



CMO's Guide to Pipeline Ownership

How to take ownership of opportunity-based marketing and revenue workflows

Introduction

Marketing and sales are out of sync.
CMOs need to step in and fix it.

Many of the processes intended to drive pipeline are failing today. Leads enter a workflow, get vaguely “scored” as an MQL based on early behavior, and then are lobbed over to sales—often prematurely—to do the heavy lifting.

Not only is this ineffective, but it’s detrimental to any business’s bottom line.

Quality pipeline is a major problem that’s rarely fixed for long. There’s a common perception that marketing sends junk leads, highly unlikely to convert. This creates a vicious cycle of wasted spend and mistrust. It can also create false confidence when it works well temporarily. This begs the question: Who then is responsible for ongoing quality pipeline?

Lead-centric strategies limit visibility into the entire buying committee. The buyer for high-consideration, sales-led purchases is typically a group of decision-makers who enter the buying cycle at different times. What can marketing do to adapt?

Buying groups outlast sales organization structures. As more teams reconsider SDR/BDR roles, rep profiles, assignment processes, tech stacks and more, it’s easy to get lost in sales structure rather than buyer needs. Who should represent the voice of the customer as go-to-market strategies evolve?

It’s time for marketing to take on the role of change agent and market driver. As the starting point

for lead generation, marketing is well positioned to drive changes that can increase revenue, boost conversion, and foster greater alignment and collaboration with sales. In other words, it’s marketing’s time to shine.

What you’ll learn in this guide:

- Pitfalls and inefficiencies of current pipeline strategies.
- Impact of a rapidly-evolving and increasingly-ungated buyer journey.
- Strategies for building an effective, high-converting pipeline.
- A roadmap for CMOs to own and optimize pipeline orchestration.

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PART 01

The Path from MQL Toss to Pipeline Orchestration

Who's Responsible for Quality Pipeline?

Today, marketing simply has too much focus on top-of-funnel (TOFU) lead volume and not enough focus on quality pipeline. And between sales and marketing, there is no clear accountability for how to get to any agreed level of quality.

Historically, marketing tactics were deemed successful if they drove a lot of leads. But here's the problem: not everyone who takes action on a B2B marketing campaign is ready to buy—even if they are the right person at the right company.

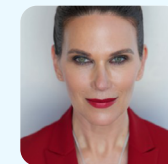
This creates a less-than-ideal scenario of high-volume, low-quality lead generation, which causes a slew of problems for sales teams:

- **Too Much Emphasis on TOFU Conversions:** Most leads aren't adequately nurtured through the early research process before getting handed to sales to close.
- **No Insight Into the Full Buying Committee:** Relying too heavily on MQLs and individual leads overlooks other players involved in complex B2B

purchase decisions.

- **Lack of Qualified Pipeline Ownership:** Once leads are lobbed over to sales, marketing rarely has visibility or accountability. The burden falls squarely on sales' shoulders.
- **An Easy Blame Game:** While some companies have joint responsibilities by audience segment or go-to-market strategy, departmental ownerships with different definitions of success easily fall into forecast failure scapegoating.

“As companies grow, pipeline will include contributions from more sources: marketing, sales, partners, and customer success. CMOs should work with their counterparts to measure and predict growth quarter over quarter from all sources, drilling into where blockage is occurring and identifying ways to accelerate progress. It could be as simple as providing a self-serve product tour to all influencers at a “TOFU” account to get them more quickly into a consideration phase.”



Alison Murdock
Founder & Chief Marketer
Trusted CMO

Common Failure Modes of MQL Marketing

Here are five reasons why the traditional lead-centric demand gen model is ineffective at driving revenue—and placing added strain on an already complicated marketing-sales relationship:

1. HIGH NUMBER OF RESEARCH LEADS MARKED AS READY TO BUY

When you reach out too soon, you get ghosted. If a champion is ready but the organization is not, you get one call with one person that goes nowhere. In today's world, a single player is never a true opportunity.

100% vs. 30%

Companies typically hit 100% of their MQL goal, but only 30% of their pipeline goal.

