

6 STEPS TO PERFECT QUAL

The L&E trust guide to ensure the success of your project



STEP 6

MAINTAINING CLIENT RELATIONSHIPS

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STEP SIX: MAINTAINING CLIENT RELATIONSHIPS

In a world focused on ‘how much,’ it’s qualitative research that digs deep to uncover the truth in consumer behavior. If the goal of qual is to explore rather than confirm, then the best qualitative research is in the art of asking the right questions, with the right people, and sharing the journey they take you on, in order to result in true insight.

Our series of six white papers and webinars is designed to support you every step along the way in your project – to provide a guide to the key elements that will drive success and how we at L&E can help you. This final step will guide you through the most effective strategies in maintaining client relationships, to help you build strong relationships that exceed the length of the qualitative project.

THE VALUE OF CLIENT RELATIONSHIPS

Independent qualitative research consultants, who care for only a handful of clients, have a strong obligation to manage and nurture these valuable relationships. Nurturing leads on a continual basis, and working hard for repeat business, is vital for running a successful business.

Consultants must maintain the relationship before, during and after completing a project with a client. This is often done through relationship building and marketing efforts, such as segmented databases, email marketing and social media, as well as generating the most compelling and relevant content to support it. These activities will help to keep you top of mind among current clients, while also attracting new clients.

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GOOD ACCOUNT MANAGEMENT LEADS TO REPEAT BUSINESS

Of course, when a project comes to a close, you can't just abandon your client. Instead, you want to put even more effort into maintaining contact with them to build a stronger relationship, one that exceeds the length of the project.

The probability of selling to a new prospect is only 5-20 percent, but fortunately you've already nurtured this lead enough for them to commit to using your services before. So, because the probability of selling to an existing customer is much higher (60-70 percent), this is the perfect chance to continue the nurturing process. This offers an opportunity to build upon the trust they have in your service, and the quality of your research, with greater likelihood that they will convert again.

So, whether you follow up to enquire how they used their insights, draft a case study, or ask permission to write a blog about your experiences working together, there are a number of ways to maintain contact and continue building your relationship. You could even offer to pitch the insights to an industry event, which would gain exposure

for both your company and the client. As qualitative researchers, there is always an opportunity to add depth to a recent study, or develop a view on how it fits with ongoing trends and desk reports.

But for those who haven't already used your services, lead nurturing is the chance to show potential clients that you are an expert in your field, by providing them with information about what you do and how great you are at doing it. Some leads, although initially interested in your service, may have dropped off the sales funnel. So, your email and social media marketing strategy could ensure that they won't forget about your services. Moreover, providing helpful and regular contact with a lead (although not too frequent to be irritating) proves reliability and will allow potential clients to see the relevance and originality of your message. Plus, you can take a dose of your own medicine by offering your clients and leads a chance to take part in surveys, which will help you to better understand what they're interested in. As you already know, this will help you target them more specifically in the future.



