

# 12 Ways to Generate Leads Online

By Diane A. Garrod

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Sales lead generation skills are necessary, especially in an uncertain economy.

You'll need customers to survive, and generating leads on a daily basis should be one of your daily tasks.

Do these 10 things on a daily basis and business will start coming to you.

Increase your Internet presence. Conduct regular targeted e-mail marketing campaigns. This is the best way to generate qualified leads.

You can also register your site with the top search engines (Yahoo!, Excite, LookSmart, Lycos, Northern Light) and increase your link popularity with reciprocal links.

If you have an optional Flash or rich media presentation on your Web site, it increases your chances of closing a sale.

Form high-quality online alliances. An alliance between companies that provide different, but complementary, products and services allows the companies to broaden their operational scope. In alliances, companies agree to look for opportunities within their client bases to use alliance services and to make referrals.

Good alliances are like having a mini sales force -- without the costs.

Here are some tips for creating worthwhile alliances:

Plan your alliances to satisfy your objectives for long-term relationship building.

Select your alliances based on three characteristics: capability, compatibility and commitment.

Negotiate and plan your agreements.

Manage your relationships to show your commitment to their growth.

Network with key organizations. Be prepared: Memorize a 25-word description of what you do and always carry your business cards.

Off-line, join your local chamber of commerce and get involved in community and business

organizations, such as your local Ad Club -- if your business is advertising -- or a local high-tech group. Local newspapers often list these groups in business or technology sections.

For my company, brand strategy, digital marketing and community development for customer acquisition and retention are the key areas. So we belong to online organizations such as the Greater Seattle Chamber of Commerce, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and Web Chamber.com. Sometimes chambers will have a listing, complete with links, of their current members: a gold mine in lead generation.

Search project database sites, such as FreeAgent.com and Guru.com, and sites that generate project leads according to your company's offerings, such as jobs.internet.com, Writer's Weekly and PeopleBank.

This allows you to see which companies are hiring in which areas. Send promising ones your company information with a cover letter.

Join online discussion forums and chat groups in your areas of expertise. At Talk City, you can register free to join business chats.

Use your clients to generate referrals. Remember, it's easier to keep your current clients happy and generate profit for your company than it is to develop new customers. Read more in workz.com's 10 Tips for Growing New Business From Old Clients.

Follow up with last year's potential clients. They might need your services or products this year. Send them e-mail or call them.

Use press releases and publicity to build excitement about your business.

Here's how to make sure you get into the news:

Call local radio and TV stations and ask if they'd like to interview you on topics you're knowledgeable about.

Approach the local newspaper with a column idea.

Contact conference and trade-show planners and offer to speak at their events.

Use e-zines. You can advertise your free reports and tutorials in others' e-zines or publish your own e-zine.

Use e-mail autoresponders to acknowledge people who sign up to receive your e-zine, report and/or tutorial. You can build lead databases from these e-mail addresses.

Find lists of e-zines at Liszt, List of Lists and Zine Scene.

Target 25 businesses. Find sites that need what you sell, then e-mail them a targeted message -- or send a package via U.S. mail -- introducing your product or service. You can also call to find the right person or decision-maker and craft your strategy from there.

Keep your site updated and interactive. Fresh content keeps customers coming back. Follow up on inquiries within 24 to 48 hours. Do you listen to your clients and upgrade your site to reflect their suggestions? Have you developed community around your products and services?

Learn lead generation online. Digital Work has free workshops and a free lead generation service. You can sign up online.

I also recommend Sales Doctors, an online magazine on selling, generating leads and much more. Try JustSell.com, where you can take a course, sign up for the sales newsletter, and learn how to close sales to the leads you generate.

Remember: Any leads you generate should take you closer to closing sales. To do that, you'll need to make lead generation a daily habit and learn to follow up with potential clients.

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