

Hello and welcome to Bridge the Gap Contributor Wednesday. I am Cristy Cunningham and it is once again, sales and marketing week here at Bridge the Gap. This is one of my favorite weeks of every month. I look forward to having the conversations with you about sales and marketing topics. And before I dig into our topic today, I just want to say a shout out to all of you who are listening to my episodes, messaging me, commenting with me, bantering with me on our topics, I really have appreciated your input and the discussions that we're having. And I love the connections that I am making with like-minded people across our space. So thank you very much for listening. This has been a lot of fun to do this podcast.

Now, with that said, I've got some fun stuff to talk about today. We're going to be talking about digital leads and digital marketing efforts because let's face it, that's just the time that we're in, right? We saw over the course of the last, what five years, there's been almost a year over year, over year increase in the customer's engagement with us via digital methods. When you look back at even the last year, there was a pretty dramatic shift during our COVID year where our customers skewed strongly digital in their outreach and communications with us. And the shift was pretty dramatic. You can look at different industry reports that'll kind of show you some statistics around that. The Enquire report from last year is really great for that. Now, that shift though, has continued even into this year, and we're still seeing really strong results from digital sources in terms of lead volume and contacts from our customers. So where there are things that many of us are doing to really maximize that, there's really a symphony of things that we can be doing together that really make the magic happen, that really bring the momentum to maximizing those digital opportunities.

And when I look at the clients that I work with in my business, Gusto Consulting, and I talk with other consultants and other sales and marketing leaders across our industry, it is clear that there are some really good things happening and ways that we're doing well at addressing this changing communication method for our customers. But it's rare to find that we all are fully utilizing all the elements of the symphony that we should to really get the most out of it.

So I thought for this podcast, I could share some of those observations, some of those pieces that really should be there for all of us and knowing that, hey, some of you listening are going to have the whole package, the whole shebang. And I hope that this episode is confirmation and validation that you are rocking it, and you're doing really great stuff!

For those of you that find opportunities in this, it's a call to say, this isn't going away, which you already know that because you're smart and amazing leaders. Yeah. I already know that the digital trends aren't going away, but it's a time to tune in and start to strategize and think about what does it really take to change your organization, your sales team, your marketing team, so that going into the second half of this and into 2022, you have made an advancement and you are doing something that is really going to help add some power to your team.

So there are five things that I sort of see as like five pillars of really effective digital marketing and digital lead management. So in this episode, we're going to go through each of these five things. I'll talk a little, what about it and why I think it's important. And then, then at the end of this episode, I'd really love to hear from you. I'd love to hear if your organization is rocking on all five of these cylinders. Would love to

know if there are, he says that you are struggling a little bit. Or if this was a complete “aha moment,” I mean, I'm just really curious. So keep that dialogue going with me, please. You can of course comment and like the episode, but I'm finding a lot of people are just private messaging me too. And that's really, really neat to have those kinds of relationships. So feel free to reach out.

So without further ado, let's dive into the five things. So like I said, our goal, if we get ourselves in the right head space, our goal here is to say our customers are going more and more digital with their contact. So how do we maximize those opportunities?

In my last podcast episode, I talked about this concept of smarketing, which is that intersection of sales and marketing. That was, that term was coined by HubSpot. You can go back to the last episode and hear more about that. But when it comes to maximizing digital leads and digital lead volume, this immeshed moment of sales and marketing is a really critical part. So some of my five things here we're going to talk about might relate more to maybe slightly more to the marketing side of things. Some of it might relate slightly more to the sales side of things, but if these basics really aren't in place and there isn't some form of a immeshment, then you have a real fundamental flaw in your operation that is going to be taking opportunity away from you and you're not going to be getting the results that you see.

So I think this episode sort of builds on the last one. If you didn't then the last one, go back and do that and then come back to this so we can have that foundation laid. All right, so what's the first thing, what's the number one kind of first priority that we should be, that should be in an organization that is really trying to get the most out of their digital.

