed to the lead-development team.

Sales-qualified lead (SQL): A prospect who meets the criteria of an MQL and has had positive interactions with your lead development team and is ready to be passed along to a salesperson.

How you define an MQL will depend on your company, but for most organizations, it's the product of measured content interaction. The more content your prospects engage with, the more interested they are in what you offer and the more likely they are to make a purchase down the road.



CONTENT'S ROLE IN LEAD GENERATION

So what does **lead generation** actually look like? It's a relatively simple process by which prospects exchange information about themselves (name, title, email, etc.) for valuable content. And if you have an effective way to capture that information, your content really starts working for you.

Pro-tip:

Use your automated emails to distribute other “heavier” pieces of content like e-books, case studies and product pages. It’s a great way to encourage engagement with other pieces of content your audience might be interested in.

The reason lead generation and qualification is important is the same reason content marketing has garnered so much attention over the last few years: Providing your prospects with useful, valuable information is an extremely effective way to both establish credibility as a brand and build invaluable trust between you and your audience.

Coincidentally, content marketing is the clear winner when it comes to lead generation tactics. According to the same CMI/MarketingProfs study, 85 percent of responding B2B marketers placed lead generation as their No. 1 goal for their content marketing practice.

The only place the survey found different priorities were enterprise marketers or “organizations that are taking the first steps of their content marketing program.” And even in those cases, lead generation was still a close second or third.

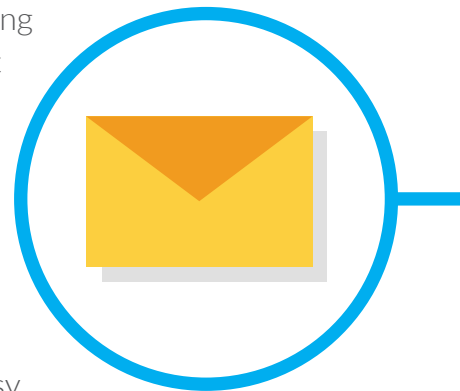
With that in mind, let’s take a look at five pieces of content and how to turn them into lead-capturing and lead-qualifying machines.

1. AUTOMATED EMAILS

Automated emails do a lot of the heavy lifting when it comes to lead generation, especially if you’re implementing a **marketing automation** program. It’s so powerful that 71 percent of B2B companies use email marketing for customer acquisition and 68 percent use it for customer retention, according to Act-On and Gleanster research.

Although it doesn’t take much to sign up for an email newsletter, it’s at least a small indicator someone is interested in your brand and your content. It’s also a good way to nurture your prospects and allows an easy way to communicate directly with your audience.

BONUS: Automated emails also make the perfect delivery method for all your other content such as new blogs, e-books or even updated pricing pages. One of our very short seven-email drip campaigns features eight additional pieces of content, delivered right to our audience.



2. E-BOOKS

E-books make an effective content type for lead generation for two reasons:

- You can pack it with useful, in-depth information
- You can gate it



You can gate an e-book because it typically contains the kind of information a prospect would pay for. PricewaterhouseCoopers actually predicted e-book revenue will reach just over \$8.5 billion in 2018.

That's all well and good. But, for your organization, the most valuable currency for your content isn't money. It's info.

For an in-depth e-book, give your audience the option to download it in exchange for their name, email address and perhaps a couple other pieces of information you find useful such as the name of their company and their industry.

Pro-tip:

Develop two to three case studies for every segment of your products and services. You'll be able to show prospects the variety of unique solutions you can offer.

If that content is valuable enough, your prospect will happily share some information about themselves in order to access those insights and, in return, you'll get valuable info about the people who are most interested in what your brand has to say.

3. CASE STUDIES

Case studies can be a real sweet spot for lead generation. They typically take less time to create than an e-book and can indicate an interest not only in what your organization does, but also the kind of results it has generated for others.



There are two schools of thought when it comes to case studies and lead generation. Some marketers say a case study is informative and relevant enough to gate it. Others say case studies play such an important role in building credibility that it's silly to put a barrier between that content and your audience. Which one works best for you might depend on how many case studies you have and what other kinds of content assets you're working with.

In any case, make sure you're able to track who is interacting with those case studies (either in Google Analytics, your CRM or marketing automation platform) and try featuring at least two to three case studies for every product or service you offer. Knowing which one(s) in particular a prospect looked at can give you and your sales team a better understanding about where to start the conversation.

