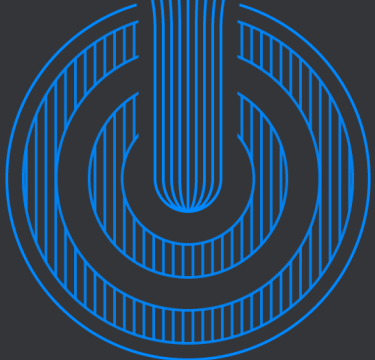


How B2B Technology Companies Convert Content Syndication Leads into Sales-Ready Opportunities



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INTRODUCTION

Content syndication can be a powerful way for B2B tech companies to get their content in front of the right people quickly and generate qualified leads at a predetermined cost per lead.

The reality is that content syndication leads are top-of-funnel prospects — *they are rarely ready to talk to sales.*

But when expectations aren't properly set, sales teams can get overly excited about content syndication leads because (when executed correctly) the leads will match your ICP.

So, how do you secure high-quality content syndication leads and nurture them into sales-readiness?

In this guide, we'll walk through how to work with content syndication lead providers and create nurture programs that convert those leads into qualified sales opportunities.

WHEN IS CONTENT SYNDICATION THE RIGHT TOOL FOR B2B LEAD GENERATION?

Enterprise and mid-market technology companies use content syndication to quickly, cost-efficiently, and predictably build a database of high-quality leads that will generate net-new pipeline.

However, to maximize the benefits of content syndication, you need a focused approach. Using content syndication to “boil the ocean” – that is, targeting too broadly – often results in a lot of low-quality or irrelevant leads that aren't a good fit for your products or services.

Before investing in content syndication, companies must clearly define their ICP, including demographic and firmographic criteria like top industries and job titles, employee size, annual revenue bands, and geographic locations. Additionally, work closely with your sales team to identify a target account list (*TAL*).

When targeting requirements are well-defined and precise, your lead provider can deliver high quality leads that match your ICP, and you can tailor the content in your campaigns to match those prospects' needs.

When working with a content syndication lead provider, be precise and specific about your targeting requirements and the information that should accompany each lead.

Experienced, reputable providers can offer valuable knowledge and data-driven feedback to help refine your content and targeting.

HOW TO SUCCEED WITH CONTENT SYNDICATION LEAD PROVIDERS

The last point bears repeating. When working with a content syndication lead provider, be precise and specific about your targeting requirements and the information that should accompany each lead.

When possible, provide your lead provider with a target account list (*TAL*), so they know exactly which accounts to focus on.

If your *TAL* has been exhausted, ask your lead provider to produce a list of **Lookalike accounts**. Lookalikes are net-new companies that resemble accounts on your *TAL*. Your lead provider should be able to build a list of Lookalikes based on your target accounts' competitors. And using the firmographic characteristics of accounts in your *TAL*, they can identify companies with similar needs within the ecosystem of those target accounts.

You should also determine the number of leads per company (*LPC*) that you want your lead provider to produce. Would you prefer to receive just one *LPC*, a maximum of 3-4 *LPC*, or would you rather generate as many leads from the same account as possible? You're in complete control of setting this number.

Should your lead provider share the city and state of the decision maker, as they might work remotely from the company headquarters? Should they provide the LinkedIn profile of each lead or the direct dial and extension number to the decision maker's desk? Get specific about what you need.

Lastly, ensure that your lead provider uses intent data from sources like Bombora, Demandbase, and 6sense so that they can promote your content to decision-makers at accounts that have a higher propensity to be in-market. You can share a list of intent keywords with your lead provider or ask them to share an example of one with you.

Seek a Transparent Partnership

Work with lead providers who are transparent about their lead production and quality assurance processes so you're confident their methods are rigorous, they adhere to relevant regulations like GDPR, and the leads will match your ICP and come with accurate contact information.

Experienced, reputable providers can offer valuable knowledge and data-driven feedback to help refine your content and targeting.

For example, depending on the campaign, you might supply the lead provider with 2-5 assets for syndication. If a piece of content isn't resonating with your target audience, the lead provider can let you know, suggest alternative formats, or adjust your campaign to prioritize higher-performing assets.

Likewise, as leads are delivered, establish a feedback loop where you return any non-viable leads (bounced emails and invalid phone numbers) so they can make adjustments. All non-viable leads should be credited and replaced as the campaign progresses.

Transparent feedback loops build trust and confidence in the lead-generation process, align expectations, and ensure campaign performance improves over time.

