



The Lead Generation Playbook

for B2B Manufacturers

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Lead Generation in a Buyer's World



There was once a time that manufacturers and other B2B supply chain members could rely almost entirely upon trade show handshakes, client referrals, and cold calls for new business leads. In those days, manufacturers had little need for full-scale marketing efforts. However, due in large part to digital disruption, those days have come and gone.

The information age has created a buyer-centered market. The ability to do extensive online research and use RFP aggregator websites has shifted much of the power to the customer, introducing far greater transparency into the relationship. This means that the information a potential customer gathers about your business may be outside of your direct control, lack your human touch, and be boiled down to side-by-side cost comparisons with your competitors.

On top of this, a growing impatience for—and numerous ways to filter out—traditional, “outbound” lead generation tactics have weakened the ability of B2B manufacturers to engage prospective clients on their terms.

Increased skepticism and caution with the manufacturing industry in the wake of the Great Recession has made it more critical than ever to build a relationship with today's prospects and avoid the anonymity of numbers-only online quote comparisons.

This is all to say that older lead generation methods have grown inadequate without support from a modern, upside-down prospecting strategy. Lead generation has evolved from outbound to inbound.



Outbound Lead Generation

The traditional channels were cold-calls, mass advertising, trade shows, and direct mail. **The focus was on mass distribution of marketing messages to your audience.** These proactive outreach methods were built to reach a larger number of lower-converting leads and provoke interest that results in contact.



Inbound Lead Generation

The non-intrusive, “you come to me” approach of inbound marketing is the opposite of the outbound methods of yesteryear. **A focus on SEO, content creation (blogs, eBooks, whitepapers), and industry thought leadership puts education and value first and selling second.** Prospects are attracted by what you have to offer and come to you on their own, resulting in higher quality leads, more conversions, and a strategy that takes advantage of the digital transformation.

The inbound methodology may prioritize helpfulness over raw salesmanship, but sales is still a major part of the equation. Inbound marketing attracts leads with free-to-consume value offers, and inbound sales follows up with easily-accessible guidance that gently pushes leads further down the funnel towards a decision. Sales in an inbound environment is all about being useful and resourceful—not just persuasive. Create high-quality bottom-of-the-funnel sales content to enable your sales team to offer the best 1-on-1 assistance and convert leads into sales.

But We've Never Needed Marketing Before...



It's no secret that manufacturers and marketers haven't always had a cooperative history. An HBR article from 1977 once asked if manufacturing and marketing can even coexist¹. The answer at the time may have seemed self-evident, but it's certainly changed. Today, the answer is yes. And they must.

The proof is in the research: **Every \$1.00 of manufacturing output requires \$0.19 of services**, according to McKinsey². Without marketing and sales efforts, today's manufacturers will quickly fall behind their competition as they try to build the B2B relationships that will get their products to market. This can be an uncomfortable situation for the manufacturing industry, which traditionally operates behind the scenes while consumer-facing tiers of the supply chain focus on messaging. Today's manufacturers have discovered that a focus on marketing is equally important for nurturing the critical B2B relationships where those products originate—or for reaching consumers directly, themselves.

That said, a marketing strategy can only be as valuable as its grounding in the realities of the supply chain. In manufacturing, a lack of communication around the status of the full supply chain can spell disaster. One needs only look at Tesla's PR struggles that resulted from a marketing/supply chain disconnect in 2017³.

As Tesla transitioned from small to large-scale production, bottlenecks led to a pile-up of unfulfilled orders and unhappy customers. The delays contradicted the great experience that marketing had promised, and tarnished Tesla's to-that-point sterling reputation. A German investment analyst was even quoted in a CNBC piece suggesting that folks sell any Tesla stock due to the company's inability to operate in the black.

This sort of damage to a company's credibility will make your marketers' jobs much tougher—and manufacturing is already a challenging space for marketing. It also means that collaboration between everyone in the supply chain is critical to making sure you never over-promise and under-deliver ⁴.

Keeping eyes on the whole chain, rather than just your piece of it, can complicate things. Fortunately, digital marketing is both data rich and highly transparent. AI and automation tools can also help when it comes to tracking trends, crunching analytics, and facilitating regular communication.

