

Lead Generation as a Tool to Ensure the Sustainability of Education

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ABSTRACT

Business sustainability issues are determined by the demand for its results by consumers. Attracting consumers and clients by companies is becoming one of the key tasks that are successfully solved by the art of marketing, promotion and lead generation. This study substantiates the need for formation of specific approaches to lead management and lead generation in the educational services market. The article proves that online lead generation allows not only attracting and retaining a consumer of educational services, but also identifying the key needs of the economy in training specialists of specific professions with the necessary competencies. Optimization and efficiency of lead generation processes is ensured by digital channels and progressive targeted advertising tools. The specificity of the target consumer and the services provided presupposes a flexible transformation of the service itself and its competence content, determined by the dynamics of environmental factors, the changing needs of the economy, new digital technologies and the implementation period. Today, lead generation is an effective tool for ensuring the sustainability of educational organizations in a competitive environment.

Keywords: *lead generation, sustainability of the education sector, universities, applicants, educational services.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The current situation of forced distancing caused by the pandemic, the wave nature of its course, the growing potential and scaling of digital technologies lead the economy and society to the need to use the Internet space for interactions and communications. Under the influence of these conditions, top management develops its business largely in the Internet space, using more and more sophisticated methods of Internet marketing. Another significant factor affecting the frequency and range of use of online tools is competition, which prompts the need to arrange the process of interaction with a potential customer, which, in a simplified sense, is a conversion of a lead into a buyer.

In Russian practice, lead management has a relatively short history, which is directly due to the pace of development of the Internet and digital technologies. However, today both large and small businesses of

various industries and spheres of activity successfully use the Internet space as a platform for promoting their products, goods, works, and services. According to the estimates of Russian companies in 2020, the average share of online advertising was 43 %, and this is the highest figure in previous years [1, p. 6]. According to PwC, the scope of the Russian online advertising market in 2020 increased by 5 % compared to 2019, along with a 2.6 % drop in the same global indicator. According to analysts, by 2024 the market will grow by 8 % and reach \$ 5.4 billion [2].

In this regard, lead management used in the theory and practice of business and education systems to describe methods, systems and practices [3; 4], which are developed to attract new potential customers, usually using various marketing technologies, is gaining special relevance.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

When examining the issues of managing lead generation and increasing its efficiency, it is important to consider the peculiarities of these processes, due to the company's activities. Focusing on the sphere of higher and secondary vocational education, we shall note that the management of an educational organization, as a rule, is reduced to two complementary contexts: to the management of education, through the development and adoption of management decisions within the educational system or educational institution; and to the process of managing activities that are aimed at developing human capital skills through training and the expansion of pedagogical functions [5]. Without denying the approaches provided, we agree with the opinion [6] of a number of authors that the management of an educational organization is a process of managing the organization of the educational system, within which it is necessary to formulate managerial decisions aimed at ensuring the basic functions of management (planning, organization, control, motivation and leadership). In this context, when a significant proportion of students receive educational services on a full cost recovery basis, an educational organization, being in a competitive environment, must use the most modern channels of Internet promotion of its educational services to achieve development goals. The complexity of lead management, as an element of management of an educational organization, lies in the diversity of the target audience, poor vocational guidance of applicants – school graduates, the temporary nature of receiving educational services and the dynamics of the economy's needs for new cadres of specific professions. In addition, the cycle of creating an educational service is also quite long, because in order to announce a recruitment for a new direction of training or a new profile, it takes almost a year, which is catastrophically long in relation to the speed of changes in the economy, since this year will add at least another (speaking of the magistracy) two years of actual study. The system of additional professional education, which is more mobile and can in a short time satisfy the needs of the economy for new knowledge and competencies through the processes of advanced training and professional retraining, is in an advantageous position today. Here lead generation will have its own implementation nuances. Therefore, higher and educational institutions today are faced with the need to switch emphasis on the Internet promotion of educational services of various forms, not to the detriment of traditional forms of lead generation.

The search for solutions of specified problem of effective lead management and lead generation of educational institutions was carried out by the authors on

the basis of content analysis of scientific research and publications on the stated topic.

