International survey results: THE BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF MARKETING AUTOMATION

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Content

Introduction............................................................................................................ 3
Prevalence and familiarity of marketing automation.............................. 4
   An unfamiliar concept to every fifth ........................................................... 4
   Over a third utilizes marketing automation ............................................... 5
   Investments are on the rise ..................................................................... 6
Why is marketing automation not utilized?.......................................... 7
Challenges of marketing automation......................................................... 9
Benefits of marketing automation.............................................................. 11
Summary of results .................................................................................... 13
Agile marketing automation with LianaCEM........................................ 15
Marketing automation has been a hot topic for marketing and communications professionals for quite a while already. However, most companies have not yet adopted the new technology. It seems that how marketing automation actually works in real life has been hard to grasp. Now the time is finally right and automation tools are being utilized on a larger scale.

Some companies are still hesitant though – why? What are the main reasons why companies are not utilizing marketing automation?

What do companies, that already use marketing automation, have to say? What are the greatest benefits of marketing automation and what challenges have the companies encountered?

### Survey

In the spring of 2017, Liana Technologies conducted an international survey about the benefits and challenges of utilizing marketing automation software. The survey was directed at marketing and communications professionals and 421 company representatives answered. The answers came from Finland, Sweden, France, Germany, the United Arab Emirates and China.

The survey branched into two parts based on whether the respondent had already utilized marketing automation or not.
An unfamiliar concept to every fifth

Four fifths (79.7%) of the survey respondents were familiar with the concept of marketing automation. A fifth of the respondents was not yet familiar with marketing automation.

Are you familiar with the concept of marketing automation?

- Yes: 79.7%
- No: 20.3%
Over a third utilizes marketing automation

35.2% of the survey respondents said they currently utilize marketing automation. 64.8% answered that marketing automation isn’t being used yet by their company.

Are you currently using marketing automation?

- Yes: 35.2%
- No: 64.8%
Investments are on the rise

Almost 40% of those not yet using marketing automation are going to invest in it in the next 12 months. About half of the respondents couldn’t say whether marketing automation will be part of their investments of the following year or not.

It is worth noting that only a tenth of the respondents don’t plan to invest in marketing automation within the next 12 months.

Are you planning to invest in marketing automation in the next 12 months?

- Yes: 38.2%
- No: 9.2%
- I don’t know: 52.9%
The lack of expertise and know-how (55.6 %), as well as lack of human resources (48.1 %) were notably the most common reasons why companies are not using marketing automation.

Lack of financial resources and lack of strategy were also mentioned as the most significant reasons by a third of the respondents.

What are the main reasons why you haven’t yet started with marketing automation?

- Lack of expertise / know-how: 55.6 %
- Lack of human resources: 48.1 %
- Lack of marketing automation strategy: 33.5 %
- Lack of financial resources: 31.6 %
- Insufficient customer data: 21.1 %
- Lack of appropriate content: 18.4 %
- Company’s poor commitment: 18.4 %
- Other technical difficulties: 18.0 %
- Falling behind schedules: 16.2 %
- Usability issues / difficulty to use systems: 10.5 %
- Introduction of system takes too much time: 8.3 %
- Lack of suitable partners: 7.5 %
Especially the capability to do marketing automation stood out in the open-ended question: other unfinished projects, organizational changes and the immaturity of marketing were seen as obstacles to marketing automation.

In one way or the other, marketing automation was seen as unfit for the company because of reasons related to organization culture, company structure, products or company operations.

“Marketing automation doesn’t fit with our company’s policies.”

“Our mission is to produce content for our customers and that is how our business works. We haven’t invested enough resources into our own marketing.”

“We have other unfinished projects that affect the introduction of marketing automation.”

“We are still in the process of building our CRM.”
Those companies that are already utilizing marketing automation clearly view the following five areas as the most challenging: the lack of expertise and know-how, producing appropriate content, lack of human resources, lack of strategy and the usability or difficulty of the tool.

In your opinion, what are the main challenges in marketing automation?

- Lack of expertise / know-how: 40.3%
- Lack of appropriate content: 40.0%
- Lack of human resources: 38.2%
- Lack of marketing automation strategy: 35.4%
- Usability issues / difficulty to use systems: 31.9%
- Other technical difficulties: 22.2%
- Company’s poor commitment: 22.2%
- Insufficient customer data: 19.3%
- Falling behind schedules: 17.4%
- Lack of financial resources: 14.5%
- Introduction of system takes too much time: 13.9%
- Lack of suitable partners: 6.2%
In the answers of the open-ended question the difficulty of integrating different programs was seen as a big challenge. The organization’s internal reasons like policy changes or the commitment of upper management, were also mentioned. The rapid changes of the market were also seen as a challenge for introducing marketing automation.

