LeadCrunch

Engaged

B2B CONTENT SYNDICATION TO BUILD RELATIONSHIPS AND REVENUE

Lainey Mebust and Emma Valentiner

Introduction

The very best marketing campaigns connect people. They're memorable. They drive action.

They're also rare.

The uncomfortable truth is that great marketing takes time to create. And the business world moves so fast, maybe you're afraid you don't have time to get to great. If this sounds like you, don't worry. This book is designed to help marketers like you get to great faster.

If you read our previous book, *Words That Sell: How to Vastly Improve Your B2B Content Marketing*, you know that we don't believe in shortcuts — but we do believe in being strategic about the marketing assets you're creating. With a strong strategy and high-quality content you're positioned to deliver campaigns that drive measurable results.

When it comes to content syndication, this becomes exceedingly important — because there is a clear financial value tied to syndication campaigns. Poor content, poor ROI. Add up enough of those poorly performing campaigns, and you're CFO is going to be leery — if not downright cantankerous — about signing off on your quarterly budgets.

In this book, we're sharing what we've learned from syndicating content for some of the world's most recognized corporations, like IBM, Lockheed Martin, Dell, Microsoft, and others. You'll find proven tactics on what really works to drive prospects to take action, and what pitfalls to avoid.

So let's get to it, shall we? *Great* is waiting.

Lead with the win — you gotta give to get

What do your potential customers want? In order to create top of funnel content that resonates with your audience, you need to know who they are — and what they care about — first. Before you start writing, it's valuable to step back and shine a bright light on the problems your prospects are facing. Fortunately (for this exercise, at least!), most B2B buyers are facing very similar challenges — and they typically fall into one of these three areas:

Not enough budget **Not enough time** **Not enough goodwill with Sales and/or upper management**

The specifics of these challenges will vary by industry or role, but when you whittle down the challenges facing almost anyone you speak to — or are trying to sell to — these are the big fish. As a content marketer, it's your job to position your product or service as the "win" — the best option on the market for addressing those problems.

But how do you know exactly what problems your prospects worry about?

Strategic research.

Speak with your Sales team

The Sales team is one of the most valuable resources in your company for getting a clear, no-filter view on the issues the prospects they're speaking with are looking to solve. What common questions come up on Sales calls? Are there any concerns that Sales frequently needs to speak to? What additional information do they need to provide to close the deal? Are prospects also looking at competitors — and if so, which ones? What are the key benefits they're hoping to get from a partnership with your business?

Visit industry-specific websites and blogs

What are the most popular types of content? What are people engaging with? If they have comments on their articles, are there any common complaints or challenges shared by site visitors? Pay particular attention to any "here's what we predict for next year"-type articles — these can be a powerful source of industry trends or changes you'll want to incorporate into your own content.

Perform a social media audit

What you're looking for here is engagement — the content and posts that generate the most "shares" and comments. Likes are fairly cheap currency on social platforms, so they're not a strong indicator of what types of content generate a deeper level of interest. Look for the similarities among the interesting posts that do drive genuine engagement.

As you review your own social profiles and those of your competitors, take note of:

- Common topics
- Headlines that grab your attention
- Frequently used keywords
- Visual assets
- Tone of voice
- Comments from audience

Consider all of this research as insurance against a blank page. When you sit down to write, you'll have a much stronger idea of what works to engage your target audience. And, by approaching this task from the standpoint of understanding your prospects' challenges, what you do write will be much more insightful.

✅ **Bonus:** This research isn't just helpful for writing a content syndication piece. Use what you've learned to develop your editorial calendar, fill in gaps in your sales funnel, create new Sales assets, and add informational pages to your website.

How to build trust (and why it matters)

The fastest way to build trust is to provide value. No matter the context — whether it's a TED talk, or a guest blog post, a speaking opportunity, a whitepaper or an email newsletter **— you need to focus on providing actionable insights whenever you communicate.** Otherwise, you'll get lost in a sea of noise. (Or, in some cases, the *spam* folder.)

What do I mean by "actionable insights"? These are clear directives that help your prospects address one of those three problems I mentioned previously. What information can you provide to help them get more out of their marketing or supplies budgets? Have you learned a valuable process for streamlining large-scale campaigns, with multiple teams pitching in? What about ways to improve alignment between teams, or a tried-and-trusted method of reporting to C-suite executives?

In the course of doing your own work, you've likely stumbled onto processes and tools that make your job easier — share those things, and be generous about it. People will likely forget the details of your product specifications or the specifics of why your firmware beats out the competition — but they won't forget that key insight you shared that helped them trim $10K off the quarterly budget. Or that easy filter trick that helps you cut down on unwanted emails. Don't hoard this knowledge, share it — and in so doing, you'll build trust and a reputation as a thought leader.

Building trust is especially important if you're implementing a content syndication campaign — it's much easier to get a prospect to actually read your content if they're already familiar with your name. But you can help that name recognition along. Here are a few ideas:

- **Include social proof.** Are you active on Twitter or LinkedIn? Do you regularly communicate with other thought-leaders in your industry? Share screen caps of those interactions when they are relevant and can provide additional support for your point of view. (If these interactions are private, be sure to ask for permission before sharing them publicly.)

- **Guest posts.** The industry and website blogs you included in your "problems research" — those are great targets for pitching guest posts. Not only are guest posts good for your SEO, they also help to cement your reputation as a thought leader in your industry and boost brand awareness.

- **Speaking engagements.** There's no better opportunity to present your valuable point of view — and promote your product or service in the best light — than speaking opportunities. And there are plenty of these. Look into local opportunities with business associations or community groups (this approach is particularly great if you're nervous about public speaking and just getting started, since it's on familiar turf.) Reach out to your own vendors and clients and see if they're interested in doing a co-branded speech at an industry conference. And keep an eye out for digital opportunities like podcast or video interviews.

- **Awards.** Every year there are thousands of opportunities to gain additional recognition, and build trust, through awards. Every industry has them, and they send a strong signal to potential customers that you're reliable and trustworthy. Most award organizations offer a digital badge you can include on your website that acts as a trust signal for prospects. You'll also want to make sure you toot your own horn by writing up a blog post or a press release to share the news.

Building trust isn't something that happens overnight, but with perseverance and diligence, you can establish a reputation that will have prospects knocking down your door. (And that much more likely to engage with your content marketing efforts.)

Data-driven research

What's a sure-fire way to get prospects to read your syndicated content? Provide information they don't already have. And the best way to do that is to present your own data. This is a great middle-of-funnel/evaluation asset because you can showcase original data, demonstrate thought leadership, and (lightly) present how your solution addresses the most common problems your customers are looking to solve.

Where can you find original data?

You are going to be both thrilled and dismayed by the answer to this question — you likely already have access to an immense trove of valuable data on your industry. How?

Internal software tools

"The call is coming from *inside* the house."

Horror movie clichés aside, it's true — the software you already use has been collecting valuable data about your customers, website and industry for as long as you've been using it. And if you're in an industry that relies heavily on data science, you might have even more high-quality data at your fingertips.

Here are some popular B2B software tools that can provide rich, valuable information on your customers and your industry:

- Salesforce
- Pardot
- Marketo
- Google Analytics
- HubSpot
- Mailchimp
- Zendesk

Now that you know where to find the data, gain some clarity on the story you want to tell. You could discuss how your customers' needs have changed over time, or how a product line you offer has delivered the best results for a specific niche industry. You could dive into purchase trends over the past five years — and how regional or global economic changes have impacted them. There are a wealth of stories hidden within your existing data, you just need to be creative to find them.

