

# A Word about Technology Marketing

## From Lead Generation to Lead Attraction

Making It Easier for B2B Technology Customers to Find You

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## Summary

If you are a B2B technology marketing professional, then most likely you have used email, telemarketing and similar lead generation tactics to help boost sales. But what happens when you want to attract prospects whose names you don't have?

More business customers are doing their shopping in secret, taking to the web from the comfort of their cubicles to research products and vendors. And purchase decisions require approval of an increasing number of key stakeholders who, in turn, seek out a broad array of influencers.

For small and midsize technology vendors, being recognized as a viable supplier will only become more challenging as the complexity of customer purchase cycles intensifies.

In this paper we look at the changes in ways prospective customers research vendors, the roles of decision makers and influencers, and how you can attract new leads by giving them the information they need to put your company's name on their A-list, even before contacting you.

## Introduction

Business-to-business vendors typically gather the names of prospective customers from trade shows, mailing lists, registration pages, and responses to advertisements. But technology purchasing cycles have become more complicated, making it difficult for vendors to identify key purchasing roles. And many potential customers avoid industry attention altogether, preferring instead to seek out vendors on their own. So more often than not, all of those business cards and registration sheets represent just a portion of the individuals that must be convinced before putting their stamp of approval on a purchase.

While direct marketing and other types of lead generation programs remain indispensable, marketers may be overlooking an additional approach: **giving decision makers and influencers the data they need before first contact.**

Name brand companies are an obvious choice for customers looking to buy, but expecting prospects to find lesser-known small or mid-sized vendors can be chancy. So instead of treating marketing communications strictly as a “push” function, consider modifying your strategy to create content that addresses the concerns of key purchasing participants, and put that content where it can easily be found. Let’s call the endeavor *lead attraction*.

**Lead attraction is a systematic approach to preparing and implementing a communications plan that:**

1. Identifies the roles of key decision makers and influencers
2. Establishes early relationships with industry influencers
3. Defines the communications content specific to each role
4. Draws prospects to the content

## Changes in Buying Habits

B2B technology customers are getting smarter in their approach to shopping. Some recent research has identified specific trends that include an increase in the:

- Numbers of purchasing decision makers
- Relevance of the web as a primary tool for vendor selection
- Impact of influencers on the purchase decision

When considered individually, each of these factors does not appear to provide much in the way of new insight. After all, influencers and the web have been important elements in purchasing decisions for years. But when taken together and inspected closely, the direction and magnitude of the changes suggests that customers of all sizes have added more rigor to their procurement processes. So vendors that respond positively to this evolved buying behavior are likely to find new sources of leads.

Let's take a closer look at the trends.

- **The decision team**

The analyst firm MarketingSherpa reports that on average, **seven people participate in a technology purchase inside companies with 100-500 employees**. For customers with 500-1000 employees, the number of participants almost doubles.<sup>1</sup>

*Decision teams, web research and the increasing impact of influencers pose new challenges for B2B marketers to identify and reach their intended audiences.*

The high number of participants is remarkable, particularly when considering that the study covered purchase prices as low as \$25,000. The challenge for marketers is to identify each of these decision-making and influencing roles early on as part of communications planning and research.

- **The secret web**

Conventional wisdom says that customers visit vendor websites after some form of contact or incentive from the vendor, and primarily in order to access technical literature and white papers. But advances in the web as a resource continually make it easier for customers to carry out independent research.

In the same study, MarketingSherpa discovered that 80 percent of decision makers and 75 percent of influencers found the vendor instead of the other way around. **Further, 98 percent used Google as the primary search tool**. Other important reference sites included IT online publications and vendor directories.

Forrester Research supports this last point in their own survey that confirms even CIOs are using the web to make purchasing decision.<sup>2</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup> MarketingSherpa Excerpt (2007). *Business Technology Marketing Benchmark Guide 2007-08: Practical Data for B-to-B Software, Hardware, & Services Marketers*.

