

THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO

# Lead Nurturing



# Why is lead nurturing important?

As a concept, lead nurturing has been around for decades. In today's world of AI, intent data, and ABM — when marketing is more data- and technology-driven than ever — nurturing can seem a tad outdated, even unnecessary.

In reality, however, nurturing is more important than ever. One of the truths of the modern B2B marketplace is that buyers are conducting most of their research independently, that is: before contacting vendors. However, today's buyers still go through three fundamental stages:

- **Awareness:** the buyer identifies a problem or need and starts researching potential solutions
- **Consideration:** the buyer evaluates different vendors, products, or services to determine the best fit.
- **Selection:** the buyer makes a final decision and completes the purchase.

Demand generation programs that ignore the early stages of the cycle often fall short. Here's why:

- Buyers lack awareness of the vendor, solution, category, or the underlying problem
- Sales are engaging with prospects very late in the selling cycle, at which point buyers have already conducted research and very likely been nurtured or educated by the competition, so close rates are lower
- Late-stage calls to action (demos, trials, talk to a sales rep) only ever appeal to a small subset of the buying audience, so response rates are low and costs per lead are high

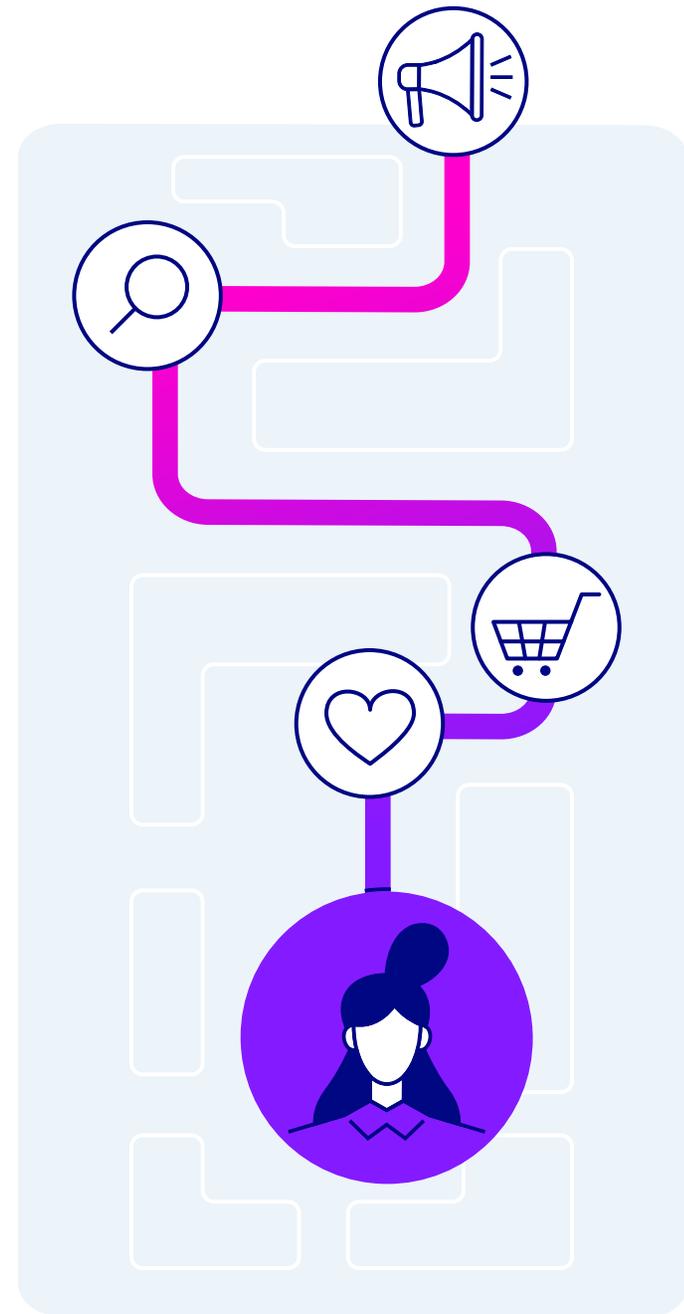
Effective lead nurturing can increase a company's pipeline up to 20%.



Instead, the most cost-efficient and productive demand generation programs:

- generate awareness for the brand, solution, and underlying problem
- reach and engage with buyers at all stages of the buying cycle, and finally
- nurture and educate early-stage buyers, building credibility and brand affinity

By nurturing a database of potential buyers at all stages of the buyer journey, marketers can generate a consistent stream of sales-ready prospects by converting early- and mid-stage leads over time, leads that translate to pipeline and deals at a much higher rate, and at a lower cost.



