



Nine Steps to Change Marketing from a Cost Center to a **Growth Driver**

Proven Keys to Pipeline Growth

Across all industries and business types, the basic steps to drive sustainable pipeline and business growth are the same. Executing these steps is where every company differs—and many struggle to get the desired results.

While no magic formula can guarantee sales pipeline and revenue growth, the underlying principles involved are well understood. These nine keys to success provide a proven framework to develop a robust, effective demand generation engine that can help you rapidly build pipeline, scale sustainably, and grow your business.





Step 1: Target the Right Prospects (Ideal Customer Profile)



The sad truth is that most marketing is wasted. No matter how compelling your message or inspired your campaign, it does you no good if it reaches the wrong people.

At best, your impact may be inefficient, requiring higher volume (and spend) to get to the occasional promising prospect. More often, this results in bogging down Sales with bad leads, driving up acquisition costs, and missing the real opportunities.

The first step to effective growth marketing is clearly defining the audience(s) you want to reach. Working with Sales, identify your most typical, profitable, or otherwise preferred customers. Look at what they have in common—a shared industry, the same company size or model, a specific region, etc. Then drill down a level and look at the contact level. Who are the decision-makers in these organizations? Who else influences the purchasing decision?

Based on these details you can define an Ideal Customer Profile (ICP), build a segmented database with many relevant companies, and direct your efforts towards your preferred prospects. Your ICP should also strongly influence your lead scoring model, determining when to designate Marketing Qualified Leads (MQLs) for referral to Sales.



Step 2: Focus on the Problem (Customer Pain Points)



To state it bluntly, your prospects are not interested in your product. Touting features, specs, and capabilities will make your outreach fall flat every time.

What matters to prospects are the pain points they're battling every day. Tell them which business problems you can solve (and how), and you'll have their attention. Granted, your product or service may be needed to make it happen, but don't lead with it—and don't make them connect the dots.

It pays to remember that prospects always have other options, including purchasing

from a competitor or simply doing nothing. You need to give them a compelling reason to buy from you. Focusing on real, significant challenges is a powerful way to establish credibility and encourage affinity, as well as making current pain seem worse than the fear of change.

In short, focus on what prospects really care about. It doesn't matter if you have better specs if what they crave is ease of use. Sales can be an excellent partner to help you better understand customers' reality and mentality, and articulate a strong value proposition for your ideal targets.



Step 3: Develop Compelling Content

After defining your target audience (ideal customer profile) and articulating what matters to them (pain points), you need a way to communicate your message. You could simply run an ad campaign and hope for the best, but creating appealing content assets is a much stronger strategy.

Why? To treat complex topic simply, content marketing works because it focuses on giving rather than selling. Instead of immediately asking prospects to buy your product or learn about your company, your initial call to action should focus on sharing valuable expertise, insights, and information. This can help you establish awareness, gain credibility, and drive engagement—all essential steps in the customer journey before you can close a sale.

The content asset(s) you offer can take many forms, including ebooks, white papers, case studies, infographics, toolkits, and video and interactive media. To decide which format to use, give some thought to the material, audience preferences, and perceived value. For complex topics or processes, an infographic, toolkit, or video may help simplify or be a practical resource. On the other hand, more sophisticated buyers may consider a white paper or ebook more appealing.

In every scenario, the key is ensuring that the content asset is relevant, professional, and valuable enough to justify someone's time to download or (ultimately) merit sharing their contact information with you.



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Step 4: Choose the Right Channels



Information overload and advances in media and technology have made the competition for customer attention fiercer than ever. Even with a compelling message and polished presentation, you won't reach your target audiences unless you publish and promote your content via the right channels, in the right way.

Potential content channels include owned, earned, and paid platforms, and in many cases a mix of all three may be ideal. For example, you might publish a blog post on your website, email current contacts, and post to your own social media (owned channels); distribute press releases and do

media interviews (earned channels); and launch paid social media, keyword search, and display ad campaigns (paid channels).

The biggest consideration will likely be which channels your target audience already uses. Ideally, you want to go where the prospects already are and present your message in a way that aligns to their existing habits and expectations. Cost and competition are also key considerations. Spending a great deal to fight for a small share of a crowded and heavily contested arena may be tempting if that's where your prospects play, but it could be more cost-effective and impactful to explore more innovative approaches.



