DEMAND GEN MASTERCLASS: HOW TO FOLLOW UP MQLs

InboxInsight

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The purpose of lead nurturing communications is to continuously demonstrate your company's value through a series of optimized value exchanges that guide your leads (and their influencers) towards your desired destination – a sale.

HOW HAS B2B LEAD NURTURING CHANGED?

Traditionally many lead nurturing programs work on the assumption of a relatively simple sales funnel, where prospects "at one stage" are encouraged to move "to another stage".

However, B2B buyers no longer follow a linear path to purchase. They jump, skip or repeat stages according to their fluctuating information needs and pressurized buying environments.

There's more stakeholders involved in the decision making unit, there are more stages in the buyer cycle and there are more external factors shaping the way stakeholders perceive, interpret and interact with vendors.

The strongest B2B lead nurturing approaches understand the need to diversify the marketing toolkit to embrace multi-channel tactics to build an always-on, always present environment that keeps your brand front-of-mind, both in and out of their inboxes.

LEARN FROM YOUR LEADS

You can use nurturing programs to non-invasively cumulatively gather more information on your prospect, so that you can make future communications even more targeted.

The depth of information you have on your leads will vary according to the qualifying criteria your campaign was built on, however, even from the most basic lead capture form, you should be able to establish:

- **Which asset they downloaded**
- **Company name**
- **Job title**
- **Industry**

From this information alone, you have some valuable insight that will help make your next communication more personalized and more relatable. Think about how the following questions could help you build on this knowledge:

Content

- What specific pain points/ challenges did your asset address?
- What other content can you offer that builds on these themes?

Company Name

- By researching the company, what other information can you uncover?
- Where do they fit into your ABM or look-a-like strategy?

Job Title

- Where does their authority level suggest they sit in the Decision Making Unit?
- Who else might they need to share information with?

Industry

- What common industry trends have an influence on the buying behavior of your lead?
- What compliance or new supplier on-boarding hurdles does your target company face?

Now you have this insight you can feed it into your follow up strategy…

NURTURING LEADS WITH EMAIL WORKFLOWS

Email workflows are great at providing timely automated communications that drip feed relevant information that generates long-term value exchanges with your audiences.

These emails can be automated to trigger at a predetermined frequency, offering content over a number of weeks to generate further awareness, 'warming up' the lead before you pass it to your sales team.

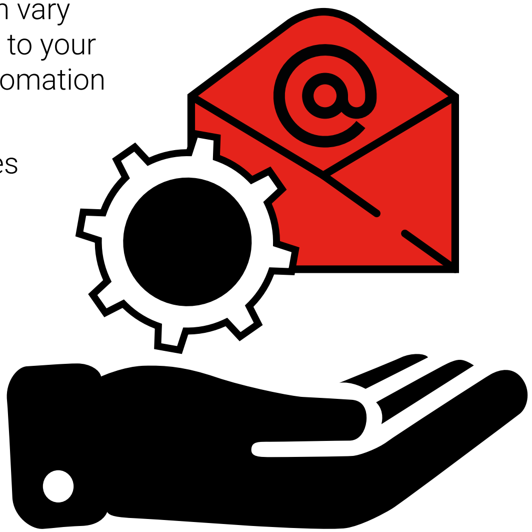
Key Benefits of Email Nurture Workflows Include:

- Drive traffic back to your website where they can find more information that aids decision making
- Promote quality content that provides value to your readers
- Provide a point of contact from your company
- Send tailored offers or exclusive promotions
- Stay front-of-mind even when prospect is off your website

Email nurture workflow programs can vary massively in size and complexity due to your available resource and marketing automation platform.

However, there are 2 main approaches (opposite) to bear in mind, no matter what your ambitions.

These approaches demonstrate the need to distinguish where your audiences are in the buyer journey and to adopt a specific set of tactics to keep them engaged and moving through your process.



