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Questions to Ask a Lead Generation Vendor

Introduction

The objective of a demand generation program is to fill a sales funnel with qualified, actionable sales opportunities – to speed up sales cycles and ultimately provide sales teams with better opportunities to close new business. If you decide to invest in a demand generation program from a third party, asking the right questions can make all the difference between the program falling short and becoming a wild success. A poor choice could result in a wasted time and resources with unqualified prospects, so it is important to know what to look for when selecting a lead generation vendor.

We know all of the tough questions, because we field them day in and day out. We know, firsthand, what you should be asking B2B lead generation vendors if you want to create a productive relationship with the vendor.

By sharing these hard-hitting questions with you, we're sharing our twenty years of knowledge and insight into the Demand Generation industry. The answers will offer you a more complete understanding of the prospective vendors' capabilities, potential synergy with your organization, and expected results.

1 Will the opportunities that you generate for my company be shared or sold to any other company? Will leads/appointments that I receive be former appointments that you've scheduled for other clients?

Sometimes lead generation and appointment setting vendors will produce a sales lead for a client, which is then repurposed for other clients with similar offerings. This can tend to dilute the quality of the lead.

2 What happens to all of the business and sales intelligence that occurs during prospect conversations when an appointment isn't scheduled?

As part of the inside sales process, lots of sales intelligence is produced as a byproduct — even on unsuccessful calls. Data points like what solution they are using now, are they in a contract, when does that contract expire, are they using an in—house solution. All of these data points may have value to you, even when the call doesn't result in a meeting.

3 What percentage of your business is in my industry?

It may not necessarily be a deal-breaker if a lead generation company does not have specific experience with your particular product or service, but you should know the vendor's general experience in the your space (tech, supply chain, healthcare devices, etc.).

4 What percentage of your campaigns market to our target market vertical(s)?

This is far more important than if the vendor has experience providing sales leads for products like yours. You need to be confident that the vendor has experience speaking to your target market, especially if you serve a niche market. There's a certain lexicon and set of protocols for niche markets, and you should be sure the vendor is familiar with those intricacies.

5 Will I own the final database at the completion of the campaign?

One of the key ingredients of a successful appointment setting campaign is a quality marketing database. Over the course of the campaign, that database is updated with new contact information, specific business intelligence, and notes. Many vendors will offer you the database complete with updated information when the campaign is completed.

6 How many deals can I expect to close?

Almost always, the answer you'll hear will be "It depends" – and it does depend on a number of factors, like the quality of your sales team, your sales processes, and the viability of your product or service. That said, the answer could also reveal an expectation based on previous results. At the very least, the vendor should be able to immediately recall success stories and case studies as part of their answer.

7 What percentage of the meetings/leads you provide result in qualified, funneled opportunities?

There's a difference to be drawn between this question and the previous one. While the number of closed deals depends largely on your sales team, the number of qualified opportunities added to your funnel is a direct indicator of the quality of those leads and adherence to the qualification criteria you've outlined with the vendor. Optimally, the vendor will have a feedback loop with their clients to determine the percentage of leads that become actionable opportunities. At Insource, we maintain that feedback loop and can confidently state that upwards of 75% of sales meetings we've scheduled for our clients become near- or mid-term sales opportunities.

8 How do I know that your Business Development Reps (BDRs) will be able to understand the complexity of our offering and communicate that to our prospects?

The success of a sales lead generation campaign is directly correlated to the quality of the BDRs that work your campaign. Many call centers or telemarketing companies hire lower-level personnel that function as script-readers. On the other hand, a quality Demand Generation company will employ BDRs that have a high business IQ and specific areas of competency.

9 If I were to talk to one of your references, what would they tell me?

Here, you're giving the vendor an opportunity to expound on the high points of their lead generation program. Not only that, this thought exercise forces them to adopt the mindset of a client in identifying the key benefits of their solution.

10 Will I be able to talk to current or former clients that can speak to the quality of your programs?

It's a red flag if the vendor does not provide client references that you can call. Ask the vendor for references and do your due diligence by taking the time to speak to them.

11 How do you adapt to the continually changing B2B landscape?

New products and services are constantly transforming industries. Key to your success is finding a partner that has the flexibility and foresight to grow your audience to maximize meetings for your sales team – and positively impact your ROI.

12 Do you ever tell a client no?

A solid lead gen partner will always position you for success. There may come a time where you have an initiative that does not match well with their service offering. A client-focused partner will be honest with you, pass on the opportunity and share alternatives. An unprincipled vendor will put profit ahead of partnership, and then let you down.