Step 5: Track Engagement



Building pipeline starts with building relationships. Before a prospect will consider buying from you, you need to gain their attention and earn their trust. Sharing relevant, valuable content (see steps 3-4) can help raise awareness and establish credibility, but how will you know if it's working?

It's critical to encourage and track engagement so you can see when and how prospects are consuming your content. You can encourage engagement by making it easy to click through an email to a landing page, access related content after reading an article, request a demo on product information pages, etc.

Tracking engagement is all about monitoring and measuring this activity, so you know who is clicking on what and when.

Basic engagement tracking metrics are often integrated with any digital communication. For example, your email platform likely offer ready access to measures like opens, clicks, click-to-open rates, bounces, unsubscribes, and more. Visitor activity on landing pages or websites is typically trackable through tools included in your CMS (e.g., HubSpot, WordPress, Wix, SquareSpace), but it's also valuable to add Google Analytics and take advantage of the detailed metrics and reporting they offer.



Step 6: Score Leads

The point of measuring engagement is to know when it makes sense to transition from Marketing to Sales. Once prospects demonstrate enough interest and/or signal that they may be open to a purchase, it's time to alert Sales so they can reach out.

Lead scoring makes this process quantifiable by assigning point values to key engagement activities, such as opening an email, clicking a link, downloading a piece of content, spending a certain amount of time on your website, etc. Once these points add up to a designated level (whether immediately or over the course of weeks or months), a prospect is considered a Marketing Qualified Lead (MQL) and ready for handoff to Sales. Establishing an effective lead scoring model depends on the kinds of engagement opportunities you can offer and measure, as well as what they suggest about an individual's interest and intentions.

Clicking on a social post or display ad may signal idle curiosity or early exploration. Downloading an ebook, case study, or infographic implies more significant interest, as does spending a lot of time on multiple website pages or viewing several videos. Taking repeated action over time (e.g., click through multiple emails or return to the website several times) or attending a webinar or event could mean a prospect is seriously considering your company or offerings.



In general, there is no fixed timeframe or rigid path for a customer journey, and lead scoring accounts for this variability. A prospect who fits your ideal customer profile (ICP) and engages strongly on their first visit could score up and become an MQL right away.

Someone who is a less obvious prospect and is just beginning to explore options may take more time to engage and ultimately demonstrate that they're worth the attention of your Sales team.



Step 7: Automate and Scale



Modern marketing is powered by specialized technology. To reach and engage your target audiences effectively, you need to have the right tools in your tech stack and use them well. This can save you time and effort, increase your reach and impact, and allow you to clearly quantify the results of your programs.

The foundation of a comprehensive demand generation program is a good Marketing Automation Platform (MAP). This essential, powerful resource lets you easily manage outbound email campaigns, digital ad campaigns, paid social promotions; monitor prospect activity and engagement across platforms; and hand off leads to sales at the ideal moment.

You can also automate much of this activity, enabling you to build efficiently and then easily scale as needed to encompass new

markets, audiences, platforms, campaigns, journeys, and more.

If you don't already have—or aren't taking full advantage of—a MAP, options to get started or improve results abound. Leading platforms like HubSpot, Marketo, Pardot, and Eloqua (among many others) often offer free or reduced-costs trials, as well as a range of pricing tiers.

Even better, these solution providers are often a great source of educational and on-the-job resources, including videos, ebooks, worksheets, and training and certification courses.

Wherever you may be in your journey with marketing automation, you can likely find information and solutions to support your current needs and enable rapid progress.



Step 8: Measure and Report

A modern MAP can offer benefits beyond efficiency and scalability. From a marketing leadership perspective, sophisticated reporting and analytics capabilities may be even more valuable. No longer limited to qualitative assessment and inferred measurement, today's marketing via digital channels can generate a wealth of detailed data. Within your MAP, you should have the ability to monitor, measure, and optimize key success metrics across the board.

In addition to core digital marketing metrics like asset and campaign performance, conversion rates, and cost per lead / acquisition (CPL / CPA), you can configure your MAP to support measurement of vital pipeline metrics. Example including total and weighted pipeline, pipeline velocity and run rate, and volume and conversion across the sales funnel (MQL, SAL, SQL, etc.).

