Beginner's Guide to Inbound Lead Generation

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Introduction

It's a well known fact that no one enjoys their day being interrupted by intrusive cold callers and their inboxes being inundated with irrelevant spam, so why would you try this on your potential customers? This idea is exactly why we're here to discuss Inbound Lead Generation, a solution that can help generate prospects without annoying them in the process.

This beginner's guide will cover what online lead generation is and why you need it, how to qualify someone as a lead, and ultimately, why inbound lead generation is far more effective than buying leads.

What is a lead?

A lead is a person who has indicated interest in your company's product or service in some way, shape, or form. As a lead, you'd hear from a business or organisation which you've already opened communication with, instead of getting a random cold call or email from a company who had bought your contact information.

For example, maybe you took an online survey to learn more about a product or service. If you got an email from the company that hosted the survey on their website about how they could help with an issue you highlighted on the survey, it is far less intrusive and irrelevant than if they'd just called you out of the blue with zero prior knowledge of your wants, needs and challenges. Further from this, the information the company collected about you from your survey responses helps to personalise that opening communication to address your existing problems.
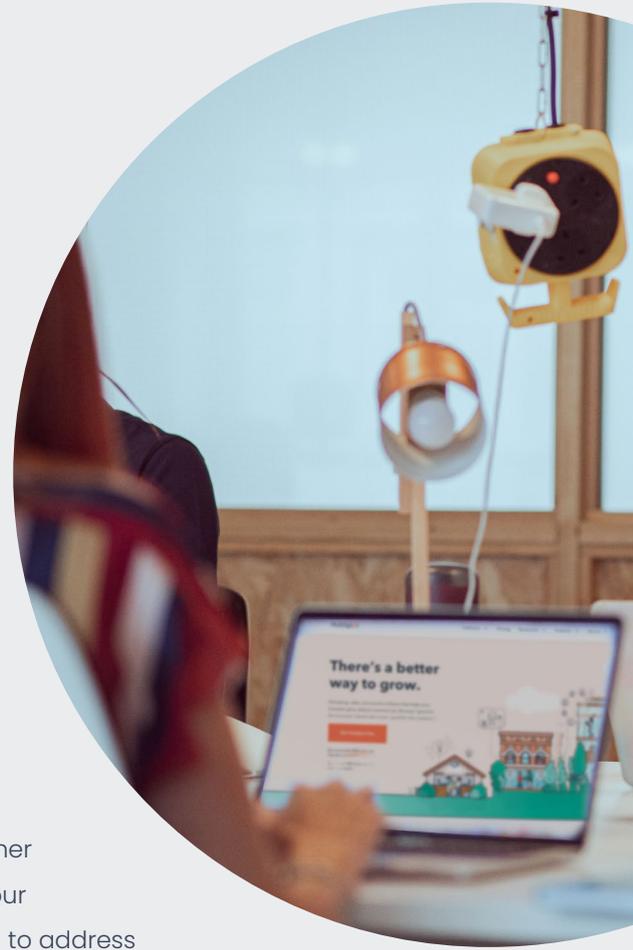
What is lead generation?

Lead generation is the process of attracting and converting strangers and prospects into someone who has indicated interest in your company's product or service. Some examples of lead generators are job applications, blog posts, coupons, live events, and online content.

As marketers for our business, we need to work on finding unique ways to attract people to our business. You want to offer them enough good content to get them naturally interested in the company so they eventually warm to the brand so much, they want to hear from us! It is ultimately a way of warming up potential customers to your business and getting them on the path to eventually purchasing from you.

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How are leads generated?

Now we have an understanding of how lead generation fits into the inbound marketing methodology, let's talk about the steps of the lead generation process.

1. First, a visitor discovers your business through one of your marketing channels, such as your website, blog, or social media page.

2. That visitor will then click on your call-to-action (CTA) — an image, button, or message that encourages website visitors to take some sort of action.

3. The CTA takes your visitor to a landing page. A web page designed to capture lead information in exchange for an offer.

