

The third era of demand generation

How digital technology is
redrawing the boundaries
of B2B marketing



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At the core of B2B marketing is your demand-generation engine, driving new and renewed sales. Where previously, it focused on short-term campaigns and lead nurturing, demand generation is now entering a new era that integrates a broader suite of techniques to help drive demand today and strengthen your brand to improve the sales outlook for tomorrow.

With more tools and channels available to fuel demand than ever before, clients are increasingly talking about how they can maximise their opportunities in an orderly and structured way. Some believe the solution lies in building a demand centre.

B2B research and advisory firm, SiriusDecisions, defines the demand centre as “a central or regional hub of shared marketing services, infrastructure and process” that has the aim of “efficiently bringing consistent, repeatable and scalable demand creation efforts to market”.

This concept of a “marketing hub” to drive demand has been gaining traction recently as organisations look for the best way to structure demand generation in the digital era. Certainly at TMP, we are engaging in more and more conversations about what a demand centre entails and how to build the right demand-generation engine.

The change is driven, in part, by the rapid development of digital technologies – particularly marketing automation, mobile and social media, and targeted advertising – and also the need to build a pipeline of opportunities to aid sustainable growth as the economy continues to recover.

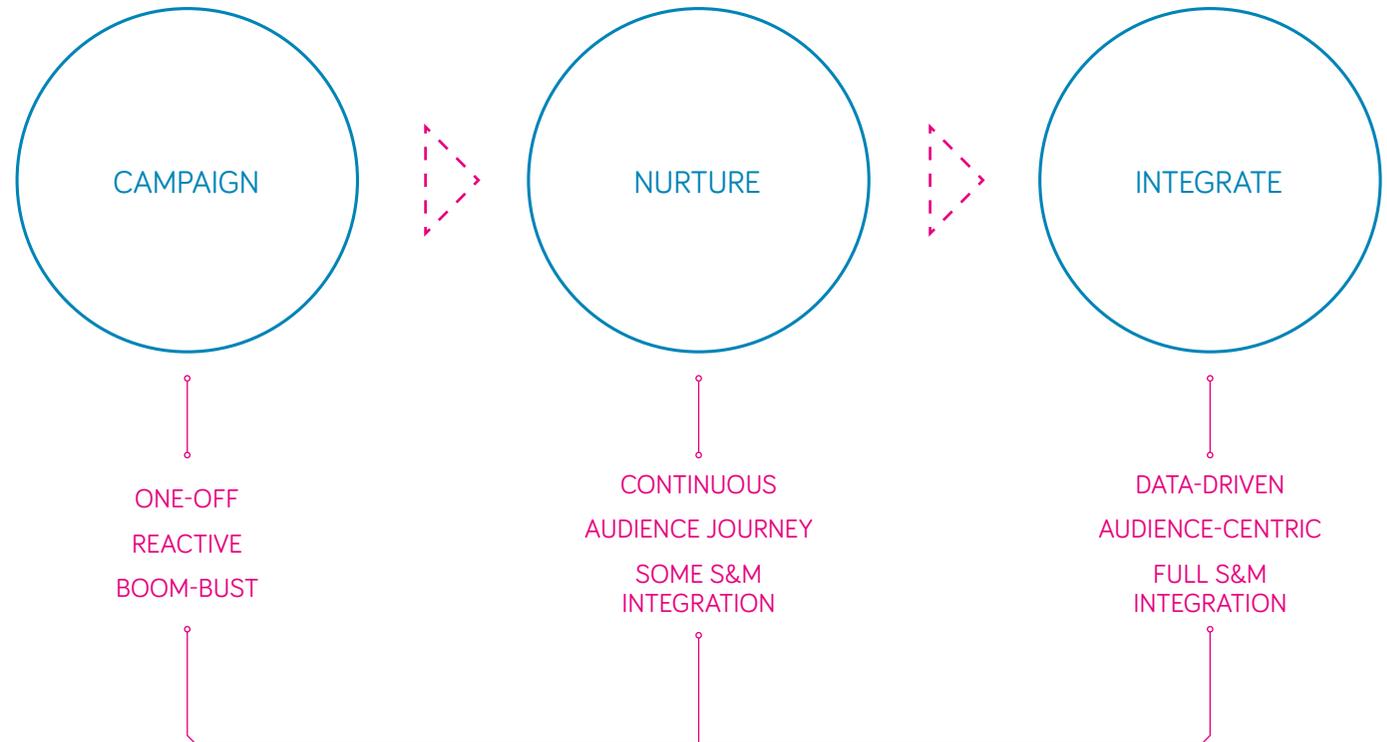
All of this is leading towards a new era of integrated marketing, where data and insight sit at the heart of demand generation strategy and practice.

