

# Marketing to the Buying Cycle

Most of us are familiar with the sales cycle—Marketing sources and qualifies leads, Sales follows up on those leads and, through combined efforts of both teams, those leads move through the sales cycle, converting to an opportunity and, if all goes well, to a deal.

The parallel journey that the prospective customer takes through this process is called the buying cycle—an evolutionary decisioning path towards purchase.

## Marketing to the buying cycle is an effective way to:

- Better understand your target audience and what drives them
- Automate early-stage touches, freeing up sales resources to close more deals
- Start the conversation with prospects so that call downs are more impactful
- Shorten the buying cycle, improving conversation rates



## The Prospect's Journey

### A typical buying cycle has five stages:

1. **Awareness:** What problem am I trying to solve?
2. **Education:** What products and solutions are available?
3. **Evaluation:** What is the best option for me?
4. **Justification:** How quickly will I see a return on investment?
5. **Purchase:** Should I buy or not?

Each of these stages offers a unique opportunity to provide value, engage the prospect and drive them closer to that purchasing decision.

## Market to Buyer Pain

To efficiently move prospects through the buying process you need to understand what problem they are trying to solve and articulate how you are able to solve that pain. It also helps to know how your target audiences like to receive information and what materials best grab their attention and prompt them to engage.

We tend to be good at marketing to “explicit” characteristics such as business size or industry, but it’s equally important to consider “implicit” (behavior) characteristics such as types of collateral downloaded or number of website visits. Capturing this information early allows you to tailor later-stage campaigns to your buyers’ preferences and ultimately drive them to the deal stage faster.

It also helps identify the buyer’s persona—the role most likely to purchase or use your product or service—as well as what additional products or services you could possibly provide them in the future.

Below is a quick reference guide to what types of messages and materials work best at each stage.

| Stage         | Marketing Message   | Offer   |
|---------------|---|---|
| Awareness     | This is the first opportunity to get your buyer’s attention. Messaging should be high level but engaging and introduce a new way of thinking or a fresh perspective.  | The best assets are simple, short and highly visual: infographics, blogs or videos.   |
| Education     | The Internet has made it easy for buyers to self-educate so it’s likely that prospects have already done some homework on you and your competitors. Therefore, it’s critical that your marketing cuts to the chase and delivers information relevant to their specific need.  | Focus on the how and the why more than the what. Good content options are checklists, webinars, reports, and use cases.                               |
| Evaluation    | Prospects start kicking the tires. They want to see if your solution is the best choice to solve their problem. This is also the pivotal point in the cycle when prospects first indicate intent to buy or possibly walk away. Highly-targeted marketing programs can help sales retain the lead and transition the prospect to the next stage. | Prospects are invested at this stage, so offers can be more substantial—guides, reports, demos, webinars, assessments and white papers all work well. |
| Justification | Time to get down to brass tacks. At this point in the cycle, your prospective buyer is looking to see how quickly they can see a return in investment and impact on the business.   | Break out the good stuff like testimonials, case studies, ROI calculators and trial offers.   |
| Purchase      | By the time a prospect enters the Purchase phase, Marketing has likely handed off the baton to Sales and the deal is going down.  | Where do I sign? Bring on the pricing, terms, and contracts.  |

How you execute marketing programs at each of these stages can make a significant impact on your close rate. Whether you choose to use single-touch campaigns for a specific buying stage or employ multi-touch campaigns to guide prospects through the entire cycle, be strategic about what, when and how you are communicating.

## Optimize Your Efforts

The cadence of the buying cycle is determined by the time that elapses between each stage from Awareness to Purchase. This can vary based on the product, audience or other factors, but ultimately the goal of any good marketing and sales strategy is to shorten this cadence and drive the prospect to decision as quickly as possible.

For businesses engaged in a channel sales model, this can feel like a lengthy process. That's because there are typically more parties involved than just the decision maker and the sales person. You'll likely also have the platform solutions provider and the ISV (and many times, a Consultant) engaged in the sale as well.

Targeting marketing programs to address each stage in the buying cycle gives you control of the timeline, offers your prospect the most relevant information possible so they see value, and reduces the amount of work Sales has to do around discovery and education.

It's also important to create visibility into marketing efforts to gauge what's working and what's not. You want to be able to track how efficiently leads pass through each stage, the effectiveness of your campaigns, and how your marketing efforts are impacting sales' ability to follow up and execute. To do this, you need to set up a proper tracking and measurement process.

### Ask yourself if you are doing the following:

- Leveraging your CRM to track marketing activity
- Tracking the performance of each marketing asset
- Integrating your marketing system(s) with your CRM
- Categorizing leads based on stage in the buying cycle
- Developing specific programs to move leads through each stage
- Identifying which assets perform best at each stage in the cycle



## Keep Your Eyes on the Prize

If your Lead Generation efforts to market to the buying cycle are successful, you now have a slate of enthusiastic new customers. The baton now passes to Customer Loyalty who will begin a new cycle of nurturing the customer, keeping them apprised on new features and capabilities and introducing them to additional products and services.

Transitioning the relationship is an important part of the process. It ensures that Marketing hands off the prospect at the right time and doesn't stay involved in the process too long. It's important that Marketing stay focused on the pipeline and driving qualified leads to Sales. The result: more cowbell!

## About Avalara

Avalara makes sales tax compliance simple and automatic for thousands of customers every day. Its SaaS-based, sales tax and compliance automation software solutions span the compliance spectrum; each year these solutions deliver billions of tax decisions, manage millions of exemption certificates, file hundreds of thousands of sales tax returns, and remit billions of tax dollars to states nationwide.

Recognized as one of America's fastest growing technology companies, Avalara is integrated with leading ERP and ecommerce software systems that serve millions of small to medium sized businesses. Founded in 2004 and privately-held, Avalara's venture capital investors include Battery Ventures, Sageview Capital and other institutional and individual investors. Avalara employs more than 500 people at its headquarters on Bainbridge Island, WA and in offices across the U.S. and in London, England and Pune, India. More information at: [www.avalara.com](http://www.avalara.com)

**Avalara**

---

**Get Started.**

Learn more about pricing, online demos, or

Call **877.780.4848**

Click [www.avalara.com](http://www.avalara.com)

