

American Marketing Association and ReadyTalk

Convert Leads Faster by Integrating Webinar, Marketing and Sales Platforms



Integrating webinar software with sales and marketing automation platforms significantly improves the efficiency with which marketing and sales drive revenue from webinars.

In a recent survey of marketing professionals, 92 percent of respondents indicated that webinars are one of the most effective means of generating high quality leads. Yet the ability to actually close those sales leads may be severely compromised if the system used to capture the lead, such as the webinar software, is isolated either from the system used to nurture the lead (marketing automation) or the system used to convert the lead (CRM, customer relationship management).

Specifically, companies face two problems if their webinar platform does not integrate with their marketing automation and CRM platforms: 1) A significant amount of time and effort will be wasted manually moving webinar registration and attendance data from one platform to another; and 2) sales will be lost due to delayed or misdirected marketing and sales follow-up activities. Both of these problems can result in drastically reduced returns on marketing investments. In other words, organizations will spend more money than they have to; they'll waste money they've already spent; and they'll leave money on the table.

To see why, it helps to understand the role each platform plays in the marketing and sales cycle and how these roles are interdependent.

Opportunities for Synergy

As the name implies, webinar platforms enable users to conduct lead generation events via the web. Essential features include email invitations, attendee registration, reminder emails, slide and screen sharing, voice conferencing, polling, chat, conference recording, attendance reporting and post-meeting emails. Additional features may include capturing engagement metrics, such as time spent attending a webinar or training session, and reuse of recorded content from the webinar.

Marketing automation tools, such as Eloqua, Marketo, Silverpop and others, typically provide for the setup, initiation and choreography of promotional offers via email and the web as well as lead scoring. They enable the qualification and coordination of follow-up actions from potential sales prospects, such as invitations to a webinar, an offer to download a white paper, or an offer to sign up for a free trial. Depending on factors like number and types of previous offers accepted, follow-up actions might be to make additional calls to action or refer them to sales as qualified leads.

CRM tools, like salesforce.com, Sugar and others, help salespeople manage sales leads from qualification to close. These tools enable the salesperson to display and update all lead-relevant information including demographics as well as the dates and summaries of phone calls, email exchanges and other forms of engagement (e.g., webinars attended or white papers downloaded).

The opportunities for synergy across these platforms are clear. A well-engineered integration will provide webinar functionality as a natural extension of these other platforms — as if webinars had been designed into the CRM and marketing automation platforms from the start. Whether the focus is on developing a comprehensive campaign or specific leads, webinars now have an equal place in the marketer's toolbox. Here's how ...

Capture Full Webinar Value

Selecting a webinar platform that is integrated with marketing and sales platforms enables marketers to fully capture the value of each webinar. After all, that is why companies typically host webinars — to identify, develop and close sales leads. Even training webinars often have a marketing and sales rationale. Webinars can be a major form of engagement with the prospect or customer. Webinars deliver advantages that complement other forms of engagement, and they are also more engaging than many other forms because they include multimedia and audience interaction. Webinars also provide opportunities to gauge customer interest — for example, through length of attendance time and the number and type of questions asked. And, as promotable events themselves, each one offers multiple points of engagement. A single webinar, for example, may involve invitations, reminders, audience satisfaction surveys, follow-up emails with links to the recorded webinar, and calls to action for additional webinars or white papers that drill deeper into the webinar topic.

Having this webinar data “built in” to a CRM or marketing automation platform — just as if it had originated there all along — has obvious advantages for these platforms’ users. The most immediate way that integration accelerates and informs follow-up is by automating the transfer of information from one platform to another.