Most Importantly,
educational
content should
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your product.

Secure a fixed Cost Per Lead

Reputable content syndication providers will produce leads at a fixed cost per lead (CPL), locking in a predictable budget and lead volume for your campaigns and allowing you to efficiently plan your follow-up and nurture processes.

Keep in mind the CPL you seek should be data-driven. Do your homework to understand your CPL goal. Identify your average CPL for high-quality leads from Google ad campaigns or organic search. Then, negotiate a lower CPL to secure as many leads as possible, given your budget.

Content syndication lead providers allow you to customize your campaign targets, but make sure they're clear about any additional fees that may apply for more concentrated, finely-filtered targeting criteria. Setting clear terms in your agreement—CPL, lead volume, quality standards, timeframe, and pacing—helps ensure your campaigns are predictable, measurable, and improvable.

Run a pilot campaign

When working with a new content syndication lead provider, test their programs before committing to a significant financial investment.

You might secure a pilot of \$5,000-\$15,000 over 30-90 days to test them out. If a lead provider truly stands by their quality, ask for a free test – if this company wants your investment, ask them to invest in you. Be wary of any lead provider unwilling to demonstrate their value upfront with a nominal 3-4 week pilot.

WHAT CONTENT CONVERTS BEST IN CONTENT SYNDICATION CAMPAIGNS?

Top-of-funnel content such as whitepapers, eBooks, third-party analyst reports, blog posts, YouTube videos, and infographics with compelling headlines can effectively engage B2B buyers.

Most importantly, educational content should never be about your product. Always educate and inform your audience about relevant topics or address painful problems within your category or industry.

Here are a few other tips for selecting content for syndication programs:

- For long-form reports, **consider creating an executive brief** that distills key insights or findings and distributing that first to give your audience an easier, more digestible entry point.
- **Align your content with market trends and topics** to initiate relevant, timely conversations.
- **Offer your lead provider the same content in multiple formats** to see what drives the most engagement and match your audience's unique preferences.
- **Content headlines should make a clear (and relevant) promise** about what your target audience will get by consuming your content – and, of course, deliver on that promise.
- When possible, **work with reputable third-party analysts and research firms**, as their recommendations are generally viewed as more trustworthy than the POV of a particular brand.

Regardless of format, always test your content with your existing audience and customers before deploying it in a paid program so you can identify any needed modifications and make sure it resonates.

HOW TO PRIORITIZE TARGETING FOR YOUR CONTENT SYNDICATION LEAD PROGRAM

When preparing your target account lists and job titles for your content syndication program, it's essential to review historical company data to ensure your program is focused on generating leads within the target customer's buying unit.

Review closed-won company firmographic data and identify the personas/titles that are most influential in the buying process to narrow your target account list and titles to companies that need your solution.

Additionally, review historical data to identify what sparked past deals and map out when influential personas enter and engage in the buying process. These insights inform your broader demand gen strategy, allowing you to target and prioritize buyer roles at the right time in the buying cycle.

Build nurture programs before launching content syndication programs

Before your vendor delivers your content syndication leads, you should have your nurture tracks ready so you can quickly follow up with relevant, personalized messaging.

When prioritizing and segmenting your nurtures, start small and narrow your focus to your top few industries to create a more manageable and targeted nurturing program. After you've segmented your leads by industry, filter those leads further by job title. Practitioners have different informational needs than a director or C-level executive. Recognize that different roles within the buying group have distinct needs, and customize your messaging and content to resonate with each persona.

DITCH THE "SET IT AND FORGET IT" PLAYBOOK AND ACTIVELY NURTURE YOUR LEADS

While there are endless tools to automate marketing communications, the fact is that automating your nurture flows (even if it's segmented by industry or persona) no longer works.

Pre-set nurture workflows often deliver irrelevant content that just adds to the noise in a prospect's inbox and leads to disengagement.

To truly engage leads, build relationships, and drive conversions, you must adopt an active approach to your nurture program. Active nurtures are responsive to a prospect's behavior—whether they opened an email, clicked a link, viewed specific content, or didn't—so the next interaction is tailored and aligned with their interests and engagement level.

You should use your marketing automation platform to set up the automations and action steps for your nurture programs, but an active nurture approach needs a human touch.

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Active nurtures are responsive to a prospect's behavior, so the next interaction is tailored and aligned with their interests and engagement level.