Research partnerships

Why do all the heavy lifting yourself? Co-branded reports or industry studies are popular ways of expanding your audience while splitting up the hard work of conceptualizing, writing and publishing data-driven content. There are plenty of B2B marketing firms that specialize in developing research materials — so if this is your first time creating an asset like this, you'd be well served to partner with experts. They'll have a keen eye for the types of information that work best in this format, and the in-house expertise to design and promote the content for a winning ROI.

Surveys

While surveys are an efficient, highly customizable way to gather data, this method works best if you have access to a large audience. If you're only surveying those in your immediate professional network, you likely won't get enough diversity among your respondents to provide the depth of data that makes for a good report.

That said, you can build a larger network while improving your brand awareness and generating survey responses at the same time. If you'd prefer the customization and speed of running your own survey, here are some tips on making it a winning effort.

Tips for running a successful survey

- **Make it fun.** Software tools like SurveyMonkey or SurveyAnyplace offer gamification, gifs, and easily customizable templates to engage respondents (which, in turn, drastically improves response rates.)
- **Use your existing social and professional networks.** Add a link to the survey in your email signature, and ask your colleagues to do the same. Share it on your LinkedIn profile and within relevant LinkedIn groups. Send it to your vendors and customers. Now widen your reach. Pitch industry influencers to share it with their own followers. Connect with the editors of industry-specific blogs and websites and ask them to share it with their audience.

- **Offer a prize to encourage responses.** It's amazing how motivating a $100 gift card can be.

- **Ask for your respondents' email addresses** at the end of the survey so you can send them the final report when it's ready. (And while you're at it, ask them to share it with their own audiences.)

Data-driven content, executed well, can drive new visibility for your business, provide valuable insights and move prospects further down the sales funnel. Not bad results for a bit of number crunching.

The content checklist

In marketing, content gives you a unique opportunity to connect with your audience in a format they're already consuming. Sadly, content marketing is no revolutionary idea and there's plenty of saturated channels and stale content out there to prove it. To cut through the noise, you need great content.

The difference between good and great content can make or break your campaign. While your readers are the ultimate judge, the recipe for great content boils down to the right message, optimization, and formatting. Life is too short for bad content. To produce engaging, ROI boosting content every time follow the content checklist.

Is your content helpful?

Value is the cornerstone of great content. The best way to build rapport with your audience is to share value — no strings attached. Your content should help your audience solve a problem or level up their skills, regardless if they use your product or services. Giving your readers this leg up positions your brand as a trusted thought leader all while keeping your readers engaged.

Is your content exclusive?

Great content is exclusive. The best assets bring something to the table that is exclusive to you and your team. Do you have internal data, studies, or findings? These are the perfect metrics to flaunt as they're unique to your brand. Sharing exclusive findings attracts readers and priceless backlinks back to your site (some of the best SEO arsenal out there).

Is your content readable?

The goal of content is to make an impression, so first and foremost it should be readable. You've worked hard to get your audience to your page, don't lose them with pretentious prose. Start your reader off with a thought-provoking (or hilarious) headline and keep them engaged with copy that's short, sweet, and easy to read. Studies find that some of the best content reads at an eighth grade level. Not sure how to simplify your tone? Readability tools can help you test your copy to make sure it flows at the right level.

Formatting your content is another important piece of readability. Breaking up your content with headers, short paragraphs, bullets, and numbered lists will help your reader digest your message and ultimately stay on your page longer. Think about the time your audience has to devote to a piece, be informative and helpful but most importantly, concise.

Is your content optimized?

Your carefully curated content won't get far if your users can't find it. To ensure your content doesn't get lost in the crowd, make it SEO-friendly. Weave keywords into your headline and throughout your body copy (without stuffing every other sentence). Capitalize on the SEO fields by including metadata descriptions, internal links back to your site, and alt tags on your images. Taking advantage of every available element will help you bump your content up the search ranks and into the right hands.

✅ **Bonus tip:** For an easy-to-implement SEO strategy, check out our whitepaper, *How to Woo Google*.

Is your content shareable?

Now that your readers can find your content, make sure it's easy to share. Social plugins simplify social sharing, making it easy for readers to post your content on LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, you name it. While, highlighting juicy grab quotes is a great way to set your reader up for a quick tweet. Reducing the amount of time it takes to share your content will help your asset double its reach.

Is it audience approved?

Ultimately great content is dictated by your audience. The difference between good and great content comes down to how it holds up with your readers. Your content that heeds the most traffic, backlinks, social shares, and engagement is your greatest content. Listening to your audience and designing assets accordingly will help you produce great content, every time.

A master marketer's quick and easy guide to content syndication

A lot of B2B firms do content syndication, but few of them do it really, really well. To help you get better results faster, we queried our VP of Marketing, **J. David Green**, to pinpoint the easy things you can do to improve your syndication campaigns.

Include keywords and pain points in the title

Obvious? Sure. But you'd be surprised how many marketers opt for clever titles instead of ones that clearly address the problems their prospects are facing. The subject — and benefit — of engaging with your content should be clear from the outset.

Write for a specific stage of the buyer's journey

Know where your prospects are at in the journey, and meet them there. For example, a Gartner Magic Quadrant Brief is useful to a prospect who has already started the buyer's journey and actively wants to change their current processes. They're looking for a solution, rather than simply looking for information. The content you write should take a prospect's place in the journey into account. If they're already convinced that the status quo sucks, there's no need to dedicate copy to making that argument.

Align your content to the segment

Who, specifically, are you trying to reach? Your messaging needs to change depending on if you're targeting an enterprise-level firm or a three-person agency. An enterprise-size business is going to have several more layers of stakeholders that need to sign off on a budgetary request. You'll want to write content that accounts for this complexity. For an agency, there are fewer decision-makers and they've got different concerns than a larger company, so tailor your content accordingly.

For successful top-of-funnel, focus on the problem

Everyone wants to be heard. By focusing on the problem in your content, readers will know that you understand the unique challenges they're facing. You have the opportunity to explain how your product or service solves for those challenges — but don't forget the prime reason for top-of-funnel content, to provide helpful information. What is going to be genuinely helpful for your audience? What can you share that will help them to be more effective? Help them succeed, and you've laid the foundation for a lasting business relationship.

Make it easy to move further down the funnel

Even while you focus on providing top-of-funnel-type informational content, you should also provide links to resources that are further down the funnel. Highlight your most valuable content, i.e. those assets that perform most effectively in terms of conversions and engagement. Include links to whitepapers, case studies, demo videos and how-to articles where relevant, so your prospects can engage with them when they're ready.

Optimize

As you run syndication campaigns, ask your vendor for engagement metrics so you can determine how well your content is performing. Some things you may consider testing are asset titles, design, CTAs and content length.

Is content syndication worth your time and marketing budget?

This is the big question for a lot of B2B marketers. With so many tools, processes, software, etc. at our disposal, is a content syndication play really valuable? Will it move the needle enough to prove an ROI? Can you feel confident in presenting this as a new budget line item for the next quarter?

If you've read this far, then you won't be surprised that my answers the above questions are resounding YES'es. But there are things you can do to tip the scales in your favor, before you contract with a syndication vendor.

Know your campaign goals from the outset

Done well, you can get a lot out of a syndication campaign — but you need to be very clear on what you're looking for before you kick one off.

