

The diary of a first-time

CMO

ALICE DE COURCY

**To the Cognism marketing team
and Inigo, the UK's youngest B2B
marketer.**

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Introduction

Two years in marketing can feel like a lifetime – it does at the pace Cognism moves anyway. I look back through my diary and realise how much of what I shared then has evolved further now. Almost nothing that we did then, we still do the same way today.

Which brings me to what I'm doing here...

I joked in my Diary of a First-Time CMO that I would come back and do a volume 2. And at the time, genuinely – it was a joke.

But as time has gone on, I've thought about it more and more. Because so much has changed, there's so much I want to update you on.

- We are on our way to breaking the 100M mark.
- We generated 300k opps from new ABM plays in the space of eight weeks – and we actually run ABM now!
- Brought a new product to market.
- Kaspr joined the Cognism Group and we are on route to 2X'ing their revenue.
- We expanded into the DACH and France markets and have our first rep in Australia.

So, long story short. I'm back. This time, to share how we've scaled since the last diary.

And unlike the last diary, you may see some cameos from a couple of other people in the team.

They have viewpoints I want to share in the diary to ensure I'm giving you the whole story!

ENTRY 1

Validating an idea



Alice de Courcy · 1st

Group Chief Marketing Officer at Cognism - Revenue Markete...

1yr · 🌐



Diary of a first time CMO.

We are working on something...

It's going to be an open and honest account of my time as a first time CMO.

Over indexing on actionable and tactical insights that we hope will be helpful.

My aim: help others through giving away what's worked and being honest about what hasn't.

BUT...it's getting long!

So I'd love to hear from you how you would like to consume this, and even if you would consume it?

Audio? Video? Long form text post? PDF (joking - unless you want that!)?

Please comment and let me know if 1. You would even want a resource like this? 2. How you would want to consume it?

#b2bmarketing #demandgeneration

Diary of a first time CMO

Introduction

Entry 1: Put yourself in their shoes

Entry 2: Test your boundaries

Entry 3: Lessons I've learned about marketing and sales alignment

Lesson 1: Growing a team

Entry 4: Data is everything

Entry 5: Lessons from E-books

Entry 6: Quality over quantity

Entry 7: Value customer loyalty

Entry 8: CMO of a startup

Entry 9: Day 1 and a marketing leader

Entry 10: Cut the BS

Entry 11: Implementing a winning content strategy

Lesson 2: Early stage marketing leader template

Entry 12: Experiment, experiment, experiment

Entry 13: The first 100 days

Entry 14: Art and science

Entry 15: Dream team

Entry 16: Done is better than perfect



97 comments · 1 repost

I'd imagine if you're reading this diary - Diary of a First-Time CMO: Volume 2 - that you've also read my first diary.

(If you haven't, I'd recommend that you do, as it provides a lot of context to what I will describe in this second volume. Sorry for the extra homework!)

In which case, you might recognise a few of these chapter titles listed above. This was the diary, in its rawest form - a basic Google doc with screenshots of my LinkedIn posts and a first draft of my entries.

Not the prettiest - but I wanted to share what I'd been working on with my LinkedIn followers before we started building the final diary. Mostly, because I wanted to validate that anyone would actually want to read it first...

Luckily, I got a lot of positive feedback on the idea and suggestions for formats we could put the diary into.

This was an important test for us to know we were creating something interesting. And it was the biggest driving force behind us deciding to create so many formats for the diary (if you remember, we had a physical book, audio book and a digital book).

We could've taken the easy route and opted for what we knew, which was doing a digital book only.

We would have done it the classic demand generation way and ungated it, of course. But I don't think we'd have gotten the response that we ended up getting had we stuck only to this format.

The feedback from this post gave me the confidence that if we were to create alternative formats, that it'd be worth it.

And I'm so pleased we did. Despite recording the audio book taking over my evenings for weeks!

For those of you who are curious, here are some of the stats from the first diary to date:

- 60,000+ page views on the digital version.
- 25,000+ podcast downloads.
- 2,000+ physical books sold on Amazon.
- 61 deals won with \$17.4m pipeline and \$6.6m revenue

It was amazing to see an idea that I'd had one afternoon come to fruition in such a big way. And it's still to date our best performing demand gen campaign.

So for those of you who did get a book, read the digital diary or listened to hours of the podcast version - thank you.

Here's to volume two!

ENTRY 2

Implementing the Easy Mode Framework



Alice de Courcy · 1st

Group Chief Marketing Officer at Cognism - Revenue Markete...
1yr · 🌐



We are rebuilding our own content playbook in 2023

We know that when focusing on demand generation, the way in which we approach our content needs to shift.

Over 22 we focused on proving out the value of using a subject matter expert to power your content engine, we built 'content value loops' by focusing on scaling our own subscriber channels.

We also got good at ungating and delivering valuable content to our audience in the places that they hang out. Always on, all the time, to everyone.

But how do you build a framework for content ideation, production, creation and measurement that can be operationalised in a scalable system?

We have been working with **Todd Clouser** and **Obaid Durrani** to formulate our playbook on this, a process that they call **Easy Mode**, and this month will see us really start to execute within this new way of working.

The screenshot shows a LinkedIn post from Alice de Courcy. The post title is "Strategic narrative" and it includes a video thumbnail of her. The text of the post discusses the 2023 focus on creating a strategic narrative and lists three steps: identifying a relevant shift, taking specific POVs, and building content topics. It also includes a diagram showing a hierarchy of content topics and a call to action "as like content ideas or". The post has 152 likes and 9 comments.

2023 focus

Strategic narrative

Big focus will be on creating a strategic narrative that binds together all our content and messaging - stretching across both of the target personas.

How will we do this?

1. identifying a **relevant shift** in the world of B2B sales and marketing
2. Take specific **POVs** about what's needed to win in this shift.
3. Build our content topics and messaging around these POVs

The narrative should fuel a need that has a dotted line back to Cognism/Sales Intelligence.

as like **content** ideas or

152 9 comments · 2 reposts

Since I wrote this post about us implementing this content strategy, we have evolved our strategy again.

I think it's critical that we don't just stick to the way we've always done things. We implement, we test, we adapt to fit what we need - and we're always open to change.

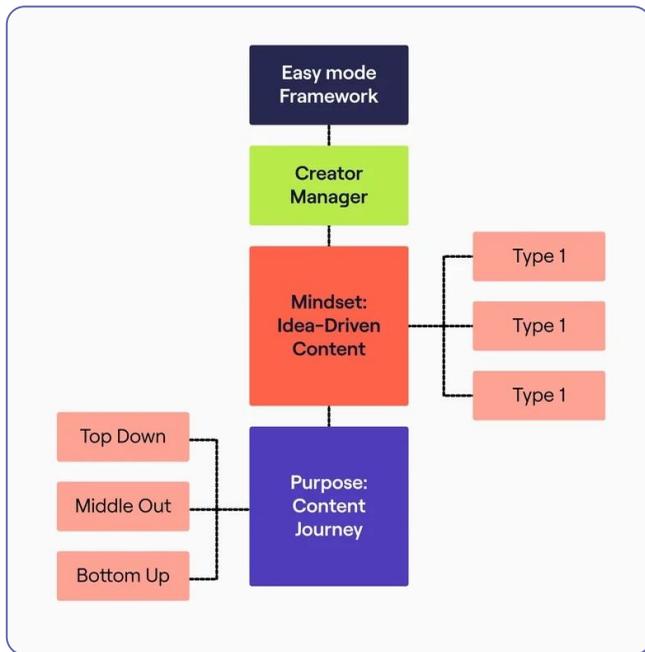
Nothing stands still at Cognism for long. This is a challenge and a strength; it's also a trait I have to index for when hiring into the team.

So while we aren't running the Easy Mode framework anymore, there are a few key principles that we learned during this process that were really useful.

Firstly, for context, for anyone who isn't familiar with the Easy Mode framework - I'll give you a quick run down.

Easy Mode was created by Todd Clouser and Obaid Durrani, who we worked with during this period. The framework is built on the idea that for content to be good, it has to be one of the following:

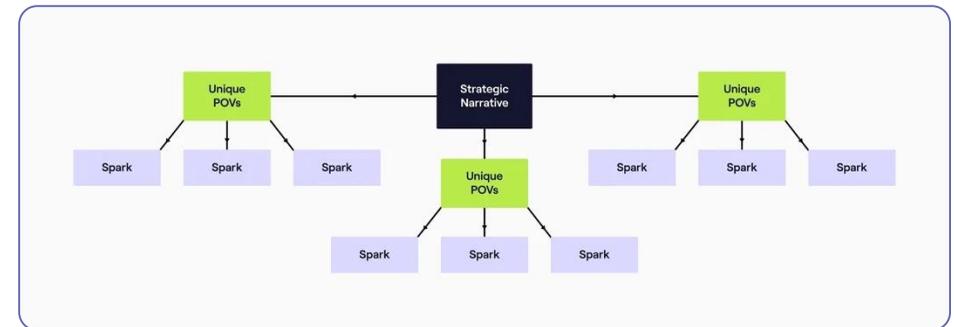
- Type 1 - insightful substance
- Type 2 - insightful substance in an interesting format.
- Type 3 - insightful substance in an interesting format and built on an entertaining subject.



It also needs to have a purpose. Which is to reach specific people within an organisation. Therefore your content needs to target one of the following:

- Top down - decision-makers.
- Middle out - implementers.
- Bottom up - end users.

The last main principle of Easy Mode is the 'realm of relevancy' which is essentially a way of coming up with the topics you can cover.



By creating your overarching narrative, then the three unique points of view which argue that your narrative is true. Then breaking these up into 'sparks', which further explain your unique points of view.

Finally, within each spark is 'subject matter' which explains the sparks.

I realise I've done a quick summary of Easy Mode here. If you want to learn more about it, we have a blog and webinar on this topic.



Scan here for the Easy Mode Framework blog



And here for the Easy Mode framework webinar

However, it also demonstrates why we decided to switch things up. It's quite a complex framework.

I felt we got to a point where we had over-engineered this process - it led to us diluting the message of what we actually wanted to be known for.

[\(Don't worry, I will go into what our content strategy is now and why we changed it a little bit later in the diary.\)](#)

But I'm glad we did this exercise because it taught us a lot about how to think about content. It got us out of a funk of thinking about content in a set way. It also served an important purpose for us. That purpose was to find a way to build a content engine that could be process-driven and remove the requirement to reinvent the wheel every time.

This next stage of growth at Cognism has been about scale and scaling, and with this there needs to be more process. Easy Mode was a useful discipline for us to unlock at the start of that process.

ENTRY 3

Powering demand generation with technology



Alice de Courcy · 1st
Group Chief Marketing Officer at Cognism - Revenue M...
1yr · 🌐



At a time when marketers are being asked to do more with less, how do you know what tech will actually help you deliver better marketing and ultimately revenue?

As marketers we are guilty of too often defaulting to new technology to solve our problems.

So as Cognism has shifted to a fully demand first approach to marketing, how are we powering that with technology? And how exactly are we leveraging that tech for our needs.

We are opening up our tech stack, with individual video tear downs for other marketers to use as a guide when evaluating what tech is necessary, how it can be used, and what impact it can have.

Some of our favourites:

- [Metadata](#)
- [Cognism](#)
- [HubSpot](#)
- [Pardot](#)
- [Wynter](#)
- [Drift, a Salesloft company](#)
- [Agorapulse](#)
- [Ahrefs](#)
- [Funnel](#)
- [Navattic](#)
- [Reachdesk](#)
- [SendGrid](#)
- [Outreach](#)
- [Descript](#)
- [Goldcast](#)
- [Asana](#)

We're lucky to be tech-rich at Cognism. We regularly use a lot of useful tools to power our marketing strategy.

However, at times when you can't have all the tools you want, choosing the right tools is so crucial.

So I'll tell you about my top three choices and how we've applied these tools in practice in recent history.

1. Qualified

Now you may notice that technically... Qualified isn't on the list in my LinkedIn post above. And that's because it's a relatively new tool for us at Cognism.

When we started our ABM program (yes we now run ABM - more on that later!), we needed a tool that could help us stop being so ad hoc with how we chose our target accounts.

Rather than having this be led by our sales team, we needed a way to identify the accounts that were most engaged from our target lists to create 1:one campaigns around.

In comes Qualified.

Essentially, Qualified allows us to see which companies are engaging with Cognism, whether that be on our website or via our paid ads. We can then score these visits based on their intent. For example those visiting a pricing page would be scored higher than those visiting a top of funnel blog page.

Qualified also allows you to have custom criteria which can filter these company results. For example, ours will only show us SaaS companies within our sweet spot size range of 1-5k.

Based on this information we can put specific companies into 1:one campaigns. And also monitor how they're engaging with the content we serve them from this point onwards.

Following the journey all the way along to see when target accounts move into opportunity stage and beyond.

Another great feature that helps us stay up to date with any movements within accounts is their Slack integration, which sends alerts when specific accounts are on your website.

Beyond this ABM use case, Qualified is also the tool that powers our website chat experience. In fact, this was originally the primary purpose for purchasing the technology.

And it's had a profound impact since we brought this tool on board.

The design and user interface for web visitors is much smoother and better looking - catching people's attention much more easily.

Now I will admit, with our previous tool, we hadn't been fully committed to a strategy which could be a contributing factor. But it's because we found it a bit more difficult to get excited.

Whereas when we made the decision to switch to Qualified, I knew we had to have a plan in place to make the most out of this spend.

It was a complex tool to get used to, but only because there was so much capability with it. You can customise it in any way that you want.

We took this as an opportunity to wipe the slate clean and start again - this time, getting really involved in making this the best journey it could be.

Once we got into the flow of implementing it, iterating on what we created and assessing the data on its performance, it was clear to us that it was having a huge impact.

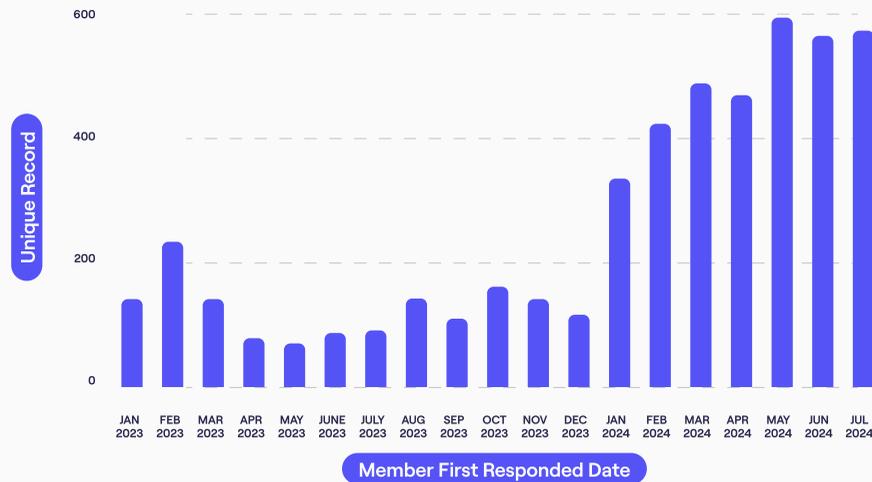
It was much more focused around relevant call-to-actions, personalised experiences, and regionalised experiences

The results speak for themselves. If you take a look at the graph below, you'll notice an immediate jump in January 2024. That was when we swapped our old tool for Qualified.

The results speak for themselves. If you take a look at the graph below, you'll notice an immediate jump in January 2024. That was when we swapped our old tool for Qualified.

Looking at the same month, one year apart, we have increased our MQLs by a whopping 739% by switching from our old chat tool to Qualified.

Number of MQL Month Over Month



View Report (Marketing: MQL Conversion Rate)

2. Wynter

Wynter offers a very quick way to get feedback from specific prospects in a market. Such as in a specific industry, company size or job title - for things like website or landing page messaging, or ICP survey insights that can help guide your positioning.

One of the common ways that we use Wynter at Cognism is through surveys. Recently, we ran a survey asking our ICP how they're thinking about their business and how they're thinking about their growth.

Our aim was to build a picture about of our ICP's current needs and pain points. We wanted to build better personas, taking into consideration what really matters to them today and how that can be tied back to the ways that our product helps them.

If you find something interesting during this process and want to dig down into this further, then you could do this with 1:1 interviews. Setting up interviews through Wynter is much faster and easier than doing it manually!

Another incredibly valuable test you can run through Wynter is preference testing. You can show a selection of different value propositions and can quickly get answers on which is the most compelling.

You might have noticed that I've used the words 'quick', 'quickly', 'faster' and 'easier' a few times here. And that honestly is one of the best parts about this tool. While you can do all of these things without Wynter, what makes this tool so useful is the speed at which you can get the answers you need.

If you did this without Wynter then you'd likely do one of two things:

1. Organise it through an agency

Which can be expensive and time consuming (you'd think it wouldn't take up your time asking someone else to do it but it does - it takes a lot of project management to get this right...!)

2. Do it yourself

While you could use customers - it generally brings up more responses about features and grumbles about your product versus the wider perspective you're looking for to answer your questions.

So you could then try to ask prospects by adding a pop up to your website asking prospects to participate in a survey or an interview. But then you run the risk of interrupting prospects in the flow of signing up for your product. Which is obviously not an ideal scenario.

Instead with Wynter, you take 10 minutes to set up your survey or other research method and within 12-48 hours you have your answers.

3. HockeyStack/Dreamdata

When it comes to attribution, you can never measure everything. You have to accept some level of the unmeasurable because so much of what happens in today's buying process is in the dark funnel.

However, having said that... a tool such as HockeyStack or Dreamdata can go a long way to plugging the gaps.

Before this, we could only attribute MQLs to first or last touch in Salesforce based on UTM tracking. But that doesn't tell you much of the story.

Whereas in HockeyStack/Dreamdata, we can see and attribute influence for any MQL that comes in and the content touchpoints that they had along the way. And this carries through deal stages, allowing you to track to influenced revenue.

Here are a few places where they help to illuminate a fuller picture:

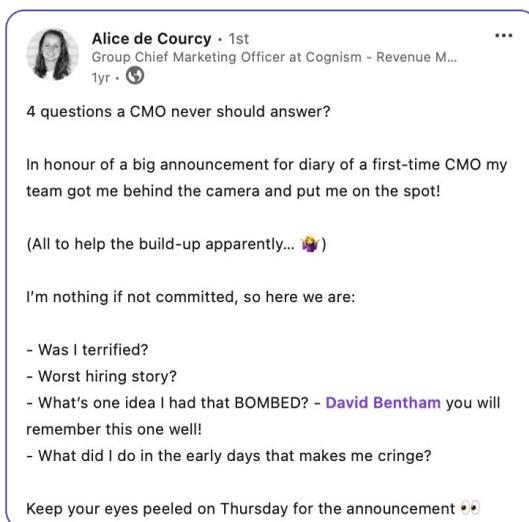
- **Demand generation** - allowing you to see impression or page view level data and how these impressions or page views translate down into MQLs, pipeline and revenue. While you can never be 100% on whether a content piece definitely 'influenced' an action, when in conjunction with other data like engagement or CRM data, it makes decision-making on what content to push much easier.
- **Paid** - uncovering insights throughout the buyer journey from the first impression to closed-won. The data allows us to identify signals from high-intent accounts which are then used to evolve our strategy so that we get better penetration within them. This means we can better attribute ROI from our create demand campaign activation while also helping to reduce wasted ad spend.
- **SEO** - they give our SEO team the ability to tie the SEO projects and blogs we publish back to revenue. Meaning we can see which blogs influenced pipeline and deals won. We can then study why those blogs were successful and copy their structure and CTAs to replicate those successes on other pages. It's also good for trend tracking - seeing how things like pipeline, revenue, demo requests from SEO progress over time.

Having tools isn't the be-all and end-all - you need to be able to apply them in practice and make the most of them to justify the spend.

But if I were to recommend any tools to you, it would be these.

ENTRY 4

Acting as a subject matter expert



I mentioned in the last diary that doing online events and podcasts doesn't come naturally to me. I'm not naturally extroverted and used to find these types of things really nerve-wracking.

But I know that I can act as a subject matter expert for Cognism - and SMEs are a big part of our strategy.

We've worked with external SMEs, but another more accessible and often cheaper way to implement an SME strategy is with your internal team.

You essentially become a B2B influencer for your business. Sharing content on LinkedIn, hosting a podcast, doing speaking events, contributing to other company's content and generally doing what you can to share your expertise and get your business out there.

Now I won't lie, as Cognism has scaled, it's become much harder for me to commit to as many of these activities.

But I know this kind of work is really helpful for the business.

'How?' I hear you ask.

Well, here's a quick demonstration. Here are the results we had on a company page LinkedIn post when we launched our recent Demand Gen playbook:



While the numbers of people liking my post are also not massive - there's still a big difference in how willing people are to engage with individuals versus company pages.

And when you compound this by sharing from multiple SMEs in-house, this just amplifies the impact you can have.

For example, Fran, Cognism's Global Head of Demand Gen and Liam Bartholomew, VP of Marketing, also shared posts on this:



So that is now a possible 1,177% increase on engagement from a company page versus from SME profiles.

Not only this, but these kinds of SME posts offer us an opportunity to push thought leadership ads on paid. These tend to perform well as they look like normal UGC.

So far in 2024, LinkedIn thought leadership ads were responsible for 35% of our influenced pipeline.

So it's about finding ways to scale this activity without requiring as much time resource from me.

Which for us, means I work with one of our demand generation content managers to workshop ideas, create content outlines for podcasts, create decks for public speaking events and build the bones of what we want to put out into the world.

And then I put this into my own words.

I think that's the most important part of this - the 'into my own words' part. Because I think people would be able to see through it pretty instantly if I had no part in shaping the content. It wouldn't be authentic anymore and it would compromise the whole thing.

But it's often the ideating and first draft that takes up the most time when it comes to writing content - we've all had that blank page dread before, right?

So this simply speeds up the process. It also works as a helpful reminder as the content manager will be in touch regularly to discuss what the next content ideas should be - so it can't fall to the bottom of the list.

Now I know many people reading this will probably think 'AI can help you with this', and you're right. That's something we're really excited to explore more at Cognism.

In fact, I've just implemented an OKR for every team, challenging them to find one repeatable workflow that can be improved using AI.

We're in Cognism's scaling phase, and I know that very soon the board will expect me to show how I've made my department more efficient by leveraging AI in the right areas and ways.

I'm trying to move the team from one-off, random AI use cases, to a predictable process that we can scale

People are wary of AI, but AI-powered tools could be the answer to unlocking extra capacity and output, which I can't be mad about.

ENTRY 5

The Ice Queen of marketing



Alice de Courcy · 1st
Group Chief Marketing Officer at Cognism - Revenue M...
1yr · 🌐

CMO mindset tip #1

Get comfortable being uncomfortable

Now I don't just mean this figuratively, but I also mean it literally!

Over the last few months, the coldest months of the year 🥶 I have started a new habit - cold water therapy.

I've become so addicted that I even repurposed an old water trough to give me daily access to the cold water in the wild.

So why do I do it and what are the benefits?

I think the biggest one for me is discipline.

Forming a habit is hard at the best of times and add to that a habit which requires you to break through some initial pain in order to get a benefit and it's even more difficult.

The cold water for me is a great way to calm my mind and focus on the present.

When the water temp is -1 it's pretty tricky to think beyond just breathing!

The next great benefit is the satisfaction you get after you have done your dip, you feel like you have achieved something great and it's only the start of the day.

Imagine if every day you started your day by achieving something that was hard.

It really sets you up to go on and tackle all that the day brings.

There are many many more benefits to the cold exposure, so if you're interested I'll keep on posting and sharing this with you.



👍👍👍 202

24 comments · 2 reposts

In a book about being a marketing leader and scaling a business into new markets and regions, you might be asking yourself why I'd be doing an impression of an arctic animal.

But there is a reason I promise!

I'm sure we can all agree that life can be pretty stressful. When I look back at my (almost!) 6 year stint at Cognism, I've worked and built a team through:

→ A pandemic.

→ Increasing international conflict.

→ A new monarch.

→ 4 PM's.

→ And a recession.

Closer to home, we see that lots of marketers are having their budgets slashed. At Cognism, we've fully transitioned out of the period of 'growth at all costs' and into a push for profitability

You might think that plunging myself into freezing cold water will add additional stress into my life - and for a short period, you may be right.

But I found it was really beneficial for me. As I mentioned in the post, I had to be disciplined in order to make this a habit.

