



# Bridging Marketing and Sales With Intelligent Virtual Assistants

## The 451 Take

Although marketing and sales teams essentially strive for the same results, they frequently find themselves pulling in different directions, hampered by process and technology barriers. Often, in a B2B enterprise environment, sales teams are not able to work all of the leads that marketing generates. Inefficient lead follow-up, coupled with poor visibility into sales performance, can result in disappointing campaign ROI and diminished lead-conversion rates. This is especially frustrating for marketers who have limited control over which leads sales teams follow up on, yet are held to those conversion rates as a marketing KPI.

One solution is to unite the flow of data and processes using tools designed to intelligently automate those processes. Businesses appear to be moving in that direction, based on data from 451 Research's Voice of the Enterprise: Customer Experience & Commerce, Organizational Dynamics & Budgets 2020 survey.

Data suggests that businesses are beginning to see the use of intelligent automation as a potential competitive differentiator. In the figure below, the difference between digital 'leaders' and 'laggards' is significant: while 51% of digital leaders strive to use marketing to boost customer acquisition, the current reality in practice is that few companies really do get meaningful ROI from their campaigns, which is the first step in customer acquisition.

### Tech for Syncing Sales and Marketing Teams Is Based on Intelligent Automation

Source: 451 Research's Voice of the Enterprise: Customer Experience & Commerce Organizational Dynamics & Budgets 2020



Intelligent automation, in the form of intelligent virtual assistants (IVAs), is now on the radar at many businesses as a way to overcome some of these barriers. Lead follow-up and engagement is a highly human activity with lots of room for error, suggesting that humans and automated systems working together can provide sales teams with the personalization and persistence they need to work qualified leads at greater scale.

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## Business Impact

**VISIBILITY INTO THE CONNECTION BETWEEN SPENDING AND OUTCOMES.** The current switch from physical events to virtual events highlights the urgent need to maximize the return on digital marketing like content syndication, advertising or webinars. Through autonomous outreach, IVAs drive people to register for virtual events and immediately follow up afterward. Marketers can see a better connection between what they spend on programs because IVAs are exceptional at elevating hand-raisers and improving the outcomes in terms of sales-qualified leads and new pipeline generated, which enhances the synergy between marketing and sales.

**IVAs ASSIST WITH ABM PROGRAMS.** IVAs provide thorough coverage of leads generated from account-based marketing (ABM) programs. Coverage via intelligent automation means qualifying inbound leads to determine the right contact or entry point within the account. When leads go silent, IVAs keep the fires burning with persistent outreach. And they allow marketers to nurture the overflow leads that an ABM program might generate.

**FILL THE PIPELINE MORE EFFICIENTLY.** More than half of digital leaders surveyed need to enhance marketing operations for customer acquisition. Even in tight economic times, refilling the sales pipeline is a high priority. Augmenting human connections with autonomous outreach from IVAs keeps the leads, qualifications and conversations going. When the IVA determines that a contact is not yet sales-ready, it will nurture the lead over time. Similarly, if a contact is out of the office, the IVA checks back weeks or even months later to ensure that no lead is dropped or forgotten.

## Looking Ahead

The large gap between digital leaders and laggards implies that there is significant room for growth in the use of intelligent automation tools. Automated outreach and AI-based conversations carried out by an IVA will become the norm for covering large pools of potential leads and customers. This, in turn, will facilitate better communication between sales and marketing teams, along with closer attention to meaningful metrics tied to marketing campaign spending, ROI, lead conversion and sales performance.

The various use cases hint at the untapped potential for IVAs to streamline the marketing-to-sales-to-customer communication process. Virtual event management, for example, becomes much more rigorous and less of a 'spray-and-pray' exercise. Marketers can cultivate early awareness of potentially interested people and reach out before events or webinars to drive attendance and schedule meetings. Afterward, sales teams can engage with those individuals an IVA has automatically qualified. The cycle is shorter, but more productive; human time is spent providing high-touch communication with likely candidates. Investing resources in virtual events doesn't lead to blind spots when marketers can see the measurable ROI from registrations and timely follow-up.

Another important IVA use case is to reactivate dormant demand, or to revive lost or derailed opportunities. Instead of letting them lie fallow due to resource constraints, an IVA can reach out to old leads to warm them back up, can check in with existing customers, or can cultivate potential new leads – all without consuming valuable time and resources. Ultimately, the use of IVAs allows marketers to deliver on-brand messaging in a human-like manner that's easy to scale and gives sales complete lead coverage.



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