(Madkudu)

2. LOW LEAD-TO-OPPORTUNITY CONVERSION

MQL conversion rates are often disappointingly low. That's why it's important to track Contact-to-MQL and MQL-to-Opportunity conversions at every stage through Closed Won and even churn.

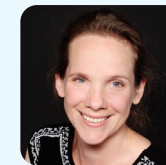
You might be below average for your own benchmarks, or for your industry. Plus, you may be setting sales up for failure down the line. Does a single prospect identity even count as an opportunity?

As a result, you may have to adjust scoring to really reflect intent and not just “human asked for demo” or “amazing account just read a blog post.”

3. TOO MANY SINGLE-CONTACT OPPORTUNITIES

Most leads passed to sales come as single contacts (aka, individual leads). However, complex B2B purchase decisions rarely come down to a single stakeholder within an organization and,

“While CMO focus must evolve as businesses demand more efficiency, our core responsibilities are still to speak for the market, the voice of the customer and how our prospects want to buy. That puts us in a unique position to own both pipeline and Buying Group insights.”



Maura Ginty
Marketing Advisor
& Fractional CMO
Maeve Consulting



Common Failure Modes of MQL Marketing (cont.)

instead, require the input and support of several decision-makers within a buying committee.

4. LIMITED VISIBILITY INTO BUYING TEAM INTERACTIONS

Relying on individual leads leaves sales with a blind spot: they have little line of sight into where each stakeholder within a buying committee is along the purchase journey. This makes it impossible to establish replicable strategies for addressing Buying Group patterns and behaviors.

100 MQLs

yield approximately 13 SQLs.

(ClickUp)

5. OVERRELIANCE ON LEAD VOLUME, UNDER RELIANCE ON READINESS

For many SDR, BDR, and marketing teams, growing lead volume is consistently a metric of success. But quantity does not equal quality, and rarely does either side know if the buyer is truly ready. When there is more information about the larger buying team—as an account map with related digital behavior—you have a much better built-in signal around intent.



A high-angle, blue-tinted photograph of a diverse group of business professionals in a meeting. They are gathered around a table, looking at documents and laptops. The image is semi-transparent, serving as a background for the text. Light green decorative lines are present: a curved line in the top right corner and a larger curved line in the bottom left corner.

PART 02

An Increasingly Ungated Buying Journey

The B2B Buying Journey Has Changed

In the past, gated content was king.

It was a surefire way to capture an interested buyer that could immediately be nurtured through the funnel and easily converted by sales.

Over the last five years, the rules of engagement have changed.

More content is ungated now than ever before, primarily because today's B2B buyers prefer a self-guided journey, no form-fills required. Buyers want to do independent research and evaluate their options *before* getting conversation started with sales.

From a marketing perspective, B2B buyers fall into two categories:

- Those who voluntarily expose themselves by reaching out directly; or
- Those exhibiting buying signals that demand immediate action.

Unfortunately, buyers who are active in their buying journeys only represent a small fraction of the MQLs passed to sales.

Figuring out how to best qualify buyers engaging with ungated content has

become a big hurdle for marketing teams. This lack of visibility creates a major blind spot.

If prospects are no longer required to fill out Lead capture forms, how can B2B marketing teams take the limited engagement information they have to work with to pinpoint higher intent leads earlier in the process?

It starts with signal management.

“In Marketing, our job is to capture and create demand. We must listen to customers, understand buyer conversations with Sales, and track market signals like competition and intent. Then, we turn this intel into compelling campaigns that move buyers into action. This coordination allows Marketing to drive demand into qualified pipeline for Sales. Even if we don't own 100% of the pipeline target, Marketing plays a critical role in orchestrating the efforts that generate buyer interest in your brand.”



Katie Foote
CMO
CaptivateIQ



Buying Group Signal Management as a Pipeline Foundation

Marketing must take the lead qualification process one step beyond “right person at the right company” taking an early stage action.

Instead of simply passing over leads in bulk, marketing teams should take the signals available to them—whether it’s a single point of content, an anonymous website visit, or a piece of ungated content downloaded—as a starting point for doing comprehensive account mapping.