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That first thing is that you and we, I should say, are focused on the wholly marketing metric, in my opinion. And there digital marketing, especially there are tons of metrics, tons of things that you can be looking at that, lots of analytics that can help with decision-making. But as far as I'm concerned, there is one. One a metric that any marketing department I'm holding accountable to, anytime I'm involved with marketing it from a consulting standpoint, I'm asking for this one question, and that is: what is the net lead volume from digital marketing sources?

So notice I'm saying net right too often, especially if you have market agencies in place, et cetera, they don't have the full transparency into the leads that they're generating and how those leads are playing in the sales process and in the CRM. So what happens is that you get sort of fragmented information, you get information from your marketing team or your marketing agency that's going to sound more like overall numbers, looking at kind of overall impressions of maybe ads that you have, conversions: what percentage of visitors to a page are converting? How many form submissions do you have coming in, or how many phone calls are coming off of your Google My Business pages, right? These are important metrics. Don't get me wrong. They're gross metrics there, numbers that are just showing you big gross numbers. They're not giving you any real indication of quality.

You know, you're driving traffic to your site. Great. But is that the right kind of traffic? Who knows, maybe you're like a company I've worked at in the past and you had an amazing blog that is ranked very

highly on Google and generates a ton of traffic from all around the world. Well, that's going to skew your traffic numbers and it's going to look like you have huge amounts of traffic being driven to your website. And you're gonna feel really proud about that, except for here's the thing. What are the folks who are reading that article in Germany, going to do about moving into your senior living community within the next three to 12 months? If ever. They're not. So that traffic, you know, number can be really deceiving. Same with form fills. Can be really deceiving because there's all kinds of forms, all kinds of reasons why people fill out forms, all kinds of reasons why people are going back and Googling your business in order to make a phone call because maybe they already lived there or their family members do and they just don't have the phone saved phone number saved in their phone. So they're using your Google My Business page to make those calls. So you have an inflated potential there of looking like your forms that are being filled out, or the calls that are being made into your business, making that look like a lot more volume and a lot better results from your marketing efforts than what you're actually getting.

This contributes when you are focused just on that and you aren't playing it out to see what happens through the sales process to get to that net lead number. You end up in a situation where sales and marketing are really at odds, right? Because marketing is showing all of these different metrics about the level of exposure, the form submissions, everything they're contributing. Meanwhile, sales might be having a completely different experience. They might feel lead starved. They might feel like the quality of the leads that are coming in are not good and that they're being asked to make a miracle happen with a whole bunch of people that aren't in a place to move in, aren't qualified to move in, etc.

So you have this, this real negative dynamic where marketing is just pushing, pushing, pushing, thinking that they're doing okay. They've got some good analytics to show that their efforts aren't being wasted. Sales, meanwhile, is feeling the pressure that they can't really completely perform with what they've been given, but sales doesn't really have any excuses. They've just got to keep trying to make some magic happen and you end up with a very dysfunctional sort of cycle. So by focusing on the net lead volume, what you're doing is sort of minimizing your focus on some of those big gross numbers, like traffic impressions, conversions, etc.

Those are important leading indicators, but ultimately the marketing department should be held accountable to the net leads. In other words, the qualified leads that they're generating from each of their sources. So what you're trying to do is say, okay, marketing, maybe you're generating X number of leads per month. Those are brought into your sales experience. Maybe with different, no digital experiences with some sales interactions, however you're doing that. And at some point a certain percentage of those customers are opting out of the engagement. They aren't qualified or they self disengage, or that the sales team is able to disqualify and give them referrals somewhere else. After that takes place, you're left with your net lead volume from your sources. Particularly from digital sources. This is really interesting because it's not about the total number of leads that you're generating, it's about after that qualification happens, how many are really left?

Is there enough qualified lead volume coming in from your digital sources to actually achieve the moving goals that need to be achieved? You might be generating a ton of leads, but if a lot of them are being disqualified and you only have a very small volume that's actually making it through that qualification, then it's not realistic to expect that you're going to be getting high move-ins from that situation. We

know that just from looking at average conversion rates for sales. Not every lead that walks in the door is going to be a sale within the timeframe we need them to be.