4. An offer is content or something of value that's being "offered" to the visitor on the landing page, like an ebook, a course, a trial etc. The offer must have enough value to a visitor to merit providing their personal information in exchange for it.

5. The form on your landing page consists of a series of fields that collect information in exchange for the offer. Forms are typically hosted on landing pages, although they can technically be embedded anywhere on your site.

6. Once a visitor fills this out — voila! — you have a new lead!

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Lead generation marketing

Now you understand how leads are generated, you can now see the importance of making content that directs audiences towards your landing pages. But what channels are available for you to do so?

Content

Typically, you create content to offer visitors useful, free information. You can include CTAs anywhere in your content — inline, bottom-of-post, in the hero, or even on the side panel. The more delighted a visitor is with your content, the more likely they are to click your call-to-action and move onto your landing page.

Email

Email is a great place to reach the people who already know your brand and product or service. It's much easier to ask them to take an action since they've previously subscribed to your list. Make sure to include a compelling CTA to ensure you shine through the recipient's email clutter.

Ads and Retargeting

The sole purpose of an ad is to get people to take action. Otherwise, why spend the money? If you want people to convert, be sure that your landing page and offer match exactly what is promised in the ad, and that the action you want users to take is clear.

Blog

The great thing about using your blog posts to promote an offer is that you can tailor the entire piece to the end goal. So, if your offer is an instructional video on setting up Google Search Console, then you can write a blog post about how to select your marketing metrics, which would make your CTA highly relevant and easy to click.

Social Media

Social media platforms make it easy to guide your followers to take action, from the swipe up option on Instagram stories to Facebook bio links to bitly URLs on Twitter. You can also promote your offerings on your social posts and include a call-to-action in your caption.

Product Trials

Once a prospect is using your product, you can entice them with added offers or resources to encourage them to buy. Another good practice is to include your branding in your free versions so you can also capture other potential customers.

Why buying leads is usually a bad idea

Marketers and sales are desperate to fill their sales funnel, thus being constantly tempted to buy leads. Although it may be much easier and quicker to purchase these lists, as they haven't actually opted in to receiving anything from your company, the messages you send them are unwanted and intrusive. Bottom line is, if the prospect has never been to your website and indicated an interest in you, your products, or your services, then you're interrupting them. This means there's a high chance they could flag your message as spam, which isn't good for business and can jeopardize your relationship with the people who might actually have a need for your business. It's always better and cheaper to generate leads organically.

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How to qualify leads

Let's talk about the ways in which someone can actually show interest in your business. Below are just a few of the many ways in which you could qualify someone as a lead. Each of these examples shows that the amount of collected information used to qualify a lead, as well as the lead level of interest, can vary. Let's assess each scenarios:

Job Application

An individual that fills out an application form is willing to share a lot of personal information because he/she wants to be considered for a position. Filling out that application shows their true interest in the job, therefore qualifying the person as a lead for the company's recruiting team — not marketing or sales teams.

Coupon

Unlike the job application, you probably know very little about someone who has stumbled upon one of your online coupons. But if they find the coupon valuable enough, they may be willing to give you their name and email address in exchange for it. Although it's not a lot of information, it's enough for a business to know that someone has interest in their company.

Content

While the download of a coupon shows an individual has a direct interest in your product or service, content (like an educational ebook or webinar) doesn't. So to truly understand the nature of the person's interest in your business, you'll probably need to collect more information to decide whether the person is interested in your product or service and whether they're a good fit.

These three general examples highlight how lead generation differs from company to company, and from person to person. You'll need to collect enough information to gauge whether someone has a true, valid interest in your product or service. How much information is enough will vary depending on the nature of your business

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Lead scoring

Lead scoring is a way to quantitatively qualify leads. Leads are assigned a numerical value (or score) to determine where they fall on the scale from "interested" to "ready for a sale". The criteria for these actions is dependent on your preferences, but it must be uniform across your marketing and sales department so that everyone is working on the same scale.

