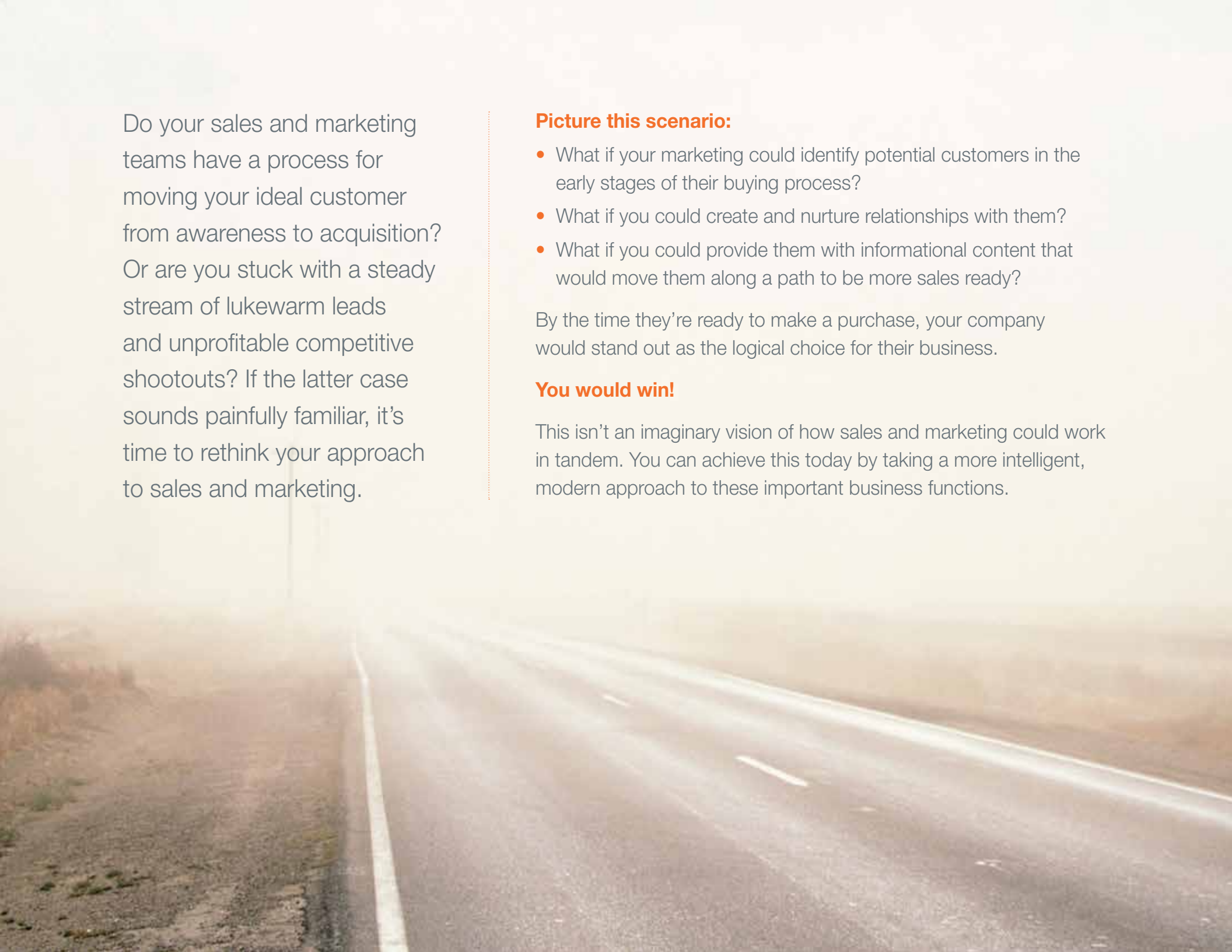




## **Are Your Leads Ending Up Just South of Nowhere?**

*Effective lead nurturing is the key to successful customer conversion*



Do your sales and marketing teams have a process for moving your ideal customer from awareness to acquisition? Or are you stuck with a steady stream of lukewarm leads and unprofitable competitive shootouts? If the latter case sounds painfully familiar, it's time to rethink your approach to sales and marketing.

**Picture this scenario:**

- What if your marketing could identify potential customers in the early stages of their buying process?
- What if you could create and nurture relationships with them?
- What if you could provide them with informational content that would move them along a path to be more sales ready?

By the time they're ready to make a purchase, your company would stand out as the logical choice for their business.

**You would win!**

This isn't an imaginary vision of how sales and marketing could work in tandem. You can achieve this today by taking a more intelligent, modern approach to these important business functions.

## Customers have changed.

Traditional sales approaches are no longer as effective today because customers have fundamentally changed. They are more immune than ever to traditional sales tactics. Why? Because they can find abundant information about your products and services via your website, on a self-service basis. They no longer want early-stage contact from salespeople; they prefer to hide behind technology, anonymously gathering information about potential suppliers and products themselves.