2 Action Tips

1. Treat your current supply chain partners with the same care that you treat prospects who are still in your marketing and sales funnel. Automated workflows and email drips can keep everyone on top of regular communication and send out polls that ensure up-to-date information or status reports.
2. Track your KPIs on a digital dashboard that updates in real-time, with a service such as Databox. These kinds of live, visual updates can help to keep you on your toes and your marketing messages accurate. Go to <https://databox.com/> to see if it's a fit for your business's needs.

7 Inbound Lead Generation Strategies That Work — for Manufacturers



1. Inbound-Powered Referrals

You can't afford to wait for referrals to happen organically. This is often too slow for the instant-gratification research being done by today's customers, and it can be hard to track whether they're happening or benefiting you at all.

Luckily, all you've got to do to see valuable referrals is to ask for one. Check with a current customer and ask if they would be willing to pen a compelling open referral that you can then develop into a slew of materials that best fit an inbound methodology. Testimonials are powerful, distributable resources for leads and sales enablement up and down the funnel.

You can:

- Dress them up as press releases on major industry pages
- Create custom image posts for social media (to visually highlight quotes of praise)
- Build case studies around the client testimonial (as gated content for direct lead capture)
- Upload quote excerpts as an attractive rotating banner on your company website
- Share the testimonial with LinkedIn connections
- Give them to sales reps for social selling
- Attach them to email drip campaigns that distribute to contacts in your CRM

Inbound marketing is all about crafting content that will build trust and authority whenever and wherever your prospects choose to consume it. Few tools are more empowering for your marketing team and sales reps than an established client's glowing review of your partnership.

In fact, 89% of B2B marketers rate customer testimonials and case studies as the most effective content marketing strategy.

This may be because 88% of people trust online reviews written by other consumers just as much as they trust recommendations from personal contacts ⁵. It works because it's not a sales pitch—it's another person speaking from a real experience they had with your business.

Action Tip

You can also leverage an online client referral as an "e-introduction" to spark conversation with a lead. Ask a current customer to introduce you to another business through a group email (John meet Jane; Jane meet John), and you take it from there.

This can prove more useful than a phone number, because if they're not ready to continue the conversation, you've got the contact information to lead nurture them until they come back around. Send a drip of useful inbound content like eBooks, press releases, case studies (from an existing client testimonial, perhaps) or industry news. Even occasional holiday greetings or congratulations (on their latest product release) can be enough to keep you top-of-mind until the time is right.

2. Click-Worthy Content

Many manufacturers set out to target wholesalers, distributors, material suppliers, OEMs, retailers, or other supply chain partners with their inbound content offers. Decision-makers and power brokers at these companies rely upon internet research to quench their curiosity, answer their questions, and find what they're looking for, the same as other consumers. That's where you come in.

Craft quality content with these decision-making target personas in mind. If you intend to skip middle-men and sell to consumers directly, design content for those personas as well. You know who you want to work with, and what they're interested in, so produce material that fits those expectations. The content itself can come in many forms, such as:

- Blogs
- Webinars
- eBooks
- Whitepapers
- Podcasts
- Newsletters
- Demonstration Videos

The key is that the content should be both useful and free. Offer helpful business advice or answer burning questions that you know your target audience will want to consume. Give each piece a catchy title that invites curiosity and sells its usefulness. Each of the following examples could be tightly customized for your product, industry, or buyer persona with targeted keywords dropped in the blanks:

- *The Secret Sauce to _____ Supply Chain Management*
- *4 Ways to Nail Your _____ RFQ on the First Try*
- *Supply and Demand Seasonality: How to Cope Like a Pro*
- *How to Negotiate a Fair Price When Sourcing _____*
- *6 Tricks for Superior Quality Assurance on the _____ Production Line*

If it's click-worthy, you'll drive traffic to your website (where you're hosting it). Warm, relevant traffic is the first step to generating quality leads. You can nurture relationships by emailing links to your latest content to current prospects/customers or interested contacts. Position yourself as an industry expert by offering valuable, free help.

3. Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

SEO is a cornerstone of any web-based marketing strategy. When your prospects are searching for manufacturer-related keywords, you want them to find you. Audit your website, blog, and content offers to make sure you include a good density of keywords with high search volume, relevance to your business, and a manageable level of competition.

