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QUICK GUIDE TO LEAD GENERATION

8 tactics to use content, social media and webinars to boost lead volume and quality

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Quick Guide to Lead Generation

8 tactics to use content, social media and webinars to boost lead volume and quality

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Lead Generation: 8 tactics to use content, social media and webinars to boost lead volume and quality

US \$45 / ISBN: 978-1-936390-74-8

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TACTICS YOU CAN LEARN OVER LUNCH

Welcome to *Quick Guide to Lead Generation* – a resource from MarketingSherpa featuring bite-sized tips for busy marketers.

In this report, we give you ideas for using webinars and other content to generate a higher volume and better quality of leads.

Content marketing can increase the volume and quality of your site traffic, which of course helps you generate more leads. These are people who have actively chosen to connect with you because they are attracted by your content or webinar topics, and they are likely to be more engaged. Therefore, these people are more promising leads than those who you solicit or pursue.

Of course, luring people in is one thing – you must also keep them engaged once they get there, so they will want to keep returning to interact with you.

Providing high-quality content and interesting webinars can help you keep contacts engaged, which translates to a high volume of quality leads.

In this report, we'll show you:

- Why using content for lead generation can have pros and cons
- Tips for using social media as part of your strategy
- Ways to succeed, even with limited resources
- How to plan an effective webinar program

We know you're in a hurry, so let's get started. We're eager to share these tips on how you can use content to generate lots of leads.

Bobbi Dempsey
Editor, *Quick Guide to Lead Generation*

About *Quick Guide to Lead Generation*

MarketingSherpa's *Quick Guide to Lead Generation* is designed with you, the busy marketer, in mind. We provide quick, simple tips you can use right away.

For each *Quick Guide*, we scour the vast MECLABS library of marketing research, from MarketingSherpa case studies and Benchmark Reports, to MarketingExperiments optimization tests and analysis. We highlight tips to help improve your marketing performance right now ... or at least by the time you're done with lunch.

Tactic #1. Embrace the challenge

Why should you use content for lead generation? For any marketer trying to generate leads, they likely have a buying cycle with some level of complexity. With complexity comes questions from your customers, who are researching different solutions.

Content helps them in that buying journey, and helps you not only capture, but also nurture those leads until they purchase.

In the [MarketingSherpa 2012 Lead Generation Benchmark Report](#) (free excerpt at that link), content was rated as one of the most effective tactics for lead generation, but also one of the most challenging. So, you must be prepared to invest some effort into developing and maintaining a content-focused lead generation strategy. But, you will then likely reap some nice rewards.

In the B2B Lead Roundtable Blog post, "[Lead Generation: Content among the most difficult tactics, but also quite effective](#)," Daniel Burstein, Director of Editorial Content, MECLABS, asked marketers for their feedback on the pros and cons of content for lead generation.

Here are some of their thoughts:

Be the resource

I don't agree that content marketing is one of the most difficult tactics, although I will agree that it is one of the most effective for lead generation. Marketing these days is about educating your target market, engaging with them and only selling when they're ready to buy. Until that time comes, be the resource that they go to while researching solutions to their problems.

– Jen Picard, Digital Marketing Manager, Meltwater Group

Difficulty and effectiveness is impacted by how you execute

I find email is less difficult and more effective with the right content.

– Jim Naro, President, The Naro Group

Content is really difficult to do right

The reason why content was labeled as most difficult is because business owners simply don't have the resources or time to run a proper content marketing campaign. Counting in:

- *Solid keyword research*

- *Separating texts to target different stages of lead interest (just looking, comparing services, emotional purchasing triggers)*
- *Proper writing for the Web (scanability, active language, short sentences, bullet lists, etc.)*

The list is pretty long, and not everybody has the time to learn all that and then apply it. Compared to say, PPC, content is really difficult.

As Jen said, it's all about feeling the pulse of your Web visitors. The power of content is that you can use different content pieces to speed up their pulse and get them to a purchasing decision by moving them deeper into the conversion funnel. Aside of email, hardly any other tactic is as effective of a convincer as content.

