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DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO B2B LEAD NURTURING

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SUMMARY

Let's face it: there are still some B2B marketers out there who focus their lead nurturing on helping the business, rather than the client. In other words, they design cadences aiming to speed up sales, rather than effectively building a long-term relationship.

Nurturing leads and providing value over a longer sales cycle, which can last up to a year or more in some B2B industries, presents a formidable challenge to organizations looking to build lasting relationships that will generate long-term revenue and word-of-mouth referrals.

This definitive guide explores how to implement a sophisticated lead nurturing strategy in only five steps and also features an actionable playbook to guide the entire B2B sales cycle and lead process.

WHAT IS THE DEFINITION OF LEAD NURTURING?

In B2B, the goal of lead nurturing is to develop a relationship that helps to drive conversions by motivating them to buy. And while this mindset is correct and time-tested, we believe a more beneficial overlook of nurture is that of forming strong, long-lasting bonds with prospective clients, even after they have made a purchase.

This is essential for building the trust necessary for facilitating sales. Why? The more your prospects trust you, the more they'll advocate for your brand and your products. Therefore, selling becomes a consequence of quality content and persuasion, rather than the pure salespersonship of your SDR team or account executives.

With the surge in remote work worldwide and B2B buyers taking more time to evaluate the multitude of options available to them, often with team members in different countries and across time zones, it becomes ever more important to cut through the noise by crafting nurturing strategies that exude trust.

HOW TO CREATE A B2B LEAD NURTURING STRATEGY

It can be daunting to craft an entire lead nurturing process from scratch, however, keep in mind that effective lead nurturing comes from understanding the pain points and knowledge gaps of your audience.

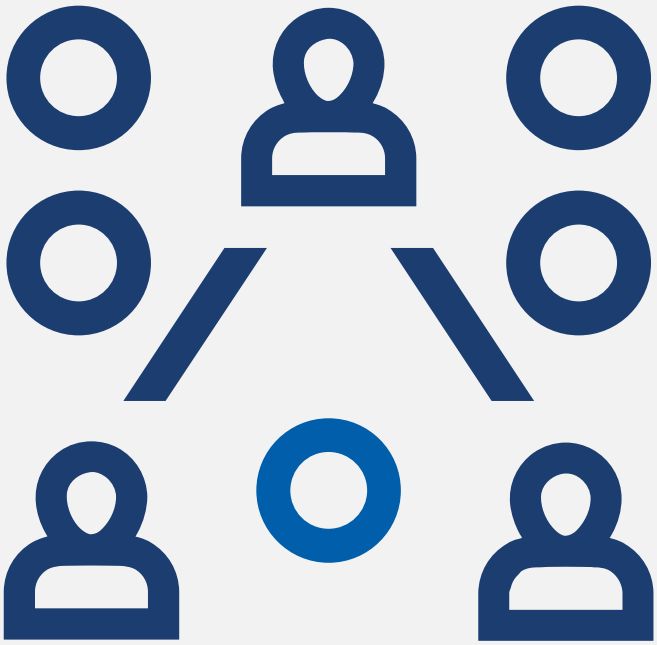
Below you will learn a simple five-step framework to create a lead nurturing strategy that will inform prospects and develop strong bonds until they feel ready to buy.

#1 Have an open conversation with leads and clients

Nurturing strives to form a relationship and build trust. And what better way to do that than addressing concerns and providing useful information?

Before you start developing your lead nurturing content and sales pitches, speak with your audience. Book meetings with loyal clients, comment on LinkedIn posts, or conduct surveys. Direct feedback with potential leads and existing clients can allow you to glean invaluable insights to help build your nurturing and overall lead engagement strategy.

Also, if you have an SEO expert in your company (or know a freelancer), search intent can help you identify the most common pain points your audience is facing that you can later address in your lead nurturing campaigns.



Create a battle card for your accounts

Particularly for account based marketing, a battle card works as a cheat sheet to inform your lead strategy and messaging. In the case of launching a programmatic campaign, this technique still works but is more similar to the conventional buyer persona.

In this battle card, you should research and include the following information on your lead:

- What is the history of their company?
- What is their current job?
- What are their pain points and goals?
- What topics do they share most on social media?
- What pages do they follow on social media?
- What are their main hobbies?
- Are they in the buying committee? If not, who are its members?

Answering these questions will help you identify touchpoints to break the ice and start a friendly conversation. It is possible to extract the social media data necessary for this battle card automatically using Zapier and Phantombuster, but the rest will require some homework on your part.

Even so, especially for accounts that are fully aligned with your Ideal Client Profile (ICP), this effort is worth the investment for a more convincing pitch and lead nurturing campaign.

#2 Develop strategies and assets for the identified obstacles

Once you know what is preventing your leads from achieving the success they desire, it is time to offer content that can tear those barricades down.

