

Lead Generation for Creatives

12 lessons from investing 100.000 USD

What is a lead?

First things first

A lead is someone that has a potential demand for our services. Throughout the sales process, a lead turns into a prospect when they have identified their demand and a fit. Next, they turn into a client once they hire us.

Lead generation is the practice of finding and nurturing such leads. It is part of marketing yet focuses particularly on the outcome of winning a client. In our case, high-ticket clients.

Marko Pfann

Fixing the marketing problem for creative companies

Within 20 years, my path led me to brand 60+ tv-stations, win 20+ top-notch design awards, build a globally operating brand agency serving tv-stations (which I eventually sold), and became a certified business coach for creative studios.



Preface

One big struggle in the creative industry truly is lead generation. Yet, I believe that a big part comes from following the advice of people that tell us how it worked in the old days.

Yet times change and so do people, industries, markets, and entire generations. I wanted to learn what works and what doesn't in these times of age.

So, in September 2021 I offered 10 of the creative studios I coached to help them with their lead generation. We focused on generating leads from medium to large-sized B2B companies in Germany and the US.

Our approach was to test the market. To see what lead generation methods work best for creative studios. We hired top salespeople, worked with LinkedIn & PR agencies, learned from ads agencies and media buyers, and helped studios with content marketing.

What follows are my insights from this venture broken down into 12 lessons.

12 Big Picture Lessons

1. **Lead Generation** – Markets change and so do the rules
2. **Outreach** – Focus makes us relevant
3. **Positioning** – Good positioning speeds up the process
4. **Offers** – People buy what they WANT, not what they NEED
5. **Packaging** – We need to repackage our skills
6. **Risks** – Don't offer too much too soon
7. **Value** – Context creates value
8. **Content** – Don't tell people what to do
9. **Ads** – Algorithms want to iterate
10. **Marketing** – Visibility beats excellence
11. **Joint Ventures** – My magic trick: buying access
12. **Coaching** – Objectivity is why we struggle

1. Lead Generation

Markets change, and so do the rules

The reason why generating leads seems so tricky is because the rules of the game have shifted. Markets change, and so do the rules; what worked 20 or even 10 years ago is not valid anymore.

The industry has changed from a seller's market to a buyer's market. We, too, need to shift our approach.

Instead of striving to be the best (which is what you do in a "seller's market"), we should strive to be the least risky option (which is what you do in a "buyer's market").

If we keep playing to the old rules taught by gurus that were successful 20 years ago, we will never win at this game.

2. Offers

Focus makes us relevant

Pitching creative services without relevancy to the buyer is synonymous with spamming people. In a "seller's market," our services were considered the solution, hence highly relevant.

So pitching our services was enough to win new business. Yet, in the past 10 years, buyers have become much more demanding.

They don't just want to buy the services anymore; they want the problem to be fixed. Now here's what we need to do.

We offer to solve a specific problem they experience through our creative services. It's how we become relevant again so that we can get those meetings with decision-makers in no time.

"We have had some insane growth percentages since we started working with Marko. Something like 40% in the first year and 100% in the second year. So we actually tripled our revenue in 18 months. On top of that, we are now working with brands like META, Headspace, and many more."



João Freitas
Mezzolab, Portugal

3. Positioning

Good positioning speeds up the process

Trust comes from focus. In today's new market environment, simply positioning as a generic service provider (AKA motion-design studio) doesn't cut it anymore. Worse, such a generic market positioning kills any trust in our studio for high-ticket clients and attracts low-budget clients.

People with big budgets want specialists, not generalists. They seek the authority that knows how to solve their specific problem.

Instead of positions as a generic service provider, AKA a "motion-design studio," position on the problem you're solving through motion design. For example: "Animating stories that make people buy more." This will shorten your sales cycles (time till someone buys) by 50%.

4. Offers

People buy what they **WANT**, not what they **NEED**

The key to a successful creative business is recognizing demand and creating a sexy offer.

Obvious, you think? The problem we creatives always seem to run into is our inside perspective. We know the client's NEEDS, yet this often is not what they WANT.