WORKFLOW FOR EARLY ENGAGERS

Audience: Soft conversion (whitepaper download, sign-ups to receive marketing comms...etc.)

Aim of your email program: Provide timely information at regular intervals that:

- **Differentiates:** your brand from competitors
- **Reinforces:** your value through offering a high level of utility
- **Informs:** about the latest industry insights and news
- **Persuades:** readers to take action

WORKFLOW FOR IN-MARKET ENGAGERS

Audience: Prospects that have downloaded sales collateral or have a reoccurring relationship with your brand

Aim of your email program: Provide timely information at regular intervals that:

- **Differentiates:** your service offering from your competitors
- **Reinforces:** your USPs and value proposition
- **Informs:** about latest offers, news or product/service information
- **Persuades:** prospects to take action

ADDING ADDITIONAL CHANNELS TO EMAIL LEAD NURTURE

However, to really leverage the full potential of lead nurturing we recommend building out your channel eco system and joining up your data points to deliver a fully immersive environment.

In order to accommodate the complex and often fluctuating needs of your target audience, it's worth considering the use of cookies and intent data to deliver timely messages in addition to your email workflows. Advanced re-marketing and nurture looks at delivering relevant messaging based on where the user sits within the content journey.

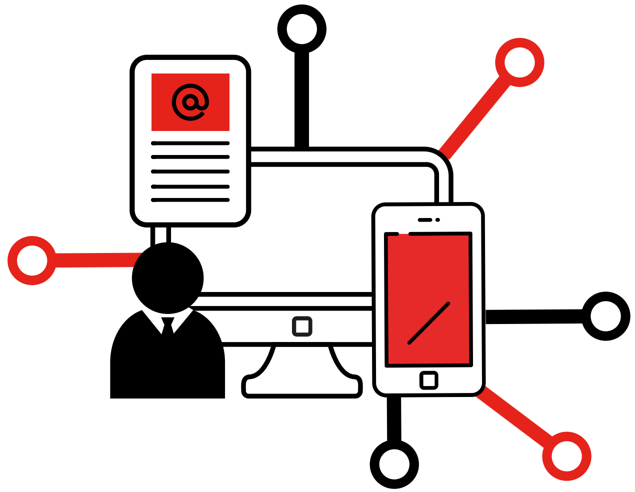
Lead Nurture Streams Split By Topic

- View's blog article content on topic A
- Re-marketing campaign across paid social and programmatic display to whitepaper on topic A
- Downloads whitepaper and joins email workflow with more content on topic A
- Measure lead score and when above 30 send email with case study on a product or service that aligns with topic A
- If visits case study page – trigger remarketing to pricing page with discount code, or demo request page to close high value lead

Repeat this process for topics B, C, D etc. that you cover in your content marketing.

A topic or category re-marketing approach drives better alignment with your audience needs and a timely relevant CTA with a reason to engage will ultimately drives better response.

