



# FASTER SALES CONVERSIONS

are a reality when you connect  
content to the way people buy

## IS THE CONTENT YOU'RE CREATING GOING TO WASTE?

If your company is like most, you've accumulated a sizeable collection of blog posts, videos, infographics, e-books and other types of content during the last few years. But, it's a problem if that content is making a negligible impact on your company's lead generation and sales.

Intuitively, you suspect that much of it never gets seen by your prospects. People are too busy to keep up with all of your content. In addition, your sales team doesn't consistently use it to influence prospects. According to a study conducted by LinkedIn and the Content Marketing Institute, **80% of all content goes unused by sales.**

You can solve this problem! Align your content to the buyer's journey of your target audience. That increases the odds that your messages will resonate with and inspire them to reach a buying decision faster. Collaborating with your sales team can increase your odds of success even more.

PROSPECTS DECIDE  
IN AN INSTANT  
WHAT DOES AND  
DOESN'T MATTER  
TO THEM.

## IS YOUR CONTENT PART OF THE BACKGROUND NOISE?

In recent years, it has become very hard to ensure that your messages are heard and acted upon by your target audience. There's so much "noise" competing for their attention that their ability to focus on a specific message has been severely diminished. If you don't design a content strategy that's closely aligned with their needs, your prospects will simply ignore your messages.

### Just look at your personal experience:

Every day, you receive hundreds of messages a day, hawking products and services you don't want or need. You've gotten extremely good at filtering out anything that isn't relevant.

Delete. **Delete.** **Delete.**

It's easy to get rid of irrelevant messages.

Your key prospects do the same thing. They decide in an instant what matters to them and what doesn't. If they perceive that your messages are wasting their time, they may decide to ignore all future communication from you.

What's the solution to this problem? You need to use a clever strategy to "get into their heads," build trust and educate them about your type of solution. You need to naturally lead them to the conclusion that you are the best source of knowledge and expertise on the challenge they face – and therefore a worthy vendor or partner.

But connecting your content to the buyer's journey can be daunting. There are many moving parts and it's hard to know where to start. You're not alone. Many marketers don't know how to set up and manage such a multi-faceted campaign.

This eGuide explains how to strategically utilize your content to make this happen, to ensure that it cuts through the clutter, influences your key prospects and nurtures more of them to a sale.



## CONTENT AND THE BUYER'S JOURNEY

Your prospective buyers are largely in control of the buying process. They prefer to do their research and then talk to a salesperson when they've done their initial assessment of your company. They're thinking, "I'd like to learn more about this company. They look like they may be a good fit for our needs."

The implication is simple but profound: The company that does the best job of providing relevant content that's precisely matched to their needs at each step of their buying process will win.

Hopefully, that's you. If it's not, you have a serious problem. When your content isn't connected to the buyer's journey, here are some of the unpleasant symptoms you may experience. Do any of these sound familiar?

- Your marketing materials and campaigns are ignored by your target audience
- Marketing only makes a minimal impact on leads and sales
- Your company has a lack of marketing qualified leads for your salespeople to pursue
- Your salespeople find it hard to get in the door because prospects don't view your company as a credible vendor
- Business growth stagnates
- Your competitors win more business