And I learned that people always buy what they want, not what they need. Simple example: People don't WANT a personal trainer, yet they WANT that summer body. So as a personal trainer offer to help them get to their summer body.

They NEED a personal trainer, yet that is not what they WANT. What they WANT is the result. What they NEED is the process or the service. When we sell the results of our work, we quickly become an investment in their business.

"Marko's techniques fucking work. He helped us to sign a big client on our terms. Today, we only work with big clients. Marko, god bless we."



Dima

Riift Studio, Moldova

5. Packaging

We need to repackage our skills

There are 3 types of buyers in any company: the service buyer, the process buyer, and the results buyer.

Now, most of us try to sell creative services to the process buyer or the results buyer. Yet it's obvious that this won't work. It's not what they want.

To get bigger budgets, we must package our services into a straightforward process that leads to a specific result. It's the same, yet it seems far more valuable because we are selling them what they want.

Now we can get those big budgets because any of those three buyers understand the value of our services in his way.

6. Risks

Don't offer too much too soon

We are asking for too much too soon in the relationship. If we are selling anything above 30k (obviously, this number is subjective to the situation), then we need to start slow.

The higher the number gets, the more risk they perceive in working with us. We don't start with the entire project; we begin with a first, small, low-risk step—something like a workshop or an assessment.

We bring clarity to their situation so they can trust you enough to give us that big budget. Yet when we propose a high number without ever having worked with them, they will perceive a massive risk in working with us.

They will not be able to decide because they are scared; hence they postpone the decision. That's why they don't call you back.

"Marko is a catalyst for change. His coaching and consulting transformed our business. *Follow the program, put in the effort, and stick it out. Your business will never be the same.*"



Aaron Johnson
Stewart Design, USA

7. Value

Context creates value

Business clients (those with reasonable budgets) can not distinguish between a mediocre and a great piece of work because they don't aren't trained to see the difference or understand its implications.

Yet if we provide a business context alongside your work, they can understand the value better. That means that the context we provide creates the value they seek.

To accomplish this, we want to frame our creative work in a business context (because that is how they see the world in a business context).

Here's the process: We explain the issue, how we solved it (through your creative work), and what results our clients got from it—a simple yet powerful formula.

8. Content



Don't tell people what to do

If our content is not performing, we are probably preaching too much about what people should be doing. No one likes to be told what to do, especially on social media.

Telling people how they should solve their problems will make them resist our content. Instead, we want to lower their shields by talking about the problems they experience and the pain they feel.

They feel understood and are open to our "suggestion" to work with us. When we help people understand their problems better, they WILL see us as their guide.

Yet they will ignore our content if we try to educate them on how they should do their job or run their company.

*"Since we started working with Marko, our revenue has increased by more than 30%, and I think even 40%. Over the years, we always had a little growth, but it was never as significant. **Marko is a catalyst for new ideas and implementing them into our company.**"*



Uwe Nadler
Ravir Film, Germany

9. Ads

Algorithms want to iterate

Many ad agencies underperform because they don't understand how algorithms work. Sad but true. Let me explain.

The algorithms of social media platforms are built to find the right audience through iterations. Sending out one ad and hoping for a big win is a false promise. What we need is a multitude of ads to find the best responding message. That is what's called a cold layer. We basically try to find the right audience with a shotgun approach. At the second layer of ads, the warm layer, we retarget those interested in our cold ads. Think of that as the sniper.

Thanks to the cold ad layer, we now know the best responding message and the right audience. Now, we can run much more targeted ads. The warm layer is the key to converting our ads at a higher rate and getting those ad spends down by half.

Yet 8/10 agencies only send out ads to the cold layer and expect big conversations to happen.