However, the thing that kept me going back was the calmness I had in the water. All I could think about was the cold. So my mind was free and clear of all the other stresses I had going on.

Plus this was something I was doing for me. A few minutes each day to do one thing for me that I knew was good for my health. Giving me a jolt of energy, time to get some perspective, and connect in the experience with whoever I could convince to come with me.

Getting in that cold water every day was something I fully controlled. It gave me a guaranteed sense of accomplishment which set me up positively to tackle the day. It's a small habit, but the compounding impact is powerful.

It means when I get to my desk each day, I can be a calmer, more resilient leader who doesn't let the stresses of life pour onto the people in my team.

TEAM ENTRY 1

Trusting in my team



Liam Bartholomew · 1st

VP Marketing at Cognism

6mo · 🌐



Four months in the hot seat as 'acting CMO' whilst **Alice de Courcy** has been on maternity leave, and what have I learnt?

- 🗣️ Speak up, no matter how intimidating a room may feel
- 📖 Experience matters, both your own and others
- 📈 Know your numbers and ALL of the context
- 🧐 You know a lot more than you may think
- ⭐ Lean on the team, they are incredible
- 😬 Loud voices aren't always right
- 😬 Authenticity will always win, stay true to yourself, acknowledge your strengths and weaknesses
- 🚶 There is nothing wrong with wanting to learn to walk before you can run

...And that I'm very excited for Alice de Courcy to be back 🥳

It's been an incredible learning experience that I can't say many, fairly early into their career, get the opportunity to take.

The fact that the time overlapped with our calendar and financial year end, 2024 planning and strategic planning and key new hires, meant I got 2x the experience in a short time!

Now to move back into a seat more familiar to me, able to apply everything I've learnt, to hopefully do it even better.



271

14 comments

I mentioned at the beginning of this diary that I'd feature a few posts from other people within the Cognism marketing team.

And that's because they have a perspective or experience that I think will be very valuable.

When I went out on maternity leave, Liam stepped up to act as interim CMO in my absence.

It was daunting. Taking that much time off, I mean. Cognism has been my world for the past 5+ years and I care a lot about what happens to it. Building something from the ground up makes it very difficult to let go!

And while I was so excited to meet my son, I did feel some level of FOMO being out of the loop for a few months.

As you can tell from Liam's post above, the timing was tough, with it overlapping with end of year reporting and future years planning.

But there were no panic stations, no fires to put out and no disasters.

I think it was actually harder for me to step away from work for a time, even with something (well, someone!!) so overwhelmingly exciting to step away for.

As I mentioned in my last diary, I got this role relatively early into my career and that came with a lot of imposter syndrome and fear of failure.

And probably with that came a desire to have oversight and control over as much as possible because then that way I could see any red flags coming on the horizon.

Hopefully being able to solve or sort out any problems that might lose me my job...

Of course over time, getting comfortable in the role and being more confident in my position, these fears dissipate slightly. But they never really go away.

So I suppose I feared that I might lose that control that had been, in some senses, my safety blanket over the years.

But taking that time off was amazing. Not only personally, but professionally.

I know that my team has my back. I have that bit more confidence in the engine we've built. And I know if I ever needed to take a step back like that again in the future, I'd be able to do so without any fear.

ENTRY 6

Keeping up with the cutting-edge



Alice de Courcy · 1st
Group Chief Marketing Officer at Cognism - Revenue M...
1yr · 🌐



If you're anything like me, as a marketer, you like to feel as though you're on the cutting edge of what's new, and what's working in the marketing world.

And let's be real - B2B buyer behaviour has changed, and we're all playing catch up to ensure we adapt to better serve these buyers.

Which is why we wanted to create a place for marketers to stay in the loop on what works today when it comes to marketing to the modern buyer. Introducing The Loop Podcast!

And my first guest on the pod is [Steffen Hedebrandt](#), CMO and co-founder at [Dreamdata](#). Here's a snapshot of what we chat about in the episode:

💡 How companies can start illuminating the new B2B buying journey.

📄 The factors throughout the B2B journey that make it difficult to understand the impact of marketing activity on pipeline and revenue.

🗨️ The pitfalls you can fall into when overly reliant on misleading data

🔍 What marketing should track quantitatively vs qualitatively

If you're interested in hearing more, the pod link is in the comments!

PS thanks so much to Steffen for being our first guest! ✨

The B2B buyer journey is a complicated one. It isn't linear and a lot of it happens in the dark funnel where you can't always observe or measure it.

When I think about the way that I personally buy software, it isn't usually because I had a random LinkedIn DM from someone selling a new bit of tech I haven't heard of.

It's usually because I've identified a business need. A reason why we would need additional tech to facilitate something we want to do.

For example, we recently onboarded with Sequel - they're a webinar hosting platform. We were already using Goldcast, and in most respects, the two platforms are very similar. But Sequel has one thing that pushed it over the edge.

It would allow us to host live events on our own website. This would give us that extra control over the events process, which is worth all the hassle of swapping out tools.

For context, live online events are a big part of our content strategy for our sales persona. We run Cold Calling Lives, which is live cold calling training with sales experts, every two weeks.

While Goldcast has worked brilliantly, when I heard that we could have the events hosted on our website, it piqued my interest.

Because it would allow us to generate traffic to our own website, have more insight into the attendees, and store the recorded material so that people can come back and watch it at a later date.

It's an inherent problem with most webinar and online event providers: the journey ends when the event ends. Hosting it on your website solves this problem; it gives you back control to continue that learning journey within your website.

If I hadn't recognised this business need, then any outbound contact between Sequel and Cognism wouldn't have got very far. After all, new software can be time-consuming to onboard and expensive to buy. Sometimes it's easier to stick with what you've got.

So there needs to be motivation from me as a buyer to move that deal along.

Which is why we have to view the buyer journey differently. Marketers can only influence those who have a business need or are already in-market for a product or solution like yours.

We all know the stat that only 5% of your target market is looking to buy at any one time. But this really drives home the importance as a marketer of needing to build future demand by being recognised as a trusted brand around what you want to be known for.

This means:

- Spending time finding the right places to create demand as well as capturing it.
- Embrace more than just the classic sales support, lead generation, and MQL hamster wheel approach.
- Generating new strategies, tactics and activities to reach buyers and influence them before they have a business need and choose a competitor.
- Focusing on brand as a differentiator.
- Stop measuring success based on how many leads or MQLs are generated. Instead, looking at the impact on revenue.

ENTRY 7

Proof that demand gen works



Alice de Courcy · 1st
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1yr · 🌐

Does demand gen work?

Q1 results are in and pretty convincing:

Marketing Global Pipeline = 113% of target

Marketing Global Revenue = 107% of target

Marketing = single biggest driver of NB revenue in Q1

We also saw a record breaking quarter for declared intent demo requests, which was a 42% increase on last best quarter. Image below.

So what helped drive this performance?

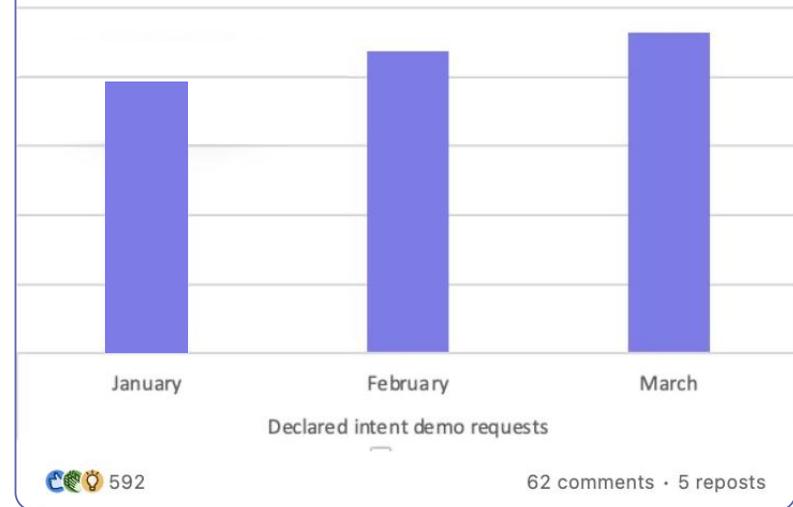
1. We have cracked the code on how to run paid in a demand first lens, and how our paid team should be working with our DG team to enable this. Professor pipeline **Canberk Beker** and his team operate like an agency for our DG team, but the best bit is that they are inside our Salesforce every day, they are optimising for revenue and not in platform metrics and they understand what good looks like by platform and ad objective when it is not aimed at driving form fills. This coupled with a DG team who are persona experts means that our paid buckets are always filled with the most valuable content, always on, to everyone, friction free.

2. I think we have also now cracked the code on DG content production and ideation. We now have the DG content role sit in the DG pods, and the role spec is far wider and deeper than just writing blogs. Our DG content role is responsible for podcast outlines, podcast guest acquisition, video scripts and briefs, SME output, big rock DG content assets like the CMO diary, live event outlines and post production, newsletters, the list goes on!

3. We have reprioritised our shop front, the website. We have operationalised processes for regular message testing and validation, CRO optimisations and experiments, and building website journeys that bring people into our value loops.

4. Focus. Our SEO team being split out and focused on one clear plan has been transformational. Thank you **Gaetano Nino DiNardi** 🇮🇹 for helping us figure this out. We rolled out what we call our 'money keyword' strategy in Q1 and we have seen the return from a traffic value perspective and a conversion uplift. The focus has also meant our domain health has never been better and our DR continues to rise.

There are so many things that go into rethinking the way you market to buyers today, but these are just the 4 key levers I think have had the greatest impact for us in Q1.



In this post I attribute our success at this point in our journey to 'cracking the code' in four main areas.

Here is how we did it:

1. A demand gen-led paid strategy

Not too long before this post, we'd been working with agencies for our paid work, with only one person in-house.

Our Demand Gen Managers were heavily involved in the behind the scenes execution of our paid strategy. While the agency and our one in-house team member managed the technical optimisations in-platform.

Because there was a lot of project management required working with external people, there was an opportunity cost for our DG managers. They weren't able to focus on the other important work they needed to do.

Meaning when we brought this activity in-house, hiring a VP of Paid Acquisition and subsequently a wider paid team, there were two main reasons for a vast improvement in performance.

1. We could free up our DG Managers' time to focus more on creative and messaging. Essentially allowing more time for us to iterate quickly and deliver new messaging angles and tests. Failing fast, learning faster, which then led to us accelerating being able to find the right themes and messaging that delivered results.
2. Having a dedicated internal paid team brought a new level of focus. The team would closely monitor ad performance and regularly feed this back to our DG managers, telling them where the content gaps were and what needed to be done to optimise our campaigns. This meant we were able to get into an effective feedback loop for communicating on what was working and what wasn't. And because DG managers were alleviated from the daily set up and monitoring of ads, they were freed up to action that feedback quickly.

Essentially, we had the headcount, speciality and expertise, plus the focus to ensure that the campaigns we had on were the right ones. We were also able to improve the ones that were under-performing against benchmarks.

2. Demand gen content production

While our demand generation content team setup has changed a little since this post (don't worry, I'll get to this soon!) I believe that this setup was the right thing for us at this moment in time. It helped us to achieve amazing results.

(That's one thing I'd add here. Even though this approach worked very well for us, we weren't afraid to switch things up and test a new approach to see if it would work even better.)

We had a demand generation manager and a demand gen content manager paired in each of our three pods. One focused on marketing, one on sales and the final pod focused on the RevOps persona.

Each of these pods were persona experts. They knew each persona inside and out, they knew the existing content we had for these personas, and they could identify where we had gaps that needed to be filled.

They'd work together to develop ideas for capturing the personas' attention through value-led content. The DG content managers would then work to bring this to life, and the DG manager would determine the best ways to get it in front of our ICP.

This would include both our media machine and value loops.

(For those who haven't heard this terminology before, value loops are places where our audience can take an action once and then repeatedly get value from us over time, e.g. weekly podcast episodes, bi-weekly newsletters, bi-weekly live events and daily social posts.)

And our big rock content campaigns. We always try to have one big rock campaign in the world and one in planning.

These big rock campaigns are heavier-lift, big-swing campaigns that are designed to raise awareness of Cognism as a brand. We encourage those who've been brought into Cognism's orbit to stick around by funnelling them into our media machine and value loops.

For example, someone may have come to learn about Cognism through my first diary, and they may now be regularly consuming our content through The Loop, our marketing podcast.

The idea being that we can't force someone into a buying situation if they're not currently in the market for our product. However, if they recognise Cognism through our content, we'll be top of mind if and when they do come in-market. As a result, they're likely to include us on their list of vendors to evaluate.

With demand generation content, it's not about targeting the 5% that are in-market at any one time. It's playing the long game, and providing as much value to the 95% who aren't in-market right now but could be at some stage in the future.

Through content, we establish ourselves as a reputable and trusted brand that has expertise in solving specific problems. So buyers associate us as a solution if and when they suffer pain points that we can solve.

3. Prioritising our website

During this time, we brought on a dedicated website manager. I was really keen for us to operationalise website testing and prioritise making it the most efficient engine that we could.

Before this, it was much more ad hoc.

And tests weren't well documented or communicated to the wider business. Which meant previous tests couldn't be easily replicated or learnings leveraged.

This period was all about running efficient A/B tests and experiments to bring the website up to scratch, fast.

We developed a process for properly briefing, implementing and tracking our tests and experiments to ensure we had them documented and could learn from them quickly.

We used tools like Mutiny, Wynter and HubSpot to validate our ideas with data from real users in our ICP.

We also tested adding pop ups to pages that our DG managers were sending a lot of traffic to, directing readers towards other resources or our value loops.

This was really successful in funnelling people who weren't already in our orbit into channels where they could continue to get valuable content from us.

This was just another step in closing the gaps where web visitors might have slipped through the cracks and in treating our website as a core part of our strategy vs set and forget.

4. Implementing a money keyword SEO strategy

Before January 2023, our SEO strategy was as you'd expect. A traditional approach with a priority to increase brand awareness by attracting relevant traffic through keywords.

These would generally be things that were relevant for the business but weren't necessarily things that high-intent prospects would search for.

We saw a lot of success with this approach. We saw our page rankings shoot to the top positions and we generated a lot of traffic.

But while working with Gaetano DiNardi, SEO whizz and Cognism advisor - he pointed out something that has changed our SEO strategy indefinitely.

He identified that people often weren't taking actions once they landed on our pages. Consequently, our conversions were low.

We aren't alone here; a lot of software companies fall into the trap of targeting high volume keywords because they align with the company's product category.

The problem is that this rarely produces new customer acquisition.

Because we're in a well-established industry, luckily, we don't need to focus as much on educational content, e.g. 'what is lead generation'.

Instead, we focused on the terms that would bring more in-market people to the site and create content that converted. This is where Gaetano helped us shape what we do now - which is the money keyword strategy.

Fundamentally, the money keyword strategy is about targeting keywords that high-intent buyers use to find solutions to their problems.

In other words, it's about focusing on the quality of the traffic, rather than the volume!

It's better to spend more time and money driving the right, high-intent people to your website versus driving as much traffic as possible and having a low percentage of people take any action.

This is where honing in on that 5% of in-market traffic makes sense.

We generate demand with our demand gen content media machine and then when this traffic comes in-market, we can convert it with our money keyword pages.

Importantly, this also brings down our overall acquisition cost.

BONUS ENTRY 1

The team's favourite tools

In entry three, I shared a few of my favourite tools we use at Cognism. But each team has their own favourites, so I thought I'd use this first bonus entry to highlight some of their top tools.

Customer marketing's top pick:

Fielo is used to power our customer advocacy program, called Cognism Champions - via Salesforce.

We can configure both the front and back end of this program and manage the experience for our customers

Through this, customers can sign up to our advocacy program and we're able to incentivise and reward them for their participation once they do.

We can then also use the analytics function to report on this activity. Overall, it's a platform that enables us to celebrate our customers and drive advocacy for Cognism.

Product marketing's top pick: Gong

PMM uses Gong as a way to easily get an inside view on how our sales teams, customers and prospects are talking about our product, our competitors and what the key messages are.

It allows PMM to access hundreds of calls and search for key themes and talking points.

PMM also uses Gong's smart tracker AI to track that our sales teams are on message and representing our values and benefits.

Demand Gen team's top pick:

Clay is a pretty new tool for us, which is exciting – hence why it's made our top picks list.

Clay.io is a tool that helps with a variety of tasks, including:

- Personalised email writing: Clay can use AI to help write personalised emails.
- Personal CRM: Clay can help manage personal and professional relationships in one place.
- Project management: Clay can help builders manage projects and grow revenue in the physical and digital worlds.

One of the reasons the team has been loving it so far is its flexibility. We seem to be discovering more use cases as time goes on and it's becoming a bit of a Swiss army knife style tool.

We're currently using or planning to use as part of our stack for:

- Email campaigns.
- Supporting reps with some new outbound tactics.
- And LinkedIn creative tracking.

Website team's top pick: HubSpot

We use Hubspot CMS Hub to create, build, manage and maintain all our websites for all brands.

It gives us the flexibility to design and create different types of content and is a central place for all our marketing efforts.

The drag and drop editor is easy to use and we can easily collaborate on building pages for all types of website content, landing pages for ads and blogs to boost our SEO.

Plus we can develop and build our own custom templates and modules for interactivity.

Bonus top pick: Mutiny

Another favourite, Mutiny is the main tool we use for conversion rate optimisation on our website. Mutiny allows us to run personalised experiences for targeted segments of users (e.g. enterprise users, returning visitors, ad campaigns or industries).

This can include updating the page content, building personalised pop-ups or side-pops and creating banners. And we can A/B test website page designs, different messaging, layouts, CTAs and more. This helps us to improve conversion rates and engagement metrics.

DG Content top pick: Hotjar

This is a great tool for analysing how visitors are behaving and interacting with our content.

With Hotjar, we can see heatmaps and recordings of our website pages. With this, we can assess if the changes we make on the website are working as expected and use this to make improvements.

Hotjar also has built-in surveys where we can ask our web visitors questions on their experience. As an example, we recently published a 'mega blog' post of 14k words (our longest-ever post) and used Hotjar to gather feedback from readers.

SEO team's top pick: Ahrefs

Ahrefs might seem like an obvious choice, but that's because it's a fantastic tool for SEO marketers and makes keyword research so much easier.

Aside from keyword research, our SEO team uses Ahrefs to track keyword rankings, analyse competitor websites, and fix technical SEO issues.

Ahrefs' rank tracking function is a powerful tool. It provides regular updates on SERP movements for our target keywords, allowing us to see how they rank and if they've won any rich text results like featured snippets.

The rank tracker's tagging feature makes categorising keyword types and monitoring their performance easy.

Ahrefs' connection with Google Data Studio further enhances our SEO reporting capabilities, making it a great all-in-one tool for our SEO needs.

We like that Ahrefs tracks competitor domains and our website. We use it to monitor competitors and see what they're doing. Have they started targeting any keywords of interest, or are they ranking for any of our money keyword terms?

This function helps us stay ahead and maintain our SEO advantage.

ENTRY 8

How we make our content outperform our biggest competitor



Alice de Courcy · 1st
Group Chief Marketing Officer at Cognism - Revenue M...
1yr · Edited · 🗨️

More resources don't always = better results.

And back to [Gaetano Nino DiNardi](#) 🇮🇹's post from earlier this week, competitor experience also does not always = the winning formula for taking your organisation to new heights.

The below side by side image is a case and point. It is a comparison of the blog traffic value from Cognism's biggest competitor, who also happen to be considerably larger in terms of resources and org size.

So how are we outperforming them?

Because we have resource constraints we are very focused with how we deploy them and 2 core principles have always driven our content strategy:

1. Write content that can truly benefit your audience and teaches them something new. Don't forward plan months in advance, but build a blog that is a searchable hub of all the latest and best which your audience wants to engage with. Write for your audience, not for Google. Our competitive advantage has always been in the quality of our content and not the quantity.

2. Capture the demand that already exists with a laser focus on 'money keywords'. They may have 0 search volume according to search tools, but if they have commercial intent for us you can be sure we will be focused on gaining that ranking. Thank you [Gaetano Nino DiNardi](#) 🇮🇹 for helping us build this out so successfully. And of course big credit to [Ilse V Rensburg Monika Kisieleswska](#) [Joe Barron](#) and [Daniel Peacock](#) for executing all this.

I believe that in content marketing, quality, authenticity and integrity are vital. Readers won't engage with content that doesn't provide them with value or the answers they're looking for.

Regurgitated content summarising everything else on the internet will only turn readers off.

Your goal with content – whether that's TOFU thought leadership or BOFU SEO-focused content – should be to get the reader to engage. Without this, all other content marketing goals are likely to flop.

So it's about providing your audience with something they actually want to engage with. We want to predict what our ICP actually wants to read about at the various stages of their interactions with us and provide it in the most valuable way possible.

In many ways, we're lucky that we are marketing to marketers and salespeople. We have so much expertise in-house with those personas.

This means we can use our internal subject matter experts to create content with authority and substance around subjects that are poignant to our core ICP.

For our marketing persona, our competitive advantage comes from sharing what we're building as we're building it.

We've been very vocal and transparent about our switch from lead gen to demand gen. We're now sharing the process of us scaling this into new territories, market segments and as the team itself grows.

This has been a huge source of our audience engagement. Because it's not something you hear about on the majority of company blogs.

Marketers are interested in our journey and us sharing our learning process holds value for them.

For our sales persona, we share everything that any sales team would need to know about cold calling and outbound.

This links so closely to our product that it serves a strong purpose. It provides our core persona with value, while also keeping us tightly associated with what our product does.

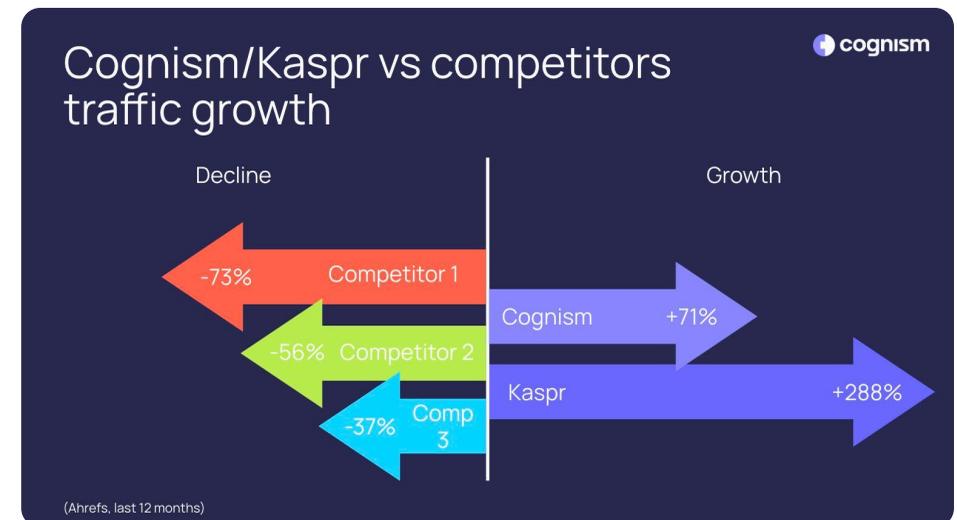
Feeding our create demand motions in this way, followed by our money keyword strategy capturing that demand, has put us in a really strong position.

Here are just a few wins we've had from sticking to this philosophy:

- We've doubled our LinkedIn followers in the last 365 days.
- We've increased our podcast downloads by 64% over the last 12-14 months.
- We surpassed our target for engaging enterprise accounts in our live events by 666% in Q1 and 384% in Q2.

And as I mentioned in the LinkedIn post above, we can also see this translating against our largest industry competitors.

The graph below shows how our blogs at Cognism and Kaspr are performing in contrast to their blogs – despite us being smaller and less well-resourced companies:



Top organic competitors



Circle size= Number of organic pages



blog.hubspot.com Target

Organic Traffic Value

Domain	Keyword overlap	Common keyword	Share	Competitor's keyword
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Cognism <input type="checkbox"/>	-	-	-	-
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Competitor 1 <input type="checkbox"/>	-	-	-	-
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Competitor 2 <input type="checkbox"/>	-	-	-	-
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Competitor 3 <input type="checkbox"/>	-	-	-	-

ENTRY 9

The endless benefits of tying yourself to revenue



Alice de Courcy · 1st
Group Chief Marketing Officer at Cognism - Revenue M...
1yr ·

I have been tied to revenue as CMO at Cognism for 4 years now.