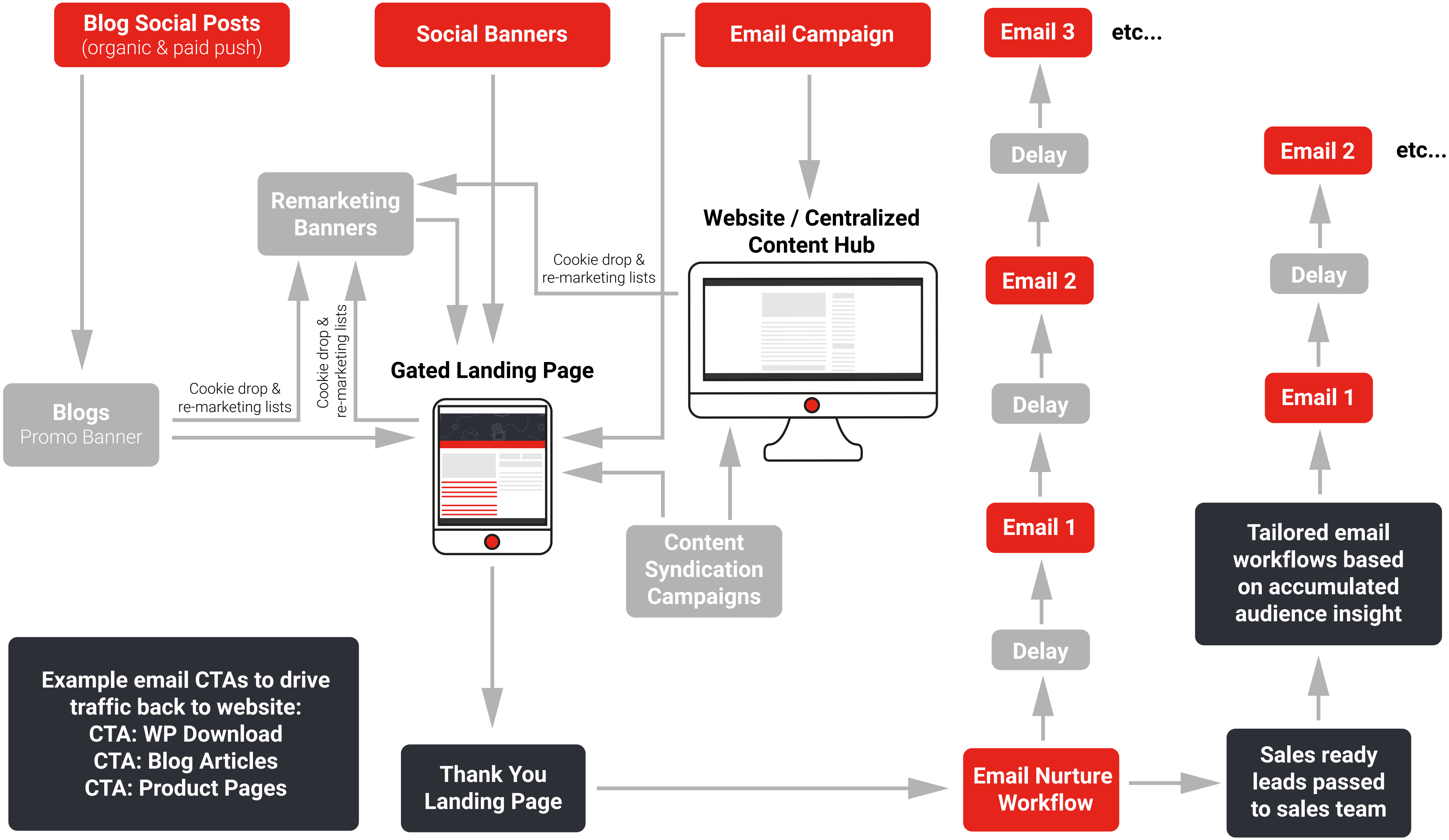
Think about data points you have at your disposal and how you can join these up with your owned, paid and earned channels. It's vital you have a strong understanding of your target buyer cycles so you can identify key touchpoints to engage and win their interest.



MULTI-CHANNEL LEAD NURTURE: EXAMPLE

This is just one example of how you can create a digital eco system. However, the best strategies leverage the most accurate audience insights to inform the most effective conversion paths for your target audience. This can often require bringing together both first and third party data and leveraging a combination of owned and paid channels to achieve your ultimate goal – revenue!

Map out your channels and touchpoints in a workflow diagram.



DECIDE WHEN THE LEAD MOVES FROM MARKETING TO SALES

The fundamental aim of both these functions is the same – generate revenue – however they're best suited to engaging customers at different parts of the buyer's journey. Leads generated from a lead generation campaign are most likely to sit further up the funnel and therefore require more marketing activity to push them towards being sales ready.

In order to do this, it's important both your sales and marketing teams are on the same page and that critical touchpoints are identified and agreed upon.