– Igor Mateski, Owner, WebMaxFormance

Tactic #2. Combine content marketing with a social media strategy

In the Marketing Sherpa article, "[B2B Lead Generation: 6 social media tactics from 7 experts](#)," Jonathan Gebauer, Product Manager, Co-founder and CEO, exploreB2B, said it's important to bring social media marketing into the content marketing strategy.

"In my experience, this is the most effective way to generate leads via social media," he explained. "It is the best way to provide valuable and helpful content for people within a target group. Content ranges from articles, videos and infographics to white papers."

The goal with this strategy is to position yourself as a thought leader in your field. He said if you can position yourself as an expert in your market, the incentive for people to follow you and listen to your social media output increases.

"Content can effectively be posted and spread via social media. It is very important to connect your different channels. An infographic on Pinterest can link to an article. A guest post on a blog can link to a video on YouTube," Gebauer said.

Shama Kabani, CEO, The Marketing Zen Group, said, "Create compelling content. Solid content should be the cornerstone of any good B2B online marketing plan. An education webinar for current clients and prospects can be a great lead generating and referral source. For example, The Trade Group, a full-service trade show exhibit provider, holds quarterly webinars for their clients as a way to educate and retain them."

She added part of the content strategy should be creating and distributing online videos across platforms.

Kabani said, “Online videos are still consistently underutilized by B2B companies – even though they can allow you to reach prospects and increase visibility.”

Frank Dale, President and CEO, Compendium, also agreed that combining content marketing with an overall social media strategy is the best way to generate leads.

“In a sense, content marketing is the purest form of marketing, because it allows companies and their customers to tell stories that are true and to educate prospects so they can make a choice,” he said. “This approach works well for B2B marketing because it focuses on knowing the customer, understanding the pain points and developing good information that answers questions.”

He offered three points to use content marketing for lead generation:

- **Develop varied content.** Create useful content to draw individuals to lead generating mechanisms on your website. Mix up your content to include written material like white papers and case studies, graphical information like photos and infographics and interactive material such as videos, podcasts and webinars.
- **Use keywords and strong calls-to-action.** Make sure content is loaded with keywords to attract prospects, and then draw them to lead generation mechanisms through clear calls-to-action. These can be contact forms, RFP forms or email opt-in lists.
- **Share your content.** Distribute content on all of your channels: blogs, social media, email marketing, etc. Use a content marketing platform to make social sharing easier.

Dale also provided an example of a company leveraging its blog to generate leads through content marketing.

“Widen, a Madison, Wis.-based digital asset management [DAM] software provider, implemented this process to spur inbound marketing,” he said. “Today, more than a third of Web referral leads come from its blog. The company’s content marketing program focused on educating its audience about the existence of DAM software and drawing individuals toward lead-generating materials, such as webinars, white papers and requests for pricing and demos. As a result, Widen’s blog is the top referrer of sales leads to Widen.com, and has helped make Widen.com and its landing pages some of the highest ranked in the DAM industry for key search terms.”

Tactic #3. Track effective content and thought leadership

The upside of using content in a social media-rich world is your prospects will tell you the type of content that does and does not resonate with them through their public actions. Therefore, one way to measure your content is by tracking social media metrics.

Twitter is one example. In the same MarketingSherpa article on social media, Eddie Smith, CRO, Topsy Labs, singled out Twitter as a platform B2B marketers can use to identify, qualify and generate leads.

Smith said, “Two specific use-cases come to mind, both utilizing data and metrics from Twitter: use [link mention metrics](#) from tweets to identify what content on specific domains are resonating, and use [link trending metrics](#) generated from tweets to understand what content is resonating on a domain.”

These data points are useful because you go beyond Twitter mentions and find out the velocity of the content and the timing of the mentions for your earned media.

“Using social media, Twitter in particular, B2B marketers can isolate and understand earned media contribution for lead generation better than any other social source,” Smith said.

