

How to Mobilize B-to-B Drip Marketing

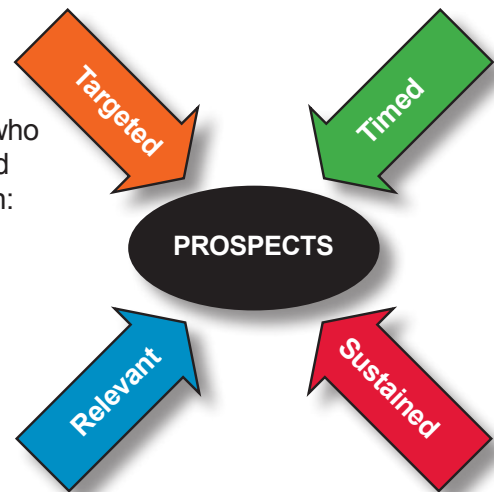
By Pamela Lockard

Business marketing is all about building relationships. It requires the same activities and investments needed to make and keep a friend – staying in touch, interacting, listening, empathizing, and freely giving time and energy. Most businesses invest this kind of care in their best leads, while nonqualified prospects often languish for lack of attention. This can be a big mistake, because competitors are always waiting in the wings. Drip marketing can help.

Drip Communications

A drip program keeps your company in touch with prospects who have shown interest, from “most promising” to “less likely,” and converts more of them over to your side. Success depends on:

1. Prospect list segmentation
2. A calendar of sustained communications
3. Relevant, targeted messaging
4. Measuring/tracking response/conversion
5. Adjusting tactics based on results



Here are the basic steps for developing your own drip marketing game plan.

Step 1: Segment Your Prospect File

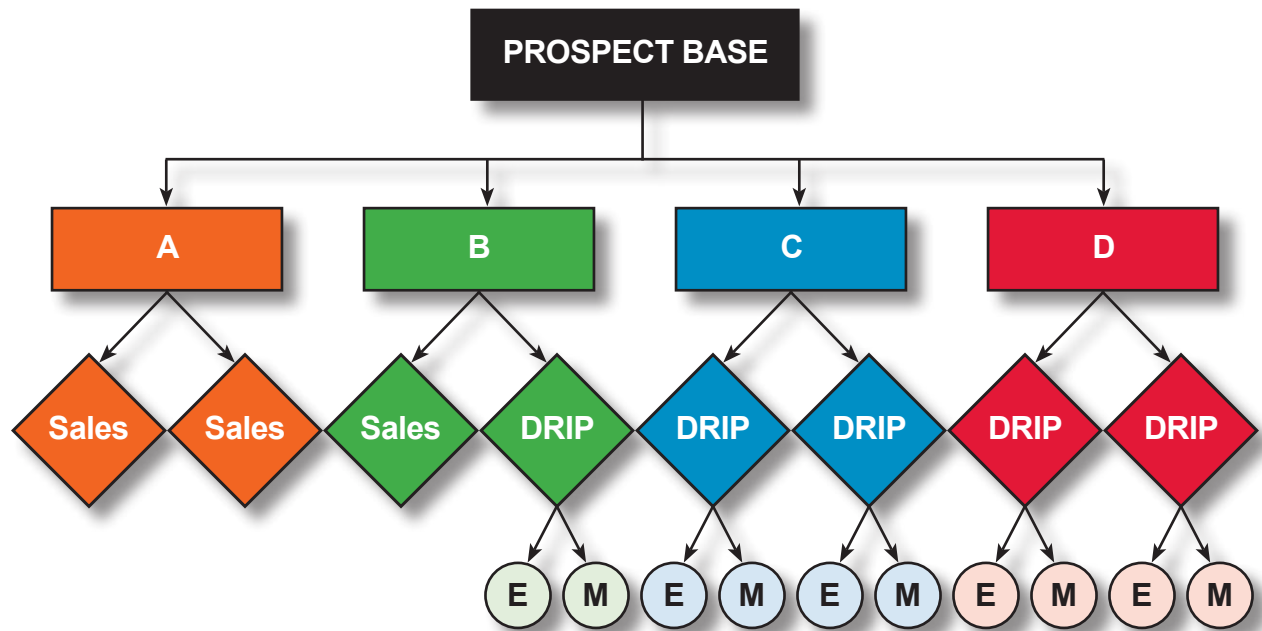
Segmentation has three important functions. It establishes a prospect value hierarchy, it helps you tailor the relevance of your communications for different audience groups, and makes it possible to manage your marketing spend by prospect segment.