By the time a prospective customer is ready to interact with your sales team, he or she has already developed a short list of potential suppliers. If you're not on that list, you lose.

Traditionally, marketers have focused only on the top of the funnel – identifying potential buyers who are just beginning to understand their needs and the possible solutions available to them. A small percentage of them may be ready to buy immediately, but the majority are not. As a result, salespeople waste a significant amount of time trying to close

them. One common solution is to hire more salespeople to follow-up on these early-stage leads. But that won't solve the problem. The simple fact is that the majority of your marketing leads are not ready to buy immediately.

## Sales and marketing must evolve.

Because customers have changed, sales and marketing must evolve as well. Lead generation is not a discrete event, but a process. As a modern marketer, you must have a deep understanding of your potential customers' buying process and their underlying needs and motives. Armed with this information, you can develop and deliver informational content that will steadily move them along the buying process – from awareness and consideration to acquisition. During this process, you anticipate and answer their questions, and establish your firm as the leader in your product or service niche. As a result, it delivers more sales-ready leads.



## Why traditional marketing falls short today.

In many organizations, traditional marketing approaches are no longer effective. Here's why:

- **Marketers often make assumptions about customer motivations.** As a result, they produce content that doesn't meet actual customer needs. Prospects simply learn to ignore it. Once they've shut you out, your chances of being considered for a purchase diminish significantly.
- **Most marketers stop their efforts at the awareness stage.** They generate a modicum of interest on the part of the potential customer, but then don't follow up to further qualify and nurture them until they are ready to buy. In contrast, salespeople prefer to stay focused on closing sales, so they simply assume these early-stage leads are poor quality and not worthy of their time. Nobody wins in this scenario.
- **Ineffective marketing messages.** Without a clear idea of customer needs and motivations, marketers tend to produce messages that don't inspire prospective customers to act. All too often, they are overwhelmingly about your company and its products and services. Lost in all of this self-promotion are the customers' needs, wants and opportunities.
- **Lack of channel focus:** Many marketers spread their content over too many communication channels, and don't stick with one message long enough to ensure prospects understand it. Often, they select channels where their potential customers have little or no presence. As a result, they dilute their effectiveness.

## Why it's time to shift to a sales-minded marketing approach.

You're missing a big opportunity by ignoring the needs of early to mid-stage prospects, and failing to nurture them until they are ready to buy. Clearly, traditional sales and marketing approaches are no longer effective in the era of the empowered customer. Albert Einstein once said that insanity is doing the same thing over and over, and expecting different results. Your approach to sales and marketing must change.

Where traditional marketing falls short is where sales-minded marketing shines. A nurturing approach naturally leads to a greater quantity of better-qualified leads. It can also help to shorten the sales cycle, by providing prospects with the information they need to move to each successive step in the process – faster. This approach, which emphasizes nurturing and education, can ultimately lead to more sales and revenue for your business.

## How to shift to a strategic, sales-minded marketing approach.

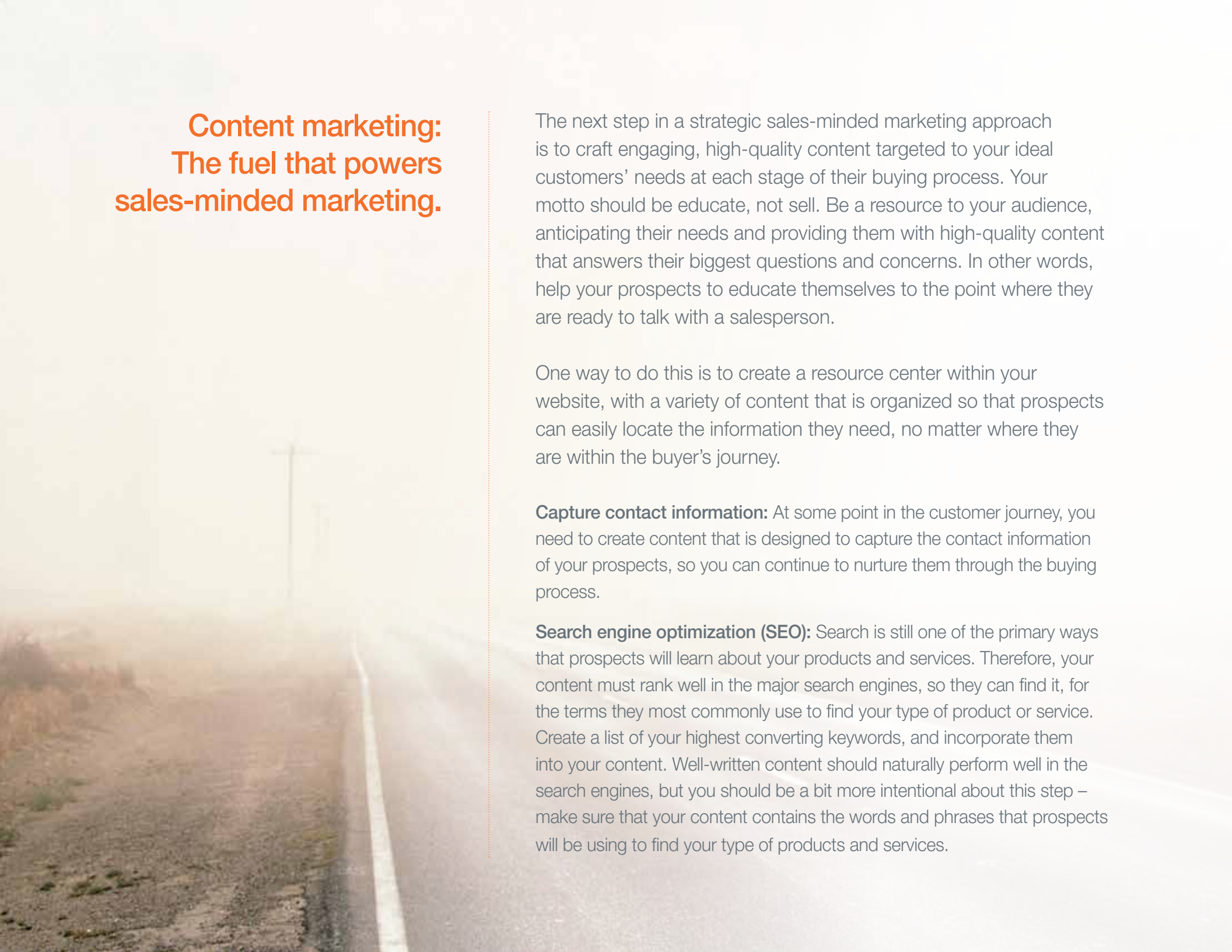
A strategic sales-minded marketing approach begins with defining the buyer's journey – the steps that prospective customers take from the time they recognize the need for a solution, develop a list of criteria that describe their needs, research potential suppliers and finally make a purchasing decision. In marketing-speak, this may be called a journey, a pipeline or a funnel.

