



HOW CAN I GET MORE SALES?

BY **ANDREW POTOTSCHNIK**

A In describing the process companies go through to generate new customers, I refer to a big old sales funnel. You pour leads in the top and sales come out the bottom. All sales funnels leak leads, though, letting them escape before you can turn them into sales. By patching your funnel, you can improve marketing effectiveness and boost sales. And in any funnel, it takes four steps to gently nudge prospects to a sale.

Each step is a potential lost sale waiting to happen, so the goal should be to improve your ability to move prospects through the steps.

Sadly, most companies put all their effort into getting attention and very little into the rest. You won't make a sale if you never guide them through the other steps.

With every hole you patch, you'll exponentially increase the percentage of leads that become sales because improvements throughout the funnel have a multiplying effect on the sales coming out the bottom. For example, increasing the attention your company receives allows more chance for prospects to become interested.

More interested prospects increases the number of them engaging with your company; and the more engaging, the more opportunities you have to sell.

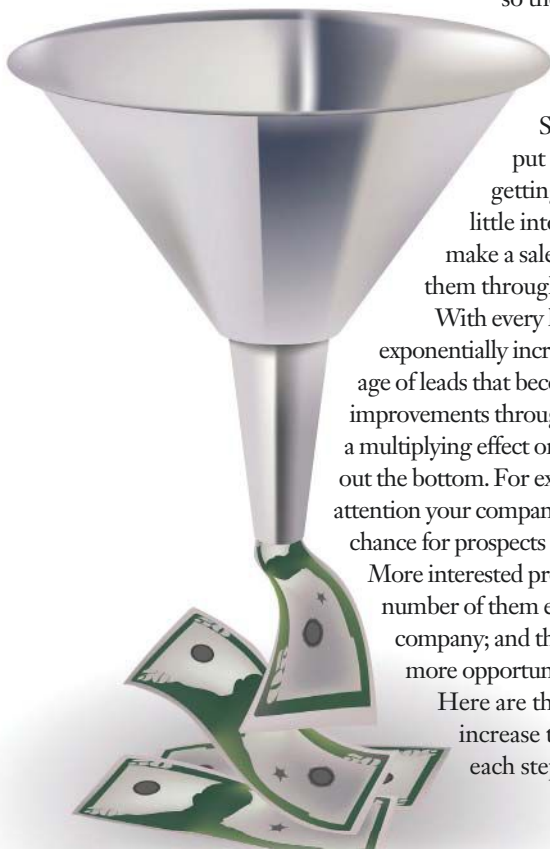
Here are the ways you can increase the effectiveness of each step.

STEP 1: Get their attention.

If you can't get a prospect's attention, you've already lost the sale. Do you have fanatical referrers? Are you everywhere prospects are looking for your services? Does your business appear in search results, pay-per-click ads, their door, their mailbox or on your truck in their area? Most leaks occurring in this stage are a result of nonexistent or poorly executed marketing. Your prospective customers simply don't know you exist or choose a company they think is larger because it's more visible in the marketplace.

It seems every landscape company uses the same tired fleet of generic white trucks with little green lettering on the door; however, companies could turn their fleets into attention-grabbing, mobile billboards with the use of neon colors, graphics and a bold, easy-to-remember phone number and website. Get noticed, then listen to prospects say, "I see your trucks everywhere," even when your fleet is only two trucks. Most online marketing programs lack similar market exposure.

Many companies have an old website that naturally shows up somewhere on the first page of Google for one key phrase. And that's it. They think they have the web thing covered. They don't, though. Prospects search thousands of key phrases to find you or your competitors. A high-ranking, properly optimized, content-rich site, supplemented by pay-per-click advertising and a presence on all of the most popular local search sites—such as Google+ Local and Yelp—will give you the largest online presence possible. This allows you to be everywhere online potential customers are looking for your services.



continued on page 96

continued from page 94

STEP 2: Get them interested.

If you don't look or sound different from other companies, you probably aren't. Try this quick exercise: Collect several competitors' direct mail pieces or door hangers. Cover the names, logos and any other identifying information, then compare your own marketing piece. Chances are your message is identical to everyone else's: "We cut lawns. We cut trees. We do beautiful landscapes. We're the best. We're professional. Call us for a free estimate."

This is a big problem. If you look and sound the same as everyone else, the only difference left is your price. Start by determining the unique selling points that set you apart from your competitors. Highlight the ones prospects care about. Saying you do great work is meaningless when everyone else says the same thing. Do you have 50 letters from ecstatic customers prospects can read online? Do you have before-and-after videos demonstrating without a doubt you do the most beautiful landscape lighting installs in Midland, Texas? Don't be the company saying, "Just take our word for it." Marketing is all about distinguishing yourself from your competitors. Look different, sound different and be better. After that, you can charge more.

STEP 3: Get them to engage with you.

Now that potential customers are interested, how easy have you made it for them to raise their hand and say, "Yes, I am interested! Tell me more! Sign me up!"? Merely answering your phone instead of letting calls go to voicemail will increase your sales. Sounds crazy, right? Sadly, this is normal for our industry and it's what you're competing against. If you're more responsive than your competitors, you'll sell more.

Most prospects visit your website before they call, so a lead-generating website should be at the center of any landscape marketing campaign to support and increase the effectiveness of all other marketing efforts. Some designers are great at making pretty websites. Pretty on its own doesn't sell, though. A website exists for two reasons: to get visitors to call or email you. Your website design determines this outcome. The images and text, where forms and contact info are positioned and even the color of buttons affects the percent of visitors who will contact you. If prospects don't know exactly what you do and in what service area, they're hitting the back button in 20 seconds or less. And they're not going to call if your website looks like you're about to go out of business. This is where companies shoot themselves in the foot.

Invest in a professional, lead-generating website engineered to convert visitors into paying customers. Spend more than \$5. Stop using crummy free sites, generic templates or Facebook to save money because you'll end up costing yourself money in lost sales. A website designed by a conversion

expert pays for itself multiple times over. Test it and engineer it to get new customers. You can spend nothing on a poorly designed, free site that converts one of 1,000 visitors into a customer, or you can spend \$5,000 on a website that converts 100 of 1,000 visitors.

STEP 4: Get them to act.

At some point, a prospect has to speak with you or your staff face to face or over the phone to make a sale. All that time and money you've spent leading up to this moment is thrown away in an instant if you can't close the sale. Your staff should be fully trained on how to sell. It's shocking how many business owners can't list 10 unique selling points about their own company. If you don't know why someone should buy from you, why would they?

The same is true with your staff members. They must be able to highlight your strengths and overcome every objection a prospect has to signing up for your service, especially your higher prices. You'll never have a 100-percent close rate, but you can capture a sale with one simple thing: following up. Ninety percent of companies never do this. They don't call, they don't email, they don't put prospects on a special mailing list. They quote a price and let them disappear to buy from competitors. Why not give them a second-chance offer? Why not send them a personal note the next day? Extra effort lets prospects know you care about having them as a customer. And if you care about doing business with them, you'll probably do a better job than the competitors who let their calls go to voicemail. A follow-up can capture an additional 20 percent of residential lawn care business that would've been lost otherwise.

It's easy for business owners to get caught up chasing a never-ending procession of buzzwords to generate more business. Stop chasing the buzzwords and become really good at what you're already doing. Instead of adding more halfhearted marketing, make your existing sales and marketing perform at the highest level possible. Then anything else you add to the mix will be much more effective and profitable. **L.M.**

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