

The Basics of growing your business with Marketing Automation

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You've probably heard about marketing automation and may even know what it is. If you're reading this however, you've probably not yet deployed a solution and are wondering what's right for your business.

Certainly there are lots of compelling statistics that may be driving your interest in marketing automation:



of marketing automation users saw their number of leads increase and 77% saw their number of conversions increase.
VR Insight (2015)



increase in sales pipeline contribution by marketers who implement marketing automation.
Forrester Research (2014)



increase in sales opportunities from nurtured leads versus non-nurtured leads after successfully deploying a lead-nurturing program.
DemandGen (2013)

While these stats are convincing, choosing and implementing the right platform is no easy decision. Like any technology, a marketing automation system is only as good as the effort you put into it. And despite having “automation” in its title, there's nothing automatic about its implementation. The payoff is definitely there, but there's work involved.

This guide will introduce you to the basics of marketing automation and help you get started choosing the right solution for your business.

What is Marketing Automation?

Let's start with the very basics.

A marketing automation system is a software platform that allows marketing teams and organizations to more easily and effectively:

Execute marketing campaigns across online channels like email, social media and websites.

Personalize and automate the repetitive tasks associated with campaign follow-up.

These automated tasks are normally in the form of a series of emails sent at staggered intervals. The process of sending these emails and content is called **lead nurturing**.

Think of it like taking care of a plant:

- A lead that you generate from a marketing campaign is the seed.
- The nurturing email touchpoints are the acts of watering and fertilizing this seed until it grows and bears fruit.
- And the fruit that you're trying to harvest are sales.

Traditional vs. Inbound [stitchDX]

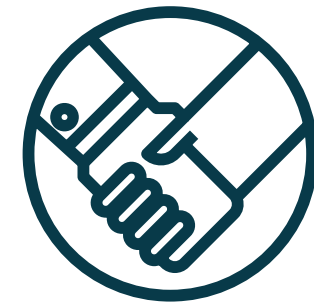
We referred to the series of automated emails sent at various intervals as **lead nurturing**. And while that's accurate, it's a **traditional marketing automation** approach that can be one-dimensional.



A traditional marketing campaign of time-based emails doesn't take into account the power of additional learning about your prospects' interests, wants and needs. There's more to their stories—and there's an interactive way to obtain and use that information to advance your sales goals.



Through **inbound marketing**, the information you learn about your prospects allows you to personalize your communications and place every message precisely in context with where they are in their buying decision process. On the next page, you'll see some examples of inbound marketing in action.





Perhaps a lead that you're nurturing has visited your website and accessed a case study, viewed several pages of one of your services offerings, clicked into content you shared on your Facebook account, or looked at your pricing page.

Those actions are telling you a LOT about what they might be interested in or how far along they are in their purchasing decision. Wouldn't it be great if that activity could help suggest content you deliver in the next nurturing interaction you have with that lead?

Or if it was added to their contact record in your CRM system so your sales people had that information when they speak to them next on the phone?

With all of this information, your lead generation and follow-up is no longer a shot in the dark. It becomes much more effective—and personalized. That's the ultimate goal of marketing automation.

Most marketing automation platforms come out of the box with standard features and functionality. While these capabilities are certainly helpful, the real benefit is that they can be integrated with each other to help you orchestrate a unified approach to your lead generation and nurturing activities.

Let's briefly look at the most commonly offered capabilities:

The Top Four...

89%

Email marketing

84%

Lead nurturing

80%

Integrations such as CRM, mobile, social, etc. for accumulating customer intelligence across channels

82%

Cross-channel campaign management

Email



Whether it's a monthly newsletter, new customer announcement or nurturing follow-ups to your prospects, all marketing automation systems include an email solution and usually become your primary email platform and service provider. And because they're part of a marketing automation system, you know exactly who is opening and clicking your email (as well as bouncing or unsubscribing).

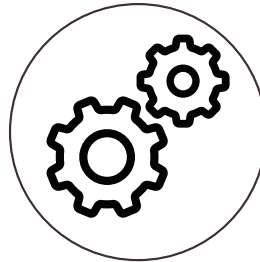
Forms



Marketing automation systems normally allow you to create forms to gather prospect information, and embed them in your website content, landing pages or blog content. Typically you create the form in the marketing automation system and then paste corresponding code that displays that form where you want it to appear.