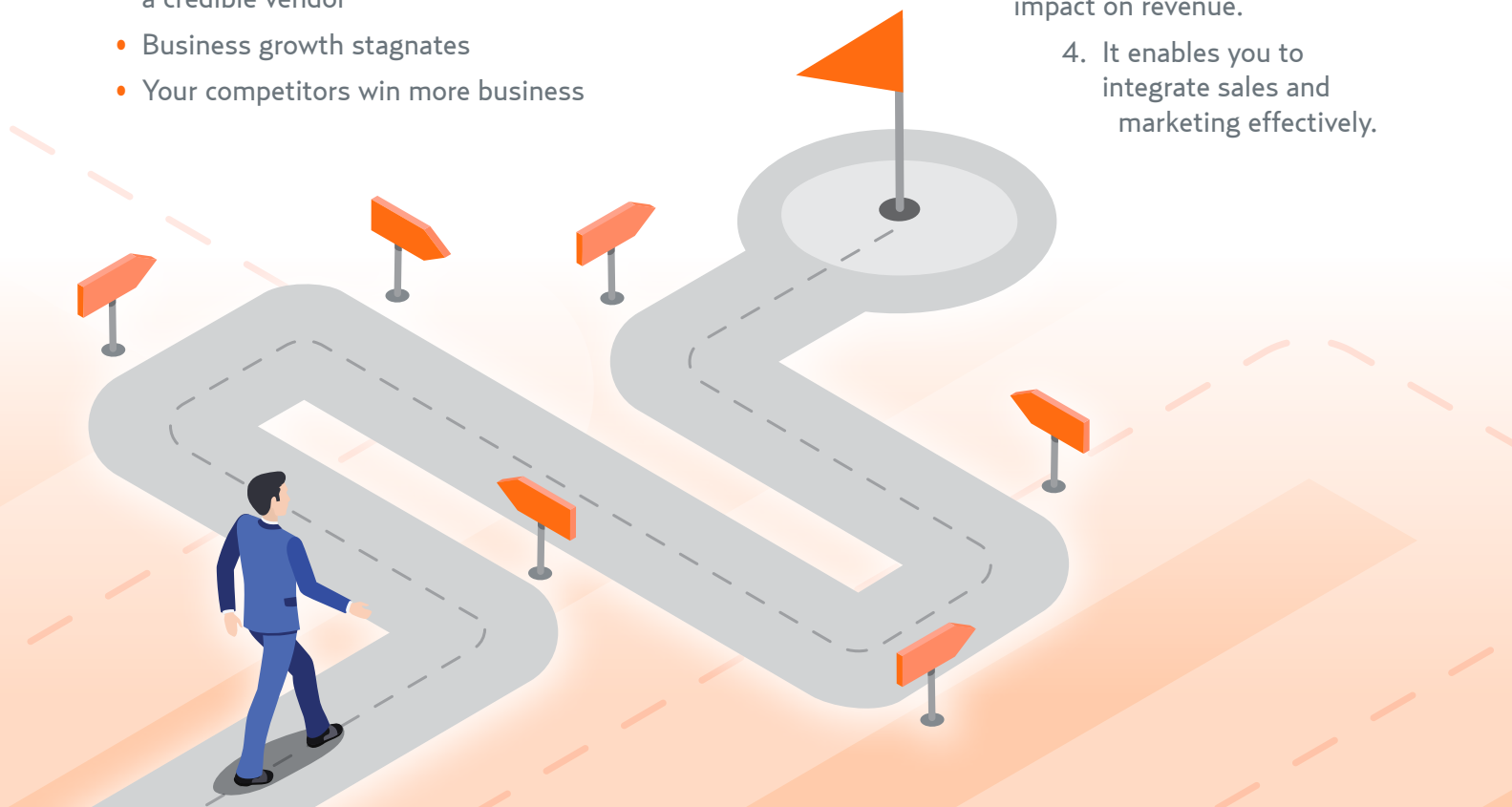
On the other hand, when content is properly aligned throughout the buyer's journey, your company can enjoy some significant advantages:

- You're able to gain and retain your prospects' attention and trust
- You're able to understand their businesses and the challenges they face
- You're able to nurture them along the path to a sale in greater numbers and faster than ever before
- You become the hero

## WHY DOES THE BUYER'S JOURNEY MATTER?

Having a well thought out content strategy that's mapped to the buyer's journey gives you four powerful advantages:

1. It enables you to deliver an exceptional and meaningful buyer experience.
2. It enables your company to stay top-of-mind during their vendor selection process.
3. It enables you to increase and effectively measure marketing's impact on revenue.
4. It enables you to integrate sales and marketing effectively.



## **ADVANTAGE 1 DELIVER AN EXCEPTIONAL BUYER EXPERIENCE**

Most business-to-business buying decisions are complex and involve multiple individuals. Nearly every decision-maker and influencer needs a trusted source of information they can rely on for knowledge and advice, so they can make intelligent buying decisions.

There's no question that the B2B buying process is hard:

- 50% of B2B buyers say they have incomplete, unclear or poorly defined criteria for their purchase decision (Aberdeen)
- 31% of buyers say the length of their B2B purchase cycle has increased significantly compared to a year ago (DemandGen)
- 45% of buyers say they're spending more time researching purchases compared to last year. (DemandGen)

According to research conducted by Gartner, buyers must complete six key tasks as part of their purchasing process:

- Problem identification,
- Solution exploration,
- Requirements building,
- Vendor selection,
- Validation, and
- Consensus creation.

Targeted, personalized information can help to streamline each step of this complex process for each member of the buying committee.

Only half of B2B buyers say that their business goals are well defined when they are researching a purchase. That means your optimized content is critically important to help them reach clarity and take action.

But doesn't this strategy require a lot of content to implement? Yes, it does. It also requires a commitment to create unique, targeted content that creates more impact for your target audience. That's why so few companies are willing to do it, and why it can become a competitive advantage for you and your firm.

## **ADVANTAGE 2 STAY TOP OF MIND DURING THE BUYING PROCESS**

To keep your company top of mind, you must communicate with your prospects on a regular basis. Too frequently and you'll scare them off. No one likes to be "carpet bombed" with marketing messages. Too infrequently and they may forget about you.

Remember, your goal is to create a guided experience for prospects that supports their research, evaluation and decision-making processes – not the one YOU think they should follow.

In addition, remember that each person who is involved in the buying process has different needs. The economic buyer, for example, is looking for a solution that is cost-effective and promises a positive ROI. An operations person, on the other hand, may be looking for a solution that streamlines his or her work processes.

## **ADVANTAGE 3 INCREASE MARKETING'S IMPACT ON REVENUE**

If you're successful in aligning content to the buyer's journey, you can generate a greater number of marketing qualified leads (MQLs) – people who are sales-ready and are more likely to buy. This approach has an important benefit: It enables your salespeople to focus on what they do best: closing A-level prospects, not wasting time trying to qualify a large number of undifferentiated low-priority contacts.

