

# Top 10 B-to-B Lead Generation Marketing Mistakes

## **Mistake #1. Treating new email opt-ins the same as older ones**

When a potential sales lead fills out a form asking to be put on your email list, do you only send them the same exact messages every other prospect gets? Most marketers do.

You're forgetting the power of newness. When names are new on a list, their interest is at a special peak. They are far more likely to open, read, click, and respond to email from you than at any other time in your relationship. You've got anywhere from 15-90 days before the newness-factor wears off and they begin to respond at about the same rate as the rest of your list.

Since this prospect may be willing to pay extra attention to you, email something extra for them to pay attention to.

Instead of just sending a new name an automated "welcome to our list" message and then dumping that name into your routine newsletter send pile, try sending it a timed series of new-reader messages, such as:

- A best-of newsletter issue featuring your newsletter's best-of evergreen articles.
- A site resources map featuring links to your best canned webinars, white papers, etc.
- A survey, quiz, or questionnaire for their opinions on your industry.
- A handy calculator or glossary.
- A "personal" message from a service rep in their area.
- A case study about a company similar to their own.
- A trial demo or free trial offer (but watch out ... see mistake #3 below).

## **Mistake #2. Zapping every badge you can at the show**

You know better. You know darned well that if you hand the sales department a pile of barely qualified leads, they'll invariably call the worst of them first. And then when the first few names don't pan out, they'll dump the rest of the list into the dreaded black hole. When you push for results, no one will tell you they dumped the list. They'll just tell you, "That list was no good."

Arrgh!

But there's something about a trade show floor that turns rational intelligent marketers' minds to mush.

Perhaps your booth expenses are really high so you're desperate for ROI. Maybe it's a mission critical show so you want to grab every lead you can. Or, it might be the sight of your direct competitors visibly snatching leads all around you.

You grab that name badge zapping machine and start scanning every badge you can get your hands on. You don't care if it's the show floor cleaning crew — they're gonna get zapped.

Solution? Set strict zapping rules ahead of time. Pre-qualify leads with a three-question survey on the spot, or by asking them to sit through a four-minute theatre presentation. When you get home, divide the leads into red-hot versus the rest before you let sales get their hands on them.

### **Mistake #3. Using a free trial or free demo as your mainstay offer**

Free trials and demo-takers are the absolute best leads. They convert faster and more reliably into sales than leads from any other type of marketing offer. So it begs the obvious question: why not use this as your main marketing offer? (In fact, why use any other offer at all?)

If you have an extremely large prospective client pool (i.e., you're probably marketing to small businesses or all businesses), you might consider sticking with trials and demos. However, if you market to a niche, you'll be in big trouble.

Prospects who raise their hands to accept a trial or demo are in the last part of the sales cycle, close to the end. By making a free trial or demo of your lead offer, you're filtering out potentially great prospects who aren't ready for a trial. You'll never get the names of people who might want a little more information, persuasion, or product education to turn into ready-to-act prospects.

Moreover, you may be missing the crucial opportunity to educate your prospect's colleagues and decision-making committee members. (Only one member of a typical committee may sign up for a demo, but you need to influence all members to get a favorable decision.)

Widen your net a little. Broaden your sales funnel. You can always make that trial or demo offer once they've become a lead through some other offer. Then, you can offer existing prospects a free trial and/or demo repeatedly until it's accepted. But you have to start a relationship with your prospect first.

#### **Mistake #4. We, us, our**

Quick test: Go look at a copy of your marketing materials such as your Web home page or your latest direct mail piece. Count the number of times you see the words We, Us, Our, or your brand name.

Then count the number of times you see the words You, Your, Yours, or the job title that your prospects tend to have.

Which count wins the contest? If it's the former, then you've got a copywriting problem. Switch the focus and you'll land more prospects and conversions. It's so simple ... yet so often forgotten.

#### **Mistake #5. Obvious clip art or stock photos**

You know it when you see it: generic clip art.

It's so painfully obvious:

- The woman in a suit holding a cell phone or typing on a laptop.
- Two men in suits shaking hands outside an office tower.
- The business meeting with a carefully balanced cross-section of ages, races, and sexes.
- A happy worker standing behind another happy worker's desk, both enthralled with whatever's on the PC screen.
- A handsome, firm-jawed exec looking upwards to the future.
- And many more.

So, why do you use it? Why is it on your home page and/or brochures? We know why.

You were scared. You thought your logo and your copywriting weren't enough to be interesting looking. You thought a photo would look more "professional" or slick. You didn't have any photos of your own executives, your own customers, your own building. Maybe your product is boring (or even impossible) to photograph. So, you popped in some stock photos.

And every single prospect knows it.

Clip art is especially dangerous on the Web where prospects know that small companies (a.k.a. a-guy-at-home-in-his-underwear) use it to look like big boys, which ultimately has the effect of making the big guys also look small.