# What role does lead nurturing play?

Too often, nurture programs are overly focused on the short-term goal of rapidly converting leads into sales conversations. (“You just downloaded our white paper. How about a demo?”) These programs tend to be designed with a single objective: move the lead through the funnel as quickly as possible by pushing them towards a demo, meeting, or price quote. While this approach may yield results in the short term, it ignores a whole subset of potential customers who aren’t yet ready to engage.

Recent studies repeatedly confirm that B2B sales cycles are only getting longer, and the buying process more complex. Our “State of B2B Pipeline” research has found that 75% of B2B marketers have experienced longer sales cycles, with nearly 20% reporting 4+ month extensions. Today’s buyers conduct most of their research online, compare vendors and gather input from multiple stakeholders, before ever reaching out to sales. If your nurture program only focuses on generating that sales connection, it overlooks the reality of the current buyers’ journey.

When a nurture program is focused on short-term conversions, leads that don’t convert immediately are often discarded or left

inactive, something that’s not only a missed opportunity but also a waste of the investment it took to generate those leads in the first place.

Providing they otherwise meet your target profile, early-stage prospects are still potential customers, if only months down the road. Left to their own research, without further positive and consistent interaction with your brand, they may not remember you when they’re finally ready to make a purchase.

Furthermore, it’s infinitely more cost-effective to nurture and convert an existing prospect, someone who is already a “sunk cost,” rather than constantly try to generate net new sales-ready leads, leads who may not yet know or trust your brand.



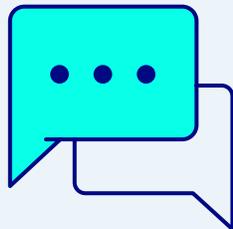
**Buyers now complete up to 70% of their decision-making process independently.**

# The two pillars of an effective lead nurture program

An effective nurture program should be designed to achieve two things:

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The first is to identify which new leads are active buyers. This means delivering relevant content, tracking engagement, and presenting opportunities for prospects to take the next step — whether that step is talking to sales, booking a demo, or attending a product tour. Identifying these qualified leads ensures that sales are prioritizing their time on the right individuals.



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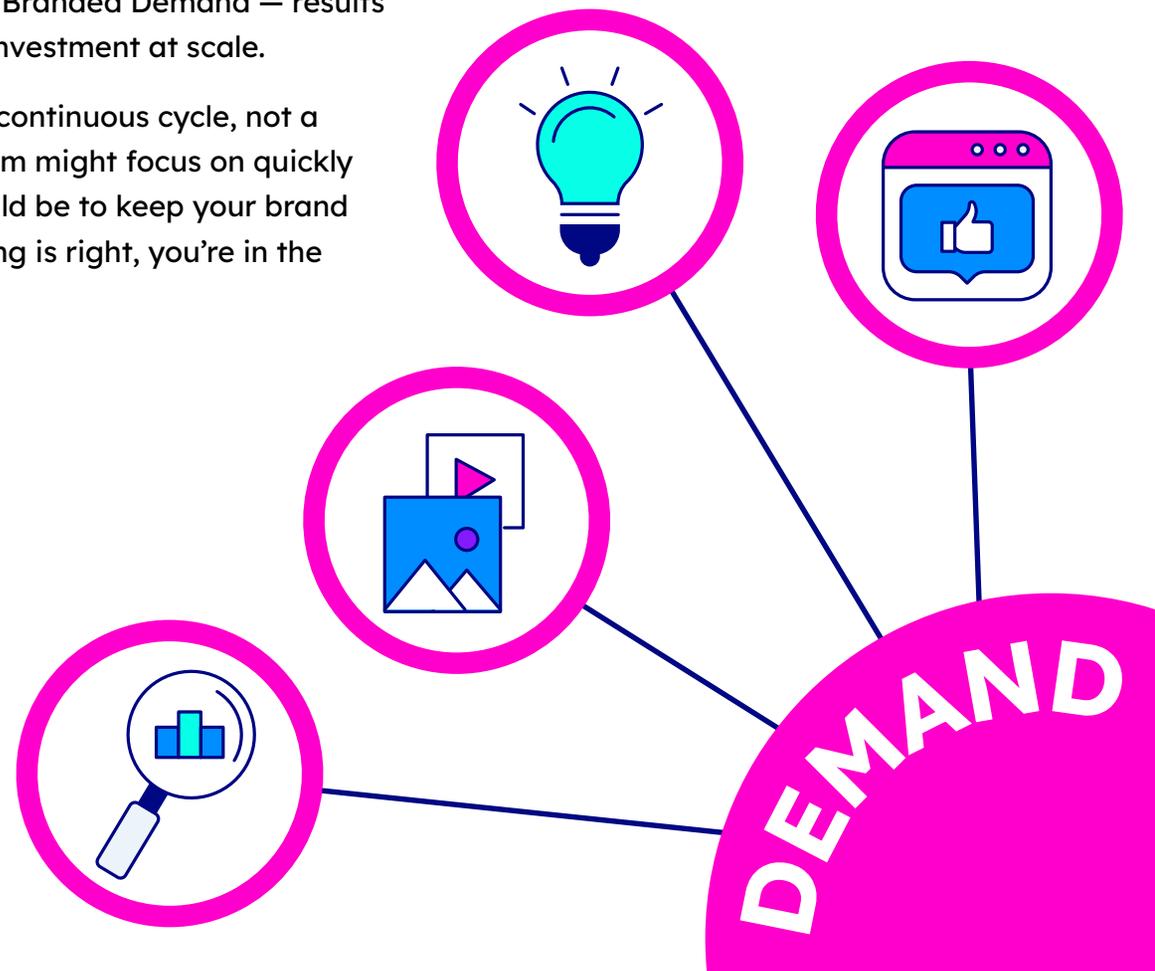
The second, and just as critical function of a nurture program is to maintain an ongoing relationship with leads who aren't ready to engage with sales immediately. Rather than abandoning these leads, nurture programs should be designed to build credibility and trust through educational content, case studies, thought leadership, and industry insights. This long-term engagement keeps your brand top of mind for when the prospect is finally ready to engage, whether that's in a month, six months, or even years.



