

Lead Generation Guide for B2B

Every established or new business must dedicate special attention to the lead generation (building up the customer pipeline). Several reasons:

- You never know when you lose a customer and need to have alternatives at hand
- Grow your market share
- Follow eventual customers that are getting bigger and more attractive
- Replace non performant customer by new ones
- “Cut the tail” – eliminate the smallest customers and replace by new bigger ones.
- Potential customers that might be in a less struggling segment and might provide higher margins.
- Keep the sales and business development team “on top” of market developments.
- Don’t remain a “hostage” of current portfolio.

Common path when building up your pipeline:

Target Industry > Suspect > Prospect > Qualified lead > Customer

Where each step the number is narrowed in big junks. You might start with 100 and end up with three or four, that’s perfectly normal and shouldn’t be reason of frustration. Frustration would be to onboard and create 20 new customers that will remain as “dormant” or not fitting your business.

1. How do we find a potential customer - and filter the findings?

Focusing on the application you can look for:

- Association websites per application (i.e. Coating Associations);
- Your product applications
 - We might have several different industries or segments your products are used on so explore them properly.
- Trade shows and events, websites related to applications (i.e. European Coatings Show);
- Industry associations reports and members
- Distributors & customers websites (often they talk about partners they work with that are in the same or similar field);
- General Google research using key words of your products or industry applications.
- Research per company or contact by LinkedIn;
- Use your contacts to see if there’s anyone in your network that could introduce you
- Look for more details on the prospect’s website.
- Competitors of your existent customers
- Old customers with whom you don’t have business in the last recent years
 - Be aware to check their financials, the reason you stopped doing business and if they still exist
- Dormant or low performant customers: Do they have potential? Can you reactivate or boost the relation and business?
- A presence of your company at seminars or trade shows can also be a good source of contacts and potential news customers.

2. How to screen a suspect - and move on the path above?

- Old customers are the easiest to screen as you have already a starting point (company name, contacts, website, historical date). Make a check of their current situation, status, growth, position in the market etc.
- Dormant and low performing customers are in the same situation. The first wave you can attack altogether with old customers. You have all the info, you just need to update their current situation and check if there's a fit and potential to explore. No need to run after contacts or names.

For new customers:

- Look for the applications and products of the prospect;
- Try to find out company turnover of previous year or more, financials;
- Is it a global, European or national company.
- Where does the company have production sites.
- Is a contact available on the web?
- Who are their customers?
- Are they a reference in the market?
- Are they growing or have growth ambitions?
- Try to find out on LinkedIn contacts and employees of the company.

3. Cold call – Lead Generation, What to ask/do?

So you've found an entity that seems a fit as a potential customer (so called a suspect).

Now what: Email? Telephone? Visit?

- I'd recommend email as first approach. But don't get too excited, you might never get an answer. People are busy and you're not their priority. The problem with email is that often the one visible to public is a general one, kind of "purchasing@blabla.com", or "info@blabla.com" but for the time being, use that one.
- So put a reminder in your calendar and send another one (with gentle note referring to the first attempt) to send another one within let's say 3 weeks.
- If there's feedback, great, take it from there. If not (most common) than cold calling. Be ready to do it professionally and without being "too heavy".
- Again, very often you might not know the person name you're looking for and if they have several purchasers you might get some difficulty, so be polite and explain what kind of products/services you're selling and if you could talk with the responsible of that area – by the way ask his name and email address -.

When you're lucky and could establish contact:

- Introduce yourself on a clear and concise way.
 - Company, your role, the purpose of your call.
- Try to get hold of the Lead Purchaser or a contact in the Purchasing department;
 - If you cannot get in contact with the person try to get name and last name, telephone number and email address;



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- If you can get hold of the purchaser, explain briefly your company, products and market presence, your role and that in scope of growth you're looking for potential customers who are relevant in their sector and that's the reason of your call. If you feel the person can let you go ahead:
 - Ask the contact to talk about their business;
 - Which type of customers they have;
 - check with the person which products they could buy (have our product list always in front of you);
 - ask consumption/volumes/potential per year;
 - where are the production sites located;
 - Do they have any specific requirements or constraints?
 - Try to understand where do they source the product currently;
 - Explain that you will put Shell Account Manager in contact with them soon if they can take full truck loads.
- Thank the person for the time and do not leave without her/his contacts!!!!
- Send an email as a follow up, once again thanking their time and availability and reconfirm the most important points. Depending on how did the conversation go, brief them on:
 - Your company usual GTC's
 - Product information, flyers or datasheets
 - Their availability to a F2F visit at their premises –always preferred a meeting at their site to physically see the assets, organization, people and products – if not possible you can also invite them to your office. In this second visit you can narrow the discussion to more specific on eventual volumes, services, requirements, offers and needs they have so you can present your offer afterwards. Don't rush on price, it should be the last thing to disclose.

When you're not that lucky and couldn't establish contact with the purchaser but could get his name and direct email:

- Send an email explaining you've got his contact from a colleague and explain your purpose and some background, asking for his availability for a phone call or visit.
- If you don't get a reply, same approach as before, gentle reminder after 3 weeks. Remember two important aspects:
 - Purchasers are busy. Those who aren't will also play the busy one. So it's somehow natural that they don't answer you the very next day
 - Your email will likely fall under his long "to do" list but on the lower end.
 - If you become too insisting, it may "scare the birds away". Purchasers don't want to be chased every week (like anyone else).
 - Give it some time. By one hand you show patience, by other you show you're not so "desperate" to get a new client.

4. Do's & Don'ts

- Do not promise anything in terms of providing documents or follow up on requests that you're not that familiar with. Say honestly you're not sure and you'll revert back at later stage.
- Do not mention capacities or any specifics of your business/production. This is something to be touched at a later stage of the relation building.
- Do not ask for competitors names but you can ask for product origin for instance, watch the anti-trust laws;
- You can send to the customer our general presentation, product lists, sales specifications and Technical or safety data sheets if they are interested in our products.
- Do not mention prices nor payment terms (they have to be discussed when their exact need and requirements are known).
- Let the customer talk as much as he wants if he does, you can get even more information just by listening.
- Do follow up. Again and again (thou with reasonable time space). You never know when a customer gets disappointed with current suppliers and might be willing to open the door).
- Do have a plan and a system/tool to capture and follow up your database.
- Cross link information and functions. Between your departments (Marketing, R&D, sales, credit). Useless to attack a potential new customer if you won't get support by your credit department.
- Do be suspicious if:
 - Customer opens the door immediately: this might mean they have issues with other suppliers (or financial weakness and need to spread sourcing)
 - Customer wants an order urgently. Would be very strange that any established customer with suppliers so far wants to place you an order just like that. Something doesn't smell good here.
- Don't ever use relevant price reductions to attract a customer. Yes you need to be competitive in order to attract them, but if you start a spiral of price you risk not only your current customers to hear or find out that there are better prices out there (and believe this is a small world) and by other hand your new customer will use your price to put pressure on his current suppliers. All in all you gain a customer but endanger your margins across all portfolio. Focus on any other service, quality, feature or flexibility that might be important to the customer but doesn't cost you much to stay firm on pricing.