Just some of the benefits I have realised as a result of this:

- Budget discussions are far easier and much more simple. I can prove the impact of marketing \$ for each business unit, region and brand at Cognism. I can model out scenario implications for budget reductions and increases.

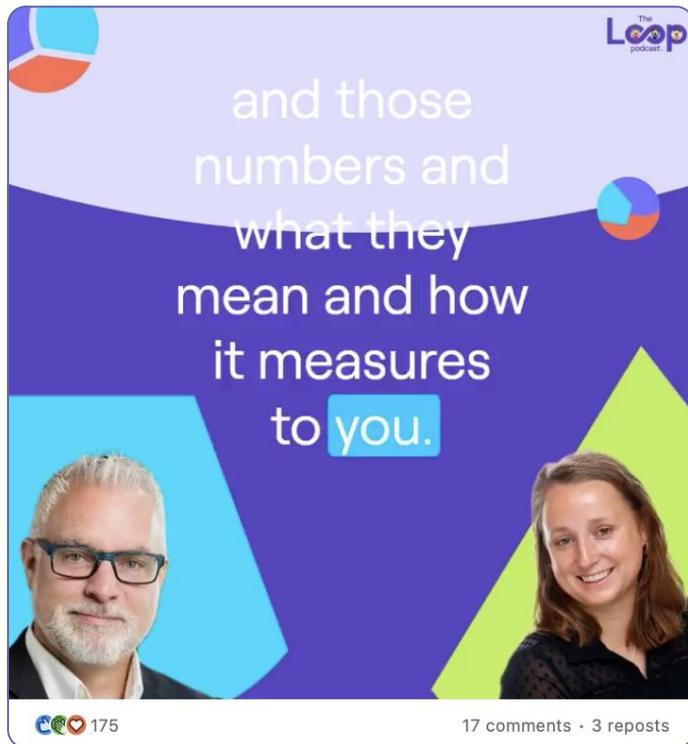
- Making pivots in the marketing strategy requires a far lower level of buy in, I am accountable for my revenue number and am trusted as CMO to make the right decisions about the route to getting there.

- Alignment with my sales counterpart is intuitive rather than a battle. We align around the same end goal and very often this means our views on how to tackle situations are also far closer aligned.

- Every part of the marketing organisation rallies around the same objective - revenue. They understand what role their position, activities and department play in us hitting this number.

- Tenure. There is a lot of talk about the short tenure of CMO's. I strongly believe that taking on a revenue number from day 1 has been a key driver to 4+ year tenure in seat.

I had a great chat with **Darryl Prail**, CMO at [Agorapulse](#) about tying marketing to revenue. Full chat link found in normal place.



As an update on this post – I’ve now been tied to revenue for over five years. And while it might’ve been a scary prospect at first, it’s one of the best decisions for both the Cognism marketing team, and my career.

Yes, I’m now accountable for a revenue target and that means it’s obvious if I fall short. But it also means I can demonstrate marketing’s impact on the wider business. Which gives us the bargaining power to ask for what we need as a team.

We can say ‘if we have X more budget, we can achieve Y result’, because we can model it out. Which is a much easier conversation versus if you were asking for more budget to generate more MQLs with varying degrees of conversion rates and quality.

And because it’s clear from the numbers that marketing brings in between 51% to 55% of the revenue, and is the largest single contributing channel to revenue, budget conversations are more likely to swing our way.

In fact, in certain cases, budget that would ordinarily have been assigned to SDR headcount (which would have been our old way to scale) has been reallocated to marketing.

One example of this was in our DACH business. We decided that rather than scaling SDR headcount, we would give those \$’s to marketing instead. Because the marketing influence was having a greater impact than the outbound efforts on revenue.

And it might sound like this would make the relationship between sales and marketing more tense – having to fight over budget. But it doesn’t. Because everyone is targeted on revenue. When everyone wants the same thing, there’s less friction over these decisions.

When we later expanded into France, our approach was very different to our expansion into DACH.

The first team on the ground in DACH was the sales team. Whereas in France, we chose to warm up the audience first with a marketing team before we invested in a sales headcount sitting in the region.

We could only do this because we were able to demonstrate the value of marketing for revenue.

In other more harsh economic times when we’ve been tasked to do more with less, we could recognise areas where our spend was less efficient.

For example, we could identify that the majority of our SMB business in NAM wasn’t sticky. So we could switch off this activity, reducing budget without having any major impact on revenue. This allowed us to put more budget into other areas that would generate much more healthy business for Cognism.

ENTRY 10

Marketing is only effective if it's memorable



Alice de Courcy · 1st
Group Chief Marketing Officer at Cognism - Revenue M...
1yr · 🌐

B2B marketing and content, no matter what your persona is, does not have to be boring.

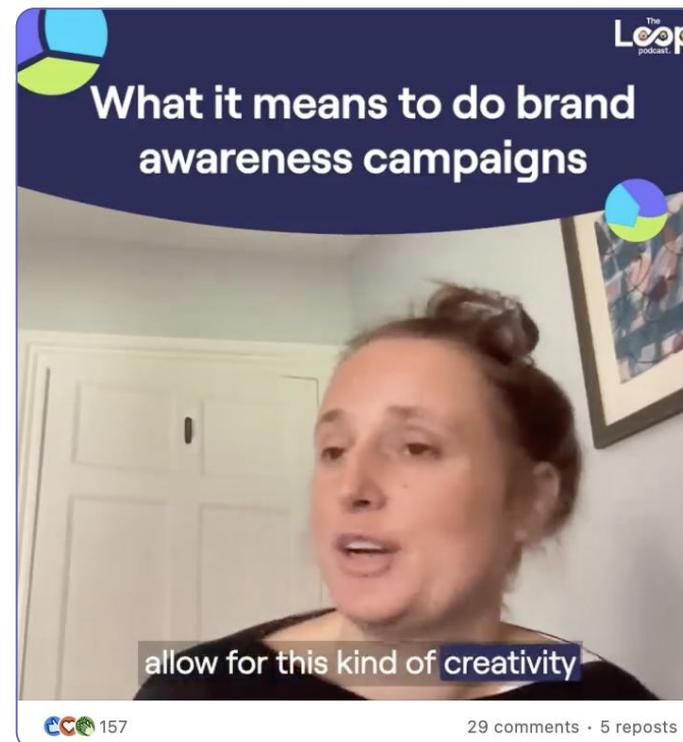
But most of our LinkedIn feeds are still filled with unoriginal content.

So what is required to change this and to start doing marketing that will be truly memorable.

I had a great chat with [Andrew Davies](#), CMO at [Paddle](#) who are leading the charge when it comes to doing B2B marketing that is not boring. For Andrew the change comes down to 3 key things:

1. A genuine understanding of your persona. You need to go deeper than your average persona documentation and build genuine insights that can fuel the content you will produce.
2. Courage. You need to be willing to fail. Building your own playbook and doing things that are original will almost certainly require a steep learning curve and most people are not willing to take on this risk.
3. Time. It doesn't happen overnight, nor will the results be visible straight away. They compound over time and you need to be able to give time to these types of initiatives.

[Link to the full conversation in the normal place.](#)



Marketing can go a long way in driving a product or brand's growth - but this only works if the marketing activity is memorable.

As B2B marketers, we're often working in highly competitive markets. Trying to get attention from prospective customers is hard and only getting harder.

If your marketing campaigns aren't building relevant memory structures in the minds of your target customers, then they won't remember you. Which means when they enter a buying phase, they're unlikely to shortlist you as one of the vendors they'll consider.

It's possible that a buyer will do a quick Google search and if your SEO is strong, they'll come across your brand and explore your product that way.

But generally, people choose brands they know and trust. Or ones that their peers know and trust.

Which is why reaching these people early on with content that establishes you as a well-known and trusted brand is such a super-power.

Here are a few of things we try to prioritise when creating memorable campaigns:

- Associating Cognism with category entry points.
- Baking emotion into our marketing.
- Creating a distinctive brand.

Category entry points (CEP)

Category entry points or CEPs are key moments in a B2B buyer's journey that trigger their search for a new product or solution.

For instance, at Cognism, a CEP might happen when a potential customer is expanding into a new market and requires contact data to support their sales team in that region.

Our goal is to align the Cognism brand with as many of these CEPs as possible, so when these moments arise, our company comes to mind and is considered a potential vendor.

This approach is a great shortcut for building brand associations, as many businesses struggle with defining what they want to be associated with.

It's important to align broadly with the category your product belongs to. But it's even more effective to identify specific situations where your product is needed and build associations around those.

At Cognism, one of our primary use cases is supporting sales teams in cold calling. We create B2B campaigns focused on enhancing cold calling success. For example:

- Running continuous content ads on LinkedIn featuring cold calling scripts, guides, and trends.
- Hosting a live webinar series on cold calling as a training resource for sales representatives.
- Collaborating with cold calling experts like Morgan J Ingram to distribute our content.
- Our internal sales leaders share cold calling content on their personal LinkedIn profiles.

Baking emotion into your marketing

I'm not suggesting that we try moving our buyers to tears - that's unlikely in B2B marketing!

But tapping into emotions such as joy, sympathy, or nostalgia can have an impact on how memorable campaigns are.

Humour is the most common way we do this at Cognism. B2B marketing is so often super-boring and so that's what people expect. When you inject an element of humour into your marketing, people are surprised and hopefully laughing!

It helps to make us look more human and relatable. It's the kind of content that people are more likely to want to engage with.

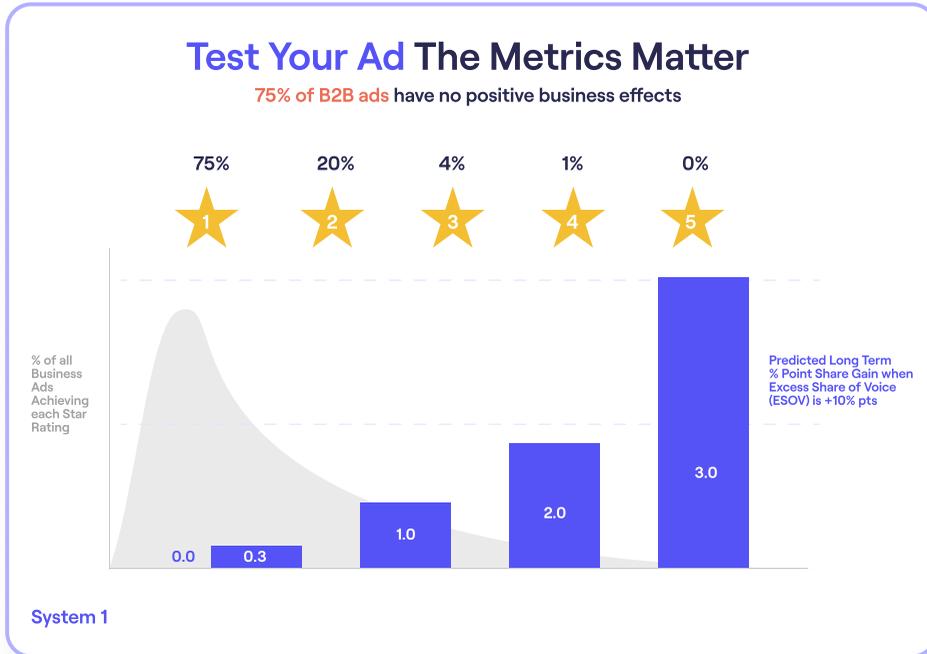
Proof is in the pudding. We recently did some work with System 1 to test our ads and we were pleasantly surprised with the outcome.

For context, System 1 uses Daniel Kahneman's Nobel Prize winning research around decision-making as the basis to measure ad effectiveness.

He concluded that how you feel is the biggest influence on buyer behaviour versus all the rational facts and figures. Therefore this ad test is measured on the level of emotional intensity it provokes and how memorable it is as a result.

They identified that 75% of B2B ads have no positive business effects and 0% get a perfect score 5 star rating. It's a tough test.

Star rating = Long-term brand growth based on an ad's creative effectiveness, calculated by measuring emotional response to an ad.



So we were thrilled to see some strong scores (and we have only gone from strength to strength since, implementing the advice we received as a result).

Cognism Cold Call Street Interview USA LinkedIn B2B Edge Biz Dev Sample	Online video Finished film US	3.6 Star Rating Good	120 Spike Rating Strong	75 Fluency Rating Modest
Cognism Kaitia USA LinkedIn B2B Edge Biz Dev Sample	Online video Finished film US	2.8 Star Rating Modest	127 Spike Rating Strong	87 Fluency Rating Good
Cognism Rating My Cold Call Snippet USA LinkedIn B2B Edge Biz Dev Sample	Online video Finished film US	1.4 Star Rating Low	108 Spike Rating Modest	71 Fluency Rating Low
Cognism USA Cognism USA LinkedIn B2B Edge Biz Dev Sample	Online video Finished film US	2.9 Star Rating Modest	137 Spike Rating Exceptional	85 Fluency Rating Exceptional

What this scoreboard shows you is that we score within the top 4% for the first ad, and very close behind for 2 others.

The other two metrics shown here are:

- Spike rating = Short-term sales potential, derived from strength of branding and intensity of emotional response.
- Fluency rating = Measures strength of branding in the ad. Fluency is driven by the % of viewers recognising the brand by the end of the ad.

Some additional feedback we got from this test was:

Our use of humour in ads is ✨ exceptional ✨

Their words, not mine!

Humour is the most profitable emotion, according to System 1 - which is lucky seeing as we capitalise on this regularly

It's fun for us to create, and it's fun for our prospects to watch. Therefore they're far more likely to want to engage.

Creating a distinct brand

Building a strong brand goes beyond just having a recognisable logo. It's about the overall brand identity, including a unique look, feel, and voice.

I want our brand to stand out so clearly that, even in a crowded market, people can easily identify content as ours.

It all started when we rebranded a few years ago - we worked with Pentagram to come up with a whole new look. For reference, we went from this:



To this:



Now I realise that a rebrand is a big-step undertaking if it's only cosmetic. The only reason I decided we needed to do this was because we were constantly running into an identity crisis in our old brand.

It was a necessary step for us to be able to scale AND be recognisable.

It was a big project. Imagine, we had to go through every page we had live, every asset, every banner, every everything! And change it over to the new branding.

But since then, we've expanded our brand look, including coming up with our own style for illustrations, icons and more.

To build an effective, memorable and recognisable brand, consistency is key.

And now we have a brand that people recognise no matter the type of content we produce. It's obviously Cognism.

And it better represents what we actually do. The connecting shapes in our logo signifies us connecting people with who they want to do business with.

We aren't just assuming this is a more effective brand either, it's been validated time and time again through tests we have run on paid, landing pages etc.

Even when comparing us to other SaaS brands or competitors, we look distinct - and that's the aim.

BONUS ENTRY 2

ICP deep diving

Checking in on your ICP regularly to assess that it is still your ICP is important.

Because a disconnect on your ICP can lead to a domino effect of misaligned marketing and dwindling pipeline.

This year, we really focused on redefining our ICP. Our CRO suggested we undertake the 'CHASM project', which is in partnership with the CHASM Group (a consultancy firm). Essentially, it's a big research project to work out:

- Who our best customers are.
- What they need.
- And how we can position ourselves to play to win.

We wanted to use this research to shape our product so it fits our ICP. And here was our process:

Step 1: Identify where you win

We started by researching:

- What we're great at.
- What are our product strengths?
- What do customers love us for?
- And what makes us stand out in the market.

We actioned this by conducting internal and customer interviews, analysing retention data and reviewing case studies.

Step 2: Build out a strawman of your headpin

Imagine you're tenpin bowling, aiming for the headpin right at the front. Because if you hit that, all the rest will follow.

We then went about creating a 'strawman' for what that headpin customer looked like.

Essentially collating the characteristics of customers with the best NDR/GDR, Customer Satisfaction scores and NPS.

From there we started to determine and define common characteristics across these customers. This then led to a V1 of our strawman, something that will always be slightly fluid.

Step 3: Define a broken process

Now that we had our 'where we win' and our strawman, we had an idea of our best-fit customers and what they saw as the most value in purchasing Cognism.

So now we set about describing the issue they faced that led them to making that purchase in the first place.

This is the "broken process", a process that isn't working for them currently that requires fixing.

We set about validating the broken process we landed on with existing customers, prospects and former customers. We did this through long and in-depth interviews to see whether the process resonated with them.

Step 4: What's the compelling reason to buy?

We also defined a compelling reason to buy. Due to that broken process, what's the driving force behind purchasing a solution to fix it? What's the outcome of that broken process that's intolerable and needs fixing?

We also defined this aspect, and after validating the broken process in the interviews, went on to validate whether our perception of the reason to buy was correct too.

Step 5: Apply this to your GTM strategy

The next step was to take that information forward into our go-to-market efforts. In other words, how do you apply what you've learned about your ICP?

You could simply view an ICP as the people you target and therefore, as defining the audiences you build in paid ad platforms or email lists.

However, although knowing your ICP will immediately impact how you build your targeting, it's just a fraction of what it should affect.

So having done the work to research and define our ICP, the work began to change everything in our GTM. This is something we refer to as the 'whole product offering' including:

- Messaging and positioning.
- Demand gen audiences and targeting.
- Product roadmap and development.
- Pre and post sales.
- Sales enablement.
- Sales process, e.g. discovery, structure.
- Partnerships.
- Content roadmap and creation.
- Customer marketing strategy advocacy, retention and expansion.

The list is extensive. It's the harder part of the process.

It's easier to define an ICP, change your targeting but do little more to meet the needs of that ICP that you will have spent so much time to identify. Hence why it's a cross-functional project; it's relevant to everyone in the team.



Listen to Liam Bartholomew talk a little more about this in this post and snippet:

TEAM ENTRY 2

Less about revenue growth, more about retention



Liam Bartholomew · 1st
VP Marketing at Cognism
2mo · Edited · 🗨️



TaLk tO uR CuStOmErS

It's an easy thing to say as advice, but how many people actually make the time to do it?

There are many time saving ways to get information from customers and prospects without having to arrange time to speak to them too, like:

- ★ Listening to Gong calls
- ★ Tools like [UserEvidence](#) or [Wynter](#)
- ★ Getting feedback from Sales and notes from disco calls
- ★ In-person events
- ★ Inviting them on Podcasts or webinars
- ★ Feedback from virtual or in-person events

And a load of other ways I've probably neglected.

All these methods can be great ways of getting customer insights without the time, effort and organisation that it takes to get 30-60 mins in front of a customer/prospect.

But what happens if you do get time with a customer or prospect, how do you use that time best?

I've recently been running interviews to get insights and help validate a hypothesis with customers/prospects and been slowly learning how to get the most fruitful conversations.

1. Come with a POV:

I did psychology at university and leading questions and labelling were big no nos. But I've now unlearned that, coming to a customer interview with a hypothesis, POV or opinion allows people to tell you you're wrong or start agreeing strongly - that's where the good stuff comes out. You've got to set the direction to get the feedback and insight you need.

2. Let the conversation go where it goes:

Don't keep it so rigid to structure you miss the good stuff. Sometimes, your off the cuff question, that is maybe a little off script is what actually gets you to the crux of the matter. Alternatively, it might unearth something you hadn't even thought about and takes you straight back to the drawing board.

3. Don't be too rigid about who you want to speak to:

You may go in, thinking you only want to speak to decision makers or c-suite. But actually, although you may want to speak to those people, there's a lot of value to be had speaking to all layers and dynamics. Not to mention, people introduce you to people and that's the best way to land your interview.

4. Post-mortem your interviews:

I've got a big ol' Figma board going that looks like I'm trying to hunt down a serial killer. But, it allows connections to be made, notes to be compared and each interview not to sit in silo from one another. The quicker you post-mortem the better too.

What else would you add? 🤔

You and 87 others

13 comments · 2 reposts

Following on from bonus entry 2 - I wanted to share a little about what we found during the CHASM interviews and how we applied it.

First, a little back story. Generating new business is the fun and exciting part of marketing - and business in general.

But it's not the most important part.

Because if you can't retain any of those customers, then you're on a constant hamster wheel of having to generate new business to keep the lights on. Meanwhile you're burning through customer satisfaction and loyalty!

Eventually, there's no new customers to win - and your brand has a bad reputation for not delivering, with a whole lot of churn to boot.

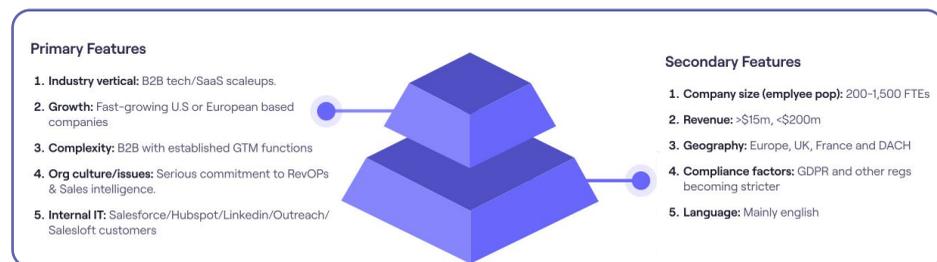
We noticed our retention rates were dropping at one stage, and it made us nervous. Because we want to be the epitome of quality, value and delivery.

And if we have customers churning, that suggests we're either delivering value to the wrong people, or under-delivering to the right people. Neither of which is a positive or long-term plan.

Not only this but in an era of efficiency, we need to find ways to optimise our internal engines to improve LTV. Which meant going back to basics and checking in on our ICP.

Here's where the CHASM project came in...

We ran the process I outlined in the previous post, and here's what we came up with:



This was our 'strawman' or 'headpin'. In other words, the culmination of data on who our ICP are.

When we dug into what their broken process was, we discovered a significant number of these rapidly expanding tech startups are failing to meet their sales targets in EU markets.

This is due to rigid outbound sales approaches, which overlooks the diverse regulations, customs, and procedures unique to each European market.

This helped us to form an idea of what the 'compelling reason to buy Cognism' would be:

'Lack of and poor quality or inconsistent pipeline causing us to miss our numbers in target markets'

At this stage, we conducted a number of interviews to try to validate our strawman, broken process and compelling reason to buy hypotheses.

Here are some of the key takeaways and themes from these interviews:

- The broken process we describe above resonated with every single interviewee.
- The common solutions to the broken process depended on their company size.
 1. Larger companies invested in outside consulting for support.
 2. Whereas smaller organisations tended to adopt a trial, error and abandon approach.
- US sales processes don't tend to work well in Europe as they're perceived as too aggressive or transactional.
- Most companies when expanding into new markets try to apply the same playbook that worked in one region to another - which rarely worked.
- There was a consistent desire to understand more about particular social and cultural norms, market analysis and competitive landscape in unfamiliar target regions.

Everything we learned from the CHASM project and our interviews is now being implemented in our GTM motions.

These insights have driven who we target, the content we create and the future of the product too.

But I'd argue that the biggest and best change is that we're building a product to meet our ICP's needs now.

ENTRY 11

How to reach the modern B2B buyer



Alice de Courcy · 1st

Group Chief Marketing Officer at Cognism - Revenue M...

1yr ·



You hear a lot of people talking about the death of the marketing funnel

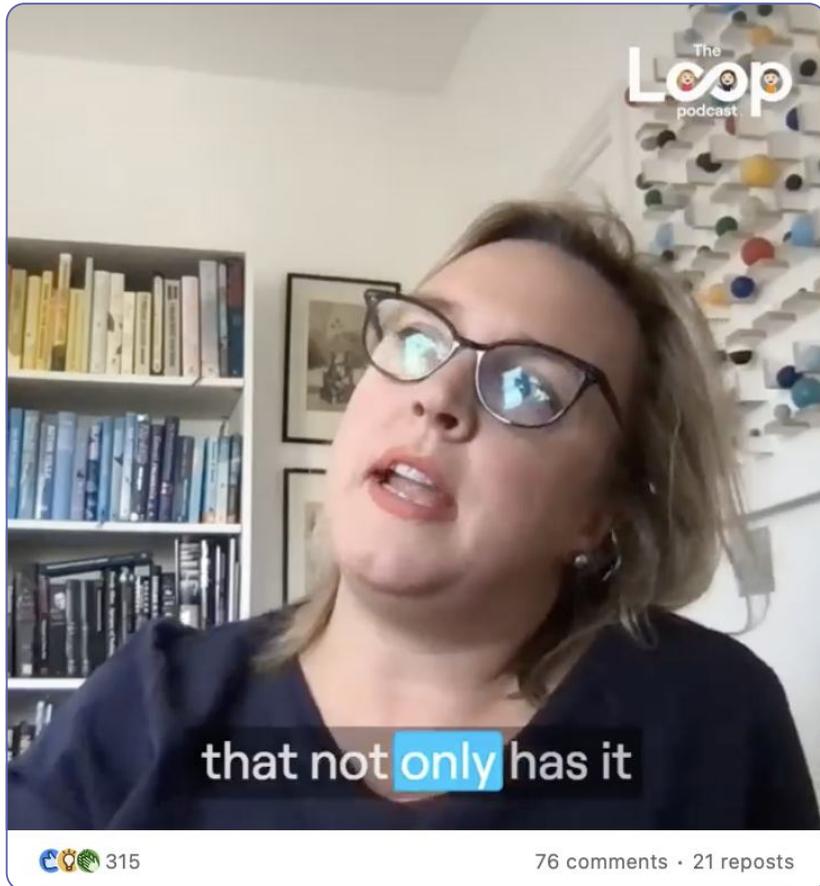
But there are very few that offer another way.