SDR | MARKETING | SALES

- **Lead** – A Marketing generated lead that has not yet been qualified as a Sales prospect. The contact has supplied their email address.
- **Marketing Qualified Lead (MQL)*** - A lead that Marketing has deemed ready for Sales to call, checked against personas or account list.
- **Sales Accepted Lead (SAL)** – A lead that a Sales Development Representative (SDR) has agreed to call. These might not be ready yet and require more nurture, but are relevant and can stay in this stage until progressing.
- **Sales Disqualified Lead (SDL)** – A lead that SDR or Sales rep will not call upon, or has been talked to and will never be relevant.
- **Sales Qualified Lead (SQL)** – A lead that has had an initial open call with an SDR and gone on to book a demo, or answer qualifying questions around their needs that align with your solution.
- **Pipeline Opportunity** – A lead that has been converted into an opportunity. Most often these have a revenue figure associated with a % likelihood of conversion.

**You may wish to establish what criteria a lead must demonstrate before they qualify as an MQL.*

These may include:

- **Number of assets they've engaged with**
- **Type of content they've interacted with**
- **Number of site visits**
- **Duration on specific web pages**
- **Inbound enquiries**

We will cover this in greater depth in the lead scoring section.

Even if you haven't invested in complex marketing technology, agreeing on when custody of the lead passes from Marketing to Sales can be make a huge impact on the likeliness of a conversion.

However, make sure your sales team are fully informed about the communications your prospects are receiving. Keep them updated with openers, clickers, unsubscribers and content downloaders on a regular basis. This will help ensure everyone is on the same page and your messaging remains consistent.

INTRODUCTION TO LEAD SCORING

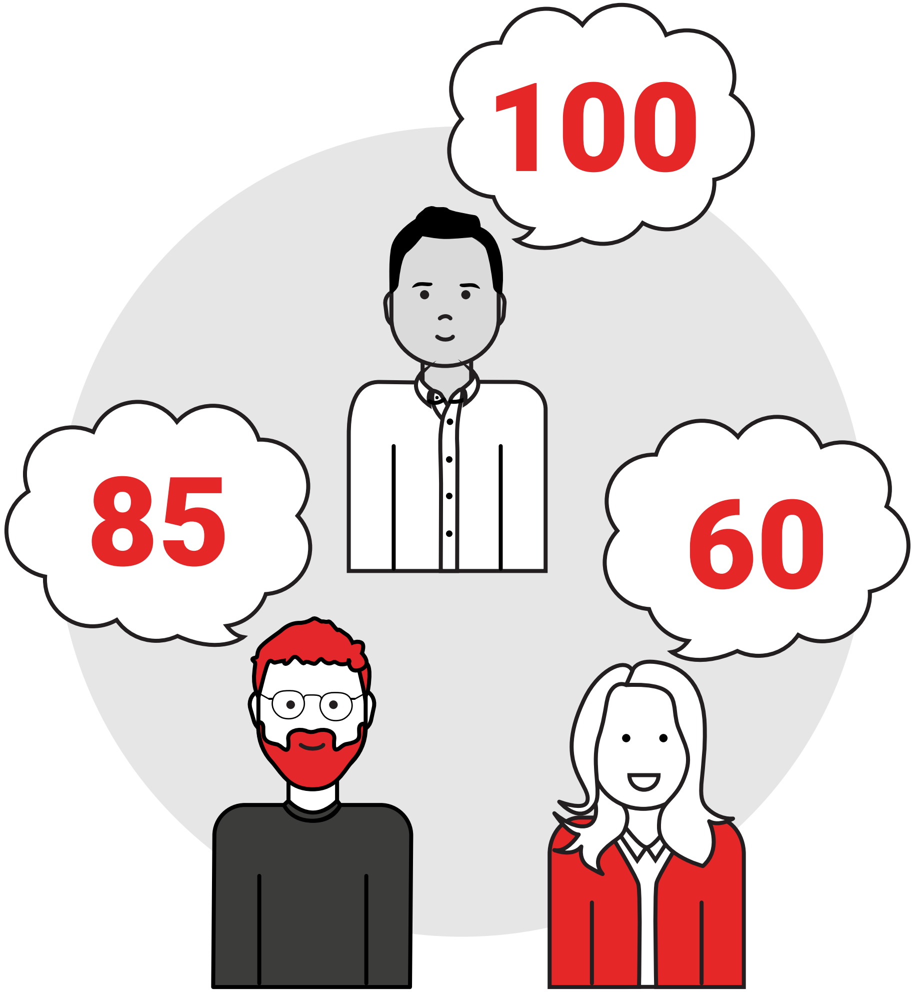
If you have the marketing automation technology in place, you can track multiple clicks and content downloads and attach a 'lead score' based on the activity of that prospect. Setting a benchmark and only passing across leads that have a high enough score, ensures your sales team only approach prospects that are engaging with your messaging.