One of the most important things that we can all do to get more out of our digital marketing efforts is to move the finish line. To move to this place where we're looking at that net lead volume as the ultimate marker of success for the marketing department in and of themselves, your digital marketing efforts in and of themselves. And then obviously, the ability for those leads to convert to sales becomes why we all exist in the world, but for marketing and their span of control, it has to be: are you generating enough net lead volume from your sources to achieve the goals that we have to achieve organizationally?

And if not, then look backwards at things like conversions, traffic, form submissions, impressions, etc. We look backwards to try to diagnose where are we getting inflated results, which I'll say usually is also where we might be spending money that we don't need to, or putting efforts into things that we don't need to, because they're really not giving us the return that we need. It's also a time to kind of optimize messaging and that kind of thing to try to get a better result, a more qualified result for the sales team.

That's my number one thing out of the gates is we gotta move the finish line. There are some really great and very reputable marketing agencies out there, guys. But if you are not a sales and marketing leader that knows a lot about digital marketing, or feel sort of intimidated by it, it can be a little dizzying and it can be tough to sit in those meetings and hear these very educated, knowledgeable marketing, digital marketing gurus, tell you about your metrics and presenting you with the data that justifies their existence and for you to know where to push or where to hold accountability, or for real to call BS, that can get really tough. And there is a certain amount of complacency that sort of happens when you don't really know the questions to ask. So if you are in that position, you don't have to be the expert in your traffic and conversions and everything else. You don't have to be because what you have to be watching and what you have to be holding everybody accountable to is that net lead volume number.

Dismiss the claims of, well, I had X number of form submissions, or our conversion rates are X number. Okay. Shrug your shoulders. That sounds good. But am I getting the lead volume into my sales team that I need to at the end of the day? That simple yes or no is going to tell you is your digital marketing effort doing what it needs to be doing and you're experts, and everybody can be accountable to those numbers and figure out what they need to change to make that happen. But knowing that is really, really key, whether you're educated or you're not okay.

Wow. I spent a lot of time just talking about that. One thing. I still have four more to go. I'll try to move a little bit faster. I feel really, really passionate about that. And that's not, it's a very, very simple thing, but not something that I'm hearing out on the streets, so to speak that people are focused on. And I think it's a real missed opportunity.

The second is just, I said this in a previous podcast, having a CRM that actually tracks this stuff, that tracks your sources, that allows you to see really clearly what the conversion rates for each of those sources are. How many inquiries, how many tours, how many move-ins. I just cannot tell you how critical that is to really optimizing your digital marketing efforts. Because it's not just about how many leads are being lost by your digital marketing efforts, but also how many sales are being won and in what

timeframe, and if you don't have a tracking method, then almost by the day you are falling so severely behind the curve.

So older, antiquated CRMs, that don't give you a breakdown of your lead sources and each even individual digital lead sources, are really holding you back. So some of the metrics that you should be looking for in your CRM, things that your CRM should be telling you: they should be able to tell you the source of every single lead that comes in the door and leads that are coming from digital sources should have that automated flow into your database. You do not want your sales team to be manually entering digital leads into your database, right? You get inaccuracies with the sources that way you're not able to track things all the way back. There's human error. Our sales teams can be slow at data entry anyway. There's a lot of things that you minefields, a lot of things that you have to work around in that case.

So you just, you want it to be automated and you want to be able to very easily see the specific lead sources, not just it came from digital, but did it come from advertising? Did it come from organic? Did it come from display? Did it come from social? What exactly did it come from? You want to be able to see the percentage of lost leads by source. So what percentage of the leads generated by each of those sources are lost and you're going to need to be able to drill through and see the reasons for that. And that's important because let's say that you have a high amount of lost leads from a particular digital marketing source. And you might see at first blush that, oh my gosh, we're losing such a percentage. Maybe this isn't a good place be investing my money.

If you're able to take that farther, to see the last close reason. And you see that it's something like financial, then that gives you insights to try to optimize that effort before you just quit on it. Maybe there's content that you need to put on the page, or there's a different approach to where you're placing your ads or who you're targeting, etc., that you need to take into account. So you want to be able to see not only the lead source, the percentage that are lost from each of those sources and then drill through into the reasons why.

