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# B2B Marketers Must Better Prepare For Marketing Automation

by Jeff Ernst

for CMO & Marketing Leadership Professionals



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### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Changing buyer behaviors require business-to-business (B2B) marketers to communicate with prospects and customers in new ways, by delivering content that is personalized to their needs, role, level of interest, and stage of problem-solving. This has made marketing automation a mission-critical system for B2B marketers, but too many marketing leaders head down the automation path without fully realizing what they are getting into. They need to prepare for the use of the technology by having 1) a lead-to-revenue process model to automate; 2) content to support the message and responses; and 3) a marketing organization that is ready to support the technology.

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Forrester interviewed vendor, user, and implementation companies, including Aprimo, EFI, Eloqua, EMC, eTrigue, Foodland Super Market, Genius, HubSpot, Jamcracker, Jigsaw, Kana, LeadFormix, LeadLife Solutions, LexJet, LoopFuse, Marketo, Neolane, Oracle, Pardot, PrimePay, QlikTech, Radian6, SAP, SalesFusion, Silverpop, Team Thor Marketing, TechSmith, The Annuitas Group, TreeHouse Interactive, and Unica.

#### **Related Research Documents**

["Lead-To-Revenue Management Transforms Tech Marketing"](#)

December 22, 2010

["B2B CMOs: Make Marketing Automation A Catalyst For Alignment With Sales"](#)

October 7, 2010

## MARKETING AUTOMATION HAS BECOME MISSION-CRITICAL FOR B2B FIRMS

B2B marketing leaders are under tremendous pressure to increase their marketing team's contribution to generating revenue. For companies serving buyers that make high-consideration purchases, from medical equipment to advertising services, marketers need to communicate with potential buyers at every stage of their problem-solving cycle, providing them with information that is targeted to their needs, role, intent, and interest level. To manage this depth of engagement at scale requires marketing automation. Forrester defines B2B marketing automation as:

*Tooling and process that help generate new business opportunities, improve potential buyers' propensity to purchase, manage customer loyalty, and increase alignment between marketing activity and revenue.*

Several changes in customer buying behaviors are making marketing automation mission-critical:

- **Buyers do more research on their own.** Business buyers have increased the time they spend talking to peers and colleagues about business problems and investigate solutions on their own before engaging with vendor sales reps. This requires marketers to use automation to monitor which offers or messages buyers respond to and what information buyers consume and then to use that data to deliver additional information that helps buyers move to the next stage of the problem-solving cycle.
- **There are fewer active buying cycles.** While buying cycles are getting longer, a smaller percentage of people in the marketing database are in active buying cycles at any one time. Marketers need automation to listen for buying signals being sent by potential buyers as they interact with content, score them based on their propensity to be in buying mode, and send those who are worthy of sales attention to the appropriate salesperson.
- **More stakeholders are involved in buying decisions.** More people affect the purchase decision than in the past, including line-of-business managers, IT, finance, and procurement. Marketing needs to deliver information that explains the offerings and business outcomes as they relate to the particular interests and concerns of each stakeholder, which is a level of granularity that is difficult to manage without automation.

## But Marketers Aren't Always Ready To Experience The Full Benefits

Too many B2B marketers head down the automation path to solve a tactical problem and as a result do not experience the full potential that these platforms deliver. They are held back because they don't have the right lead management process in place, the right contact information in their database, the right content for engaging buyers, or the right skill sets for managing the intersection of these efforts. This is exacerbated, as:

- **Companies rush to justify the implementation.** Marketers feel pressure to show results quickly by getting more emails out the door or more leads into the top of the funnel. So they implement automation to address a tactical capability, such as making it more efficient to run campaigns, publishing a newsletter, inviting people to webinars, or capturing leads on their website. This can actually backfire, because sending more leads to sales without a process for scoring, qualifying, and following up on leads only adds fuel to the gripes of the sales team that the leads they get from marketing are not qualified.
- **Vendors hype the simplest installation as “so easy.”** Responding to competitive pressure and the fact that the “quick and easy” message resonates with buyers, many of the marketing automation vendors make claims that you can be up and running within hours or a few days. Small businesses with simple requirements can receive a lot of value within days by implementing basic features and may not ever need to do more. But for larger companies that serve sophisticated buyer needs, it takes time to build a revenue engine that produces a steady supply of qualified sales opportunities, and getting an email campaign out the door in three days does not ensure that you are on a path to achieving that bigger vision.
- **The full benefits are hidden behind old company habits.** We interviewed more than 20 companies that were identified by their vendor as being great case studies and found that most are still at level 1 or 2 of Forrester’s marketing automation maturity model.<sup>1</sup> Those that have been using the system for a few years have gradually expanded their use of features like lead scoring and multi-touch lead nurturing campaigns. But they have done so in a manner that is fairly simplistic, compared with what is possible with behavioral-based targeting capabilities, which require adequate resources, data, and content to fully leverage.