- **For SEO and improving site authority**
  If your content is shared on a website with a higher domain authority than your site has, content syndication can be incredibly helpful as long as there is a "dofollow" link from that website to your own. (Check out this Backlinko post for a thorough look at nofollow vs. dofollow links.) Greater site authority means that it will be easier for your website and content to rank for the keywords that matter to your business. Better rankings equals more qualified organic traffic. For new businesses with new websites, this will be an important focus.

- **Brand awareness, reaching a wider audience**
  This is perhaps the most common reason most B2B marketers cite for running a content syndication campaign. Just like life, sometimes you need an introduction from a trusted someone to get your foot in the door. In partnering with a syndication vendor, your content will be presented to a (ideally large) new audience — and they'll be more likely to engage with it, since they've likely already received content from the vendor before. It's trust by association.

- **Lead gen**
  But let's get real — will content syndication drive new leads, and revenue, to your business? Yes, and it's why most B2B firms include these types of campaigns in their overall marketing plan. With the right vendor, and the right targeting parameters in place, you can get in front of prospects that might be your next best customers.

Choose your most useful top-of-funnel content.

Hard truth? You won't get a lot of opportunities to get this right. If you run your first campaign with low-quality content, you are building a brick wall between you and potential customers.

What's low-quality content?

- **Sales-centric**
  Remember the tip earlier in this ebook — be useful. Don't focus the entirety of your content on why a prospect should choose your product or service — people don't want to be sold at the top of the funnel. This is about goodwill building. You know the problems your existing customers are facing, so speak to these with smart, insightful solutions they can implement and benefit from.

- **Ugly**
  Design matters. While you don't need to hire Madison Avenue's finest (an Upworker will do fine), your asset should adhere to your existing branding and style guidelines. It's human nature — we judge books by their covers. It should look polished enough that your prospect is enticed to read it, and when they visit your website to learn more, it should be a consistent visual experience.

- **Typo City**
  Double-check your content before sending it to your vendor for grammatical and spelling errors. These sorts of silly, easily avoidable gaffes subconsciously signal to your readers that you're not good with details. And that's never the message you want to send when you're trying to win someone's business.

Make sure your targeting is laser-accurate.

Correctly identifying and connecting with the right target audience has been historically difficult for most marketers. (Some might even say this is the bane of their marketing existence.) It's why we're constantly trying new approaches and processes, developing buyer personas and refining our ideal customer profiles. And it's why conversion rates are so abysmal.

Case in point? In a typical programmatic display ad campaign:

99.6%
of B2B buyers will never click on your ad

99.2%
of B2B buyers don't visit your site and will never become a lead

99.2%
of leads never become customers

It amounts to a staggering amount of wasted ad spend.

The good news? It's not our fault. We just haven't had the data we need to make highly accurate targeting decisions. We've been using data — like SIC and NAICS codes, headcount, revenue, job titles — that doesn't tell the complete story of what a company really does and who we really need to be speaking to.

The bad news (that actually isn't)? We do have to fix it. I say this actually isn't bad news, because we now have access to tools and data that can help us make highly accurate targeting decisions.

Tools *and* data. It's not one or the other. This is important. Tools like artificial intelligence can deliver B2B lookalike audiences, prospects that are mathematically similar to your existing best customers. And paired with machine learning, so the targeting model improves as you run campaigns and provide performance feedback.

And data. We need accurate, current B2B data that tells us how much a company is involved in a range of industries and activities. We need a better understanding of the people at those companies — their titles and functions, but also their professional relationships so we know who we need to speak with to make the sale.

And, depending on what product or service you offer, we need specific details we don't even know we need to consider. In the case of LeadCrunch client Oracle Bronto, a key commonality for their most successful customers was the use of Apache servers.

We've been relying on instinct and inaccurate data to drive targeting. To move forward, we need to rely on the intelligent tools and data now at our disposal — because they're uncovering opportunities we don't even know to look for.

For a deeper look at artificial intelligence for B2B, see the bonus interview with LeadCrunch Chief Data Scientist Steve Biafore included in this book.

When this type of targeting is pointed at a content syndication campaign, it results in campaigns that are more effective, efficient, and profitable. You're not wasting money reaching people who will never become customers. Your content is delivered to prospects that are more likely to become happy, long-term clients. You understand their challenges, and provide useful, engaging information that helps them do their jobs better. You've built goodwill from the outset — before your Sales team ever picks up the phone.

Now that's just good business.

Meet the authors

Lainey Mebust

Lainey Mebust is a marketer, word nerd, and Oxford comma enthusiast. As the resident Email Marketing Specialist at LeadCrunch, she's all about bringing the right message to the right people at the right time. With over six years in the industry, B2B is her jam.

When it comes to marketing, she believes in the power of keywords, testing, and authenticity. After years in the tech world of San Francisco, she left the zip-up hoodies and puffy vests and brought her expertise to America's finest. When she's not whipping up click-worthy content, you can catch her chasing waves that she doesn't know how to surf (yet).

Emma Valentiner

For 15+ years, Emma Valentiner has been writing a lot of copy — for inbound and outbound marketing campaigns, mass-market consumer products, tutorials, customer support documentation, websites, national publications, and at least three indie rock records.

As SEO Content Manager at LeadCrunch, Emma is responsible for orchestrating a multi-pronged SEO campaign — no easy feat in the ultra-competitive B2B industry. She also oversees a talented team of writers providing clients and prospects with useful, engaging content on B2B content marketing and next-gen demand generation strategies. And in her off-time, she's hard at work on that fourth indie rock record.

Bonus chapter: Why ROI is terrible in B2B demand gen

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:05.1] ANNOUNCER: Live from deep in the heart of Galveston, Texas all the way to the gleaming shores of Jacksonville, Florida, it's the Green & Greene Show. Here are your hosts, Dave Green and Jonathan Greene, ready to unlock the mysteries of scaling demand gen. The Green & Greene show is brought to you by **LeadCrunch**, which has reimagined how to find B2B customers at scale.

[EPISODE]

[0:00:29.0] JG: We're in. It's the Green & Greene Show. I'm your friendly neighborhood, Green & Greene host, **Jonathan Greene**. I'm here with my partner in crime, mentor, supervisor, all-around marketing ninjutsu expert, **Dave Green**. How's it going?

[0:00:44.6] DG: Oh, boy. Jonathan. I sure have to dish out the big bonuses for that kind of a build-up.

[0:00:51.6] JG: Well, listen. I'm excited about today, because what we're going to do next in the show is going to be beneficial to people. We've been talking in the background as it relates to our business and the industry at large. I think we've pretty much decided that the vast majority of B2B demand generation tech and/or the way people are using it is BS. It's about time we cut through some of the nonsense and get real. What do you think?

[0:01:23.3] DG: I think so, man. Let's be fair. There are definitely great tools out there and good things to do, but I do think we need to tap the brakes just a little bit on some of the hype and some of the posturing that goes on in the industry.

A history of innovation in demand gen yet conversion rates suck

[0:01:40.8] JG: All right, so let me set the scene if I could. If you go back and look at the history of technological innovation in the B2B space, what's been happening over the years, what's been developed, way back in the day, you had search marketing and then you had social marketing and then you had content marketing. Then, circa 2007–2008, you had the advent of lead nurturing and scoring. Around about that time, maybe a little later, 2009–2010, SDRs an inbound team started to be the big thing. Then, circa 2015, everybody starts talking about account-based marketing. In 2018, we're delving into chatbots and all.