Pro-tip:

Don't forget to include one clear CTA for every piece of content you create. Your audience will be more compelled to take further action if you empower them to do so.

4. BLOGS

This is an often overlooked and undervalued lead generation tactic. It works sort of like an email in that it can serve as both a demand generation asset and a lead-generating and qualifying tool.

Demand generation differs from lead generation in that the desired outcome is less about qualifying individual leads for the sales team to pursue, but **increasing brand awareness** and general interest in what your company does. Blogs can do this really well.

It can also help you generate leads in a couple different ways.

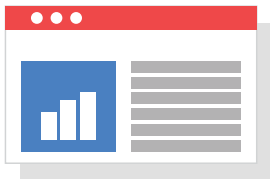
First, you can tailor other relevant blogs and heavier pieces of content to include within the blog itself. This is a great way to both provide your readers with additional value and encourage them to interact with more content.

Another way to use your blog to generate and qualify leads is to build a **subscribe button**, allowing readers to sign up to receive your blogs via email.

This would take some additional planning, strategy and IT resources. If you're already using a marketing automation platform, setting this up could be a piece of cake. After it's set up, this can be an easy way to make digesting your content even easier for an already captive audience.



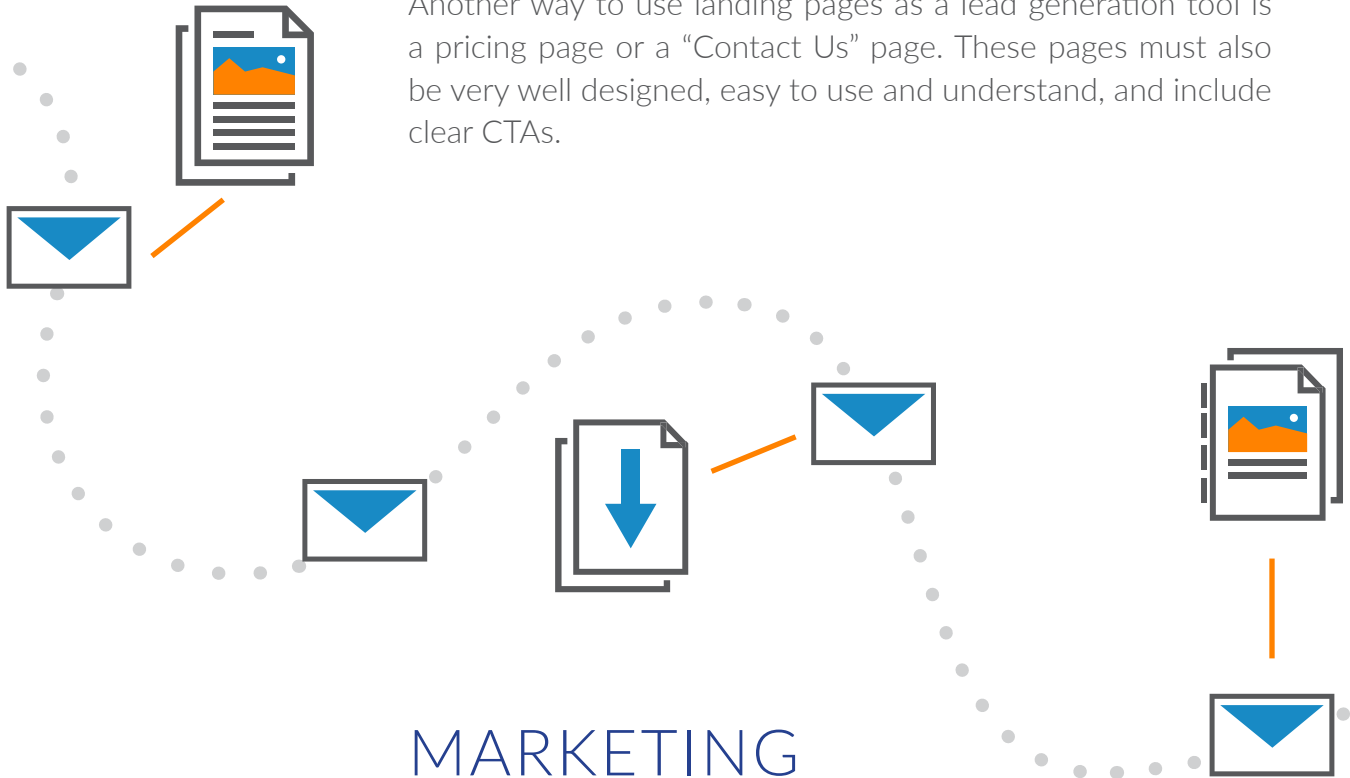
5. LANDING PAGES



When you think about it, your entire website is one giant piece of content, serving to engage and inform your audience through images, video and copy.