A lead's score can be based on actions they've taken, information they've shared, their level of engagement with your brand, or other criteria that your sales team determines. The higher a lead's score, the closer they are to becoming a sales-qualified lead (SQL); one step away from becoming a customer. Lead scoring and its criteria needs to be continuously altered in order to find a formula that works, but once mastered, your lead generation will become customer generation.

Lead generation benchmarks and trends

It's tough to figure out if your lead generation strategy is working if you aren't looking at industry data. More than 900 marketers were surveyed from all different industries in North America and Europe to create a demand generation report with data on website visitors, leads, opportunities, customers, and revenue. You may be surprised to find that:

» 74% of companies that weren't exceeding revenue goals didn't know their visitor, lead, MQL, or sales opportunities numbers.

» Over 70% of companies not achieving their revenue goals generate fewer than 100 leads per month.

» Only 5% generate more than 2,500 leads per month.

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Cost per lead by industry

The media and publishing industries report the lowest cost per lead at $11 to $25. Software, information technology and services, marketing agencies, and financial services companies all report the highest average cost per lead at $51 to $100.

## Leads generated per month by annual revenue

Unsurprisingly, the more revenue a company has, the more leads they generate. The differences are most drastic at the highest and lowest end of the spectrum: 82% of companies with $250,000 or less in annual revenue report generating less than 100 leads per month, whereas only 8% of companies generating $1 billion in annual revenue report less than 100 leads per month.

Leads per month

58% of companies generated 500 leads per month or fewer, and 71% generated 1,000 or fewer. But as we saw previously, the companies having the most success are also the ones generating the most leads.

Lead generation software

It was found that the most successful teams use a formal system to organize and store leads: 46% use Google Docs, 41% use marketing automation software, and 37% use CRM software.

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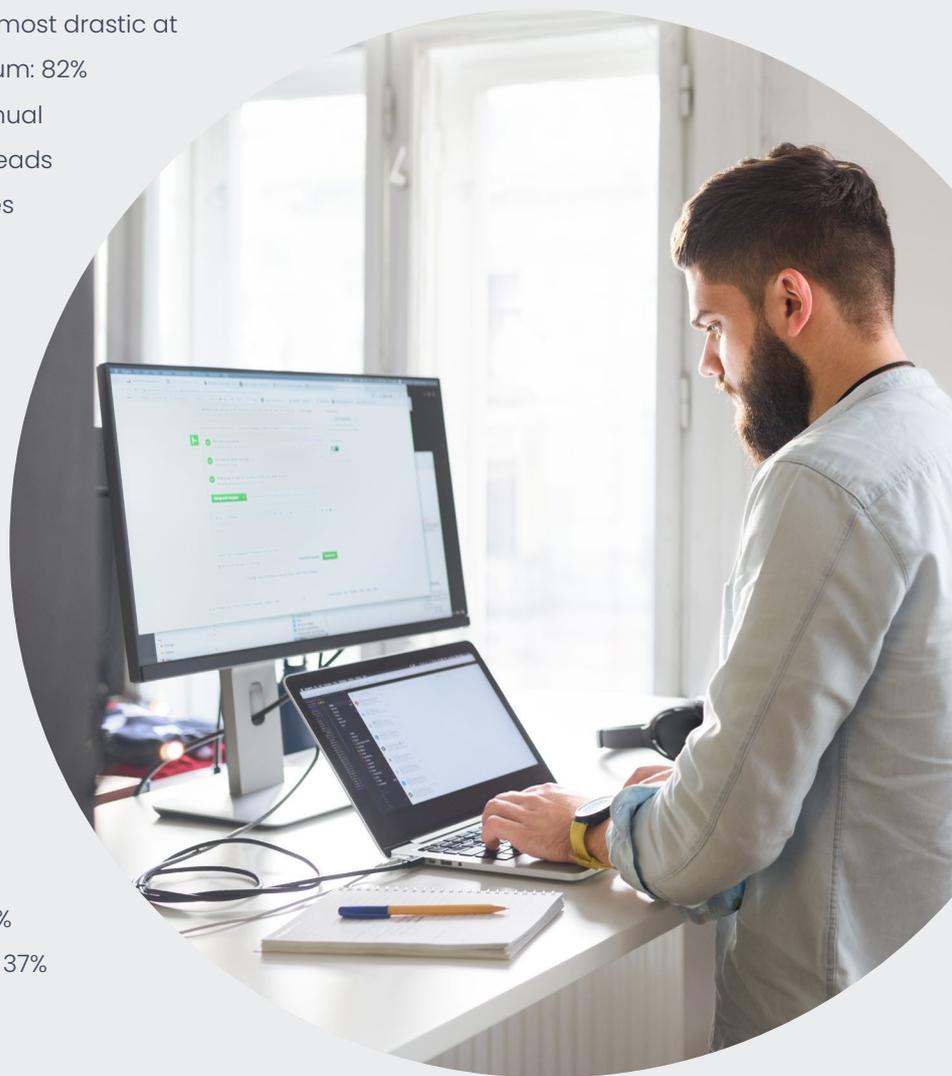
Paid lead generation strategies