Having these numbers will clarify the true business impact of the Marketing function, as well as the value of investing in marketing programs. With lead attribution and activity tracking, determining Marketing's contributions to pipeline—and, ultimately, revenue—becomes much more straightforward. Depending on how successful specific programs or channels are, the numbers could make a strong case for significantly greater investment in marketing to help drive additional pipeline or accelerate growth.





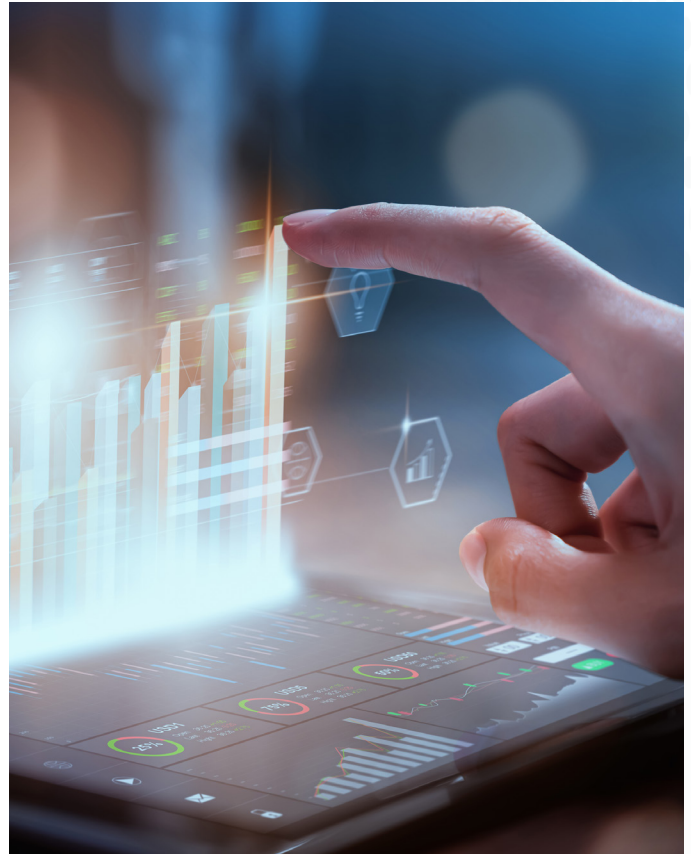
Step 9: Test and Optimize

While a quality marketing automation platform (MAP) can help you save time, increase reach, and clearly measure performance, to truly maximize the impact of your demand gen program, you'll need to get hands-on again. How? By regularly trying new things and comparing results.

This process of ongoing testing and continual improvement is the key to optimizing outcomes. A classic example is A-B testing of email elements like subject lines, headlines, or calls to action (CTAs). By trying different opening messages, you may find that one nudges up your open rate or engagement time. Similarly, swapping out a text link CTA for a colorful new button may drive more click-throughs.

Keep in mind that even incremental improvement can have a profound impact at scale. A 0.5% increase in clicks may seem minor, but if your email list includes 5,000 prospects, that could mean 25 more potential customers engaging with your content and moving one step closer to a sale.

This same mindset and methodology apply at a macro level as well. Would your content perform better packaged as an ebook, or possibly a video or infographic? Do prospects stay interested over an eight-touch nurture journey, or would condensing your messaging to six emails increase engagement? Does gating certain assets reduce lead volume, or will you see more MQLs because more



people self-qualify sooner, making the prospects you do target more likely to convert?

Over time, regular testing and optimization can have a powerful cumulative effect. Once you've done the hard work of setting up your demand gen engine, fine tuning it for optimal performance can help you go well beyond performance targets to deliver pipeline and revenue numbers that are off the charts.



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Take the Next (First) Step

If you've enjoyed this ebook and found its breakdown of the nine steps to achieve pipeline growth helpful, please feel free to recommend it to others by sharing this link:
www.mktgen.com/9steps.

If you're ready to take the next step and change marketing from a cost center to a growth driver in your organization, we'd love to chat. Reach out for a free consultation and initial strategy recommendations today.

*"This new program is really a **game-changer** for us, and it will be a **key driver** toward meeting our aggressive growth targets. Making this much progress in such a short time has been very important for me as an incoming CMO, especially while addressing team and technology gaps—and **positioning our brand for success** at a pivotal moment."*

Darcy Kurtz
CMO, BentoBox