And then for each lead source, what's the percentage of inquiry to tour? What's the percentage from tour to move in? What's the overall inquiry to move in conversion? What's the length of the sales cycle? You would want to see that for all of your digital efforts combined, and then even be able to break that down by some of those kind of sub-categories of lead source, so that you're able to sort of diagnose what's happening in the sales process.

Is there an issue in sales where maybe we're not converting from a tour to move in like we should, but we're getting a lot of tours in the door. That's a good place for sales and marketing leader to investigate, to go out in the field, to go spend some time with those salespeople, try to figure out what is the need that's not being met in those tour experiences for those digital leads, or is there a different way we're approaching them that's not allowing us to achieve what we can achieve elsewhere? So by breaking it down, you can see a little bit of the performance for the sales team and help isolate where you can optimize your efforts with sales, so that they're really getting the maximum results.

This can also be helpful with setting goals for how many move-ins did your digital marketing efforts be really generating in a year, especially as it relates to like the average sales cycle and knowing that, is it

realistic that if you spend, let's say \$5,000 today on digital marketing, what's the average sales cycle? Are you really building for the \$5,000 that you're putting in today, is that a realistic expectation that you're going to be getting move-ins within the next 30 days? Or do you need to be thinking in a longer term format than that? And that's important strategic insight. Especially as we're talking about how to use dollars, especially as we're talking with our investors and making sure that we're creating realistic expectations and presenting our strategies in comprehensive ways, we've got to be able to say, yes, we're investing this money today. And this is how and when we think that we're going to see the results of that. Instead of just guessing that I'm going to throw money at this problem and expect that in a week or two weeks or a month, that everything should be changed. Maybe that's realistic based on the length of your sales cycle and some of these other metrics for you and your buildings or whatever, but often it's not. We get in a lot of trouble with not being able to set realistic expectations and also not being able to be realistic with our strategies simply because we don't know the information. So having a CRM that tells us these things lead source, the percentage from each source that is lost and drill through into the reasons why, the inquiry to tour, the tour to move in the inquiry, to move in, the length of the sales cycle. Those are your most important metrics that you need to pull out of your CRM.

Those metrics obviously support the previous point that I've already laid out of focusing on that net lead volume. You should be able to, you should be able to really easily pull that number and hold your digital marketing teams accountable to it.

The third important piece of this, and this is a little bit, I'm not going to go into heavy detail here because it is a little technical, but if you'd like to have a conversation about how to do this, I would be happy to have a conversation with you about it. Just reach out to me on LinkedIn.

For our marketing teams and for our sales teams, we need to be looking backwards from our occupancy goals to how many move-ins will we actually need to achieve those occupancy goals? And that needs to include realistic attrition expectations. Then from there, what percentage of our move-ins are going to come from maybe more traditional marketing efforts, what's going to come from digital marketing efforts, then working backwards to conversion rates on those leads so that your marketing team eventually has a goal that they're working towards that's really specific, and that's aligned to the move-ins and the occupancy that you're going to need to reach.

There's a lot of math involved as you kind of work backwards here. That's why I'm not going to go into it on the podcast. But if you can understand the overarching idea is that whether you have a digital marketing person on your team, or even a whole department, or you have a digital marketing agency that you're working with, every year, they should have move-in goals. They should have a goal of what their inquiry to move in conversion should be from their sources, and they should have overall net lead volume goals. You could even work it backward one more time, to set goals around that percentage of lost leads. And maybe trying to minimize that to some degree, if you would like that to be a focus, but your marketing teams should have that and that's what they should be working towards. That's what their strategy should be built on.

