



SaaS Marketing: 10 marketing strategies to help SaaS providers improve engagement, data capture and conversion

A Xander Marketing Guide



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**'leave your marketing to us'**

# SaaS Marketing

For larger businesses it seemed that self-hosting IT services and software applications in-house - 'on-premise' - was always going to be a natural part of the workflow of the IT team.

'Traditional' outsourcing deals that shifted the IT function to an external supplier may have allowed businesses to focus on core issues, but did not represent a fundamental change in technology; generally they only shifted the employment of the IT people from customer to supplier.

However, the need to focus on core business issues never really goes away. It's a business constant that tends to fade into the background when cash and credit flow freely. Today's tough economic conditions thrust it to the fore as business leaders seek greater efficiency to sustain growth.

Web enabled applications and the SaaS subscription model of application and IT service delivery combine with the cloud to offer superior efficiencies and financial benefits when compared to 'on-premise' solutions. It's an outsourcing model that doesn't shift people. It's a tectonic movement in technology that offers an opportunity for businesses to re-think how they provide IT applications and services for their employees.

"Easy sell!", you might think, but it's not straightforward, especially if you have ported an 'on-premise' product to SaaS. Here we highlight some important considerations for SaaS providers as solutions are taken to market.

## 1. Build a marketing strategy specifically for your SaaS solution

Selling SaaS does not alter our marketing tactics. We still need to create appropriate messages and engage audiences by creating empathy and offering solutions to business problems; we must stimulate responses and activity through clear calls to action; SaaS doesn't change the bread and butter basics. What it does do, however, is alter the strategic elements.

The value proposition has changed, because it's now less about the IT department acting in isolation and advising the business on the best course forward for any required technology tool. The emphasis now is on how technology as a whole can best deliver value to the entire business.

This means that the audience focus has shifted, to the executive level as a whole, rather than those heading up or influencing IT and finance decision making. The audience for key messages has moved substantially beyond finance and technology leaders.

This represents a baseline shift and it is insufficient to tweak the strategy for marketing on-premise solutions. SaaS solutions create new challenges for the marketing mission and a strategy re-think is required to meet them.

A strategy will help you assess your competition, define your target market and establish your positioning and USPs.

A good starting point is to map out all the marketing activity that you want to

undertake in a month-by-month plan. This ensures your marketing is well thought through and avoids the pitfalls of being reactionary or ad-hoc.

Importantly, it prevents activity from being perceived as tactical but without direction.

## 2. Focus on sales leads

Let's face it. The number one channel for SaaS marketing must be your website... no prizes for that one! If nothing else, it's a compelling credential that SaaS vendors do web stuff really well, and that goes for marketing too; but we can't forget that activity must be integrated.

If marketing is to prove its business value and justify its budgets then it must be measurable. In B2B technology marketing perhaps the most critical statistic is the number of qualified leads delivered to the sales function.

But what is a qualified lead? Is it individuals that engage? Is it individuals giving out strong buying signals? How do we start to move someone through a process of assessing whether they are a qualified lead or merely someone in the early stages of a buying cycle that is 3 years long?

Where does the contact data come from? How many have been frustrated by the relatively low levels of interest and actionable results delivered from expensive commercially sourced email marketing lists?

The truth is that consistently delivering meaningful levels of qualified leads is

dependent on data quality. The most receptive and responsive e-marketing data lists are those composed of contacts gathered by engaging prospective buyers with compelling internet content.

Driving traffic to your website and presenting strong calls to action such as free trials, watching videos and downloading guides provide the sugar-lumps that acquire quality email addresses and grow your lists. This is the best way to build a valuable list of engaged individuals that are genuinely interested and seeking experts to help solve their business problems. As such, clearly they are solid future prospects for sales conversion by you or one of your competitors.

Best make sure it's you then...

## 3. Have one call to action on your website

When putting your website together, remember that if you divide then you dilute. Do not divide the attention of your website visitors with multiple calls to action because it dilutes the message and impacts response rates. Focus on just one call to action. An increasingly popular tactic in the SaaS space is to offer a free trial. However, if this is not feasible, other actions around which you can build strong singular calls are prompts to request more information, download guides, and watch video demos of specific functions, or a whole-of-product tour.

We increased the conversion rate on one of our client's websites by 60% by simplifying the user journey. We removed two calls to

action and re-designed the site to focus on just one.

This illustrates an important governing principle for ensuring that marketing focused websites are effective - easy usability. Don't confuse people – guide them through your website.

#### **4. Focus your marketing online, but don't neglect offline**

The idea of integrating marketing activity across multiple channels should be nothing new to you. However, there is a tendency for technology businesses to let activity in non-digital channels slip.

It's easy to see why this happens; your product is sold and delivered online; getting people to your website is a lot easier from a search engine or banner, so yes, your marketing needs to be focused online. However don't exclude offline. Not every prospective customer is aware that solutions exist for what you offer, so direct mail or advertising in appropriate trade magazines is a useful tactic to catch those that slip through the digital channel net.