The technology train appears to be pressing on unrelenting. Yet, it seems as if the average B2B marketer, a demand generation person is having a hard time getting any additional return out of their ad spend as opposed to what we had 15 years ago. What is going on here?

[0:02:50.8] DG: That's the thing. I think if you reflect back — and being an old guy, I get to do that a lot—you would think that you'd have these monumental increases in conversion, ROI. Sure, people have wins here and there and do great things. It seems like, if anything, it's harder than ever, that if you can get 1% of the leads that fill out one of your web forms to actually buy something in your career, you're a pretty cutting-edge marketer.

Let's face it, a lot of people can't even measure. Something's really wrong. There's some way we're not thinking about this which I think we need to start thinking about. You and I both have been looking at a lot of vendor websites since we started here at LeadCrunch, because we're building infrastructure and capabilities. How many claims of a 300% increase in revenue

and stuff like that have you seen?

Big claims. Small results

[0:04:04.2] JG: Sure. I mean, the claims are everywhere.

[0:04:07.1] DG: We have them, too. I'm not sure we're being helpful with stuff like that. I'm not trying to say that somebody's occasional, fantastic ROI is being made up. I think it creates an expectation that that's what you should get to.

[0:04:30.2] JG: I think it comes off as hyperbolic, because there's so much white noise about how this, that, or the other thing is generating 200% lift or 300% lift. That becomes hyperbolic at some point in time, and I have trouble believing it as a marketer. I'm inclined to tune out the noise, because, frankly, it just all seems to be BS to me.

A sober CFO view of B2B demand gen

[0:04:52.8] DG: I think it's always helpful to get the perspective as a marketer of a CFO, or some senior level financial executive. In fact, we're planning to have a couple of CFOs come on the show and just give a financial executive perspective on return on investment for marketing spend. They're not usually expecting heroic return on investment scenarios, because they don't see them. They're looking for marginal increases.

With a company like Facebook whose growth is so explosive, it probably doesn't have anything to do with marketing. It had to do with the appeal of the product and its value in being at the right place at the right time. The rest of us need to look at how we can marginally improve what we're doing and chip away at it over time rather than expect that, because I get a chatbot, my ROI is going to go through the roof.

[0:06:01.8] JG: An important first step, I think, is to ground yourself in reality. If you have not done the research to figure out what the industry benchmarks are for conversion and for throughput at various stages of the funnel, you might want to start there. I feel a lot of the problem is that people are asking the wrong question: "How can I get a 200% or a 300% lift off of what I've been doing?" I think most experienced media managers and practically all experienced executives, CFOs, CEOs arrive at their destination through the effective management of the aggregation of marginal gains, which is to say they tend to manage and live their lives in such a way that they get 1% better every day instead of trying to look for that 200% or 300% quick win.

It tends to be a more holistic approach to things. I think part of that is the reason we're not seeing the returns despite the advance in technology. People are buying into the hyperbole and expecting, and essentially, for lack of a better strategy, they just bounce from tactic to tactic.

Why we waste huge dollars on B2B media

[0:07:13.4] DG: Well, I think what happens quite often is that when there's a new channel, such as text or a chatbot, for a while you get some gain that you weren't getting before. Sometimes it's hard to isolate and really look at it holistically within the context. Pretty soon everybody's doing it. That's what happened with social media. Initially, everybody got a bazillion shares on anything they put out, and now there's so much content and so many people doing things that it's hard to get that lift from social.

I think there's an initial bump from any new technology, or there can be. To your point, I think that the bigger thing is sustained growth. The other thing and the reason I'm here at LeadCrunch is something that's bothered me for a long time

and I looked at this. Everybody should just take a moment to think about the experiences they have in their B2B life when you're on LinkedIn, or whatever business publication or website you might look at. How many ads do you see that are irrelevant? How many emails come to you that are really irrelevant?

The answer to that is a lot. We all get lots and lots and lots of irrelevant ads. I think that's why there are terms like banner blindness or spam or junk mail and all the rest of it. For all the effort and energy we put into it, actually getting the right message in front of the right person at the right time and the right company is really hard. We haven't quite figured that out yet.

[0:09:06.3] JG: That's an interesting point. Especially in the programmatic realm and in the CPL, when you buy leads by CPL, so much focus goes into the concept of fraud that almost nobody remembers to focus on waste. Waste is a gigantic concept in advertising, and it's all to do with effectively segmenting and then effectively targeting. I feel, for a lot of the people we consult with and engage with, both in our own personal lives and as a business, who are having difficulties with proving ROI, it's because they've not really thought through their topic on a whole segmentation. They're not always entirely sure who they're supposed to be talking to, or they've not done the work to segment it in a way that's appropriate so that they can talk to the people they want to and not talk to the people they don't want to.

Start with the obvious: who the heck should you be marketing to?

[0:09:59.3] DG: I was doing demand gen consulting earlier in my career, and through that and other things, I probably interviewed 200 or 300 marketers. Probably more than that. Probably 500 marketers, usually about demand gen and related topics.

The vast majority of them are not really clear on who their ideal customer is. It's very common. You've seen where the market definition is every single company with—and I'm going to make up some numbers—250 employees to 1,000 employees, or anybody over 50 million dollars, or anybody over 50 million in these 12 big industry segments, and it can't be that all of those have equal value and that they're all valid and that it actually defines your market.
It's a really crude way, when you think about it, to try to say, "Yeah, those are the people I really want to do business with." You end up spending a huge amount of money on people who probably aren't a good fit at all, and you probably miss a lot of people who are.

[0:11:12.0] JG: It's a fair point. Yeah. I think one of the key things you have to do there is sit down and really think through and take the time to do it. I know it's a pain, and it's probably not the funniest meeting you're going to have in the history of the world, but really figuring out who those people are, because ultimately, what you just described I would call firmographic targeting. If you're following the show, if you're watching the episodes, what Dave just described is what we like to refer to firmographic targeting.

Firmographics is flawed from the outset, because even the divisions of industry were not created for the purpose of really categorizing businesses. They were created for the purpose of reporting for the government and things of that nature, which means it's not terribly accurate. It's not granular enough. There's way too much black-and-white. There's not enough approaching the gray area. There are business units within companies that you'll miss entirely which could be strategically very important if you're looking at it that way. That's really step one: to become much more nuanced and much more targeted in terms of understanding who it is that you should be reaching out to in the first place.

[0:12:25.5] DG: Maybe the industry or the size of the company isn't the be-all-end-all for who your market is. For example,

let's say that you're selling a CRM. All right, well, some people in a company are more inclined to need to have access to a CRM than others. Like sales reps and customer service reps, for example. Not every company has the same concentration of those types of functions and whatever other functions might leverage a CRM.

It might be they start to look at what kinds of people are at that company, and to what degree relative to their overall size, to begin to get a better handle on how good of a fit they are. That's just one dimension. I think there are lots of dimensions we don't have ready access to which should play a much bigger role, moving forward, in how we figure out who we want to sell to.

How to figure out who the heck you should target

[0:13:26.0] JG: I think it's important to understand. There are a couple ways to go about this if you're at the beginning and you don't know how to get to where you need to go. Let's walk through that briefly. There are a few ways to do this process of ferreting out who your customers are. I know that you're among the best I've ever seen in segmentation. Maybe give us a few minutes on your process for doing that and how you arrived at the very detailed, very stratified, very strategic segmentation that LeadCrunch uses, for instance, at the top of funnel.