13 How are your BDRs paid?

You want a company that pays their reps with a significant commission component. Incentive-based performance is a must for production volume.

14 How do we reject an appointment/lead and why would we?

At the very least, you should know what the replacement process looks like. Know what makes a lead or sales appointment replaceable.

15 How many BDRs do you have? How many managers and non-reps?

There are a number of things that can be deduced from the answer to this question. An appointment setting company with 200 client campaigns spread over 10 BDRs is spread too thin, in which case you can expect slow results and even poor results in the worst case. If the vendor is top-heavy with a high number of managers in proportion to reps, you have to be certain that they can not only talk the talk, but that they walk the walk, as well.

16 What is your employee turnover rate for BDRs?

The turnover rate will indicate job satisfaction and how competitive the pay is – both indirectly correlated to campaign success rate.

17 What is the average tenure of your BDRs?

Questions about tenure will give you an indication as to whether the vendor employs seasoned BDRs with complex sales experience or whether they have a roster of BDRs who may be newer to the inside sales game.

18 What is your BDRs experience in my industry?

At Insource, our reps are vetted on two levels – inside sales experience and industry experience in certain product/service categories. You should ask if the vendor has a similar vetting process for prospective BDRs, and get a feel for how many of their BDRs have experience in your vertical.

19 Do your BDRs use email? If so, how?

If your lead gen vendor is going to be representing you, you probably want to know if email is one of the channels they will use for outreach.

20 How is qualification criteria developed?

Developing qualification criteria should be a collaborative process. At the end of that process, there should be no ambiguities. Both parties should be clear on what types of prospects are going to be included in the campaign.

21 What qualifies as a billable sales appointment/lead?

You should clarify with your lead generation vendor which metrics will be used as a guidepost for campaign success. Find out how they measure success. Do they measure quality of the delivered leads? How about the speed of lead production? Do they measure consistency of lead flow?

22 How do you assist your clients in measuring the success of the program?

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23 What is your pricing model? Pay for performance? Monthly fee?

There are a few different pricing models available in the B2B appointment setting industry. Two of the most common are a set pay-per-time fee (\$XXXX per hour/week/month/year) and pay-for-performance. Pay-per-time is often advantageous because it balances the vendor/client relationship by removing the emphasis on quantity over quality. Insource calls its time-based program "Managed Services". With a pay-per-appointment model, the vendor shoulders the risk with the client and you pay for what is produced. There is an implicit guarantee with a pay-for-performance model, as the vendor is obligated to provide you with leads and/or appointments to fulfill their quota to you.

24 Can I have an example of a campaign that succeeded? Can I have an example of a campaign that failed, and why?

Vendors will chomp at the bit to tell you some of their success stories and maybe share a case study or two. By asking the follow-up question about a campaign that failed, you are asking the vendor to provide some transparency on campaigns that don't work well for them.

25 Do you have Case Studies you can send me today?

Case studies can be very telling. Ask if the vendor has Case Studies in your industry, specifically, to get a handle on how they have performed for other clients in a similar industry or situation. But beware, as you know, Case Studies tell the stories of the best results. As they always say in infomercials, the results may not represent typical customers.

26 Do you outsource or offshore any of this program?

Some companies don't mind if their appointment setting and market outreach program is offshored. Some companies would rather have agents that have a native English accent. It all depends on what you're comfortable with, but you should know if offshoring or subcontracting of lead generation services is part of the package so you can make an informed decision.

27 How is messaging created? Do you work from scripts?

In the initial phases of your campaign, messaging should be a primary concern for the vendor. They should have a measure of research that goes in to creating messaging that aligns with your company's value proposition. Significant emphasis should be applied to this critical task. A great follow-up question is: 'If the initial messaging is not performing well, how quickly can we alter the messaging?' As it pertains to scripted telesales, ask if the vendor rigidly adheres to the script or whether their BDRs are experienced and agile enough to go with the flow of a conversation that veers from the original messaging.

28 Can we come for a site visit?

You can tell a lot about a company and their culture by walking their halls and meeting on their turf. It gives you a sense of the intangibles that can't be ascertained on a phone-based sales presentation. Extra points to a lead generation vendor that invites you to come visit their offices; but beware the vendor that shies away from site visits. It makes one wonder, "What are they hiding?"

29 Where do you get contact data for campaigns?

In this day and age, sources of contact data can be widely varied in their completeness and accuracy. Where will the data come from? Independent data vendors? A homegrown database?