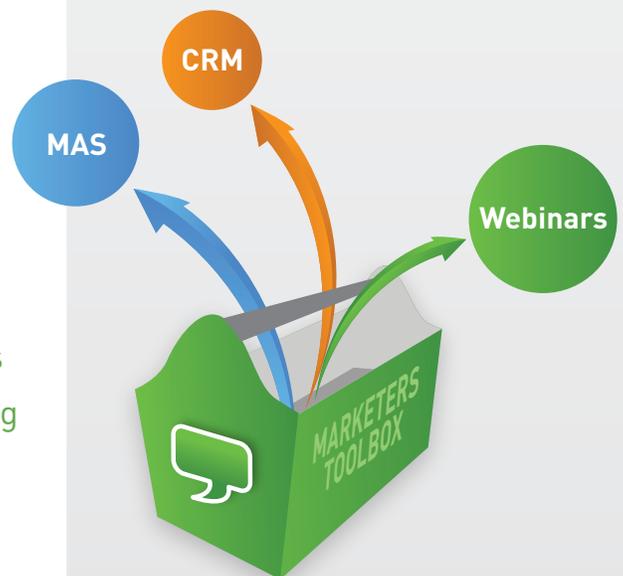
By carefully blending offers, possible responses, potential follow-ups to responses, and so on, it is possible to develop highly choreographed marketing campaigns that more completely encompass the level and scope of engagement with each prospect.



Maximizing the webinar’s return on investment (ROI)

requires carefully managing the attendance-related information surrounding each communication, including:

- Who was invited?
- Who registered?
- Who attended?
- How long did they attend?
- What did they do in the webinar (e.g., poll responses, questions asked)?
- What webinar follow-up offers were made and accepted?



Less Manual Effort

Without an integrated solution, marketers must manually move webinar registration and attendance data from the webinar platform into the marketing or sales platform. At a minimum, this process involves downloading CSV files from one platform, uploading them into the other and doing the necessary field mappings. Very often it can mean copying and pasting items from fields in one open window on your computer screen to fields in another — or even manually keying items one at a time.

More Accurate Attendance Data

Time is at stake, but so too is the accuracy of attendance data. When using a webinar platform that is not integrated with marketing automation, marketers may only be able to send out a generic “join meeting” link in confirmation and reminder emails. At the time of the live event, attendees are presented with another registration form before being allowed into the webinar. This approach means people needlessly have to register twice, creating a poor experience for attendees and compromising the accuracy of attendance data. An example of how this complicates getting accurate attendance data is that an attendee may provide their business email address on the initial registration form, but enter a personal email address (or bogus data) when joining the webinar. Connecting the dots can be tedious, if not impossible.



The end result of having more webinar intelligence is a higher return on investment in all three areas: marketing, sales and webinars.



A best-of-breed webinar service, on the other hand, should be able to assign a unique “join meeting” link to each individual registrant. With an integrated solution, the webinar platform can automatically pass this unique link to the marketing automation system for use in confirmation and reminder emails. Later, when the person assigned that link clicks it, the marketing automation application and the webinar host know exactly who has joined the webinar. This helps ensure more accurate attendance data for follow-up later and provides an increased level of security for the event.

Timely and Targeted Follow-Up

A lack of integration not only wastes resources and risks data accuracy, it also delays time-sensitive follow-up activities after the webinar. Without an integrated solution, valuable webinar data is trapped in the webinar platform while time ticks away and leads grow stale. Not following up fast enough — for example, to someone in a webinar who requests a sales call — could result in a missed opportunity to qualify and close a sale.

With an integrated solution, webinar data is immediately available in the marketing or sales platform, allowing for timely follow-up actions to leverage an opportunity that resulted from the webinar. After a webinar a prospect might receive:

- A “thanks for attending” email
- An invitation to attend a future webinar or download a white paper
- A phone call or email asking if he or she has questions
- A higher lead score than he or she had before the webinar

Integration also allows for more targeted follow-up. Some CRM and marketing automation platforms have special features that leverage webinar information to an advanced degree. These include workflow tools that enable users to program “what-if” decision rules to automatically take actions based on prospects’ responses to previous actions.

With webinar platform integration, decision rules can be extended so that, for example, prospects receive a “Not what you were expecting?” email if they attend a webinar for fewer than 15 minutes.

Expanded Access to Webinar and Training Programs

Salespeople often live in their organization's CRM system. One benefit of an integrated webinar platform is that it gives salespeople greater visibility into the webinars and training sessions their prospects and customers are registering for and attending by making this data accessible directly via the CRM. An integrated solution also expands sales access to these important programs. Salespeople in the process of developing an active lead can invite a prospect to a webinar directly from the lead or contact record even while they have the prospect on the phone. The prospect receives the same polished email invitation as other invitees — even if the webinar host did not originally include them. Following the webinar, their webinar metrics are then immediately available to the salesperson who invited the prospect. Based on those metrics — along with other data already captured in the sales platform — the salesperson can then reach out with highly targeted content in a phone call or email.