Courtney Seiter, Community Manager, Raven Internet Marketing Tools, said, “Twitter is an avenue for news and resources at a rapid pace so capitalize on that by being a thought leader in your segment. Being the go-to source for industry knowledge and trends can open the doors for a deeper relationship and sales down the line. Carve out a set time daily to read industry blogs or news sources, and use a Twitter scheduling tool to tweet the most relevant news throughout the day.”

Tactic #4. Use branded content on social media platforms

Jenny Vance, President, LeadJen, said branded content on platforms like Facebook and Twitter helps create awareness and builds customer loyalty, and monitoring social media for negative mentions of competitors or for prospects expressing a need are both opportunities to generate leads.

She also provided a three-point plan for lead generation through social media:

- **Monitor.** Listen to your target audience by carefully selecting and monitoring keywords. Capitalize on additional terms people are using.
- **Respond.** Develop messages and test them. In social media, companies can send either branded messages from the company or non-branded messages from individuals. In either case, the messages should point recipients to additional content: a landing page, an offer, an article or other content. Test these elements in various combinations (branded vs. non-branded, offer vs. landing page, etc.) to see which drives the best results.
- **Convert.** Social media messages combined with links provide a wonderful way to engage people and convert the conversation into a sale. Include in your strategy ways to foster conversions with messages encouraging recipients to like you on Facebook and join your email list. Measure your success by following the click all the way through the sales funnel to determine if the program is driving leads and sales, and what the value of the sale is.

Seiter said the process is very similar for both B2B and consumer marketers. It's about connecting with individual people and getting them to engage with your content. She added no matter what industry you are in, it's important to have some personality, opinions and genuine conversation on social media platforms.

She explained, "The vast majority of social media users see many of these networks as entertainment, which means even 'boring' brands have to find a way to inject some fun into their social presence."

Tactic #5. Make the most of limited resources and tools

In the MarketingSherpa article, "[Content Marketing: Inbound strategy pulls in 25% more revenue, 70% more leads](#)," the team at Delivra, an email service provider, wanted to pull in more qualified leads, but their budget was tight. Spending more on advertising and other outbound strategies was not an option.

"My job was to build marketing efforts where we could get inbound leads to start flowing in," Carissa Newton, Director of Marketing, Delivra, said. "In my past experiences, that's where we found the highest-quality leads."

Newton set her sights on building marketing assets on a low budget and without the help of agencies or vendors. She wanted these assets to efficiently attract more qualified leads and to be easily measurable.

Here are some of the steps her team followed:

Step #1. Create guidelines for messaging

Newton planned to generate a large amount of content for the strategy. For it to be effective, she needed the strategy to accurately describe Delivra's brand, products and philosophy. Delivra did not have a messaging strategy before this effort – Newton's team had to create one. Over a period of three weeks, the marketers shaped Delivra's tone and style through meetings with management and employees, and through research on Delivra's position in the market.

The team created documents outlining Delivra's branding and messaging guidelines. The documents explained topics such as how employees should describe Delivra's services and how the company differs from other email service providers. The messaging platform took less than a month to create, Newton said. But, applying it to every part of Delivra took nine months. During that time, Delivra's marketers worked to ensure consistent messaging through Delivra's website, customer service team, sales reps – everywhere.

They did this by ensuring every employee had access to the messaging documents and through many meetings to explain the guidelines and their goals.

Step #2. Set up and monitor architecture

Newton planned to create and disseminate content that would attract people researching topics on email marketing – which directly relates to Delivra’s target audience. The content would point to Delivra’s website where people could find more information about email marketing and the company.

Here are the channels the team focused on:

Blog

Delivra launched a blog called [mailchatr](#), and published daily posts. The blog served as an email marketing resource and provided a face for Delivra’s brand and content, Newton said. Today, blogs are written by Delivra’s staff, such as the CEO, director of operations, and members of the marketing team.

Social media

Immediately after a post is published, Delivra shares a link to it through social media channels. The team maintains active profiles on:

- Facebook
- Twitter
- LinkedIn
- Smaller Indiana – a local social network

Delivra’s marketers also interact with audiences on these channels and employ other social media marketing tactics.

