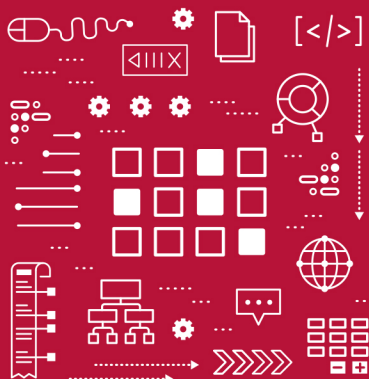


## 5.1 | Preparation & Selection



## Marketing Automation Platforms

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### | Introduction

Marketing automation platforms (MAPs) are gaining considerable attention for their ability to help marketers develop highly targeted inbound and lead-nurturing campaigns, track detailed metrics, and improve results over time. Yet most organizations adopting these solutions fail to take full advantage of their power. **It's like driving a Porsche at 15 miles per hour.**

The key to optimizing use of a marketing automation platform is to understand that it will take months to implement and to become fully operational. Maintaining executive support during this process demands that marketers deliver and communicate real results both in the near term and incrementally over time.

*This white paper, the first in the three-part **Marketing Automation Platforms** series (5.1-5.3) outlines the preparation and selection considerations when choosing a MAP, and includes:*

- ▶ Few Marketers Take Full Advantage of a MAP
- ▶ Optimizing your MAP — The Key is Planning
- ▶ Defining Your Business Strategy
- ▶ Execute Incrementally
- ▶ Communicate Expectations and Results to Executives
- ▶ Inventory Your Strengths, Weaknesses, Skill Sets

### | Few Marketers Take Full Advantage of a MAP

Every inbound marketer seeks the holy grail of being able to automatically send personalized, highly relevant messages to prospects driven by their online engagements — and to measure the results of these marketing activities with a high degree of precision.

Marketing automation platforms that promise to deliver these elusive capabilities are among the fastest growing marketing innovations. Just like cars, there are a plethora of choices in regard to a platform along with the suite of features offered. For example, **on the top end** there are marketing automation platforms that strive to be the nerve center for all things marketing. In other words, it will have **complex analytics engines that incorporate propensity modeling and attribution modeling**. In addition, the platforms offer **sophisticated personalization capabilities** to enhance end-user prospect journeys along with capabilities to have **multiple dynamic lead scoring models**. The

challenge with such platforms is the high subscription costs but more importantly, the skillset needed to optimally use the entire platform. It is best suited for enterprises with full-time staff dedicated to the administration and campaign execution or if you choose to work with a marketing services company to manage the platform on your behalf.

On the other hand, there are many platforms in the marketplace **developed specifically for a small or mid-sized business** who don't necessarily need all the sophistication of the top-end platforms. These platforms offer an abridged version of functionalities as compared to the top-end platforms but **do include all the 'must have' features** such as dynamic content targeting, lead scoring, landing page development, analytics, etc. These platforms are **extremely cost-efficient** and many of them are **monthly commitments** as opposed to the annual contracts needed for the top-end platforms. These platforms are developed with an average marketer in mind, i.e., **ease of use to minimize the learning curve of a marketer**. They are targeted at companies that require a marketing resource to wear multiple hats and in essence, 'do more with less'. Lastly, the incorporation of these platforms within the marketing execution of a small to mid-size business helps even the playing field when competing against larger enterprises.

The best place to start optimizing a marketing automation solution is to create a plan.

### | Optimizing Your MAP — The Key is Planning

Clearly, organizations need to do a better job of taking advantage of their marketing automation solution. But they may be unclear on the steps to take to accomplish this goal. **They may also be unsure about how to demonstrate the value of this investment to executive management.**

The best place to start optimizing a marketing automation solution is to create a plan. This plan should include the following elements:

- ▶ Define the business strategy
- ▶ Develop a roadmap for executing the strategy incrementally
- ▶ Set appropriate expectations and communicate regularly with executives
- ▶ Evaluate and augment the organization's existing skill sets
- ▶ Define metrics and track progress
- ▶ Manage and analyze customer data
- ▶ Develop a good content creation/curation process
- ▶ Architect lead-nurture tracks

## | Define Your Business Strategy

Organizations should start by defining their overall business objectives and how marketing should contribute to these outcomes. For example, marketing might aim to speed the sales cycle or increase revenues by 15 to 20 percent. **Having concrete goals will provide a high-level measure by which to determine whether the program is successful.**

Next, translate marketing goals into a tactical strategy and define metrics to track progress at key points along the way. For example, with the revenue target in mind, work backwards. Based on conversion rates, an organization can calculate that it needs X number of A-level prospects. To generate those, it'll need a steady flow of leads at Y rate.

