

The Manufacturer's Introduction to **Online Lead Generation**

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 **Industry**
today

A black and white photograph of industrial machinery, likely a conveyor belt system, with various metal frames and rollers. The image is slightly blurred and serves as a background for the title.

How and Why Online Lead Generation Works in the Industrial Sector

In today's digital world, the industrial buying process has changed. According to an IHS Engineering360 research report titled **2015 Digital Media Use in the Industrial Sector**, "58% of technical professionals don't make contact with suppliers until the later consideration/evaluation or purchase stages of the buy cycle."

Buyers are seeking information on their own and qualifying vendors and partners before sales conversations even happen. And that means it's your job not only to make sure your prospective customers discover you, but also to be sure they discover you early enough in the buying process for you to be influential.

It should be no secret to you that buyers of industrial products and services behave very differently than consumers. And because of this, the marketing approach must follow suit. Here are a few common threads among industrial buyers.

Industrial buyers are looking for something (very) specific

Mass marketing doesn't work when each buyer has such specific (and technical) needs and requirements. **A successful industrial marketing strategy** requires a much more targeted, niche-specific approach.

Heavy research often precedes the purchase

Long sales cycles tend to accompany big industrial B2B purchases. Lots of money is involved. Often, many people are involved. And sometimes quite a bit of office politics is involved. As a result, this kind of big purchasing decision is typically accompanied by a significant amount of research by the buyer.

Purchases mean partnerships

When the sales cycle takes months, or a year or more, staying

top of mind, earning trust and qualifying your business are all critical steps in the buying process.

The researcher often isn't the decision maker

The person who discovers you is not always the person writing the check. More often than not, an engineer, plant manager or procurement staff member is the one looking for answers to questions, solutions to problems, partners and vendors. His trust must be earned before he recommends you up the chain to his C-level decision maker.



Aligning Marketing Strategy with the Industrial Buying Process

Like in many business-to-business verticals, the industrial buying process consists of phases. Following a buyer's realization that he or she has a need that must be filled, three distinct phases of the buying process ensue, as outlined in the following table.

Stage	Buyer's Intention	Role of Marketing
Research	The buyer begins a search process to discover answers to questions, solutions to a problem or providers of a product or service.	The seller (the industrial marketer) should aim to be discovered by the buyer as early as possible in the buying process. The earlier this discovery occurs, the more influence the seller can have on the often long buying process.
Evaluation	The buyer develops a short list of products or service providers and begins evaluating each in depth.	The seller's job during this evaluation stage is to qualify his or her business and prompt a sales conversation. It's important to note that 57 percent of the industrial buying process happens before contact is ever made with a salesman. Translation – educational, qualifying website content will be critical.
Purchase	The buyer has reached the point of decision	Marketing should have done its job at this point and duties fall into the hands of sales to close the deal

Because the mindset of a buyer – your potential customer – is very different during each of these three distinct phases of the buying process, we need to carefully consider how we can fulfill his needs and solve his problems during each.

1. Identify your buyer

Who is involved in the buying process within your target audience's company? Engineers seeking specs? Purchasing departments seeking low bids? Business owners seeking long-term partnerships?

2. Identify the buyer's need

What problems are they trying to solve? What challenges are they trying to overcome? What solutions do they think they need? What solutions do they actually need?

3. Learn where they go to seek out answers to their questions and solutions to their problems

Where do they gather information online? Search engines like Google and Bing? Industry directories and trade journals? Industrial sector resources like ThomasNet or GlobalSpec?

4. Learn what specifically they're trying to learn

What keywords do you suspect they're using in their searches? Are they searching by product? By service? By problem? By solution? Real data can be gathered through sources like Google AdWords Keyword Planner to validate or negate what you suspect to be true.

5. Answer their questions

There's no better place than your own website to **answer common questions** and provide the beginnings of solutions to those problems through written, visual or watchable content. Educational content actually helps your buyer and begins to establish trust in a way that promotional marketing language very rarely will.

6. Compel your website visitor to take a lead-generation action

Right now your website visitor is an anonymous person. No face. No name. No phone number. No email address. You need to assure you prompt a real conversation before that anonymous visitor leaves and never comes back.

Gating educational content behind a form allows you to trade something of value for your prospect's contact information. And this in turn allows you to take control of the sales conversation.



Planning for Results Before Choosing Tactics

When there are marketing results to be produced, you may be tempted to jump straight to tactics – a website overhaul, an AdWords pay-per-click campaign, an email marketing push. But we need to start at the other end of the equation. Remember – the reason we’re doing any of this in the first place is to grow your business. And that means we need to focus on driving revenue before anything else.

Ask yourself this question alone: One year from now, what is the revenue number I need to tie back to marketing? Start there and work backwards.

1. Revenue Target

Whether a revenue target was given to you by your boss or you've created your own goal, you should begin with a tangible number in mind. For the sake of an example, let's say your target is \$3MM in revenue growth over the next 12 months.

2. Qualified Leads Target

Next, we need to figure out how many qualified leads we'll need to generate in order to reach \$3MM in revenue growth. Setting a qualified leads target requires us to answer a few questions first:

1. What's the value of a new customer? \$1000?
\$100,000? \$1,000,000?
2. What's your sales team's close rate among qualified leads

Let's say we've answered these two questions as follows:

- Your average customer is worth \$100,000
- Your sales team closes business with 50 percent of their qualified leads

Doing the simple math, we now know that our marketing initiatives must contribute to the acquisition of 30 new customers (worth \$100,000 each) over the next year to reach \$3MM. And with a 50 percent close rate, doing so will require 60 qualified leads (an average of 5 qualified leads/month).