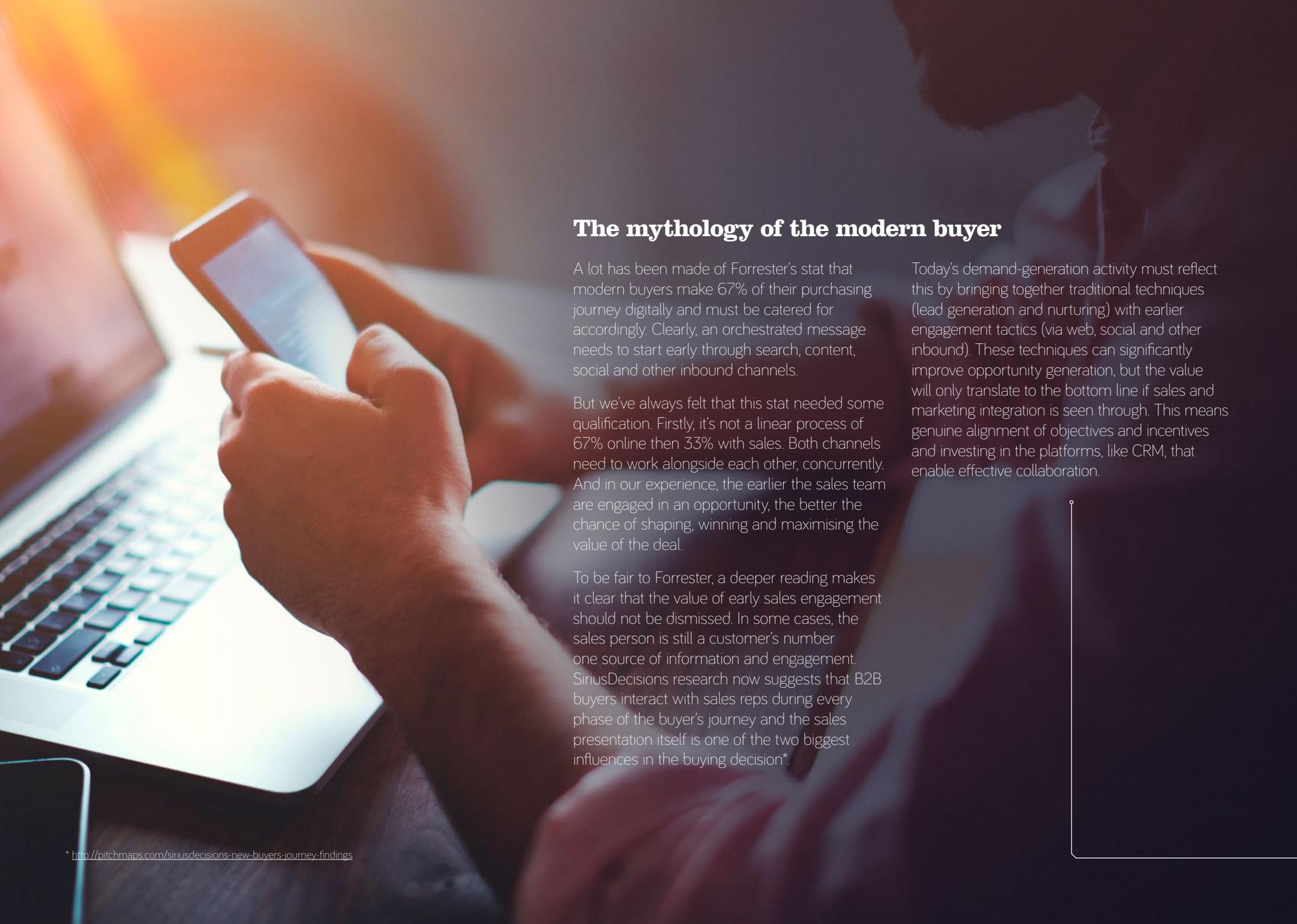
Although the Demand Centre is a relatively new term, [The Marketing Practice \(TMP\)](#) has been delivering this type of programme for clients for over 13 years. Our founding principle was to bring together the distributed elements of B2B marketing into a single, integrated offer.