Scores can be set against different prospect behavior across your website and marketing channels, as well as fields held against the data that denote company fit.

Each marketing automation system might have slight differences in how it measures actions or allows you to count the score, but overall it most often fits into two **types of data**:

1. IMPLICIT DATA		2. USER ACTIVITIES	
Prospect fit vs your Ideal Customer Profile (ICP) / Audience Persona	**Score**	**Engagement with your content marketing materials or website**	**Score**
Target industry where we have case study	20	Visits blog page	5
Seniority level is manager or higher	10	Downloads whitepaper	10
Job title indicates works in right department	10	Register for webinar	20
Company has over 1000 employees	10	Clicks nurture email	5
Owns a certain technology already (e.g. Salesforce CRM, SQL database)	10	Filled in a contact form	50

If the score reaches or exceeds the threshold (e.g. it goes over 50) the lead would be considered relevant to be passed to inside sales for further qualification.



MATCH YOUR CONTENT FORMATS TO THE BUYERS JOURNEY

Different formats generate different value according to where your lead sits in the buyer journey.

For example, a whitepaper may provide a generous wealth of value to your lead at the beginning of your relationship, however as they near the latter stages of their journey; rate cards, case studies and product sheets often take precedence.

By mapping your content and formats to your content funnel, you are better prepared for anticipating your lead's information needs. This puts you in a strong position for ensuring you give them the right content at the right touchpoints to accelerate them down your pipeline.

You can also build this into your scoring model, allowing you to apply a weighting to the prospect's buying intent based on which content they are consuming.

JOURNEY	FORMAT	SCORE
Top of funnel / Initial touch	Blog article read	**5**
Top of funnel / Initial touch	Video view	**5**
Top of funnel / Initial touch	Product webpage visit	**5**
Middle of Funnel / Researching stage	Guide download (tactical resource with tips and advice)	**10**
Middle of Funnel / Researching stage	Whitepaper download (research backed, longer resource with more detail)	**20**
Middle of Funnel / Researching stage	Webinar registration / on-demand view	**30**
Bottom of Funnel / Buying signal	Pricing webpage visit	**15**
Bottom of Funnel / Buying signal	Request for information form page visit but abandon	**10**
Bottom of Funnel / Buying signal	Request for information form completion	**50**

PRIORITISING LEAD FOLLOW UP TO PASS TO SALES

Once you have your scoring model in place you can use it to break leads out into 4 categories.

1. **Leads with bad fit and low score**
2. **Leads with good fit but high activity score**
3. **Leads with high activity but low fit**
4. **Leads with both high activity and high fit (YES!)**

These leads should be approached differently based on where they fall within this model.