PR

Scoring mentions in industry press has been essential to building Delivra’s credibility, Newton said. The articles were published by trusted organizations and listed in search results next to Delivra’s own content, which lent the company more credibility.

“That [credibility] has really helped us in leaps and bounds with larger scale clients. The clients that we would really like to have because they’re more profitable and we can work with them longer term,” she said.

Step #3. Add more high-value content to the website

Newton’s team first established the blog, website and social profiles, and offered a few case studies and white papers from its site. After several months, Newton showed results to her superiors, proving the strategy was working and she gained support to continue.

The team moved on to “phase two,” Newton said, and added more detailed how-to articles to the website. These articles were open access. They helped establish Delivra’s expertise and were intended to appeal to search engines and people researching email marketing.

Keep premium content behind a form

The goal was to have highly relevant prospects – those shopping for email services – find Delivra’s site, enjoy the content and reach out via telephone or contact form to learn more about its services. To encourage more prospects to fill out a form, the team also added more case studies and white papers to the site and placed them behind [lead generation forms](#). Visitors who supplied basic contact information could download the reports and would be entered into Delivra’s customer relationship management (CRM) system.

Step #4. Leverage automated marketing and respond quickly

Newton’s team found a different approach was needed to nurture leads arriving from unpaid, inbound sources than leads from paid sources. For example, leads from a paid lead generator would be called to schedule an appointment with a Delivra salesperson. Leads from inbound channels, however, were automatically assigned to a relevant salesperson and contacted via telephone within 24 hours.

“If we acted on them quickly, we’ve found that those [leads] convert much more quickly than any other kind of sources of purchased leads or cold calling,” Newton said. “And, having that automated and flowing into our CRM system has really created an army out of two people in the marketing department.”

Do not annoy or overwhelm

Delivra’s leads from inbound channels receive [confirmation emails](#) after filling out a form. Newton is careful not to send them too much additional information, she said.

For example, leads from paid sources generally have not had prior contact with Delivra. Some are entered into a five-part email series to familiarize them with the company. Leads from inbound sources, however, have interacted with the company and expressed interest, so Newton’s team does not enter them into the five-part series.

“Typically, they’ve already done a little bit of research ... They’ve already seen a bit of that information in a couple of different areas, and so I don’t want to be too redundant and I also don’t want to scare them away.”

Tactic #6. Consider your audiences’ interests and needs

Bonnie Thomas, Director of Content Strategy, Lithium Technologies, also wanted to find a consistent and relatively inexpensive way to build a list of highly qualified leads. In the B2B Lead Roundtable Blog post, “[Lead Generation: How Lithium Technologies uses webinars to grow its customer database](#),” Thomas said she figured out she could

grow her database month over month with minimal investment of resources after discovering how her marketplace loves to learn through webinars. Her strategy was based on providing useful content and information that would attract their target audience.

Two and a half years ago, Thomas started hosting webinars when she became Director of Content Strategy at Lithium Technologies, Inc., a social software company. Back then, she hosted about one every four months or so.

“In the early days, it seemed like a lot of work, and I had a lot of anxiety about each one going properly,” she admitted.

But, regardless of that anxiety and effort, every webcast attracted more attendees than the one prior. So, she gradually increased frequency. Thomas now hosts one webcast a month while the Lithium product marketing team hosts another two or so per month.

Thomas’ webcasts are more awareness focused, delivering new thought leadership or best practices, and are strong demand generators. Significant percentages of the 1,000-plus people who attend are new leads.

Furthermore, Thomas said her webcasts “are very cost effective,” given:

- Putting together webinars has become easier for Thomas’ team, so the time investment is now minimal.
- Webinar platforms have become inexpensive and allow for easy production management, from setting up registration pages to interfacing with the audience to reviewing attendance metrics.

And then, there are the benefits that go beyond list-building ...

- Webcasts enhance Lithium’s content library since broadcasts are available on demand immediately after the event and are used in lead nurturing efforts.
- Sales professionals use these events to gauge the interests of their leads.

