MARKETING AUTOMATION: DREAM OR REALITY

[Chapter 11 – Digital Minds v2]

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Introduction

If you're a business owner or marketing director, the thought of a steady flow of qualified leads coming to your sales team on a daily, monthly, and yearly basis is, quite frankly, the stuff dreams are made of. It's the Holy Grail of marketing, the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, the hidden treasure found through a journey marred with twists and turns that only Johnny Depp could appreciate. After all, the potential of creating a constant flow of leads with virtually zero effort means more time with family, better golf scores, and the bliss of knowing your company's sales and profits are destined to grow forever.

Dream or Reality

This magnificent bounty is called marketing automation. Ever heard of it? Sounds as if it's as easy as switching your marketing controls to autopilot and letting the leads flow in! The truth is, *it is a reality*, though not exactly in the "sit back and relax" sense. The other truth is, *it's not the easiest to achieve*, and will remain a dream if proper steps are not taken. It can be difficult to accomplish because contrary to the word automation, it's far from an automatic process when designing and executing the plan. It involves laser focus, deep customer knowledge, relentless testing and the optimization of communication channels delivering the best results. For a company willing to make the commitment, marketing automation can be a sweet reality yielding dreamy returns.

What Is Marketing Automation?

The term marketing automation refers to technology designed to effectively market through multiple digital channels (such as email, social media, websites, etc.) and automate marketing processes using customer segmentation, customer data integration, and campaign management. It allows companies to connect multiple touch points while nurturing and converting potential customers to customers and customers to delighted promoters.

Marketing automation by definition may seem kind of cold and impersonal, and maybe even a little spammy. To the contrary, it's a highly personalized process of collecting important data on a potential customer's interests and goals, allowing a business to deliver specific, custom-tailored offers that resonate and delight. A successful marketing automation campaign creates unparalleled customer satisfaction and loyalty. No other form of marketing could be more personal.

Is Marketing Automation Right For You?

So, who uses marketing automation? Larger companies started using the technology as far back as the late 1990s, but now the fastest growing segment in marketing automation software adoption is small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs are companies generating revenue between $5,000,000 and $500,000,000).

Early adopters were primarily business-to-business firms in industries such as manufacturing, high-tech software and business services. Only in the last few years have all categories of business adopted marketing automation for its relationship-oriented approach to directing potential customers through the buying funnel.

Most industry experts agree the boom in marketing automation is the result of new providers offering solutions through software as a service (SaaS) where marketers can manage tools in a browser rather than accessing a technology that often requires IT support. Since the technology is sold on a subscription basis, the investment is typically lower and comes from operating budgets rather than capital investments.

Is it Different than Email Marketing?

There is a lot of confusion between email marketing and marketing automation, since email is one of the most common methods used to engage customers. Is it simply a more sophisticated method of sending personalized emails asking potential customers to visit landing pages and download offers? Actually, it's much more than that. It's a fully integrated solution using email marketing, landing pages, campaign management, lead scoring, social media tools, CRM integration and analytics. It utilizes each of these tools to ensure every touch point is managed to create optimal customer conversions.

Email is only one channel of customer communication. Marketing automation dynamically delivers relevant content based on specific profiles, behaviors and demographics. It further enables a marketer to test messages across multiple communication channels to drive engagement and segment potential customers based on their website and media usage patterns.

Marketing automation also allows for closed-loop reporting. When integrated into a CRM system, it allows a company to track and analyze leads through the entire sales process, giving an insightful view to the combined methods that bring the highest ROI.

How Does Marketing Automation Work?

Marketing automation uses technology to guide potential customers through a buying funnel. Rather than sending an individual message to someone interested in your product, a series of messages and other engagements are delivered to educate, inform, qualify, and close a potential customer. The close may occur during the automation process, or once a potential customer is convinced of the product's value; either way, they are directed to a sales representative as a qualified lead, ready to complete the order.

A simple marketing automation process looks like this:

Step 1: You visit a website, blog, or social media post with an invitation to download a free guide.