Online lead generation encompasses a wide range of tactics, campaigns, and strategies depending on the platform on which you wish to capture leads. Whilst we covered lead capture best practices once you have a visitor on your site, we are still yet to cover how you get them there in the first place. Let's have a look into kinds of online lead generation strategies:

Facebook

Facebook Ads was launched in 2007, its algorithm began to favour accounts that used paid advertising, allowing for a major shift in how businesses used the platform to capture leads. Facebook created Lead Ads and also implemented a feature that lets you put a simple call-to-action button at the top of your Facebook Page, helping you send Facebook followers directly to your website.

Twitter

Twitter has Twitter Lead Gen Cards, which let you generate leads directly within a tweet without having to leave the site. A user's name, email address, and username are automatically pulled into the card, and all they have to do is click "Submit" to become a lead.

Linkedin

LinkedIn has been increasing its stake in the advertising space since its early days. When it comes to lead generation, LinkedIn created Lead Gen Forms, which auto-populate with a user's profile data when they click a CTA, making it easy to capture information.

PPC

When we say pay-per-click (PPC), we're referring to ads on search engine result pages (SERPs). Google gets 3.5 billion searches a day, making it prime real estate for any ad campaign, especially lead gen. The effectiveness of your PPC campaign relies heavily on a seamless user flow, as well as your budget, target keywords, and a few other factors.

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Tips for lead generation campaigns

In any given lead generation campaign, there can be a lot of moving parts, making it difficult to tell which parts are working and which need some fine-tuning. Here are a few tips when building lead gen campaigns:

Use the right tools

As shown in the data previously, the most successful marketing teams use a formal system to organise and store leads. That's why lead generation tools and lead generation software is imperative.

> » **How much do you know about the people visiting your website?**
>
> » **Do you know their names or their email addresses?**
>
> » **How about which pages they visited and how they're navigating around?**
>
> » **What they do before and after filling out a lead conversion form?**

If you don't know the answers to these questions, chances are you're having a hard time connecting with the people who are visiting your site. Here are some lead generation tools that can help you to answer these questions:

CTA Templates

50+ free, customizable call-to-action (CTA) templates in PowerPoint that you can use to create clickable CTA buttons to use on your blog, landing pages, and elsewhere on your site.

Lead Generation Software Tools

A free tool on HubSpot that includes lead capture and contact insights features, will scrape any pre-existing forms you have on your website and add those contacts to your existing contact database. It also lets you create pop-ups, hello bars, or slide-ins called "lead flows" that'll help you turn website visitors into leads immediately.

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Visitor Tracking

Hotjar has a heatmap tool. A virtual tool which creates a color-coded representation of how a user navigates through your site, helping you understand what users want, care about, and do on your site. It records visitors and tells you where they spend the most time on your site.

