

How to Avoid the Black Hole of Sales Leads

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To quote physicist Brian Greene: “Black holes, we all know, are these regions where if an object falls in, it can't get out, but the puzzle that many struggled with over the decades is, what happens to the information that an object contains when it falls into a black hole. Is it simply lost?”

Not “simply lost,” but lost forever...at least to you.

Just as a black hole’s gravitational force sucks in all matter and light, so too **in the B2B universe, our prospective sales disappear when we pass volumes of unqualified leads along to the sales force.** Even more likely, they may end up in another dimension and maybe another universe...one controlled by your competition.

Unqualified Leads Seldom Convert

Let me put the metaphors aside for a minute and focus on something a little more concrete. In its 2012 *B2B Benchmark Report*, researchers at MarketingSherpa found that 73 percent of leads are unqualified when handed off to sales and will not readily convert into business. In spite of this, 61 percent of marketers pass all leads (qualified or unqualified) directly on to sales.

Is it any wonder then that salespeople seldom follow up on marketing's leads? As former Gartner researcher Claudio Marcus documented in his report, "*Re-engineering Lead Management*:"... more than 70 percent of leads are never acted on—typically because they do not reach the right person or organization at the right time."

Your salespeople's primary objective is sales. ABC (Always Be Closing) is practically written into their DNA. And qualified leads are the means to that objective. A recent Forrester Research study confirms that companies that actively qualify and nurture leads will have 50 percent more prospects that are "sales-ready," and their cost-per-lead will be 33% lower.

So you can expect that your best salespeople will ignore unqualified marketing leads and cultivate their own— based on their years of experience and expertise. Meanwhile, the people who have provided their names, email addresses, and phone numbers to your company in good faith, who may not be sales-ready today, remain ignored. This lack of attention can sour potential customers on you and your products and services...permanently.

Remember That Quality Trumps Quantity

The adage reads, "Value is in the Worth, Not the Number," and it comes from Aesop's Fable, *The Lioness*. Today, we often just say "Quality over Quantity," and it's the perfect maxim for developing qualified sales leads. The fact is, finding and qualifying 10 hot leads in every 100 is a way to:

1. Encourage your sales force to follow up on 100 percent of the leads you pass along and, ultimately
2. Close more business

But since sales people likely will not qualify any unqualified leads you're passing along today, you need another resource to do the job, and it's the perfect task for telemarketing. Whether your lead generation is inbound, outbound, or both, a professional and well-trained telemarketing team is invaluable.

If lead qualification is a new step for you, it's time to involve your sales force in the process of coming up with the right set of lead qualifiers. You'll benefit by alerting them to this important change in your lead generation program and gain their buy-in – both of which are critical. Here are a few ideas to get you started as marketing and sales work together to develop a list of key qualifiers:

1. Measure each prospect's degree of interest in your products and/or services.
2. Determine if your products and/or services are a good match for the prospect.
3. Identify when the prospect will be most likely to buy.
4. Verify that the prospect has an appropriate budget.
5. Determine if the prospect is a decision maker with buying authority.

You'll Catch More Worms With This One

As spring tries valiantly to push through and make the winter of 2013-2014 a bleak but distant memory, I see a solitary Robin pecking at a bare but still-brown patch of grass. I'm reminded the proverb: "The early bird catches the worm." While I'm not sure that this brave little Robin is having great success today, as the ground is still frozen, this saying is a powerful metaphor for the need to move quickly on all leads. Don't let them grow cold.

And here's the proof: Researchers at South Korea's Sungkyunkwan University found and reported in the March 2011 issue of *Harvard Business Review* that, "Firms that tried to contact potential customers within an hour of receiving a query were nearly seven times as likely to qualify the lead." Respond quickly, and you'll be in rarified company as only 37 percent of the 2,241 U.S. businesses audited for this study respond within the first hour.

So don't put off until tomorrow ... well, you know how the saying goes. Put your telemarketing company

to work on lead qualification now. Let them do the work your salespeople are reluctant to do by finding the value among your leads and keeping your best prospects warm and well nurtured until your salespeople can work their magic.

For more information download our FREE e-book: “Bridge the Divide Between Sales and Marketing.”

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[Lead Qualification](#)