If prospects aren't responding, you shouldn't contact them more than once every two weeks. But if they are engaging, you want to respond promptly.

And because your nurture is responsive, you won't miss triggers to fast-track hand-raisers who are ready to talk to sales.

Having a human in the loop who's "reading the room" and responding appropriately to a prospect's behavior increases your chances of converting leads into pipeline — especially for longer B2B buying cycles.

BUILD A DIRECT RELATIONSHIP WITH RELEVANT, HELPFUL CONTENT

If you're going to be a leader in your industry, you have to be a leading provider of knowledge and resources in that industry.

When you receive content syndication leads, the prospect likely isn't familiar with your brand yet – they might know nothing about your company. **Your goal is to start a conversation and build positive brand associations by providing them with relevant, helpful content.**

When you start your digital relationship with your new leads, focus your early communications on the themes of the initial asset they engaged with. The theme and topic of that first asset spoke to their needs and interests, so validate that interest with relevant, related content.

Whether it's a short video, blog post, or white paper, the format of the campaign asset indicates their consumption preferences, so the first content you send directly should also be in the same format. This will help you test and validate what resonates with that prospect.

Prospects are unlikely to read an entire whitepaper from start to finish. More often, they read it partially or just skimmed through it.

Make it easy for prospects to access value. For longer-form assets, repurpose different sections and pieces into bite-sized, digestible formats, such as a series of blog posts. When linking out to a piece of content in an email, provide insights from that content natively in your email, so if they don't click, they still get value.

Remember, as top-of-funnel leads, these prospects haven't yet bought into learning more about your solution to their business pain point. Avoid any product-focused content like long case studies or product comparisons.

Don't ask for a call. Don't ask for a demo. **Don't ask for anything in return.**

By sharing lighter, informative content, you can build trust and move leads from an interest in a topic to an interest in your brand and specific solutions.

Make it easy
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access value.



Pro tip: Have product experts run weekly live group demos

Consider creating a weekly live group demo hosted by a systems engineer or other product experts who aren't members of your sales team.

Invite very small audiences of only about 20 to 30 people; typically, just five or six will attend.

In this small group setting with a technically savvy team member, prospects lower their guardrails because they know it's not a sales pitch. They're more likely to engage, ask questions, and volunteer tons of information about their specific needs and pain points (which can also inform future content).

These non-sales demos give your team a firsthand sense of whether a prospect is ready to engage with more in-depth product information and help you determine where they are in the buying cycle. And if and when the prospect is ready, you've teed up sales perfectly because you've essentially done half a discovery call without the customer knowing it.

LEVERAGE WEBSITE PERSONALIZATION TOOLS

As you build your digital relationship with content syndication leads, one important early goal is to drive them to your website; your website is the ideal place to ensure these prospects associate your brand and solution with the content they originally engaged with.

Think of your website homepage as a billboard on a highway — you only have seconds to grab their attention. You want prospects to build a clear picture of who you are and what you do and organically find more helpful content. Not easy.

To help ensure your leads are engaged and build positive brand associations once they reach your website, use web personalization tools like PathFactory or Optimizely to deliver a customized experience.

These tools allow you to tailor your site to each visitor based on firmographics and behavior. You can customize content and messaging to match specific industries or visitor characteristics, customize CTAs based on their funnel stage, and create microsites for target accounts.

Start small and target just your top two or three industries, ensuring you serve them relevant, customized content when they visit your website. As your web personalization strategy advances, you can A/B test variations to identify the most effective messaging and integrate your personalization tool with your CRM to continuously refine your strategy based on visitor data.

AI-driven chatbots have also become more effective at drawing from your knowledge base to deliver relevant answers to direct visitor queries.

With website personalization, leads can more easily find relevant content, get answers to their questions, and understand how your products match their needs.

Your website is the ideal place to ensure these prospects associate your brand and solution with the content they originally engaged with.

Advanced lead scoring will help you align with sales by enabling you to separate the demographic and firmographic fit of the lead from their behavior.

CREATE AN ADVANCED LEAD-SCORING MODEL TO ALIGN MARKETING AND SALES

Advanced lead scoring will help you align with sales by enabling you to separate the demographic and firmographic fit of the lead from their behavior.

When you receive leads from a third-party content syndication leader provider, grade each based on how closely aligned their demographics and firmographics are to your ICP.

You can use a simple A-F scale to identify how closely the leads fit your ICP.

