The increasing trend of AI in advertising/marketing lead generation

To help marketers execute campaigns that generate highly qualified sales opportunities and accelerate deal cycles, Oracle announced Oracle Fusion Marketing. Part of Oracle Advertising and CX, Fusion Marketing enables marketers to easily create campaigns that span traditional marketing and advertising channels, and is the first marketing automation solution that is engineered to bypass the entire lead qualification and conversion process.

Fusion Marketing uses artificial intelligence (AI) to automatically score leads at the account level, predict when consumers are ready to talk to a salesperson, and generate a qualified sales opportunity in any CRM system.

Ashley Sanichar, senior director of business applications at Oracle South Africa

Ashley Sanichar, senior director of business applications at Oracle South Africa, shares some insights.

▦ *How has access to an increasingly wide range of digital channels, rising buyer expectations, and the need for information at any time transformed how customers engage with salespeople?*

With the commoditisation of services and convergence of B2B and B2C buyer expectations, B2B buyers expect vendors of products/services to enable personalised interactions based on their activities across these channels, irrespective of when or where it was done. Forrester Research found that 74% of business buyers conduct more than half of their research online before making an offline purchase. Most of the purchasing decision is now made before a salesperson is engaged.

B2B buyers have an increasingly informed conversation with sales teams. Sales teams on the other hand also need to be informed of their customer activities across channels and hence engage with customers based on a Next Best Action/Next Best Offer basis. This allows for intelligent engagement between B2B buyers and the sales teams.

▦ *Why did marketers struggle to collect detailed customer information before the widespread integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into lead generation?*

As often has been the trend across organizations, marketers tend to work with several agencies – for content, lead generation, ad services etc. For situations where the entire marketing function is in-house, there are several siloed tools for ad-tech and marketing-tech.

The added complexity of customer behavioural data that required collection and analysis before deciding on the next course of action added to the challenge and has always been a severe strain on marketing resources. Enter AI, which allows for collecting relevant data, analysis of this data and providing intelligent recommendations (based on history as well as prediction capabilities) on whether an interaction from a target audience can actually be considered a lead.

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⊞ *What impact has AI had on marketers' ability to retain existing leads and acquire prospective customers?*

The market has evolved from Batch & Blast to Segment of One. Marketers desire to communicate with the right target audience at the best time, in the most convenient and appropriate channel, with the most relevant and accurate content.

Knowing at scale, the correct time (morning or evening) to send the appropriate content (types of offers) on email/SMS/push channel to an individual is a herculean task made easier with AI. Oracle's AI tech for marketers allows for marketers to use AI switches in the marketing orchestration toolset to determine the right time/right channel/right content combination to a target audience based on past interaction data and campaign success. All of this is done to increase the probability that the target audience opens the communication, clicks on the content and eventually converts.

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⊞ *How can AI help marketers generate a higher quality of leads and accelerate the deal cycle?*

AI can help improve the most appropriate content/audience/time/channel combination. This increases the probability of the target audience viewing the content sent. Furthermore, AI can assign lead scores predictively based on profile and engagement across all campaign channels including emails, online ads, and microsite visits.

Because interest at the company level is what matters, AI in Fusion marketing will qualify account level interest by aggregating engagement from people at the same company. This AI algorithm automatically generates qualified opportunities for salespeople when it detects sufficient engagement. As soon as a lead is HOT enough to assign to Sales, the lead can be passed onto Sales teams while suggesting next best step recommendations, best discounts and deal closure predictions as well as appropriate references at various stages of the lifecycle. That will enable a salesperson to accelerate the deal cycle.

⊞ *What role do customer relationship management (CRM) systems play in marketing lead generation? And How have specialised software and Oracle helped drive AI marketing solutions and programmes that have benefited CRM systems and the marketing industry?*

CRM has become the system that both sellers and marketers love to hate, due to disconnected workflows, too much manual administration, and siloed data often preventing sales and marketing teams from working with each other to engage customers and drive revenue.

Because of this, the experience for most salespeople is that their CRM system doesn't help them sell—and this disconnect between sales and marketing teams is a growing challenge as the B2B buying process becomes more complex.

Fusion Marketing simplifies and accelerates the creation and execution of marketing campaigns by automating the end-to-end process of lead generation and qualification. CRMs provide the necessary feedback to marketing in terms of Leads that converted, that did not convert, Nurture campaigns leads in long deal cycles, etc: Integration between CRMs and Mar-tech allows for closed-loop reporting that enables budget allocation and ROI calculations for future campaigns to be run.

Customers and prospects are now interacting with organizations across an increasingly broad range of digital channels, buyer expectations are growing, and the need to access information at any time means much of the purchasing decision is now made before a salesperson is engaged.

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