Every company is unique. The criteria you use to profile your ideal client (and your most promising lead) form the basis for segmentation. For instance, if your best client brings in \$120K revenue, and your ideal lead is a \$10 million company, you can group prospects in descending order by earning potential. The product or service you sell also helps define your ideal prospect.

Start the process by dissecting your prospect base into a ranking system such as A, B, C, and D levels. Assume that A and B leads closely match your ideal client profile. Most of these normally receive immediate personalized follow up from your sales force. Your C- and D-level leads have potential but are less likely to produce revenue in the near term. Your drip program will target and supply C- and D-level prospects with attention and relevant information

If possible, create a second tier by demographics such as CEOs, Purchasing Agents, Middle Managers, etc. The more targeted you are in defining segments, the more relevant you can make your communications. High-level executives require different communication tactics than Purchasing Agents further down the management chain. The following graphic example illustrates segmentation down to the demographic level with E (Executives) and M (Middle Managers).

Prospect Segmentation Tree



Step 2: Develop a Calendar Plan

A calendar plan is the best way to ensure timed and steady flow of communications. This is one of the key success factors of drip marketing – sustaining a steady “drip” of messages. Response and conversion may be sparse at first. Nevertheless, over time you’ll see higher counts of new customers from that previous stack of untapped leads.

The drip calendar establishes what you will send, when it will go out and which prospect segments will receive it. Some segments can share mailings. There’s no set formula for frequency, but a typical drip campaign touches prospects every 2-4 weeks over 36-48 months. Consider the first few months as your testing period to get a feel for what your prospects appreciate and how often they want to be ‘touched.’

The following sample calendar uses the same segmentation strategy as the previous example. Drip materials and mailing schedule cover the four weeks for each month. Your plan should break the calendar down by the week, or even by day, if needed.

Calendar Drip Plan

	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN
E-mail A	CE; DE		CE; DE		CE; DE	
E-mail B		CM; DM		CM; DM		CM; DM
Newsletter	ALL	ALL	ALL	ALL	ALL	ALL
Book Review	CM; DM	CE; DE	CM; DM	CE; DE	CM; DM	CE; DE
Press Release	ALL	ALL	ALL	ALL	ALL	ALL
White Paper	CE; DE			CE; DE		
Letter A	CM; DM		CM; DM		CM; DM	
Letter B		CE; DE		CE; DE		CE; DE

Key: CE= C-Level Executive; CM= C-Level Middle Manager; DE= D-Level Executive; DM= D-Level Middle Manager

Step 3: Create Relevant Content

With segmentation and a calendar plan in place, the next step is to develop content that targets your prospect groupings in relevant ways. The immediate goal is to develop rapport and trust. Set the stage for appropriate, high-quality communications that will create goodwill.

For instance, what method of delivery and kinds of information will C-Level Executives find relevant? This group probably uses the Web, so e-mail may be effective. They are decision makers, so white papers and book reviews on topics related to their industry (or yours) may fit. White paper downloads deliver nicely in a colorful ad-format e-mail and book reviews grab attention in a large yellow postal envelope with a letter.

If you plan to use a newsletter in your campaign, make sure to publish it at regular intervals. Content should cover issues of interest to your audience, be unbiased in tone and authoritatively written. A smart newsletter helps brand your organization as a thought leader in your industry.

Letters should be included in the content mix. Develop templates for each segment to ride along with case studies, industry news, self-published articles, book reviews, etc. For new inquiries, a thank you note and brochure makes an appropriate starting point for dialog.

Step 4: Track, Measure and Analyze

Build measurable response mechanisms into every mailing and track conversion by segment. Tracking is easiest to accomplish with online communications, but it is possible with offline mailings, too, if you include an incentive that requires response. Every e-mail should include links and every postal mailing, a response card or phone number. After six months or so, you should have enough data to begin analyzing which of your strategies are paying off and which ones need more work.

Step 5: Adjust Tactics Based on Results

Drip marketing provides a wealth of information about your prospect base. It can also inform your general selling strategies through the feedback and response it provides. Here's an example:

TruckerB2B, a volume buying service for small truck fleet companies, found that postal mail is the right channel for their audience. Their sales tripled when they switched from e-mail offers to postcards, co-branded letters and coupons distributed via postal mail.

Putting It All Into Action

A drip program uses sustained, relevant communications to convert more of your untapped prospects and improve your overall marketing ROI. Success depends on careful prospect segmentation and targeting, a calendar plan that ensures follow through, measurement and tracking and adjusting tactics based on results.

When you're ready to start, DMN3 can help with integrated online and offline solutions to put your drip marketing game plan into action.

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For help in planning effective, measurable drip marketing campaigns, think of DMN3. It's what we do. Call 1-800-625-8320 or visit www.dmn3.com.