Why Your Leads Keep Dropping Off the "Conveyor Belt"

By Susan Saldibar

Remember that iconic "I Love Lucy" chocolate factory episode in which the conveyor belt speeds up and Lucy and Ethel can't box the chocolates fast enough? Remember how, in desperation, Lucy starts stuffing them down her dress and into her mouth, while the rest of chocolates drop off the end of the belt?

I'm laughing just remembering it. What made me think of that was a recent conversation with Sean Ochester, EVP of Digital, Integrated Marketing and Technology with [Sage Age] (a Senior Housing Forum partner), as he described the inefficient way sales reps are still handling their leads.

Okay, leads aren't chocolates on an assembly line. But maybe that's the point. The very image of gobbling up as many leads as you can, as fast as you can, and leaving the others to "drop off", is one many sales managers would recognize. And it can be a lethal mistake in an industry such as senior care, where each lead represents a potential move-in downstream, if not worked properly.

Stop the conveyor belt!

No lead needs to drop off. Not anymore.

"With all the data we now have, and all the tools and technology available, we can now know a lot more about a prospect than ever before," says Sean. "Through a combination of automation and customization, there is no reason any lead should be left unattended," he adds.

It makes sense. But how does this actually work?

Automate and Customize Your Lead Management

Here are three things, using available technologies, that you can be doing now to automate and customize your lead management:

- **Respond quickly to all online inquiries**. By "quickly" Sage Age recommends within 15 minutes (or sooner) of initial contact. According to a study by Caring.com, after 1 hour of no contact with a potential inquiry, the ability to schedule a tour drops by 50%. So putting out that initial response quickly is critical.

- **Automate everything you can**. Lead management systems allow you to orchestrate, to a high degree of granularity, email campaigns that free up your sales team to focus on personal calls to those prospects further along in the pipeline. Having sales reps tied up in crafting and sending one email after another is a waste of their time. And, while they are doing so, they may be missing out on an important call-back.
- **Customize everything you can**. Customizing and automating are not mutually exclusive activities. Not any longer. You can create a highly customized set of emails that can be sent to nurture growing interest shown by a prospect. These responses can even include attachments of articles, check lists, and other items of interest to the prospect. "A large percentage of these can be automated by connecting your lead management system to your CRM," says Sean. "By automating correspondence with those prospects who aren't yet ready for a conversation, you can keep their interest alive by providing them with information that matches their actual needs and where they are in the buy cycle.
- **Integrate your systems**. As Sean points out, it is important to integrate your lead management solutions with your CRM system so that the process from initial lead inquiry to move-in is seamless. "To be effective, your sales team must have total visibility over what emails have been sent, what attachments have been sent and where the prospect is in their decision process," says Sean. "Having that visibility will help them be far more effective in their personal communications with the prospect," he adds.

Once you start, don't give up!

Key to all your lead acquisition and management programs is not to give up on a prospect after two or three communication touchpoints, according to Sean. "Keep them engaged and use your targeted automation to do it," he recommends. "You should ideally have had at least 3 communications with the prospect within the first 48 hours."

The result? An orchestrated lead machine that is not out of control. A program that allows you to respond quickly to inquiries in an appropriate way. "For those earlier in the process your correspondence will be more informational, rather than promotional," says Sean. "Gradually, as they move along, you will want that correspondence to pull them into your community. As long as you know the difference, you can calibrate your lead management and CRM to "know" the difference as well," he added.

As for leads dropping like Lucy's chocolates off the conveyor belt? Good news. No more. And you don't have to eat them either.

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