PRACTICAL TIPS ON HOW RESEARCHERS CAN BUILD AND MAINTAIN CLIENT RELATIONSHIPS OUTSIDE OF A PROJECT

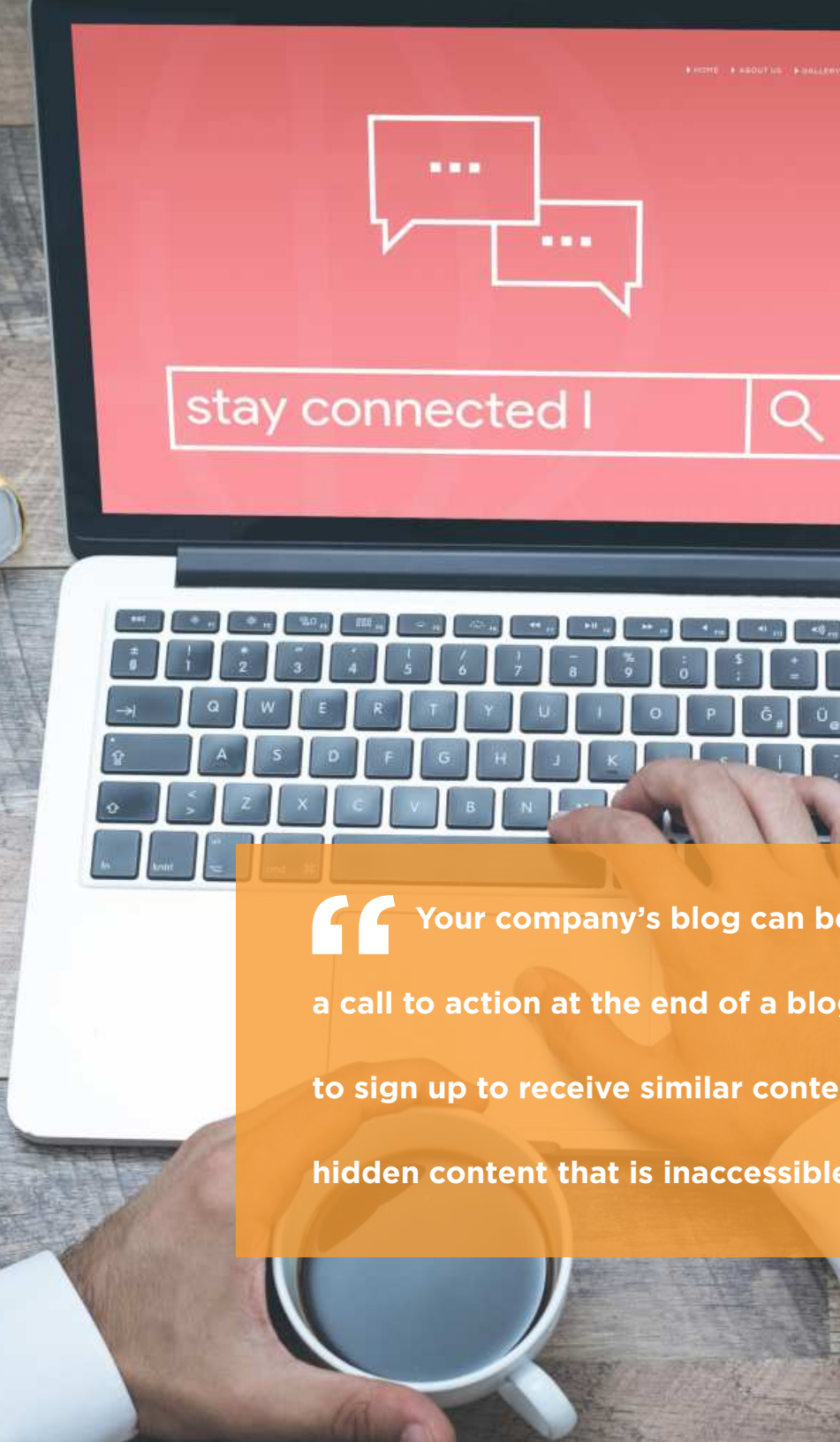
The key is to provide the right level of contact with appropriate and relevant content. You don't want to be forgotten, but you also don't want to bombard them with useless information that they have little interest in or requests for repeat business which are blunt and pushy. Therefore, it's important to have excellent email and social media strategies, along with interesting content, to drive leads back to your website where they can explore your company for themselves.

CREATING AND MAINTAINING DATABASES

Although it can be time consuming, building a solid database is a vital starting point in both nurturing client relationships and reaching out to potential business leads. When creating your database, you'll be looking for opportunities to gain as many contacts as possible. But persuading

people to part with their personal or business data can be tricky, so it's important to give an incentive to encourage them to exchange their details. This could be done by offering a competition, or by organizing or sponsoring an event or webinar where registration also requires contact details to be shared. Moreover, your company's blog can be a great way to gather email addresses. By using a call to action at the end of a blogpost, or a popup form, you can persuade readers to sign up to receive similar content via email. A more enticing tactic is to offer hidden content that is inaccessible without the reader exchanging details. This often includes white papers, eBooks, infographics or other in-depth downloadable content. It's important that this content is original and substantial though, people will be very quickly annoyed if they have to share their details just to get a 600-word blog.

Once you have sufficient contacts in your database, it's a good idea to segment them for targeting purposes. Some categories to consider are: job title, age, location, industry, or interests. This will allow you to target



them individually with different types of content. For example, you could share a case study involving Bank of America with your contacts who are located in the US and are in the finance and banking sector (more on this later). Another option is to create different personas within your database, creating identities for the types of clients you want to target, so that you can supply them with only relevant information and content. For example, the brands in your database will be interested in different content than the traditional research agencies - and the same goes for the suppliers in your database, such as focus group facilities. And if you have the bandwidth, another valuable way to segment your database is based on your pipeline. Are they hot, warm or cold leads? How frequently should you be contacting them? One of these categories could be previous clients who you're hoping will provide a repeat business opportunity. This means they already know about your company, and therefore they should be sent information to remind them of the value you provided on a specific project. Unlike new leads, they may not want to be completely re-educated about your company and services.

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EMAIL MARKETING

Email marketing supports a regular form of communication that can build loyalty and trust between the company and client. Email marketing is therefore highly important in maintaining relationships with past clients and persuading them into working with you again.

Although generating new or repeat business is the main aim of your email campaign, emails must not be used for continuous business pitches. Instead, ensure that your emails are really adding value to those receiving them by providing them with useful insight into their industry, or educating them on how the service you provide can specifically help them. If you've already worked with a client, it's likely they know the value that your company can offer, so it's important to think of extra value your company and services could provide and remind them of this. This could follow the 'if you liked this, then we think you'll also like this...' format.

