

## SHOPPERS AND BUYERS: DIVIDE, AND CONQUER BOTH

*Analytics tools and methods can boost sales-closure rates by concentrating sales efforts*

Salespeople receive tons of advice on how to close a deal. But even the best technique will fail with a prospect who is really just looking for information. Time spent on a prospect immune to a sales pitch is time wasted. How can a sales rep tell the difference between a shopper and a buyer?

According to Mark Yuhn, global practice director for customer analysis at Urban Science (US), it all comes down to good lead qualification through well-targeted metrics. “Many OEMs [original equipment manufacturers] have numerous lead sources, and we work with them to qualify the leads and combine them with other data sources.” This way the business can separate buyers—the hottest prospects—from shoppers who may be just looking, but are ripe for later development.

US CMO Jack Bowen agrees that lead vetting is still the best way to focus on the most eager customers. “There’s a lot of excitement over being able to develop relevant and meaningful communications with customers.” He claims that a company that closes sales at 10 percent can increase its success rate to as much as one in three by separating out and focusing on high-priority leads.

“Lead qualification to sift the tire-kickers from those really interested in buying is not as difficult as it used to be,” says Martin Schneider, enterprise software analyst with The 451 Group. “Thanks to Web-analytics tools and other tracking software, companies can get a better handle on who is ‘just browsing’ versus who has been doing real prepurchase research.”

Despite the scientific approach, there is more to the skill of winnowing shoppers from buyers than data collection. “Sorting, scoring, and qualifying leads is not the most important part of the process,” Yuhn says. Rather, it’s helping clients address inconsistent follow-through with leads. After all, it’s not what you’ve got, but what you do with it.

Bowen relates examples from the automotive industry, where he gained early experience. Model selection is an early indicator, he says: “Buick customers tend to fit certain age and income demographics, so targeting them is always a good first step.” But options can be more telling than the car model. “When we have specific information from the customer about paint color—‘deep metallic blue’ as opposed to just ‘blue,’ for instance—that customer is clearly more interested in making a deal.”

Faster access to better info lets sellers reach the entire spectrum of buyers and establish treatment paths for each. A dealer might require salespeople to contact a high-priority lead within one hour of an email or phone message, or might set up an email schedule to reconnect with shoppers doing early research. “If Web analytics is tied to the lead tracking system in a company, sales agents can see where an individual has been online prior to or after responding to a promotion,” Schneider says. “Those that spent time on three or more related sites might get scored as ‘hot’ leads, versus those who simply clicked on the URL in an email and made no other visits. Leads can be processed accordingly, and agents can spend less time selling to colder leads.” —*Marshall Lager*