I see a lot of marketing that's operating in a really loosey goosey way. Especially on the digital side where we're just trying to get as much as we can. And there isn't really an accountability to have specific move-in number there isn't really an accountability to a specific conversion expectation or a specific net lead volume expectation. So our strategies are lacking the ump, they're lacking the real power because

they're not directed at a specific result, right? We're all just trying to get as many move-ins as we can. And it also puts some strain on the leadership because then everything becomes a judgment call versus a real strategic thinking process. You're, let's say, trying to decide how to spend, you know, some marketing dollars and whether to reallocate them to, from one, you know, market source to another, but you're sort of operating without the knowledge of what exactly are our move-in goals from each source, where are we hitting our goals? Where are we not? What are the reasons why we're not hitting those goals? And does it make sense to shift money around? What could I reasonably get for that investment?

You can't answer those questions if you don't actually have some of that foundation built out. So not only can your teams lose their way and lack the real power behind their tactics, if they don't have a direction that they're moving towards, but also you as a leader, lose a lot of your strategic thinking abilities. Lots of people across our industry, finding success without having really specified goals. However, what could they be getting if they were more focused? What could you be getting if you were more focused and aligned on individual contributions, how would that change your work if you really had that knowledge and the whole team was operating off of it? So really, really important to just have those goals and that they're very specific even on the marketing side.

Number four is kind of shifting into the sales mode of, you've got to have a protocol. You've got to have a plan for what you're doing with your leads. You can't just be winging. There has to be some high accountability, some very clear communication around it. And your marketing team also needs to know what that protocol is, right? It's almost like a contract that says: Marketing, you're going to do XYZ to get that net lead volume. And that's your promise to the marriage between sales and marketing. And sales, when those leads come in, you're going to work them in XYZ way. And that's your promise to the marriage, right? And that builds trust on both sides of the line.

If sales knows and can trust that marketing is focused on net lead volume, and they're not just trying to throw a tsunami of junk at their table and say that they did their job, and that trust is going to go a long way with sales. And if marketing trusts that there is a good protocol in place, and that sales is going to be on top of it and accountable to it, then they know that the effort that they're putting in and the blood, sweat, and tears that they're putting in on their end, isn't just going to be squandered by things outside of their control, right? So you need a protocol in place.

A good protocol has three components. Number one, there's a speed expectation, right? Don't need to harp on speed to lead. Y'all know that, but there should be a speed component of how quickly are we going to be making contact with our leads in any way, whether it be, phones, phone, email, text, whatever, what is that speed expectation?

Number two, what is the expectation for persistence? How long are we going to try to reach people for what period of time are we going to try to reach people?

The third is frequency. How often didn't in that period of time, are we going to attempt to reach them? And there has to be an end date to this like, so I say frequency, and I say persistence, because that needs to be defined on what exactly that means for you, your organization, your leads. It can't just be that we set the protocol up with a speed, expectation, persistence, and frequency. And then when you've

achieved that, now what? Your sales teams may not know what to do with those leads from there. So there has to be that defined what happens next? If I follow the protocol, at what point do I stop following the protocol and what happens to those leads? Those questions need to be in your protocol.

Then finally, we've got to use some tools to supplement the sales effort. There are very real obstacles that we have to recognize right now, because there has been some denial around some of these things. In the past, there are obstacles to our sales teams being able to achieve of our protocols and both the way we write our protocols needs to acknowledge that. But also the tools that we use to supplement our sales team need to be really specific to these obstacles as well. So what are these obstacles I'm speaking of?

So the first obstacle for our sales teams are speed. It's one of the most important parts of our protocol yet it's also one of the most difficult parts of execution because our sales teams are inundated. They're busy, they're juggling a lot of leads, a lot of relationships, a lot of priorities. We may have high hopes that, you know, they're contacting every lead while the mouse is still hot, right? However, if that's happening a low percentage of time, not because you've got a lazy salesperson, but simply because the nature of the job does not allow for that speed to be achieved, then you've got to think about what tools can you use to help you achieve that? If that truly is a part of your protocol and something that you want to do then get real on the fact that, that can't just be up to the salesperson to make their call as fast as they can. You're going to need to think about tools to supplement.

The next opposite obstacle is what I call synchronicity, right? We are not always synchronized with our customer in terms of availability of time. So for example, they may inquire, fill out a form or something. We respond quickly, but they may not be available. When they are available, might be when we're not and vice versa.

