CHEAT SHEET

Marketing Attribution – What It Is and Where It Fits in Your Marketing Stack

Determining whether your campaigns are succeeding is critical to delivering quality leads that convert. To arrive at that understanding, marketing teams often track activities like lead form captures, email opens, and links clicked.

However, senior management isn't interested in activity-based tracking – it's return on investment (ROI)-based measurement that matters to the C-suite. Plus, when your marketing team tracks activities and the sales team tracks revenue, the departments can easily feel misaligned.

What is marketing attribution – and why does it matter?

That's where marketing attribution comes in. At its simplest, B2B marketing attribution is about connecting marketing and sales data, so every deal can be correlated to specific marketing programs.

Without proper attribution, marketers are forced to use metrics like visitors and leads that serve as proxies for revenue. They estimate what percentage of visitors turn into leads, and so on, without a clear view into how much revenue they are driving. The higher the metrics are in the funnel, the less they indicate quality, making it difficult to identify what is truly driving revenue.

In Bizible's 2018 State of Pipeline Marketing Report, marketers named pipeline and ROI as the top two metrics they use to measure performance. However, a CMO can't prove they are meaningfully driving and optimizing for revenue when they're not using the right attribution solution.

Why analytics and marketing automation tools fall short

Many marketing tools claim to provide attribution or at least some version of it, but they rarely enable the level of true attribution needed to both drive and prove impact.

Web analytics (e.g., Google Analytics) and other channel-specific analytics (e.g., Facebook Insights) only track form conversions, which are seen as a proxy for revenue. To use these tools as meaningful attribution solutions requires quite a bit of hacking by setting URL parameters and events, and connecting spreadsheets full of channel-specific data. Even then, it takes significant effort to analyze the details of each channel to determine the impact on revenue.

Moreover, because the attribution is decentralized in this approach, marketers risk double counting credit. For example, say a visitor clicks on a Google Ads advertisement on Monday and a Facebook ad on Wednesday, and then buys something for $100 on Friday. Because the tools used to track these channels are separate, both the Google Ads data and Facebook data will claim 100% conversion credit. When the marketer pulls both data sources into their spreadsheet and enters the conversion as $100, the report will show $200 of revenue — twice the actual revenue — a big, and potentially embarrassing, problem.

Marketing automation platforms focus on lead creation and management and typically look at attribution measurement from a broad channel or campaign perspective. They excel at showing what channels impact the middle of the funnel (i.e., lead creation). However, they don't focus on bottom-of-the-funnel metrics (i.e., sales opportunities and revenue) with the granularity needed for optimization, such as paid search keywords, specific blog posts, or contributing conferences.

To fulfill the multi-touch attribution needs of most B2B marketing teams, marketing automation must connect back to the first anonymous touch and convert the history of the unknown lead to a known lead when it is created.

Plus, some marketing automation tools may not capture the full B2B buyer journey. This is also true of most channel-specific analytics. Most have cookies that expire within 30 to 90 days of the contact creation date. This works for B2C marketers (and is built with them in mind) because the B2C decision process ranges from hours to a few weeks. However, as B2B marketers know, the B2B customer journey is often longer than 90 days.

What you can do with a true marketing attribution solution – and where it fits

When relying on any channel- or campaign-specific solution, marketers don't get the complete view of data they need across all touchpoints on the path to conversion. Yet that comprehensive view is key to defining a marketing strategy that proactively drives conversions. What marketers need is a solution that correlates all their activities to revenue.

The right marketing attribution solution, integrated with the existing marketing automation platform and customer relationship management (CRM) system, does just that. Attribution doesn't replace marketing automation or CRM; it sits between these systems and enhances both. At its core, marketing automation is about scaling while maintaining an effective level of personalization — marketers dictate the tasks and let the software run them faster than a human ever could. The CRM system on the sales side is about tracking and organizing leads and customers.

Attribution, on the other hand, helps determine the marketing strategy, provides feedback and insight, and helps marketers make better decisions across the entire marketing funnel. It allows automation tools to scale more effective campaigns and helps the sales team use the CRM system more efficiently.

This enables marketers to receive credit for the influence of their marketing programs on revenue. In turn, they can optimize their programs based on full-funnel performance data, with more precise audience targeting, better channel decisions, smarter budget allocation, and more. Combined, these capabilities increase marketing's credibility and position the team as a strategic partner to senior management.

Find out more about marketing attribution and where it fits within your marketing stack. Visit marketo.com/bizible

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