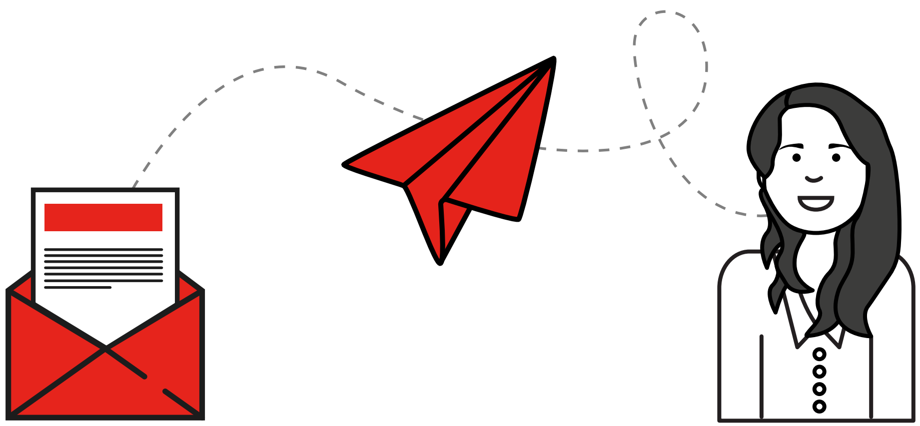
This is just one example of a lead scoring framework. The important thing is to know what data fields, and prospect behaviour, you value the most in a lead and be able to measure it. This will allow you to work in step with your colleagues in sales and accelerate lead conversion. Remember to work with them to define what makes a lead worthy of being followed up.

POINTERS FOR YOUR FIRST FOLLOW UP EMAIL

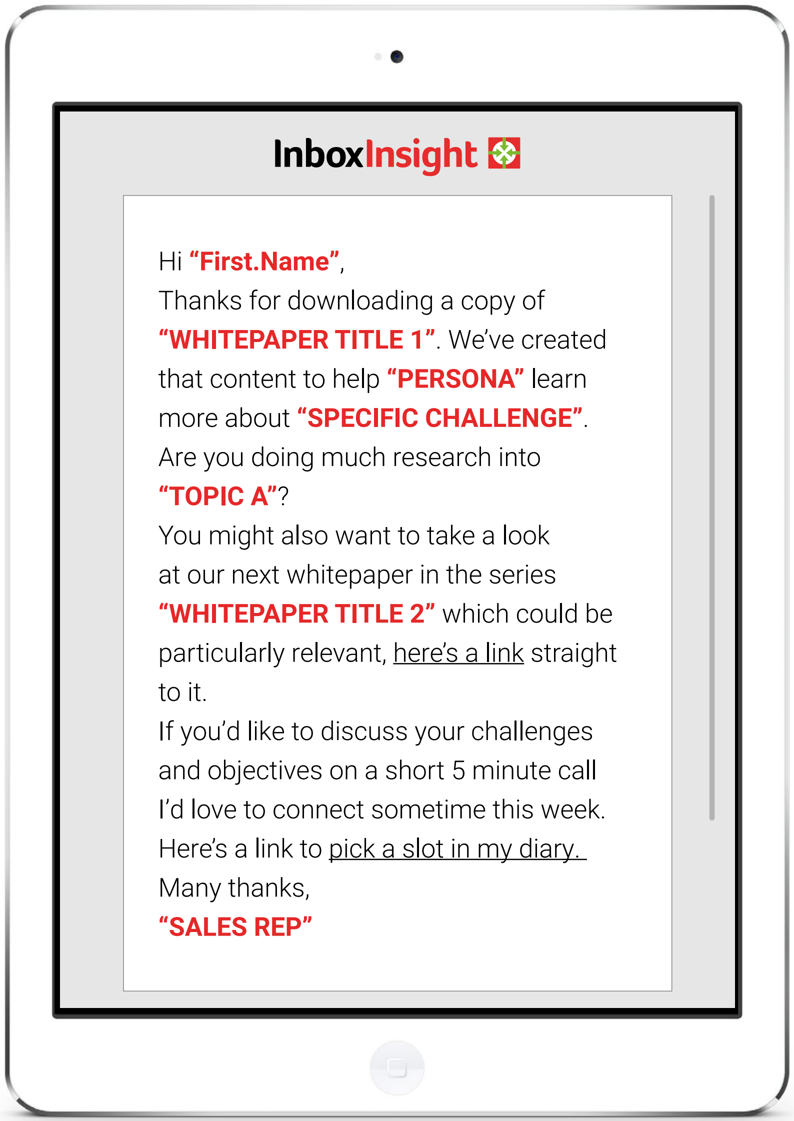
Once a lead has been passed through to sales the work does not stop there. Marketers can help arm their sales team by working with them on their email copywriting and sharing ideas around what will engage the buyer.