Your messaging should be tailored to showcase you and your company as a valuable source of information, someone who has experience solving problems and knows how to deal with obstacles. Be sure to convey a personal tone and genuine interest in helping prospective clients in your email nurture campaign and other outreach tactics, such as LinkedIn and cold calls.

When it comes to content creation, produce materials with actionable advice and data specific to the needs of your leads and that can help them overcome challenges. If, for example, your prospective client needs to sell a product that is taking up factory inventory, provide a guide to sell stock sitting on the shelves. This boosts your lead nurturing campaign by demonstrating your investment in spending time getting to know them and their pain points, as well as a valuable source of ideas and expertise.

Keep in mind that leads usually share with their buying committee the content you produce, so make sure it stands up in quality as a positive brand awareness tool. Content shared from the start can make (or break) your chances of a successful deal later on.

LEARN HOW TO IMPLEMENT A LEAD GENERATION STRATEGY IN 5 STEPS →

#3 Fill in knowledge gaps

In the previous section, we covered how helping leads to overcome challenges can benefit lead nurturing and the overall path to a sale. However, sometimes, your prospective client has a knowledge gap they need to address—and for the marketer this gap can be problematic to assess.

Your prospective clients may tell you what they need or want to learn, or they can be vague, making it more challenging to identify knowledge gaps yourself.

Industry-wide surveys are an option to assess knowledge, but respondents can answer with bias, so be sure to scrutinize these insights and take them with a grain of salt. However, SEO audits and buyer intent analysis can reveal the most common queries and visited webpages, which can signal the kind of information your prospective clients are looking for.

Use these inputs to tailor a strategy that fills in these gaps on a one-to-one basis (if you are following an account based marketing strategy) or on a one-to-many level for email nurturing campaigns, social media, and programmatic ads.

Providing your leads with valuable educational opportunities targeted at their needs positions you and your brand as an industry expert. This boosts your brand image and lead nurturing campaign, as well as empowers prospective clients to make a well-informed purchasing decision in the next step.

#4 Develop personalized approaches for a sale

At this stage, mobilize your sales teams and make the most of the interest you have curated. Marketing teams should develop and arm your sales development representatives (SDR) with assets and copy to make that pitch to the buying committee memorable.

Do a deep dive and consider the knowledge gaps they filled with your content and any obstacles that remain. Based upon that, pick one insight as an ice-breaker for your lead nurturing emails.

Here are some examples:

Hi [first name], I've been researching [topic of interest] at my company.
I can send you my data if you are interested.

[First name], I am a specialist in [topic of interest] at [company name].
I can help you with [challenge] in a free consultation.

Hello [first name], do you need help with [challenge]? I have helped [client X] and [client Y] to [result]. Book a free 30-minute call and I'll go over the details.

Hi [First name], curious, how are you [team] solving [problem] to ensure they are getting [solution]? We've helped [company name] solve [problem] and were wondering if you'd be interested in [content] that can guide you through the same process. May I send it to you?

Done correctly, this type of outreach can spark curiosity by creating an open loop. Your SDR team can later funnel out who is interested in your solutions from those who need to be nurtured a bit longer based on their response.

#5 Keep nurturing, even if you get a sale

Nurturing doesn't end with a sale, especially in B2B.

To avoid churn and ensure client success, the first step is to ensure a seamless and comprehensive onboarding process. Make yourself available and top-of-mind with regular, relevant content drips. This can be achieved with lead nurturing emails such as newsletters. These share new and existing content of interest, as well as regular updates, news, and promotions.

Continuing to provide your clients with value well after a sale will help your brand maintain relevance and gain recurrent revenue. Your client satisfaction will also be higher, which will lead to better social proof, and create a virtuous word-of-mouth marketing cycle with earned media. This boosts brand awareness and adds credibility that can facilitate the lead generation process.

FOLLOW THESE 8 STEPS FOR EFFECTIVE LEAD NURTURING →

B2B LEAD NURTURING PLAYBOOK FOR A 6-MONTH SALES CYCLE

Below is an actionable playbook you can use to guide your lead nurturing campaign as you nurture leads over a 6-month sales cycle.

In B2B, sales cycles are usually longer than a year, but the playbook below can be tweaked to cater to more months by simply extending the period of each step.

This playbook will help you develop a game plan that resonates with leads beyond simply following the sales funnel, by helping them overcome their challenges faster and boosting your lead generation process.

Month #1

In the first month, you'll want to focus on crafting your cadences and scripts for the entire sales cycle. This includes cadences via email and social media (such as LinkedIn).

In regards to scripts, write your messages for at least the first, second, and third touch. You can add more later as you get to know their buying committee and its challenges.

Your scripts should cater to social messaging and voicemail. If you are going to cold call, create a separate script and cadence just for that, as the messaging must be crisp to resonate on the phone. While creating a script is important, practice improvisation and objection handling. Your call should strike the balance between hitting the marks and sounding natural.

