LEADMAKERS

TIRED OF BAD LEADS?

How to choose a lead gen agency that actually delivers

WHAT'S INSIDE

TIRED OF BAD LEADS?

YOU'RE NOT ALONE

If you've already hired a lead generation agency or two and still ended up with bad leads, no-show calls, and little to no pipeline, you're not the problem.

Many providers overpromise and underdeliver. They sell "qualified meetings" and flood inboxes with templated outreach that damages your brand more than it builds your funnel. No wonder so many founders give up on outbound entirely.

INTRODUCTION

But lead generation can still work. When it's done properly, with the right strategy and targeting, it's one of the most powerful growth levers in B2B.

The challenge is knowing how to separate the providers who talk a good game from those who can actually execute.

This guide is for founders and growth teams who have tried before and want to get it right this time. You'll find the warning signs to look out for, the right questions to ask, and a clear picture of what good lead generation should really look like, based on what we've seen working across hundreds of B2B campaigns.

Let's get into it.

HOW TO AVOID THE WRONG FIT

Most agencies sound good in the pitch. That's the easy part.
Not all lead generation partners are created equal. Many come highly recommended and sound great in a pitch — but that doesn't always translate into strong results.

After working with dozens of clients who've tried other providers first, we've seen some consistent patterns. The signs are often there early — you just need to know what to look for.

CHAPTER 1

“We Guarantee 30 Meetings per Month”
High-volume promises can be appealing, but quantity without quality often leads to no-shows or low-fit prospects. If a provider focuses only on numbers, ask how they define success beyond the booking.

What to ask instead:
- How do you qualify leads before booking them?
- Can you share examples of strong-fit prospects from past campaigns?

“We Use Proven Templates That Work Every Time”
Templates can help speed things up, but if they’re reused across multiple clients, they risk sounding impersonal. Decision-makers are quick to tune out messages that feel generic or recycled.

What to ask instead:
- How do you customize outreach based on each client’s ICP?
- Can you share examples of different messages used for different segments?

“We’ll Handle Everything — You Don’t Have to Worry About a Thing”
It’s helpful when an agency can take initiative, but you still need clarity on what’s happening and why. A hands-off experience shouldn’t mean a lack of transparency.

What to ask instead:
- How much visibility will we have into campaign messaging and performance?
- Can we review or adjust messaging if needed?

“We’ll Start Tomorrow”
Agility is great, but if there’s no structured onboarding, targeting strategy, or messaging prep, the campaign may be running without a clear foundation. Good outreach takes a little setup.

What to ask instead:
- What does your onboarding process include?
- How do you align messaging and targeting before launch?

No agency can guarantee perfection, but the right questions can save you months of wasted time. The more clarity you get upfront, the better your chances of finding a partner who actually fits your goals.

THE BIG 5:

QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE SIGNING

Choosing a lead gen agency can feel a bit like dating. Everyone looks great on the first call. But what matters is what happens after you commit.

These five questions aren't just due diligence — they're your best chance to spot if you're aligned before anything hits your calendar.

CHAPTER 2

1. How do you define success?
Every agency will say they're results-driven. What matters is how they define "results." Are they focused solely on meetings booked? Or are they thinking in terms of pipeline, fit, and conversions?

Listen for: a clear, shared understanding of success that aligns with your goals, not just theirs

2. Who's writing the messages?
Messaging makes or breaks your outreach. Ask who actually writes the copy, how it's personalized, and what level of input you'll have.

Listen for: collaboration, context

3. Where are the leads coming from?
Even the best message won't land if it's going to the wrong person. Sourcing and list-building should be strategic, not just scraped from LinkedIn in bulk.

Listen for: clear processes, reliable data tools, and an understanding of who's most likely to buy (not just who's easiest to find)

4. Will we see what's happening?
It's your brand and your funnel. You deserve to see how it's being represented. Make sure you know what's being sent, how people are responding, and what's working. Especially when your brand and team name are involved.

Listen for: regular reports, open access to outreach messaging, and room to tweak things together as you go

5. What does onboarding look like?
If they're ready to start tomorrow without asking many questions, be cautious. Good outreach takes context. You can't automate relevance, at least, not the kind that books real meetings.

Listen for: ICP alignment, messaging development, testing time, and a clear launch plan (bonus points if they push back on things that don't make sense yet)

These questions are there to start a real conversation. You're not grilling anyone, just making sure you're on the same page before moving forward.

The goal is clarity. When that's in place, everything else is easier to build.

WHAT GOOD LEAD GEN FEELS LIKE:

METRICS, COMMUNICATION, AND EXPECTATIONS

So let's say things are moving — you've kicked things off with a lead gen partner, the brief is solid, messaging is approved, and you're live.

Now what?

Here's what should happen.