Moreover, it's important to make use of the categories within your database. This will allow you to target specific groups with specific email content that is relevant to them and will avoid irritated leads and requests to 'unsubscribe.' This personalization is important as it removes

“ Personalization is important as it removes the sense of automation and builds a genuine relationship, where the client feels like the company knows and understands their needs.

the sense of automation and builds a genuine relationship, where the client feels like the company knows and understands their needs. This trust can also be built by using the recipient's name at the top of the email or in the subject line, as well as using personalized information such as location and company. These small details can make otherwise plain and informative emails feel like personal invitations to learn more about the company, or to increase knowledge of an industry through content platforms such as webinars. There is also the option to use trigger emails, which can be sent when a viewer clicks on certain links or web pages on the company site. These can be useful for drawing a potential client back to an idea that they may have forgotten about.

Email marketing is important, but as a company you shouldn't be relying upon it entirely. Remember to also prioritize social media and make sure your online content is of a high enough standard to keep clients engaged.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media has the power to nurture leads by strengthening thought leadership, raising brand awareness, maintaining brand positioning, and deepening company/client relationships. Plus, it can give clients a look into your company culture to assess whether you're a good fit, so it's crucial that you're employing the best social media strategy. While email marketing will be received by a set group of people within your database, social media has the potential to be shared to a wider audience through the power of sharing. There is also a backlog of information on a Twitter or LinkedIn feed that allows a visitor to see a wider variety of content in one go, rather than having the information drip in on a regular basis as through email marketing. For a B2B marketing strategy, it's important to use Twitter, LinkedIn and sometimes Facebook to nurture your leads.

When you're beginning your social media marketing strategy, it's important to set objectives - what do you plan to achieve? This could be a percentage increase in followers, an increased reach or engagement statistics, or even how many new business prospects you plan to receive. Thankfully, your social media activity is easily measurable with analytics available on every platform, which make it simple to track progress. Software such as Hootsuite also helps with reporting, and makes it easy to stay ahead of the game with post scheduling across all your social media channels on a single platform.

Across all social media channels there is the option for promoted content, which can allow posts to have increased reach, increased engagement and can even boost followers. Of course, the hope is that using these features will see an increase in traffic to your company's website and, fingers crossed, increased business for your company and a good ROI. This process doesn't have to be pricy as a budget can be set to avoid huge bills piling up. You can even choose the specifics of who your posts will reach, to ensure you're getting the best out of your investment by targeting the right people based on locations, interests, industries, management levels, and much more.

When sharing anything on social media, it's important to consider the purpose of the post - who are you trying to reach, what are you saying, and why should anyone care?

However, even promoted posts won't help you if your social media content isn't good enough. When sharing anything on social media, it's important to consider the purpose of the post – who are you trying to reach, what are you saying, and why should anyone care? This process avoids off-brand posting which followers may view as spam, or have little interest in. Furthermore, it's important that your posts drive traffic to your site. For example, when sharing your site's content (e.g. blog post), you should always include a call to action in the written content (e.g. 'click below to read more from our blog'). Once on your site, the viewer has a whole hub of information about your company to explore, which if your content is good (more on this later), should draw them to realize, or recall, the value of your services.

Attracting clients to your social media channels can be achieved through placing icons and links on your website and within marketing materials such as mailers. Engaging with clients on social media, by liking and

sharing or retweeting, is a way to show your company's interest in their company activity, and could be the beginning of a conversation between the two.

Specifically, in a B2B environment, LinkedIn allows you to nurture leads through groups. This is a great way to interact with likeminded people and companies who may not already be aware of your work. You can attract attention to both your own LinkedIn page and your company page through proving your expertise and your value to others in the industry. On Twitter, you can create and maintain lists to categorize those you are following, such as industry influencers, clients and potential clients. These lists make it easier to engage with specific people. And of course, another valuable way to connect with others using Twitter is through industry-specific hashtags. Hashtags work especially well during industry events, where live conversations take place using the event hashtag.