“Being able to say, ‘We’re having a webcast in a couple of weeks’ is a great excuse for outreach,” Thomas said. “The topics they sign up for and whether they attend is also a great test of engagement – you can tell if folks really are interested and what interests them most.”

Here’s a look into Thomas’ process for producing webinars that attract leads:

Step #1. Pair your webinar content with your marketing strategy

Thomas starts by pairing the company’s overarching marketing strategy – such as a quarterly focus on a particular product, channel or use case – and her audience’s appetite. She gauges this by looking at other content-success

metrics like white paper downloads. For instance, an organizational focus on social customer care and the popularity of content around ROI can become a webcast on “Getting to Big ROI with Social Customer Care.”

Afterwards, she secures webinar presenters, usually an expert inside the company and one outside the company that is perceived as a credible speaker that knows how to engage an audience. Thomas sets up the event with presenters months in advance, since the speakers she selects are in high demand.

“You could have a speaker with a great story to tell, but they must know how to tell it in a compelling way,” Thomas said. “The optimal combination of good content and an inspirational personality is critical.”

Step #2. Work with your presenters to familiarize them with content beforehand

Next, she meets with these presenters three times before the event to:

- Introduce presenters to the content
- Review slides
- Practice the presentation

Step #3. Promote your webinars well in advance

Then, she moves into promoting the event about a month beforehand.

Thomas’ promotion process includes:

- Setting up the registration page – an easy task since her platform allows her to clone previous events.
- Sending an email invitation to the Lithium database three weeks before and a day before the event – these invitations are often shared by recipients, which accounts for the new leads.
- Setting up a Twitter hashtag for the event that is printed on all of the slides – Thomas or one of her co-workers also tweets during the event.
- Mentioning it in Lithium’s social media channels, and encouraging outside presenters to do the same.

Step #4. Have your follow-up materials ready to go

Last, she develops event follow-up materials so they can be sent immediately when the webinar concludes.

“My platform provides me the emails of those who did and didn’t attend so I can follow up with ‘Thanks for attending, here’s the white paper that you should download,’ or ‘Sorry we missed you, here’s a link to the recording,’” Thomas said.

“Preparation ensures a smooth webcast and follow-up,” she said. “But, the success of our webinar hinges on the topic and the speakers. People keep coming back, and invite others to join them, because they trust they’ll get good information from inspiring people.”

For more on getting the biggest bang for your buck from webinars, check out [“Lead Generation: Phone calls turn first-time webinar into million-dollar leads.”](#)

Tactic #7. Establish a routine and strategy for your webinars

Webinars are a great tool in the content marketing kit, but they throw a number of issues at marketers: what content does the audience want? How do you turn registrants into attendees? And, maybe most importantly, when should you schedule the webinar to reach the largest audience?

In the MarketingSherpa article, [“Content Marketing: Webinar strategy increases registration, lead capture 91%,”](#) the team at Dataversity, a provider of data management resources for IT professionals, faced all of those questions when they began a webinar strategy to drive awareness about their conferences and provide education about their services.

Shannon Kempe, Executive Editor, Dataversity, described the initial foray into webinars as *ad hoc*. As the team started to learn what worked, and what didn’t work, with the webinar strategy, the program became more formalized. Dataversity now has a schedule featuring a monthly webinar series with set timing on certain days of the week and at the same time of day.

Kempe said the webinar campaign makes up the largest part of Dataversity’s website strategy, accounting for around 50% of the online business, followed by white papers and then other website content.

Step #1. Determine the webinar schedule

Dataversity was conducting multiple webinars each week. Through the trial-and-error process based on the availability of third-party presenters, the team found its audience responded to a set schedule of webinars each week on Tuesday and Thursday, almost always at 2 p.m. Eastern Time. Kempe said that time worked best for the Dataversity audience because it reached U.S. customers, yet still accommodated attendees from Europe and India.

Along with the set timing of webinars, Dataversity also implemented a three-track webinar series that occurred monthly, along with additional webinars that were not part of the formal monthly series.

Step #2. Determine the webinar content

For Dataversity, all of its webinar content is specific to data management, but there are a wide variety of topics within that general topic area.