**Personas:** The first step in this process is to create detailed personas for each of your target customer segments. These personas should include detailed information about needs, intentions and motivations. You should even consider giving each of your personas a name and a backstory, to make them more “real” to you. Essentially, personas act as surrogates for actual customers.

**Identify potential customers that match your personas:** Next, use what you've learned in the creation of your personas to identify potential customers with early-stage needs. How? Seminars, surveys and interactive content are excellent ways to get people engaged with content that is focused on the “pain points” you've identified in your personas.

**Make inferences based upon behavior:** Watching which types of content prospects interact with can help you determine what part of the buyers' journey they are currently in. For example, if they are downloading informational content, chances are they are still early in the process. But if they are downloading product data sheets, assessments and configuration information, you know they are closer to making a purchase decision.





## Content marketing: The fuel that powers sales-minded marketing.

The next step in a strategic sales-minded marketing approach is to craft engaging, high-quality content targeted to your ideal customers' needs at each stage of their buying process. Your motto should be educate, not sell. Be a resource to your audience, anticipating their needs and providing them with high-quality content that answers their biggest questions and concerns. In other words, help your prospects to educate themselves to the point where they are ready to talk with a salesperson.

One way to do this is to create a resource center within your website, with a variety of content that is organized so that prospects can easily locate the information they need, no matter where they are within the buyer's journey.

**Capture contact information:** At some point in the customer journey, you need to create content that is designed to capture the contact information of your prospects, so you can continue to nurture them through the buying process.

**Search engine optimization (SEO):** Search is still one of the primary ways that prospects will learn about your products and services. Therefore, your content must rank well in the major search engines, so they can find it, for the terms they most commonly use to find your type of product or service. Create a list of your highest converting keywords, and incorporate them into your content. Well-written content should naturally perform well in the search engines, but you should be a bit more intentional about this step – make sure that your content contains the words and phrases that prospects will be using to find your type of products and services.

**Content delivery:** Deliver the content you have created across those channels where your target audience is already gathered. Don't try to cover every possible channel and type of content. For best results, focus on one or two channels and several types of content. Aim to develop relationships on these channels; look for opportunities to cultivate conversations with prospective customers. Ask questions. Answer their questions. Be useful. Build authority. Examples of channels where you can do this include LinkedIn Pulse, Google Plus communities and Quora.

Develop an editorial calendar that specifies the topics, content types and timing that you will employ to deliver your messages. Be strategic about it. Most marketers don't know how to do this properly, which can create a big opportunity for you. A strategic approach to content distribution helps to ensure that your content creates the intended impact.

## Conclusion.

Now is the time to employ a more strategic sales minded approach to marketing. Because this is something that so many of your competitors and other companies struggle with, it's an area where you can differentiate your company to its ideal prospects. This will help you identify more buyers and grow your business in a much more strategic way.



### Don't let your leads end up south of nowhere.

You can avoid this by taking a more intelligent, modern approach to lead conversion... and we can help. Contact **Bob Wendt** at [Cultivate Communications](#) at **262-373-4001** for more information.





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