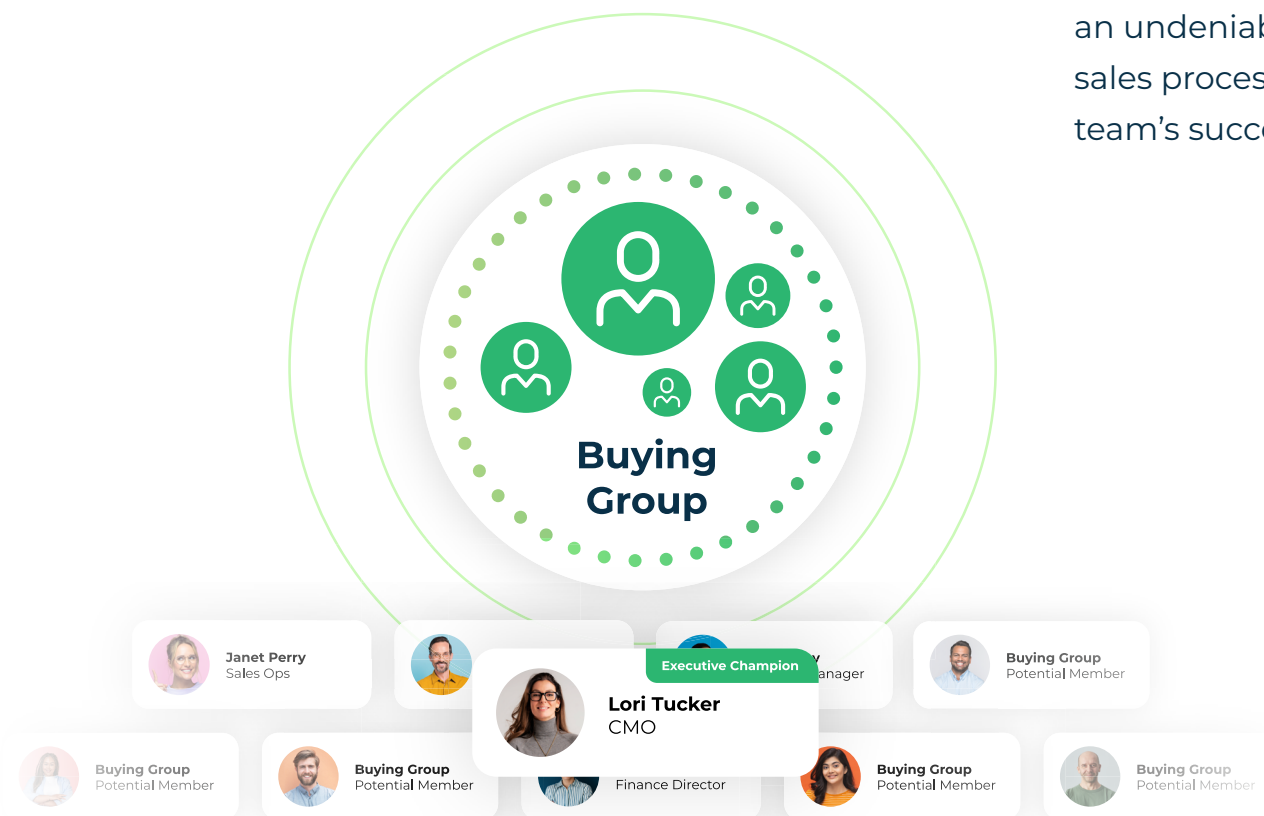
The goal here is to form a qualified opportunity that:

- Contains multiple leads manifesting buying signals within the same organization.
- Adds new leads to the opportunity as they enter the sales cycle.
- Nurtures the Buying Group through the sales cycle.

For marketing, this is a bit of a paradigm shift.

No longer is it sufficient for B2B marketing teams to simply track, collect, and react to intent data. Instead, they must embrace a more proactive, **signal-based approach** to understanding, evaluating, and creating a qualified opportunity.