This is exactly what [Antonia Wade](#), Global CMO at [PwC](#) does.

It was brilliant to be able to talk through this framework with Antonia a weeks ago.

It's a refreshing way to rethink how we market in b2b today in order to better serve the modern buyer and buying groups that exist and demand us to do better.

Link to the full episode in the usual place.



If you haven't listened to this episode of The Loop podcast, I'd suggest you do.



Listen here

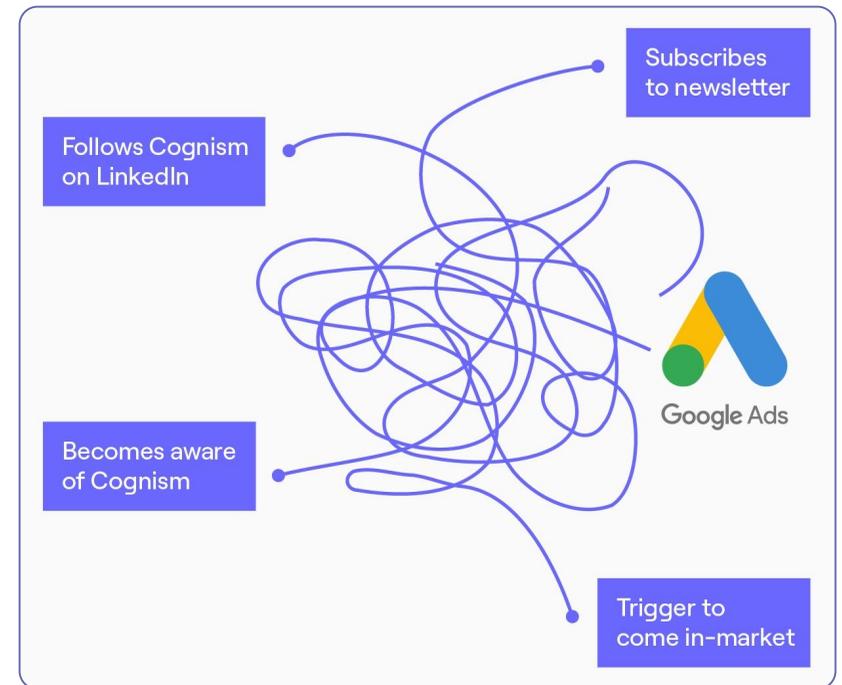
It's still to date our most popular episode. And I'm not surprised!

Most B2B marketers will recognise that the traditional funnel doesn't really fit the way that modern buyers buy. But Antonia, CMO of PwC went beyond condemning the old way, presenting a new way to look at the funnel.

She shared a step-by-step framework for mapping the buyer journey, aligning channels, metrics, and tactics to meet customer needs at each stage

We have thought about this a lot at Cognism, how the AIDA model is no longer fit for purpose. It implies a linear, one-size-fits-all buying journey, with specific activities neatly mapped to each stage. It assumes that buyers follow a straightforward, rational path from awareness to action

In reality, our individual buying journeys rarely adhere to this rigid structure. Instead, they often resemble the more complex and non-linear process like the one below.



Our approach to this messy, unpredictable and often unmeasurable buyer journey is to focus on the various stages of buyer intent.

This means creating content that caters both to those who are currently in-market and those who are out-of-market but could become future customers.

Here's how it breaks down:

In-market buyer content

We divide in-market demand capture content into three areas:

1. Demand capture - Paid search and affiliates.
2. Demand capture - Pricing page and product demo requests.
3. Demand capture - SEO strategy.

This content targets in-market buyers who are already aware of their needs and actively seeking solutions.

The goal is to direct these buyers to specific parts of our website designed to capture demand, such as pricing or demo request pages

By using strategies like paid search, organic search, and affiliate marketing, we can guide potential customers to the right information, helping them choose our product over competitors and allowing us to gauge their level of intent.

By using strategies like paid search, organic search, and affiliate marketing, we can guide potential customers to the right information, helping them choose our product over competitors and allowing us to gauge their level of intent.

Out-of-market buyer content

For out-of-market buyers who aren't actively looking to purchase right now, we create content that falls into two categories:

1. Education and exploratory - main website pages

These pages highlight the products we offer, the various use cases they can solve, key features, customer testimonials, comparison tables, positive reviews, how they work, and integrations.

2. Education and exploratory - blog and resources

Most of our content planning happens here. This is our media machine value loops and is often where our big rock campaign content falls into.

By breaking down our content in this way, we can try to provide everything that anyone at any stage of the buyer journey might need or want to see.

ENTRY 12

Diary of a first time CMO campaign plan pivot



Alice de Courcy · 1st
Group Chief Marketing Officer at Cognism - Revenue M...
11mo · 🌐

Marketing campaigns often fail because as marketers we are bad at operating on the fly.

We like to plan, then execute that plan, regardless of what the feedback and numbers start to tell us once the campaign has launched.

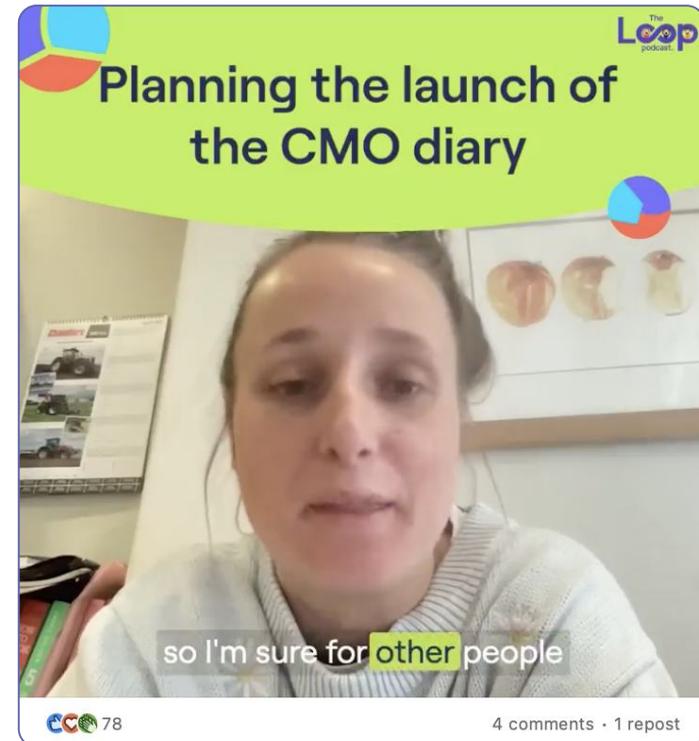
Most of the time this is because we have not built the necessary muscle memory for adapting and building as we go.

Because I love to do marketing by shipping MVP's, it is very much a part of my and my teams DNA to be flexible in everything we do.

This was certainly the case for our Diary of a First-Time CMO campaign earlier this year.

I sat down to deep dive the whole campaign with it's mastermind [Jamie Skeels](#).

A great insight into how to plan, build, run and adapt a campaign that actually drives \$ in revenue.



Half way through this campaign, after weeks of planning, we had to pivot - and quickly too.

Because publishing a book isn't a common thing for most B2B companies, we had no idea how to gauge what the demand was likely to be. So the original plan was to have maybe 120 copies of the physical book and then everyone else could consume the digital or audiobook versions.

We had a pre-hype phase where we enlisted the help of a bunch of B2B marketing experts and LinkedIn influencers. They shared a photo of their book's physical copy, drumming up some promotion.

We then launched a waitlist where people could sign up and be in with the chance of winning one of the physical copies.

Our idea was to send everyone else to the digital copy. Everyone would get access to the diary, but the physical copies were scarce, making them more desirable.

The thing is though...

We hadn't quite anticipated how well this process would've worked. We had over 4,000 people on the waitlist within 48 hours. And so many people were sharing their own LinkedIn posts about how they had signed up and were excited to get a physical copy.

Realising the potential here, we had to act fast to get more physical copies available. The problem was that printing the books was expensive, and we had intended to give them away for free.

The best option for us to be able to allow people to get their hands on the physical book while also keeping true to our 'give it away friction-free' mentality, was to put the book on Amazon. Anyone who wanted the book could get it, for the cost that Amazon charges to print it.

We prioritised the free 120 copies to customers on our waitlist, and everyone else was directed to either the Amazon listing or to the other free versions of the book we had created.

I'm not sure if you've ever tried to get a book ready to publish within 48 hours - but it was a lot of last minute work. But it was so worth the blood and tears, because within a matter of days, when people started to receive their diaries, we saw another flurry of posts on LinkedIn.

People sharing what they had learned having read it, others taking photos of it from planes as they'd taken it to read on holiday, and the biggest compliment of all, putting it next to books by highly revered authors.

The book has grown arms and legs since; we've used it as part of our targeted ABM campaigns, we've handed it out at in-person events as swag, and obviously... I've written volume two.

It would've been so easy for this mad idea to have stayed in the backlog because it was such a heavy lift and we had no way of knowing what the return would be. But I'm so glad we're a team of (reasonable!) risk-takers who took the opportunity to do something different.

ENTRY 13

Build your own B2B marketing playbook



Alice de Courcy · 1st
Group Chief Marketing Officer at Cognism - Revenue M...
11mo · Edited · 🗨️

Build your own playbook.

This would be my top piece of advice to fellow marketing leaders.

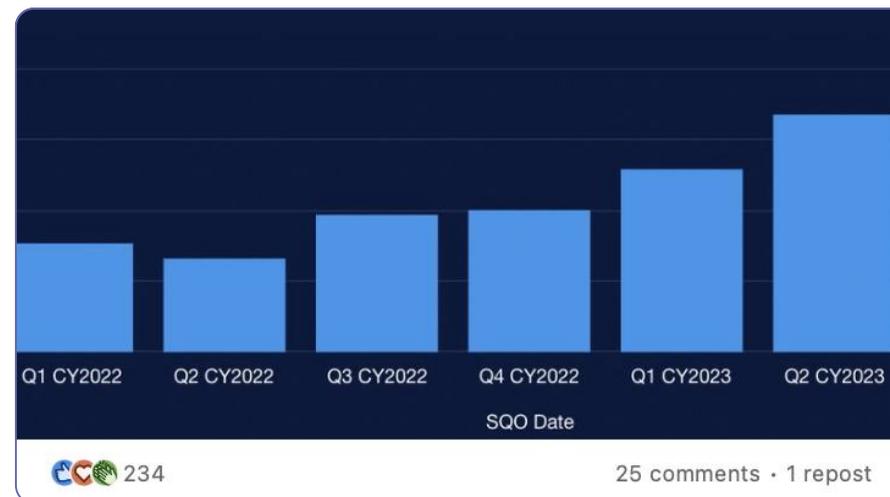
It is harder and it is more uncertain, but the payback is going to be well worth it.

The graph below shows the growth in our marketing generated pipeline across the last 6 quarters, which tracks a very nice curve against the rolling out of our own/new way of doing b2b marketing.

The best part about this graph is that our budget has actually not grown over the last 4 quarters, this growth is really driven by the compounding impact of our create demand playbook building momentum.

And all during a time of needing to do more with less and economic uncertainty.

I love learning from others, and constantly want to push the boundaries of what we do and innovate, but there is a critical skill in learning what to try and test and how best to implement that into your business. As well as what parts to ignore and deprioritise.



This is something I truly believe in. If you want to have an impact within your own business environment and circumstances, and you want to be doing better than your competitors, then you have to be doing something different.

You have to be forging your own path and coming up with the best strategies and tactics for your specific business needs.

As much as I wish I could say as you read this diary, 'here's the silver bullet', there isn't one

You can take ideas from what we have done and test them for yourselves, but realistically, without adapting them to what fits your business - it would never work the same way for you as it did us, because every company is different.

So it comes down to finding a process you can deploy each and every time you need to find a solution to a problem or start up a new marketing program.

One that allows you to get under the hood of your organisation, understand what is happening now, what you want for your future state and what needs to change in order for you to get there.

Then building your own playbooks as you go.

We've done this countless times:

- Pivoting our SEO strategy towards the money keyword strategy playbook.
- We moved up-market, targeting enterprise accounts - of which we have created another playbook for including personalised microsites, in-person events and dinners, plus other offers such as 1:1 sales training (I'll cover this later!)
- Our demand generation content playbook is another great example - having a dedicated demand generation content role is quite a rarity. And we're always innovating on this framework and team setup.
- And obviously, the biggy... our demand generation playbook.

Building our own playbooks has been a part of everything we've done at Cognism and I attribute so much of our success to this.

I think one of my favourite things about this approach though is that it attracts talent.

Because we openly share our journey of building our own playbooks in public, this has led to quite a few applicants coming to us, hoping to work for us.

Which has only reinforced this team culture of forging our own path.

You might have noticed, however, that a few different times during this diary, I've explained how we were running our playbooks at one stage. But we've already updated them and are doing something different.

That's because our environment is always changing, the goalposts change, our circumstances change or we learn something new that changes our approach.

Anyone who's worked in start-ups or scale-ups knows that change is part and parcel of business as usual.

How we react as a marketing org to changes in the market, results we see from tests or any research we've conducted makes all the difference. And we can't be precious about what we need to abandon if we learn there's a better way.

ENTRY 14

Minimal viable tests and minimal viable products



Alice de Courcy • 1st

Group Chief Marketing Officer at Cognism - Revenue M...

10mo • 🌐



Stop guessing what will work, start asking.

I recently had a great example of wanting to validate an idea/spend, where there were a lot of differing opinions on the matter amongst stakeholders.

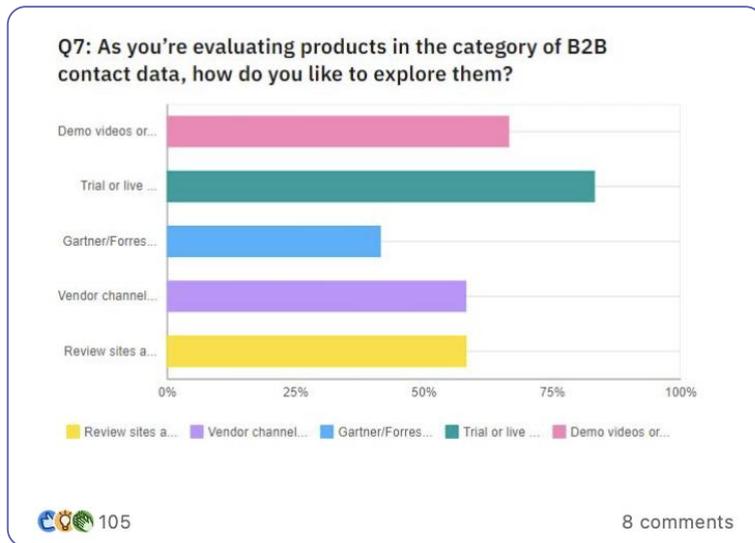
It can be very easy to get led by 'what has worked before', 'we used to do this at X, have we tried it' and 'everyone else is doing it'.

But the good news is that these decisions no longer need to be made in silo from your target customers and can now actually be led by them.

Tools like [Wynter](#) exist exactly for this purpose.

Paying 1K to ask my prospective customers and ask them, vs sinking spend based on the basis of opinion or bias is 100% worth it.

I will let you guess what we were evaluating in this survey...



'Done is better than perfect' is one of my mantras

Of course, we always want to be producing things to the highest possible quality - however, often the benefit for getting something out into the world to test the waters is bigger than having it be perfect right away.

Once it's out there, you can start to get feedback on it.

There's no point spending ages on a project, getting it to what you're guessing is a perfect state, only to learn when you put it out that it doesn't have the intended impact.

Wynter can help to alleviate the pressure of validating an idea.

Because you can hear straight from the horse's mouth whether or not a message resonates. And how they'd want to consume that message.

It's the best of both worlds. You can act right away to validate an idea before you've had to spend any major time or energy putting it out.

We've used Wynter to:

- Validate campaign ideas.
- Find out where our ICP gets their information from.
- Understand search behaviour for SEO.
- Test landing page and home page messaging.
- Learn about a new market segment.

So there are loads of ways that we've tested the market before we made a move. And ultimately this helps to drive our strategies.

- What are the next keywords we should focus on?
- Where should we spend our time during audits?
- What content should we create and in what formats?

It removes the guesswork that could have led to wasted time and budget.

TEAM ENTRY 3

Being a woman in C-suite in a fast moving scale-up



James Isilay · 1st

CEO @ Cognism | Helping salespeople find phone numbers that ...

[Visit my website](#)

6mo · Edited ·

Happy International Women's Day. At **Cognism** we believe diversity drives innovation and today spotlight the talented women on our team who lead with courage, innovate with purpose, and inspire us all to aim higher.

The majority of **Cognism**'s C-Suite are women with the CTO - **Ivana Zuber**, CFO - **Jennifer Grunebaum**, CPO - **Michelle Bradbury (Slezak)**, CMO - **Alice de Courcy** and CLO - **Elizabeth Rushforth** and our Chief of Staff - **Antonia Williams** all contributing to making **Cognism** an incredible place to work. At **Cognism**, talented women excel at every organizational level, and we remain committed to fostering an environment that propels their careers forward.

As leaders we need to continue to strive to support diversity throughout the tech and sales industries. One number to just highlight how much more still needs to be done is that women-founded start-ups raised only 1.9% of all VC funds in 2022, a drop from 2021. The community can do more.



248

5 comments · 2 reposts

This subject has probably become more topical than ever over the last 12 months as I had my first child.

It was challenging to down tools and step away from work as we were entering Q4 (which is planning and budget season). Accompanying this there was a lot of change happening in the C-suite at the time.

Admittedly I didn't step back for very long, getting back to work after 3 months (which in the UK is quite a short amount of time to take off

But I wanted to be able to continue being part of key meetings and joining final stage interviews for core marketing hires

Looking back I definitely felt a pressure to return to work and reclaim my seat at the table.

It was a very difficult juggling act between new mum mode and CMO mode.

If you've fought to get to the CMO seat, to maintain tenure and position within your organisation, it can be very hard to step away from it.

While I often wonder if I was setting a bad example for other women at work by my swift return, I've sought to make sure that the unease and pressure I may have felt won't be shared by others.

And I should say that a lot of this pressure and unease was fully self inflicted!

I've also had to introduce new coping mechanisms for my imposter syndrome since becoming a mother.

I can't always rely on working the longest hours, because I have a little human who also needs quite a lot from me.

I think the last 12 months has been a 'growing up' period for me in the CMO seat. It's been about being able to prioritise my impact in the most important areas, setting myself some new boundaries between work and home life, and importantly, finding my voice more.

One great unlock for me this year has been about approaching any situation head on.

I've learnt to be direct, to address things upfront and without fluff. It saves time and it stops any resentment or misunderstanding gaining traction by going unresolved or unaddressed for any length of time.

It also prevents narratives forming in my head.

ENTRY 15

The Demand Gen Playbook



Alice de Courcy · 1st
Group Chief Marketing Officer at Cognism - Revenue M...
9mo · 🌐

2nd best month of marketing pipeline build...ever...in August...in a tricky climate

And you can now take a closer look under the hood of our marketing engine that is driving this success.

Today we are setting live the next 3 modules (paid ads, media machine, content strategy) of our DG Playbook.

These new modules will teach you:

- 👉 How to build a media machine for B2B
- 👉 Our complete paid ads set-up and strategy for DG
- 👉 How to build a DG content strategy & strategic narrative

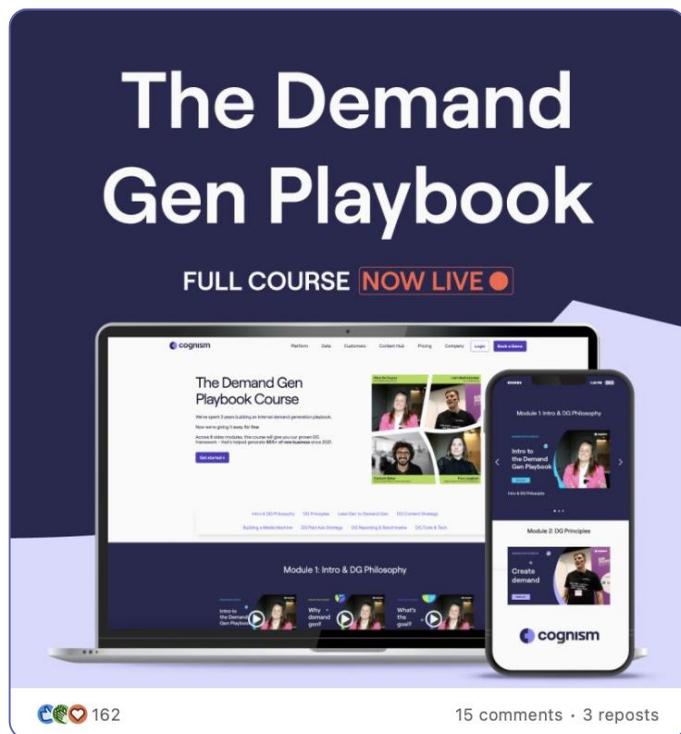
The lessons are all about execution.

And are packed with tactical DG gems that took us years to stumble on...

- The LinkedIn setup that increased our ROAS by 2x in 7 months
- How we increased our Facebook Ad pipeline by 500% in Q1
- The Google Ads tweaks that boosted conversion rates - by 3x this year
- How we used narrative to grow our podcast by 110% in 8 months
- And how we used it to grow our newsletter by 88%
- And to grow our live webinar attendance by 73%

With plenty more topics to come in the next few weeks!

If you want to level up your Demand Gen knowledge, go check it out - link in normal place below 📌



The Demand Gen Playbook is one of our most successful DG campaigns to date.

The aim was to build the the first and most complete demand gen resource for B2B marketers who were fed up with traditional B2B activity. In usual Cognism style, we wanted to deliver it for free, ungated.

We wanted to collect the disparate ideas of demand gen, found across 1000s of podcasts, blogs, webinars and LinkedIn posts and distil them down into one actionable framework.

Allowing users to learn our step-by-step process to implement a framework that's already proven.

It was a collection of around 45 lessons, all lasting around 5-10 minutes, delivered by our internal marketing experts as part of an on-demand online course.

This was a big lift to put together. If no-one engaged with it, it would've been a lot of sunk time and effort, and no reward.

But we knew this asset could provide our audience with a lot of value.

So it all came down to how we distributed this content. How would our ICP know it existed?

We really lent into the messaging around this being the first course of its kind, collecting together the dribs and drabs of demand gen knowledge into one, easy-to-consume course.

We emphasised that it was a unique offer, giving us clear messaging that would hopefully accelerate distribution.

Once we landed on this positioning, we needed a creative concept to deliver the message.

We decided to use one of our favourite tactics to generate some interest and drive engagement for the course - comedy!

I've already covered in entry 10 why comedy is such a useful tool in B2B marketing, and we love to incorporate it into our launches.

In this instance, we did that with a launch video. Here's a screenshot from the original campaign plan describing the video brief:

Demand Gen Playbook

Launch 2: Lower lift, 2 videos launch



Launch is anchored to two video assets

VIDEO 1: 'Asking marketers demand gen questions' teaser

This video focuses on articulating the problem we are solving in a humorous way. Like the '50 people, 1 question' video, a number of the Cognism team will enter on screen and take the hotseat. They will be asked:

- "Where did you learn Demand Gen?"
- "How do you make a Demand Gen plan?"