The lead generation process is one of the stages of lead management as a process of working with leads in order to increase conversions at each turn of the funnel. We shall note that the process itself is based, first of all, on creation of an informative and attractive website, while the structure of the official website of an educational organization in the Internet information and telecommunications network is regulated by the Federal Service for Supervision of Education and Science of the Russian Federation [7]. The goal here is to convert the site visitors into the leads. Further, for sales, you need traffic, i.e. a steady stream of visitors coming to the site and landing pages, first of all. The next stage is conversion of the visits into leads, i.e. a potential client who left a "trace", for example, asked a question, left an application on the site with his/her contacts, called himself/herself for additional information. Next, there is a conversion of leads, i.e. converting a lead into a buyer. the submission of documents for admission to an educational institution is considered as the end of this process. The effectiveness of lead generation is assessed by a limited number of indicators, which is due to the order and timing of documents admission and entrance examinations to an educational institution.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The traditional approach to work arrangement on the annual attraction of applicants is failing more and more. The hope that school graduates will have to choose their own university or college is often not justified. The inertia and tradition of vocational guidance methods not only do not contribute to the influx of applicants, but also often block it. There are a number of reasons that a priori make it necessary not only to revise the marketing policies of many educational institutions, but also to revise the methods of interaction with "consumers" based on progressive Internet technologies.

The requirements for the structure of the site do not at all limit the ability of universities to fill it with positive, useful, attractive, dynamic and creative information about the life of the university, students, the achievements of all participants in the educational process, and about the opportunities that the educational institution provides to students, faculty, region, society, country. It is important that the site meets not only the requirements of the Federal Service for Supervision of Education and Science of the Russian Federation, but also the needs of applicants, students, teaching staff, and that the most complete, clear and understandable answers are on the website of this particular university. Therefore, lead management here receives the first signal about the quality of the site. The first influx of leads, namely the first contact with a potential client, happens here.

Traditionally, the site informs applicants about educational services, educational programs. This communication channel shall be convenient, i.e. the addressable content shall be convenient and simple in navigation, allowing by fewer clicks to get the information the consumer needs. The existing methodology for assessing the effectiveness of a university website is based on considering the following parameters: design, navigation, content, interactivity and visibility of the website on the Internet, each of which has its own primary assessment criteria. An ineffective website will prevent an adequate return on investment, damage the institution's brand and image [8], and reduce the number of applicants. Even at this first stage of lead generation, real "deals" are possible, which consist in the lead making the final decision on the choice of the university and the direction of training for obtaining a profession. From the very moment of acquaintance with the website of the educational institution, the so-called lead-time can begin, i.e. the "order" lead time is started. The paradox is that for other areas of activity, marketers are striving to reduce the lead time, and in the education system, on the contrary, to lengthen it, because the sooner a school graduate makes his/her choice in favor of a particular university, the more effective the website and the entire marketing university strategy. As for other categories of consumers, for working applicants, an increase in the duration of the lead time can also be considered an indicator of the effectiveness of the site, and for those wishing to improve their qualifications and/or pass professional retraining, its reduction. Every manager shall know how long it takes from receiving information about a lead to paying for training.

Competitive analysis and site performance evaluation is extremely important. Specialists of the Spanish laboratory Laboratorio de Internet engaged in the development of methods for assessing educational web resources within the framework of the "Webometrics Ranking of World Universities" project, publish a rating of the websites of universities and research institutes once every six months. The main criteria for evaluating websites are: the total number of pages on the site (size), the number of hypertext links to the site from other resources (visibility), the number of .pdf files (Adobe Acrobat PDF), .ps (Adobe Postscript), .doc (MS Word) and .ppt (MS PowerPoint) (rich files). 3,000 best websites of universities in the world included 30 Russian websites (the total number of reviewed websites of Russian universities is 304). The three first places among the websites of Russian universities are occupied by the websites of Moscow State University (<http://www.msu.ru>) (426 in the world), Novosibirsk State University (<http://www.nsu.ru>) (1081 in world), St. Petersburg State University (<http://spbu.ru>) (1130 place in the world). Saratov State University (<http://www.sgu.ru>) ranks the 12th among universities in Russia and 1932 among universities in the world [9].

Therefore, universities have an opportunity to strengthen their competitive advantages, using the example of leaders, and strengthen their positions in the lead competition.