- An **'A' grade** signifies a perfect match within your ICP: the right title and priority companies within your #1 target industry that bring in the most revenue. Is that a practitioner or a mid-level director level? Work with your sales team to determine the precise persona of your best-fit customer.
- **'B' grades** might indicate leads that fit your top two personas, that might be mid-market companies (when your top priority is enterprise) in your top 2-3 industries.

The less a lead matches your ideal lead criteria, the lower the grade.

For example, if you're targeting CTOs of Fortune 100 banks, a lead fitting this description would receive an 'A' grade. Whereas a CTO from a mid-sized fintech company might receive a 'B.'

If done right, all your content syndication leads should be A's and B's. If you have a bunch of Ds and Fs (*e.g., industries you don't sell to, countries you don't sell in*), strongly consider asking your provider for new leads or considering a new provider altogether.

Some marketers include demographic data in their lead-scoring model. Grading your leads allows you to prioritize best-fit leads as soon as they enter your system and focuses your scoring strictly on the prospects' activity and engagement (*also known as behavioral scoring*) directly with your company.

Work with sales to develop your lead-scoring methodology

Each graded lead starts with a score of zero, and that score increases with each engagement after you've initiated a conversation.

By isolating demographic data from your scoring model, you can weed out noisy, misleadingly high scores from poor-fit prospects.

To develop an effective lead scoring model:

- **Collaborate closely with your CRO and sales leadership.** Work with top-performing salespeople from different regions to build and refine the model and establish which behaviors truly indicate sales-readiness.
- **Create a point system (your model) for different actions.** For example, downloading a whitepaper might be worth 2 points, attending a webinar might be worth 3 points, and watching a product demo video could be worth 5 points.

Marketing teams often build their lead scoring model without any input from sales, but establishing the right threshold for the sales handoff requires alignment from both sides.

By arming your lead provider with precise targeting requirements and building trust with those leads through an active, personalized nurture program, you can consistently convert content syndication leads into sales-ready opportunities.

- **Present realistic prospect scenarios, including example leads, demographic information, and a list of engagements.** Ask them whether, under each unique scenario, they'd consider the prospect sales-ready.
- **Assign leads to sales** when they've reached an agreed-upon points threshold.

Work with sales ahead of your program to define successful outcomes, like a target goal for initial sales meetings scheduled, meetings completed, and the opportunities created from the leads generated.

Lastly, plan for ongoing refinement. Lead scoring models aren't static – they evolve as your business changes. Regularly review performance data (e.g., lead to meeting and meeting to opportunity conversion) and adjust your model accordingly.

Marketing teams often build their lead scoring model without any input from sales, but establishing the right threshold for the sales handoff requires alignment from both sides.

SET TEAM EXPECTATIONS AHEAD OF TIME AND NURTURE YOUR LEADS UNTIL THEY ARE READY TO TALK TO SALES

The leads generated by content syndication providers are attracted by your content, not your brand. Chances are, they don't even know your company name yet.

Sales often believes that because leads have the right titles and are from the right companies in the right industries, they'll convert faster.

That's why managing the expectations (and impatience) of your sales team regarding these leads is critical.

When leads are passed directly to sales (or sales grabs them, expecting them to be warmer than they are) too soon, it usually leads to awkward, misaligned conversations that undermine the initial content syndication investment.

It can take up to two or three quarters to nurture these leads into opportunities, so temper your sales team's expectations.

Focus on building relationships with prospects by delivering a continuous and diverse mix of valuable content that builds positive associations for your brand.

By arming your lead provider with precise targeting requirements and building trust with those leads through an active, personalized nurture program, you can consistently convert content syndication leads into sales-ready opportunities.

To all marketing professionals, we sincerely hope you found valuable insights within this eBook that will contribute to the success of your future content syndication initiatives.

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS



LeadSwell has been providing global lead generation services to enterprise and mid-market customers for over 25 years. With over 1,600 programs launched worldwide, we help our customers by leveraging our expertise to create top-of-funnel targeted engagement to feed into their programs. With a customer-first approach, LeadSwell can help you with your lead generation strategy today. Contact us at sales@leadswell.com.



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Lisa Hatheway, founder of DemandReel, is inspired by a lifelong passion for generating demand and delivering results; leveraging this passion has developed into over 20 years of experience in demand generation. DemandReel is transforming targeted prospects into loyal customers, driving a 300-600% increase in pipeline and revenue growth in the B2B SaaS market. Reach out to Lisa at lisaghatheway@gmail.com to start a conversation.