Make sure you update your site with new material frequently. Search engines reward fresh material, which means a fast-paced content schedule of bite-sized pieces can potentially earn you more traffic than a slow schedule of long, dense pieces. **B2B companies that blog 11+ times per month get almost three times more traffic than those blogging 0-1 times per month** ⁶.

Generate enough traffic through content creation and SEO, and you'll start to create leads. Visitors might offer contact info, make phone/email inquiries, subscribe to newsletters, or respond to email blasts after they've signed up.

Action Tip

A FAQ section on your website is an easy way to generate content topics and regular updates. Start by compiling a list of all the questions you've been asked during RFQs, phone or email inquiries, meetings with current partners, or at trade shows. This question bank is a resource for small, self-contained content topics.

Each update to your FAQ can have the question link to a new page with a concise, blog-style answer. Make sure to optimize them with keywords so they'll appear in relevant searches. Prospects will ask these questions in Google searches, and Google will point them to you.

4. Give and You Shall Receive

To convert traffic to leads, you've got to get their contact information while they're engaging with you. Typically this is done by trading value for lead capture. Your content might be free, but a visitor can still "pay" by offering you their name, email address, or phone number in exchange for your content. Park it behind a landing page with a contact info form, and allow a free download after the form is completed. This contact info can feed into your CRM (read on below) for future outreach.

Potential buyers are most willing to register for and share information about themselves in exchange for white papers (76%), eBooks (63%), and webinars (79%), according to Demand Gen Report ⁷, so it will often take more than a 500-word blog to make the form completion worth their while.

Action Tip

You might not need to invest time and resources into brand new material to start using this strategy right away. Try collecting a few pages of content from sales decks or existing company product literature that can provide value. Package it as a download, give it a catchy title, and place it behind a lead-capture landing page. Now sit back and watch as these re-purposed pieces start doing lead generation work for you!

5. Email Marketing Automation

Email is a leading marketing channel for B2B manufacturers. **79% of B2B marketers call email their most effective distribution channel for demand generation** (while 59% say the same for generating revenue) ^{8,9}. This would make sense, as research has shown that email marketing generates \$44 for every \$1 spent (which amounts to a whopping 4,400% ROI) ¹⁰.

Automation tools can make email marketing a breeze. This technology is especially useful for a small team with limited bandwidth, as with many in the manufacturing space. It's not unusual for manufacturers to devote only 1-2 personnel full time to marketing (or perhaps it's handled on the side by someone with another job!). With template-fueled, intelligent workflows that respond to website and contact behaviors, you can empower a small team with a considerable reach.

You can also engage in lead nurturing by using drip campaigns that slowly pepper leads with valuable content, which will help build a trusting relationship with your company. Automation can also run sales sequences for cooling leads so that your sales team can enroll the lead in a sequence and focus on more impactful tasks while the system chases them for the right moment to make 1-1 contact.

6. Integrate a CRM System

With a proper CRM system (HubSpot's is completely free), you can move beyond the Excel spreadsheets and email mailing lists you may have used in the past to track leads. Use it to:

- Record info on conversations with the lead
- Store email dialogue
- Set follow-up reminders
- Sync with your email marketing database
- Bridge the gaps between marketing, sales, and customer service

When every team has access to the full customer history of each contact, interactions are consistent and personalized. Also, consider the value of loading leads you collect at events and trade shows into your CRM database. When you get home, you can nurture them with emails and high-value content. In the B2B setting, events help generate the most leads, while case studies help convert and accelerate the most leads—a perfect marriage of active engagement and savvy content marketing ¹¹.

7. Leverage LinkedIn

If you haven't yet, it's time to get your company active on major social accounts, with LinkedIn leading the pack. **94% of B2B marketers are distributing content via LinkedIn, making it the top social channel for sharing content in the B2B space.** As a business-focused network full of professionals and decision-makers, it should hardly be surprising that LinkedIn drives more traffic to B2B blogs and sites than any other network. It's also responsible for an enormous 80.33% of social media B2B leads ¹².

Use your LinkedIn account to share fresh content from your website and link to trustworthy industry news while you're still working on your next original offering. It's also possible to target a more relevant subsection of the LinkedIn user base by geotargeting (if a location is important to your company) or posting within LinkedIn Groups that are related to your business niche.