In this step, you should also decide which steps in your cadences may be automated and which you will complete manually depending on triggers uncovered with your nurturing strategies and the research you've performed to date. Manual cadences can be more effective, yet require more time on your end for personalization, so choose wisely.

After all this preparation, it is time to launch your cadences and test your scripts with your prospects.

Month #2

In the second month, you need to measure the engagement from the cadences and scripts. If engagement is low across the board, either you are nurturing the wrong audience or your content is irrelevant. In this case, return to the previous step and adjust your content and/or targeting.

If, however, only some leads are not engaged, then you need to tweak your content for their liking. Evaluate the scale of the edits necessary based on the knowledge of your prospects gathered with market segmentation.

Once you have done your edits, continue cadences and follow your scripts as usual for the second month. After all, lead nurturing emails and calls can take time to perfect so that they resonate with their target audience.

If you haven't hit any barriers in your lead nurturing by the end of the second month, it's time to experiment and expand your channel or content reach with further segmentation, A/B testing, channel diversity, etc.

Month #3

In the third month, it's important to remember that the buyer's journey is not linear—and you should evaluate each lead's content consumption and web searches to check how far they are in their brand discovery.

Lead scoring can help determine this automatically with a points system. Although following lead scoring best practices is a must, you should make the final call based on your interactions with the lead on whether they are ready for a more sales-focused conversation. If possible, evaluating engagement across the buying committee makes for a clearer picture of the buyer's journey throughout the target organization.

You can test the waters by sending a message with content that features the benefits of your solution, or even case studies with proof of the results you deliver. If the prospect is receptive, that's a sign they've moved down further in the sales funnel and may be (soon) ready for your sales team.

Month #4

The fourth month in, you will know who is sales-ready and who, according to the sales funnel methodology, is stuck in the middle stage of the nurturing process. Although lack of progress can be frustrating, it is normal for leads to stay idle in this stage and you should not force them to advance quicker than they can (however, there is a tactful way to speed up lead nurturing).

Nurture the leads that are idle in the consideration phase with content that helps them decide in your favor by proving the value of your brand, such as analyst reports, in-depth guides, comparison charts, and testimonials.

Remember this must all seem natural, so time your touchpoints carefully. You cannot contact your prospective clients out of the blue with a testimonial and expect engagement. Stay in touch over a longer period of time and find the right timing for these touches.

Identify the buying committee of leads that are more prone to making a purchase and conduct B2B psychographic research on its members. This will provide data to personalize your pitch and make a more convincing deal that resonates with their emotional triggers.

Month #5

Most SaaS companies will see a deal at around this time in the nurturing process. If no deal has been made yet, more nurturing or relationship building may be required—or perhaps you've outreached at a bad time for your prospective client. If you did build a productive relationship with your leads, which is certainly something we would expect, encourage them to introduce you to their buying committee in a no-obligation call to talk about their challenges and your solutions.

Continue to drip content to these leads, such as thought leadership, product updates, and even industry-wide news in email newsletters that you believe could be useful for them. By making yourself available, you'll remain top-of-mind and ready for sales when the time is right.

Remember that even this late into the nurture, you still need to be conversational and avoid sounding too salesy. So even when booking meetings and showcasing your solutions, think of yourself as a sherpa helping your prospective clients on their path, rather than a salesperson or a business development representative (BDR).

For the leads that are idle in the middle phase, you can split them into two separate cadences depending on their engagement levels:

- **Leads that continue to engage, but aren't sales-ready:** Continue to nurture with thought leadership, webinars, videos, and articles. In essence, anything that proves brand value will likely move the needle of these prospects towards a buying stage.
- **Leads that don't engage at all:** These leads should be placed on an automated long-term lead nurturing track, which you can further scrutinize for engagement (but don't overdo your outreach or you will risk unsubscribes). Educational content works best for these leads and if they engage, then move them to your prime cadence.

Month #6

As the end of the nurturing cycle looms, despite the pressure to close the deal—timing, especially in the last month, is of the essence to make sure the deal works in your favor.

As buying committees in B2B consist of members with different schedules and priorities, catering to all of them can be challenging. Do your best to abide by their preferences based on the data you've gathered from previous interactions.

In the last month of your cadence, you should also re-evaluate all the data you compiled on engagement and make final adjustments to the content, your overall nurturing stream, and your target audience. This is crucial so you can reboot this six-month sales cycle with new leads and obtain better results.

To summarize, at the end of the cadence you should facilitate sales by making yourself available and catering to the preferences of your leads.

THE EVER-EVOLVING B2B LANDSCAPE CONTINUES TO PRESENT UNIQUE CHALLENGES TO MARKETERS.

