

NURTURING RELATIONSHIPS IN AN
EXTREMELY LONG SALES CYCLE:

Marketing Agency Starshot Sees Stellar Results

Marketing agency Starshot was founded in 1999 by two partners who wanted to create a new type of agency model. The agency has grown to become a leading force of change for some of the largest brands in the world. Through its agency hubs in Toronto and Chicago, Starshot is a single source of marketing expertise and results optimization, serving companies like Intuit, Sonepar, and Dell and being a North American Agency of Record for Microsoft.

Starshot focuses on customer experience design. With expertise in event marketing, demand generation, and digital marketing, its client roster is a who's-who of global B2B companies.

In her role as Starshot's demand generation practice lead, Angie Anderson looks beyond immediate client needs to anticipate long-term business objectives. She had two objectives when choosing a marketing automation platform: To create and sustain demand for Starshot clients' products and services, and to make the agency's own marketing efforts more efficient and effective.



The Issue:

Long, complex sales cycles and large, global distribution channels demand make lead nurturing a difficult process.

The Solution:

By implementing Act-On marketing automation, Starshot has gained visibility into the sales funnel, customized email campaigns, and helped sales close more business faster.

The Results:

With automated tools, including an easy-to-use email composer, Starshot saved approximately three hours per campaign. Averaging 23 campaigns a month, the savings was significant: about 96 people-hours monthly. Plus, using a variety of Act-On tools such as segmentation and A/B testing to optimize engagement, the team nurtured more leads through the longer sales cycle – 25 percent were leads who had been nurtured for at least 36 months. With average deal sizes of six figures – that 25 percent close rate equals real revenue.

The Need for Both Power and Simplicity

Starshot's customers have complex, solution-based sales cycles and large, multi-national distribution channels, so the agency needed a powerful, sophisticated solution to use on their behalf.

At the same time, for its own team, Starshot wanted an agile, intuitive solution that could simplify complicated processes, be deployed swiftly, and be managed with a minimum of fuss. In both scenarios, the technology had to deliver measurable results. Angie and Starshot found what they were looking for in Act-On.

Making Email Creation Easier and Faster... Saving Billable Hours

Before adopting Act-On, Starshot's email process began with the design team. All changes to an email had to go back through a designer, making edits and corrections labor-intensive.

"We know that our design team will create a great template, but we also know there will be revisions to the first draft including editing of links or content. With Act-On, the email doesn't have to go back to the designer. Our team can just go in, do the wordsmithing or change an image, and finalize it. And we don't need to know how to code."

The time saved penciled out to approximately three hours per campaign. Averaging 23 campaigns a month, the savings was significant: about 96 people-hours monthly. For Angie, time is billable hours – and saving her clients money during campaign creation frees budget for other projects, making for much happier clients.

Helping Sales Close More Business

Starshot's marketing team uses the Act-On platform to manage an email program that not only sends personalized messages on behalf of 95 sales reps, but allows each email to be customized and segmented based on where the contact is in the sales cycle.

The key to success in such a dynamic environment is the sales team's ability to



Having a tool like Act-On enables our sales team to view the prospect's history, score, and timeline. This makes the sales rep fully aware of each step along the way so they can be targeted and timely with their sales process.



ANGIE ANDERSON

Demand Generation Practice Lead
Starshot

quickly score leads based on their level of engagement with messages. Starshot's team uses Act-On's precision lead scoring capability to automate the process, enabling them to focus on marketing-identified "hot" opportunities and move leads through the pipeline faster and more strategically.

The team benefits further by the integration of Act-On with Microsoft Dynamics CRM, Starshot's customer relationship management system. Within Dynamics, sales reps can see the marketing data: whether someone clicked on the email, what pages they visited, and what assets they engaged with, to what degree. In addition, Act-On's triggered alerts feature lets sales know – in real time – when a prospect or lead takes a specific action, which allows reps to respond within the window of opportunity.

By combining customized messaging, automated lead scoring, and real-time visualization, sales knows exactly what's happening at all times.

"Sales doesn't know about the behind-the-scenes work; they just love the results. They love that if someone requests a meeting, they actually get that alert instantly, so they can follow up right away," said Angie.

Angie has found that marketing automation has aligned the sales and marketing teams by integrating many functions. "Sales relies on marketing more now; we're really working together," she said.

Nurturing Clients' Leads for the Longer Sales Cycle

Starshot's clients have lengthy sales cycles – the average is 18 months and some run as long as three years. Moving people through such a long funnel is both a long-term commitment and a formidable challenge, but success can often be significant to a client's top line.

Case in point: Starshot nurtured one client's leads for over three years, using a variety of Act-On tools such as segmentation and A/B testing to optimize engagement. And it worked. Of the sales that closed, a full 25 percent of them were leads who had been nurtured for at least 36 months. With average deal sizes of six figures – that 25 percent close rate equals real revenue.

"We nurture all those individuals for our clients, making sure that we've got the right decision-makers in the process," said Angie. "We can set it all up to run automatically, to take an action in reaction to the prospect's behavior. The tool lets us provide what they're looking for at that time, without necessitating interaction by an individual. But it's still a personal relationship. At any point the rep can jump in because they know exactly what's happened."

Nurturing Clients' Leads for the Longer Sales Cycle

Starshot has been an Act-On customer since 2012, long enough to gauge performance, see measurable results, and ultimately increase its clients' success. The numbers bear out Starshot's ability to apply process and creativity to capitalize on marketing automation – and get results.

"It's more than just the numbers," said Angie. "Really, Act-On is a partner to us, working with us to get to the other side, to solve the bigger crises of marketing and sales problems. Act-On helps us shine in front of our clients – which is awesome."



Sales can never have enough time to nurture all these people. So we're constantly doing things for them, nurturing leads, sending them the alerts, sending them the hot leads. Act-On's the key. It's the system that makes us able to do that.



ANGIE ANDERSON

About Act-On Software

Act-On Software is a marketing automation company delivering innovation that empowers marketers to do the best work of their careers. Act-On is the only integrated workspace to address the needs of the customer experience, from brand awareness and demand generation, to retention and loyalty. With Act-On, marketers can drive better business outcomes and see higher customer lifetime value. The Act-On platform provides marketers with power they can actually use, without the need for a dedicated IT resource.

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