

create stuff that matters.

HIVEMIND STUDIOS

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Keeping Your Visitors On the Path

Tons of website traffic means little if the majority of your visitors take no action and leave anonymously. Increasing visitor engagement and converting more visitors to leads requires creating a clear path to the content they want combined with a compelling reason to act.

At HiveMind Studios, we help you break visitors free of 'anonymous web surfing' mode and move them into 'active engagement' mode through a combination of intelligent web design and strategic content management. In this Handbook, we'll show you how.

Why You Should Read this Handbook

Many B2Bs work hard and spend lots of money to generate high volumes of new leads only to find themselves disappointed by frustratingly-low conversion rates. What's worse, they really don't understand why.

Sound familiar? The problem is that most new leads — even qualified leads — do not walk in the door ready to buy. When all available leads are passed on to sales, the sales reps quickly conclude that marketing-generated leads are under-qualified, unqualified, or simply worthless.

Turning this situation around and consistently delivering higher quality leads to sales requires more than getting pickier about which leads go to sales. It requires recognizing that interested visitors are on a journey and must be engaged with compelling content that meets their needs exactly.

Without good content, most of your leads lose their way. Which is why, as a marketer, you must act as a guide. By meeting your leads at every critical junction with the information, advice and tools they need to keep moving forward, you'll earn their trust and their business when they're ready.

Get Help from HiveMind Studios

If your business could use a helping hand in putting these best practices in action, we invite you to apply for a Free "**Content Management 2016**" one-hour strategy session with HiveMind Studios's CEO and Senior Strategist, Tom Lauck.



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A treasure map on aged, yellowed parchment. The map shows the outlines of continents and islands. A thick, black dashed line traces a path across the map, starting from the bottom left, curving around the left side, then across the top, and finally down the right side. At the end of this path, in the upper right quadrant, is a large, bold black 'X' mark. A semi-transparent grey horizontal bar is overlaid across the middle of the map, containing white text.

Identify where “X” marks the spot

1. Identify where “X” marks the spot

The first step on the road to becoming a successful guide starts at the end of your leads’ journey — where “X” marks the spot — i.e. sales-readiness. Marketing and sales need to agree on what truly distinguishes leads as sales-ready. This requires identifying and agreeing on the signs that a lead has arrived at a destination in the vicinity of the solution you offer. This is a critical marker for a very important handoff.

Although simple in concept, identifying sales-readiness is often more complex than many businesses realize. It’s rarely akin to a red flag flown in a wide-open clearing, such as a simple request to speak with a sales representative. Most actions by leads are more subtle clues, like bent blades of grass and obscured footprints, requiring more insightful interpretation by an experienced tracker.

In other words, it’s not enough to rely on superficial indicators. A solid definition of what constitutes a “sales-ready” lead should be based on a profile of an ideal customer for your products and services.

Insights from HiveMind Studios

All too often, we run into companies that believe a request for a quote is the key trigger for sales-readiness. With shorter buying cycles, this trigger might be credible, but more often than not (particularly with the long sales cycles of B2B, it is nothing more than the first step of a prospect’s search for information. For example, your leads might be wondering: *“Are you even remotely in my price range so I can justify the amount of time I’m going to need to investigate whether your solution is right for me?”*

1. Identify where “X” marks the spot

To define that profile you have ask, and answer, questions like:

- Did the prospect visit your website? If so, how often and which pages did he/she visit both before and after registering on your site?
- What search terms did the prospect use to find more information about you?
- Has the prospect visited “high-value” pages such as the pricing or contact information pages?
- Have multiple prospects from the same company visited your website?
- How has the prospect responded to your email campaigns or offers?
- What interactions has your sales team had with the prospect and when?
- Has the prospect provided sufficient qualifying information to judge that they’re a good fit for what you have to offer?

In our experience, the list of questions varies from client to client. Dig deep. Solicit input from sales, and thoroughly plot out the clues. More often than not, the place where “X” marks the spot isn’t so much a single spot as it is a small territory — and how well you define the boundaries of this territory will play a big role in whether you make your hand-off to sales at the precise moment when your leads’ realize that your solution is the destination they are seeking.

“More often than not, the place where “X” marks the spot isn’t so much a single spot as it is a small territory.”