The third era

B2B demand generation is entering a third era. From the boom-or-bust beginnings of single targeted campaigns, to the longer-term tactics of continuous nurturing, we are now seeing a further transition: to the importance of full sales and marketing integration.

This new era is defined by certain characteristics. The first is that marketing becomes increasingly forensic – driven by better data, sales insight and smarter automation that results in more effective targeting. This allows programmes that are genuinely centred on the customer or prospect, and able to deliver personalised messages on an industrial scale. These messages are not the old generic business benefit claims of 'better, faster, cheaper', but specific commercial insights about the audience's business.



A person is shown from the side, holding a smartphone in their right hand. In the background, a laptop is open on a desk. The scene is lit with warm, soft light, possibly from a window or a lamp, creating a professional and focused atmosphere. The person appears to be working or researching.

The mythology of the modern buyer

A lot has been made of Forrester's stat that modern buyers make 67% of their purchasing journey digitally and must be catered for accordingly. Clearly, an orchestrated message needs to start early through search, content, social and other inbound channels.

But we've always felt that this stat needed some qualification. Firstly, it's not a linear process of 67% online then 33% with sales. Both channels need to work alongside each other, concurrently. And in our experience, the earlier the sales team are engaged in an opportunity, the better the chance of shaping, winning and maximising the value of the deal.

To be fair to Forrester, a deeper reading makes it clear that the value of early sales engagement should not be dismissed. In some cases, the sales person is still a customer's number one source of information and engagement. SiriusDecisions research now suggests that B2B buyers interact with sales reps during every phase of the buyer's journey and the sales presentation itself is one of the two biggest influences in the buying decision*.

