

Lead Management: A Focus Above the Funnel – Part II

Last month we highlighted the need to better manage things [“Above the Funnel”](#), with a specific focus on how to best manage leads. The central message being that leads need to be fully maximized and nurtured using a system of campaigning that dictates what actions we take with “Active” lead and what needs to be done with “Inactive” leads. Clients, who embrace the methodology, monetize a larger percentage of their leads by consistently converting more of them into viable prospects. This still leaves a question that many reps claim to struggle with every day, and that is where you source leads.

One of the sad truths of sales is the activities involved in being successful above the funnel - Lead Generation and Prospecting - are more “blue collar” in nature than the rest of the Revenue process - Sales - which traditionally has been more “white collar” in nature. Many sales reps fancy themselves white collar professions and therefore do not take to lead generation and prospecting. They fail to acknowledge that there is heavy lifting, plenty of hard work, in this contact sport called Prospecting.

Having implemented a **Touch > Contact > Engage**, approach to managing your leads, you need to have a replenishment plan. The fact you are recycling leads, ensuring that you benefit from the fact that today’s dud is tomorrow’s cash cow, understanding that more is not best, just a start, you still need a means of bringing new leads in to your base.

As with many things above the funnel, there are few secrets, the real deal is in implementing, and staying consistent; the things you’ll read below all will work if you put them in to practice, and do so in a consistent, ongoing way.

In no particular order, and with the understanding that many verticals have other unique sources for leads, here are a few everyone could use immediately:

- Referrals
- Dependent Referrals
- Networking
- Directories
- Cold Calling

● **Referrals** – Everyone talks about them, very few actually do it, or do it right. I find it very interesting, at every workshop I ask how many people have success with referrals, and in a group of 15 or 18 people two people will put up their hand; I then ask how many actually ask for referrals, and the same two people raise their hands. Everyone has worked referrals, but very few actively generate referrals. The ones that do seem to restrict it to people they “have a relationship with”; when asked why they don’t include prospects or leads in pursuing referrals, they rarely have anything to offer other than that they “don’t yet have a relationship”. There have been numerous quality books written on referrals, we recommended one in The Pipeline’s Recommended Reading section. The key is you can get referrals from a lot more people you deal with in business, from prospects, clients, vendors, tradesmen, even other leads. It is never too early to ask for referrals, you may not get one right away, but people will know you are ready for them.

● **Direct Authority Referrals** – One source of referrals needs to be segmented from the others, and needs to be more consistently pursued and harvested, we call these Direct Authority Referrals. These are people who have relationships with people who could use your service or product, and are in a position to have to more than strongly influence matters as a result of being an authority figure. Often as a result, they are privy to information that you can benefit from, and where their recommendation or referral will fast track the process of moving a Lead to a Prospect, and hasten the sale in general. These could be lawyers, accountants, business advisors, bankers. Within given markets there could be very specific relationships where one party is in a position to help the referral take on real teeth.

For example, there is a natural synergy between what I do and Sales Compensation consultants. They are interacting with people who can use our services, and can often be perceived as “an authority” by these people. Not only can we add value to their relationships by ensuring that the client fully benefits from their service, we are able to accelerate the cycle for both our companies and increase the benefit for the client.

Regardless of the nature of the referral, you can take the initiative in ensuring a healthy relationship, send referrals their way, if you can, before you even receive one from them, this is a small investment, but one that pays long dividends.

● **Networking** – It’s on everyone’s to-do, not all ways done effectively. There are all kinds of books and articles written on networking, everything from etiquette to finding different networks. Our focus here is to get you thinking about where networking fits into your lead management strategy and program. Not all networks are suitable for every type of sale, but there are always a number that will provide you a steady stream of leads. Since networking is part of the overall strategy make sure you don’t over do it, but do it right. When you attend an event remember you are there to network not socialize. Have targets to measure against and adjust them and your networking based on clear objectives and results.

● **Directories** – Much like networking, there are a number of different directories out there. Some may cost more than others, but if they provide the leads you need you’ll find the cost negligible. We do quite a bit of cold calling, and we rely heavily on **Scott’s Directories**, over half our leads, managed or pre-sourced come from Scott’s. The ease of use, sorting, creating lists, all make this more than a cost effective way of securing quality leads and prospects on an ongoing basis. There are association member lists, chambers and boards of trade, and many more.

● **Cold Calling** – As we have outlined in this space before, other than referrals, cold calling is still the most time and cost effective way to gain and qualify leads and turn them in to prospects. A few months back we wrote about this in an article called [“Rediscover a proven and easy way to Increase Sales and Productivity”](#), we highlighted the finding detailed on [Businessweek.com](#):

“That’s right, because cold-calling works, if it’s done right. The survey results showed that the top three ways companies generated quality new leads over the past two years were referrals from clients or partners (22%), general referrals (16%), and cold-calling or telephone prospecting (13%).”

Even in these days of global warming, the inconvenient truth in sales is that you have to have prospect to get sales, and cold calling done right is still an effective way to get to those people who want to buy, but who don't know how to find you.

Using the sources above and other tactics, you can ensure that you have a steady source of leads. Using the strategies we outlined last month in part One, you can qualify, rank and continuously convert those leads to prospects and then to sales.

While we have not found a way to make things easy, I think you'll find that putting into practice the things highlighted in these two articles, you will find it easier to engage with more people at a time when they are more likely to have an interest in what you have to sell, and manage those that will be prospects in the future.

[What's in Your Pipeline?](#) If you are sad to admit it, contact Tibor Shanto, Principal with [Renbor Sales Solutions Inc.](#), and find out how he has helped dozens of organizations to fill their pipeline with real prospects - - driving real revenue. For more information on helping your team sell better, write to: info@sellbetter.ca, visit <http://www.sellbetter.ca>