Ultimately, if sales can close more deals, that's good news for the bottom line of your firm.

## **ADVANTAGE 4 INTEGRATE SALES AND MARKETING EFFECTIVELY**

Another powerful way to deliver a seamless experience to your target audience is to ensure that your sales and marketing teams are aligned with each other. Here's why that's important:

During the buyer's journey, marketing must create messages, content and campaigns for



sales to execute. In return, sales must provide feedback to marketing, which it can use to refine those assets and tactics. In other words, it must be a symbiotic relationship in which your messaging and sales outreach become more targeted and effective over time.

Unfortunately, this level of integration is only a pipe dream in many companies. According to research conducted by Forbes, only 40% of the content created by marketing is used by salespeople. That means nearly two-thirds of it is going to waste!

A strategic combination of marketing and personalized sales touches can move your prospects toward a sale faster and give buyers greater confidence that they're making the right decision. When sales and marketing work closely together, content can become a true measurable asset in your organization for the first time.

## **HOW TO TIE YOUR CONTENT TO THE BUYER'S JOURNEY**

Now that you understand the importance of strategically connecting your content to the buyer's journey, here are some tips on how to make that happen:

Your content strategy needs to be tied to your company's key business objectives. In order for the C-suite to take marketing seriously, everything it does must be aligned to key business objectives. Otherwise, your efforts won't be sustainable.

A strong marketing strategy is a must: All of your company's marketing efforts, from your website and emails to your collateral and social media elements, need to convey a strong brand image that promises exceptional customer value.

Your company's website needs to provide your target audience with easy access to the information they need, and your emails need to be focused on nurturing them toward a sale. Your communications must also be differentiated from your competitors, so your prospects can clearly recognize and understand the unique benefits of your solution.

Nurturing is a must: Today, sales and marketing executives are almost universal in their use of the funnel model of converting prospects into sales. It's a numbers game: You communicate with 1,000 prospects, who turn into 10 prospects and 3 of them buy.

But leads don't naturally "drop" from one stage of the funnel to the next. That's not how it works. Funnels don't have "gravity." In order to help convert prospects to customers, you must actively nurture them through each step of their buyer's journey. One way to do that is with email "drip" campaigns that are designed to deploy on a timed basis after a prospect downloads an eGuide or signs up for a webinar.

Strong, well-defined buyer personas: Don't assume that you know who your key prospects are, how they think and what motivates them. You must do the research. Talk to your best customers and to customer-facing people in your organization. Look for patterns in what they're telling you, and then document that in archetypes that describe the people who make and influence the purchasing decisions in your industry.

Content must be mapped to each step of the buyer's journey: In order to do an effective job of nurturing prospects from awareness, through consideration and evaluation to a sale, you must map your content to the entire buying process. You need to ask questions like, "Which of our existing content assets will empower our prospects with the knowledge they need to move to the next step on their journey?" Your understanding of these needs is informed by the detailed buyer personas you have created.

Perform a content gap analysis: Create a table that contains the following information for each piece of your existing content:

- The name of the article, eGuide or other content asset
- The stage of the buyer's journey it applies to
- The persona to whom it is targeted

Your goal is to create a visual inventory of your existing content. You can then identify gaps and brainstorm the new content you need to create to fill them. Remember: Your goal is to ensure that your ideal prospects' information and knowledge needs are filled at each step of their journey.

You should also conduct an analysis of your competitors' content. This may help you uncover key customer needs that no one in your marketplace is addressing – gaps that you can fill with a compelling point of view.

Use data to show where prospects are in the buying process: As your ideal prospects consume content, their actions generate signals that tell you where they are in their journey.

For example, if a prospect downloads one of your eGuides, that's an indicator that they have a specific problem for which they're seeking a solution. Let's say that you followed up with a drip campaign of 5 emails over the next 2 weeks, culminating with an invitation to a webinar that tackles the same topic, but at a deeper level. If they register for that learning opportunity, it's a signal that they're moving into the consideration stage of their buying process. They are starting to engage with you on a deeper level.

To capture and manage these signals, a marketing automation system is a must.



## THE BOTTOM LINE

The bottom line is that a well-defined strategy, built around a clearly-understood buyer's journey, is the key to sustainable business growth in today's turbulent marketplace.

Let's recap: Your ideal audience is now largely in control of the buying process. That means you need to level up your marketing strategy to meet their needs head-on. As we've demonstrated, aligning your content to their buying process can help to:

- Streamline their research, evaluation and decision-making processes,
- Build trust in your knowledge and expertise, and
- Position your company as the go-to source for the products and services they need to grow THEIR businesses.

**HERE'S ANOTHER BIG WIN:** This smart marketing approach can become a sustainable competitive advantage for your firm. Your competitors will only be able to see bits and pieces of what you're doing. It will be very hard for them to discern your strategy and the thinking behind it.

**Contact Cultivate today  
for a free content  
audit – the first step  
in designing a more  
effective buyer's journey  
for your company  
and its offerings!**

**cultivate**  
communications

3575 N 124th Street  
Brookfield, WI 53005

262 **373-4000**

[cultivate-communications.com](http://cultivate-communications.com)