Webinar-generated leads can play a crucial role in the sales cycle. Integrated directly with a CRM system, webinar-driven data can be delivered more quickly and accurately, speeding results and improving ROI.



A Well-Engineered Integration

Workflow

Perhaps the most important issue to consider is how well the integration works with your most efficient and effective workflow. How well do the platforms leverage each other's features? As discussed, just having webinar information immediately available in CRM and marketing automation systems is a huge plus. But, an even bigger plus is when you can apply those other systems' functions to that webinar data as if it originated in the CRM or marketing system in the first place. You may want to be able to score a lead based in part on how many webinars the prospect attended and how long they attended each one — in addition to more “platform-native” data like how many white papers the prospect has downloaded.

Developer Resources

When the webinar platform vendor provides resources and support for developers, organizations can integrate directly with their own proprietary systems as needed. The advantage of a well-documented, standards-based API (application programming interface) is that new integrations can come online faster and with fewer bugs. Developers who wish to integrate the webinar application with their own software do not need to work with source code; they simply need to invoke the programming calls specified and read or write the arguments required to make those calls work. User organizations benefit from an open API by having more options in the range of applications the webinar platform supports. Features are also more likely to be implemented correctly and work consistently from platform to platform.

Field Mapping

Field mappings are important because they help determine how quickly users become productive. Products made by different software companies typically have different names for the same thing and it takes time to map fields from one environment to the other. Once the fields are mapped, information updates in one system should immediately be reflected in the other system and vice versa. That's another benefit of having a good field mapping function as part of the integration.

Cloud Integration

A cloud-based implementation means that the integration is hosted on a remote server so no software is downloaded to, or runs on, the local user's servers. One advantage is that the integration already exists and simply needs to be "turned on" — i.e., a remote instance of the integration now runs in the same remote space hosting the organization's webinar, sales and marketing automation platforms. Another advantage is that any feature updates are applied globally to all instances at once — so each user organization always has the most up-to-date version of the software running.

Evaluating an API

All of these capabilities and benefits rely on how well the webinar integration is engineered. Issues that positively affect the ability of the user's organization to start leveraging these capabilities quickly include:

- Does the integration support my workflow? How well does the webinar integration leverage my platform's capabilities?
- Are developer resources available? Is there appropriate documentation, a development sandbox, available test servers, example code and, if needed, access to professional services?
- Is field mapping between platforms easy to do and efficient?
- Is the integration server implemented in the cloud?

More than the Sum of its Parts

The end result of having more webinar intelligence is a higher return on investment in all three areas: marketing, sales and webinars. Each platform's users can move faster with better overall results because they have access to all the information needed to accomplish their mission, not just pieces of it. Fewer opportunities are therefore likely to slip through the cracks or grow stale due to lack of timely action.

Ultimately, the best way to judge any integration is by the increase in both the speed and volume of sales. Improvements will be realized as sales and marketing users gain end-to-end visibility of the entire lead development process — including webinars — and gain that visibility quickly with minimal disruption to their ongoing webinar, sales and marketing activities. Cutting out the manual effort involved in tying webinar data together with sales and marketing data is only a start. It's what you can do with that data after you've tied it all together that counts. What you are looking for in a well-engineered integration is a significantly greater webinar, sales and marketing impact than the individual platforms can deliver separately.

About ReadyTalk

ReadyTalk provides audio and web conferencing and webinar services designed for lead generation, interactive training, sales demos and collaborative meetings. ReadyTalk combines ease-of-use with sophisticated marketing tools to increase audience engagement, event ROI and meeting productivity while integrating seamlessly with existing business processes. Visit www.readytalk.com for more information.

About the American Marketing Association

The American Marketing Association is the largest marketing association in North America. It is a professional association for individuals involved in the practice, teaching and study of marketing worldwide. It is also the source that marketers turn to every day to deepen their marketing expertise, elevate their careers, and, ultimately, achieve better results. American Marketing Association members are connected to a network of experienced marketers more than 30,000 strong. For more information on the American Marketing Association, please visit www.MarketingPower.com.



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