Step 2: To download the guide, you must fill out a short form with your name and email address.

Step 3: You receive a thank you message once you've downloaded the guide with an invitation to read a related guide that offers even more detail about the solution or a case study from another customer with a similar problem to solve. To gain access to this offer, you fill out another short form that asks more detail about your company size and your role in the company.

Step 4: Once you receive this additional content, a sales representative from the company receives an alert that you've taken this next step and contacts you for further assistance to complete a sale.

The automation process can be as simple as two or three steps, or depending upon the complexity of the product or service, a series of five or more steps are necessary to pull a potential customer through the entire sales funnel. The most effective campaigns consist of stages of personalized messages exhibiting a high-touch customer service approach.

What Are the Benefits of Marketing Automation?

Marketing automation is really about optimization. There are significant advantages to businesses focused on growth:

It Saves Time

Time is one of the most precious resources in any business. By automating a marketing campaign, a potential customer is taken step-by-step through the buying cycle and can choose to engage with a sales person at any step of the process. Instead of managing each individual communication point, an automated work-flow is set in motion according to the choices a potential customer makes as they are moving through the cycle, delivering appropriate messages and nurturing leads closer to a purchase.

It Delivers Leads

For the sales team, marketing automation ensures that leads have immediate access to all information helping them get closer to a buying decision, in a deliberate order, so when they choose to engage with a sales rep, they are ready to buy. Lead intelligence gathered as the potential customer moves through the automated steps allows the rep to score the lead and focus on the hottest leads first, while avoiding the weak leads that often take more time.

While marketing automation saves time, it also keeps weak leads in the sales funnel and notifies the sales team when they get closer to a buying decision. By comparison, email marketing will disengage with potential customers that don't respond to a number of emails without the opportunity to further interact and nurture.

It Generates High Revenues

Because automation tracks customers through the sales funnel and records interactions through a series of metrics in each campaign, a company is able to maximize the efforts that generate the

highest revenue and minimize the ones that don't produce. Higher revenues can also be achieved by automating cross-sells, up-sells, and customer follow-ups.

When combining the most successful campaign methods and prioritizing the most qualified leads, an organization will rapidly produce a better ROI.

Marketing Automation Creates Valuable Buyer Personas

One of the biggest advantages to marketing automation is developing a deeper understanding of your customers through a compilation of engagement profiles across all customer touch points. Automation allows you to build a database of website visits, blog visits, social media site visits, email opens, whitepaper downloads, form submissions, surveys and sales contacts.

This one-to-one relationship enables a company to learn more about their potential customers and customers, arming them with invaluable data for future marketing campaigns and, more importantly, the development of buyer personas. Get a head start on developing your personas by downloading our guide, *How to Create Buyer Personas* at this link: https://www.wsiworld.com/buyer-personas.

The Steps to Marketing Automation Success

Marketing automation is an incredible technology tool. Of course, it's just software. The true value to a customer is how that software is used to create more business. A dedicated strategy based on a customer's needs and a solid system of meeting those needs with personalized content is essential to success.

1. Set very specific goals

How many qualified leads do we need? How much website traffic needs to be generated to get to those leads? In most cases, the desired number of leads is targeted and the metrics required to achieve them are backed out and set up as first line goals.

For example, if you need 50 qualified leads per month, then you may target 12,500 visitors to visit a landing page with 20% of those visitors accepting an offer on your landing page, and then 2% of those visitors turning into a lead.

12,500 visitors

20% accept offers = 2,500

2% contacted as leads = 50

2. Create remarkable content that your potential customers want to read.

Relevant content marketing is essential to success in marketing automation. The content must appeal to the characteristics of each potential customer and answer questions dedicated to showing how a product or service will effectively solve their problem. Creating buyer personas of your ideal customers is critical to ensuring the right content is matched to the right person.

3. Create accountability between marketing and sales departments.

The analytics available in marketing automation allow marketing and sales departments to strategically improve their processes, and in turn, hold each other accountable. As leads are produced through automation and a clear path is established through the buying cycle, it becomes evident whether a lead had a proper follow-up to close the sale. By the same token, sales departments can view the metrics involved in developing qualified leads and see when and where marketing may be falling short. Cooperation between both marketing and sales teams will drive sales to unprecedented levels.