Create offers across all stages

Not all site visitors are ready to talk to your sales team or see a demo of your product. Someone at the beginning of the buyer's journey might be interested in simply an informational piece like an ebook or a guide, whereas someone who's more familiar with your company and near the bottom of the journey might be more interested in a free trial or demo. On the other hand, If you don't offer anything for visitors who aren't ready to buy, then they may never come back to your website and could risk permanently losing them. Ensure you're creating offers for each phase and offering CTAs for these offers throughout your site.

Personalise

If you want to take personalisation a step further, something that is proven to help boost your conversion rate, try using smart CTAs. Smart CTAs detect where a person is in the buyer's journey, whether they're a new visitor, a lead, or a customer, and display CTAs accordingly. Personalized CTAs convert a whopping 42% more visitors than basic calls-to-action.

Be consistent and deliver on promises

The highest-converting lead gen campaigns are the ones that deliver on what they promise and create a seamless transition from ad to deliverable. Make sure that you're presenting a consistent message throughout the process, providing value to everyone that engages with your lead capture.

Your lead gen campaign should mirror everything else on your website, on your blog, and within the product that you will eventually try to sell. If not, you'll have a difficult time getting your lead to the next lifecycle stage. Your campaign should be about more than just obtaining an email address, it should be about developing a new customer.

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Link CTA to landing page

Don't use CTAs to drive people to your homepage. Even if your CTA is about your brand or product, you should still be sending them to a targeted landing page that's relevant to what they are looking for and includes an opt-in form. If you have the opportunity to use a CTA, send them to a page that will convert them into a lead.

Get sales involved

This is crucial in lead scoring. How will you know what qualifies a lead for sales without knowing if your defined SQLs are sold? Your marketing and sales teams need to be aligned on the definitions and the process of moving a lead from MQL to SQL to opportunity before you even begin to capture leads. Also, be open to evolving your relationship with sales and how you guide leads along your funnel. Your definitions will need to be refined over time; just make sure everyone is involved and up-to-date.

Use social media strategically

Start by adding links directly to the landing pages of high-performing offers within your Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and other social media posts. Tell visitors that you're sending them to a landing page. That way, you're setting expectations.
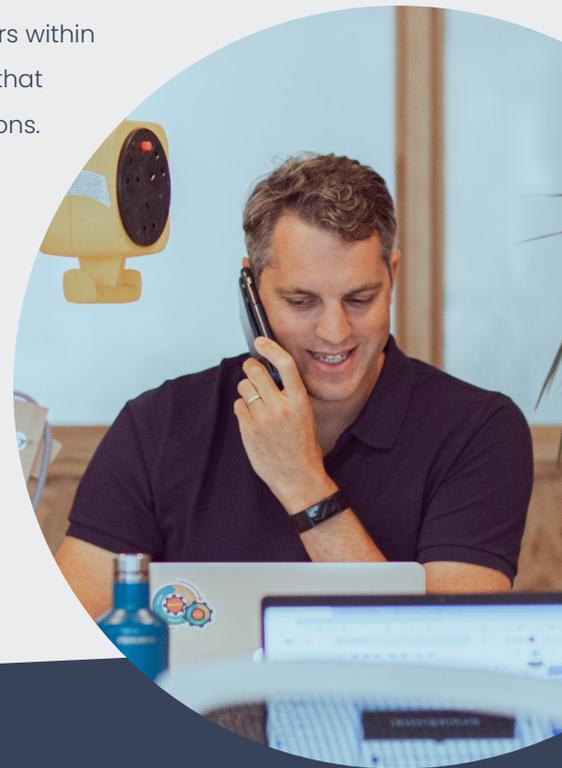
Next steps

If you're just getting started with Inbound Lead Generation, you can check out the **Inbound Marketing page** on our website here for helpful tips and resources. But if you'd like a more guided Inbound experience, **click here** to book a meeting with one of our specialists.

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