Read Outlook 2022 to stay ahead of trends in lead nurturing and buyer enablement ⟶

LEAD NURTURING BEST PRACTICES

Now, we will explore best practices to keep in mind when creating your nurturing campaigns.

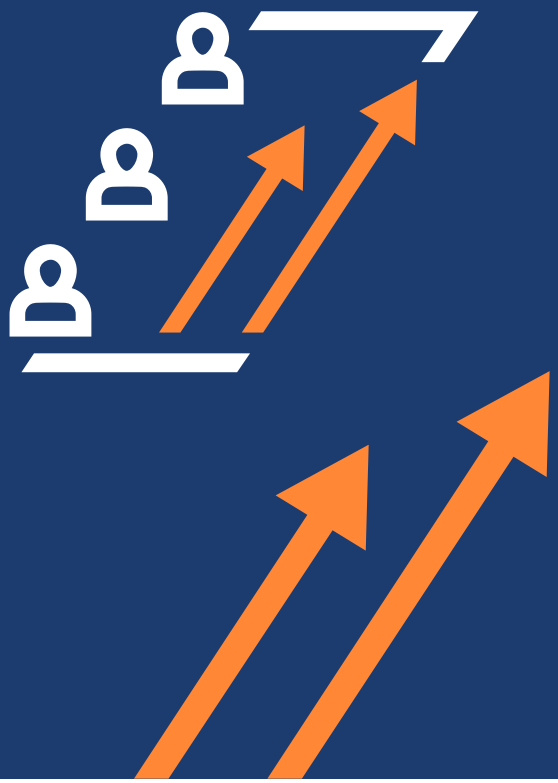
Think of these best practices as recommendations rather than strict rules for effective lead nurturing in most B2B verticals.

#1 Align marketing and sales teams

Effective lead nurture depends on both sales and marketing staying up-to-date by communicating and creating campaigns together.

Siloed departments can be a huge disadvantage to high-growth organizations. Make sure both marketing and sales teams can collect and analyze the same data, are measured on common KPIs, as well as collaborate on projects.

A sales-marketing summit once a quarter can be extraordinarily helpful to keep everyone on the same page. You can also book meetings every week or two to discuss your lead nurturing strategy, assess the results, and discuss any necessary changes. All the adjustments we outlined in the playbook above become much easier and more efficient with aligned sales and marketing teams.

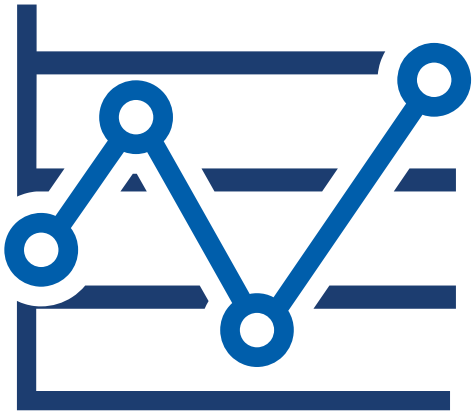


#2 Create data-driven and personalized cadences

Your cadences should be crafted based on buyer intent, search intent, and segmentation analysis to drive up the engagement of your leads.

Adding more personalization to your outreach distinguishes it from the other offers and adverts your leads see daily and makes your messaging more likely to resonate with them. Even with an automated cadence, make sure to personalize your messaging and fuel it with data that is helpful to your leads and does not sound generic.

#3 Monitor touchpoints



Every touchpoint matters. Evaluate what content leads interact with and get granular with the data such as time on page, clicks, and watch time.

This will help you define the quality of these touchpoints and assess with further clarity how engaged the leads are with your brand. Adapt your outreach based on this input and switch underperforming content for what works best.

#4 Be zealous with re-engagement campaigns

Remarketing has a bad reputation with B2C audiences for a good reason, and that malaise is felt by B2B leads, too. It's that feeling of being "followed" with display ads wherever you go.

Evaluate if you should pick contextual or audience targeting for your remarketing campaigns and strive to provide value. Promoting tools, reports, and educational content works better than straight-out product ads for remarketing.

#5 Always adopt a conversational tone in your outreach

Lead nurturing must be conversational, not salesy, and you must always focus on developing relationships rather than closing deals. With this approach, you'll gain trust and be of higher value to your prospective clients as an expert and solution provider.

Focus on talking with leads, not on selling.

CONCLUSION

Lead nurturing is about developing trust with your audience over time, by staying top-of-mind with high-quality content and approachable sales teams. By focusing on long-term value, your brand benefits by association with the quality of your marketing.

Instead of focusing on pipeline generation and measuring engagement to quickly advance leads down the sales funnel, the goal of lead nurturing is to create a win-win relationship for both parties.

To create a lead nurturing strategy that is truly effective, you must be hyper knowledgeable of your audience, analyze data on their preferences, and deliver content that helps them overcome their professional challenges.

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