Resource / Lead Management

5 Challenges to Lead Mgmt

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How do you overcome the top 5 challenges of lead management?

The tools for gathering and distributing sales leads in a direct selling environment are readily available and well understood.

Sales leads from a variety of electronic and traditional marketing media are collected, qualified, nurtured to be “sales ready”, and then deposited in the sales organization’s Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system for conversion to a sale. You’re reasonably sure these leads will be pursued because today’s CRM tools make it pretty easy to track what sales people are doing with the leads. Consequently, if a sales person is not making visible progress toward dispositioning the lead with a closed sale or request to be “put on the shelf” for later action, management may begin to take a dim view of that sales person’s future with the company.

It's not as easy to tell them what to do, even if you're sending them the sales lead.

Channel partners are typically independent businesses, so it's not as easy to tell them what to do, even if you're sending them the sales lead. Although reseller networks present additional challenges in charting a lead management strategy, there are numerous techniques and technologies that can promote channel sales participation so you can achieve your sales objectives. Engagement with channel representatives in handling your sales leads usually comes down to two primary principles: make it easy for them to handle your leads, and utilize a system of "carrots" and "sticks" to reward participation and punish non-compliance. This brief article will examine some common challenges with lead management in a reseller environment, and some basic ways to gain channel commitment to your sales lead program.

You may find yourself asking the following questions.

001

How do you know if your resellers will pay attention to leads sent to them?

002

Is it clear which dealer or distributor should get the lead, especially when multiple partners may be covering a given area?

003

How do you ever find out what the channel partner did with the lead?

004

How can you ensure that your channel partners' response to your leads aligns with your brand message?

Challenge One

Getting the channel partner to pay attention and quickly follow-up on sales leads that are sent to them.

Sales people are driven by generating sales. If you provide high quality sales leads, they will pay attention.

However, there are a few noteworthy impediments you must address or your representative's follow-up may be slow or non-existent. This is how to get an indirect channel representative to be proactive with your leads.

001

The lead delivery to the sales person and initial response to the end user must be timely and convenient. This includes notifications that suit mobile media, assurance of quick viewing by the sales rep or sales lead administrator, and an ability to quickly contact and make an initial disposition on the lead. The key here is to enable the sales person to see and respond to the lead within 20 minutes.

002

Lead quality must be satisfactory. The quickest way to have a sales person abandon your leads is to send them inquiries that, over time, do not close at a high enough ratio to satisfy them or their management. This means that you may have to manage the initial response and nurturing to the point where the sales person can expect a higher proportion of leads to close.

003

As the lead sponsor, you must set performance expectations on how the lead must be handled. This includes how quickly a response to an inquiry must occur, the manner of the response to ensure your brand integrity, and what consequences may occur when a lead is not handled to your standards.

Getting the sales representatives to report back on leads you've sent them.

Channel reps will act on and report back to you on sales leads if you provide a few key elements in your program.

Make it easy for them to use, and show the benefits of reporting sales. Once again, lead quality must be satisfactory. Since the first step in reporting back is to view the lead, your lead quality must provide sufficient incentive for the sales rep to see the lead as quickly as possible. Provide a system where activity recording and reporting is easy. This can be done either using a system that can be easily linked to the dealer's or distributor's internal CRM system, or by utilizing a system where the recording tools are basic, easily understood, or quick to use. A set of incentives should be installed to encourage lead activity recording and lead disposition reporting. This can include leveraging already existing dealer incentive programs to reward behavior, and the receipt of more and/or higher sale amount leads for those representatives who provide timely feedback on sales leads.

Getting multi-line partners to sell your product vs. a competitor's product when you send them a lead.

Our systems generally show that most partners will sell the lead sponsor's products versus their competitors. However, there are a couple of items to understand when considering this issue.

Build a partnership with your dealers and distributors. You need a way to measure whether this is occurring. Only if channel partners know you can track this behavior will they be less apt to pursue it on a large scale basis. They should also understand the consequences of switching leads away from your products, which should include the prospect of no longer receiving any leads from your system if the behavior continues. Although the lead may have initially spawned from your marketing system, leave the reseller partner some latitude to determine a competitor's products may be better suited to the prospect's needs once they've done the work to completely understand the need. As long as this behavior is not widespread, it makes the partner look like the expert. If that partner is a good spokesperson for your products over time, this will eventually pay off for you.

