

Who moved my *CHEESE* Trade Show Booth?!

By: Rob Felber, President, Felber Public Relations & Marketing

How are you going to replace the leads generated from trade shows or in-person meetings?

Yes, we're all in this together. Yes, these are unprecedented times. Yes, we're all tired of hearing this. But you still need to generate leads for your manufacturing business. Trade shows are all but extinct for the remainder of 2021. Many of your prospects and customers are limiting in-person meetings (if they allow them at all). Tired of Zoom yet? Digital marketing, or what many call Inbound Marketing, is a strong option during normal times. Now, many of our manufacturing customers are asking us how to replace their trade show marketing budgets with other tactics that will impact leads, name recognition, and keep their deskbound sales engineers in the game.

What are your options? I'll discuss three tactics you can employ today to fill the gap and start getting qualified leads.

Tool Up – Conversion Paths

It seems a little strange to tell NTMA members to tool up but here goes. Are you ready to capture, manage, and measure the effectiveness of any marketing campaign? We call the ability to capture and manage prospects, or even existing customer leads, a conversion path. From website visits to form-fills to prospect behavior on your website, a conversion path measures each step your new lead takes while they engage with your company – and what gets measured, gets reported.

What should you look for in a CRM (customer relationship management) or central database tool? Your system should provide, via website form integration, a real-time lead capture process. All associates that have contact-facing responsibilities need a system that will show the most recent and relevant information. A connected system can evaluate your investment in SEO/paid advertising campaigns. We're partial to industry leader HubSpot (Read this *Forbes* article on HubSpot), but there are countless options.

Content Development – the fuel for the engine

Content is used to capture the attention of your prospects. We'll discuss how in a moment, but first a definition: content can be defined as a message, written and/or graphic, that conveys a thought. In business-to-business manufacturing, content is often a blog article, a case study, a video/photo, or even a story in an industry magazine such as the one you are reading. You probably have content right under your nose.

Need a mantra?

The right content, to the right person, at the right time (in their buying process)

Your engineers and designers are great subject matter experts. I bet they have tons of stories that your prospects would love to hear. Worried about the quality of the writing? There are many agencies and freelance technical writers available to polish your story and make the reader want to learn about your expertise.



Turning on the engine

So, you have the content, what are you going to do with it? How will you generate leads? Often called Organic Lead Generation or Search Engine Optimization tactics, these are the free or non-paid options. The great stories and messages you have created can live in so many places. A company blog is your canvas that you own and control; no publisher can delete or control this content. Impacting search engine visibility, your ability to be found by prospects with problems you can solve, is where optimized, current, and frequent content will attract people to those forms we discussed in conversion paths.

This same content can be used in email campaigns, social media channels, as well as traditionally printed sales and marketing literature. Also, as mentioned previously, industry trade magazines love, and can never get enough of, case studies. Saying is one thing, but demonstrating your abilities by showing how you solved a customer's problem is pure gold. Get to know the editors and reporters in your industry. Without trade shows, they, too, do not have access to stories. They need your content and they need it NOW. Need more ideas on content that generates leads? Read this article.

Paid advertising that generates leads

Paid placement, which is often referred to as Search Engine Marketing or pay-per-click, is another strong lead generation tactic. Plus, since this is all digital, the measurement and return on investment are highly transparent – the tactics are either generating leads or not. We first recommend you build out the organic tactics; and then, once you have a vault full of content, a CRM that can help capture, validate, and manage the leads through the buying process. Once those steps are complete, you are ready to consider paid advertising.

A few of the options in paid digital advertising include Google and Bing ads, as well as LinkedIn. To some extent, some manufacturers can find success with Instagram and Facebook if their prospect has more of a consumer background.

For our company and many of our clients, LinkedIn is a strong channel. In addition to the placement of content on the organic side, paid LinkedIn ads can generate very granular, targeted-to-company or specific title, campaigns. And, since you have a conversion path, you can capture and respond to

leads in literally seconds. I am not kidding; we receive a lead, it enters our HubSpot CRM automatically and pings my phone. I can even have pre-determined and automated email messages sent to these prospects which saves tons of time.

To conclude, generating leads will require you to tool up, develop content, and release the content to the world. Have more questions? For NTMA members, here's our free e-book: The Industrial Manufacturer's Guide to Inbound Marketing.

About the author

Rob Felber is president of Felber Public Relations & Marketing, established in 1993. Operating out of a century old home in Twinsburg, Ohio, the firm's clients include Fabrisonic, Grand River Rubber & Plastics, General Die Casters, and Novagard.

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