The video will cut back and forth to clueless, cliché answers. We will end the video by saying there is a problem, and that comes to an end tomorrow (seed launch).

READ FULL DRAFT SCRIPT

VIDEO 2: Buzzy Demand Gen Playbook promo video

More of a straight promo announcing the course and pushing people to sign up for pre-interest list. Should articulate the positioning from this deck, what they'll learn, and the fact it's completely free and ungated for everyone.



Tactics used to drive interest:

- Type 3 humour/comedy
- Pre-interest list: Sign up to get a link straight to the course
- Scarcity driven offer - first 300 to sign up will all be automatically entered into a prize draw. The winner will get free 1-1 demand gen training from the Cognism team.

Essentially, we wanted to simulate an interview style video whereby we'd 'ask marketers demand gen questions'. Such as:

"Where did you learn Demand Gen?"

"How do you make a Demand Gen plan?"

The video runs through a number of cliché or downright dumb answers.

Highlighting the fact that there is no one place where marketers can go for this information.

The video ends by seeding the launch of our Demand Gen Playbook and offers a pre-launch sign up link.

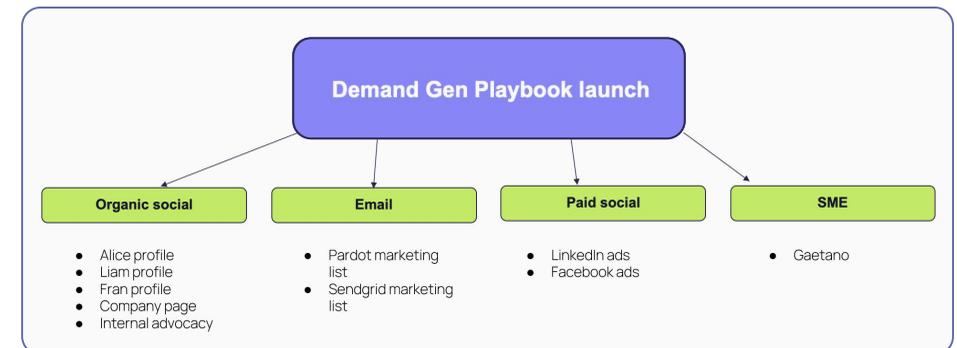
In the short time between the launch video and launching the Playbook, we had around 1,400 people on our waitlist.

I think another relevant aspect of the campaign - which came a little later, when people were consuming the course - was we built word of mouth into the course.

We had a video halfway through the course asking people to share why they enjoyed the course on social (and that my team would give them a shout-out if they did).

That word of mouth tactic gave us priceless social proof that we could then use in the Playbook's promotion.

We also had a number of other activities including organic social posts, paid social, email marketing and SMEs posting about the launch. All this helped to compound the early success signs.



Since the Playbook's launch, we've had 60,000+ page views on the course homepage, which has translated to \$1.9million in influenced revenue.

BONUS ENTRY 3

C-suite dynamics

In my Diary of a First-Time CMO, I talked about how important it is to speak the different languages of your C-suite. Being fluent in CFO, CEO, COO and so on.

Because each of them cares about very different things and is responsible for vastly different things. So you need to adapt the way you speak to them.

As Cognism has scaled, this has been taken to a whole new level and has been a big learning curve for me over the past few years.

As the now most tenured member of the Cognism C-suite team outside of the co-founders, I've seen a lot of change happen and had to form a lot of new relationships as a result.

I've also had to come to terms with a fundamental mindset switch, understanding that 'my team' is now the C-suite and not actually my marketing organisation.

In my day-to-day, we invest in a lot more time together as a C-suite than we ever have before.

We have a Monday strategic call every week, where we focus only on strategic items.

Then, on a Thursday, we have a tactical call which sees us get more in the weeds of the day-to-day.

On top of this, we commit to a minimum of monthly 1-2-1s with every C-suite member and of course with some they're far more regular. In my case finance, revenue and product are weekly.

Additionally we have quarterly off sites which have a team cohesion element, as well as strategic sessions.

And we have the support of a coach to help us as individuals and advise us on improving challenging relationships.

ENTRY 16

Creating enterprise-specific content



Alice de Courcy · 1st

Group Chief Marketing Officer at Cognism - Revenue M...

8mo ·



eBooks can work...

Like all things in marketing it is not a 0 sum game.

I enjoyed this trip down memory lane with **Tom Bangay** discussing how you could make eBooks work as a tactic by rethinking the way you do them, what you use them for and how you distribute them.

eBook is just another name for a type of long form content asset, and it does not need to be gated.

If you can reimagine how you run more traditional marketing plays, they can very much still fit into a modern demand generation playbook.



How to market to enterprise accounts has been one of the biggest learning curves we've undergone over the past year or so.

When we decided to move up-market and start actively targeting enterprise accounts, we had some assumptions about how we could go about this - but we had nothing concrete. This was new and uncharted territory for us.

I'm sure based on my previous diary entries that you won't be surprised when I tell you what we decided to do first. A Wynter test!

We ran message tests to each of our personas in an attempt to better understand this market segment's needs, pain points and status.

For our marketing persona, I had a hunch that our usual demand generation content wouldn't fly. Because generally, enterprise organisations are still running lead generation plays.

It's much easier to change the way you do things in a scaling or smaller organisation, where processes and thinking are much less entrenched.

And our Wynter test only further validated this belief. In fact, we found that the definitions for what demand generation was within the enterprise segments of our audience were wide. In most cases it was actually lead generation lightly veiled with some demand generation language.

Most were still creating long-form eBook content to put behind a gate, and then passing content leads onto their sales teams.

So we came up with an idea. A bit tongue in cheek. To create the ultimate eBook on how to write eBooks. But applying all of our demand generation principles to it

In other words, we created an eBook the way that we would do an eBook now, if we were to run an eBook play. And the content essentially explained how we created it and why it's better to do it the demand gen way:

- Ungated.
- Value packed with insights from subject matter experts.
- Unique and original.
- Contained multiple formats, e.g. we had an eBook podcast mini series plus a video series on YouTube explaining each chapter (in case the user learned better by watching or listening versus reading).

The idea being that if you give people the content they want to read, that gives them real value, then they're more likely to have a positive experience with you and remember you in future.

Versus the old-school way of giving them an experience that doesn't fit their intent (e.g. they downloaded your eBook on "top sales trends of 2024" and then got a cold call from a rep trying to sell them a sales intelligence platform).

Those who aren't in the market to buy are more likely to be annoyed by the premature call. Without a business need, you can't be persuaded into purchasing.

Now, I still believe that the rationale for this project was on the right lines based on the information we had at the time. But this eBook campaign didn't exactly cause any fireworks.

Ultimately, I think it came down to the fact that eBooks are so well established as an activity, that most people are going to continue doing them the way they always have done.

And those who want to dip their toes into demand gen are going to do it in a more radically different way to a slightly altered eBook approach.

When I was reviewing what content had performed the best with this segment, it was actually things like the CMO Diary and other content discussing our journey to \$50M ARR.

I'd have assumed that these numbers were too small to be of interest to enterprise accounts, and therefore discounted them as content options.

But this was an important lesson to learn. We don't need to make 'enterprise-specific' content. We don't need an enterprise-specific media machine.

Instead, we just need to make sure that we create content that's generally interesting, valuable and engaging.

We also need to keep a close eye on the data to ensure that it's generating engagement among the accounts we want to have in our orbit.

If you're interested, here are the pages that attract the most enterprise account engagement for us right now:

→ Cold Calling Report

→ Fix your Funnel

Neither of these campaigns were specifically built for an enterprise audience. They're just positioned in a way that speaks to this audience in the ads directed to them.



Check out the ultimate eBook on producing eBooks here

ENTRY 17

Fresh paid acquisition leadership



Alice de Courcy · 1st
Group Chief Marketing Officer at Cognism - Revenue Markete...
6mo · 🌐

Would you like to work in a team that is pushing the boundaries of b2b marketing daily?

Responsible for multiple brands, substantial budgets and rewarded for innovation?

Fully embracing demand gen and waving a happy goodbye to lead gen?

I am hiring for a critical role in my team, looking for our next superstar to run our Global Paid function.

Full spec 📌

   202

24 comments · 8 reposts

  Like  Comment  Repost  Send

You might remember in my last diary that I'd talked about finding our unicorn marketer to fill this paid position, meaning we could bring paid in-house and away from agencies.

It was great; we could take some of the pressure off the DG Managers who were covering a lot of the work that the agencies couldn't do. And we had someone creating a dedicated internal strategy for paid.

Unfortunately the only constant in life is change - and this VP of Paid decided to pursue another opportunity. So we were back on the hunt for someone else to take the hot seat.

Luckily for me, this time it didn't take as long to find someone. Our new hire into this role had heard of Cognism before. He had been following our content and knew all about our demand gen approach.

[\(This has been a theme with some of our best hires!\)](#)

Which meant he was able to get up to speed very quickly, as we didn't need to teach him the Cognism DG mindset.

Here are two quick wins that Liam Collins, our new VP of Paid Acquisition, was able to achieve in the first 160 days of being in seat:

1. Cleaned up our Google Ads

When Liam conducted an audit of our ads account, he found various cases of 3-4 ads competing with each other which he could simplify and reduce.

He also:

- Segmented out match types.
- Updated our keyword groups.
- Refreshed our ad copy so it was aligned with intent.
- Updated landing pages to have better relevance.

Really going back to basics and thinking about what the search intent of the user would be.

By improving the customer journey in this way, we improved conversions by 600%.

2. Restructured our remarketing campaigns to last 90 days

One of our company goals at this time was to grow our mid-market segment. Liam looked into the data measuring how long on average it took for mid-market accounts to get to closed won after entering our CRM.

On average, it was 60 days. But our remarketing campaigns were only set up for 30 days. So there was a huge opportunity to better engage with MM accounts.

Not only this, but Liam broadened our remarketing campaigns to cover those decision-makers who might visit our website as part of a wider research phase.

In other words, we know that at a certain stage, MM accounts go away and do their own research on us. And some people in the accounts that we hadn't prospected before will visit our website

Our remarketing is now setup to include the wider buying committee, building trust and credibility.

And that's had a massive impact! Since restructuring, we've seen a 150% uplift in conversion and our CPL has come down significantly.

Quarter on quarter, we only spent 1% more on LinkedIn remarketing but reached 406% more of our target audience, with 228% more impressions and 196% greater clicks to the website.

This was caused by our larger audience pool and switch to traffic objective.

More importantly, we generated an incredible 131% more bottom-of-funnel conversions for 56% less.

It was also very low-lift. Assessing a campaign that was underperforming, extending the time frame, broadening the buying committee and refreshing the creatives. It wasn't a particularly difficult or complicated thing to do but has made the world of difference.

The lesson is:

Sometimes the biggest impacts are in the basics!

BONUS ENTRY 4

Driving pipeline and revenue with aligned DG and paid teams

Cognism is a marketing-centric business. Our CEO understands and trusts marketing – most importantly, knows the impact marketing can and does have on generating business.

Therefore we tend to get pretty substantial budgets to play with. And a lot of this goes into our paid media activity. Our paid team is then entrusted to try to get us the best return of investment with this budget that they can.

I see my paid team as an in-house agency. They work alongside other teams to facilitate the activity needed.

And the team that paid work with most often is Demand Gen. For context, the Demand Gen Managers are split by region or segment:

→ EMEA (Mid market and SMB)

→ NAM (Mid market and SMB)

→ Enterprise (Global)

So each of these DG Managers act like mini ‘CEOs’ for their segment with different goals, targets, budgets and work cross-functionally with other teams, including paid, to ensure we have what we need to reach our goal.

In other words, it’s almost like each of the DG Managers is a client and the Paid team is an agency servicing all these clients – but everyone is under the same brand.

I also see the Demand Generation team as a bit of a bridge between the other teams.

They are the go-between with Product and Paid making sure that the right messaging is incorporated into the creative and copy for ads. And ultimately that everyone is aligned and pushing for the same goals.

Here are some of the ways that we ensure our Paid team and DG team are aligned:

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The monthly reporting is co-owned.

We have a DG x Paid monthly report whereby the two teams have to share the progress and performance of the previous month or quarter. This ties their destinies together.

This also means they have a shared view of the state of play which makes it much easier to identify the places where focus is needed

Regular meetings to close the feedback loop

Paid and DG are constantly in touch to share results and consider optimisations that should be made.

This also isn't just meetings between Paid and DG, this is also regular meetings with Sales to ensure that the knock on impact is having the desired effect. This might sound obvious but in so many organisations this is neglected

These calls also allow us to highlight important factors to adjust our paid efforts with, such as: are we losing deals to a particular competitor at the moment? Or is there a particular pain point that is being referenced this quarter?

Content campaigns are marked out with deadlines in the content roadmap

Any content coming from DG Content Managers that could fuel paid activity is mapped out in advance with deadlines in a calendar.

DG Managers can look ahead at what's to come then plan their creatives with paid.

New projects are properly briefed

Any new initiatives out with 'business as usual' have to have a comprehensive brief.

This is to make sure:

- There's a defined reason as to why this work is being proposed
- We know how it will be measured
- And generally avoiding 'random acts of marketing'

These briefs look like this:

Test Exec Summary: T1 & T2 Experiment		cognism	
Test Summary:		Success KPIs & measurement	
Hypothesis & objective:			
Length of experiment:		Systems/tools used	
Sample size and budget		Next steps	

ENTRY 18

Marketing (and parenting) are not one-size-fits-all



Alice de Courcy · 1st

Group Chief Marketing Officer at Cognism - Revenue Markete...

4mo · 🌐



Motherhood and marketing are not so different.

As I prepare to return to work and leave my 3.5 month old I've been reflecting on the whirlwind that is becoming a new mum.

What has stood out the most has been the number of opinions of so many on parts of motherhood I had never anticipated. Turns out there are a lot of experts out there!

Anything from:

How I gave birth

How I choose to feed my baby

How I approach his sleep

How and when I return to work

There is only one other place where I have encountered so many 'expert' opinions and that is in marketing.

So I have got very good at nodding, thanking and very selectively choosing what pieces of advice I decide to take onboard.

It turns out a career in marketing trained me very well to be a mum!

Last of the mum content from me for a while as I return to work on Monday and return back to my normal demand generation and CMO content!



343

47 comments · 2 reposts

For any of you readers that didn't know, I was on maternity leave at the end of 2023 and beginning of 2024.

And when I wrote this post, I'd become quite frustrated with the amount of unsolicited advice I'd been given about how to raise my newborn son, including unhelpful comments around my decision to return to work after 3 months.

Okay, so maybe parenting and marketing aren't so similar in a lot of ways. But I could draw the comparison of experiences I've had when it comes to 'experts' and advice I've been given in both situations.

Because everyone has their own 'winning formula' for both, and are desperate to tell you you're wrong if you do something different to them.

So I've learned to nod along - because I'm sure they mean well - but ultimately I will make my own choices, based on what I think is best for my child, or for my marketing team.

Every family or marketing organisation has their nuances and you need to be led by the data you have in front of you. No one external to the business, or to your family, will have the data that you do.

Therefore they can't make as informed decisions as you can.

There will of course be times where listening to the advice of others will help. Sometimes they can spot something you didn't, or help you see things from another perspective.

But if you're always listening to everyone else, you'll be overloaded with options for things and you'll never see a plan through.

No two children are the same, and no two marketing departments are the same.

Don't get me wrong, I love that there's a supportive, open and transparent community on LinkedIn sharing valuable insights.

But I also think it's important to have independent thought, make choices based on the needs of the business and not do everything you've seen people talk about online.

Just because someone says it's a good idea, doesn't always mean it is.

My advice is to be your own filter when it comes to the advice you take.

ENTRY 19

Improve user experience with enrichment



Alice de Courcy · 1st
Group Chief Marketing Officer at Cognism - Revenue Markete...
3mo · 🌐

Good campaigns require great data.

And good lead to sales conversions come from having instant access to quality data.

It's often not the glamorous work or the shiny new creative that has the biggest impact or that can make the biggest difference.

Sometimes it's the mechanics. It's the behind the scenes stuff.

We have been drinking our own champagne on this for a long time at Cognism and now we are launching it to the world so other marketers can benefit.

For the first time, marketers can tap into our global database to automate the enrichment of their Salesforce data. In two ways:

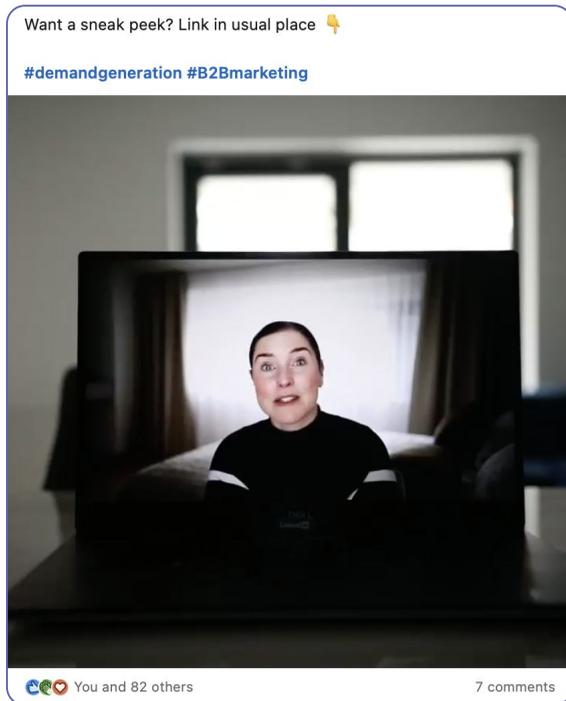
1) Scheduled Enrichment > checks and updates all your Salesforce data at a set frequency of your choosing

2) Instant Enrichment > speed up lead to sales handover, reduce forms and prevent data issues by appending and correcting new data as it enters your CRM

So if you found yourself despairing at your CRM during annual planning...

Cognism Enrich can help.

- ✓ Prevent dirty data from ruining reports & measurement
- ✓ Ensure your segments and lists remain accurate year-round for campaign success
- ✓ Cut forms to minimal fields and maximise your conversions
- ✓ Fix data-caused routing, scoring and lead follow-up issues



Enrichment has been a game changer for us internally. And no, not just because we have an enrichment product - even though we do...!

We use three different forms of enrichment, form enrichment, instant enrichment within the CRM, and scheduled enrichment. Cognism runs all three types as every layer of enrichment ultimately provides an additional layer of information.

1. Form enrichment

This is the holy grail from a marketing operations perspective.

Essentially, when someone fills in a form, like an inbound demo request form, we can limit the number of questions we have to ask to get the information we need. Why?

Because enrichment can fill in a lot of the gaps for us.

This also works in cases such as market research or surveys. It allows us to reduce the friction without sacrificing the information quality.

We enrich the following data points:

- Company size.
- Sales headcount.
- Industry.
- Annual revenue.
- Company name.
- Department.
- Job title.
- Seniority.

2. Instant enrichment

Form enrichment on the fly can be technically tricky, so in some cases we'll enrich data just after a form has been filled out.

For example, when a lead doesn't book a meeting or instantly select a time with a rep, which happens around 30% of the time.

You can get additional information on your prospects through enrichment and ensure those who are harder to reach are followed up by the right person.

This is also particularly useful in cases such as monthly reporting. We can use enrichment to see who's engaging with our content and media machine.

For example, we can enrich the list of people's demographics attending our live events to assess if we're reaching the right audiences, e.g. are they from our target industries, company sizes or are they the right level of seniority?

The great thing about this is that we don't need to compromise the ease of access to information in order to understand if we're building the right type of content for our ICP. We can do all of that work in the background.

3. Scheduled enrichment

We continuously use enrichment to keep our data up to date.

Sometimes, people might input out-of-date data or misspell a company name. Then, the data quality is compromised.

By regularly updating and cross-referencing with enrichment, we can make sure our data is as accurate as possible.

This helps us to provide our customers with the most up to date data and also means we can access the right data to make important marketing decisions.

Enrichment has been a big unlock for me in turning around a user's experience when they interact with Cognism. Rather than having to ask for lots of information upfront to get the data we need to properly tailor customer experiences, we can do that work behind the scenes and ultimately give everyone a more friction-free experience.

It also enables us to gather insights on our media machine and measure performance based on ICP audience interaction versus net new growth.

BONUS ENTRY 5

Wearing many hats: Strategic vs operational

This year has been unique for me as a CMO.

Despite the company continuing to scale and grow, I've actually been closer to the weeds than I'd expected upon my return after maternity leave.

Because 2024 has been the year of marketing babies, most of whom have been boys!

Lots of the Cognism team have been off for maternity or paternity leave over the course of the last year, meaning a shift in who reports into who in the meantime.

As a result I've taken on more direct management of team members and hand-in-hand, much more of the day-to-day.

This, coupled with a climate of doing more with less, means I've spent much of the year diving very closely back into the details of our marketing engine.

One minute I may be editing copy for a landing page and the next I could be presenting quarterly performance numbers to the board or talking about company strategy.

I've gone back and forth on this over time, but I think I'm now prepared to stand loud and proud as an operational CMO who can switch into strategy mode as and when required.

I'm just as happy discussing the nuances of our lead routing set-up with the operations team, as I am discussing the pros and cons of our market positioning.

The difficulty is you're pulled in a lot of different directions and need to become very good at context switching. Beyond that, the benefits of being in the details far outweigh any downside here in my opinion.

I think in a world where resources are harder to fund and efficiency is everything, this type of CMO will be required more and more (or at least I hope!).

ENTRY 20

Launching long-form content that isn't a gated eBook



Alice de Courcy · 1st

Group Chief Marketing Officer at Cognism - Revenue Markete...

1mo · 🌐



How do you write and launch a report that isn't something from the 2010 marketing playbook?

Have something meaningful, unique and different to say: data backed research is a great way to do this.

Ungate it! You spent all this time and effort creating something impactful, why would you then make it harder for people to consume and get value from?

Expertise. A report is only so useful. What makes it actionable is the next step. How do you take the learnings and apply them into your day to day to drive better outcomes? Expert POV's can help you do this.

Focus just as much on the way you are going to launch and campaign the report as you do on the writing of it. And that does not just mean sticking it on LinkedIn Ads and paying to distribute it.

Think about the format in which it is produced. We all learn differently, so cater to that in order to maximise engagement.

Think through the customer journey. Think of the report as a product. What happens once someone lands on the page? What are the following actions you want to drive towards? And no, it should not be a cold outreach sequence!

Check out our latest industry research into cold calling in 2024 to see how we have applied our DG lens to a 2010 tactic.



Ilse V Rensburg and 93 others

13 comments · 1 repost

We don't run eBook content download plays at Cognism anymore and here's why:

- Prospects are used to the process; they know what's coming and are wary of being caught in a low-value content trap followed by premature pushy sales calls. They're much more sceptical about giving away their contact details.
- Downloading an eBook ≠ intent to buy. Passing these leads over to sales isn't likely to spark a productive sales conversation. In fact, the sales rep might end up hearing responses like 'what eBook...?'
- Prospects are moving towards finding their information in other formats, e.g. in Slack communities or on video or podcasts.
- We discovered that our content leads close at a drastically lower rate versus our inbound demo requests.

While we have a completely ungated content engine - we do still create long-form content.

Because there's nothing wrong with providing your ICP with a value-led, long-form content asset packed with insights and useful information

The main point of difference here is how accessible it is. We don't want people to have friction before engaging with our content. Because we want our ICP to have the shortest time to value possible.

We want them to see content they're interested to read, and for them to actually read it.

Adding in the friction of a gate means they're more likely to click off the content. Most people want to protect their contact details and avoid a call from a sales rep, right?

Our aim is to give our audience value and build trust that we're a high quality source of information. We don't ask for anything in return. We want to be somewhere people choose to go to.

Realistically, pumping out gated eBooks every other month isn't likely to thrill and excite your potential future customers.

And it likely isn't maximising the impact you could have with eBook activity.

For example, if you change your goal from gathering MQLs (which we found would never close at a high rate anyway) to engagement from your ICP, you reprioritise content quality.

(When you want them to continue reading, it needs to be good enough for them to want to continue reading! When you have a gate and all you need is MQLs, all you need to do is make the outside of the content look appealing.)

It also makes it easier to focus on the readership's quality too. Focusing on the 'who' rather than the 'how many'.

With gated content, you want to get as many people inputting their email addresses as possible so you can pass them onto sales. But in doing this, you often sacrifice the quality of the people being passed over.

