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## Drip Marketing: Slow and Steady Wins the Customer

By Rick Cook | April 30, 2009

Drip marketing is the rather inelegant term for a marketing campaign that relies on repeated contact, or "touches," with a potential customer.

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Unlike a leaky faucet, drip marketing is no accident. Successful drip marketing involves a carefully planned and thoughtfully targeted series of communications that will get your message across to customers and keep your company's name in their minds. As prospects move through the early stages of the sell cycle, drip marketing helps ensure that those potential customers become your actual customers.

### Advantages

Building awareness is one of the most important advantages of drip marketing. It fixes your company name and message in the potential customer's mind.

Education is another important function. Drip marketing can inform prospects about your products and your industry by giving useful information while building trust in your company.

### Who It's Good For

Drip marketing is ideal for high-value products with a long sell cycle, especially high-ticket items which are purchased at infrequent intervals. For example, mortgage companies and real estate agencies are big on drip marketing. So are health and life insurance agents. IT vendors whose products are purchased at infrequent intervals are also a rich market for drip marketers.

Drip marketing is especially effective if you have some insight into the prospect's buying cycle. Some kinds of goods, such as business computers and automobiles, tend to have a definite lifespan and are replaced every few years.

### Aim Your Drips

Drip marketing needs careful planning for maximum effect. You must decide on a basic theme or themes that you want your campaign to drive home.

But the same message endlessly repeated loses effectiveness. Even though the themes remain the same, drip marketing requires variation in the way you present the message.

### Kissing the Minimum Number of Frogs

On a percentage basis, drip marketing is not very efficient. It requires you to contact a number of people a number of times to drive sales . This doesn't mean drip marketing can't generate a lot of sales. Properly done, it can turn up many good prospects. But it does mean that you need to carefully focus your drip-marketing efforts. Paradoxically, while drip marketing uses mass-marketing techniques like email and direct mail, it becomes most effective when the messages are customized for specific audiences.

Once you've decided on your basic themes, you need to analyze your prospect list to determine which presentations are likely to be most effective with different groups. For example, a real estate agency will have some potential clients who are buying their first homes, some who are retiring and looking to downsize and some who are moving into the area. Each of these groups will benefit from a different approach. First-time buyers are likely to be interested in affordability. Older prospects looking to downsize will probably be more concerned about issues like tax implications and how to handle the sale of their existing home. By segmenting your prospects, you can provide them with the appropriate series of messages.

### **Drip Systems**

Fortunately, drip marketing lends itself to a high degree of automation . Equally fortunately, there are a number of tools to help you run a drip-marketing campaign, or alternatively a number of companies who will run your campaign for you.

Many drip-marketing products are specialized for particular industries. For example Norvax Inc.'s

LeadMiner is designed for insurance agencies selling health insurance. Agent 360 from RENWare Inc. is designed for real estate agents. Other software programs, such as Swiftpage , are more general and will work for many kinds of businesses.

Beyond the industries they serve, drip products vary enormously in what they do. In fact, drip marketing is more a buzzword than a product description. One must look beyond the term to see what a product actually offers.

The most basic drip marketing products are email auto-responders. These simply send a reply, or a series of replies, to queries emailed to your business. Even within this category there is variation. Some of these products, like Swiftpage, automatically assemble a leads database in addition to sending out email messages. Others, such as TriggerTouch , will start with visitor information from your Web site. Most of these programs will send a series of messages, spaced over a period of weeks or months, in response to an initial query. In effect, they automatically launch a drip marketing campaign aimed at the potential customer. The more sophisticated programs allow you to vary the content of the messages as well as their timing depending on your evaluation of the contact. Some of them even have advanced features: LeadMiner can automatically generate current quotes to be included in the emails.

But drip marketing can be much more than just email. It can also include direct mail contact, newsletters, telephone calls or on-site visits. In fact, just about any form of customer communication can be integrated into a drip-marketing campaign. Some drip-marketing software will also automatically remind you to call the lead or send out mailings.

Some CRM programs, such as ACT4Advisors , which is built on Sage Software Inc .'s ACT! CRM program, come with features that let you set up a drip-marketing program. In the case of

ACT! that includes a series of sample letters on various topics.

Finally, there are a number of companies that specialize in running drip-marketing campaigns, such as MyMarketingPartner Inc . They can help you create your message and analyze your prospects, and can provide you with prewritten or customizable materials aimed at the various target groups. You work out the basics and they do the rest.

### **Avoid the Spam Trap**

Badly done drip marketing is Chinese water torture for prospects. They may remember you, but they're unlikely to deal with you. Bombarding prospects with uninteresting or irrelevant messages is a great way to end up being ignored. In this day of spam filters and floods of junk mail, it's all too easy to wind up as part of the background noise rather than a signal.

Email marketing is a particularly tricky business because of spam's current choke hold on email campaigns. In fact, most people who get a message from a company with whom they're not familiar are likely to assume it's spam.

Another problem with email marketing is that malicious emails have made people wary of opening attachments such as newsletters or reports.

The basic way around this problem is content combined with trust. To overcome the spam barrier you need an interesting message. You have to say something in which your potential customers are likely to be interested. Often that means giving them tips or other useful information.

Second, you need to build trust. Your prospects must trust you to give them something they want and not send them viruses . This is one limit for sending newsletters as attachments to emails.

Personalization also builds trust, both in your emails and in your company. As much as possible, include your prospects' names and other information — correct information — showing that they're not just a name on a mailing list. Also include information about who you are. For example, an email signed by the sales rep who will handle the account is more effective, especially if the email is from that rep's own email account.

### **Customizing on the Cheap**

The big advantage of drip marketing is that it gives you a relatively low-cost, low-effort way of maintaining regular contact with leads who haven't yet made the critical buying decision. You can do this by other means, of course, but drip marketing lets you touch a lot more people effectively without wasting a lot of work. With drip marketing you can have more contact with more prospects without overloading your sales force or breaking your budget.

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