Map the terrain and prepare supplies according to the demands of the expedition

2. Map the terrain and prepare supplies according to the demands of the expedition

A good guide knows what obstacles lie ahead and acts accordingly — anticipating and answering their leads' questions before they've even been asked, and keeping the momentum moving forward, not back.

The better you understand your leads' journey, the better you will be able to facilitate — and perhaps accelerate — their progress by supplying them with the tools and information they will need to successfully complete the journey to sales-readiness.

To guide your leads effectively, you need to understand the key phases of your leads' journey, and the accompanying terrain.

While the specific obstacles and landmarks may vary from business to business, there are essentially only four main stages to any lead's journey: **Awareness, Consideration, Research, and Purchase.**

Every stage in your leads' journey presents different questions, obstacles and cross-roads, and your guidance (*think content*) must adapt and respond appropriately if you want your leads to continue moving forward.

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2. Map the terrain and prepare supplies according to the demands of the expedition

1. Awareness: In the early awareness stage, your leads need introductory education materials to help them assess either the existence of a business need/problem, or the breadth and depth of a known need/problem. This is like giving them a basic map and compass (in exchange for their email address). It shows them where they are and enables them to find their way forward. Examples of these no-risk offers include: informational whitepapers, webinars, ebooks, and blog articles.

Awareness obstacles/questions: Is this really a problem? How big a problem is this? Are there solutions within my budget? What types of solutions exist?

2. Consideration: In the consideration stage, your leads have determined they have a problem and are now looking for more focused information to assess what is the best type of solution to address it. The supplies (*think content*) you provide in this phase are more like a detailed topographical map, so they can assess the terrain and evaluate route options. Examples of these low-risk offers include webinars, live learning events, workshops, online assessments, surveys or interactive games.

Consideration obstacles/questions: Which of the available types of solutions is best suited to my business/budget/problem/timeframe? How big of an investment do I need to make to get the result I want? What risks are associated with picking one solution over another? What benefits?



2. Map the terrain and prepare supplies according to the demands of the expedition

3. Research: By the research stage, your leads have picked the path they think they should take and are now learning about the different types of solutions available on this specific path. The information they need is more specific product information that helps them compare similar types of solutions to determine the closest fit to their needs. Examples of these considered-risk offers include a product webinar, an analyst's report, a case study, a buyer's guide, or even product literature.

Research obstacles/questions: What makes Company X's solution different/better than Company Y's? What are the pros and cons of each? Is an all-inclusive, out-of-the-box solution best for my needs, or would I be better off with a more customized solution?

4. Purchase: As prospects narrow the field to a specific solution, company-focused materials are appropriate to help them determine that your company's solution (rather than your competitor's) is the best fit for their needs. This is when you might provide direct business offers including consultations, live demos, and free trials.

Purchase obstacles/questions: Will Company X deliver on its promises? Will they provide me with the support I need to successfully implement their solution? Is the price reasonable for what they're offering/what I'm getting? Are they responsive to my needs and my questions?





Give your leads the advice and provisions they need exactly when they need them

3. Give your leads the advice and provisions they need exactly when they need them

We've already discussed what tools and information your leads need at each stage of the journey — now your job is to deliver those provisions to your prospect at the exact right time — when they need them, and not a moment too late or too soon. It doesn't help to give them paddles for a canoe, if they're trying to scale a mountain, or a parka when they're crossing the desert.

Your “guidance” will be written off as irrelevant and possibly obnoxious, if provided out of context or at the wrong time, and may drive your leads to seek an alternative path to some other destination. Without taking this metaphor too far, this simply means that you need to provide content (*think information, tools, or documentation*) appropriate to where they are.

For example, if a lead downloads an educational whitepaper describing their general problem, it's fairly safe to assume they are early in their journey, so your response would be to offer additional educational materials. On the other hand, if they request a product comparison guide, you know that they are much farther along, perhaps near the end, and an offer to provide a product demo or trial would be appropriate.

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3. Give your leads the advice and provisions they need exactly when they need them

Nailing the right frequency of communication is another part of being a good guide. The guidance you provide is the breadcrumb trail that nourishes your leads while it leads them in the right direction. You need to feed them at just the right intervals - when their taste-buds are piqued, not when they're starving or stuffed.

As a general rule of thumb, you should be reaching out to your prospects somewhere between once a week and once a month. The specific frequency will depend on the length of their buying cycle, their level of engagement, the complexity of the transaction, etc.

