

The 3 Essential Phases of Conversational Marketing through Automation

Phase One: Buyer



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Phase 1: Focus On The Buyer

The term “Conversational Marketing” is much more than just another bit of marketing speak to emerge from the shifting multi-channel maelstrom. In action, it is the opening of a truly bi-directional dialogue between prospect and vendor – in that order – enabled by the right combination of process and technology. This conversation is not easily started, as it demands deep dives into indentifying who the prospect is; defining their role within their organization; and looking for clues from their past successful conversations so that more leads are converted.

Conversational Marketing is a process and practice few companies have successfully applied. In trying to make the business case that their offering is better, faster and more powerful, vendors often get stuck in a 1-way dialog focused on their own speeds and feeds.

There is a light at the end of the tunnel, and it’s not another new media train. Frameworks, platforms and expertise exist to decode the mysteries of today’s prospects, which are more likely to ask others about you than to talk with to you. That’s welcome news to marketing and sales professionals who feel like they’ve been caught in a riptide of change for the past 36 furious months. This 3-part white paper series will examine the most crucial components of effectual marketing conversations by focusing on the buyer; focusing on the technology that enables multi-channel conversations; and finally, by a focus on sales that favorably caps the process.

Analyzing Conversation

Marketing experts generally agree that users need a few critical things to be successful in establishing and sustaining a conversational marketing strategy.

“The first thing they need is to be able to identify and pursue audiences to have conversations with,” says Michael Dortch, Director of Research for vendor-funded lead-gen and research firm, Focus Research. “The second thing they need is what an executive who runs YouTube for Google recently described as ‘remarkable content.’ The third thing is an infrastructure that allows them to manage relationships across their lifecycle, gathering as much actionable information about those relationships as possible.”

Peter Burris, Principal Analyst and Research Director for Technology & Marketing at Forrester Research offers an eye-opening account of the origins of conversational marketing, how it’s historically gone awry, and why it’s now truly possible.

“I start some of my presentations by reminding people that the term ‘customer-centric marketing’ has been around for 60 years,” Burris begins.

“We can go back to the 1940s to first hear marketing theorists and practitioners talking about ‘value in use’ as opposed to ‘value in exchange.’ But ironically, all of these beliefs fundamentally boil down to this: you can control your message and change buyer’s minds. In many respects this is in direct opposition to what customer-centricity is all about,

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which is being responsive to customer needs. Not acting upon them, but letting them act upon you,” Burris adds.

He calls the convergence of web 2.0 search, social and mobile media “The Big Transition” that’s breathed new life into customer-centricity in the form of conversational marketing. The ignition point came when customers began talking to each other and asking questions in open forums. “They are no longer dependent on a set of information channels that originate with and often are controlled by sellers,” Burris says. “That is a magnificent change.”

“What a lot of marketers say now is ‘Oh my god, I’m losing control of my messaging.’ Marketing automation is going to help me regain control over my messaging.’ No, it’s not,” Burris adds. “You’ve lost control of your messaging! You can do a better job of it, but the act and practices of messaging are now going to evolve dramatically from message-based to conversation-based marketing.”

Defining Target “Personas”

Another common denominator among newcomers to automated marketing is that they don’t know exactly who to converse with, or how to strike up the conversation in the first place. This is where the concept of buyer “personas” is starting to regain a foothold.

In a recent article for DemandGen Report, Mike Gospe, Co-Founder & Principal of KickStart Alliance wrote, “Buyers are a skeptical bunch that don’t like to be sold to. You need to empathize with your buyer personas. And you can only do that by knowing what makes these folks tick.”

“Who you are as a person is going to play a lot into how we engage with you,” says Justin Gray, CEO of LeadMD, a marketing consultancy and value-added reseller of the Marketo marketing automation solution. “When you come to my website as a 45-year-old marketing director who can’t seem to get the desired results anymore, how am I going to get you a message that resonates and actually helps you accomplish your personal and business goals?”

Like others in his field, Gray believes that being able to identify at least four or five different personas that companies constantly find themselves engaging with is a marketing imperative. “We all fall into a combination of very basic categories,” Gray says, “and that’s what we’re playing off of here in terms of the psychological reasons behind why we buy. How do these archetypes engage with the concept of price? Is it at the top of the funnel or at the end? Personas really get into how we buy, and open up a lot of the things that happen phase-to-phase that we’re now able to gauge and react to.”

Developing a Content Marketing Plan

“As you get into personas, which may cross departmental and corporate ranks within the same organization, you need to assemble content based on the conversations you’re having,” says Mark Smith, CEO & EVP of Research at Ventana Research. “Part of this process is getting people to self-identify with a particular challenge or problem through broad-based awareness content. Then you move to educational content that helps them solve that problem, which might include some third-party perspectives.”

For example, Smith says Ventana will get requests from technology vendors for educational content. “They want a five-page white paper or a 15-minute podcast because they’re trying to get their buyer to a certain level of conversational competency before they get to a consideration phase.” Only after this free exchange of content aligned with personas will buyers consider listening to a vendor’s approach to a problem.”

Indeed, most marketing discussions now prominently feature the word “content.” But this is where marketers – and even many publishers that have

been offline content engines for decades – are stumbling in the digital domain. Here again, the answers are out there.

“The good news is that this is one of those places where marketers can borrow a page from the playbook of software developers,” says Dortch of Focus Research.

“The mantra of every software developer reduces to this: write once and sell many times. You can take content you already have – a white paper for example – and the guts of that white paper can be used

to create webinars, email campaigns, tweets on Twitter, FaceBook and blog posts. You can leverage content you already have, thanks to new media and marketing automation alternatives, and breathe new life into existing content before you have to sit down and start thinking about new content.”

“It’s all a transformational change for marketing organizations from doing “The Big Program” every three months, to offering these bite-sized pieces that align to those buyer personas and need to be reusable,” adds Ventana’s Mark Smith.



About LeadMD

LeadMD combines the resources of a digital marketing agency with revenue focused sales and marketing alignment strategy, all through the use of on-demand cloud technology. Creating, managing and converting quality leads in higher numbers is how we enable our clients to out perform their competitors and out market their peers.

The most effective way to engage more prospects and convert better leads is through Conversational Marketing. At LeadMD, we will help your team leverage email and online channels to build buyer trust and engagement through cutting edge technology such as Marketing Automation. When your focus is on building a demand generation process that truly drives revenue, it’s time to engage LeadMD and fix your funnel.

About DemandGen Report

DemandGen Report is a targeted e-media publication spotlighting the strategies and solutions that help companies better align their sales and marketing organizations, and ultimately, drive growth. A key component of the publication’s editorial focuses on the sales and marketing automation tools that enable companies to better measure and manage their multi-channel demand generation efforts.