“Somebody who attends a SQL webinar isn’t necessarily going to attend a business intelligence webinar,” Kempe said. “The variety of topics helps us tremendously, and we try to hit all of them each month to give our attendees a good selection to choose from.”

The goal of the webinar strategy is “education first,” according to Kempe. Dataversity has sponsors for its webinars, and Kempe said her team informs sponsors the goal of the webinar is education, not a marketing pitch. For webinar speakers, Dataversity always engages a third-party industry expert.

Kempe said, “We have a strong peer-to-peer mentality, so it is always somebody who has been an information architect, or been in the field for a considerable time and can speak on that topic.”

Step #3. Promote the webinar

Dataversity promotes its webinars in a number of ways:

- The homepage of its website, above the fold on the left-hand side of the page, features a listing of the next three upcoming webinars.
- The team develops an email send for each webinar.
- An email newsletter announces each month’s webinars.

Dataversity’s entire email subscriber list receives the newsletter email. A more targeted list receives emails promoting individual webinars, and Kempe said those emails are sent to a more broad audience if the team is looking for a larger registration number for a particular webinar. A follow-up email is also sent to all registrants.

The follow-up email includes links to the webinar content, such as slides and the recording. Kempe said once registrants became used to receiving this content, actual webinar attendance lowered. She added although that outcome wasn’t ideal, Marketing was still achieving its main goal because registration was not affected. The lead capture for Marketing came from registration for a webinar, not actual attendance.

Dataversity’s webinars are also promoted on social media through Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn.

Step #4. Make sponsorships and partnerships a part of the webinar strategy

Sponsorship of Dataversity’s webinars wasn’t in the initial plans, but Kempe said having sponsors for the webinars became an important part of the process. Sponsors typically come from companies Dataversity works with at its conferences, and that the team hasn’t needed to solicit for webinar sponsorships. She said the sponsorship process is very flexible, includes a lead guarantee, and the company offers a full media kit for potential sponsors with information on subscriber demographics, content contributors, promotional campaigns and pricing.

Dataversity also offers partnerships to sponsors with discounts when the partner agrees to cross-promote the

webinar. Sponsor partners help promote the webinar, as well as build the promotion list.

Kempe said the leads are separated, so the lead guarantee that is part of the sponsorship is only on the leads Dataversity generates for the partner, and does not include the leads the partner is generating on its own.

She said, “[Partnerships] really help build our list, help build our community and really get them engaged and of course, our sponsors are happy to receive the discount.”

For more tips on executing a successful webinar campaign, check out [“Content Marketing: 21 ideas for planning, creating, and leveraging content from your webinars.”](#)

Tactic #8. Include SEO/keywords in your content plans

In the MarketingSherpa Blog post, [“Google as a Grocery Store: Use SEO and search engine marketing in tandem to boost lead generation,”](#) David Kirkpatrick, Senior Reporter, MECLABS, said it’s important to use SEO, ideally in combination with SEM, to improve lead volume. He relayed highlights from a presentation at the Dreamforce conference by Bill Leake, CEO, [Apogee Results](#).

Look beyond your website for optimization

Leake said more and more of the interesting things on the Web are happening off of your website. These things are happening on blogs, news articles and Facebook. To take advantage of this, create a cluster of content in many places, and optimize that content.

One example he provided was a client with a news release picked up by CEO.com and re-posted to that site with a CEO.com byline. The client maximized this “earned media” win by running paid search campaigns on the CEO.com URL for several months.

The reasoning behind this effort was the reposted news release gained third-party credibility, and the paid search campaign allowed the company to gain full SEM and SEO value from the CEO.com content.

Useful Links and Resources:

[MarketingSherpa Blog: Lead Generation: 3 basic tips for webinar newbies](#)

[MarketingSherpa Article: Lead Generation Optimization: 7 'must-haves' to improve your campaign planning process](#)

[MarketingSherpa Blog: Lead Generation: Trends in 2012 marketing budgets](#)

[Marketing Research Chart: Most widely used lead gen tactics](#)

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