A huge proportion of them might not be who you want to attract.

Whereas if you were to optimise the content quality with the aim of bringing in a specific persona, your messaging can get much more relevant. Offering more value and ultimately attracting the attention of the people you want to bring into your orbit.

ENTRY 21

The evolution of the demand generation content marketer



Alice de Courcy · 1st

Group Chief Marketing Officer at Cognism - Revenue Markete...

1mo · 🌐



You need to condition teams for change.

Anyone who's worked in start-ups or scale-ups knows that change is part and parcel of business as usual.

How we react as a marketing org to changes in the market, results we see from tests or any research we've conducted makes all the difference. And we can't be precious about what we need to abandon if we learn there's a better way.

Which means it's my job to condition my team for change. Like any form of conditioning it is built over time and it takes practice.

For example, very recently I came to the conclusion that how we had our demand generation function set up wasn't the most streamlined or logical way to achieve OKRs with what the business looks like today.

For context, this was the old way:

- Demand Gen Managers and Demand Gen Content Managers were paired together in pods, working on a persona, e.g. Marketing, Sales and RevOps.

- This worked well for a long time as it allowed them to become persona experts, which really drove our demand creation efforts.

- However it did mean each of these teams tended to become siloed and attention was split in too many competing ways.

So coming back from Mat leave and reviewing our goals for 2024, as a team, we decided we needed to pivot.

So we restructured the team:

- Our DG managers now own a specific region or segment and DG content is a standalone team, working like an agency to support them.

- When our DG managers have ideas for campaigns for their region or segment, they submit a request to the DG content team.

- The DG content team now owns the content process from end-to-end, allowing for more control and oversight.

This change was made very quickly and the transition was relatively short.

Additionally it was met with positivity from the team vs resistance.

Why? I believe that over the last 5 years we have as a team learned to condition ourselves to expect change and to see it as an opportunity.

Importantly we always bring the team along with us in any pivots we make. We allow space for thorough review and brainstorming, giving people the ability to think through all the implications fully.

Within 2 weeks of making this switch each team member had built a revised plan and started executing.

Change does not need to be daunting if managed correctly, and building that muscle as you grow and scale is really important.

You and 103 others

12 comments

Having a demand generation content team is quite unusual – so again, there’s no blueprint on how to get this function right.

Which means we have had to develop our own playbook for this over time. There have been a number of iterations:

In the early days, the DG content team was kind of an extension of the SEO team. They worked within personas, creating content targeting specific keywords relevant for the persona.

But I felt we were missing out on some of the more journalistic-style, thought leadership content.

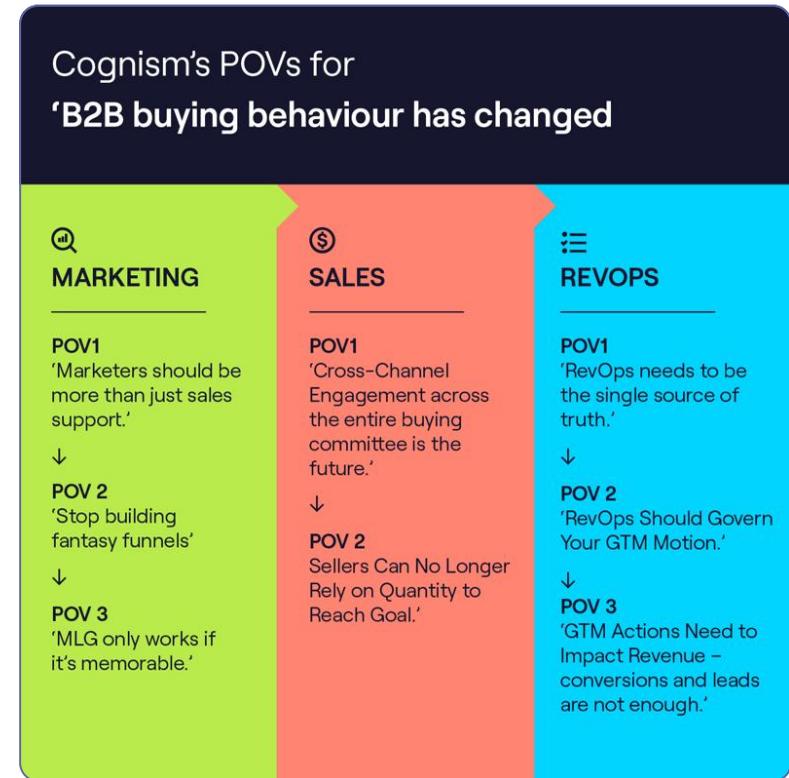
So this later evolved to have DG content managers within each of the persona pods acting more like journalists. Deeply understanding the personas and going out to find the stories these personas care about.

This was when we worked with Todd and Obaid on implementing the Easy Mode framework (see [diary entry 2 for the breakdown!](#)).

Easy Mode had us creating a ‘realm of relevancy’ which was all of the things that we could talk about, that fed into our wider POV (point of view).

Our company-wide POV = B2B buyer behaviour has changed.

This would then filter down into complementary POVs per persona, for example:



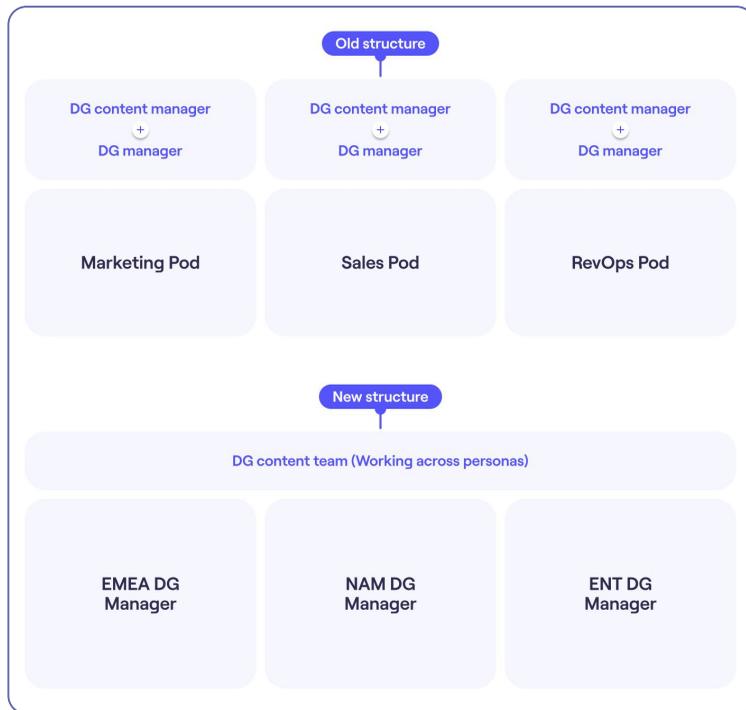
DG content managers spent a lot of time creating thought leadership around these specific points of view.

But after a while, I felt we were moving away from what had led us to be successful in the past. And we had found we were over-engineering our content process.

I wanted to bring us back to basics and focus again on what we wanted to be known for.

Which brings us to today's team structure and philosophy.

We have our DG content team acting as an agency. They're a stand alone department rather than working in persona-based pods.



Rather than creating persona-based content in silos, the DG team now works across personas to create content. The DG managers are then tasked with distributing it to their designated segment or region.

The content is mapped out on a roadmap so it's clear to the DG managers what's coming and when.

Each of the personas has a core thing that we want to be known for:

- Marketing = the switch from lead gen to demand gen.
- Sales = cold calling.
- RevOps = European data quality and expanding into new markets.

And within each of these topic areas, we have 'big rocks', which are heavy-lift content campaigns.

Lead gen to demand gen = The diary of a first time CMO + DG Playbook
 Cold calling = SDR Zone and cold calling report
 EU data quality and expansions = Fix your funnel and the ultimate guide to new market expansion

We aim to revive these campaigns continuously over time. For example, when we update our internal processes, we'll update the DG Playbook course on how we do demand gen at Cognism.

We had to overcome one issue recently, which was a matter of productivity. Big rock content can take many months to complete.

But that was resulting in a lack of regular content being produced.

To avoid having months and months go by without output, we came up with this idea:

Rather than have the big rocks lead the way, flip this on its head.

What content do we need for the big rock that can be created in instalments, building towards a big rock?

For example, this diary will take a number of months to write. But we can't just not output other content in the meantime. So what are the themes of this diary content likely to be?

- New processes we have developed since the last diary, such as our ABM strategy >>> Create blog content on our ABM strategy that can then feed into the content we add into the diary.
- Our experiences expanding into other regions >>> Record podcasts on this subject which can later fuel these chapters of the diary.
- Team set up >>> regularly updating my LinkedIn with how we've restructured the team. Posts will then be filtered into my diary.

This way, we can ensure that we're creating content on a regular basis that feeds into what we want to be known for, while also building towards a big rock campaign.

Change can be difficult for some to accept, but as I mentioned in my post, my team is well-conditioned for change.

We've gone through a number of iterations based on the data we have and the needs of the business at that point in time.

But this evolution has been necessary and without it, we wouldn't have come to our current setup. I'm confident that this can be a really successful content process.

BONUS ENTRY 6

Working with my CEO

Feedback from my last diary told me that one of the most popular entries was about how I learned to speak the different languages of the C-suite.

In other words, learning what each person in the C-suite cares about and the kind of language they use in order to better communicate with them.

Because each of them heads up very different departments and so their interests and experiences are very different. Being able to put yourself in their shoes and figure out how best to present information to them has been super-beneficial.

And arguably the most important person to be able to do this with is your CEO.

If you understand what matters to your CEO, it makes everything else easier. It means you can adjust how you report, how you prioritise and how you operate to align.

I often say I 'can speak James', and what I mean by that is I can interpret and understand what he wants and expects when he's discussing a particular topic. He doesn't need to directly translate that for me into detailed asks or action points.

It also means I can preempt some of the push back or questions that may arise on certain projects. I can come prepared for them upfront or address them before they're even raised.

There's no shortcut to getting here; it takes time to build this kind of dynamic.

You need to be able to recognise when something is very important to them.

There will be times when you disagree, but recognising what battles to fight and which to back down on is a big unlock to creating a good relationship.

Uncovering the motivation behind a task can be a very helpful way of tying the strategic importance of it together. The CEO will not always have time to do this for you and it's up to you to take the initiative as much as possible to build this understanding.

It's hard to underestimate the importance of being easy to work with, proactive and obedient. One thing the CEO doesn't have is time.

So just being that person who only needs to be asked once and will consistently deliver on time without a requirement to be chased or followed up with can quickly build positive equity.

Another useful tip I've learned, and I think a reason I have a strong relationship with our CEO is because I can match his energy. He is an intense operator and loves all things to be grounded in data.

I learnt early on that matching his way of working led to an effective partnership.

You need to recognise how much they have on their plate at any one time.

Instant or close to instant responses can be very meaningful. I don't ever want to be the thing that delays him getting the answer he needs.

ENTRY 22

Building a team of agencies



Alice de Courcy · 1st

Group Chief Marketing Officer at Cognism - Revenue Markete...
1mo · 🗨️

I like to think of my different marketing functions as agencies and my DG Managers as business unit owners.

There is a lot of specialisation in marketing. This can prove challenging as you scale. With more and more work happening in silo.

Here is how I am thinking about it at Cognism.

The best way I can describe it is as a number of independent agencies. Each team owns clear goals and business responsibilities and has oversight of processes end-to-end. They are specialists in their fields.

So what happens when multiple teams work on the same problem in a different way? For example, we have multiple roles that input into 'content', so how do they all work together?

The SEO team owns our overarching SEO strategy, with a primary focus on BOFU keywords (we call these money keywords - search terms with intent). They form a part of our organic capture demand function, making sure anyone looking for a solution like Cognism can find us and the information they need to convert.

DG Content Managers own all our media machine content. This is our always-on, create demand motion, including content such as podcasts, newsletters, live events and more. They also produce more TOFU thought leadership content (optimising for search) and produce what we term 'big rock' content that we use for campaigns, think Diary of a CMO or our recent Cold Calling Report.

And then our DG Managers own targets for pipeline and revenue in their specific regions or segments. They come up with initiatives to reach our ICP in order to reach these business objectives. Whether this is more targeted ABM campaigns, distribution of media machine content, ideating on 'big rock' campaigns or developing paid ad campaigns.

Finally our paid team owns the process of launching, testing and optimising our ads.

When it comes to these teams working together, they consult one another as you would with an external agency.

For example, when DG content is optimising their campaign content, they will consult the SEO team as the internal experts at the start and at the end of the project to ensure they're using the best format and other best practises to optimise for search.

When DG Managers are building out quarterly plans for their regions or segments they work very closely with the DG content team to define any changes or additions that need to be made to our media machine work to accommodate their strategy consulting them on the formats, SMEs or distribution channels that would work best for the persona. Before briefing it in for them to go ahead and build out.

And with the paid team, DG managers will put together the idea, then allow the paid team to present back recommendations on what can be done to further optimise the ads and audiences for increased performance.

Sharing insights, visibility on reporting and clear processes for working with each other are also key elements to making this model work.

 You and 119 others

1 comment · 1 repost

As you scale into a big marketing team, made up of lots of smaller specialised teams, it's really easy to lose contact with each other.

You end up with lots of work being done in silos and you lose sight of a lot of the team's expertise.

We have so much expertise in-house at Cognism. I want to ensure that we use that expertise efficiently, allowing the rest of the teams to benefit from advice.

Which is why I came up with this agency idea

The easiest example of this is the one I used in this post. We have lots of different teams who all feed into content:

- SEO team producing content for organic search.
- DG content team producing content for campaigns and to fuel the media machine.
- Product marketing producing content around new feature releases or product launches.
- Customer marketing producing content from our customers.

They're specialised in their content niches and have end-to-end oversight for their team's processes.

Then, when projects overlap between teams, such as product or feature launches, each team consults with the others - like external agencies would.

The product marketing team would share relevant messaging that the teams can and should mention in content.

The DG content team will use this to create launch day social posts for internal SMEs, and start building other top-of-funnel content around the subject matter.

The customer marketing team will consult with product marketing on the best strategies for communicating this new product or feature to current customers. They'll also work to obtain social proof from the customer base to support the release.

The SEO team will work with product marketing and DG content on what bottom-of-funnel content to create around the launch.

And the DG managers will work closely with both product and customer marketing to create landing page content for their campaigns.

If none of the teams were talking, the messaging would be off, time would be wasted and expertise would be lost in the cracks.

Here are a few things you need to make this model work:

Information sharing: Establish channels for regular insight exchange between agencies. We use Slack and Asana.

Clear processes: Define workflows for inter-agency collaboration and project handoffs.

Business unit oversight: Assign “business unit owners” (like Cognism's DG Managers) to coordinate between agencies and align efforts with overall business objectives.

KPIs: Every team should understand about wider picture that they're working towards. What's measured gets improved and KPIs can be very effective for ensuring the right behaviour happens.

They're specialised in their content niches and have end-to-end oversight for their team's processes.

Then, when projects overlap between teams, such as product or feature launches, each team consults with the others - like external agencies would.

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The customer marketing team will consult with product marketing on the best strategies for communicating this new product or feature to current customers. They'll also work to obtain social proof from the customer base to support the release.

ENTRY 23

Growth is hidden in your existing processes



Alice de Courcy · 1st
Group Chief Marketing Officer at Cognism - Revenue Markete...
1mo · 🌐



Your biggest opportunities for growth are not flashy new campaigns or channels.

Instead they sit within optimising what already exists.

At a time when we are all being asked to do more with less, there has never been a better time to forensically examine your funnel and every step of the process for improvements.

If you are looking for ways to improve:

Lead:sales handoff conversions
Meeting booked to meeting held
Double your MQL:opp rate

We have built a resource which will give you the under the bonnet view of how we approach this at Cognism.

It's the nitty gritty detail of the processes that have driven our growth year after year and which have scaled as we have.

Introducing the Fix Your Funnel Hub.

It's the first-ever training hub for Marketers and RevOps. What will you find in the hub?



A guide to 35 funnel fixes that doubled our MQL to Opp rate.



A library of stealable pipeline tactics from 12 industry experts.



Coaching videos to remedy problems from MQL to expansion.



And a mystery funnel giveaway for one team worth \$13,000+

If your team is struggling with lead quality, routing, funnel analysis, automation, grading models, lead qualification or just alignment between marketing and ops...

Then this is for you.

Starting today we're giving away everything. Our processes, systems, plans and experiments.

To help you generate a quality pipeline and not lose leads after they've submitted a form.



 You and 132 others

7 comments

“Do more with less”

I'm sure many of you are sick to your back teeth of this phrase, as it's all we have heard for a few years now.

It's a tricky market, and during times of economic uncertainty, we tend to return to making sure we have the most efficient engine possible to weather the storm.

Here are three ways in which we've optimised our marketing engine to be as efficient as possible:

1. Direct booking solutions

When someone completes an inbound demo request form, we want a team member to reach out to them promptly. Ideally, avoiding any impatience that might lead them to seek out a competitor and gain a negative impression of Cognism to boot.

To give the smoothest customer experience we can, we have implemented a direct meeting booking system for a portion of our inbound traffic.

We've all experienced the frustration of filling out a form only to be directed to a 'thank you' page, unsure of when we'll hear back. Typically, when you complete a form, you're either ready to talk to someone or you want a clear idea of when you will.

With this in mind, our solution allows prospects to schedule specific dates and times for follow-up contact.

The need for immediate contact is reduced because the prospect knows exactly when the conversation will take place.

Of course, it's still important to offer as many early slots as possible for those eager to speak with us sooner.

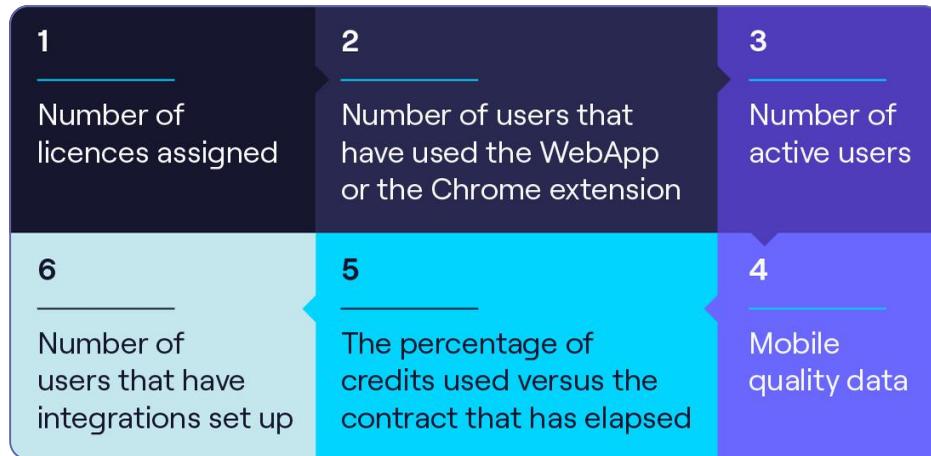
This has a positive knock-on effect too.

When individuals can choose their preferred meeting times, they're more likely to attend. This accelerates the sales process and boosts conversion rates across the funnel.

At Cognism, the impact of this solution was significant, as it doubled our conversion rates from MQLs to opportunities and meetings attended.

2. Used the avidity score to prevent churn

The avidity score looks at 6 key product usage metrics to measure customer health. These are:



This system allows us to monitor a customer's journey from the initial onboarding to meeting each of their objectives.

Each factor is weighted based on historical data regarding its potential impact on the risk of churn. The outcome for each factor is scored, and when combined with the weighting, generates an avidity score.

We combined the scores and demonstrated that they correlate with renewal rates throughout the customer lifecycle. Essentially, a higher percentage indicates a healthier customer.

This system helps the customer success team, account managers and marketing team identify which accounts fall below certain thresholds.

Accounts scoring below 43 were marked red, those between 43 and 73 were amber, and anything above 73 was green.

This approach provides a clear indication of where issues exist and where attention is needed. The faster we can identify at-risk accounts, the better our chances of retaining them.

The avidity score helps the customer success team alert the marketing team to any problems. The CSM identifies at-risk cases, explains the reasons, and outlines an action plan.

The customer marketing team can then develop targeted plays in a customer success platform to improve the adoption stage.

The avidity score is crucial to our customer marketing efforts, providing a reliable metric for assessing the likelihood of churn.

3. Used account scoring to identify upselling opportunities

We use firmographic data to identify which accounts present an opportunity for up-sells and cross-sells, such as:

- Their sales headcount.
- The number of SDRs.
- If they have a CRM.
- If they have a RevOps team.
- If they have a sales and marketing automation tool.

Each variable is judged as follows:

	Best	Good	Medium	Bad
Sales Headcount	>50	>20	<20	<5
SDR Headcount	>50	>20	<20	<5
RevOps Headcount	>1	1	1	0
CRM	Yes	Yes	No	No
Sales Automation Tool	Yes	Yes	No	No
Marketing Automation Tool	Yes	Yes	No	No

The higher the account score, the more likely the account is to retain or expand.

This information is then passed over to both customer marketing and the AE on the account, allowing them to create and deploy strategies to expand the account's contract with us.

ENTRY 24

How to launch a DG campaign the Cognism way



Alice de Courcy · 1st

Group Chief Marketing Officer at Cognism - Revenue Markete...
3w · 🌐

9 weeks.

1x four part video series
12x external SME's and playbooks sourced and written
1x 12,000-word guide
1x new homepage hub for the content
1x launch video
100s of creatives, emails and social posts

All this from a very bare bones brief from me:

'Hi all, as part of launching our new Enrich product, I'd like us to start a content series called something like: improve my funnel.

Should be a mix of podcast, video and written content and all around the areas we can improve our funnel.

Example: how to optimise forms to improve conversions (Instant Enrich) or direct AE routing for improving lead to opp conversion rates.

Can you build a plan around this and share back to me to input into?'

On Thursday last week it went live.

Anyone who has followed my posts will know we are a demand gen first org. We want to provide our audience and potential future customers with as much value up front, friction-free as possible.

So when we introduced our Enrich product to the market, I wanted us to have a value-packed way to educate our audience on its benefits. I wanted us to find the 'so what story' behind the product.

The plan was to create a resource in a variety of formats covering the entire funnel - highlighting how you can optimise each stage.

To bring this to life, the team created a video series involving our internal SMEs on how we have optimised each stage of the funnel at Cognism.

This content then fed into the 12,000 word guide - which went into more detail, offering examples for activities and initiatives we have run.

And crucially the team then engaged with 12 external SMEs - experts in their industries - to interview them for their insights, creating a library of playbooks detailing examples on how they fixed problems or optimised stages in their respective funnels.

This is what gave the campaign authority and opened up new audiences for us.

So how do you go about measuring the success of such a campaign?

We have what we call a 'big rock' dashboard. This is where we can see the campaign vitals and compare it to our previous big rock campaigns.

Now as you can imagine - with a campaign like this with so much content - a big part of the success metrics will be around engagement. So we are measuring things like:

 Page views, time on page, bounce rate etc, web journeys started

Organic post engagement, reach and shares

But we are also measuring the business impact that this has on our inbound revenue number by looking at:

 Assisted conversions (an assisted conversion is defined as a page view within a session that contains a demo request)

And ultimately we will be able to track all this activity from ad impression right the way through to revenue and pipeline using tools like Hockeystack.

This is a really cool content experience that showcases how to ungate really well. Plus I discovered organically not through a paid ad. Great job all around! Might borrow this idea 🙌

 You and 113 others 16 comments

  Like  Comment  Repost  Send

When it comes to campaign planning and execution, this is a pretty strong example of what I expect.

It all started with an idea I'd had when we were bringing our Enrich product to the market.

As with any new product launch, there's generally a bit of education that needs to go around it.

But creating content that just tells people what enrichment is and what it can help you do isn't likely to grab your ICP's attention. If you don't really know what enrichment is, you're not going to be searching for content like that anyway.

So we needed a way to share the value of enrichment, but as part of something bigger.

So I sent the team the message I shared in the post above.

What's great about this, is I didn't really have a fully formulated plan in my head. I had the basis of a campaign name, and a rough outline of what I wanted us to achieve with it.

But the team - a mix of demand gen managers and demand gen content managers - ran with the idea and just a few weeks later, we had the Fix Your Funnel Content Hub.

Here's what they did:

The video series

As part of the brief I said I wanted multiple formats, so the team got to work on a video series.