[0:13:56.1] DG: I think it starts with just having conversations with the people who are talking to customers, both the salespeople and your customer success team, if you have it, to try to understand those qualities and characteristics which tend to characterize the person and the company you do business with. There's usually something there that's really important. For us, characteristics, just for example, are that they're actually buying leads.

They may be at a stage in their evolution as a B2B marketing company where they're not ready to do that. It's just referral-type selling, because they're starting out. It's friends and family and trying to figure out who your market is. You haven't really defined it, so you're not going to go out and spend a bunch of money on that. Then there's a later stage of evolution where you're actually buying leads. Usually, an early part of your evolution is you throw every single lead over to the sales team. I was just talking to a guy who's doing that and I felt bad for him, because I knew how that was going to end: not well. You have to start putting in things like lead nurturing and lead scoring and data augmentation. You start to do that and then you start to look for mechanisms that can help you identify that market. One of the mechanisms, if you can, is to try to take a quantitative view once you've gotten this qualitative understanding and try to see, "Are there some characteristics of my customers and maybe I haven't even thought of that I can use those markers?" Try to find other companies with those characteristics, too. I think that the combination of qualitative and quantitative are both really useful. I think this idea of lookalikes is going to become a very important component to bring some reality to it.

[0:15:53.5] JG: We're going to do a whole series on getting real about B2B marketing, because frankly, there's so much BS, we can't cover it all in one episode. There's so much BS happening in and around the B2B space, in particular. I feel people are easy prey, because the options that are available for targeting are so limited at present.

We're going to do a whole series, but I want to just try to wrap this one up, why your ROI is terrible as it is right now. Then, over the course of the next few weeks, we'll unpack some solutions for people, talk about some ways forward, and get into some more specifics about what particularly is bad about targeting and what you can do about it and things like that Do you have any parting thoughts before we wrap this one up? I think this was a good, coherent initial thought on the subject, so I'm going to let you close us down.

Can we shoot for a tolerable ROI in demand gen?

[0:16:52.1] DG: I was interviewing one of those 500 marketers back in the spring, and she had what has become one of my favorite phrases. I was asking her about her accomplishments and her game plan for doing demand gen. One of the phrases she had was she would tell the powers-that-be that she'd be able to get a "tolerable ROI". I thought that was so wise. What's the least amount that you can commit to and how long can you put off committing until you have better data, and not over-promise so that you're not under-delivering? I think that's the wisdom I would leave with everyone for today.

[0:17:35.4] JG: That's a great thought. All right, guys. That's our episode of Green & Greene Show for today. Tune in next time. I think we're going to dive more specifically into the targeting aspects and what's BS about targeting in the B2B space. Trust me, there's a lot. You don't want to miss it. I think we have a revolutionary perspective on targeting, so we invite you to tune in for that.

Until then, it's been real. I hope you have a happy weekend. Green & Greene, you're out.

[END OF EPISODE]

[0:18:02.8] ANNOUNCER: Thank you for tuning in to the Green & Greene Show by LeadCrunch. Green & Greene think differently about B2B and want to start a movement to transform demand gen. If you have ideas for topics or would like to be a guest, send an email to **david.green@leadcrunch.ai**. If you'd like to find more customers, **visit our website** to talk to one of our demand gen guides.

▶ **Watch the full video episode**

⚙ LeadCrunch

Interested in learning more?
www.leadcrunch.com

Bonus chapter: How artificial intelligence is solving the B2B targeting problem

[INTRODUCTION]

[00:00:06] ANNOUNCER: Live from the city with the most perfect weather ever, San Diego, California, all the way to the gleaming shores of Jacksonville, Florida, it's the Green & Greene Show. Here are your hosts, **Dave Green** and **Jonathan Greene**, goofing off instead of working, while unlocking the mysteries of demand gen. The Green & Greene show is brought to you by **LeadCrunch**, which creates B2B lookalike audiences.

[EPISODE]

[00:00:26] JG: Dave, we need to be popular enough to have people do remixes of our intro song.

[00:00:40] DG: That would be good. That would be good. Jonathan, we normally have people on that are smarter than us. Today, it's a person so much smarter than us, I didn't even know if we're going to be able to understand what he's saying. We have probably the smartest guy on B2B targeting in the entire universe, **Steve Biafore**.

[00:00:57] JG: Yeah, I agree. I don't even sort of know which questions to ask. Thankfully, I have this handy-dandy document over here to help me out.

B2B audience targeting and the problem of dirty data

[00:01:09] DG: Let's start with the simple one. Steve, in your mind, what's wrong with all the normal ways that people have for targeting today? They've been in place for at least a generation, sometimes a lot longer than that. A lot of people seem to think that those are good enough. What's wrong with the current approach to targeting in your mind? What is the big problem or problems?

[00:01:39] SB: Well, it's a bad combination, I think, of a really complicated problem. B2B targeting's harder than B2C targeting and not by a little bit, by a lot. Yet the data available to do that targeting in B2B is way worse. It's a mess. It's very difficult to know the most basic things about a company. What's the industry? Half the time, that information is either wrong or incomplete. What's the headcount? Most of the time, it's off by a lot: 30%, 50%. This is just a bad data, complicated problem. Those two things together spell bad news. You've got to fix the data to solve the problem, and that's kind of where we took off when we went after this problem.

[00:02:39] DG: Is it just a matter of, "Hey, if we just tweak the industries and the headcount, we're good to go?"

[00:02:46] SB: Well, now, not only is the data dirty and incorrect. It's the wrong things to be asking about companies. If you go to any B2B marketer and say, "All right, here's your magic wand. Wave that and I will tell you anything you want to know about every company that's possibly in your market. Millions of companies."

They are not going to say, "I want to know their headcount," or, "I want to know their industry." They're going to say something that's deeper and more meaningful to them about the things they sell and whether companies out there need that or not, or whether they have the capacity to take it in and get value out of it.

[00:03:32] DG: Yup.

[00:03:33] JG: When you said dirty and incorrect, I thought he was talking about all my exes, Dave.

[00:03:42] SB: That could be true, too.

[00:03:44] JG: Steve, there are a lot of people in the market who are beginning to raise their hand and say, "Me too. We also have artificial intelligence," but the structure of their artificial intelligence is built on all of these comprised data you're talking about. All artificial intelligence really is not created equal.

What we mean when we say artificial intelligence

[00:04:07] SB: No, I've been doing this business for a while, trying to make AI work for real, and every time, it's all about the data. Is the data there? Do you have coverage of whatever you're trying to understand? In this case, we're trying to understand companies or the people who work at them. Is the data correct? If you don't have that, it doesn't matter what magical, fantastic, amazing AI technique you pull out of your bag. It's going to fall on its face. You've got to fix the data first. Now, fixing data sometimes takes some really, really complex AI to do, but you've got to stay focused on pulling the data together first.

[00:05:02] JG: Sounds like a giant gob. How much time would you say that you and your team of data scientists have put into trying to crack that egg?

[00:05:09] SB: Gosh! We've been working on this for the better part of three years with a small team, and we grew that team over time. We've got easily 15 man-years in just laying the groundwork to solve the problem of getting this data squared away so that we really do know who works where, what companies really do. Then we can dig in and understand deeper things about those companies.

[00:05:44] DG: When you say dig in and know deeper things, can you give me an example of the kind of deeper thing that you would have your team do or that you're maybe doing now?

