



How to Convert SUSPECTS to FANS in 6 steps

Matching collateral to the Buyer's Journey^{1,2}

As buyers move along the journey from being unaware of you to becoming customers and advocates, their needs change. You can send the same content to all of them and risk losing them— or you can match collateral to their needs and make their journey direct and their stay with you enduring and lucrative. This morsel shows you how to be in their drivers' seats.

1. Unaware

At this stage, the contact is not aware of the problem you solve, so offering your solution will fall on deaf ears.

Your goal is to show him a problem he hasn't yet acknowledged, such as the shortcomings of his current solution or the risk of having no solution at all. You need to explain the problem objectively, showing how to solve it without self-promotion. Demonstrate your knowledge and willingness to share it, asking nothing in return. This will also build your profile as a Thought Leader and as a source of useful, educational content.

The most influential resource you can use is a White Paper³, the most downloaded is a video⁴ and your choice will depend on your market. Don't give up just because he (or 1,000 like him) doesn't download first time. He might have been busy or on holiday or the resource may not have been relevant at the time. Send a different one next time, resend the first one after some time and see what happens. No response doesn't necessarily mean 'no never'. It just means 'not now'.

Your first White Paper will probably be generic, but if you trade a few questions for your download, you'll get clues to his interests and can target the next one. Your goal at this stage is to get him to download something so you can start your online relationship.

2. Shows interest

The problem is not yet acknowledged but he's responded by downloading a resource, revealing something about his needs or priorities.



Now you can target that need with a specific solution, so he knows you have the answer.

The resource you send could be a Solution Brief (by industry vertical), an Application Brief (by problem or decision-maker) a Mapping Guide or Best Practice Guide, depending on what you sell. All of these reveal clearly how well you solve the problem. You could also send an invitation to an event or webinar focused on solving the problem. Whatever you choose, it needs to address the problem with real solutions in real situations.

3. Confirms problem

At the last download he' re-confirmed his interest and the problem, so it's time for direct contact by phone, telesales, bringing human contact to your automated process, to start an offline relationship.

During the call you can find out more about the problem—its size and implications, the current solution in place and its shortcomings, the contact's role in decision-making, his budget and timeline to decide. Depending on his response, you may pass him directly to sales or put him into a nurture program until he's ready. Conversely, if he has a problem you can't solve, at least you'll know now not in six months.

1. Hugh MacFarlane, MathMarketing Group www.mathmarketing.com.au

2. Why Messaging Must Match Buyers <http://www.technoledge.com.au/sm-ct>

3. Eccolo Media 2010 B2B Technology Collateral Survey Report, 2014

4. <http://www.marketingsherpa.com/article.php?ident=32075>



At worst, you'll earn brownie points by passing him to someone who can help. At best, you might get a referral from both parties.

4. Seeks solution

He's confirmed a problem of a scale and type that you can solve, so it's time to engage sales, but that doesn't mean forgetting about matching collateral or running parallel relationships; it means equipping your sales team with the right collateral.

At this stage, apart from asking many questions to define his requirements, other influencers and decision-makers, you need to prove your credentials by showcasing multiple customer success stories, each with measured ROI (if possible), defined benefits, proof of easy implementation, glowing testimonials and, of course, provide comprehensive technical brochure-ware and data sheets to define what your product does.

This stage is all about proving how your solution works in situations like his, and how it's much better than alternatives. If appropriate, you might offer an online demonstration, free software evaluation or Proof of Concept (POC), depending on your business model and cost structure.

Each of these should be matched to his requirements, so your collateral at this stage should include a checklist of his environment and the results he expects. If specified tightly enough and the results fulfill all his needs, he'll find it hard to say 'no' to the next step.

5. Evaluates solution

Here, he is probably evaluating your competitors too, so all your advantages need to be highlighted. Apart from meeting his stated objectives, you need to highlight the intangibles like ease or speed of deployment, local support, cost-effectiveness and scalability, if applicable. Supporting collateral might include checklist comparisons with competitors or case studies where other solutions failed to resolve the problem. You also need your own checklist of requirements and constraints, so you'll know any show-stoppers.

Part of this phase will be your proposal, showing how your solution resolves the problem, covers the gaps that competitors leave, addresses the constraints,

meets the budget and is easy to implement. Part of the proposal should be an easy, low cost first step such as a pilot deployment in one department or covering one parameter, to demonstrate measurable results, savings or ROI, without a whole-enterprise six month deployment schedule. You should also provide contact details of three customers for direct feedback, ideally in similar situations or verticals.

Your proposal needs to easily convert to a signed contract, including signature panel and version control so the final version is easily signed, or attached to a separate services agreement. This makes sure that paperwork doesn't become a last minute obstacle.

6. Chooses solution

Once he's made his choice, the journey isn't over; a new one's just begun.

If he chooses you, you'll want to reinforce the wisdom of his choice by sending him ongoing developments or expanded uses, so the longer he remains a customer, the more benefits he'll enjoy. In this way, he'll become not only welded to your product and company, but an referee and advocate as well. Here you'll help him participate in user groups, listening to his feedback and giving him open access to feedback from others.

If he didn't choose you, the journey isn't over either. He may have a competitor's offering on trial and that trial may succeed or fail. If it succeeds and you lose the business, the relationship isn't over. First you need to find out why. Conduct a loss review (why you lost, to whom, why and the term of the contract) and learn from the feedback.

Then, you need to put him on a slow drip of information about your product's advances and success stories. In time he may find he made a poor choice, and he (or his successor) may be seeking an alternative in 3-5 years' time. When that happens, his company needs to know that you're still in business, still ranking up customer successes and still very keen to help.

In summary, the Buyer's Journey never really ends, it just takes new directions. If you match your collateral to all stages, you'll build strong, enduring customer relationships that will withstand pressure from many points, including financial and political. # # #