<sup>2</sup> Forrester Research Excerpt (March 5, 2007) *CIOs Lean on Web Sites to Make IT Product Decisions*.

data suggests the competitive value of generating content that is both relevant to a variety of audiences and easy to find on the web.

▪ **The influencers**

The growing size and cross-functional makeup of purchasing teams are evidenced by the diversity of participant roles listed in Table 1. Vendors that identify the critical roles within their industry and then create relevant information for each will be in a stronger position against competitors who offer only generic collateral.

Many teams also rely on external influencers to provide guidance and recommendation. But approaching external influencers once a specific sales cycle has begun may be too late. By adopting a strategy of early identification and relationship-building, vendors can proactively keep external influencers engaged and turn them into advocates before sales opportunities arise.

Peer groups represent an especially interesting influencer group, particularly in light of the growing significance of online communities like the vendor-sponsored **Oracle Mix** or the industry group **ITtoolBox**.

Internal	External
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Executive</li> <li>▪ Legal</li> <li>▪ Finance</li> <li>▪ Information Technology</li> <li>▪ Purchasing</li> <li>▪ Business unit management</li> <li>▪ User group</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Consultants</li> <li>▪ Analysts</li> <li>▪ Journalists</li> <li>▪ Bloggers</li> <li>▪ Resellers</li> <li>▪ Vendor partners</li> <li>▪ Peers</li> </ul>

**Table 1: Possible internal and external participants**

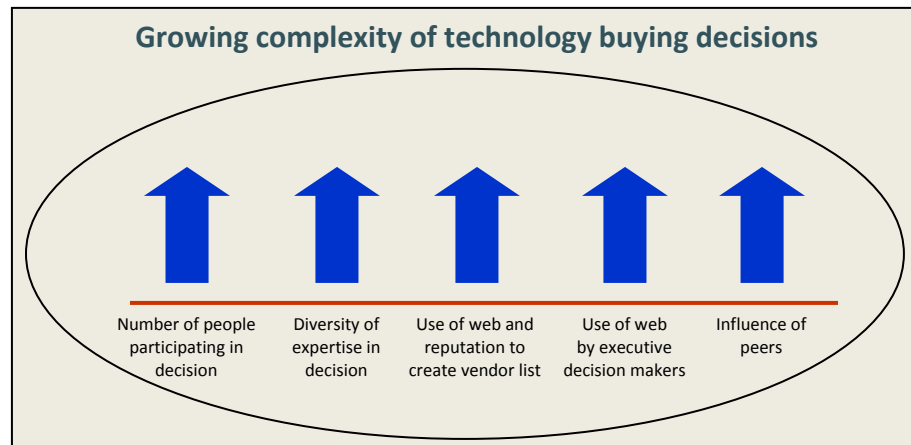
In their November 2007 semi-annual survey, ITtoolBox found that among its membership, **IT decision makers and influencers spend more time viewing social media than traditional editorial media or vendor content.**<sup>3</sup> These communities are quickly becoming the new “virtual trade associations” in which peers exchange notes, opinions and experiences. As the relationships among community members grow stronger and more trusted, vendors can expect the groups to become increasingly influential in advocating or opposing specific products.

<sup>3</sup> ITtoolBox/PJA (November 2007) *IT Social Media Index Wave II*. ([http://research.ittoolbox.com/surveys/survey.asp?survey=purchasing\\_smt\\_survey2](http://research.ittoolbox.com/surveys/survey.asp?survey=purchasing_smt_survey2))

## Follow the Arrows

As illustrated in Figure 1, the growing complexity of marketing and selling technology products cannot be explained with one or two points, but instead by an interrelated series of trends that reflect how customers manage their selection strategy.

**This situation is a signal to marketers that customers will respond to nothing less than complete and accurate information about products and the true impact of the purchase on their business.** Decision makers and influencers want to be certain of not just the feature lists, but the total cost of a purchase, the IT resources needed to implement the solution, the reliability of customer service, the effect on business processes, and the legal issues.