Real world implications of high quality data

[00:05:55] SB: Yeah, I'll give you some real ones that seemed to have a pretty big impact when we got them out into the world. Let's say you sell cloud communication solutions. You're really interested in delivering value to companies that have lots of communication demands. Maybe they run a big customer service center, or maybe it's essentially phone. Maybe they have a big sales team that sells by phone. Maybe they have software teams spread out across the world and they need to interact with each other. That's a lot of collaborations: phone, video, data, all those things.

None of those things is really tightly coupled with headcount, and there are plenty of solution providers in that space who really focus on headcount as criteria for figuring out who's in their market and who's out. The client I'm thinking of was in the same boat. We went in and we said, "No. That's not good enough." Counting heads doesn't make sense.

What makes more sense is to really quantify how much communication demand a company has, so we set about doing that. To do that, you have to look deeply at the people who work in the company, what their jobs are and how many of them there are. We did that. We were able to find lots of market that the client was missing, and we were also able to find, "Hey! Just chasing these guys who have the headcount is kind of silly, because when we looked closer, they don't have any communication demand." So, rejiggering that, throw out the waste, put in the missed opportunity. That's made a big difference to a B2B marketer.

[00:07:44] DG: Yeah. A simple example of that would be a hotel. There are tons of headcount, but they're cleaning rooms and other manual jobs. They're not sitting there all day with the phone and some sort of a computer and needing a lot of communication capability. They go up to a floor. They probably have a little walkie-talkie on their cart, and if somebody needs them, they'll buzz them, or they'll just go up to that floor and go get them. When you start looking a little bit more deeply about headcount, I think that's a classic example of that.

How did LeadCrunch and your team go about solving this problem? Let's start with the industry. What did you do to get a better handle than a Dun & Bradstreet does or any of the other companies that are out there trying to figure out what a company actually does?

SIC, NAICS, and why industry codes don't really work

[00:08:42] SB: Yeah. Industry, that's a favorite topic for sure. Most people know their codes. Industry codes. Most people have heard of SIC codes or NAICS codes. Those are the government standards, and there are a lot of sort of homegrown ones, but all of them essentially follow the design that the government laid out in 1937. Companies do one thing. What do they do? Well, let's pick one, and that just does not fit reality. Companies don't do one thing, and they sure as heck don't do the things that a bunch of human experts set out to define, "Here are your options."

There are lots of codes, but new things pop up all the time and all of a sudden, you've got businesses that no one knows what they are, because they don't fit a code. That's not how understanding what companies do really works. How it really works is companies do five different things to five different degrees, and that might be changing. Apple, yeah, they make computers. They also sell them. They're sort of a fashion company. They're definitely an information company, a lot of software. Now they want to be a transportation company too, with a self-driving car thing.

[00:10:02] JG: A finance company.

[00:10:04] SB: All those things, and they can do almost everything. They probably have their own agriculture, too. I don't know. If you're selling something to a company, you can't hang your hat on a single label that you slap on them. This isn't that different from the way you would try to run a dating app.

We're doing essentially matchmaking for companies. Are you a good fit? You would never say, "I just want one label for these people, because it's way too complicated for me to understand these people. Slap a label on them, and that's what I want." No. You want to know more. You want to dig in and understand what makes a person tick. We're doing the same thing here. With industry, industry is all about what a company does to turn its inputs, stuff it buys, into its outputs, the stuff it sells. If I know what that core activity is, I know the kind of things they need to buy. If I'm a seller, that's exactly what I need to know. Our take on it was we don't need 10,000 industry codes. There are probably 20 meaningful things, sort of big things, that companies do, and all the rest of those codes are really band-aids to try and patch up and say, "Well, if you're a special case of this, I'm going to give you another label." You need to know what they basically do, and then you need to dig in deeper to understand how they do it, and that's our take on things.

Industries should be less numerous. The code should be simple. Companies should be allowed to be any of those things they want to be to any degree they want. Not just one thing. We're going to have a bunch of other dimensions, some of which we talked about before, that really fill in the blanks about how in the world they do this thing that they do.

[00:11:55] DG: How do you know that the codes that are out there are inaccurate, the industry codes?

[00:12:03] SB: Well, some of them are really obvious. You see, I'd say there're a couple of really big mistakes that get made. By the way, if you go to most of these data sources, even the ones everybody knows that are accepted gold standard guys, the data is missing a good fraction of the time. It's not just there. Maybe they couldn't figure it out either.

One of the biggest drivers of getting it wrong is messing up, basically confusing what a company does with who they sell it to. A hospital software company is a really good one. If I write software to sell to hospitals to help them run their operations better, a good part of the time, I will be classified as a healthcare company, and that's just nuts. Software engineers do not stab people with needles, and they don't do operations. They're writing code. If you're going to sell something to that company, you're not going to sell them gloves and supplies for a medical facility. You're going to sell them dev ops stuff. You've got to get that right. There are a bunch of other reasons, but that's one of the bigger ones.

[00:13:24] DG: What did you do? What did your team do to actually go out and look at all these millions of companies and figure out what they do, and how do you know that what you've done is accurate?

How to data science your way out of poor targeting

[00:13:35] SB: That's a tough one. We had to be patient, and we had to do a lot of hard work. You have to get ground truth data. We did that through the school of hard knocks. A lot of the time, you have to do that at least partly manually. We use a lot of machine algorithms to get us partway there. The last miles, there always a human saying, "You know what? I've looked at this company really closely, and they are a software company. They're not a hospital."

Once we have that data, the trick is to consume a bunch of inputs that really tell the story about what a company does. We do that mostly through the free text we can find on a company's website. It's not too different from what a normal human would do if they wanted to spend a couple hours really analyzing a company, everything I can find out about them on their website, on Glassdoor, if I go to LinkedIn, or if they have a Facebook presence. Things I can look at if I go to LinkedIn and see the people who work there, I can make a judgment about what that company really does, and a pretty good one.

That's what our models do. They consume all that information using machine algorithms that are natural language processing, the sort of state-of-the-art models that are able to understand that information. The difference is, it doesn't take the machine two or three hours to get you a good answer. We can do that for millions of companies really quickly, and that's essentially the way we solved this problem with industry.

[00:15:07] JG: Just to facilitate my understanding, can you differentiate your solution from what you perceive everybody else's solution in the market to be? What are all the other AI people doing that is different?

[00:15:20] SB: It was confusing to me when I first entered this space. I actually came into this problem as an investor. I was an early investor in LeadCrunch, and it was confusing. Why in the world hasn't this problem been solved? There was plenty of venture money that was thrown at trying to figure this out. I think what happened is any reasonable data scientist—I guess I'm an unreasonable one—would look at this and say, "Oh my gosh! This data, it's not there. It's incomplete. I'd better go solve some piece of this problem where the data is decent. It's clean enough and there's enough of it.

We didn't say that. We were the nutty guys who said, "We're actually going to go try and clean up this data mess, because I want to really know what's going on with companies. I want to really know what's going on with the people who work at those companies so I can get this right." That's what we did.

We've spent almost all the time we've invested in solving this problem on cleaning up data. It's gritty, it's dirty, it's boring and it's slow. A lot of the Silicon Valley companies don't have the luxury of taking their time to do this kind of work. I don't think there's that kind of patience for most of those types of startups. I think a lot of them got caught in that, and we didn't. We took our time and we've solved a lot of these fundamental things, and now it's starting to pay off.

[00:16:54] DG: You described the data that you've created as vectors and dimensions. Can you unpack each of those terms and help us understand what each one means?

