

Using Webinars to Drive Your Lead Generation



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MARKETING

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Greg Grdodian’s 20 years of leadership experience and creative conceptualization of integrated marketing strategies makes him a business development and revenue architect thought leader. He devoted the first 16 years of his career to Infogroup/Edith Roman and became President of Infogroup/Edith Roman in 2010 where he developed industry-leading multichannel products and tactics. Greg then joined Crain Communications, where as Director of Audience Development, he developed strategies that optimized digital products and services for a world-renowned publishing company, yielding triple digit growth.

Because Greg’s experience covers a broad spectrum of technological knowledge and marketing expertise, he embodies the Reach philosophy of revenue performance marketing. Our clients get the combined benefit of outstanding customer service, innovative concepts and multi-channelled data assets.

Greg is a frequent presenter at major industry conferences, contributes articles to industry trade publications, and recently co-authored the book *Marketing AI™: From Automation to Revenue Performance Marketing*.



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Executive Summary

Generating quality leads is a top priority for all B2B firms, and webinars are an outstanding way to infuse quality leads into your nurture stream. Marketing automation capitalizes fully on the potential webinars have to identify leads with strong interest, capture in-depth information on these leads, and establish your thought leadership through content. Other sources might show you how to host the webinar itself, but they fail to explain why you should. This guide reveals how to develop, promote, and execute webinars as an integral part of your lead gen strategy with a focus on automation-assisted webinar development.

Why Webinars?

In a sense, webinars are like an online tradeshow without any other competing vendors. As with tradeshows, you guide the conversation with leads you already know have an interest in the subject matter, but in this case, you do it remotely. Moreover, you get to do it repeatedly because webinars last for as long as you have them recorded and available on your website. A tradeshow only happens once, but a webinar can funnel well-prepared, highly-qualified leads to your sales team time after time.

Your marketing automation system not only collects data on webinar sign-ups and attendees, it also administers every step of the information flow before, during, and after the webinar. It also delivers new attendees who sign up for the webinar to the appropriate point of the marketing pipeline.

To get an idea of how a marketing automation system manages a webinar, let's go through the steps of creating, promoting, delivering, and following up on a webinar.

Choosing a Webinar Topic

Too many companies think more about what they want to say than about what their audience wants to hear; they spend their time and money creating webinars, then wonder why they have such small audiences. A marketing automation system that has carefully tracked demographic, firmographic, behavioral, and contextual data over time will show you where your audience's interests lie.

The keyword analysis you do for your SEO also applies here, steering you to the topics your visitors search most frequently. Demographic and firmographic information tells you who your potential webinar audience is so you can address their needs directly. When brainstorming webinar subjects, looking at the data your marketing automation system (MAS) has already amassed will dramatically streamline the process.

Your MAS also tracks your content marketing metrics and can point out the subjects your audience has responded to well in the past. What are your most popular blog posts? Which white papers have gotten the most downloads? Repurpose this content by making it the kernel of your webinar subject, and you have built-in interest in the topic.

Webinar Promotion

If your audience doesn't know about your webinar, they can't sign up for it. Blog posts and guest posts, newsletters, tradeshow, Facebook events, LinkedIn groups, front page banners, e-mail marketing invitations – all of these are prime opportunities to let people know what they're getting.

Your MAS knows which audience segments each of your marketing channels reaches and will guide your promotion strategy. For example, website visitors who find you via an organic search might respond best to a home page banner that features a mention of the keywords they used to find you – and yes, you can even customize home pages within your MAS. Your newsletter recipients, on the other hand, may respond better to an in-depth article that feeds their desire for more knowledge about the subject of your webinar.

Form Design

Marketing automation technology also simplifies form design. Make it easy for attendees to participate by letting them sign up via Facebook, Twitter, an on-site form, or a custom landing page. These forms serve a dual purpose: They reserve space for attendees, of course, but they also give your MAS a wealth of new data on leads.

Not all forms are created equal. Keep these five tenets in mind when designing your webinar form to attract the most valuable leads:

- ▶ **Streamline:** Leads are naturally efficient. The fewer clicks or keystrokes they have to enter to get to where they want to go, the better, as far as they're concerned. Take a look at your current forms and think about where you can eliminate a step or two.
- ▶ **Focus:** In your form dialogue, emphasize why you're asking for the information to focus on the reward leads get for completing them. For example, your email address line could include the phrase, "Where should we email your reservation confirmation?" Other ways to focus on the purpose of your form might include images of what leads will receive or pull quotes from the webinar.
- ▶ **Simplify:** A lengthy form is a benefit to you only if leads fill it out, but they're less likely to do so when confronted with a dozen blanks. Instead, break longer forms into steps. Dividing it into stages makes a form feel more purposeful and require less time to complete.
- ▶ **Engage:** Think of how an online game or quiz is designed, and you have an excellent example for creating engaging forms. Add a completion bar to your form to enhance response rates, especially if you already fill in part of the bar for them. People like to complete what they start, so keep them engaged through the entire process.

The Webinar Lead-Up

After prospects fill out the necessary reservation forms, your MAS also initiates a sequence that starts with an autoresponder "thank you" message. This note is a small but critical step because it verifies your lead's

information and serves as a reminder to attend – and you do want attendance, not just sign-ups. Attendees of webinars are more than 60 percent more likely to convert than those who sign up but don't attend.