Don't forget about PR and events as these both have their part to play in raising the profile and 'watchability' of a business.

#### **5. Act as an expert**

It's highly likely that your software shares similarities to competitor solutions. Yes, you'll have the odd unique feature and hopefully a USP to enable you to stand out. But differentiation has many facets.

Positioning your organisation as expert thought leaders to your target market is an excellent tactic for building 'differentiation daylight' between you and the competition. For example, if your expertise is a business expenses solution, then create a free expenses policy template for FDs; if you sell collaboration software, host a seminar on setting up a virtual organisation; or if you sell CRM software, create a guide for sales managers about how they can increase sales by 10%.

In striving to become an authority, don't foster an air of arrogance, aloofness or indifference by being one-dimensional, with the emphasis on high brow content. You are trying to engage real people not business bots, so remember to soften the messages by using social channels such as blogs and Twitter. The informality helps to promote a conversation on the things that matter to the target market. It's an invaluable source of market intelligence that helps you to develop more compelling content and focus on real points of concern.

One SaaS customer we work with offers virtual switchboards to the SMB market, so we blog with posts such as 'Use the cloud to make your home office look like a big business', 'How to record a professional message for your Virtual Switchboard' and '3 ways a virtual switchboard can improve your marketing ROI'. These are great ways to open a dialogue and stimulate a conversation by touching on some likely pain points within the target audience.

## 6. Nurture your prospects

SaaS products can take time to sell. They are not impulse buys; someone may come to the website many times before they contact your company or sign up. It's highly likely that they are regular visitors to competitor sites, so you need to keep your site moving forward – evaluating and updating as necessary - content, look and feel. Familiarity, open dialogues and trust levels - cornerstones of relationships - all develop over time.

To capture contact details, your site needs to have a lot of engaging content, from case studies and white papers to videos and industry news that demonstrates your connection with your marketplace.

Really we're continuing on from point 2 - nurture doesn't happen overnight. It takes time to build a stack of compelling content, and time to build a significant database of engaged prospects. Once you've got that database send them regular emails with free information and special offers. Look after it because it is possibly the most valuable marketing asset you possess.

## 7. Market to your existing customers

Your existing customers will come up for renewal once their subscription expires or can cancel at any time if they're on a monthly contract. That means that they are also prospective customers, so treat them as such. The ultimate measure of great marketing to existing customers is when they don't bother looking at what your competitors offer...

Get them on-board painlessly, engage them in a community, keep them informed of product enhancements and help them maximise the value from the solution.

## 8. Share case studies and testimonials

Do market leading companies use your software? If so, ask to put their brandmarks on your website, and request testimonials. Most importantly develop case studies, so people can compare their businesses to real life examples. What your customers say enables prospective customers to see how their businesses can benefit from your solution. It's even better if you can get video testimonials.

If you are writing case studies follow the tried and tested formula: company, problem, solution, results, and don't forget to bring it to life.

Encourage customers to provide testimonials on different features of your software, and ensure your testimonials are promoted throughout your website, marketing collateral and sales presentations.

## 9. Don't worry about the cloud, focus on the benefits

To you your software is built on great technology; it's in the 'sparkly new' cloud, it's online, it's cool. Generally speaking, nobody will care about any of that - unless you're selling to IT people. You must bring your marketing messages back to earth.

What are the benefits of your system to business? What benefits does it offer to

users? Why does it save people money or make them money? These are your marketing messages; avoid poorly defined buzz concepts and acronyms. Avoid leading with messages containing references to SaaS and cloud.

Try picking out important elements for your messaging from this list of generic SaaS benefits:

- Access anytime, anywhere for true workforce mobility
- No software or hardware to install or manage
- Reduces or eliminates administrative burden
- Little or no capital investment
- Monthly payment model shifts costs from CAPEX to OPEX

## 10. People like to talk to people – make communication easy

Just because your software is online doesn't mean you have to only sell and communicate online via email and live chat. Make your business available and within reach of your customers and prospects with some old school technology – offer a phone number because people like to talk to people.

It's easy to ignore the importance of interpersonal skills when you communicate primarily through digital communications channels. But remember, not only do people like to talk, they prefer to buy from people as well. This is especially true when dealing with service products, because prospective buyers can't hold, touch or assess the build quality.

So much of the SaaS model is built on a promise, and often the proof that performance matches expectation can only be provided by using the service. This explains the SaaS market trend for offering free trials as a call to action, identified in point 3.

From time to time, many customers and prospects like to speak to a real person - even if it's just for reassurance, to prove that it's possible to speak with real people if the need ever arises.

### Next steps with your SaaS Marketing

Xander Marketing has worked with and looked after and performed the marketing function for a number of SaaS companies.

It's this experience, and experience with SMEs that makes Xander Marketing a great choice for businesses that value marketing but don't have the time, resource or know-how to do it themselves.

Visit our website for more information: [www.XanderMarketing.com](http://www.XanderMarketing.com) or to read how we've supported an SaaS expense management company click [here](#).

### Get in touch

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