Doing so will give marketing teams an undeniable value-add role in the sales process that will support the sales team’s success and drive more revenue.



PART 03

Creating a More Effective Pipeline Approach

Why Pipeline Starts with Buying Groups

Given these ongoing changes to the B2B buying journey, the need to make the shift from “lead generation” to “opportunity creation” has never been greater. This is the key to overcoming GTM bloat and many other drawbacks linked to traditional MQL models:

- Long sales cycles
- Poor buying experience
- Leaky sales funnels
- Wasted marketing investment

A comprehensive pipeline orchestration strategy grows more revenue by

aligning sales and marketing from the start around an account view that puts marketing where it performs best: **identifying and engaging a variety of audience types.**

In an opportunity-centric motion (aka, a Buying Groups GTM motion), instead of simply handing over individual leads to sales, marketing would first proactively target, identify, assemble, engage, and nurture all members within a buying committee.

Once marketing has pieced together and qualified a minimum number of

members in the buying group, it then gets packaged up as an opportunity for sales to engage, handling individual account dynamics like political authority, business goals and unique perceptions.

Knowing that big B2B purchase decisions are not made in a vacuum, this approach adds real value to sales by **ensuring all key decision-makers are on the same page before sales gets to work.**



What's a Buying Group?

A Buying Group refers to all key players involved in an organization's decision-making process, who are each influenced by the information they've gathered independently. Because there can be multiple Buying Groups within the same organization, an opportunity-centric motion creates greater visibility into multiple viable opportunities within a single account.

The Benefits of a Buying Groups GTM Motion

Among the many benefits of making the transition to an opportunity-centric sales motion, here's what often rises to the top of the list:

REVENUE GROWTH

This goes beyond simply acquiring new leads. Rather, the Buying Groups motion uncovers hidden goldmines by revealing where members exist in other opportunities. This exposes lucrative expansion opportunities within existing accounts that would have otherwise gone unnoticed in a traditional MQL model.

Palo Alto Networks' Buying Group GTM Results

- 2x the close won rate
- 20% improvement in MQL to Opportunity
- 15% improvement in revenue

As shared at Forrester B2B Summit, May 2024

BETTER CONVERSION

Adopting a Buying Groups motion leads to dramatic uptick in both pipeline quality and quantity, while simultaneously shortening sales cycles and boosting bottom-line results. It's not just about working smarter; it's about unlocking meaningful growth potential.

Delivering a verified Buying Group to sales results in a 20% to 50% improvement in conversion rates.

(Forrester)

In bigger Buying Groups, sales outreach can increase conversions by 3.4 — 4.4x if sales talk to 11+ people instead of just one person.

(Influ2)

5% to 15% increase in hidden opportunities as a result of an opportunity-based Buying Groups motion.

(Forrester)

EFFICIENCY GAINS

This highly curated approach to opportunity qualification makes it possible for marketing and sales teams to eliminate (the unnecessary pursuit of) dead-end leads.

Reltio's Buying Group GTM Results

- 39% improvement in conversion rates
- > 30 day improvement in deal velocity
- 71% improvement in new logo revenue

As shared at a Forrester Webinar in December 2023

GREATER ALIGNMENT

Buying Groups motions break down silos and foster a more unified front across marketing, operations, and sales—to target, reach, engage, and qualify opportunities like never before.

PART 04

CMOs: Take the Reins of Pipeline Orchestration

If Marketers Own the Market, We Own Pipeline

There's no doubt that a disconnect exists between marketing and sales — and it's getting in the way of both teams from performing at their best.

That's why this is the ideal opportunity for CMOs to take the lead, leaning into this opportunity-centric approach to position marketing as a key driver of meaningful and measurable business impact.

Moving towards the Buying Groups GTM motion is not something that

simply happens overnight. It requires top-down organizational change within the marketing team, *as well as* strong cross-functional alignment with the sales and customer success teams.