While it may seem a little redundant, there are a few ways a landing page can serve as a lead generation tool. The most obvious way is to build a landing page that hosts your gated content forms. While an e-book is the food, your landing page is the plate that presents it. Make your gated content landing pages simple to read and navigate, and make your calls to action easy to find.

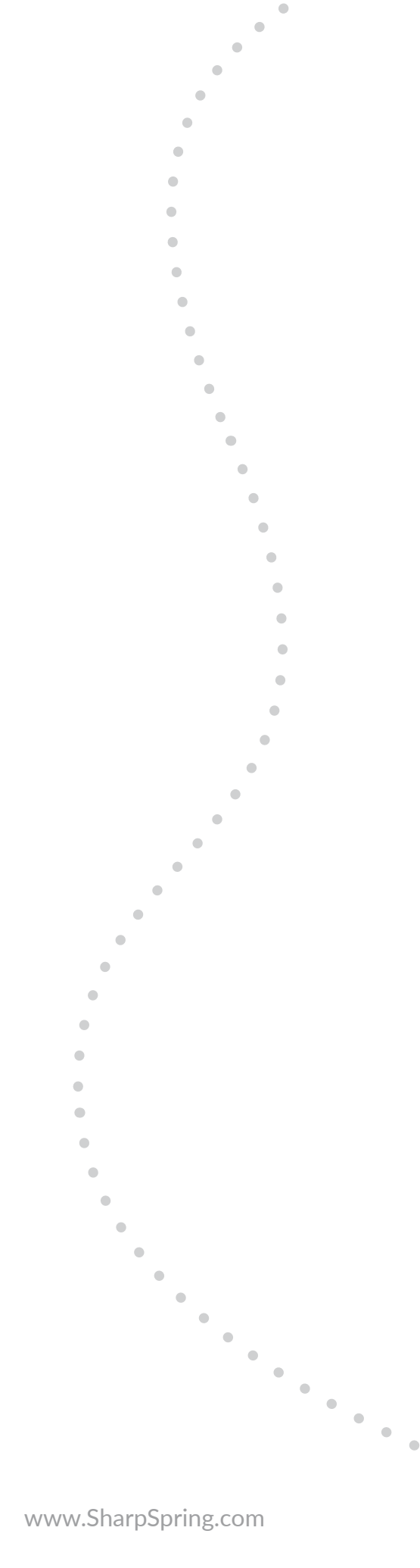
Another way to use landing pages as a lead generation tool is a pricing page or a “Contact Us” page. These pages must also be very well designed, easy to use and understand, and include clear CTAs.



MARKETING AUTOMATION'S GROWING ROLE

If lead generation is the ultimate goal, marketing automation is the ultimate method.

Marketing automation, while not an easy thing to master, can be an incredibly powerful tool. It's becoming so popular that 83,000 companies are using just the 10 biggest platforms alone.

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Marketing automation brings a new and exciting dynamic into the world of lead generation for three reasons:

- 1. You can automate your marketing messages:** This is an obvious benefit, seeing as “automation” is in the title. But the ability to configure certain emails to send out after certain actions (like signing up for your blog or downloading an e-book) makes this an undeniably awesome feature.
- 2. You can automate (and simplify) your lead-scoring process:** Organizations that have a lead-scoring strategy experience a 77 percent boost in lead-generation ROI. Assign different content types and different lead scores and watch them travel down the pipeline right into your sales team’s lap.
- 3. You can track it all:** You can’t measure a return if you don’t have the proper way to track it. Marketing automation, with all its bells and whistles, also comes with the tools to capture all the right insights you need to make better decisions in the future.

Marketing automation is also helping organizations find better alignment between marketing and sales, making your lead generation strategy even more successful. Though it might be a bit of an undertaking, it’s turning out to be a lead generation juggernaut.

WHAT’S YOUR LEAD GEN STRATEGY?

Consumers are clamoring for a better experience, one where they’re not given the hard-sell. Whether you’re going to start creating a little more content or dive right into full-scale marketing automation implementation, lead generation and a robust content marketing practice is the ideal solution.



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