A math guy explains vectors and dimensions (and why they're so useful)

[00:17:09] SB: Yeah, the design we had from the beginning was—I'm a math guy. I guess maybe I just feel more comfortable with those guys, but a vector is just a list of numbers. The important thing is they're real numbers. They can take values anywhere between minus one and plus one, or whatever the range is. They aren't labels. I'm not calling a company just a healthcare company. I'm saying, "To what degree do you do healthcare," and I'll give you a .79321 for that. Everything we know about a company or about a person is a number. It's a real number, and we line those up in a list, and that list is called a vector.

Why in the world would we do that? Why is it so important? The reason it's important is if you have a representation in that form where everything is a number, you can play math games on those numbers. Suppose I know I have a vector for every person who works at Apple. It says things like, "Here's your function. These are the things you do. Here're your years of experience, how long you've been working. Here are the kind of companies you worked at before, lots of startups, giant enterprises," whatever it may be.

If I know that about one person, that's great. I can say something about them. If I know it about every person in a population that mattered, like all the people who work at a company. I can add them up. I can combine them, and I can say things about the whole company. So the same thing that represents a person can represent all the people who work at a company, or all the software engineers in the whole world. I can talk apples to apples about all those things. A single person, a little population, a giant population, and that is a really valuable thing to be able to do.

[00:19:14] DG: If I'm understanding it right, you use information about people to understand companies and information about companies to understand the people who work there.

[00:19:22] SB: You bet. It's an interaction between the two, and there are a lot of companies I saw in this space that said, "You know what? What's really important is the people." Some said, "No. No. It's the companies." The truth is, it's both. There's no free lunch. You don't get to pick and choose and still succeed. You need them both.

[00:19:44] DG: What are some of the vectors that your team has created?

[00:19:49] SB: Yeah. Let's talk about companies, and let's pick on headcount. You often hear that as a criterion for marketers, and that just doesn't really get at what most marketers care about. We said, "No. That's not enough to know about the people who work at a company or just counting them."

I've really got to count how many people are in different functions. If I know that a given person does both sales and marketing and maybe a little engineering, I can assign that person's weight across those functions. I can add up all the functions at the company, and I can say things like, "This company has 32.3 engineers."

That's a sort of bench strength in engineering. "They have 75.7 marketers. Hey, they're twice as strong in marketing as they are in engineering." That says something about that company and what they're likely to buy. There are companies that are the flip side of that. They have way more engineers than marketers, and that says something about that company, but if you're counting heads, they're exactly the same. That just doesn't make sense. You need lots of dimensions to describe what's going on. Those are the kinds of things we want to know.

We can go deeper: Okay. You've got 77.5 marketers. Gosh, 67 of them are fresh out of school. They don't know anything yet about how this works in the real world. Go to another company. They've got 77.5 marketers. Wait a minute. Those guys are all 10-year veterans, 15-year veterans. They really know what's going on. That's going to be a different situation if you're trying to sell a marketing technology solution to those companies.

[00:21:37] JG: Yeah, I can't imagine how in the world B2B businesses have attempted to do marketing without that information for so long. That probably says something about why the outcomes have been what they have been, right?

[00:21:49] SB: Yeah, and the tricky thing about is—and this is the part that is interesting—no matter what you do as a B2B marketer for targeting, if you haven't completely missed the target, you're going to get some closed deals. You might feel like, "Well, this is just a tough market. There's a lot going on. I've got competitors." In fact, you just didn't target right, but you don't know that. You just don't know what you don't know, and that is a killer. Our job, really, is to build the dimensions that really shed light on that, show what the missed opportunity really is. It's a tough job. This B2B marketing deal is no easy walk in the park. It's a tough one.

[00:22:32] JG: Yeah. When you're actualizing all these data that you guys have put your heart and soul into building out, you're doing it onto essentially what we're calling a look-a-like audience. Can you tell me about that mechanism? **What is a lookalike audience?**

Why lookalike audiences are the secret sauce of successful B2B marketing

[00:22:48] SB: Yeah. Lookalikes were our solution to what I call a rock-and-a-hard-place problem that B2B marketers face. You're stuck, right? You've got two choices in this and neither one of them is good. If you really want to describe your market, it's complicated. It's really complicated, which means you're going to have to dig in deep and say things about 12 different aspects of a company.

This is the dimensional stuff we've been talking about but done manually by a marketer. You have to expect the marketer to go figure out all the things about their market that really drive companies to buy what they sell. That's a tough, tough thing to do. Either do that, or you can go back and say, "Well, that's too hard. I'm just going to do the rough targeting. I'm just going to give headcount criteria, and maybe I'm going to whitelist some industries and blacklist some industries."

If you do that, you're going to miss the target. If you do this complicated thing, you are going into a really scary world. Trust me, when the dimensions go up, this problem gets harder and harder fast, really fast, and the math is not on your side. Either do it right and you're going into a really tough, tough job that is mathematically designed to make you fail, or do it easy and you're guaranteed to miss that way, too. That's the rock and the hard place.

The solution to that is talk to us in terms of lookalikes, companies you want more like these. We call those seeds, and those seeds go into a lookalike model that does that work for the marketer. It says, "We're going to go try and find out what is the essence, what are the characteristics of these seeds that make them different from everything else that could be in your

market." That's the golden thing that the lookalike model does. Instead of requiring a marketer to dig in manually through 20 dimensions that describe a company, and a lot of times, it's more than that, give us the seeds. Communicate in terms of seeds. I want more like these and I want less like those.

[00:25:25] JG: Yeah. Sorry, we had a technical difficulty there. Let me just recap what I think you just said to make sure that the audience got it. I'm a marketer and I've been fumbling around trying to carve out what I think are the similarities. We'll stop there, because most marketers are never nuanced enough with their targeting to get to the differences between their target market and anything else. They just do the similarities.

Then I'm talking to probably a highly inefficient segment, but I'll close some deals over time. Once I've done that, what you're saying is that I can bring you the customers that I've liked, the deals that I've closed. Bring you a list of those companies, drop them in your lap, and you will go out and determine the algorithmic similarity between them and then extrapolate that to the bigger dataset of, say, all North American businesses and return to me something based on dimensions I probably never could have thought of on my own that's definitely more nuanced and probably way more accurate.

[00:26:29] SB: Yes, that's the idea. To the degree that that makes someone uncomfortable that they don't know what was really driving the differences, we can explain that. The models, to a degree, can tell what was important and what wasn't. That's exactly it.

[00:26:46] JG: Does it get smarter? If I give you information on how that was performed, what happens then?

Improving the targeting model with feedback

[00:26:53] SB: Yeah, that feedback is really valuable. Tough problem, and it's unlikely that you're going to solve it optimally first crack off the bat. What you do is you take a big population of potential prospects and you winnow that down and say, "How does this pool look?" You see how that actually performs. What converts? It should convert better than other sources. Let's see what this lookalike model got right and what it got wrong. It's valuable to see both, and we can tune the model going forward in every got it right/got it wrong piece of feedback that comes back to that model, only makes it better. It won't get the same things wrong. It might get something a little different wrong, but over time, what it gets wrong starts to fade away, and what it gets right starts to take over.

[00:27:46] JG: Yup. For all of you newbies to artificial intelligence, what Steve just said is what makes it artificial intelligence: the fact that it learns and gets smarter. If it were just looking at algorithmic similarities and predicting outcomes, that's just predictive analytics. If you're there saying that that's what you're doing and that's artificial intelligence, stop it, because it's not. When it learns, now it's artificial intelligence, right?

[00:28:13] SB: Exactly.