Some tried and tested tips are below:

- **Use personalization in your subject line and body copy**
- **Prompt their memory by offering another opportunity to download your asset**
- **Ask them if they found the asset useful**
- **Offer them further content that helps build on what they learned (this could link to your resource hub or to a specific content download)**
- **Introduce them to your services by tailoring your value proposition to resonate with their needs**
- **Make sure every CTA has a purpose – and don't use too many!**
- **Offer easy ways for them to get in touch**



An example template of an initial follow up email might be:



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Hi **"First.Name"**,
Thanks for downloading a copy of **"WHITEPAPER TITLE 1"**. We've created that content to help **"PERSONA"** learn more about **"SPECIFIC CHALLENGE"**.
Are you doing much research into **"TOPIC A"**?
You might also want to take a look at our next whitepaper in the series **"WHITEPAPER TITLE 2"** which could be particularly relevant, here's a link straight to it.
If you'd like to discuss your challenges and objectives on a short 5 minute call I'd love to connect sometime this week. Here's a link to pick a slot in my diary.
Many thanks,
"SALES REP"

The email template on the previous page is just one example of how to deliver more value in the first touchpoint after an MQL conversion. We would suggest experimenting with a few templates that can be used depending on the score of the lead and the familiarity they have with your brand.
Here's a model for this:

GIVE VALUE	TALK ABOUT THEM	WHY US
Has little awareness of brand	*Has some knowledge of brand*	*Has deep knowledge of brand*
Make an impression	Learn about their challenges	Explain clear benefits
Provide relevant, accurate info	Show you are credible	Give them proof (case study)

What should we say on the phone?

Leveraging intent data and passing intelligence around content consumption to sales can help you uncover specific pain points, topics or themes that matter to your prospect most. It can also provide an indication of when they are moving towards the motivation to buy.

Whilst generating a sale is your ultimate goal, bear in mind that when following up Marketing Qualified Leads, you're engaging prospects that are in the research phase of the buyer's journey.

Therefore the best way you can provide value in your first follow up call is to offer more information or marketing collateral around that particular area.

If you have a team of **Sales Development Representatives** who qualify leads and book appointments for more senior colleagues this sales intelligence can be vital. Use this as an opportunity to ask more about what they are struggling with and offer guidance in the form of booking them onto a webinar or demo to cover the topic in more detail for them.

EXAMPLE SDR FOLLOW UP STREAM

- **Prospecting call 1** – offer content resources on the same topic as the original whitepaper, or their area of interest as indicated by intent data
- **Prospecting call 2** – offer exclusive access to an upcoming webinar or meet-up for industry specialists
- **Prospecting call 3** – remind them of the webinar, and offer a 1 on 1 deep dive in a demo session with an expert

This leads to higher quality, mid-to-low funnel leads that have given your sales team intimate knowledge of their challenges as they enter the pipeline.

Taking it to the next level with sequences

If you're looking to design a whole sequence of interactions the same pointers apply. However, make sure every touchpoint builds on their knowledge and adds value.

These processes can be run through marketing automation platforms, or through specific software like Outreach.io or Salesloft that put personalised follow up approaches into the hands of the inside sales team.