Idea being they'd interview internal subject matter experts on the various funnel stages, sharing how we at Cognism have 'fixed' our funnel by making optimisations over time.

We wanted to go video-first - collect a bunch of recorded SME insights right from the beginning, which could then be fed into the written guide. This would save us from doubling up on videos and SME interviews.

Plus one of the longest parts of the process is video editing. By prioritising this part of the campaign content first, we could give our video team plenty of runway before we needed the content to be ready, thus avoiding delays.

Filming in person isn't for everyone - I know when I first started, I hated it. But luckily for us, we have a few people in-house who are brilliant on camera.

Even luckier for us, one of them is our VP of Marketing, Liam Bartholomew - and the other, Simon Heckhuis who is our marketing operations whizz. Both have a lot of experience in our marketing funnel and could tell the story from a first-hand basis.

That's not to say that things didn't go wrong...

We booked a beautiful meeting room that looked out over the London skyline. But as we were filming one of the episodes, window cleaners started dropping into the shot at a comedically slow pace.

Bearing in mind that this was one of the few time slots when we could get Liam, Simon and our video team in to record. And we'd already spent a couple of weeks trying to organise this session!

Rescheduling to another day would only have prolonged the process.

So we lent into it. We made a joke about the window cleaner and we kept in the edit. If anything, we felt it added a little authenticity and realism to the whole thing.

And another case of done is better than perfect.

The written guide

As I mentioned above, we used the insights that Liam and Simon shared as the basis for the 12,000 word written guide. It was again split into the stages of the funnel:

→ Optimising high intent pages for conversion.

→ Optimising lead routing.

→ How to improve MQL:SQO.

→ How to improve SQO: Closed won.

→ Preventing churn and increasing expansions.

But we wanted this guide to be a more in depth and detailed version of the information provided in the videos. So the team then conducted further interviews with the internal team to gather more context.

One of the challenges we have when it comes to DG content is how to find the balance with SEO and thought leadership.

We have an SEO team for a reason - they're experts in creating content for organic search, so we don't need to double up. And we don't necessarily want our thought leadership content to be shaped and altered too much in order to cater to the algorithm.

(For Fix Your Funnel specifically, we'd have had to cover a lot of basic subjects that in many cases would be 'teaching granny to suck eggs' in order to get the pages to rank. We want to maintain the high quality of the content and keep our core audience engaged without having them lose interest reading the parts optimised for SEO).

But at the same time, we want our campaigns to have longevity. We want people to be able to find them organically and get value. So we knew we needed some kind of way to optimise the piece for organic search, but without compromising the thought leadership.

The team came up with the following idea:

Create an SEO introductory chapter.

Essentially, this is a chapter that's optimised for keywords so it would show up in searches but that would be the only way you'd land on it.

From any other navigation on our website, you'd land on the first thought leadership chapter.

In other words, the only way you'd land on the SEO chapter is if you were searching on Google.

All of our campaign ads or website navigations would land straight on the main thought leadership chapters.

This way, we could get the best of both worlds, as people coming from organic search could then continue reading the rest of the guide, bringing new traffic - and maintaining the integrity of the following chapters.

The playbooks

The team ended up producing 12 playbooks with external contributors. 6 were with marketing ops SMEs, and the remaining 6 were from marketers.

Each detailing different stages of the funnel and different solutions and optimisations that were implemented in different organisations.

We felt this was an essential part of the content for this campaign as Cognism is just one company - not every business will be set up in the way that we are or have the same problems we do.

So by having these playbooks, we can share insights from different company sizes, stages and industries, and solve different problems.

The team reached out to recognisable faces on LinkedIn - people who often shared their insights online. This was for a number of reasons:

1. If they share their insights online, they're more likely to be open to sharing them with us.
2. They already have a following, meaning people are more likely to recognise them when we release their playbooks. Hopefully prompting more people to want to read them.
3. We could get a preview of their tactics and solutions, so we had a good reason to believe we could create some valuable content with them.

Promotion and distribution

Once we had the content in place the thought process was "How best can we distribute it?"

This led us to explore a number of different avenues: LinkedIn paid ads, SME social posting, email, and a giveaway.

Paid ads

We boiled it down to one or two clear and succinct value propositions to help showcase the value on offer.

This was hard because there was so much great stuff to talk about but the team didn't want to over-complicate it.

Email

Our email approach was split in two.

One email cadence to a cold audience where we spoke about what they could expect to find in the FYF assets. It contained some insights from the content to drive clicks and consumption.

The second side was to active prospects - because the value shouldn't stop once they become an MQL. It followed a similar cadence but it was much shorter - being only one or two emails so as to not disrupt the sales process.

SME posting

The SME posting was a coordinated effort between all senior revenue leaders to hit the market far and wide. As the old cliché goes "people buy from people" so the team thought our SMEs audiences would have lower barrier to entry and people would trust their judgement, consuming the content we launched.

What's amazing is that from that my first message to the Fix Your Funnel content hub being launched was only 9 weeks. And you see the amount of content and promotional materials that had to be produced to make this happen.

(Not to mention they were also fuelling the media machine during this period as well!)

This is how you plan and execute a campaign the Cognism way!

ENTRY 25

Hiring mindset over skill set



Alice de Courcy · 1st

Group Chief Marketing Officer at Cognism - Revenue Markete...

2w · 🌐

Hiring the right team is arguably one of the most important responsibilities I have as a CMO. It's one of those make it or break it type activities that can have a huge knock on impact.

One of the things I have learnt along the way is that it's easier to teach new skills than it is to teach a new mindset.

I'm sure this is true across most organisations but it's especially true for us as a marketing team that is building our own demand generation playbook. Demand generation vs lead generation is still relatively new in B2B and it's rare to come across anyone who has a lot of experience with executing a TRUE demand first strategy.

All businesses will have different systems, processes and tools - so generally it's a learning curve to get used to how a new company operates.

But the demand gen mindset can be difficult to find and harder to teach if it has not yet been clearly understood.

Here are a few things I look for when hiring into demand gen:

#1 A true understanding of what it means to create demand. Can showcase examples of work they have done to build pipeline and close revenue with these programs.

#2 A love for numbers. Someone who understands how to interpret revenue and pipeline numbers and build reports that can help direct strategy based on these.

#3 Creative. When investing in brand is core to your strategy, it is very important you put your best foot forward. You need to create your own playbook, to be brave enough to do things differently in order to break through the noise.

#4 Love sales. Our job is to make sales easier. As a DG Manager, sales must be your core stakeholder and you need to be comfortable forming a strong and robust relationship with them.

#5 Adaptable. Things happen quickly around here, and sometimes we have to pivot from plans to focus on a new target. We may have to move on from projects we have worked hard on if there's something bigger on the horizon.

And if you resonate with any of these mindset characteristics - or these remind you of someone you know - the good news is we are currently hiring into our DG team today.

We're looking for a new Demand Gen Manager to join us! I will link the job spec below.

   You and 132 others

9 comments · 1 repost

Hiring the right people is a lot of responsibility. The impact of making the wrong hire, especially the more senior the hire, can be widespread.

So I take it pretty seriously.

I've found it quite hard to find a couple of specific roles. I mentioned in the last diary how hard it was to find our unicorn paid acquisition hire. That role took us years to get right.

More recently, as I mention in this post, it's been finding those true demand gen marketers. Because demand gen - and I mean true demand gen - is not that common yet in the UK.

There are very few people who have experience working in demand gen, so you have to be open to hiring people who don't necessarily have direct experience doing the role.

So then it becomes about finding the right person who has the skills - and more importantly - the mindset required to do the job well.

As I mentioned in the post above, one is much harder to teach than the other.

→ Mindset = beliefs, motivations, habits, marketing philosophy, thought process.

→ Skills = know how to use a spreadsheet, how to set up UTM links, how to implement a paid ads campaign, great copywriting etc.

Which is why I much prefer to focus on finding the people with the mindset I need off the bat, and fill any skills gaps with supplementary courses or training during onboarding.

You have to expect there will be a knowledge gap and a learning curve with any new hire. But you cut the ramp time in half (if not by more!) by training for skills than you do training someone to think the way you want.

People only change - like REALLY change - if they want to. And that is hard to guarantee from a couple of interviews.

This is where us being so vocal and transparent about what we do at Cognism, and our approach to marketing in general, has really helped us.

On multiple occasions now, we've had people reach out - when we were looking for new team members and when we weren't - telling us how they'd like to join Cognism because they want to be a part of what we're building here.

They cite things like Chris Walker, my LinkedIn posts, The Loop podcast, our live events or my first diary.

It signals to me that they've engaged with the content we've published around our switch to demand gen and that they likely understand our philosophy.

Which makes it much easier to identify the people with the right mindset and who'd be good fits for our team.

So top tip...

If you do ever see an ad for a role at Cognism, specifically in the marketing team, then there's a few clues on where to get some information on demand gen that could help you nail the interview!

TEAM ENTRY 4

Paid ad wins



Liam Collins · 1st

VP Paid Acquisition at Cognism | B2B SaaS | Ex GroupM | WPP | Media...

1d · Edited · 🗨️



Looking to scale your activities in Q4? 🚀

Below are 4 quick wins from my first 180 days at **Cognism**:

1. Leverage 1st party data (de-risk your approach with historical performance) 📈

In my first 30 days I conducted a revenue analysis to identify the best performing regions, products, channels, job functions/ titles, and what the most frequent seniority was for the primary contact in Salesforce when we win new business. This enabled me to validate our ICP and shape our strategy (more on this later).

** Bare in mind that the primary contact in Salesforce can be edited which might skew your data.

2. Plan budgets with a revenue first mindset (Spend where you win!) 🤑

I overhauled our media planning process adopting a revenue first planning hierarchy, distributing spend to areas working hardest. The structure is:

Region > Company Size > Persona > Seniority > Content Bucket.

Using this approach allows me to have more influence over which 'lever' to pull to dial up or down spend depending on the outcome I am trying to achieve. By spending a larger share of the budget on our core ICP we reduced wastage and achieved 15% growth, banking \$600k in savings in the process.

3. Play Google at their own game 🧠

Every account manager will tell you to group your keywords and match types into a single campaign and to "let the algorithm" optimise for performance. We've all been there. Yes, there will be a time when this is standard procedure. Yes, there will be a time when match types no longer exist. But that time is not today.

Instead, focus on high intent keywords, optimise landing pages to match the original keyword intent (increase relevancy), and separate match types (exact from phrase). Segmenting campaigns in this way provides greater control, while making it easier to identify top performing keywords to scale.

Doing this delivered +600% growth, from ZERO spend increase.

4. Align your retargeting strategy to the buyer journey ⌚

Buyers of high ACV products require time before they feel confident enough to make a purchasing decision. This is because buying carries a perceived risk to individuals job security, with buyers often prolonging/avoiding making a purchasing decision.

As part of the revenue analysis I reviewed our Avg. sales cycle to understand how long it takes for buyers to convert to closed won and found that our avg. deal cycle was 30-180 days (depending on region/product), while retargeting campaigns were limited to a 30 days 🤔. How are our buyer meant overcome inertia if we stop nurturing them outside of that window?

By expanding our retargeting campaigns from 30 days to 90 days I was able to instantly address this problem which resulted in a +240% increase in reach, +230% MQLs, and a 31% reduction in CPL.

Nurture your leads!

Would love to hear how you're planning for Q4?

🗨️👍👍 Ilse V Rensburg and 49 others

10 comm

Text

There is so much value hidden in the basics. I say basics, but that doesn't mean most people get it right or that this stuff comes easily. We obviously had to have missed some of the 'basics' for Liam, our new VP of Paid, to be able to fix it.

But when Liam came on board, he was keen to find low-hanging fruit that could quickly make an impact. Here are a few of the things he did.

Revenue analysis

Essentially identifying who our ICP is (where we win) and aligning our strategy to focus on them. This was a customer analysis project using first-party data from Salesforce.

Liam looked at the audience make up of our customers (regions, job functions, job titles, seniority and industry) plus the channels that influenced their journey. He then compared this to how our ICP was modelled to ensure accuracy.

Then, he updated our LinkedIn targeting to better mirror the traits identified.

Media planning

Similar to the previous initiative, Liam reviewed our budget allocation based on the criteria he discovered.

The paid team conducted an audit of LinkedIn Ads - both our biggest investment channel and main demand creation driver. To do this, they used HockeyStack, working out the percentage of MQLs and pipeline influenced by each.

For example, in one instance, Liam found that our EMEA "content" ads influenced 60% of MQLs/pipeline but we only spent 30% of the budget there.

He also identified that we were over-investing in social proof and thought leadership ads.

Similarly, 70% of our EMEA pipeline was coming from SMB but enterprise investment wasn't translating to deals.

So essentially, he created a media plan which was geared towards maximising marketing effectiveness and delivering results against our core ICP, reducing wasted spend, and improving ROI.

The main purpose was to give better control so that we could influence metrics more easily.

Google Ads quick wins

Our Google Search campaigns were running both exact and phrase match keywords in the same campaigns and ad groups.

A big quick win was breaking these out into separate campaigns.

So we'd have "competitor A - exact" and "competitor A - phrase" with separate budgets.

Exact keywords trigger your ads for search terms that are most closely related to your keyword (in theory, the same exact meaning, if not identical term).

Phrase match keyword targeting is slightly looser. Here, search terms must contain your keyword (or very similar) but will trigger for long-tail versions of the same search.

By breaking them out, we can more easily control the keywords we were showing up for, and intentionally invest budget into either keyword type.

Most of the time, we found exact match campaigns drove lower costs and better lead quality. We've since leaned into investing budget here first, scaling with phrase where needed.

Retargeting

When we audited our LinkedIn Ads campaigns, we spotted we were only using a 30-day look back window for our remarketing audiences.

We were also only running direct-response "offer" ads to these 30-day audiences. Either encouraging someone to book a demo or take up our "free 25 leads" offer.

We levelled up our retargeting strategy by extending this look back window to 90+ days, creating a larger audience of “warm” prospects.

The bigger audience size meant we could maintain our persona targeting (sales and marketing) but also run campaigns expanding to the wider buying committee (such as C-suite, operations, and procurement).

We diversified our creatives and messaging to include other types of ads like social proof, thought leadership, competitor battlecards, objection-handling content and on-demand video demos.

This further supported our “demand gen” philosophy for the channel.

ENTRY 26

Cognism’s in-person events strategy



Alice de Courcy · 1st
Group Chief Marketing Officer at Cognism - Revenue Markete...
1w · 🌐

I blow hot and cold on in-person events. I've debated them back and forth over the years. On one hand, I see the value in in-person communication and relationship and brand building.

On the other hand, I have felt that they're an expensive investment for an unguaranteed and very spiky return, as well as a big lift for the team to execute properly.

So I've been trying to find a balance. A way to benefit from the value of being in person with our ICP. But without the excess waste that can be a by-product of some events.

Here's how we are finding the balance at Cognism this year:

- 🎯 We kicked off 24 planning with an events committee. We aligned and agreed on the key strategic events we wanted to do this year, as well as the objectives for these. This serves two purposes: 1. To reduce the number of ad hoc event requests we would get and to align everyone on the budget and approach 2. Make evaluating the success of each event ahead of next year's planning a clear task.
- 🍷 We have put a lot of focus on activating beyond the sponsor package around key events. This has mainly taken the form of small, more intimate dinners. We invite both our brand champions as well as stakeholders from high priority opportunities and highly engaged accounts. This has been a big support for activating our ABM strategy this year.

It has also enabled us to dip our toes in the water without having to over invest in the unproven. Where we want to test an event out, we prioritise purchasing tickets for event attendance, coupled with a strategic dinner on one of the evenings. Doing this with core partners has further enabled us to reduce cost and build even closer alignment.

🧠 Making large sponsored events a brand building activity. We aren't trying to convert people and collect email addresses. We simply want our ICP to be introduced to Cognism, build awareness for what we do and how we compare to others in the space who may be better known in a given region or segment. While I don't love them, sometimes they're a necessary evil when brand recall is building or low.

At the mid-year point, and with the majority of our events schedule still to come, we have already started to see the benefits of this approach:

We've progressed conversations with senior decision-makers at accounts with 6 figure ACV opportunities.

And unlocked net new conversations with decision-makers at accounts we have previously struggled to close because we simply didn't have enough authority in the previous deal cycle.

The long and the short of it is that I'm back on the event hype.

AND I am excited to be speaking at **Pavilion** GTM EMEA on the topic of building enterprise pipeline, a peak inside the **Cognism** playbook.

 Ilse V Rensburg and 195 others

18 comments · 4 reposts

When we started out with our in-person events strategy, we went all in. We invested a lot in going to big events, for example the B2B Marketing Expo, SaaStock, SaaStr, and trying to make our mark.

And at the time, for our business's age and stage, this worked pretty well for us. Because it helped us - a not very well known company at the time - become much more recognised.

Plus we were able to capitalise on the fact that our product category was already quite well known. Meaning we were able to capture some of the in-market demand already existing, getting some inbound requests off the bat.

But the issue was big in-person events like this are expensive. Not just the fee to represent your business there, but all the activation around it. The stalls, the marketing materials and swag, and having our team away from core tasks to attend the event. Which meant these events didn't always work out as ROI-positive for us.

It didn't make sense for us to attend every event and make the big memorable splash that you'd want to make - based on the audience size and ICP fit that you can reach.

Especially when you consider that generally, the people attending these events can very often be the same people (so the value looks amazing initially but dips overtime).

Just before COVID made it impossible to do in-person events anyway, we had decided to pull our budgets away from in-person events for a while and instead, focus our attention on more digital event activity, striving for that more repeatable, less lumpy pipeline build.

This time, with much more of a strategic mindset. Firstly, we were much more selective about which events we'd 'go to' (another benefit of online events is less travel costs!).

We looked at who were the types of accounts to attend these events and this factored into the ones that made it onto our shortlist.

We also worked out which events historically had been ROI-positive and pulled out of the ones that weren't. Meaning that for the UK, for example, we were only attending two events.

After COVID passed and in-person events started to come back into the frame, we did start to re-explore attending events in person. But this time, we had a new aim.

We'd started to move our focus upmarket, having been building out our ABM program. And a new part of our events strategy became more exclusive, invite-only dinners in the evenings after the main events were finished for the day. ([I'll come back to this topic in another diary entry.](#))

We've also been building out our regional events plays as we've expanded into new markets, e.g. DACH and France. Following a similar strategy as we did in the UK, picking two main events to focus on. For DACH they were DMEXCO and OMR.

Any event we do today is tied to a key strategic goal, and when we complete the event, we measure each one closely against the goals we set out beforehand.

ENTRY 27

OKRs, sprints and Asana tasks



Alice de Courcy · 1st

Group Chief Marketing Officer at Cognism - Revenue Markete...

1w · 🌐



How do you keep efficient as you scale?

As your team grows and requirements for more specialised roles and more defined ownership and responsibility builds you can get caught in a trap of reduced efficiency.

Ownership and responsibility are very powerful for empowering teams to perform against clear goals and outcomes, arguable they make you more efficient?

But do they?

Recently I spent some time deep diving some projects to understand where they were getting blocked and slowing down.

What I realised was that we had got too caught up in areas of ownership vs pooling our resources to get something done as fast as possible.

So how do you solve for this?

Sprints. Clear business objectives. Data.

It is fine for people to broadly own a particular area of focus and to be the ones accountable for that, but it is also fine that where needed, others can come in to help, speed up and drive forward progress, even if not in their specific 'area'. That is the benefit of working in a team.

But for this to work, you need a mechanic by which you can prioritise and decide on resource allocation accordingly.

This is what sprints are great for. The sprint needs to be grounded in the key business objectives that the wider team are driving towards. It needs to start with a review of the data and knowing exactly where the opportunities and threats are.

This then makes prioritising and choosing activities to work on much more simple, and it gets people used to being agile and being able to pause current work streams to help push others forward that may or may not sit in their exact remit of responsibility.

The additional benefit is you end up with far fewer silos within the team, shared knowledge, and no one point of failure.

 You and 51 others

6 comments · 2 reposts

As I mentioned in this post, operationalising processes becomes crucial as your team and company grow. As leadership moves further away from day-to-day operations, it's easy for blockers to go unnoticed for longer periods.

To address this, we've been working on formalising our OKRs, improving our progress reporting, and tightening up our Asana usage.

During a recent audit of team OKRs, we found that each team was storing their OKRs in different places, leading to a lack of visibility and alignment across the department.

This fragmented approach made it difficult to ensure that all teams were aligned with our common goals. Many OKRs were overly task-focused, which made it challenging to measure outcomes effectively or understand the broader impact on company objectives.

This "set it and forget it" approach increased the chances of misaligned projects and unmet goals.

To fix this, we shifted to an outcome-focused OKR model. By defining clear, results-oriented goals and metrics, we're now better aligned with the company's broader objectives and can measure our impact more effectively.

This change has already sharpened our strategic focus and improved our ability to track and communicate our progress.

Once we had our outcome-focused OKRs in place, centralisation became essential.

We migrated everything to Asana as part of a company-wide initiative. This move has helped us align our marketing efforts with company-wide goals, making it easier to see what other departments are working on and collaborate on shared objectives without duplicating efforts.

Within the marketing department, this increased visibility has streamlined our collaboration and improved alignment.

Even though our marketing team had been using Asana regularly, our processes were inconsistent.

Different teams had their own ways of using Asana, which made tracking projects a challenge. We weren't properly connecting our work to the OKRs.

To address this, we held meetings with each team to introduce Asana best practices, including setting clear due dates, assigning tasks, and linking projects directly to OKRs.

Now, Asana automatically updates key project milestones, giving us a real-time view of our progress toward OKRs.

This improved visibility has made it easier for leadership and other departments to see how our work is contributing to broader company goals.

We also introduced monthly OKR status updates across the company, giving the C-suite and all teams greater insight into our progress.

Our next step is to optimise our marketing department standups by incorporating OKR status updates.

During these standups, each team will discuss their goals for the month, fostering more focused collaboration.

This will strengthen cross-team communication, help identify synergies, and ensure all efforts are aligned with our shared objectives. It will also promote accountability and transparency across the department.

BONUS ENTRY 7

Bringing Cognism Enrich to market: A PMM perspective

We launched a new product this year, which was a long time in the making. Cognism Enrich, which allows you to fill gaps in your data to make sure you have the most complete and accurate data set possible – either as it enters your CRM or as a scheduled action that automatically updates your CRM data over time.

Enrich was built on two main principles. Speed to lead and combatting data decay.

Speed to lead is all about providing the most complete and accurate data for a contact as it enters your CRM, which is where Instant Enrichment comes in.

This enables:

- Correct routing to reps.
- Faster, more efficient, and valuable follow-ups.
- Increase in overall productivity as reps are actioning quality data.

Combatting data decay is about maintaining your CRM's health. Scheduled Enrichment enables RevOps teams (or equivalent) to continually cleanse specific cohorts of data at a frequency of their choice to ensure that it's always actionable.

This enables:

- Higher data accuracy across all contacts and accounts, which leads to higher connect rates, email deliverability (minimising bounce rate and increasing domain authority).
- Increased confidence from the sales team in that the leads they're actioning are as up-to-date as possible.

This product is currently only for Salesforce users, however other integrations are planned.

But as you can imagine with any new product launch, there's a lot that goes on behind the scenes. And our product marketing team was powering away to bring this campaign to our audience.

Here are some of the steps they took to ensure we had everything we needed to launch Enrich smoothly.

Prelaunch

Research and create messaging and benefits hierarchy

Once our product marketing team has received word from our product team that there will be a launch on the horizon, they jump into action to begin building relevant messaging.

This requires crucial research into our customers' and prospects' (for each core persona) jobs to find relevant messaging explaining how our new product could help them achieve these jobs.

Messaging must take the following points into consideration:

- What are the job titles that will get value from Enrich?
- What are each persona's JTBD (Jobs To Be Done)?
- What are the pain points within these jobs?
- What capabilities do they need?
- What would having a solution for this problem mean?
- What are the buyers' needs and non-negotiables for buyers (based on buyers' words during research interviews)?
- What is the value proposition of the new product/feature?
- Do we have sufficient 'reasons to believe' that will SHOW the customer how it will make an impact?

