

# Do Lead Nurturing Best Practices Really Exist?



Do a quick search on Google or your favorite search engine on “lead nurturing best practices” and you will quickly receive an abundance of results. Apparently, the consensus among lead nurturing experts is that an effective lead nurturing program should include the following components:

- A lead nurturing budget and a “champion” to drive the initiative;
- A commonly accepted definition by sales & marketing of what a qualified lead is;
- A clear and documented lead-management process;
- High quality content for each phase of the buying cycle (interest, consideration, purchase);
- Lead scoring to customize communications to the prospect’s level of interest;
- Regular multi-touch and multi-channel communications;
- Prompt phone follow-up with the leads that are more advanced in their decision-making process;
- Marketing automation software to track lead activity (browsing patterns, offer download, email open and click-through rates) and automate the lead follow-up process.

This all sounds like good advice, but are they necessarily best practices?

## What exactly is a best practice?

Wikipedia defines a best practice as “a technique, method, process, activity, incentive, or reward which conventional wisdom regards as more effective at delivering a particular outcome than any other technique, method, process, etc. when applied to a particular condition or circumstance.” Furthermore, Wikipedia notes that “best practices can also be defined as the most efficient (least amount of effort) and effective (best results) way of accomplishing a task, based on repeatable procedures that have proven themselves over time for large numbers of people.”

But most articles on the subject of lead nurturing best practices do not specify the particular outcome(s) that lead nurturing is supposed to deliver. Is it more sales-ready leads (quantity and quality of leads)? Is it a higher average deal size? Is it a higher lead-to-close conversion rate? The success of a lead nurturing program may be defined differently by different organizations.

Also, if these best practices are indeed more efficient and more effective ways of delivering more qualified opportunities or bigger deals, what are we comparing these methods to? It is unclear what methodology was used to conclude they are indeed best practices.

## The limits of best practices

It is only natural during times of economic uncertainty to look for best practices that would minimize costs and reduce risks, but, as pointed out by Mike McLaughlin, the problem with best practices is that they are rarely successfully transplanted and they tend to focus on how the work should be done, while neglecting the important questions of what should be done and why.<sup>1</sup>

Besides, there are numerous examples of companies that do not follow best practices in specific areas, but that are nevertheless extremely successful. Just think of Google, which repeatedly redesigns its logo (a clear no-no in the world of branding), or Apple, which sends email leading with big images (something that would make email marketing experts pull out their hair).

Sure, it is nice to keep on top of what others are saying and experiencing, but when looking for lead nurturing best practices, you should really aim for what is working for you. And the only way to do that is to experiment and make changes along the way to fine tune your lead nurturing program. In other words, don’t try to follow best practices; invent your own.

<sup>1</sup> Mc Laughlin, Michael, *The Worst Thing about Best Practices* <http://mindshareconsulting.com/worst-thing-best-practices/>, read on October 23rd, 2010.