**Figure 1: Changing factors in technology purchasing**

By creating a strategy that addresses these purchasing trends as a whole, marketers can ensure that their communications tactics will mesh. Focusing instead on individual elements is likely to interrupt the flow in ways that prevent customers from realizing their research objectives. For example, improving search engine rankings without developing informative web content may help potential customers find your company, but will lower the probability of getting on their A-list.

Containing elements of awareness campaigns and lead generation, lead attraction differs from each in a couple of important ways. First, it is continuous. The intensity of awareness campaigns dissipates over time and most lead generation campaigns focus on getting a new set of names into the "marketing funnel," after which the attention turns to nurturing and

selling. Lead attraction continually monitors who the decision makers and influencers are.

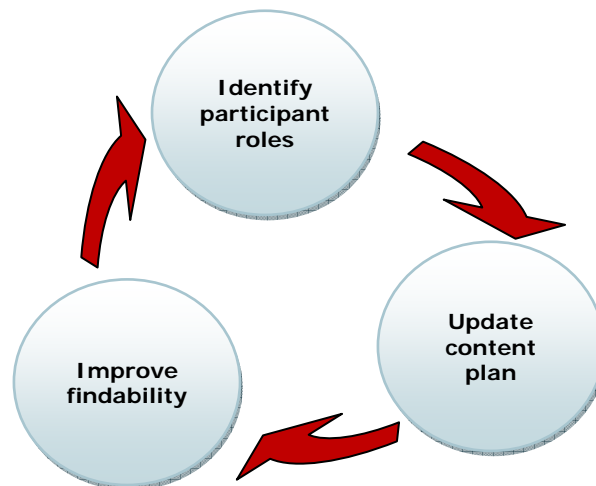
*Lead attraction provides content specific to each key decision-maker and influencer role.*

Second, and most importantly, lead attraction provides updated and relevant content specifically for each critical decision-maker and influencer role. Because each role looks at a technology purchase through a different lens, lead attraction addresses those individual concerns and uses the language with which the reader is familiar.

**The goal of a lead attraction strategy is to get the right level of information into the hands of key decision makers and influencers, resulting in more positive impact versus the competition.**

## Adopting Lead Attraction

Lead attraction is a data-driven process that begins with identifying the key internal and external roles in the purchase cycle.



**Figure 2: Lead attraction is a continuous process**

To start, use your current customers as a guide to what your unknown prospects might be looking for.

- **Identify decision makers and influencers**

Talk with your trusted current customers to learn what information is important early in the buying process and who is responsible for making the final decision. Gather as much information as possible from your sales team, and then ask your customers directly. A 15-20 question

survey should suffice. Find out:

- Which internal roles **have a direct say** in the decision
- Which **internal roles influence** the process
- Who the **external influencers** are and how your customers communicate with them

Pick a representative sample of customers and follow up with a conversation that will provide more insight. If you are skittish about conducting a study on your own, ask the business department at a local college for help.

Once you have identified key external influencers, contact them to find out what information catches their eye and what media format or forum they prefer.

#### ▪ **Update your content plan**

In addition to writing product literature and the occasional case study, include a section in your marketing plan for role-based content. Readers look for web content and marketing collateral that demonstrates you understand their point of view and can address their concerns. The goal is to become an educator and advocate while not overselling your product's feature lists.

Specify in the plan the:

- **Core messages** for each key decision-maker and influencer role in each stage of the purchase cycle
- **Most effective forum** for each role – research papers, articles, video, blogs, mobile, conferences, industry associations, etc.

Repurpose content by taking a central theme and modifying key elements such as the document title, impact, and language. For example, rather than packing all the business benefits of the latest manufacturing software product into one white paper, create multiple versions of the paper by altering the emphasis as shown in Table 2.