10. Marketing

Visibility beats excellence

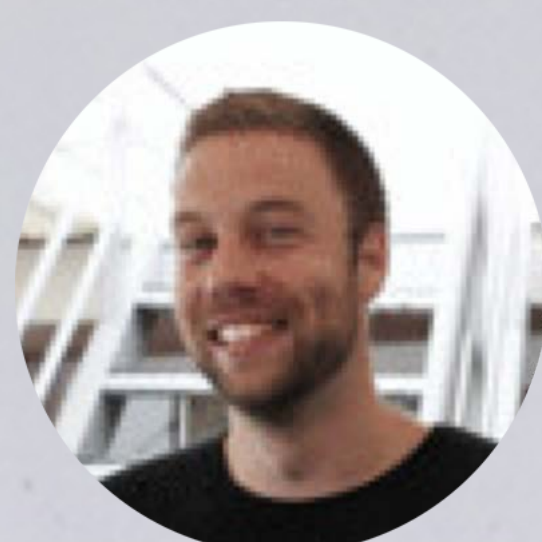
It's not enough to be better to stand out in today's markets. How can we expect our clients to call us if they have never heard of us? Look, we compete to be better because we have this inherited belief that once we are at the top of our industry, we will stand out.

Yet the harsh truth is that it is not our work that makes us stand out, but how visible we are to our audience. That is why less qualified studios often get better jobs.

They are more visible to our clients than we are. So, it doesn't matter whether our work is better; what matters is that we are seen and top-of-mind (TOM) when they need someone like us.

As long as our peers in the creative industry still compete to be the best, we can win the game by simply being more visible than them. To get there, we create content, share our POV, and show our faces, so people will remember us.

"We have grown from a tiny studio to a huge one in just a year. And, I definitely have Marko's inspiration to thank for that. Today, I can honestly say that I'm the founder of the biggest video marketing agency in the crypto space."



Joeri Pross

Hypercube, Netherlands

11. Joint Ventures

My magic trick: buying access

When I co-started my studio in 2011, we grew from a two-man studio into leading 30 artists signing 3,6 million euros in contracts within 18 months. We won four huge tv-stations (our clients) against internationally renowned agencies, yet nobody knew us.

Do you want to know what the key was? First – we were tightly positioned as a tv-station branding studio. Second – We (accidentally)created joint ventures with partners.

We made deals with people that had built a warm network of our target audience. Partners that our target audience already trusted and would take advice from. It's how we quickly moved up the ranks.

We didn't need to work our way up to be better. We paid to access the decision-makers we wanted to do business with. It's how we quickly skipped the early survival stage of a start-up and boosted our revenues.

12. Coaching

Objectivity is why we struggle

We struggle because we are not objective. It's that simple. We look at our competitors and try to copy what they are doing. We look at the big studios and try to analyze their strategies. Yet that doesn't seem to work, no matter how hard we try.

We feel stuck inside our bubbles. To get out of those bubbles, we need coaches and mentors with an outside perspective.

A good mentor with an outside perspective on our business WILL fast-track our journey. Look, we don't see what we don't see, right?! And it almost always is the small things we ignore that can unlock our next level.

My advice is to work with a coach that has been where we want to be and, most importantly, knows how marketing works. His job is not to tell us what to do but to show us our options, help us make informed decisions, and hold us accountable while helping us implement the plan.

*"Marko's energy and clarity are insane. He jumps right in and keeps the goal in focus the whole day. Result: positioning, product definition, plus a plan for marketing. Immediately actionable and grained with success. **It doesn't get any better than that.** Thank you, Marko."*



Tina Rapp

Mental Coach, Germany

We stuck in survival mode

The feast or famine cycle is what happens when a business owner lacks control of his cash flow due to ineffective or non-existent marketing and lead generation. Sometimes we have more work than we can handle. Other times we don't know where to get the next client from. It's impossible to build a successful business until we break that cycle.

Yet lead generation is the biggest obstacle in the creative industry. Many of us get stuck in that survival mode forever. Always working, never getting to a place where we get a decent return on our investment of time and effort. We sacrifice our health, even our family life because we buy into that false promise that "**great work leads to success.**"

I'm not saying that we shouldn't strive to produce great work; we are creatives. Yet great work without any marketing or promotion will not lead to success. There are so many mediocre agencies out there that get the great jobs not because they are better or because they price dump (they often charge more than we) but because they are seen, known, and trusted. — **They are visible.**

Where do you want to be in 3 years or even 18 months?

If you genuinely believe lead generation is the one problem holding you back from building a great, successful studio, then let's talk.

Schedule your free 30-minute call today, and let's see if we are a fit and how, if indeed, I can help you win some dream clients for our studio.

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