

Moving From MQLs and SQLs to Conversation-Ready Leads

Thursday, May 19, 2022 - Written by: [Jeff Kalter](#)



Since James Oldroyd's 2007 Lead Response Management Study, we've known that speed counts.

The difference between a sales rep successfully connecting or not with a lead can come down to minutes. Oldroyd reported that reps who responded within five minutes were 100 times more likely to be successful.

Today, given expectations for instant gratification and the advent of chat, responsiveness is more critical than ever. So why do we cling to a lead qualification process that can leave lead inquiries waiting for 24 hours or more?

Sales reps need to strike while the iron is hot—and the inquiry is burning on a prospective buyer's mind. It's time to rethink the MQL (marketing qualification lead) and SQL (sales qualified lead) model and consider something that better serves both buyer and seller—the conversations-ready lead.

The problem is the demand gen model itself, which forces marketing to top-load the sales funnel, then spend too long qualifying the leads. Many of those who contact the company fail to receive the answers they need and those who were likely to make a purchase have gone cold by the time someone reaches out to them.

Now we need to convince marketing that it's time for something new. Their love for the MQL likely stems less from its success as a sales tool and more because it's a convenient KPI they can use to measure their performance.

But the time is right for something better—a lead generation process that puts the focus on what counts:

- Sales revenue
- Responsiveness
- Customer experience

It's time for conversation-ready leads and a marketing team that expedites connections between buyers and sales reps.

What's Wrong with the Lead Funnel Model?

The problem with the lead funnel and MQLs/SQLs is:

- In many cases, sales reps all but ignore “qualified” leads because they believe that by the time they get them, they are cold with a small chance of conversion.
- Similarly, qualifying and lead scoring before passing the lead along to a rep can slow response to a customer's inquiry so much that they've either forgotten the question or gone elsewhere for an answer. How's that for customer experience?

- Finally, the fact that marketing can rack up leads—any leads— isn't a good metric for measuring performance. **The focus should be on getting leads into the hands of sales reps while they are still hot** and have a higher chance of conversion. In other words, marketing, like sales, needs to be more closely tied to revenue.

And then there's the reality of buyers. Just because someone raises their hand by filling out an online form for a white paper, attending a webinar or watching a video doesn't mean they are ready to buy (or even seriously considering a purchase).

It's estimated that only about 3% of your market is actively looking to buy. Another 7% may recognize that they have a need and intend to buy soon. The remaining 90% either don't have a burning need to buy, don't think they have a need or don't care about your company.

With the lead funnel, too much energy is spent on the preliminaries of lead qualification and scoring when a simple conversation, whether digital or human-to-human, would satisfy the customer. In the few seconds it would take to initiate a conversation:

- Customers could be helped along their buying journey and feel good about the responsiveness and experience working with your company. They may not be ready to buy now but might come back later.
- Reps could initiate engagement more quickly, answer the question and suggest a more formal sales meeting if buyer intent is high.
- And thanks to cloud technology, data access and bandwidth, marketing can still qualify and score the lead—in the background and in real time.

It's important to keep the market of potential buyers informed and thinking about your company because they could become active buyers. But that's what websites, videos, emails and social media are for. Marketing should cultivate and nurture future buyers but not waste sales reps' time by passing these people along as leads.

It's time to change the focus to conversations.

It's All About Conversations

The first step is to change the mindset of marketing. Instead of focusing on processing leads, getting them qualified and into the sales funnel, marketing needs to put the prospective customer's needs first.

A conversation-ready lead has urgency—they want something, and they want it now. It's marketing's job to identify the nature of the inquiry and fulfill it. In a recent State of Conversational Marketing report, Drift found that 46% of respondents surveyed said they expected a chat response within five seconds or less.

Here's how that process might go:

1. An account-based marketing team will work with sales to identify the ideal customer profile (ICP) and align their efforts to create campaigns and content to attract accounts that match the ICP.
2. The company uses technology, such as live chat or AI-enhanced chatbots and marketing automation that can link to firmographic databases and help qualify a lead in real time.
3. Marketing assigns someone to monitor the chat and identify leads that are conversation-ready. A rules-based system can handle many chat inquiries by directing a person to specific content, an online demo or an FAQ page with answers to simple questions. But when a chat monitor sees a person asking to talk with a rep or not getting satisfactory answers, the monitor can intercede on the lead's behalf and facilitate the connection.
4. If the person is already a customer, the technology should be able to identify their sales rep. If the lead is new, the chat monitor can put them in touch with a rep while continuing to pull together qualifying data in real time and all in the background. Meanwhile, the lead's immediate needs are met.
5. The sales reps should know how to ask the right questions to help the qualification process. For instance, these questions should help determine the problem or opportunity, the buying cycle and where the lead is in the buying journey.
6. Finally, as the conversation is closing, the sales rep can invite the lead to schedule a sales meeting/call and initiate the sales process.

When marketing and sales are focused on conversation-ready leads, the customer's sense of urgency is met. Questions are answered. Satisfaction is high, and lead qualification is underway without hassling a prospective buyer up front when all they want is a simple question answered.

With conversation-ready leads, sales can act while the question is burning. Their conversion rate rises and marketing's performance can be tied directly to sales and revenue.

Realistically, it will take some work to move away from the old MQL model, but the outcome is worth it when buyers and sellers win.

Call us at +1 813-320-0500 (US) or +39 06 978446 60 (EMEA) or contact us online for help meeting your sales goals.

Published in

[Lead Qualification](#)