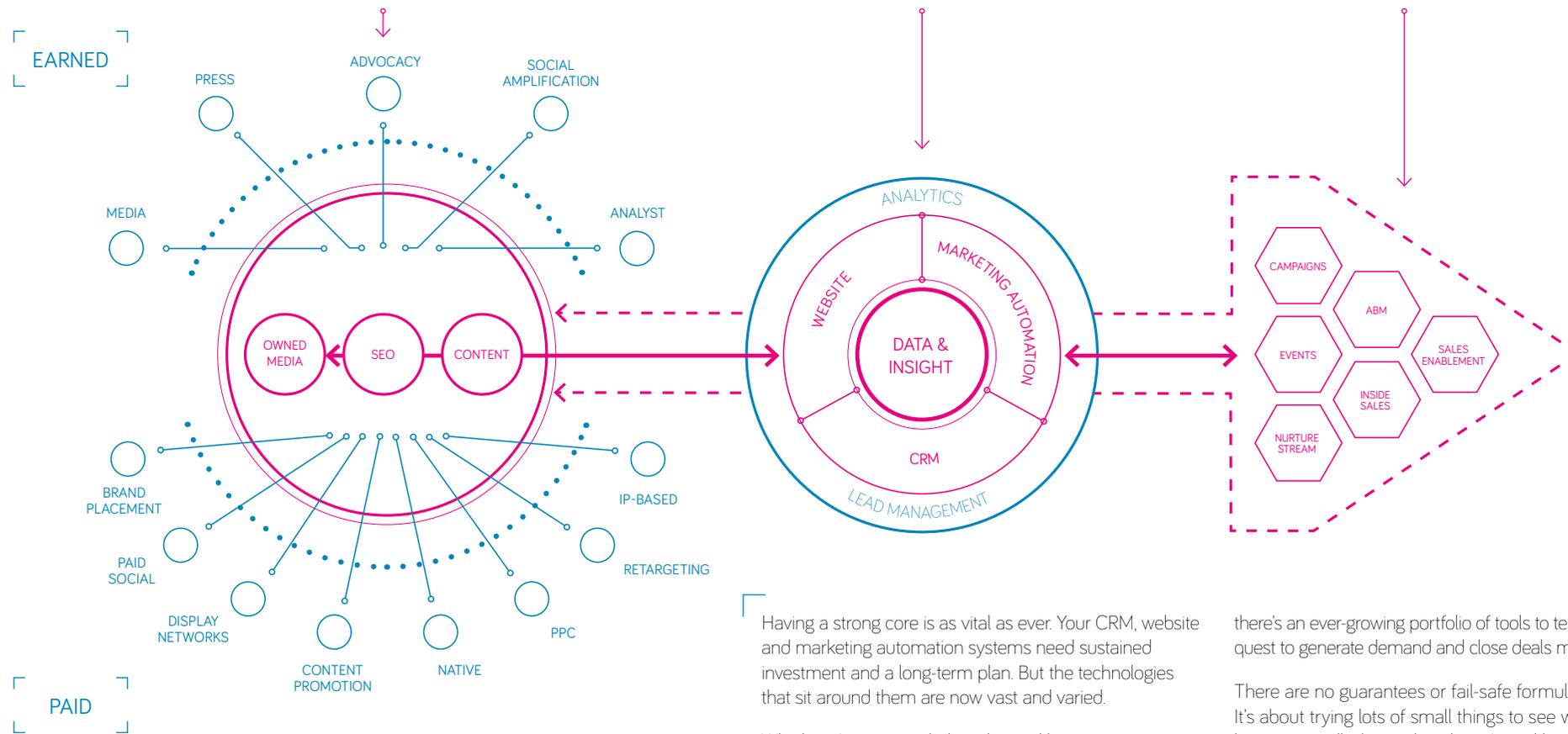
Today's demand-generation activity must reflect this by bringing together traditional techniques (lead generation and nurturing) with earlier engagement tactics (via web, social and other inbound). These techniques can significantly improve opportunity generation, but the value will only translate to the bottom line if sales and marketing integration is seen through. This means genuine alignment of objectives and incentives and investing in the platforms, like CRM, that enable effective collaboration.

* <http://pitchmaps.com/siriusdecisions-new-buyers-journey-findings>

Redrawing boundaries

Digital technology is redrawing the traditional boundaries of demand generation to encompass a broader suite of marketing tactics. You could look at it as an ecosystem, with three inter-connected elements:

Reach, engage, attract — Data & pipeline management — Nurture to close



Having a strong core is as vital as ever. Your CRM, website and marketing automation systems need sustained investment and a long-term plan. But the technologies that sit around them are now vast and varied.

Whether it's an app to help with social listening, a new platform to manage content or programmatic ad-buying,

there's an ever-growing portfolio of tools to test out in the quest to generate demand and close deals more effectively.

There are no guarantees or fail-safe formulae, of course. It's about trying lots of small things to see what works, learning rapidly from what doesn't, and keeping up-to-date on evolving techniques.

Four things you can do today

1. Integrate social and advertising with direct campaigns

Advertising and paid social have evolved quickly and the opportunities for hyper-targeting mean that their role is changing. We've seen the simple addition of targeted advertising to direct campaigns, like using LinkedIn's Sponsored Updates for example, significantly improve the propensity for a target to convert to a qualified lead.

2. Go further with personalisation

As the accuracy and insight of customer data continues to improve, there are greater opportunities to personalise content – for example, personalised videos driven from a database or websites that display variable content based on the IP address of the viewer. When harnessed in the right way – to deliver genuine commercial insight – we've seen these tools have a huge impact on results.