You start to get a clear sense of what's going on. Not just from a weekly report, but in how things feel. The leads coming in actually match what you talked about. You're not second-guessing the targeting. You're not rereading messages thinking, "This doesn't sound like us".

CHAPTER 3

The metrics make sense, too. You're not chasing vanity numbers or hoping a spike in replies means something. You're looking at the stuff that moves deals forward: positive replies, meetings that actually happen, qualified leads your sales team wants to talk to.

It's also okay if results take a minute. The difference is you know what's being tested, what's next, and how things are trending, because you're looped in.

When it's working, you're not constantly questioning if it's worth it — you just see progress. The right conversations start happening. Your calendar fills with people who make sense. It's steady, it's clear, and it frees you up to focus on what comes next. That's what good lead gen actually feels like.

SHOULD YOU
KEEP IT IN-HOUSE OR HIRE AN AGENCY?

There's no one-size-fits-all answer here.

Some teams are better off owning everything in-house. Others save time, money, and stress by partnering. The right move depends on what you're trying to achieve and what you have (or don't have) in place already.

Let's break it down.

CHAPTER 4

When in-house works best

- You already have a proven outreach system — ICP, messaging, tools, workflows, the works
- Your team has the time and bandwidth to test, optimize, and consistently manage outbound
- You want full control over messaging, brand voice, and how your team shows up in people's inboxes

When partnering makes more sense

- You've tried doing it yourself, but the results weren't consistent (or meaningful)
- Your team is focused on other priorities, like closing deals, and outreach keeps slipping
- You want to move faster, but without sacrificing strategy or quality

	In-house	Partnered
Time investment	High (setup + ongoing optimization)	Medium (collaboration, reviews, feedback)
Speed to launch	Slower	Faster (existing systems/processes)
Internal expertise	Required	Optional
Cost structure	Lower hard costs, higher time costs	Higher upfront, lower team strain
Flexibility	Full control	Shared control, guided by expertise

There's no wrong answer, just the one that fits your goals right now.

Some companies start in-house and eventually partner. Others do the reverse. Clarity matters most: knowing what you can handle, what you want to do internally, and what gaps you'd rather fill with outside help.

Trying to do everything when you're not set up for it? That's where outreach breaks down.

YOUR FIRST 30 DAYS – WHAT A REAL PARTNER SHOULD DELIVER

You signed, you're set up, and the campaigns are ready to go. Now comes the real test: does anything actually happen?

The first 30 days of a lead gen engagement tell you everything. Not because they'll deliver perfect results (they probably won't), but because they reveal how your partner thinks, works, and adjusts in real time.

So, what should you actually expect?

CHAPTER 5

Week 1–2:

Laying the groundwork

This isn't about ticking boxes but setting up something that can actually work.

Your partner should be asking smart questions, poking holes in assumptions, and refining your ICP until it's sharp enough to aim. Messaging won't be one-and-done either. You should see multiple versions, different angles, and ideas that sound like you, not copy-paste templates.

Tech-wise? It should feel smooth. Whatever tools are used, they shouldn't break your existing workflow or require you to learn a dozen new logins. Clean setup, minimal friction, and a system that fits how your team works.

Week 2–4:

Getting to signals

Once campaigns are live, the work doesn't stop. This is when you should start seeing early patterns, who's opening, who's replying, what's resonating (and what's not).

Your partner should be proactive: adjusting copy, shifting segments, tightening targeting & not waiting until the end of the month to "report." You don't need noise. You need insight.

And most importantly, you should feel like you're in the loop without doing the chasing. Clear updates, honest takes, and a sense that someone's actually steering the ship.

What you shouldn't see

- Metrics that look good but mean nothing (like reply rate without any context on quality)
- You doing all the chasing for updates or explanations

You won't have a calendar full of perfect leads by day 10. But by day 30, you should:

- Know how messaging is performing
- See a few early signals of traction (positive replies, early calls, promising threads)
- Feel confident in how your partner thinks, reacts, and communicates

It's about how you're getting there, and whether it feels like you're building something sustainable.

KNOW WHAT YOU'RE GETTING INTO

By now, you know what to look for, what to ask, and how to spot the red flags before they cost you time, money, or your brand reputation.

So here's the final piece: clarity upfront saves everything later.

Clear definitions of success. Clear expectations for collaboration. Clear signals of progress. If those aren't there from the start, they're unlikely to show up later. But when they are, you get more than meetings. You get momentum.

This isn't about being picky. It's about protecting your team, your budget, and your reputation from the churn of bad-fit vendors.

If you're ready to move forward, take your time & ask the questions.

And if you're still not sure what to do next? That's okay too. Save this guide. Share it with your team. Come back to it when you're ready.

Turns out, avoiding bad leads is less about luck and more about knowing what to look for. Now you do.

FINAL CHAPTER

LEADMAKERS