Think of nurturing as a long-term relationship-building exercise that combines both elements of brand building and demand generation. When your program consistently provides information of value (and not just reasons to buy your product), prospects will associate your brand with helpfulness, expertise, and credibility. As these prospects continue their buyer journey, your company becomes a trusted resource, increasing the likelihood that you'll be the first vendor they turn to when they're ready to engage.

In fact, our research has found that nurture programs that ensure brand recognition when sales engages with prospects — an approach called Branded Demand — results in nearly 40% greater performance and higher return on investment at scale.

What's more, relationship-building should be viewed as a continuous cycle, not a one-time push. While the initial stages of a nurture program might focus on quickly funneling qualified leads to sales, the long-term goal should be to keep your brand top of mind and educate prospects so that, when the timing is right, you're in the best possible position to win the deal.



# Why nurture programs should run indefinitely

A well-structured nurture program doesn't have an expiration date. It's a living, dynamic process that shifts and evolves depending on a prospect's engagement level and their stage in the buying journey. In the very early stages, lead nurturing can focus on identifying those leads who are ready to engage. Beyond that, the goal should be maintaining relevance so that your brand is the preferred choice when that individual is ready to buy.

Whether a prospect buys in six weeks, six months, or two years, a nurture program should be continuously educating, building credibility, and reinforcing your brand as a trusted solution. Nurtured leads routinely close at a higher rate because you've built that trust and credibility over time. A well-structured nurture program, built for the long-term, ensures that pipeline remains healthy without having to rely exclusively on net new leads.



# How to measure lead nurturing success

Establishing firm, measurable objectives for lead nurturing is a critical first step in designing programs that genuinely move the needle and generate more pipeline and revenue. Traditional email metrics like open and click-through rates may tell you how prospects are engaging (and are a useful tool for testing and optimization), but they don't say much about true business value.

Success metrics may vary depending on the type of nurture program and where in the sales cycle it's focused. An early-stage program that responds to new leads should be judged on its ability to increase sales engagement and conversion to MQL. A late-stage program is better measured on metrics like length of sales cycle (pipeline acceleration).

Ask what business problem the nurture program is designed to solve and measure accordingly. Raw leads not converting? Measure Lead to MQL conversion. Sales reps unable to reach prospects? Measure sales engagement. Leads stuck mid-funnel? Measure Lead to Opportunity rates or Time to Close.

Long-term, the true value of a nurture program is to increase the ROI from demand generation programs. Effective lead nurturing builds stronger relationships with potential customers, and guides them through the buyer's journey. This increases the likelihood of conversion by keeping leads engaged, maintaining brand awareness, and building trust to where you become the preferred solution when that prospect is ready to buy.

# Mapping content to each stage of the funnel

Content is the backbone of lead nurturing, and each stage of the buying journey requires content, and calls to action, that reflect where the buyer is in the decision process.