3. Make social selling everyday

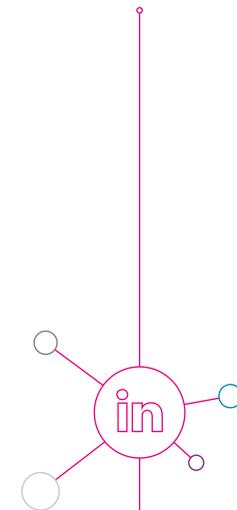
Around a quarter of our qualified sales leads come from social selling. Our Inside Sales team use LinkedIn Sales Navigator, for example, as a key tool alongside the phone, email and Salesforce.com. Consider, also, how many people will look at a salesperson's LinkedIn profile before meeting them, and what the impact of that might be.

4. Start at the end

Understand how the best sales are made and take this back into the start, middle and end of your campaign. Sit down with your top salespeople to understand the audience from their perspective and how they perceive their challenges. Then use this insight to craft your overall marketing approach.

At TMP, we've seen +20% leads and 1.5x better MQL-to-SQL conversion rate by integrating "early stage" digital techniques with "traditional" lead-nurturing tactics.

For example, social selling via LinkedIn sponsored updates in addition to traditional email campaigns, event marketing and inside sales.



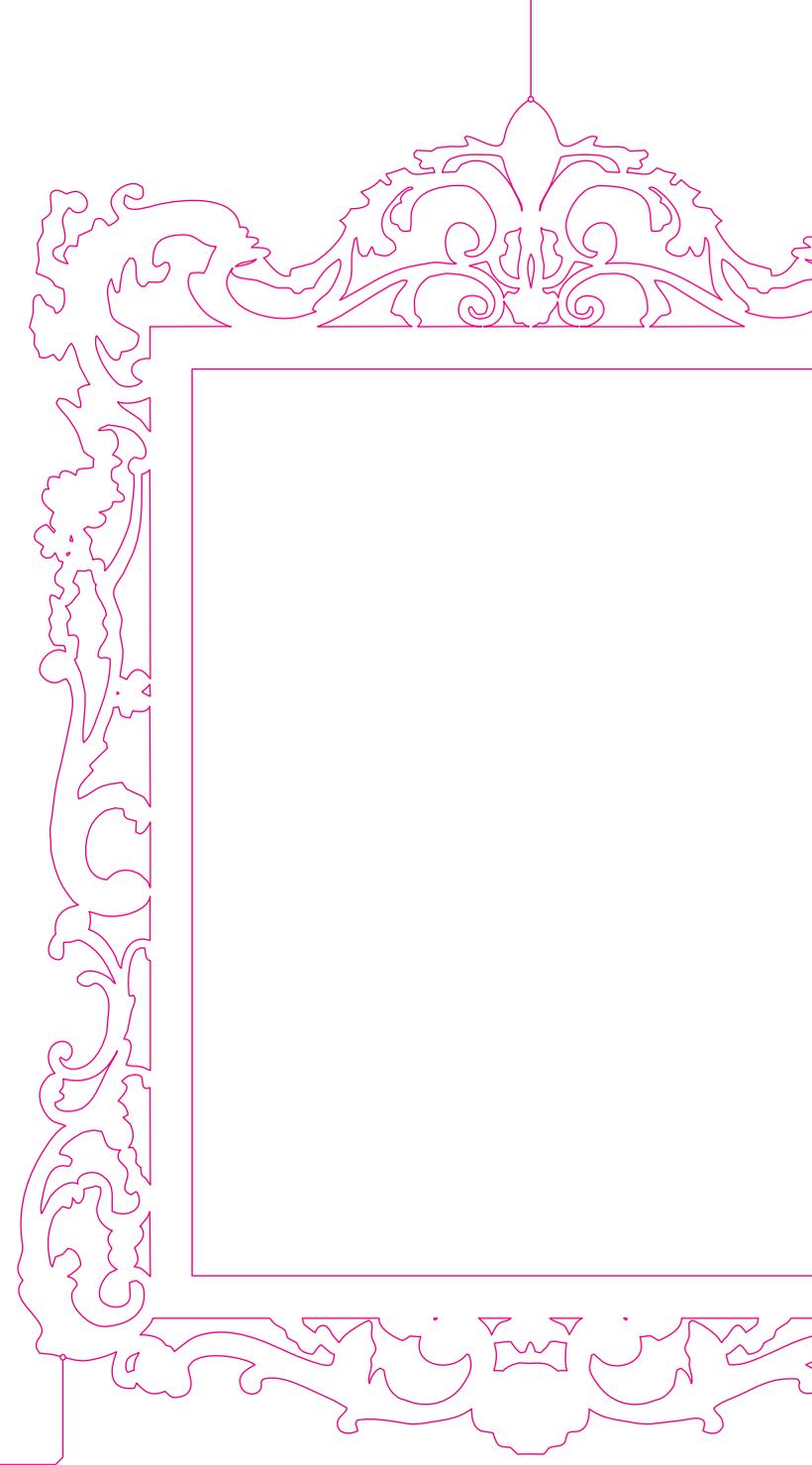
Mirror, mirror, on the wall...