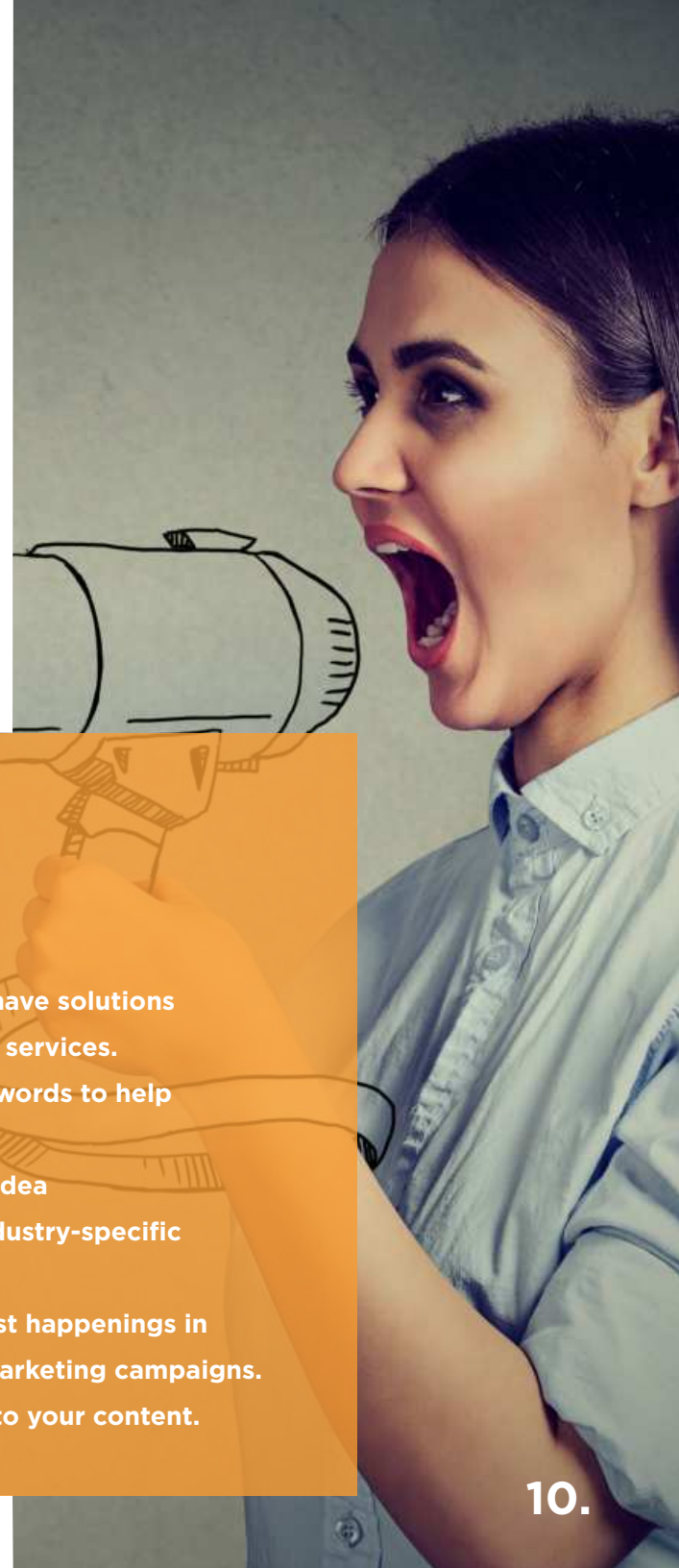
CREATING CONTENT

Creating compelling and relevant ongoing content can help keep you top of mind with your clients. It can also show your expertise as an industry thought-leader in areas specific to your research services. This could be anything from recruitment to video analytics. And it can take many forms, from blogs, to white papers, to case studies, to opinion pieces, to feature articles.

It's important that your content reflects your company's strengths and USPs. Writing about topics irrelevant to your offering risks confusion about what you do. Having a clear brand and messaging strategy, and working with what you do best, will lead to content that shows off your skillset and your expertise within your industry – without seeming too promotional. Of course, just as important is providing content that is relevant and interesting to your readers.

Here is a check list of things you can do to help you create strong content:

- » **Make sure it's original – add something new to the conversation.**
- » **Give opinions – have a strong opinion and stick with it.**
- » **Give actionable advice and answer your client problems – if your content suggests you have solutions a potential client may need, they are more likely to get in touch with you for use of your services.**
- » **Consider your headlines – this is your opportunity to grab a reader's attention – use keywords to help your content stand out.**
- » **Engage readers – consider images, infographics or even video to help you explain your idea**
- » **Communicate on your client's level - you don't want them to lose interest because of industry-specific jargon they don't understand.**
- » **Update your website and blog regularly – keep potential clients up to date with the latest happenings in your company and make sure this content is posted on social media and in your email marketing campaigns.**
- » **Make sure content is targeted for SEO – agree up to ten keywords that will lead people to your content.**





EXCEED CLIENT EXPECTATIONS FOR LASTING RELATIONSHIPS

At L&E, building positive relationships is one of our company's core values and we are passionate about our investments in our clients. When you're an independent consultant with only a handful of clients, this process is essential.

If you don't spend the proper time nurturing your leads you risk missing out on important business opportunities. Maintaining high quality marketing strategies through email, social media and compelling and relevant content will help keep potential customers within your sights and encourage previous clients to use your services again.

But remember, the simple things matter too and must not be overlooked. As a company, you should always work toward exceeding your clients' expectations – even through simple matters such as communicating efficiently, keeping positive and personable, and being open to what your client suggests.



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