By consistently supplying your leads with useful, quality information, you encourage them to take the next step forward. And every step you get them to take brings them one step closer to journey's end: where the result they seek meets the solution you offer.

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Interpret and respond to your leads' signals consistently, promptly and effectively

4. Interpret and respond to your leads' signals consistently, promptly and effectively

The longer the journey (sales cycle), and the greater number of leads that embark on it, the more challenging it becomes to keep up with them as a guide. You will quickly discover that it is impractical to provide custom guidance for every possible combination of actions and qualifications. Yet, to provide effective guidance to many leads over a long sales cycle, you need to be able to interpret and respond to a diverse array of behaviors coherently and consistently, without sacrificing speed. This is where lead scoring, grading and marketing automation technology come into play.

During a long, complex B2B sales cycles, you inevitably will collect bits and pieces of data for each lead across multiple points of contact. This includes both activities (such as responding to an email, visiting a certain number of pages on the website, or downloading a specific piece of material), as well as specific responses to qualification questions in registration forms (i.e. company size, timeline to purchase, title, budget, etc.). This information is key to determining where your leads are so you can continue to guide them appropriately.

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4. Interpret and respond to your leads' signals consistently, promptly and effectively

Begin by assigning a value to every action your leads take or qualification they meet along the way. A maximum cumulative score might be anywhere from 100 to 1000 points, with the highest numbers reserved for the most advanced, sales-ready leads. From here, you can begin to separate your leads according to their respective scores. Think of this as splitting your leads into groups according to their skill sets, and motivation. In our experience, you should have no more than 5 ultimate groups (in sales-parlance: cold, cool, warm, warmer, hot or A-F grades).

Keep in mind that the path towards sales-readiness is rarely a rational, linear process where leads always move forward, passing by one landmark after another. Instead, we've found that leads often move chaotically forward and backward on the trail, as they balance rational decision making with the emotional impacts of fear and risk. It's perfectly normal for a lead graded initially as an "A" or "B" lead to be downgraded to a "C" lead from time to time. Your groups need to be discretely defined and yet flexible enough to allow leads to move from one group to the next as appropriate to their level — whether they are moving forward or backward.

Ultimately it is YOUR responsibility as the marketer to determine what guidance is appropriate for each of your leads at any given stage of their journey.



Marketing Automation

In guide-speak, think of marketing automation as a sophisticated GPS satellite-based tracking system that helps you to pinpoint where each of your leads are on their journey, monitor their progress, and provide rapid automated responses to certain key activities and qualifications.



Adapt, overcome and never stop exploring

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Now that you have assembled all of the tools, equipment, maps, directions and supplies your leads need to successfully complete the journey, you should immediately experience a bump in the number of qualified leads going to sales. Having mapped the terrain thoroughly and helped your first batch of leads traverse it successfully, you are now in a better position than ever to zero-in on areas where some leads still get lost. The journey from interested prospect to sales-ready lead is no longer through uncharted territory. Thanks to you, the path is well-marked, and successful completion of the journey is an attainable goal.

But your work as a guide is never over. Having mastered the route, you can now focus on refining your guidance (*think content*) with increased confidence and decreased guesswork to supply even better, clearer input and more effective tools for the journey. Maps need updating, routes may change, supplies need replenishing. Down the road, you could find yourself dealing with unprecedented numbers of leads on well-marked trails, or you might find yourself forging entirely new paths as your company's array of solutions grows and changes over time.

The key to retaining your title as trustworthy guide is to always stay one step ahead of your leads and keep them pointed in the right direction.

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HiveMind Studios is a talented group of serial entrepreneurs, wordsmiths, designers and developers in the SF Bay Area. We eat, sleep and breathe advertising and we're always on the lookout for the next big thing, the next creative way to reach consumers. If we put our heads together, how can we lose?

Based in San Jose and Silicon Valley, HiveMind Studios serves companies across the country, providing engaging creative solutions for branding, websites, email, and advertising and organizing your marketing within an inbound marketing framework.



With over 25 years of broad industry experience, we can help companies in high tech, biotech, consumer electronics, e-commerce, fashion, retail, financial services, healthcare, and travel. The agency marries creativity with strategic market insight to deliver powerful marketing programs. Call us for **Creative Solutions** that work.

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