Action Tip

Locate decision makers from your target audience (in a location search or by joining related groups), and send as many connection requests as you can. Include a meeting link with personalized message to encourage conversion. Some of them will accept, which is your opening to send a weekly warming-up message (perhaps with targeted inbound content attached) to nurture the prospects. After a couple of months, if you've sent out 400 connection requests peppered with useful content, and got 5 or 7 leads ready to meet, you may end up with one high-LTV B2B contract. All it took was time and a free social account.

2 Alternative Lead Generation Strategies



Online RFP Sources

It's hard to gain a significant advantage in a customer-centric, RFP-only channel, but there's still something to be said for setting up shop right in the place where your target audience is looking to do new business. There are many websites where companies you'd typically target post online proposal requests, and wait for you and your competitors to battle it out with competitive bids.

Here are two examples, both in the construction space:

- <https://www.merx.com/>
- <https://www.biddingo.com/>

A word of warning about these RFP aggregator sites—they often don't allow you to talk directly with the companies posting the RFP. All you'll get is your bid. Developing a relationship would increase your odds of winning the bid and beating out an incumbent partner, but you'll have to rely upon inbound strategies to do this.

Trackable Advertising

"Outbound" advertising (such as ads placed in trade publications) is often expensive, but some companies still turn to it due to the old wisdom that it can produce "quick results." The actual mileage may vary by channel, strategy, and objectives, but what remains constant across them all is that outbound ROI is tough to prove with hard numbers.

As an alternative, consider low-cost, high-return trackable advertising. Many trade publications, for example, offer online banner ads or email newsletter ads at a much lower

cost than print ads. A regular e-newsletter might charge a \$25-\$50 CPM (cost per “mille,” or per 1000 impressions) for a daily edition. Have your banner or newsletter ad link out to a custom landing page for lead capture. Now you can measure exactly how many leads came from the industry source, which nails down your ROI. And even if you got 10,000 impressions, you’d still only pay \$250-\$500 ¹³.

A magazine ad, by comparison, could cost \$500 to \$20,000, depending on whether the publication is local or national, the size of your ad, whether you use color, and if you’ve negotiated a multiple-ad rate. You can spend as much as \$500,000 to buy the inside front cover of some national magazines ¹⁴! Worse, you’d never have any idea exactly how many leads came from your massive investment—which complicates your decision when the time comes to renew.

Since banner ads and email ads are clickable, they are also trackable. You save money on the investment, and can also solidly prove the ROI. Try contacting industry publications to request pricing for web banner ads or e-newsletter sponsorships. Make sure to ask about the traffic they receive and the size of their distribution lists to evaluate the cost-to-benefit ratio of the opportunity.

Content Marketing is the Future (and the Present)



In 2015, the Content Marketing Institute found that **only 8% of manufacturers had a dedicated marketing team** (and only 19% of manufacturers planned to have one in 2016). At the same time, only 1% of manufacturing marketing teams rate their marketing as “sophisticated” ¹⁵. These are clear signs that there is still plenty of room to grow beyond the old, traditional methods and into the innovative strategies that drive modern business.

While digital disruption may have trickled into the manufacturing space more slowly than it did in the consumer marketplace, it’s definitely here now. Like the famous quote from Moneyball, businesses are left with two choices: “adapt or die.” That’s a colorful way to put things, but there is some wisdom in it. Inbound marketing is a ripe opportunity to become one of those sophisticated manufacturers that fall into the 1%. Upgrade your manufacturer marketing strategy with inbound channels, quality content, and trackable analytics that can prove the ROI of these new age efforts.

Lead generation with inbound is a whole new world. Make the leap and soar above your competition.

About Us



Our company is a marketing love story.

Market Veep was born out of a passion for helping businesses reach a broader market, get more leads, and improve their sales and marketing alignment. We believe that people are the most important part of any business. The human factor is what influences our marketing method, business philosophy, and company culture.

Not only do we want our clients to be successful and our team to love coming into work every day; we want our company to stand for something positive in the world.

If you're looking for a close-knit team of marketing professionals who are driven, collaborative, and a little silly, then you've come to the right place. We dive deep into the data and use frequent touchpoints to keep you agile, generate meaningful leads, align sales and marketing, and evangelize customers into lifelong advocates.

We want our clients to be delighted, plain and simple.

"Marketing Made Human" isn't just a slogan for us; it's a lifestyle.

Contact Us

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