“The fast changes in the market. The best results are achieved when campaigns are designed and the delivery times are determined within a short timespan.”

“The lack and price of integrations.”

“Integrating different programs.”

“The management doesn’t grasp the importance of marketing automation, is not committed and doesn’t assign resources.”
In the benefits of marketing automation one clearly surpassed the others: almost 70% of the respondents mentioned that the improved targeting of messages is the most important benefit of marketing automation. Other answers that stood out were improved customer experience (45.9%), improved quality of leads (37.7%) and an increased number of leads (34.9%).

In your opinion, what are the main benefits of marketing automation?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefit</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improved targeting of messages</td>
<td>68.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved customer experience</td>
<td>45.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better quality of leads</td>
<td>37.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting more leads</td>
<td>34.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved efficiency / ROI in marketing</td>
<td>32.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher conversion</td>
<td>30.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closer cooperation between marketing and sales</td>
<td>29.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost efficiency</td>
<td>27.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to combine data from different channels</td>
<td>26.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased web traffic</td>
<td>23.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better profit</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shortened sales cycles</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
</tr>
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In the open-ended answers the most clear benefits seemed to revolve around reassigning marketing resources and decreasing manual tasks.

“\textit{Being able to assign marketing resources to other tasks.}”

“\textit{Decreased manual labor, customer-orientation.}”

“\textit{Decrease of routine tasks.}”
Summary of results

A little over a third of the 421 marketing professionals that filled out the survey already utilize marketing automation. 40% of those that are not yet using automation are going to start during the next 12 months. Only about a tenth of the respondents knows that they will not be starting to use marketing automation within a year. According to the results, marketing automation is on the list of future investments for many companies or at least companies are very interested in it.

Why is automation not yet utilized? The respondents stated that the main reasons are human resources, as well as the lack of expertise and know-how. The situation is very typical for new technologies: even though there is a fairly good amount of information about the subject, becoming acquainted with a new technology always requires courage and innovators inside the company. Management also has to be committed to the idea, as learning something new always requires additional resources, or at least reassigning them.

Five things were seen as the biggest challenges in the companies that already use automation: lack of expertise and know-how, producing high-quality content, human resources, lack of strategy and the usability and complexity of the automation tool.

The results show that the challenges are not only about the know-how of the professionals but also about the immaturity of the tools and solutions that are available. The tools aren’t yet as user-friendly and agile as they could be and marketers often encounter technical difficulties.
Marketing automation is often associated with the misconception that automated campaigns run on their own without any effort. However, the truth is that you always need high-quality content. Producing appropriate content and lack of strategy rose to the top five in the challenges of marketing automation. This might be due to the fact that marketers haven’t been aware how much content is actually required.

It is also possible that systematical content production and utilizing that content thoroughly still has room for improvement. In the content marketing survey that Liana Technologies conducted in 2015, only 37% of the companies that do content marketing carried out a content plan even though it clearly correlates with better efficiency of content marketing.

The experience of the benefits of marketing automation corroborates the current marketing trend: targetability. Most of the survey respondents stated that improved targeting of messages was the most important benefit of automation.

Improved customer experience, an increased number of leads and their improved quality, improvement in marketing ROI and better conversion rates stood out as the key benefits for over a third of the respondents. This shows that an automation tool affects the efficiency of the whole marketing chain. Investing in automation is clearly seen worthwhile and it directly correlates with the important metrics in marketing.
Liana Technologies is an international company that provides cloud-based digital marketing and communications technologies. We have successfully carried out numerous marketing automation projects and produced content to support the digital marketer’s journey along the way. We gathered our best tips on how to get an agile start in marketing automation.

10 common misconceptions about marketing automation

Marketers are finally embracing the potential of marketing automation. But before we get to work, let’s shed a few of the most common misconceptions.

Guide: Marketing Automation in a Nutshell

How to get started with marketing automation and how can you get the most out of your marketing automation tool? Find out in our illustrative guide.

Interested in marketing automation?

Contact our experts to discuss more about marketing automation.