Once metrics have been defined, identify a baseline for each one. Because the marketing automation platform delivers complete visibility into metrics for each step, it's easy to determine whether programs are on pace to reach their goals or whether the organization needs to adjust tactics.

## | Execute Incrementally

Marketing automation platforms are powerful and complex. To make the most of these solutions, marketing organizations must not only learn the platform, but also redesign business processes and improve their collaboration with sales and IT. Few organizations start off with all the skills they need in-house and many face a steep learning curve.

Rather than attempt a big-bang implementation, it's better to take an agile and incremental approach. This will give organizations time to develop the necessary technical expertise, processes, and skill sets while achieving the quick wins that demonstrate the value of the solution.

Start with a proof of concept: Automate existing procedures to improve productivity by eliminating time-consuming manual tasks. Then add one new variable at a time. For example, instead of having prospects go to a website with all parts, have them go to a microsite that talks about the specific part they're interested in. Or automate messages so they go out based on a person's interactions and interests.



## Communicate Expectations and Results to Executives

Because of all the hype surrounding marketing automation platforms, executives may not understand that these solutions are not plug-and-play tools but rather sophisticated solutions that take time to implement. Yet if executives don't see return on investment (ROI) quickly, they may lose confidence and may want to slash funding.

To mitigate this risk, marketing organizations need to clearly communicate up front that it can take up to six months to achieve ROI. Marketing should keep executives apprised of where they are in the implementation, where they need to be, and create a roadmap with milestones. An incremental implementation that demonstrates value by successfully completing a series of projects over several quarters can help retain executive support until the platform is fully operational.

Marketing should keep executives apprised of where they are in the implementation ...and create a roadmap with milestones.

## Inventory Your Strengths, Weaknesses, and Skill Sets

Marketing automation sits at the crossroads between business objectives, technology, marketing, and demand-generation best practices. Organizations need a wide range of disparate skill sets as well as cross-departmental processes to fully take advantage of these platforms. Few organizations start off with all the necessary expertise and processes.

### Necessary Skill Sets/Processes Include:

- ▶ **Process Design.** Envision the steps a potential buyer will follow and design a business process that spans marketing, sales, and support to generate end-to-end results.
- ▶ **Marketing Automation Expertise.** Develop sophisticated workflows within the marketing automation platform to implement these inter-departmental business processes using internal industry intelligence and best practices around demand generation.
- ▶ **Strategic Data Management and Analysis.** Determine what types of information to capture, how much to capture, when to capture it, where to capture it and use this information to build customer/target profiles.
- ▶ **Organizational Communications.** Set expectations on strategic initiatives and tactical execution and report on the results to ensure executive support.
- ▶ **CRM Expertise.** Until all marketing automation platforms include a customer relationship management (CRM) solution, a marketing operations specialist must understand how data and information flow between the marketing automation platform and the CRM.
- ▶ **Content Creation and Curation Expertise.** All inbound marketing campaigns depend on sending the right content to the right target audience to drive action and advance the buying cycle.

Organizations need a wide range of disparate skill sets as well as cross-departmental processes to fully take advantage of these platforms.

Organizations should determine their strengths and weaknesses in each of these areas. They should then prioritize acquisition of missing skills and the development of processes that span departments; for example, to improve communications from marketing to sales and encourage sales to provide feedback to marketing. Consider working with a consultant to help identify the required and existing skill sets and processes and determine how to plug the gaps. Online communities can also provide advice on how to avoid pitfalls and find solutions.

### | Summary

Preparation and selection of your marketing automation platform is obviously critical and without proper due diligence can result in challenges down the road. But once in place, the platform becomes a powerful tool in your marketing toolkit.

*Our second white paper in the **Marketing Automation Platforms** series (5.2) will review how to define and set metrics, as well as how to analyze the data.*

**Determine your organization's strengths and weaknesses in each of these areas and then prioritize acquisition of missing skills.**

### | About StratMarketing Group (StratMG)

With 95%+ in customer satisfaction ratings and 100s of projects, our proven methodology has successfully generated more than \$100M+ in sales for our industrial manufacturing customers. We help build deep and meaningful relationships with their prospects and customers which in turn is a catalyst to organic sales growth.

We consistently exceed objectives by leveraging complex technologies and analytic methodologies to deliver simplified sales, faster. Our methodology breaks the process into three main categories:

- ▶ Make Customers
- ▶ Manage Customers
- ▶ Monetize Customers

### | Specialties

Demand Generation | Marketing Automation | Go-to-Market Strategy | Marketing Operations  
Marketing Services | Marketing Strategy | Lead Management | Lead Nurture  
Database Marketing | Sales-Marketing Alignment | Lead Qualification

### | Let's Talk

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