So you have this obstacle of not only do I need to get to them, but I also need to connect with them despite the fact that we have different schedules and priorities and all of that. So overcoming that, you know, if we know that this is an obstacle that our sales is going to run into, then we need to think creatively about what kind of tools can we use to help us with that synchronicity. Are there ways that we can create an engagement create contact, even when we're not in sync schedule wise with the customer and how do we achieve that in a way that's better than maybe than the competition.

Then the third is the third obstacle is intimacy. Particularly for digital leads. We see leads that come in, looks like they have full intention of inquiring. And then, there isn't a response to the sales team, or there isn't an engagement with the sales team. And I consider this to be an intimacy issue, where we want, we're going for that more intimate relationship with our customer. We want to have that voice to voice contact. Yet our customer is rejecting that by not answering our phone calls, by not calling us back, by not participating in the relationship. They're sending us a signal that, Hey, I don't want that type of relationship. Right? It's like, they've got their head, their hands on our forehead, holding us at arms distance here. And we're trying like heck to get close to them. So this seems to happen more often with these digital leads, where there is something that is prompting them to inquire. However, there is something very big and very real, that's holding them back from having a relationship.



So how do we address that obstacle of intimacy? Because yes, our team's making persistent efforts and frequent efforts over time. If it's out there to be had, if, if the relationship can be had, our sales team protocol should be capturing that. But if this was a dabble for our prospect, if it was something that they don't want an intimate relationship right now, they're just testing it out. They just wanted to experiment for a second. Then how do we address that? Where we're not losing those opportunities, but where we can really meet the customer where they are in terms of their expectations for a relationship. Looking at our data, looking at the number of leads that are, let's say unresponsive from digital sources, I think there's a lot of opportunity around addressing this obstacle that we haven't even tapped into yet.

How do we address our customers who inquire, but aren't ready for a more intimate relationship? So this final tip is recognizing those obstacles, but also thinking about the sales tools and the marketing tools that can supplement our efforts and help us overcome those obstacles. So these are things, and there's a lot of different solutions out there. And I don't want to give any particular thing too much airtime, but things to think about might be call centers, for example, and the usefulness that they can provide when it comes to some of these obstacles.

Automations automations can be really helpful, using video and automations or, you know, video and other sorts of communication methods to allow our customers to be a little more voyeuristic, for example, versus truly engaged with the sales team. Even lead scoring, where we're able to identify leads and differentiate leads that have more online activity. They're showing that kind of voyeuristic behavior, online, but they're not necessarily engaging with the sales team. Well, those might be special case leads that we decide to work differently or have some strategies or tactics assigned to, or some tools that we use for them. So to really think about the obstacles that exist and the tools that are at our disposal that can help us supplement the sales efforts and being real about what those protocols can actually achieve when we, when we set up our protocols from item number four.

So here it is, guys, we've got five key things:

If you want to maximize your digital marketing efforts, you are going to be looking at:

1. Making sure the focus is on net lead volume.
2. Making sure you've got a fantastic CRM gives you the data that you need.
3. That you've got very specific goals set, moving backwards from occupancy, and move-ins all the way back to each market source.
4. That your teams have a realistic and specific sales protocol for digital leads.
5. That you recognize the universal obstacles and that you are using tools to supplement your efforts, to overcome those obstacles in a way that is better than the competition.

Those are your five things for today. There's so much more in digital marketing that we could talk about, so much more opportunity that exists, but if we're not doing it, if we're not working towards it, have in effect these five things, then we're winging it and we're missing opportunity.

So, like I said at the beginning of this podcast, I want to hear from you on this. I know the conversations I'm having, I'm loving the debates about these topics with people, but I want to broaden my audience. So please, if you hear this podcast and you've got a thought about it, comment on one of the posts on LinkedIn or YouTube or Instagram or whatever hop on my LinkedIn page message me. Would really love

to have some banter on this. So again, this is Cristy Cunningham, guys. It has been another great episode of Bridge the Gap Contributor Wednesday. I hope you all have a great day, take care and happy sales and marketing!