### THE MARKETING AUTOMATION MOTTO: BE PREPARED

As with most business processes that have been automated, technology is not the solution — it is just an enabler. Before jumping into a technology evaluation or implementation, marketing leaders need to sit back and make sure that they prepare their organization for the changes required to fully leverage marketing automation. This means that you need a clear understanding of where you want automation to take you and need to prepare the process, content, data, and people that are required to get you there (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1** Prepare For The Right Process, Content, Data, And People

| <b>B2B marketing organizations lack:</b> | <b>Risk of not being prepared:</b>   | <b>How to prepare for market automation:</b>  |
|--|--|---|
| Lead management process                  | Marketing generates low-quality leads that frustrate the sales team  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop an integrated lead-to-revenue management process</li> <li>• Define customer personas and buyer journeys</li> </ul> |
| Strategic content creation               | Messages don't resonate with buyers' needs and just focus on products and promotions                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create educational content</li> <li>• Enlist help from subject-matter experts in business units</li> </ul>                 |
| Data and people to manage data           | Wasting budgets by marketing to the wrong people; unable to take advantage of advanced automation of marketing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acquire relevant contact data for target markets</li> <li>• Have people with database marketing skills</li> </ul>          |

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Source: Forrester Research, Inc.

### Prepare To Develop An Integrated Lead-To-Revenue Process Model

Effective automation requires marketing to shift from being a volume producer of leads to being a leader in supporting sales activity with an integrated lead management process. This is a big change. Automating lead generation activity without the hard upfront work can drive marketers to waste money on campaigns and cause sales frustration with a high volume of poor-quality leads.

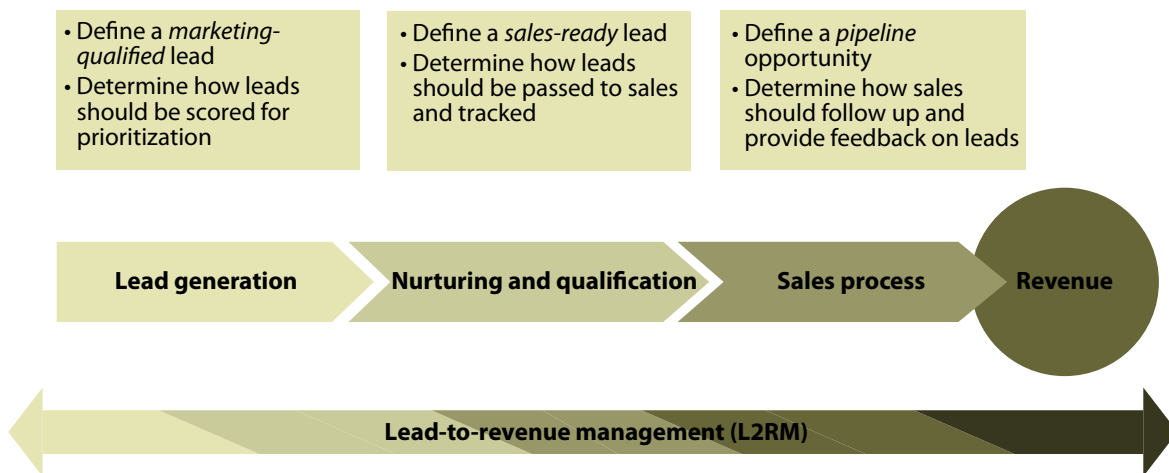
Marketing needs to work with sales to define the goals, metrics, and activities at the three process stages that leads go through — lead generation, nurturing and qualification, as well as selling.<sup>2</sup> This requires a plan to:

- **Qualify, distribute, and follow up on leads.** Marketers should take a close look at leads that come in the door today, along with how they get handled and where they end up, and ask themselves if the existing process is ready to automate. Decisions need to be made with sales and marketing at the table, such as defining what attributes and behaviors indicate that a lead is worthy of being worked by sales, how quickly sales will follow up on leads, and how they will record the feedback (see Figure 2). For example, while implementing Marketo, the QlikTech executive team made a policy change requiring inside sales reps to select which leads to call based on lead quality score rather than calling all leads they had in their queue, which would not scale and was inefficient.
- **Determine the personas and buyer journeys that can be supported with nurturing.** Most marketers struggle to use lead nurturing because they don't know enough about how their buyers seek information early in their problem-solving cycles. Marketers must identify the

personas within the segments they want to target and map the buyer journeys that each persona takes. They need to crisply define the questions buyers may ask when they go online and do research on their problem, learn about approaches others have taken, define their requirements, and build the business case to get budget for a purchase so that they can satisfy these information needs with lead nurturing (see Figure 3).