It's time for you to get some photos of your own people and buildings. If that's not possible, at least go to a bigger stock photo or clip art pool than the usual CD-ROM that

creatively bankrupt art departments use as a crutch. We like istockphoto.com the best, for cost and breadth. (No, they didn't pay us a cent for this endorsement.)

### **Mistake #6. Assuming brand ads have no ROI**

"I don't spend money on anything that's not direct response. My budget is tight. I have to see every penny pay off."

We hear those excuses from a lot of marketers, and it worries us. Fact is, we've seen plenty of data — formal research studies and anecdotal evidence — revealing that if prospects don't know enough about your brand, they are far, FAR less likely to respond to your direct response marketing.

Your direct mail, email, telemarketing... all campaigns... will get a lower response rate because your prospect doesn't recognize your brand name.

Brand marketing is painful for b-to-b marketers who are judged purely on meeting sales lead goals. You have to get in 100 leads this month, 250 this quarter. There's no time, no money for an extended branding campaign to prep the ground before you begin planting the direct response seeds.

Frankly, very few CFOs or CEOs in sales-driven companies really understand or support brand marketing, aside from the ego ad buy (I want my logo in the WSJ!).

Do whatever brand advertising you can on the cheap, on the sly, and measure it in any way you can. The sales department may be more willing than you think to help you. They love PR they can brag about to prospects. And they love it when prospects call back because they've heard the name. More fame equals more sales.

### **Mistake #7. Relying on Google ads to the exclusion of other engines**

Male high-tech marketers are the worst offenders, but we've seen other marketers also make this mistake. You love Google. You use Google yourself. You can't imagine your prospects ever searching on AOL or MSN or any of the other engines out there. Anyway, you're so busy, you feel you need to concentrate on the biggest pool of keyword searches.

There's only one problem. According to Nielsen//NetRatings April 2004 data, only 27% of search users rely on Google exclusively, while 73% of search users go to more than one engine or don't use Google at all.

If you only advertise on Google, you are missing prospects.

Try other engines; we think you'll be surprised at the results. (For example, New England Journal of Medicine told us in May that they were stunned to see many of their best physician sales leads come from AOL users.)

## **Mistake #8. Hard-to-read type (a.k.a. art-director-itis)**

Get out a copy of your latest Web page, space ad, and/or slick sheet and run through this list. Is any of your copy:

- Smaller than 10-point type?\*
- Reverse type (such as white letters on a dark background)?
- More than two lines in a row of centered type?
- Justified on both sides, so columns have even edges?
- In paragraph blocks of more than six lines long?
- In lines of more than 60 characters across, including white spaces?

If any of this describes your text, rest assured: nobody will read it. (Except maybe you, while performing the final proofing edit.)

\*Note: 12-point or bigger is even better than 10. The few exceptions to the 10-point rule are copy in clever footnotes (such as quiz answers) and subtitles under graphics, which people will squint to read.

## **Mistake #9. Basing media and list buys based on cheapest CPM**

The best responding media will almost always be vertical, niche media consumed by prospects who have responded to offers extremely similar to yours in the past (a.k.a. Qualified Proven Responders).

So why are you buying that ad or that list because it's the cheapest CPM (cost per thousand), compared to your other options?

This decision-making process drives most agency media buyers we know crazy. They present a list of options to their clients, who invariably cross off the most expensive media. Truth is you're not saving money. You're probably paying *more* per final lead.

You'll never know until you test and measure it. Test every list you can possibly afford to test. And every media outlet. Start with proven qualified responders as your core and work your way out to the edges. Base your media buys strictly on what the final cost per qualified lead turns out to be.

Buying cheap media is often penny wise and pound foolish.

## **Mistake #10. Registration forms that appear daunting or time-consuming**

You created a lovely, beautiful marketing campaign. You spent hours with the art department tweaking typefaces, photos, copy. You bought the best media you could select.

And then you asked the Web guy to "stick up a form for them to respond to."

It's a bit like gussying yourself up for a date, then showing up with onion-breath. That's why about 94% of prospects who "click here" and reach your registration form to get a white paper, or sign up for a webinar, or get a quote, will immediately leave.

That's right: 94% take one look at your Web guy's form and bail as fast as they can.

You'll need to tweak, measure, and tweak some more to beat the averages. But for starters, we recommend that you make three quick fixes:

- Get rid of every question (especially in the address fields) that you don't desperately need right away. If you have zip, you don't need city and state. You don't need fax. You may not even need phone.
- Add a reassuring line of copy immediately next to the box asking for email address, explaining that you won't abuse the name. "We value your privacy" is a good standard. Don't rely on a little tiny privacy link at the very bottom of the Web page to be reassuring.
- Include a picture or at the very least a brief description of what the prospect will get when they fill out the form. Just because you described the offer on the marketing piece they clicked from doesn't mean they remember (or trust you to). They need to see it again here.

In the meantime, you should at least be measuring your form abandon rate. It's easy — just take the number leads generated (forms successfully submitted) and divide it by the total number of visitors to that Web page. It's a very useful number to convince your CEO to give you more Web design and testing funds!

## About MarketingSherpa

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