3. New Contacts Target

How incredible it would be if every form submission that came through your website produced a qualified lead? Unfortunately, those kinds of expectations are unrealistic.

When online marketing starts working as it should, you'll get your fair share of qualified leads requesting quotes and downloading your content. But you'll also get your fair share from submitters that you'll classify as spam, vendors trying to sell you something, students conducting research and competitors trying to figure you out.

For the sake of a round number, let's say one in ten contacts you generate through your website is a truly qualified lead. Since we've already determined that we need to produce five qualified leads/month to reach our \$3MM new revenue target, and we've made the assumption that one in ten contacts we

generate will be qualified, we can conclude that we'll need to produce 50 total new contacts/month.

4. Website Traffic Target

Finally, we can ask the question – How much website traffic do we need to generate in order to produce those 50 new contacts each month? Our experience shows that an industrial website sufficiently equipped for lead generation should yield a 2-3 percent visitor-to-lead conversion rate. Using that percentage range as a benchmark, you'll need to produce 1600-2500 visits/month to generate those 50 new monthly contacts.

Now we're getting somewhere tangible. The example we've talked through here is illustrated in the table below:

Targets	Questions to Ask Yourself	Example
Revenue Target	What revenue do I need to generate from my marketing initiative over the next 12 months?	\$3MM
Qualified Leads Target	How many qualified leads do I need to generate for my sales team over the next 12 months to reach that revenue target?	5 qualified leads/month
New Contacts Target	How many total new contacts do I need to generate to produce that many qualified leads?	50 total new contacts/month
New Contacts Target	Assuming a 2-3 percent visitor-to-lead conversion rate, how much website traffic do I need to generate those new contacts?	1600-2500 website visits/month



Designing Your Tactical Marketing Plan

In the last section, we looked at how to plan your industrial marketing strategy by starting with desired results and working backward toward a tactical plan. Now it's time to choose the right tactics. In our example from the table in the last section, we established the following goals for our example marketing initiative over the next year:

- \$3MM in new revenue
- 55 qualified leads/month
- 50 total contacts/month
- 1600-2500 website visits/month

So now the only real question to ask is this:

What is the absolute best combination of marketing activities that I can set in motion to get me to that 1600-2500 visits at month, and at the required 2-3 percent visitor-to-lead conversion rate?

The two tables that follow illustrate the tactics that may play a role in generating your goal website traffic volume, as well as the tactics that may play a role in generating our target visitor-to-lead conversion rate.

Traffic-generating marketing tactics

Tactic	The Role it Plays
Keyword research and on-page search engine optimization	Utilize real data to learn what keywords your audience is using to search for solutions Optimize the individual pages on your website so they'll be discovered when your audience searches on Google and other search engines

Content Marketing

Help Google understand that your business is a strong source of information for the topics related to the keywords you're targeting

Educate visitors and qualify your business in front of them after they discover you

Inbound link building: guest authorship, content syndication, directory listings

Establish the credibility of your website in the eyes of the search engines. **Links from other credible, industry-centric sites to your site** are seen by Google as votes of confidence for your site, and directly impact your search engine rankings

Paid search engine marketing

Drive traffic quickly through paid advertising in search engines

Social media publishing

Intersect buyers as they gather information and seek solutions in online social networks like LinkedIn

Lead-generating marketing tactics

Tactic	The Role it Plays
On-page visitor-to-lead conversion paths: Calls-to-action, lead-capture landing pages	Compel visitors at all stages of their buying processes (research, evaluation, purchase) to become real contacts with names and phone numbers rather than anonymous website visitors
Lead magnets (valuable resources gated behind forms)	Create a variety of opportunities for visitors to trade their contact information for something of value to them in their buying process (examples: white papers, case studies, buyer's guides)
Quote / consultation prompts	Compel visitors who are close to making a buyer decision to reach out and start a sales conversation with you



Where to Go Next

As its title implies, this guide was meant to serve as The Manufacturer's Introduction to Online Lead Generation. Hopefully by now you understand:

- How and why online lead generation works in the industrial sector
- How to align your marketing strategy with the industrial buying process
- How to plan for revenue-generating results
- How to begin designing a tactical plan

Now it's time to get to work! Some industrial sector companies are staffed internally with the right skill sets and manpower to successfully build and execute their online marketing strategy internally. Others need a hand. Regardless of where you stand, here are a few next steps:

Visit our Learning Center

We're constantly creating new educational content for manufacturers, industrial service providers, distributors, builders and their subcontractors to help them grow their businesses online.

Begin exploring at gorilla76.com/blog

Request a Free Consultation

Let's have a conversation about you. Help us understand your marketing / business development challenges and the results you're seeking. We'll in turn help you figure out how to attract a qualified audience to your website, convert them into leads and close more lead as customers. If there's an opportunity to work together, great. If not, we'll point you in the right direction.

Visit <http://offers.gorilla76.com/request-a-free-consultation>

About the author



Joe Sullivan is a Partner at Gorilla 76 – a B2B marketing agency specializing in inbound marketing for the industrial sector. Gorilla helps manufacturers, industrial service providers, distributors, builders and their subcontractors grow their businesses online. Visit gorilla76.com to learn more.