Partnership
Affiliation
Association
Responsibility
Relationship

Challenge Four

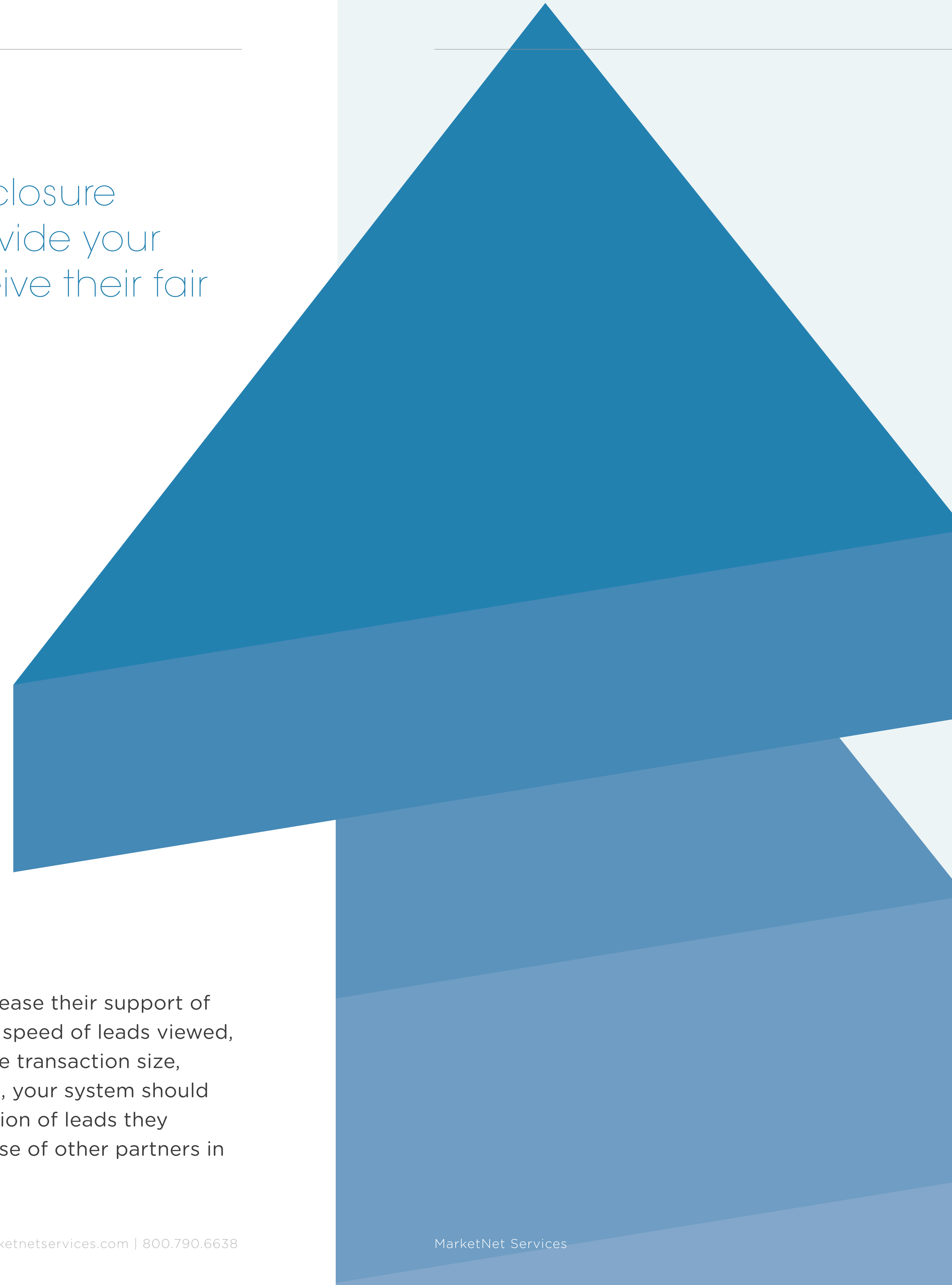
Convincing channel managers leads do not have to be manually reviewed before it can be assigned.

Leads through administrator or territory manager before it gets to the targeted sales person wastes time and hinders possible conversion.

Maintain urgency for lead follow-up with your channel partners and sales representatives. The expectation of consumers is to receive follow up activity from an inquiry quickly, especially if the lead is from a web-form. Although it may feel more comfortable to pass any leads through your internal sales organization to select the best reseller partner for that lead, that extra step can have a couple of adverse consequences. For one, the lead administrator or territory manager may not be readily available, resulting in a delay that could cost you a sale. Additionally, the territory manager may not have a fair method of selecting which partners should receive the lead. It is better to utilize a process and lead management system that quickly distributes leads to your channel sales reps based on a predetermined set of rules that take into account what's important for your marketing and sales strategy. This includes an equitable split of leads among your partners as well as rewarding traits of the locations in the areas of brand loyalty, product mix, size, customer service, and other relevant capabilities.

Convincing channel partners that your lead distribution system is fair.

Your ability to provide reasonable disclosure on lead distribution "rules" should provide your channel with comfort that they'll receive their fair share of leads.



These rules should not only support your lead management strategy, but your overall sales and marketing strategies. The system you utilize should also be able to adapt distribution ratios in real time as the behavior of your channel partners improves. As your resellers, VARS, dealers and distributors increase their support of you in areas such as speed of leads viewed, leads closed, average transaction size, and end user ratings, your system should escalate the proportion of leads they receive at the expense of other partners in the area.

In Summary

Give them good value, keep your schedules, and use simple language that reassures them that you'll do the right thing every time. You'll find consistent use of these phrases will work wonders. They'll create customer confidence, cement better relationships, and increase your likelihood of securing repeat business.

Your business has only one reason for existing, and that is to serve the particular needs of your customers.

With a philosophy of "No Lead Left Behind™," MarketNet creates lead management solutions for people who:

- Want to capture, respond to, distribute and track leads from all sources
- Need immediate lead notification sent to the best-suited sales person based on the channel sales strategy
- Require automatic follow-up and lead nurturing to increase sales closure rates
- Want to know what the sales person actually did with the lead
- Must be able to justify their marketing campaigns by measuring ROI Clients such as The HON Company, Konica Minolta Business Solutions, U.S.A., Inc., 4Front Engineered Solutions, BrassCraft, Inc. (A Masco Company) and others have partnered with MarketNet to leverage their marketing investments, yielding more leads and converted sales per dollar spent.

Founded in 1996, MarketNet is based near Grand Rapids, Michigan.

For more information, please visit MarketNet at **www.marketnetservices.com**

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