More advanced systems let you create dynamic forms that recognize when a lead is a repeat visitor and serve up different form fields (questions) each time they complete your form. With dynamic forms, you can quickly build a robust file of information about your prospects.

Automation & Workflow



Automated workflows are core to any marketing automation system. They allow you to set up a series of automated nurturing tasks that will initiate based on a prospect's actions.

For example, if a site visitor requests to attend a webinar you have scheduled, the nurturing tasks could include an immediate thank-you email, followed by an offer of a free consultation a few days later, followed by webinar reminders before the actual event.

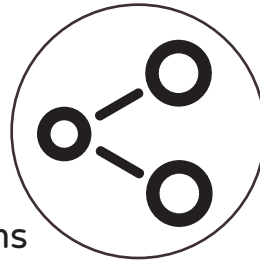
Lead Scoring



Prospects and leads in your database can be given a lead score based on certain interactions they can have with you. These can include downloading a case study, requesting a demo or visiting your pricing page. Each interaction can be worth a different amount based on how it relates to likelihood of purchase.

When a prospect reaches a particular lead score threshold, your marketing automation platform initiates a new workflow of nurturing tasks and content relevant to his or her stage in the buying process (or “buy-cycle”). A particularly high lead score—or certain combination of interactions like a demo request and multiple visits to the pricing page—can also alert the sales team to pick up the phone and call that lead directly—someone's ready to buy!

Social Media



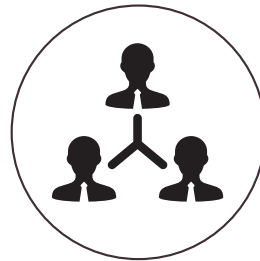
Many marketing automation platforms allow you to manage your company's social media accounts from one centralized location. The most powerful ones can schedule posts and track the success of your Twitter, LinkedIn and Facebook activity—as well as the accounts of employees willing to give you access.

Visitor Identification



You market more effectively when you know who is visiting your website and exactly what content they are accessing. If that visitor is a prospect you are nurturing, their website interactions will be added to their contact record in the CRM. If they're anonymous, they can at least be identified at the company level based on their IP address. Some systems then offer suggestions on appropriate contacts within that organization for your sales team to follow up with.

CRM



A CRM is a **Customer Relationship Management** platform. Most marketing automation systems have at least a basic level of CRM built in, while some are even more advanced and can potentially replace the system you may currently be using (like Salesforce.com or SugarCRM).

The real benefit of CRM integrated with marketing automation is that all that activity you're tracking—from website and social media interactions to content downloads and lead scores—is recorded in one place and can provide your marketing and sales team with the right information to close more sales.

Landing Pages



If you've ever registered for a webinar or downloaded content off of a website, you've likely visited a landing page. These are dedicated pages designed and structured specifically for the purpose of converting a visitor to complete a desired action.

Many marketing automation systems provide a platform that allows you to easily build landing pages with forms you've also built in the system, and then track all conversion and activity back to leads and prospects you're nurturing.

Analytics



Nearly all marketing automation systems offer basic reporting and dashboards that show leads by source/campaign/month, email and landing page performance, etc. From a web analytics perspective, Google Analytics is great (and free). And while it gives you a lot of intelligence around what content is being accessed, it doesn't tell you exactly who is accessing that content. By tagging repeat visitors and individually tracking interactions, marketing automation platforms are able to drill down to that next level.

Platform Integration



Of course no marketing automation system offers everything you need right out of the box, or is a replacement for tools you are using even when they overlap. Therefore it's important that the system you choose also have "platform" capabilities and can easily integrate with third party systems like Salesforce.com, or an API connector tool such as Zapier.

The guide that follows is not meant to tell you which system is right for you—it's simply an overview of the more popular solutions on the market. Choosing the one that is right for you depends on a lot of things including budget, how broad your needs are, the technical capabilities of your marketing team, and third party tools you're using now like your Customer Relationship Management or Content Management System.