4. Establish a definitive closed-loop reporting process.

Closed-loop reporting ties the sequence of steps delivering potential customers through the buying cycle to the point of recording the actual sale. In the end, marketing analytics reports will establish customer profiles in which every engagement that leads to a sale is recorded, in addition to following the interactions that turn customers into promoters. The easiest way to accomplish closed-loop reporting is with CRM integration where each sale is linked back to customer interactions automatically. If a CRM integration is not available, then most platforms accommodate manual additions of sales transactions to complete the loop. Closed-loop reporting is vital to leading to improvements in both marketing and sales tactics.

5. Test, test, test, and then test again.

The beauty of marketing automation is that marketers receive a constant flow of data to assist them in optimizing results. All aspects of marketing can be reviewed with A/B testing. Landing pages, calls-to-action, offers, blog and social media posts and website pages can all be evaluated and fine-tuned to produce the best results possible. Testing is a never-ending component in marketing automation, and those who practice it consistently yield the strongest competitive advantage.

What Is Advanced Marketing Automation?

Of course marketing automation campaigns can be effective in the most basic to the most highly advanced plans. Contact lists can be segmented into hundreds of categories each with a series of specific messages to be delivered and a definitive workflow to move through. High-level marketing automation is often required for more complex products with steep average dollar investments. The most advanced level of marketing automation links advanced analytics to turn business data into customer intelligence in real time. It optimizes each customer contact by micro-tailoring promotions and offers that exceed expectations. Advanced automation also enables more opportunistic marketing than ever by responding to triggers that indicate a change in a customer's state—did they just move, make a purchase without add-ons, make a comment about a competitor, or purchase a newly introduced line for the first time?

Advanced marketing automation is bound by the highest level of personalization and customer knowledge achievable, but rewarded with an increasing rate of return through long-term loyalty and relationship building.

Conclusion

Alas, marketing automation is not a button to push that immediately drives leads to your door as you take that extra-long daily nap or add another one or two golf rounds to your week. It is, however, a reward worthy of high pursuit.

There are several marketing automation platforms available. The most notable are HubSpot, Infusionsoft, Eloqua, Marketo, Pardot and Act-on, just to name a few. No matter how sophisticated the software, proper implementation is the key to success.

Make sure you are aligned with a team of professional digital marketers not only proficient with the software you choose, but who also make a commitment to constantly learn more about your customers, create value through each step of the sales funnel, set precise goals that meet your growth needs and execute a high-touch methodology that delivers new customers.

That commitment will make marketing automation for your business a superb reality.

About the Authors

A WSI Consultant since 2009, Michael Watkins has an extensive background in both traditional and new media. He began his career as an ad agency copywriter and television commercial producer, then worked several years in broadcast sales and management for local FOX and CBS Television stations.

Mike's insights into the forever changing media world have become a vital resource to business owners and marketing directors. Having sold and managed literally hundreds of campaigns utilizing convergent media, his experience has made him one of the leading experts in digital media efficiency.

Nicole Dupre brings over 10 years of experience of marketing knowledge to WSI. She specializes in analytics, search engine optimization, search engine marketing, social media, and marketing automation. Mike and Nicole are WSI Top Guns and WSI Area Representatives for Nevada, Utah, Wyoming, New Mexico, Colorado, and Arizona.

About WSI

WSI is a digital marketing company with a strong international presence. Our Digital Marketing Consultants use their knowledge and expertise to make a difference for businesses all around the world. Headquartered in Toronto, Canada, we also have offices in over 80 countries. We're a powerful network of marketers who strive to discover, analyze, build and implement digital solutions that win digital marketing awards and help businesses succeed online.

Over the last 20 years, WSI has won multiple digital marketing awards for our solutions by adapting to the constantly shifting landscape of the Internet. We take pride in helping businesses make the most of the dollars they spend on digital marketing.

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