Your MAS knows who has signed up and those who haven't. It waits a few days and sends another email to leads who have not yet registered, letting the prospect know there's still time to attend. After another two or three days, the system sends a final email.

Should a lead register for a webinar and not attend, you still have a chance to make an impact on that lead. Allowing registrants who miss the webinar to download a recording of the event and can afford you an excellent opportunity to ask for more information and refine that lead's qualification status.

Your MAS also sends out an auto response email thanking prospects for registering. Even with this thank you letter, attendees sometimes forget about a scheduled webinar without the occasional reminder. Depending on how far out the event is, you should send an email reminder a week in advance and another the day of the webinar. Timing of reminders varies from industry to industry, but your MAS can track historical data and reveal what the most effective reminder schedule is for your audience.

Lastly you should allow your registrants to update their calendar with the event title, date and time of the webinar. By having this information in their calendar the registrant has the ability to see the event and schedule around it as well as set up reminders to heighten the likelihood of attending.

Webinar Execution

From your marketing automation system's standpoint, the webinar itself is the easy part. It records attendance, tracks whether people stay for the entire presentation, and prepares a thank you message for attendees. A marketing automation system also integrates with popular webinar software to create and organize slides for a sleek and compelling presentation.

In general, a good breakdown for an hour-long webinar is as follows:

Introduction (5 minutes) – Welcome the audience and offer personal insights into why this topic inspired you to create the webinar. Explain what they can expect to learn from it.

Overview (5 minutes) – Present the outline of the information you'll be sharing. This part of the webinar fills the same purpose as a table of contents in a book.

Presentation (30 minutes) – Half an hour is typically long enough to cover a webinar topic in depth. If your topic extends much longer than this, consider breaking it into a series of webinars.

Q&A (15 minutes) – Open the floor to the audience and answer questions they may have. Not all audiences are forthcoming with questions, so have a few prepared from past webinars or practice sessions to answer.

Call to Action (5 minutes) – Every webinar should conclude with a clear, direct call to action for your audience.

If your webinar is a release of a pre-recorded session, consider implementing a chat messaging service that lets new attendees communicate directly with your representatives.

Follow-Up

A timely and organized follow-up after your webinar delivers higher conversion rates, and your MAS excels at coordinating follow-ups and reminders.

You and your marketing team can choose to send out a general thank you to all attendees, but you can also fine-tune the responses to send different messages to leads depending on what questions they asked in the Q&A or how long they stayed with the webinar. Historically, attendees who stay for the entire event have far greater conversion rates than those who leave early, so you might send a direct mail offer and arrange a telemarketing call as part of the follow-up process on these highly engaged qualified leads.

Having tracked the behavioral and contextual cues from attendees during every step of the process, your MAS has also been scoring these leads so it can channel them toward the correct nurture flow. Some leads may have reached the SAL or even SQL stages by the end of the webinar, while others need additional input to arrive at that point. Either way, your marketing automation system can schedule email and phone calls to maximize the ROI on every webinar lead.

Sorting and Scoring

Some of your most valuable leads come from tradeshow and webinars. To keep the return on your investment of time and money as high as possible, it's imperative to put verified, qualified leads on the appropriate nurture track while weeding out false signals of interest. It would be impossible for a human member of your marketing team to go through your database, cross-reference the data there with attendee records, eliminate dead ends, and put valid leads on the right nurture program. For your marketing automation system, it's a routine task.

How do false signals appear in webinar attendee lists? Students and members of the press may account for a certain number of attendees. Although they're there to learn about you, that knowledge rarely translates into sales. Sometimes, attendees are competitors who want to see what they're up against or learn a few new ideas. Even the friendliest competition will never buy from you, and your marketing automation system knows that. It's able to spot these false signals and filter their results out of the nurture process so you aren't handing your competition tools they could use to leverage their own success.

When people sign up for a webinar, they're already sending a pretty strong signal of interest, but it's sometimes challenging to see just where that interest lies. With a marketing automation system, companies can filter attendees by interest, demographic data, and firmographic information. By filtering leads and sorting the most promising prospects into differentiated nurture streams, automation users are able to turn every possible lead into a sale and maximize their webinar investment.

Conclusion

What you do before and after the webinar has as much impact on its value as a lead generation tool as the webinar topic itself. Marketing automation plays a critical role in receiving optimal ROI on your webinars, resulting in more and better-qualified leads. To maximize the impact of webinars on your lead generation strategy, work with a marketing team that knows how to utilize the power of marketing automation to its fullest.

About Reach Marketing

Reach Marketing provides integrated solutions that fuse traditional marketing methods with leading-edge technological advances. This confluence of innovation and tradition gives clients unparalleled access to the data they need to shape more effective campaigns. Reach's inter-disciplinary team brings together marketing specialists, software developers, IT experts, database marketers, analysts and SEO/SMO specialists in one powerful multi-channel marketing force.

The dedicated professionals on the Reach team have positioned the firm at the industry's forefront and continue to look toward the future of marketing as it continues to evolve.