[00:28:16] DG: Steve, one of the technologies your team has dreamed up is something you call topic maps, and I wonder if you could help everybody understand what that is and why it matters.

[00:28:30] SB: It's a cool technology that we use in the laboratory a lot, and we use it to solve a lot of problems. It takes every company that we know of—we call that our universe—and topic map goes out to look at their free texts that they use to describe themselves. Just think of what they say about themselves on their website. Natural language processing models

are really good at taking gobs of free text and boiling it down to the basic concepts that are being talked about.

Now we know, for millions of companies, what concepts they really kind of put out there into the world on their website, and that gives us the ability to go search for companies that do that. For example, if I want to go find all law firms that are engaged in injury law, I can go look for injury, accident, legal, those sorts of terms, and all of that defines sort of a conceptual center point. Then I can just measure the distance from that point to every company that I know about. Sure enough, what bubbles to the top are injury law firms. That's important to some clients who sell solutions in that space. You can do that all day long with any concept that really matters to you, and it can be used to either find targets or to find negative populations that I want to take out so that I don't treat them as targets. It's very useful to us for all those reasons.

[00:30:11] DG: On the natural language processing side, you're using the case of a law firm, and you used two words that are kind of similar: accident and injury. Human beings know that that kind of means the same thing. To what degree does the natural language processing understand these groups of words that are kind of related to each other from a meaning standpoint?

Why natural language processing is so vital to AI

[00:30:37] SB: The mathematical way that natural language processing goes at that is pretty intense. For a long time in the AI community, natural language processing was just a wall that was insurmountable. Somewhere around, I would guess, 2007–2009, big advances happened. A lot of it happened because of a technology called deep learning. Those models got better and better and better. At the core of all those things is a mathematical process that takes any word, any phrase, any sentence, any paragraph, any document, a website, and compresses it into some fixed number of dimensions. It just turns them into numbers, these vectors I was talking about earlier for describing companies or people, that's used to describe words, sentences, documents.

That technology just turned a corner and started getting things right. That's why Alexa works and all these other inventions that really seem to understand what people are talking about. It's compressing what you're transmitting in terms of text or speech into this compressed vector form, and it works.

It works pretty darn well, and we've been able to leverage that kind of technology to solve this problem. It is talking about concepts. It is not doing a keyword search on websites. That is, mathematically, a difficult game to solve, but when you really do understand the concepts like this technology does, it gets a whole lot easier and we can find what we're looking for.

We may find websites that don't even have any of those words on them. You don't see "law." You don't see "injury." You don't see "accident." They're just using different words to explain the same concept. That site can bubble up in this distance metric.

[00:32:36] DG: You and I were talking, about a month ago, about the population of business professionals in the U.S. and the incredible number of unique titles that they had. **Everybody uses titles to target, right?** "I want all the directors of blah-blah-blah." I don't know that they always understand how nuanced and complicated that request is and how infrequently you get that exact title out in the population. Do we use natural language processing on titles to try to get at some of this stuff? What function are they really?

[00:33:20] SB: Yeah, we do. You kind of have to. It just doesn't work otherwise. If you're just looking for the string, you can

get into trouble, because it's just impossible for any human to know what the space of titles looks like. We did the analysis. There are 120 million people we knew about in our data, with 31 million unique titles. Almost everybody had them. Here's an example from cyber security. We were looking for security people. Cyber security is safe enough. When you expand to security, if you were going to do a string search on that—I tried it just to see how much better we can be when we're going for concepts and not going for these actual strings. You get some great ones, but there were a bunch of bio security and sort of those kinds of titles, but my favorite was "Head of Security, Bouncing." You get the bouncer, and I don't think the guy you're selling the cyber security software is going to do so good selling to that guy.

[00:34:25] JG: I actually intentionally do that on my LinkedIn, because if I put Director of Marketing, I get 10,000 queries a day in my inbox. Instead I put B2B Marketing Ninja. So far, not very many people have figured it out. My number of queries goes way down.

[00:34:45] DG: Steve, this has been totally awesome. I know you have tons of other obligations, but we wanted to, in this series, kind of open the black box of what's going on with the AI and give people a little bit of a peek inside. We want to do a little bit more of this next week with you. I really appreciate it. Are there any questions that you have, Jonathan, or any final thoughts, Steve, that you'd like to share?

[00:35:11] JG: Where in the world did you get that fantastic shirt?

[00:35:19] DG: There are vectors and dimensions on that thing or something, aren't there?

[00:35:24] SB: Yeah, my shirt vector. I've been trying to light off a Hawaiian Friday here for a long time, and it's not really sticking, but I keep trying.

[00:35:35] JG: If we were in the office, I would be all about that life. I'll tell you right now. All right. Listen, Steve, thanks a lot, man. We really appreciate your time. The chief science officer at LeadCrunch. Obviously, he's got a lot of things to do. We're going to let you get back to it. I'm going to play the funky music. Tell them goodbye, Steve.

[00:35:55] SB: Hey, thanks guys. I appreciate it.

[END OF EPISODE]

[00:36:04] ANNOUNCER: Thank you for tuning in to the Green & Greene Show by LeadCrunch. Green & Greene think differently about B2B and want to start a movement to transform demand gen. If you have ideas for topics or would like to be a guest, send an email to **david.green@leadcrunch.ai**. If you'd like to find more customers, **visit our website** to talk to one of our demand gen guides.

▶ **Watch the full video episode**

About the Green & Greene Show
Hosted by marketing experts Dave Green and Jonathan Greene, this popular weekly podcast tackles the real challenges of B2B marketing today. From demand generation to content marketing to improving alignment with Sales, Green & Greene share hard-won insights and battle-tested strategies — and have a great deal of fun while doing it. No sugar-coating, just real marketing strategies that work. **View our complete episode archive.**

About LeadCrunch

The problems we solve

Despite technology advancements, even the best marketing teams get very low conversion rates throughout the funnel. Plus, most marketing teams must argue constantly to get revenue credit for marketing influenced leads. Conflicts with sales over lead volume and lead quality are never-ending.

These problems stem from B2B complexity. B2B buying behavior involves multiple stakeholders, evolving buying criteria, and an elongated consideration cycle. The sales and marketing tech stack has thus far only increased this complexity.

Our experience design

We think differently about how to find and grow lasting B2B relationships. Scaling relationship development with artificial intelligence (AI) necessitates a data model that describes the B2B ecosystem. The data must not be a snapshot in time but a network of ever-changing people, ideas, and companies. Mere firmographic models are too inaccurate and simplistic.

Scaling relationship development also means analyzing not just your hand-raisers, who convert infrequently, but your ideal customers. With such profiles, AI can predict who will buy and their buying capacity and buying longevity, not just who will respond.

Because the B2B ecosystem is constantly changing, your marketing model must learn continuously, too. The LeadCrunch always-on AI platform adapts to competitive threats, ideas that are changing market perceptions, and changes to your solution portfolio and business strategy. This continuous learning means tightly integrating content marketing with audience targeting, delivering a stream of proactive insights, and feeding outcomes back into the platform to improve targeting and insights.

Above all else, the design must simplify the complexity and make marketers the new maestros of shareholder value.

Our services

We make it easy to pilot our AI-driven B2B marketing system. No complicated tech stack integrations. No long-term commitments. Only pay for qualified leads who engage with your content. We can also nurture the leads with your content, identify additional personas within an account for your sales team to engage, or even engage and nurture those additional personas in each account. Each lead is multi-touch verified and guaranteed to meet your campaign criteria and contain valid data.