Use your current customers as a guide to what your unknown prospects might be looking for.

Role	Emphasis
CEO	Organizational efficiency gains
CFO	ROI analysis
IT	Migration and integration best practices
Users	Adapting the software to business processes

Table 2: Example of repurposing content

Finally, think about applying some of these communication techniques to your existing customer base. If you email the same quarterly newsletter to your entire subscriber list, try writing one article for each key decision-maker and influencer role, then email the articles based on individual subscriber responsibility.

#### ▪ Make it easy to find you

Attracting the attention of your intended audiences is a matter of adopting some standard marketing and public relations tools. Once you have identified key external influencers, develop and maintain your relationship with them. Possible ways for doing this include:

- Getting products reviewed in industry journals they commonly read
- Inviting them to private web seminars to discuss industry topics
- Distributing short podcasts that emphasize your business value
- Producing an informational email campaign and landing page

Next, using the following list as a guide, turn your focus to helping internal influencers and decision makers find you.

**Search Engine Optimization.** Perhaps the most important step you can take is to improve your website's search engine visibility using SEO. The essential tactics are:

- Find keyword combinations using sites such as **WordTracker** or **Nichebot**.
- Optimize your website content with key words and phrases often used in a search
- Create landing pages and perhaps purchase ads through services such as **Google AdWords**
- Engage in "link building" to increase links to your site from partners, online publications, and industry directories.

**Press releases.** Issue press releases when an important events occur, including the availability of new marketing collateral. Use keyword

optimization in the releases as you would for your website. Distribute the releases through online services such as **Marketwire** or **PRWeb**. And by all means, archive all releases on your website.

**Online communities.** If your research indicates that feedback from communities is a significant factor in purchasing decisions, look at ways you can interact with those sites. For example, **ITtoolBox** allows you to join or create discussion groups as well as post your collateral to their Vendor Research Directory (for a fee) and position it to your intended audiences.

**White Paper Syndication.** Syndication websites such as **KnowledgeStorm** and **TechWeb** offer prospective customers one-stop-shopping for collateral. The sites typically require user registration, so you will receive the contact information of everyone who downloads your paper. Due to the high volume of collateral available on these sites, the competition for readers can be fierce, so developing unique content and coming up with eye-catching titles will help attract attention.

**RSS.** An alternative to email notification, Really Simple Syndication is an anonymous content distribution mechanism that notifies subscribers of new web content and documents. RSS gives your information a wider audience.

#### A Word About Content Registration

Requiring registration for access to collateral is a common means to acquire lead names. It can, however, backfire if the prospects you want to attract refuse to comply for reasons of privacy. Consider making registration optional or only for highly-prized collateral. If you decide to collect registration information though, ask for minimal personal information and provide a detailed abstract of the collateral you offer.

#### ■ Measure and adjust

As with any communications plan, once implemented, continual review of lead attraction is necessary to determine its effectiveness and provide an opportunity for improvement. Opinion surveys and interviews are valuable to elicit feedback on effectiveness of the plan. For example:

- Invite review from external influencers on your strategy
- Measure the impact of the strategy on the volume of new leads
- Ask for feedback on collateral

Requesting customers to review collateral before it is released can also raise your confidence level that the messages are appropriate. And repeated monitoring of the industry environment will help to identify changes in the landscape, such as the appearance of new influencers.

Plans seldom work perfectly as originally drawn up, so employing periodic reviews and making adjustments will improve the strategy's effectiveness.

## Conclusion

Lead attraction allows otherwise unidentified prospective customers find your company by making available the information key decision-makers and influencers look for when building a vendor list. Lead attraction complements awareness and lead-generation campaigns and holds the additional benefit of reinforcing your company's reputation with current customers.

## About Case Mountain Communications

Case Mountain Communications helps companies identify and convey the strengths of their technology and vision through clear and concise writing.

We reach beyond the ordinary and create a point of view that speaks to the technical, business and market needs of each audience.

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