The following six platforms are certainly a good place to start your search (grouped by business size and listed alphabetically):

Smaller to Midsize Business Platforms



www.act-on.com

Act-On: Serving a customer base that primarily consists of companies with fewer than 50 employees, Act-On has a highly regarded, easy-to-use user interface. With a full range of features and capabilities, Act-On's pricing is not the cheapest nor the most expensive, beginning at \$600 per month for companies with 1,000 contacts and jumping as high as nearly \$8,000 per month for databases with up to 1 million contacts.



www.hubspot.com

HubSpot: Launched in 2006 and having pretty much invented the concept of Inbound Marketing, HubSpot is a well-known player in the SMB marketing automation space. With an easy-to-use interface, HubSpot is all about helping customers shift from “outbound” lead generation tactics (cold calling, trade shows, etc.) to “inbound” tactics which revolve around the creation and distribution of useful content that helps companies get found by potential customers. They also run the annual Inbound conference each fall in Boston, an event now close up attended by more than 12,000 marketers. Pricing starts quite low at \$200 per month for 100 contacts but quickly jumps for more typically sized contact databases: \$800 per month for 1,000 contacts and \$2,400 per month for 10,000 contacts.

Smaller to Midsize Business Platforms



www.pardot.com

Pardot: Now owned by and optimized for integration with Salesforce.com, Pardot is probably a better option to consider if you are using, or plan to use, Salesforce as your CRM. Pricing is higher than other SMB solutions and begins at \$1,000 per month for their Standard offering. Not necessarily known as super-easy-to-use, Pardot is nonetheless a powerful platform—but it’s more sales team-focused than truly one optimized for marketing teams.



www.sharpspring.com

SharpSpring: A newer entrant to the SMB marketing automation space, SharpSpring touts itself as a “second generation” solution, designed and developed specifically for the less technical marketing and business user. While SharpSpring is a lower-priced platform sold exclusively through their agency partners, it’s far from short on its feature set, especially those most useful and able to provide ROI to their core B2B customer base. Pricing is typically \$400 to \$500 per month for databases of up to 100,000 contacts. SharpSpring users can map their existing forms or replace them with SharpSpring forms, as well as use their existing CRM or adopt SharpSpring’s robust visual CRM capabilities. Additionally, SharpSpring integrates ZoomInfo’s contact database directly within the platform and offers access right out of the box.

Enterprise Business Platforms



www.oracle.com

Eloqua: Launched in 1999 and developed for large organizations with millions of contacts, elaborate workflows and lead scoring rules, Eloqua is a mature offering. Part of the Oracle Marketing Cloud product suite. Pricing starts around \$2,000 per month for their basic product, \$4,000 for Standard and is custom priced for Enterprise. Meant for sophisticated marketing teams, Eloqua's extremely flexible workflow creation features are not exactly drag-and-drop but, do allow for any contingency.



www.marketo.com

Marketo: For true Enterprise class, Marketo is more affordable than Eloqua with pricing that starts around \$900 per month for their basic solution (called Spark), climbs to \$1,800 for Standard and jumps to about \$3,200 for Select, their top-tier offering. Marketo also delivers more user licenses than Eloqua, further lowering its net comparison cost. While meant for large-scale deployments, Marketo workflow creation features are considered user-friendly and utilize drag-and-drop controls.

So What Now?

This overview was certainly not meant to be a deep dive into marketing automation, but an introduction to the basics. If you're looking for help selecting, implementing or improving your use of a marketing automation platform, we can help.

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stitchDX is a Boston-area marketing agency working with B2B, B2C and social impact organizations to help them achieve their strategic goals and drive revenue growth.

OUR BRAND-FIRST PHILOSOPHY

We believe your brand and core message form the **red thread** that runs through every aspect of your organization. Whether you're designing a product or service, trying to reach new audiences or strengthening existing customer relationships, we help organizations leverage their brands to accelerate those efforts. Our process starts with building a deep understanding of who you are, and then weaves powerful narratives with proven marketing strategies to build awareness, engage prospects and drive growth.

Through our HubSpot and SharpSpring agency partnerships, our clients more effectively engage prospects, convert leads and close sales. Our diverse client roster includes MeTEOR Education, Backyard Footwear, Minuteman Trucks, Sentry IT Solutions, Arden Engineering and O'Brien & Levine Court Reporting Solutions.