Marketing automation is, the story goes, integral to modern, data-driven marketing techniques. Certainly, it has the potential to enable smarter, more effective demand generation. It can be a catalyst for better data management, smarter segmentation, more effective content and responsive audience journeys.

But there is a snag. As Bill Gates put it:

“The first rule of any technology used in a business is that automation applied to an efficient operation will magnify the efficiency. The second is that automation applied to an inefficient operation will magnify the inefficiency.”

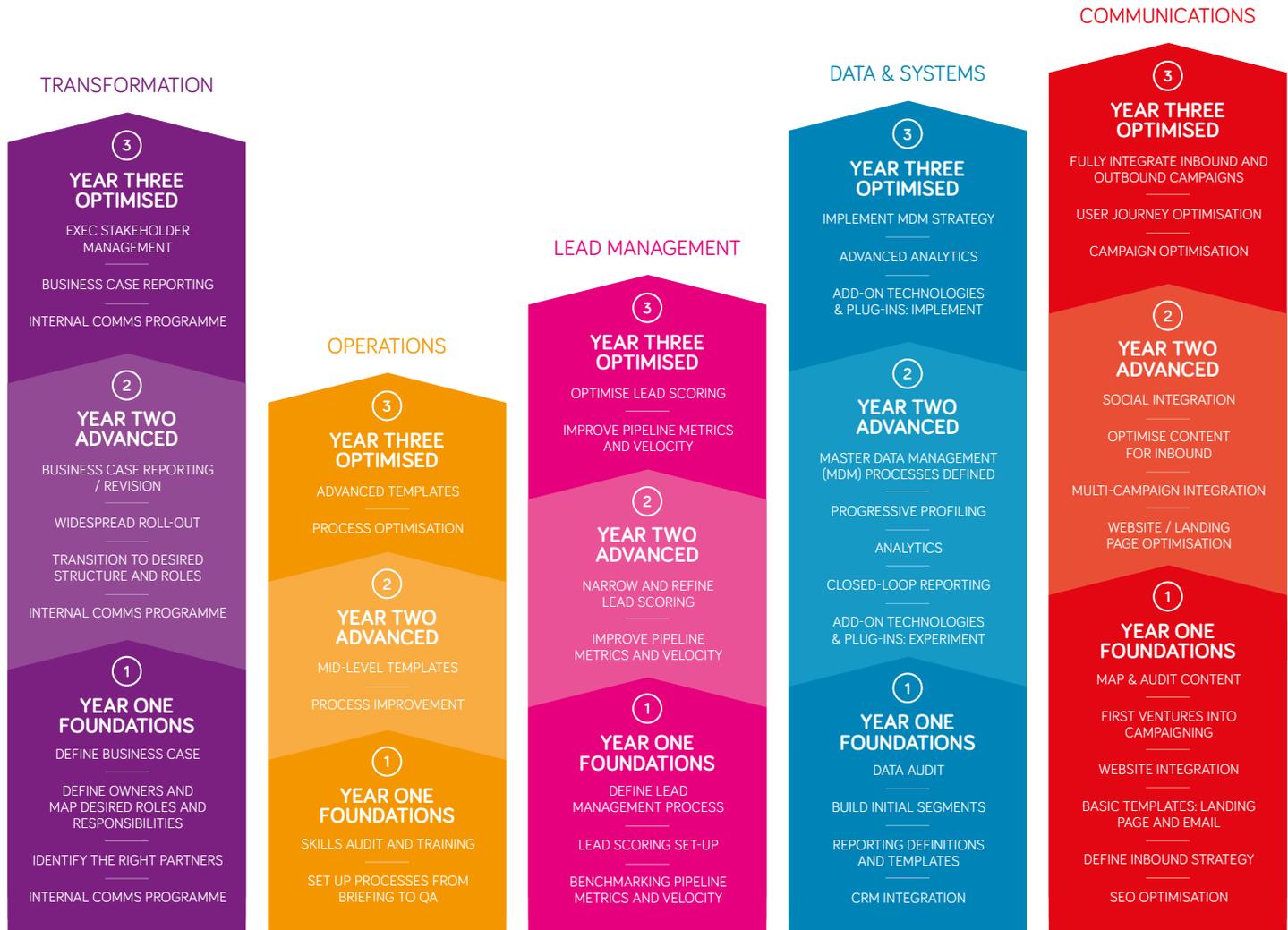
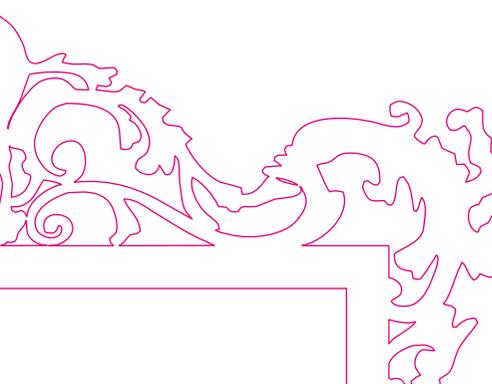
In our experience, both the biggest challenge and biggest value in implementing Marketing Automation is that it holds a mirror up to your demand-generation practices and infrastructure. And there is no flattering soft focus.



Mirror, mirror, on the wall...

It's not realistic to expect immediate success. The challenges of getting your processes, practices, team and culture to a place where Marketing Automation can be of real value should not be underestimated. But neither is it practical to wait until you have the perfect environment before you start.

Which is why we've created our view of the Marketing Automation roadmap. You might change the elements and the order but the principle remains: the key is to have a structured, long-term plan. One which you can break down into manageable chunks. One which acknowledges the need for a robust change management programme to educate teams in the marketing skills as well as the technology. This way, you can define your success by milestones reached and be very clear on where you're winning and where you need to change course.



A man in a dark suit is seated in a plush, dark leather tufted chair. He is holding a white coffee cup with a saucer in his right hand. The background is a dimly lit room with warm, ambient lighting, possibly a lounge or office. The overall mood is sophisticated and professional.

Moving on up

There has been plenty of talk about the opportunity now for marketing to 'regain its place at the top table'. Whether or not marketing needs a renaissance, if it indeed ever left the 'top table', may be moot points. The skills that underpin marketing's contribution to growth, profit and competitive strategy remain the classics: segmentation, proposition development, positioning, audience insight and market strategy among others.

But the opportunities that are being created by digital platforms should not be ignored. If their potential for smarter, more forensic marketing can be harnessed in the right way, they could drive competitive advantage in the medium term. But by forcing you to ask the tough questions of your marketing infrastructure and practices, they also have the potential to kick-start long-term, sustained transformation.

To find out more:

Contact **David van Schaick**, Director, Marketing Innovation and Planning
dvanschaick@themarketingpractice.com

