

# Planning the Campaign Cycle

By BNET Editorial

published on BNET.com 11/30/2007

Every sales prospect goes through a “customer journey,” moving from a prospect with little or no awareness of a company and its products to a loyal, repeat customer. At each stage of the journey, companies can use specific marketing tools and activities to engage prospects and communicate with them effectively. This is known as the campaign cycle and includes five main stages—raising awareness, driving consideration, reinforcing preference, purchase, and building loyalty.

## What You Need to Know

---

### Why is it important to understand the buying cycle?

Companies rarely buy products or services on impulse. The decision to buy is the result of a long process of investigation, consideration, and review. Different people will evaluate products and companies. To be able to market and sell effectively and to make the best use of your marketing resources, it is important to understand how your customers and prospects buy and to recognize which stage of the cycle they are currently in.

## What to Do

---

### Recognize the Buying Cycle

Although your customers and prospects may vary in size, most companies share a common buying cycle. Those common factors can help you determine the nature of your marketing campaign. The buying cycle typically moves through four key stages:

- identify a business need
- research a solution
- design and evaluate different solutions
- purchase

## Align Your Campaigns to the Buying Cycle

Your marketing campaigns need to target the different levels of awareness and readiness to buy at different stages of the buying cycle. When your prospects are identifying a business need, you need to:

- raise awareness of your company and its products;
- demonstrate the relevance of your products to the business need.

When the prospect is researching a solution, you need to:

- continue raising awareness of your company and its products;
- continue demonstrating the relevance of your products to the business need;
- nurture the relationship with your prospect;
- encourage consideration of your product.

When the prospect is designing and evaluating different solutions, you need to:

- continue nurturing the relationship with your prospect;
- build preference for your product.

When the prospect is ready to purchase, you need to:

- reinforce preference for your product;
- make it easy for the prospect to purchase your product.

## Identify the Decision-makers

The identification of the need is usually the responsibility of a business decision-maker. They pass this business requirement to the technical decision-maker for solution research, design and evaluation. The solution then goes back to the business decision-maker for approval and purchase. If you market your products through channel partners, they may also be involved in working with decision-makers. To move companies through the buying cycle, you therefore need to influence three main audiences:

- *The business decision-maker*

Business decision-makers are driven by business growth and competitive pressure, and they face comparison with their peers. They look for solutions to business pain points. However, they may not have any technical knowledge and they may not be aware of your company.

- *The technical decision-maker*

Technical decision-makers may be familiar with your company but may not be aware of all your products. You need to help them understand how different products work and provide examples of how solutions could be deployed to drive business benefits.

- *The channel partner*

Channel partners work directly with your target businesses, advising them on the value of your solutions. You need to win the hearts and minds of your channel partners, educating and enabling them to create a preference for your products.

## Identify Prospects' Key Objectives

To identify the key objectives of your prospects:

- review focus group research and transcripts;
- review research articles or reports in business publications/user groups;
- consider setting up an online poll.

## Set Campaign Objectives

Your campaign should be designed to support your revenue growth goals and the specific needs of your business strategy. The campaign should focus on two important marketing objectives:

- Increase the number of new customers.
- increase the number of repeat customers.

These, in turn, drive the communication objectives and strategy. To align with the buying cycle, your communications should have four specific objectives:

- **new contact acquisition**—to drive awareness and relevance of your company and your products. Your communication initiatives should demonstrate the relevance of your products to prospects by addressing customer business pain points;
- **relationship marketing**—to develop deeper customer insight and strengthen relationships. Your objective is to move from a transactional approach to a relationship marketing approach. You should nurture new contacts and develop a trusted advisor relationship for your company and your channel partners;
- **lead generation**—to drive consideration and preference for your solutions. You can run a variety of lead generation programs to drive preference for your products;

- **sales and channel enablement**—to enable your channel partners with the right tools to support your campaign. By supporting the sales teams and channel partners you can help them convert leads into opportunities and new revenue.

## Run a New Contact Acquisition Program

The objective of the acquisition program is to attract new contacts and prospects by making them aware of your company and demonstrating the business relevance of your products and services. To do this, communications focus on the key pain points and concerns of decision-makers and demonstrate the value you have brought to similar companies.

The main focus of the communication program is on public relations and online activities. These could include:

- public relations stories relating to business pain points;
- customer success stories in print and video format;
- online Web banners with a business and technology focus;
- Web pages with business and technology sections;
- print advertisements.

The key measurement for this program is:

- the number of new contacts.

## Run a Relationship Marketing Program

The objective of the relationship marketing program is:

- to acquire and nurture new contacts;
- to strengthen relationships with existing customers.

A program of regular newsletters and other information can provide a communication platform for ongoing regular communication with customers and prospects. Newsletter content should follow the structure of the main campaign with articles to support both business and technology themes.

The key measurements are:

- numbers of new contacts;
- percentage response rates.

## **Increase Lead Generation**

As well as providing immediate sales leads, a lead generation program can help identify new contacts and information on future purchase plans, which can be used in subsequent marketing activities. The program could include:

- communications templates for telemarketing scripts, e-mail, and direct mail;
- customer offers including event invitations and demonstrations;
- supporting documentation including press release templates, how to sell guides, whitepapers, and customer presentations.

The key measurements are:

- conversion rate of leads to customers;
- number of new customers;
- number of repeat purchases.

## **Improve Sales and Channel Enablement**

It is important to the success of your marketing campaigns that you get buy-in from the field sales and channel partners to follow up on the leads and convert these into sales. The objective of the sales and channel enablement assets is to provide these teams with the right product information, sales tools, and supporting documentation to be able to close marketing-driven opportunities.

Sales and channel enablement assets include:

- sales enablement kit containing assets for finding, creating, maximizing and closing opportunities
- product and sales training programs
- sales incentives
- customer presentations.

The key measurements are:

- Conversion rate of leads to customers
- number of new customers
- number of repeat purchases.

## Recognize the Success Factors

To ensure that your campaign is successful, you need to consider a variety of other factors:

- How effective is your marketing and sales team? Do they have the right contacts and selling capabilities? Are they familiar with advertising and marketing campaigns?
- Are you able to get good press coverage for your media activities? Do you have high-quality promotional material for product information and market education?
- How effective are your distribution channels? Do you have good relationships with the main players? Are your channel partners financially stable? Do they have access to a good base of prospects and are they familiar with your product or service offering?

## What to Avoid

---

### You Fail to Align Campaigns with the Buying Cycle

Decision-makers need different types of information at different stages of the buying cycle. When they are first investigating a business need, they may not be familiar with your company or understand why your products and services meet their needs. Later, when they are close to purchase, they may need reassurance that your company is capable of delivering its promises. It is important that you match those different information needs with the right communications at the right time.

### You Target the Wrong Decision-Makers

Understanding your customer's buying cycle also helps to highlight who makes the decisions at each stage of the cycle. Your advertisements may be aimed at the wrong decision-makers, or your sales teams may be contacting prospects at the wrong level. Wrong targeting wastes money and may lose you opportunities to win business.

## Where to Learn More

---

### Book:

Westwood, John, How to Write a Marketing Plan, 3rd ed. Kogan Page, 2006.

## **Web Site:**

Institute of Direct Marketing: [www.theidm.com](http://www.theidm.com)

Copyright © 2007 CNET Networks, Inc. All Rights Reserved.