How to attract the leads? When determining the acquisition toolkit, it is necessary to evaluate the scale of attracting cold, warm and hot leads. Knowing what types of leads are, you can choose the right target audience and set up ads. This is where content marketing comes in. Search Engine Optimization (SEO) will be one of the most effective solutions for generating leads. Such optimization will allow the university to attract users who have not yet heard about new educational programs, or about the university in general, which is important when implementing a strategy for geographic market expansion. As for the retention and replenishment of existing applicants, then it is advisable to launch a thematic, content or information boom around your offer through emails and social networks. Video information for the target audience about the main advantages of the university, educational programs, student events in personalized letters and messages will be useful too. The launch of advertising campaigns, the positioning of the university in the face of the participation of its leadership, teachers, scientists and students in various social, economic, information events of the city, region and country, all this replenishes the treasury of the university's competitiveness and attracts the attention of potential consumers. In the created content in various social media channels, it would be attractive to conduct surveys and case studies on certain aspects of the educational process [10], topics and areas that are attractive to applicants. In general, using the entire arsenal of tools to attract new leads and retain existing ones, you need to get the most out of your social media marketing.

When working with leads, it is necessary to segment the audience as much as possible, considering the fact that school graduates often make decisions influenced by the opinion of their parents, and send only targeted messages for different groups of applicants, based on the information they have left about themselves. This will not only increase the response rate for outgoing messages, but also show good results in the number of incoming messages.

Events are one of the most successful lead generation tools. For educational institutions, these are conferences, exhibitions or webinars, etc., held both face-to-face and online. Events provide an opportunity to communicate directly with potential and actual leads. In addition, the designated events are a productive platform for event participants to interact with each other. Therefore, the events serve as interactive educational forums, and position the university as a source of knowledge and student opportunities.

Special attention is paid to cold leads. Applicants and potential consumers of educational services who are looking for information on their own can ignore the messages of the educational institution. In this case, building relationships is critical. Not all leads who turn their attention to a specific university are ready to apply for admission and make the appropriate choice. This decision will be made by cold leads considering that the university has a reliable lead nurturing strategy that allows the university to increase its reputation through quality education. Leads grown include graduates of technical schools and colleges located in the structure of the university. They, by contacting cold leads, increase their loyalty level and drag them into the "funnel".

Lead conversion. Completion of the process of accompanying the user throughout his/her acquaintance with the educational service, ideally, shall be the conversion of a lead into a student, considering the decision in favor of the university. So, starting from getting to know the brand of the university, the process of mastering site information, landing pages, chat bots, content and other sources, it is necessary to constantly accompany the user path. User journey shall bring the latter a lot of pleasure and usefulness.

Lead generation will be effective when quality leads are obtained, i.e. those adequate to the target audience and criteria; marketers and/or lead managers have sales skills and experience in the educational system; specialists are motivated for high-quality lead processing and a process of control over the quality of lead processing and subsequent sales has been established. Universities and their educational services and products have a predominantly long sales cycle, since the company for attracting applicants begins long before receiving a high school diploma, therefore, the requirements for competent lead management are increased until the moment of "purchase".

4. CONCLUSION

Lead generation is an effective tool for promoting universities, expanding the flow of leads and the sales funnel of educational services. Lead generation enables university marketers to identify effectively potential consumers who are interested in one of the educational services. Lead generation allows you to receive personal data provided by the user himself/herself (e-mail, phone number, address, level of foreign language proficiency, the availability of passed tests, previous education, GPA, and etc.). This data can later be used to conduct marketing campaigns to generate leads and convert them to students, such as, for example, telemarketing, e-mail newsletters, etc., allowing to personalize maximally messages intended for different groups of applicants and students. The obvious and key advantages of lead generation for universities are: the ability to create quickly a base of potential students who have expressed interest in

studying at this university/in a specific program, the ability to collect data on the current state of the applicant market, trends, demographics, and etc.

The evaluation of the results of the lead generation of the university admissions campaign is carried out on the basis of calculating the conversion in completed applications, calculating the cost of attracting one user, and then analyzing the technology for working with processed leads to develop recommendations for the next campaigns. Therefore, lead management and lead generation are today one of the most effective tools for promoting a university and educational services for training personnel in various areas of training.

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