They also allow for interaction between channels. Many agree that best practice lead follow up should involve multiple touchpoints working together, across email, social selling, and outbound calling.

These automated, or semi-automated emails allow greater control of the messaging for the marketing team while also supporting the salesperson with greater resources. This sales enablement approach to lead follow up allows you to feed the prospect more content with a personalised approach, while measuring your tactics so you can improve conversion rates.

Here is an example of a sequence to provide salespeople who are following up early stage Marketing Qualified Leads who may have interacted with content marketing materials, i.e. downloaded their first whitepaper.

Day 1 – **Personalized email** sharing more content on the same topic and introducing yourself

Day 3 – **Open call** to see if they needed any more information on topic

Day 4 – **View their profile** on LinkedIn (with privacy settings open so they can see who checked them out)

Day 6 – **Personalized email** mentioning an upcoming webinar that they might want to attend with link to register

Day 7 – **Call:** Ask for 5 minutes to understand their objectives so you can direct them to an expert from your company who would give them more detail, offer to schedule a meeting/call

Day 11 – **Automated email** reminder nudging your email back up into their inbox – very short

Day 12 – **Like an update** from the prospect company or one of their social posts, leaving an insightful comment if possible

Day 13 – **Send connection request** on LinkedIn reminding them who you are and saying you share a network of industry pros

Day 15 – **Personalized email**, mentioning something their company has done in industry press that is relevant to your solution, then asking if this impacts their projects

Day 18 – **Call:** check-in with prospect in attempt to schedule time for meeting or demo

Day 19 – **Research** other contacts in the same department at the company that might be involved in the project and reach out to one speculatively

Day 22 – **Personalized email** offering another piece of content on the initial topic of interest and ask if they are still researching it

Day 26 – **Call:** Check-in with prospect in attempt to schedule time for meeting or demo

Day 27 – **Send message** if they connected on LinkedIn with why they should speak to an expert

Day 30 – **Call:** Give your best 30 second pitch on why they should care about you

Day 31 – **Automated email** with another piece of content and a request for a 5-minute call to understand their needs

Day 33 – **Cool off** for a while, leave a note to contact them a month from now

Note that this is also run alongside you usual marketing automation sequences so each of these emails should be coming from a salesperson, while marketing covers off synchronised lead nurture from the brand through their newsletters and email marketing offers. As long as enough time is left between touchpoints so as not to

The software isn't strictly required however, just the mind-set of adding value with each touchpoint when contacting prospects.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Optimizing your lead follow up procedure is always going to be a learning process. There is no one size fits all approach, and results and baseline expectations will vary depending on your target region, industry, and type of solution that you offer. What you can do to help build a predictable pipeline is follow the above fundamentals and create a sustainable approach for your organization.

Collaborate with your colleagues in Sales to gather feedback on lead spec and score to evolve your approach to who you send through. The predictive model of who is most ready can get more complex over time, but you should always have a service level agreement about who is going to follow up, when they should do so, and what the expectations are form both sides. Remember to test and learn with your messaging, but leave some freedom for individuals on the sales side to shine and be human in their approach.

Connecting a demand generation approach with a sales enablement mind-set will empower your team to support sales and hit those all-important revenue goals.

“We can support your B2B marketing with a series of optimized demand generation products based on your objectives”

Ready to build your own success story?

InboxENGAGE

Identify your audience, activate their interest and generate qualified engagements through our optimized multi-channel campaigns.

InboxNEXUS

A blend of targeted email marketing and the latest programmatic advertising technology to achieve superior audience reach, relevancy and scale.

InboxINTEGRATE

A powerful end-to-end content amplification solution built around creating seamless digital experiences and optimized reader journeys.

InboxINBOUND

We curate your best content, and optimize it using insight, then drive a relevant audience to the hub with multiple digital touchpoints.

InboxCREATE

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