By leading the shift to a Buying Groups GTM motion, CMOs can demonstrate their ability to directly influence revenue outcomes, showcasing their strategic impact on the company's bottom line. **This positions CMOs as revenue drivers, rather than just brand builders.**

Plus, this efficiency in pipeline management reflects a sophisticated understanding of marketing's role in revenue generation, strengthening the CMO's leadership profile. Not to mention, CMOs will gain credibility and recognition for fostering cross-functional collaboration.

“Marketing and Sales alignment are key to driving revenue predictability, velocity and repeatability. No one wins unless the company hits the ARR numbers. If you only care about your top of funnel goals, you will not maintain sales alignment or hit your ARR repeatedly. True leaders align to ensure that what they deliver converts and drives success for the business. This will earn you the trust of sales, the CEO and the Board.”



Tricia Gellman
CMO
Box



Why Should CMOs Lead This Charge?

For starters, because marketing *is* the demand entry point for this entire process.

B2B marketing teams deploy campaigns specifically to target and collect leads. So it only makes sense that, before passing anything off to sales, they take the lead in retooling their lead qualification processes to make the Buying Groups GTM motion the new status quo. But this work can't be done in a vacuum. It also requires meaningful conversations with sales.

Look at the data and ask yourself the following risk questions:

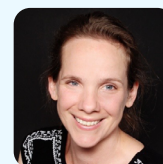
- Are you satisfied with your MQL-to-Opportunity conversion rate?
- Do you know who the usual suspects are for your product's Buying Group, even if it's by role and not title?
- When a second lead from the same account with an open opportunity enters the funnel, how is it treated – ignored, merged blindly or duplicated?
- Are you capturing buying signals from multiple members of a buying committee?
- How many contact roles are typically attached to an opportunity?
- How much higher is your win rate when more contacts are attached to an opportunity?

When selling to a Buying Group, the people, processes, and technology you rely on will need to change. So, be sure to speak with the key stakeholders, in both sales and marketing, to understand how they will influence and be impacted by an opportunity-based Buying Groups motion.

Learn how they do their jobs, then map out system-wide changes accordingly.

At the end of the day, this is a rare opportunity for CMOs to make an undeniably direct impact on business growth and, in turn, yield even more influence on business outcomes.

“Modern CMOs must own pipeline, and to own pipeline is to own insights into the Buying Group. That starts with compelling brand introductions and ends with pattern-matching on the opportunities that will become our company's best future customers.”



Maura Ginty
Marketing Advisor & Fractional CMO
Maeve Consulting



Conclusion

Buying Group and Pipeline Ownership Is the Only Path Forward

It's past time for demand capture to change.

Approaching pipeline orchestration purely through the lens of the once tried-and-true MQL metric is no longer a recipe for success. Nor will it enable both marketing and sales to amplify each other's efforts and drive meaningful business growth.

That's why it's time to shift to a Buying Groups GTM motion, where all stakeholders in a buying committee are nurtured as a group throughout the sales cycle.

This is the path to more revenue. But, in order for this opportunity-centric motion to happen, someone internally has to initiate the change. We believe that person should be the CMO.

So CMOs, seize this opportunity to revolutionize pipeline orchestration within your organization.

Contact LeanData for a Buying Groups readiness assessment today [▶](#)



About LeanData

Recommended Resources



EBOOK

The Authoritative Guide to Buying Groups



VIDEO

Buying Groups Demo



EBOOK

The Buying Groups Adoption Journey
A Step-by-Step Guide to More Revenue

Start Your Opportunity-Centric Journey

To learn more, visit the [LeanData Buying Groups Resource Center](#) today.

Consult with an Expert

Why LeanData?

Today's growth leaders power their B2B selling with LeanData, the gold standard in modern revenue orchestration and an essential element of the modern RevTech stack. The LeanData Revenue Orchestration Platform, powered by No-Code Automation, simplifies and accelerates coordination of all the plays, people and processes needed to transform buying signals into buying decisions. LeanData is inspiring a global movement among its 1,000 customers and community of 5,000+ OpsStars worldwide, empowering them with revenue operations excellence that translates into compelling buyer experiences and competitive advantage. Join the movement!