30 Is there a fee for contact data acquisition? Are there campaign set-up fees?

In addition to the cost of the campaign, many vendors will tack on other ancillary fees – most commonly for contact data to fuel the campaign and/or other set-up fees. Ask the vendor to lay out any additional fees you might incur in the course of your lead generation campaign.

31 What guarantees do you provide?

As mentioned in a previous question, a pay-per-appointment model implies a guarantee of production. In the absence of a pay-for-production model, find out if the vendor makes any at-large guarantees of performance. In other words, does the vendor guarantee a production benchmark – such as XXX sales leads or appointments per week? Time-based programs can make # of dials and email send guarantees,.

32 Who are your closest competitors?

Most vendors don't want you seeking out competitors, as a general sales rule. But there's a lot to be said for a vendor who IS willing to share this information with you. It indicates that the vendor is confident in the services they provide and the potential ROI of their client campaigns.

33 Is it only cold calling or are other marketing elements incorporated into the campaign?

Some vendors use a traditional cold calling approach without the help of other integrated marketing elements. On the other hand, programs like Insource Leads' methodology include other marketing elements – like content marketing, email marketing, etc. – to identify and land sales prospects that may be further along in the buying cycle.

34 Can you input leads directly into my CRM?

This is an indicator of the sophistication of the appointment setting vendor. Are they technologically savvy? Do they have a vehicle to drop sales leads and appointments directly into your CRM? Some do, some don't. If they won't (or can't directly input sales leads into your CRM, you should know exactly how you are going to experience the delivery of leads and appointments. Will it be a spreadsheet – or a PDF lead sheet? What exactly is it?

35 When we get a lead/meeting, what exactly do we get? Can you provide us a sample?

What exactly is the deliverable? Will they send meeting requests to all parties? How will the sales intelligence associated with the prospect be delivered and in what format?

36 Do you use any of our whitepapers, case studies, or other premium content in the prospecting process?

Many lead generation vendors will request marketing collateral from you in the initial phases of the campaign. How will that be used? Will it be used on-demand, when a prospect asks for more information? Or does the vendor use your carefully-created collateral as part of a larger email outreach campaign? At Insource, we recognize the tremendous utility of content in the sales process. For example, our lead nurturing cadence threads your marketing content throughout the lead generation process.

37 What is your client onboarding process?

The vendor you choose should have an onboarding process which includes ample time and resources for a Discovery Phase to fully grasp your value proposition, differentiators, and unique selling points. The vendor you choose will be an extension of your own sales team, so you need to feel comfortable that they can talk like one of your employees and speak to the value of your solution.

38 When will our first leads show up?

Some vendors take longer than others to ramp up your campaign. Ask the vendor to set the expectation with you as to when you might expect the flow of leads to begin. Typical time-to-market is 1-2 weeks.

39 Do you incorporate an email marketing component into your campaigns?

Most lead generation vendors rely exclusively on telesales outreach. Telephone outreach alone may not provide you with a consistent flow of leads or appointments. Furthermore, an outreach strategy that includes email and/or content marketing tends to uncover buyers that may be further along in the buying cycle. Insource's program is designed with a lead nurturing cadence to include LinkedIn connections, outbound calls, email and content.

40 How long have you been in business?

The B2B demand generation and appointment setting industries are replete with fly-by-night vendors. Industry experience aside, make sure you feel comfortable with the vendor's experience in inside sales.

41 Do you do B2B, B2C or both?

B2B and B2C lead generation are like apples and oranges. A company that does both should have a clear division of specialized labor for both methods, in order to be effective. Preferably, you'd want a vendor that specializes in only B2B appointment setting.

42 Do I need to sign a long-term contract?

Obviously, you want to know what exactly the contract terms are. Some vendors allow for a month-to-month agreement, while others might require a longer-term contract. A month-to-month arrangement is not preferable to either party, because developing a mature pipeline (especially for solutions that have a longer sales cycle) can take time. An appropriate pilot period is at least 3-6 months.

43 What is your quality control process?

You want to find out if the vendor has resources dedicated to ensuring the quality of the sales leads and appointments that they deliver. Lack of a great quality control process can cause lots of unnecessary wasted time, as you'll be chasing some leads that may be minimally qualified or, worse, unqualified altogether. A good follow-up question is 'How are Quality Control Agents and Account Manager's compensated?' Optimally, you want a team that is unbiased, with no compensation attached to the number of leads they deliver.