- **Awareness stage:** Focus on educational content that highlights best practices, industry trends, and solutions to common problems.
- **Consideration stage:** Introduce more high-value assets that showcase your expertise and thought leadership, like survey reports and Webinars
- **Selection stage:** Offer content that emphasizes ROI, customer success, and competitive advantage, such as case studies, ROI calculators, and buying guides.



## CHECKLIST

# 16 features of a best-in-class nurture program

The degree to which a particular technique, program, or strategy makes sense for your organization depends entirely on the scope, scale, audience, and objectives of your lead nurture program. Nonetheless, the degree to which you currently employ few, some, or most of the following features says a lot about the sophistication of your program relative to best-in-class companies, and the associated potential for improvement.

1. Immediate, quick-fire response to new leads (ex: 2-3 emails over 7 days) to complement BDR follow-up and increase sales engagement, potentially leveraging AI technology like Conversica to optimize lead qualification via automated, two-way conversations.
2. A core engagement program that runs indefinitely, one that delivers a regular stream of informational content to all prospects in a pre-defined sequence, can be paused at any time to allow for tactical batch sends (ex: Webinars), and is regularly augmented by new or replacement content.
3. Integration of “skip logic” to ensure that prospects don’t receive emails for content already consumed.
4. Strategic and measured use of form fields to capture critical information, minimize friction and maximize conversion rates, combined with progressive profiling to append contact data and better qualify leads as they re-engage.
5. Segmentation of key nurture tracks by persona, vertical, or lead source, using dynamic content where possible for maximum scalability.
6. Use of a subscription management (subscriber preference) page, enabling prospects to select topics of most interest to them, thereby increasing engagement and reducing unsubscribes.
7. A “mid-stage” (MOFU) nurture track, stream, or program, of finite length, triggered by pre-defined actions, specific behavior, lead score threshold, or third-party intent data (ex: Bombora) that suggest increased buying interest.

8. Use of sales alerts triggered by actions from key accounts, demo requests, or “contact us” form fills, perhaps via a dedicated Slack channel for real-time notification and to enable faster sales response.
9. Integration of other, online channels (Google, Facebook, LinkedIn, Programmatic, Content Syndication) to nurture prospects outside the inbox.
10. A “lead recycling” or “re-nurture” program for leads rejected by sales or otherwise returned to nurture, perhaps segmented based on a “reason” field (ex: budget, competition, time frame).
11. Integration of direct mail as a triggered flow step for high-value prospects, perhaps leveraging a sending platform like Sendoso.
12. Integration of custom chatbots to increase sales engagement on pages (ex: thank you pages) where prospects might have additional questions or be ready to take a next step, or — where appropriate — to replace landing page forms altogether.
13. Consistent, rigorous A/B testing of subject line, “from” field, call to action (CTA), design elements and other key success factors in order to optimize email performance over time.
14. A clear, defined gating strategy that ensures that 1) content is gated appropriately (if at all), and 2) when used, forms are pre-populated for known contacts to enable progressive profiling.
15. Documented entry points, exit points, triggers, wait steps, and overall workflow schematics for each stream, track or program, to facilitate planning, optimization, and change management.
16. Tight synchronization — messaging, segmentation, offer strategy — between nurture tracks and sales outreach cadences to ensure alignment and maximum synergy between sales and marketing.





## About Pipeline360

Pipeline360 is the trusted partner for B2B marketers seeking predictable, scalable pipeline growth without added complexity. Our Demand-as-a-Service model, fueled by our powerful B2B marketplace, streamlines the entire pipeline generation process, delivering Branded Demand, advanced content syndication, targeted digital advertising, performance insights, and leading content and creative services.

Through data-driven intelligence and enabling technology, Pipeline360 takes a strategic, end-to-end approach tailored to today's evolving B2B buying journey. Leading global brands, including Adobe, Red Hat, and Splunk, trust Pipeline360 to fuel their revenue and growth. Learn more at [www.pipeline-360.com](http://www.pipeline-360.com).



## About Spear Marketing Group

Spear Marketing Group is a full-service agency that helps B2B companies generate, nurture, and convert sales leads to revenue. The firm's unique, full-funnel approach blends strategic expertise, creative flair, and a deep understanding of marketing technology to drive measurable results across every stage of the lead lifecycle: lead generation, lead nurturing, and customer marketing. To learn more, or to talk to a Spear representative about a lead nurturing campaign or other demand generation initiative, go to [www.spearmarketing.com](http://www.spearmarketing.com).