- **Sell the new process to peers on the senior management team.** A proper implementation of marketing automation takes a company from doing one-off campaigns to building relationships with potential buyers over the course of months and years. This is a much more strategic focus for marketing, which the chief marketing officer (CMO) needs to socialize with the rest of the management team. The CMO at Jamcracker earned the support of his vice president of sales by giving him access to the LeadFormix system to see what companies were coming to their website. Now his sales team can manage immediate opportunities and see the long-term health of the business potential at the top of the funnel with a history of interactions with target organizations.

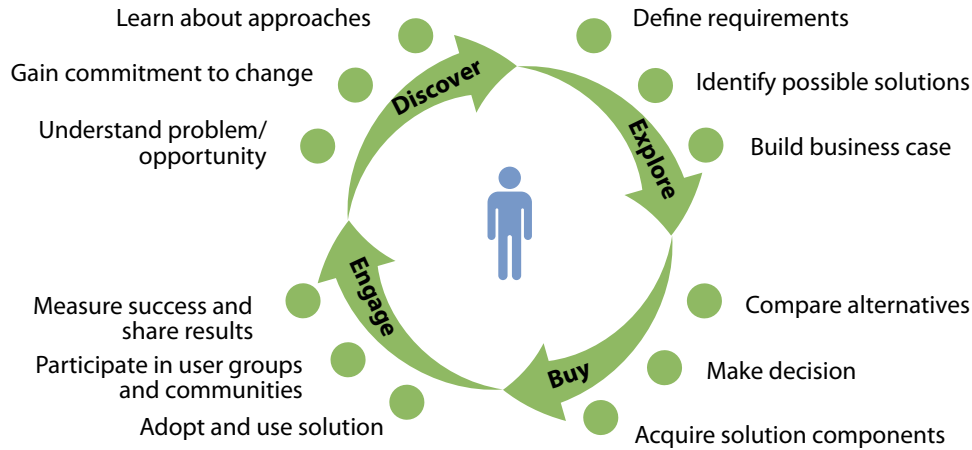
**Figure 2** Automation Requires An Integrated Lead-To-Revenue Management (L2RM) Process



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Source: Forrester Research, Inc.

**Figure 3** Business Buyers Perform Many Activities When Solving Problems



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Source: Forrester Research, Inc.

### Prepare For Being A Content Marketer

Marketers go into automation projects thinking that they can use their existing content to power lead nurturing campaigns but discover that their content consists mainly of product brochures, technical white papers, and press releases. If they only push this type of content out in campaigns, they push their audiences away, since business buyers have a low tolerance for commercial messages. When companies start to tailor content to different audiences and stages of the buying cycle, they greatly increase the amount of content, and the type of content needed changes. So marketers need to:

- **Create content that educates while it sells.** The right content that attracts buyers is focused on problems and not products. It educates people on how to solve their problems. PrimePay originally thought it could use its product brochures for lead nurturing in HubSpot but experienced a doubling of click-through rates when it redesigned campaign messages to be shorter and focused on educational topics such as complying with labor laws and understanding the impact of healthcare reform on employers.
- **Align content with buyer journeys.** This educational content must be aligned with how buyers engage along their buyer journey and arranged in a way that surfaces clues about the buyers' interest and intent, while immersing the brand in their customer life cycle. For example, LexJet uses SalesFusion to educate executives on ways to expand their business with new applications of its printers, such as producing photo wall murals, and plans to use order information on what clients have bought before recommending similar products.

- **Enlist experts to contribute content.** Buyers want information that is much deeper into the problem domain the company serves than what most marketers can create. Marketing leaders need to go to subject-matter experts within the business units or outside of the company to help supply content. This content often already exists in raw form within engineering, consulting, and customer service departments and can be crafted to address buyer needs in lead nurturing efforts. How can you best do this? Find experts who write blogs or speak at industry events and reuse their content. Use a content curation platform like Curata or ConnectedN that can help internal experts monitor the Web for industry news and practices that can supply nurturing campaigns.

### Prepare The Organization For Database Marketing

Marketing leaders typically don't appreciate that automation makes them a database marketing business, and database marketing requires a continuous effort to run campaigns and maintain an accurate, robust marketing database. B2B companies think nothing of assigning full-time resources to manage their sales force automation (SFA) systems and data, but when it comes to marketing automation, they think they can just have one of their marketing staff members run the tool in addition to everything else on that person's plate. It's important to:

- **Start with a relevant mix of data.** Most B2B firms have marketing databases full of contacts that have been gathered from trade shows, list purchases, and inquiries, but the data is spotty and out of date. Marketers need to assess the contacts they have to make sure that they represent the right types of people in target markets and that the contact records contain the data needed to segment them with targeted campaigns. For example, a global professional services firm worked with its sales team to identify target accounts, group them by priority and geography, and then match that with its existing database to pull out all of the relevant titles such as chief executive officer (CEO), chief financial officer (CFO), chief information officer (CIO), and data center management. Once it exhausted internal sources, it used list services such as Dun & Bradstreet to fill in the gaps and arrive at a comprehensive database to load into its LeadLife system.
- **Fill the technical and business skills gap.** For B2B marketing organizations that have never done more than public relations (PR) and collateral, a new set of skills is required. Business analysts who can interpret web-based behavioral data will understand where people are in a problem-solving cycle and better target them based on their intent. Operational experts who understand email deliverability, opt-out, and spam issues will increase success and decrease wasted efforts. EFI attributes its success with Neolane to staffing a strong customer relationship management (CRM) team that listens to business goals, translates them into a process, and maps the data flow between marketing automation, CRM, and enterprise resource planning (ERP) systems to close the loop on each prospect.

- **Plan on a global platform that can handle unique local laws and approaches.** CMOs of global organizations need to determine the right balance of centralized control and local autonomy. A global manufacturer deployed Unica in the US and is extending to Europe and Asia. The US team developed a playbook of campaign templates that local marketers can pick from as starting points. A single marketing leader serves as an evangelist to promote the platform and seed it into each region.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### DON'T PUT TECHNOLOGY AHEAD OF ORGANIZATIONAL READINESS

Nearly every vendor will tell you that they have the easiest-to-use and easiest-to-implement system. While an intuitive easy-to-use interface is crucial, remember that the ease of implementation has less to do with the technology itself than it does with the readiness of your organization's lead management process, content, and people. When evaluating the players, don't fall for the prettiest demo. Instead, look at the vendors' expertise and best practices and determine how well they will help you prepare your organization for getting to a high level of marketing automation maturity.

- **Reconsider what value means in the vendor's "time to value" equation.** When measuring time to value, don't define value as the time it takes to get the first email campaign out the door. Instead, think of it as the time it takes to get to a point where you are delivering a steady flow of nurtured, sales-ready leads to the sales organizations, with a high percentage converting to qualified pipeline opportunities. Accept that getting there may require significant changes in marketing and sales processes. While implementing Aprimo, Elsevier identified all of the infrastructural and procedural issues where there was room for improvement and took the opportunity to start with a clean slate to build a more sophisticated marketing engine supported by the technology.
- **Don't blame the technology if you're not advancing your usage.** Some marketers who don't make much progress in the first year blame it on the platform and switch to another vendor. Aggressive competitive replacement campaigns being waged by some vendors make this tempting to do. Don't be too quick to point fingers at the vendor and cancel your contract. Get your marketing and sales teams together to determine where your lead management process is breaking down. Do you have compelling content? Do sales reps follow up on the hottest leads quickly? Once you've identified your own faults, ask your current vendor to help solve them with you.
- **Think big, and start small.** While it's important to have a lead management process thought out, don't get stuck in analysis paralysis. It's possible to have a bigger vision, but implement in phases so that you can get quick wins that help get the buy-in to the behavioral changes required in the sales organization. For example, start with scoring rules based on demographics and simple behavioral factors and add more refined criteria over time. Start with one lead nurturing campaign and develop more targeted campaigns over time.

## SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL

### Companies Interviewed For This Document

|                       |                       |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Aprimo                | Marketo               |
| EFI                   | Neolane               |
| Eloqua                | Oracle                |
| EMC                   | Pardot                |
| eTrigue               | PrimePay              |
| Foodland Super Market | QlikTech              |
| Genius                | Radian6               |
| HubSpot               | SalesFusion           |
| Jamcracker            | SAP                   |
| Jigsaw                | Silverpop             |
| Kana                  | Team Thor Marketing   |
| LeadFormix            | TechSmith             |
| LeadLife Solutions    | The Annuitas Group    |
| LexJet                | TreeHouse Interactive |
| LoopFuse              | Unica                 |

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Businesses have changed their buying behavior, and while the capabilities of the marketing automation platform vendors have kept pace, most marketing organizations have not advanced beyond initial stages of maturity. Using Forrester's marketing automation maturity model and scorecard, you can assess where your firm is in terms of maturity today and develop plans for improvement. See the October 7, 2010, "[B2B CMOs: Make Marketing Automation A Catalyst For Alignment With Sales](#)" report.
- <sup>2</sup> To get marketing to work more efficiently and effectively with sales counterparts, Forrester recommends a lead-to-revenue management (L2RM) model and approach that defines processes, goals, and service-level commitments spanning the entire marketing-through-sales process. See the December 22, 2010, "[Lead-To-Revenue Management Transforms Tech Marketing](#)" report.

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