44 What technologies do you employ?

A serviceable technology infrastructure is needed to effectively manage your campaign. Think about it. Your vendor needs to be able to effectively collect sales intelligence, track a number of metrics to optimize the campaign, schedule meetings and distribute calendar notifications, and transition leads and appointments to your sales team. With a weak technology base, there's too much room for error. Ask specifically about their dialer and CRM technologies – as they are prime indicators of the sophistication of the vendor's technology base.

45 How do you develop the marketing database for our campaign?

The answer to this question could be the difference between an effective or ineffective campaign, because the quality of the contact data affects all aspects of your campaign – speed to market, the quality of the delivered leads, and the quality of the sales intelligence attached to each sales lead.

46 In developing the marketing database, how can you be sure we are targeting our absolute ideal prospects? Are you just pulling a database by the standard parameters (industry, company size, etc.) or are there other fields which allow for better targeting?

Look for a vendor with a rich database (or the ability to obtain one). A database that has numerous filters makes it easier to get granular with who exactly you want to target and provides for pinpoint focus.

47 What kind of consistency can I expect in the lead flow?

It's difficult to build a pipeline for your salespeople with inconsistent sales lead production. You don't want your sales reps tending to six back-to-back meetings one day and then no scheduled meetings for the following five days. A consistent, predictable sales forecast depends on a reliable lead flow.

48 How can I ensure that your sales reps will maintain the integrity of my brand?

You've worked hard to build your brand. You do not want the first impression that your future dream client has with your company to be in the hands of an inexperienced telesales rep.

Demand that your lead gen vendor can naturally communicate clearly, confidently and persuasively with key decision makers. Through the course of their day-to-day work on behalf of your company, they will, by default, become your front-line brand ambassadors. Be sure that the vendor you choose represents your organization well, builds trust in your brand and ultimately gets the results that you need.

49 How do we grade your performance or make changes to the program if it's struggling to produce?

Some campaigns are more difficult than others. Some target markets and prospect title levels are more difficult to reach. Sometimes the first iteration of messaging doesn't resonate like you hoped. In the event that the campaign is slow to produce, how agile and flexible can your vendor become to right the ship and get results?

50 Can't we just develop an internal lead generation department ourselves?

Inevitably, this question opens the door for the vendor to further explain the value of outsourcing. In short, you could always develop an inside sales/lead generation department yourself – but not without significant expenditures on data, human resources, sales management, and technology infrastructure.

ABOUT US

Have you ever wondered why it's so difficult to get in front of your dream clients?

Insource Leads can jump-start your organization's sales pipeline. A 100-day introductory engagement with Insource will offer your company the opportunity to build a sales pipeline with our meetings, monitor conversion rates, forecast ROI and provides ample data and results to determine the viability of a permanent partnership with Insource.

- Experienced B2B Inside Sales Representatives
- Master Lead Generators managing your Program
- Outbound Marketing cadence architecture customized for each Client's Program
- Demand Generation Waterfall production methodology
- Target Market Data filtered to your precise requirements

To build a sustainable lead generation strategy today, you have to synchronize multiple prospect touch-points inside the outbound marketing channel. Insource takes a holistic, integrated approach, where the phone, email, LinkedIn and marketing content work together to drive immediate sales pipeline contribution, while setting the table for a constant flow of qualified opportunities.

A Better Approach for the B2B Sales Landscape

Insource Leads developed a "Conversational Marketing" methodology which engages your B2B target audience through outbound digital and live conversations. Conversational marketing reaches prospects "one-at-a-time" making it possible for your brand to:

- **Build** a relationship with the prospect that transcends to your sales team
- **Align** its value proposition and unique differentiators to prospects
- **Communicate** to the prospect's needs and interest

For more details and pricing, contact us to receive a custom proposal from our Program Expert outlining a Program exclusively geared to your sales goals, target market and sales qualifiers. Contact us by phone, email or through our web form to learn more about how we can grow your sales.

What Our Clients Are Saying

"In evaluating Lead Generation vendors, we found the pay-for-performance model offered by Insource to be extremely attractive. Other per-month or per-rep models we evaluated didn't provide a firm guarantee of results. So we were eager to work with Insource, and have been more than pleased with the results." — IT Security Client

"What we liked most about working with the team at Insource was the open communication we had throughout the course of the campaign. They were always available to discuss critical aspects of the campaign. In addition, they successfully developed a structured process to follow-up with key prospects."
— Medical Device Client

"What I like most about working with the Insource Leads team is that they do what they say they'll do."
— Workforce Management Client