



**Gaining Competitive Advantage
through Thought-leadership
Marketing Campaigns**

The ways in which people, and companies, buy technology products are changing. Only between 3% and 5% of suspects generated by various sales and marketing campaigns are ready to buy now – the rest have a future need.

Potential buyers are conducting much more of their pre-buy investigation and product evaluation via self-service inquiry over the Internet, and they are engaging your sales force much later in the buying cycle – often not until an RFP is issued. Further, it now requires 7-9 proactive communications to gain a decision-maker's attention.

When marketing technology-based products and services, distinguishing your company as the industry thought-leader is vastly superior to competing on product's features and functions.

Thought-leadership accrues from establishing a position as *the* organization that identifies industry issues, codifies and publishes business process best practices, and clearly defines future trends.

Traditional methods for marketing technology products have largely been made obsolete – new tools and disciplines have evolved.

ENGAGEMENT MARKETING

Engagement Marketing (also known as Campaign Marketing) software tools and processes allow vendors to manage a large database of suspects over time. As a technology vendor, you know you must be in the right place at the right time when a suspect is ready to buy – and this may require repetitive messaging over *several years*. As a result, you need to push repetitive messages to suspects through a variety of channels to become foremost in their minds when they are ready to choose a vendor.

Engagement Marketing reduces marketing costs and improves return-on-sales using new demand-creation strategies, tactics, and tools. The goal is to improve lead quality and pipeline performance by performing much more suspect profiling and qualifying in marketing, rather than tossing incoming leads over the fence to sales. (In many vendor organizations, incoming leads from marketing go directly to sales; 70% of inquiries that have a future need are not called by sales and become lost.)

This separation of the marketing from the sales pipeline allows the sales process to become significantly more efficient. A suspect becomes a prospect when they give you “permission” to call on them. The prospects are turned over to sales, and they make warm calls on interested buyers, versus cold calls to general suspects.

Engagement Marketing Automation software tools allow you to:

- **Build a Marketing Database** of suspects, not prospects. This is separate from your database of active sales leads. A suspect becomes a prospect when they ask for sales to contact them. Based on your defined criteria, suspects are transferred to sales for follow-up.
- **Develop Marketing Campaigns** that allow you to constantly touch your database of suspects. This has two parts: first is the offer of specific material to gain the suspect's attention; second is an accompanying survey of buying intentions to determine readiness to buy. Marketing Campaigns are most often threaded, *i.e.*, they consist of a sequenced series of documents offered over time that build a holistic offering.
- **Measure Campaign Success** – both in terms of lead sources and campaign materials. You can measure each campaign from launch to close and statistically determine the success rates. The marketing database maintains each suspect's responses to all campaigns.

The Engagement Marketing automation software allows you to enhance your market effectiveness with messaging that is clear, concise, and compelling; relevant and personalized for each target audience member; and delivered through multiple channels and media. Further, it allows you to build scalable and repeatable processes that create large company mass-marketing performance with a small marketing budget.

THOUGHT-LEADERSHIP CAMPAIGNS

Companies need compelling and frequent communications that educate prospects about their solutions before and during the early stages of the buying process. Communications that attract the most attention are those that engage the audience and help them conceive solutions to their business problems. They also allow the vendor to position itself as the thought leader, and not to be forced to compete solely on features and functions.

You can distinguish your company on expertise, and establish it as the thought-leader in your market space, by publishing three types of materials:

- Vision documents that speculate the direction of the marketplace and envision solutions to accommodate future needs.
- Industry Best Practices that define particular ways-of-working that reduce costs and increase efficiency. Technology-oriented products can create new ways-of-working that are enabled by your technology; best practice definition is documenting how to use the tool to enable the best practice. In other cases, best

practices exist but are not widely disseminated, nor published. When this is true, best practice definition is simply the codification and publication of recognized ways-of-working.

- Industry Case Studies that document how others with similar business problems have solved the same issues employing your technology and best practices. Drawing this type of corollary is the most effective way to communicate how technology tools can be employed to solve business problems – particularly if the case study is drawn from the prospect’s industry group.

While you may be capable of creating thought-leadership material in-house, an effective means of increasing audience attention is to employ recognized expert resources within an industry for credibility. These resources include Industry Analysts primarily, and Industry-specific Media Publications and their Editors secondarily.

Both White Papers and Webinars are effective media channels for disseminating these messages. White Papers employing Industry Analysts provide instant credibility – credibility that a vendor company itself cannot project, regardless of the quality of the content. These papers should also employ actual customer experiences and benefits as proof.

Webinars that involve presentations by one or more Industry Analysts and present customer case studies will also draw audience attention. Capturing media attention by issuing press releases and getting issue-based articles published in trade publications increases campaign effectiveness.

The best way to establish and exploit a thought-leadership position this position is through an Engagement Marketing program. It is most effective in tracking a suspect’s position in the sales funnel and reducing cost-per-lead.