Here's an example research summary for our marketing persona:

Marketing

Persona snapshot
Titles: CMO, VP Marketing, Marketing Director, VP Demand Gen, Director Demand Gen

- ▶ JTBD 1: Understand marketing impact and make data-driven decisions
- ▶ JTBD 2: Run targeted campaigns to increase relevancy and engagement
- ▶ JTBD 3: Improve team efficiency and productivity
- ▶ JTBD 4: Improve conversion rate

JTBD 1: Understand marketing impact and make data-driven decisions

Problem	Inaccurate data leads to faulty campaigns and makes it impossible to run accurate reports, which can lead to faulty decision-making
Capability	Enrich accounts and contacts in your CRM
Feature	Scheduled data enrichment
Benefit	Measure and improve your marketing ROI. Deliver results and protect your budget.

This also serves as a useful document to share with the wider team. Product marketing isn't the only team who touches new product launches.

This is something that spans many teams. Especially in the case of our Enrich launch.

The level of input from various teams depends on the tiering of the feature or product that PMM puts in place.

For example, a Tier 1 launch would involve many departments and span across multiple content types. But a Tier 3 would be handled by PMM or Product directly. Maybe including customer comms, or an in-app pop-up for example.

But in this case, Enrich was a mega-launch that had many stakeholders.

So sharing the results of the research phase and messaging results across teams for this mega-launch was crucial. We needed a unified front when creating anything for the product launch.

Generating launch content

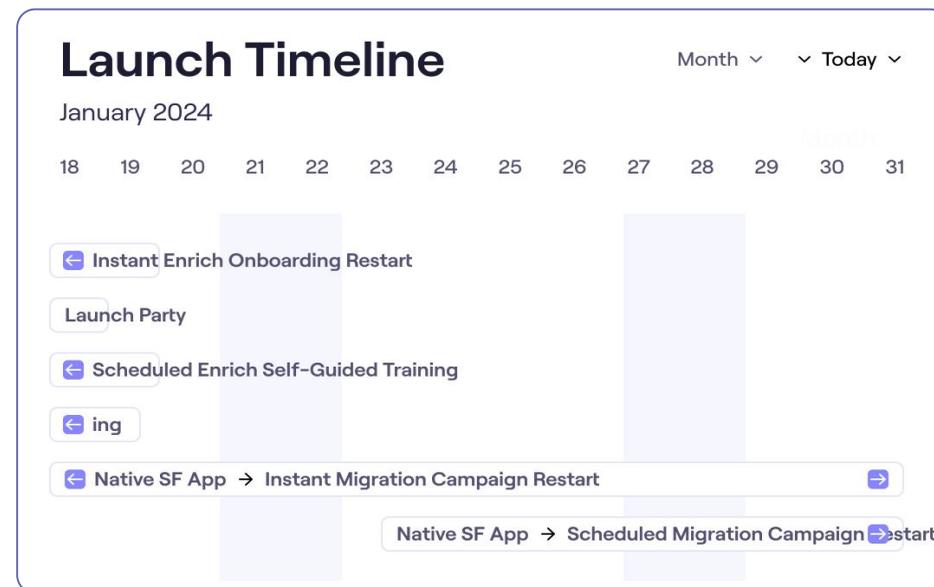
Using the research and messaging documents the product team created, the team got to work creating the necessary content pieces needed either internally or for customers and prospects.

This included things like landing pages, demos, sales enablement documents, competitor comparisons, promotional videos – even a data decay calculator.

Name	Content Format	Activated by Team	Should it be added to ...	URL
Enrich Product	Document	Sales Enablement	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	cognism.com/apl234rt09gfuhij
Enrich Product	Document Messaging	Sales Enablement Demand Gen Customer marketing	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	cognism.com/apl234rt09gfuhij
Personas & Jobs to be done	Document Messaging	Sales Enablement Demand Gen Customer marketing	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	cognism.com/apl234rt09gfuhij

This database of content was shared with the wider team along with a timeline for when each stage of the launch would happen. Everyone had to be informed on when each element would be released.

This expanded from just marketing collateral; we were managing a lot of different stakeholders. Whether it was getting the CPQ on Salesforce ready for the sales team, or helping with sales enablement training sessions over Zoom, to writing a brief for our video team for promo videos.



All of the information that was collated, created and required for the launch was then added to a company wide, internal landing page called 'The Enrich Hub'.

This was the single source of truth for all Enrich details and content, aligning marketing and sales about what to say to customers and prospects about the product.

Launching

Testing our product

We wanted to test our product before releasing it to the wider audience to ensure we had ironed out any bugs or faults ahead of time.

So we rolled Enrich out as a BETA first. We conducted customer calls and sent out surveys to gather as much feedback as possible about the product. This feedback helped us improve its functionality. @

It also offered us an opportunity to start developing some case studies based on the successful enrichment projects these champions shared.

On the note of case studies, we felt it was important to 'drink our own champagne', and so had also been rigorously testing and implementing our own product internally. Meaning we could also share our own case study on how our sales process improved.

Campaign launch

Our launch campaign contained a number of elements. From top-of-funnel education around enrichment, such as blog posts like this:



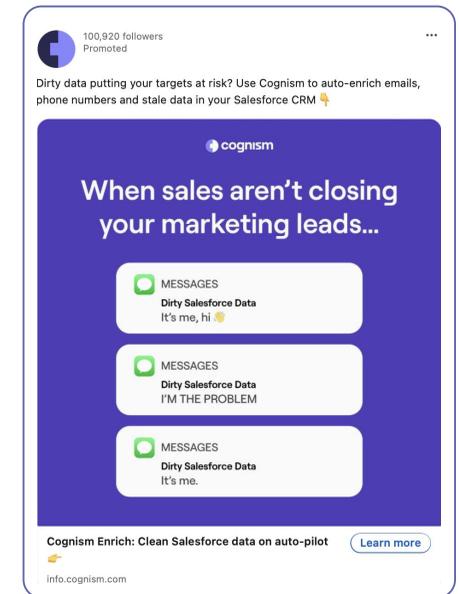
To product pages like this:



SME posts like this:



And ads like these:



Migration

Each product launch is different and comes with its own challenges. For us, there were quite a few logistical things to be ironed out in our launch.

Prior to having our own Enrich product, we had been paying Salesforce for their native enrichment app as an intermediary solution.

But when we launched our own Enrich product, we wanted our existing customers to begin using our solution. Which meant trying to migrate as many people over from the Salesforce solution to our own.

This required time from our customer marketing team, customer success and account managers to encourage customers to make the switch.

This wasn't an easy task, as lots of people had built their workflows within the Salesforce app – and with anything there's inertia to adopt change.

Therefore this has been a long-term process over the course of the year, with only the final people recently having been migrated.

Post launch

Campaign performance

One of the most important parts of any campaign is measuring how successful it was. So we knew it was important to have a comprehensive dashboard where everyone could see data and results.

Showing us results like:

- Marketing sourced revenue from closed-won deals from Enrich.
- Average deal value from marketing sources revenue from Enrich versus average deal value from all marketing sourced revenue.
- MQLs from Enrich UTMs.
- Opportunity pipeline.
- Saved cost associated with the migration from our previous Salesforce solution.

ENTRY 28

When to translate and when not to translate, that is the question



Alice de Courcy · 1st

Group Chief Marketing Officer at Cognism - Revenue Marketer an...

5m · 🌐



Expanding in a new region is more than just a website translation project.

A few years ago, Cognism made the decision to expand into the DACH region and then more recently expanded into France as well.

Taking your business into new markets is a high risk high reward type of activity. Usually, the safe bet for a lot of marketers is to go down the 'translate all website copy and content into a new language' route. Because if it has proved itself to work then why reinvent the wheel.

But in the same vein, you can't just assume that what works in one market will resonate in another. So we have approached things a little differently at Cognism.

Of course, there's the low hanging fruit content which can be translated - for example we did translate our recent Cold Calling Report into German.

The main thing for us is that we don't just rinse and repeat what works in the UK. We stick to our principles of being data driven and maintain our demand generation strategy, applying it to the new market.

Which meant creating dedicated media machines for each region, producing regional specific content, using SMEs that are known in the area, in the language that they speak.

Here's a few takeaways we've learned from our EU expansion experiences so far:

#1 - You'll know there's an opportunity to expand into a new region if you're seeing demand (such as inbound demo requests) coming from specific regions outside your core markets without any marketing spend allocated there.

#2 - Run a small R&D test to validate before you make the leap. Put some budget behind paid ads for the region - once you hit a certain benchmark for opportunities from this small amount of spend, it's an indication that you have enough demand in this market to expand.

#3 - Don't assume the main use case from your core region will be the same for your new expansion region. As a data provider, one of the core uses of Cognism in the UK is for email addresses. But in DACH for example, the legislation is much tighter on when you're allowed to email someone. We had to reconsider our messaging to ensure it resonated with this market. (This is where having people from this region on the ground can be super helpful as you learn this much faster.)

#4 - Have a dedicated role to own the regional strategy and data. While we do have someone who owns the global view of our demand gen efforts, we also have 'Heads of' for our regional work as they can live and breathe getting to know the local audience and make the right decisions based on what works.

#5 - There's huge opportunities in getting local decision makers involved in your regional specific media machines. We invited senior decision makers to get involved in our French live events and podcasts and started conversations with accounts that we struggled to get access to before.



2

1 comment

When I say that expanding into a new region isn't a website translation project, I don't mean you can't translate content. I just mean that can't be the only thing you do.

So when is it right to translate content, and when should you create something new?

For us, it differs depending on the kinds of content you're producing.

When it comes to SEO content, it obviously comes down to the keywords we want to target in that region.

It wouldn't make any sense translating content from English into French for example; the keywords are different in both regions.

Instead, we assessed what keywords we did want to rank for and created brand new SEO content to rank for French keywords.

However, if the direct translation did make sense within our SEO strategy, then a simple translation project would be a quick win

For thought leadership and demand generation content, it can be a real mix. At first when we initially moved into France, we were mostly localising pieces from the UK as it was low-hanging fruit and allowed us to test things quickly.

We were picking the articles that were the best-performing pieces in the UK and could still resonate with the French market.

However, as we become more established and have more resources and bandwidth, our priority is to create net new content specific for France.

This is because as much as there will be content that is relevant for both markets, when it comes to creating demand and delivering value, the more specific you can be in tailoring content for a market, the better it will be.

One downside to creating net new, of course, is that it takes more time. So deciding where to place your bets in terms of what to create becomes the core of your strategy.

We'll usually only decide to create new thought leadership content pieces when we have a good idea that they could make a big difference to our audience.

A good example of this working in practice is during our recent AI Search launch.

Essentially, we had developed an AI Search feature as part of the Cognism product, and we wanted to share content across each region to educate them on AI in general and introduce them to this new feature.

In the UK, we created six new SEO content pieces to target relevant AI keywords. We also created a new thought leadership piece in which shared how we use AI internally as a GTM team. Plus, we had a product page where anyone interested in the new feature could learn about how it works.

In France, we took inspiration from the UK SEO team's target keywords:

- AI sales tools.
- AI marketing tools.
- How to improve a marketing campaign.
- Sales workflow.
- Sales data quality.
- Targeted marketing list.

We checked the search volume for these terms in French to see if it would make sense to translate the content. After validating that these keywords would make sense, the French team liaised with the UK SEO team in terms keyword prioritisation.

The UK strategy was to prioritise the BOFU keywords, and then go after the 'pain point' keywords as a secondary project.

So this was replicated in the French region. Our top three keywords to target were:

- a vente.
- outils ia marketing.
- data quality.

In this case, it made sense for the French team to translate the content and optimise for French keywords. However the content creation didn't end there. This is where the main differences between the regions comes in.

The French team decided to create a unique thought leadership piece by interviewing a famous sales expert in the French market.

Elric Legloire is known for using AI for prospecting. His audience is international but he is French - and luckily for us, we had a great relationship with him already.

This meant we could create a highly relevant content piece specifically for the French audience, with absolute gold coming from the SME interview.

Allowing us to have the balance of low-hanging fruit content translation and specific, value-led content creation using a local SME.

Of course, every campaign will be slightly different, with some requiring a little more fresh content than others depending on how transferable the content is across regions. So it does take individual assessments in each case.

ENTRY 29

Five years' investment in SEO: A HubSpot competitor



Alice de Courcy · 1st
Group Chief Marketing Officer at Cognism - Revenu...
3d · 🌐

When your competition zigs, you should zag.

But you need to be brave, you need to be prepared to fight hard for your decisions and you need to be ok with potentially being wrong.

5+ years of investment in value first SEO has given us a huge competitive advantage today.

If you had looked at this picture 2 years ago, you would have questioned the value of our approach as we were growing far more slowly than the competition who were using programmatic SEO to build traffic at speed.

I was probably getting monthly emails from 'SEO experts' that had done a break down of our approach vs our competition and every single time the 1 insight they would provide is: 'you don't do programmatic SEO, they do, do that.'

There is a very good reason we hired the team we did and we worked with the likes of [Gaetano Nino DiNardi](#), and that is because the way they think about winning in SEO is the way you actually win, in the long term.

Value first, match search intent and focus on commercially relevant terms. Traffic has a place, but only once you have figured out how to do the rest well.

Getting pulled out as Hubspot's second largest competitor is kudos to the teams approach and hard work, could not be more proud [Joe Barron](#) [Monika Kisieleska](#) [Ilse V Rensburg](#) [Daisy Shevlin](#) [Maja Muzhdeka](#).



I have come up against a lot of... we'll call it... feedback over the years. People who claim to be experts and tell me I've made the wrong decision or should be approaching things in a different way.

It's hard not to question yourself in these moments. But I've learned over the years that:

- Lots of people find comfort in doing the same things as competitors, because if they're doing it - it must be a good idea, right?
- Everyone has an opinion on what the 'right' thing to do is; you'll never satisfy everyone if you try to listen to advice.
- The only people whose opinions matter in these decisions are the ones who have access to all the data and a lens on our strategic future.

As I mention in the post above, a lot of people told me that 'we would grow our SEO faster if we did programmatic SEO', and you know what? They're probably right. We could have. But that wasn't the strategic aim we were gunning for. So that advice was irrelevant.

I wanted to build something with longevity. Something based on quality. Something that began to feed itself and be an efficient engine in the future.

Which meant we had to take a different approach to common advice. So I had to be comfortable with defending my decisions and standing by them when challenged.

There are another couple of times that I remember having to defend my choices. The most obvious one was around building a create demand strategy.

In fact, I still get challenged on this from time to time now, even after having proven that this approach works.

At the time that we switched from lead gen to demand gen, 99% of the industry was still running lead gen plays. (Not long before that, I was arguing with Chris Walker about why lead gen was perfectly fine and that we had an effective lead gen engine! And that was generally the stance in B2B marketing.)

Lead gen had been the status quo for so long. So it's unsurprising that it was going to take some time for people to warm up to the idea of making such a massive, fundamental switch.

Obviously, the easiest way to get people onside is to show them it modelled out - if you've read my first diary, you'll remember how I split the funnel and tested this out extensively

But what is interesting is even still, after implementing the strategy and having very positive results, I get challenged on whether creating demand is necessary.

For example, when I was brought on to be Group CMO for Kaspr after we acquired the business a few years ago, my strategies were met with hesitation. In their experience, they had been able to grow with demand capture alone and felt that they could continue this way indefinitely.

Whereas I feel strongly that in order to set up the business for long-term success, you need to fill your cup with demand as you capture it to ensure pipeline for the future.

Therefore I wanted to introduce a similar demand generation approach, building a create demand motion to compliment their existing capture demand activity.

It took a lot of patience, change management and education for the team to feel comfortable to come around to my way of thinking. But since introducing demand generation, Kaspr's ARR has grown 3X.

BONUS ENTRY 8

How we work with freelancers and agencies

In the early days of my role at Cognism, we obviously had less resources and therefore would rely on the work of agencies and freelancers more often.

However, I think I always felt somewhat that the more roles we had in-house, the more control we had over the output and quality of work.

So the ideal state I wanted to aim for was to have as many roles in-house as possible so we could grow at speed.

But with that in mind, there's also an ability to scale up and down much more easily when you're working with freelancers and agencies than there is when you have an in-house team.

This is especially important during times of efficiency.

Either when you're not able to get sign-off for additional headcount but you still have a vast workload to complete.

Or when you have less workload or you need to scale back or certain activities, it's easier to scale back with agencies versus losing internal staff.

We've also enlisted the help of agencies for other reasons, such as:

- Short-term projects where it doesn't make sense to hire someone long-term.
- To benefit from the experience and talent that an agency can bring.
- For an 'outsider looking in' counsel or guidance.

Ultimately, the choice of whether to hire someone in-house or work with someone external comes down to the your business needs. If you don't have the talent in-house to achieve something and it doesn't make sense or isn't the right time to expand the team - freelance it.

We have worked with a number of freelancers and agencies, such as Gaetano DiNardi (an SEO and growth marketing whizz), Obaid Durani and Todd Clouser (Easy Mode founders and content marketing geniuses) and Refine Labs (our demand generation and paid ad guides). Without which, we wouldn't have made leaps and bounds in our learning, development and strategy.

Here are some of our rules of thumb for working with freelancers and agencies:

- Try to work with agencies that can fit into our ways of work, e.g. use Asana and Slack for seamless communication and task management.
- Is willing to at least start on a short-term basis to test the waters for both parties. If one or the other isn't getting value from the partnership, then there's scope to end it. If the relationship proves to work well, it can then be extended to longer contracted periods.
- Outline the expected output or end goal as part of contracted deliverables. For example, with our contracted SMEs, we have a list of the content responsibilities they have to deliver within a specific time frame.

ENTRY 30

How to manage wide-scale company reporting as you grow



Alice de Courcy · 1st
Group Chief Marketing Officer at Cognism - Re...
1m · 🌐

How do you keep end of quarter reporting useful and timely as you scale?

One of the challenges I've noticed as we've scaled has been around reporting. I want to have as much oversight over as much data as possible. But when you've got so many people in the team doing so many different activities, there's a lot we can report on.

Which means there's a lot for me to absorb when it comes to end-of-month or end-of-quarter reporting.

So it becomes about finding the balance. How do I enable my team to do the necessary storytelling I need to quickly understand the data they're presenting?

Here are some things we've done to streamline our reporting:

#1 - Summary slides. Simple, but effective. Just by adding a quick summary slide at the start of a deck, I can get the top line insights fast and identify any major red flags that I need to look into further.

#2 - We have a dedicated analytics manager who helps the team to set up dashboards and uniform ways of reporting. She also authorises when a new dashboard can be set up to avoid there being lots of duplicate places to look for data. Or dashboards sitting getting dusty!

#3 - Trending data only. Point in time snapshots are fairly unhelpful without an idea of how we are trending or where it sits vs our benchmark data. While I wish I could remember benchmarks for each activity across the org, I don't. So seeing them next to this month's results is useful for me to see off the bat where we land and if we are growing in the way I want us to.

#4 - Useful commentary. Telling stories with data is such an undervalued skill for a marketer to have. If there's a spike in the data somewhere, why does the team think this is? Did we test something new? What is the context that I need to know to make sense of the numbers.

By building this into each team's reporting process, it makes monthly reporting much more meaningful - whilst also making it easier for me to get a snapshot of what's happening within the org.

I cannot explain how important I view data and reporting. As a CMO, it's the thing that gives me a map of what I need to do to succeed.

Obviously, as the business gets bigger (not just Cognism, also Maltastic and Kaspr!) I am less and less in the weeds of the day-to-day activity happening each month (well, actually I am never that far away from it!).

But I need to be able to understand what's happening in each department and business in order to make important decisions for the future of the company and be able to support my teams.

But equally, I can't spend two weeks of every month reading reams and reams of reporting. I need to get a snapshot of our status quickly and be able to report this back to the rest of the C-suite.

This makes our reporting systems incredibly important.

We've gone through many iterations of reporting over the years. Trying to find the best way for me to get the insight I need, without overloading with so much information that it's impossible to absorb. I also don't want it to take up too much of my team's time.

As I write this, we're now implementing a more uniform process across the company (I explain this in more detail in entry 27) whereby each department and team is reporting back on the status of their OKRs monthly

This is really useful for me because it's an easy way for me to be able to see how we're progressing towards company goals, with all of the contributing projects and initiatives being monitored and updated monthly.

However, we're also doing our own monthly and quarterly reporting as a marketing department:

→ **Monthly** - more of a light touch status update on progress.

→ **Quarterly** - an in depth deep dive into a quarter's performance compared to the previous quarter.

If we check in on the data monthly, this highlights if we have any issues that might take us off track for the quarter. Catching issues early is especially important for our demand generation, website and SEO teams.

But we really look to review performance quarterly, checking how we're tracking in comparison to previous quarters and whether we're hitting quarterly targets.

Here are a few of the monthly and quarterly reports we create:

→ Paid x demand generation - to give performance on new business.

→ Customer marketing - focused on customer review trends, customer case study acquisition and reporting on account expansion campaign progress.

→ Website - deep diving web health, web journeys and reporting back on the performance of any web tests.

→ DG content report - measuring the effectiveness of and engagement in the media machine and value loops.

→ SEO team - tracking our money keywords, plus overall traffic and revenue coming from organic traffic.

→ Product - individual reports on product launches.

An important focus when creating these monthly reports is to have consolidated places for people to get a snapshot of performance so they can easily translate this into reports without having to look 100 different places for the data.

For the paid and DG team for example, we have a Salesforce dashboard which shows our 'single source of truth' for pipeline and revenue figures. We use it across the business so we know everyone is singing from the same hymn sheet.

We also have an Analytics Manager in seat within the team who helps to create reporting systems and dashboards depending on each team's needs and goals.

That also involves making sure that people are using those reports correctly, and that the data feeding into those dashboards is accurate and up-to-date.

She's also responsible for documenting these reporting systems so everyone is clear and consistent on how to report with them.

Not an easy job, but a very important one!

I think another really important piece of the reporting puzzle is that we aren't just reporting on numbers for the sake of it.

Instead, I want us to have action items for the outcomes of what we report on, and that there is storytelling around the numbers.

I never want us to be in a position where people feel they need to spend hours and hours reporting on numbers that don't have any real objective.

I want the team to:

- Know why they're reporting on the things they're reporting on.
- Be able to understand what that data is telling us, and be able to communicate that in the deck so that everyone reading it also understands it.
- Always have a list of action items that come from these reports. I don't want our reports to be for nothing.

With this in mind, each report is built to be as actionable as possible. And to be transparent for each of the other teams. For example, the SEO report can't be in inaccessible SEO lingo as I want the paid team to be able to dip in and get the information they need.

The main aim of these reports is for them to be used. So you have to think about it almost as if your reports are your product and your team are your customers. If you were trying to get your customers to engage more in your product, what would you do?

You'd make it easier, simpler, clearer - reduce the barriers to entry.

Another way of making sure that we properly communicate results with each other is to have calls.

In the past, we just added reports into a Slack channel. The issue we found was that it was easy to get busy and forget they were there, meaning people didn't read them.

But if we dedicate time on calls with the relevant parties, we can make sure the results are shared.

As I said at the beginning of this entry, reporting as you scale does get harder. And it's been an iterative process. I've added an OKR for my VP of Marketing to work with the team on their reporting structures, helping them to find the best ways to get and present the data each month.

This will be an ongoing process but I think it's important to prioritise internal processes like this with OKRs. That way, I know they'll get the focus they deserve.

ENTRY 31

Developing an ABM strategy



Alice de Courcy · 1st
Group Chief Marketing Officer at Cognism - Revenue Marketer an...
19h · 🌐

Keep revisiting things that 'didn't work before'

I have been leading marketing at Cognism for 5+ years now and over that time we have scaled certain initiatives and chosen not to pursue others.

But we never say never when it comes to revisiting those things that maybe did not work before or perhaps we, as an organisation, were not ready for.

In comes ABM.

For many reasons we are now at a stage where ABM is an impactful and necessary motion for us.

What do I mean by ABM? We have taken our demand gen principles and have applied these on a more personalised and targeted scale in our 1:1 and 1:few programs.

The biggest unlock to our success in ABM has been our focus on the 'who' we are targeting.

So what have we done?

🗨️ Instead of sales dictating which accounts they want marketing to go after and target, we work together with sales and make our recommendations which are then validated by sales.

We come up with recommendations based on using Qualified to track target accounts, measure their level of engagement and identify which companies are engaging with our ads and high-intent pages on our website. This allows us to be hyper-focused and select the most active accounts.

But we don't stop there. While this helps create a list of broad target accounts, we need to refine our account list further.

📊 We then take that list and analyse our data to understand our sweet spot. This means understanding what industries, company sizes and job titles we win and retain at the best rates.

So, we look at which accounts in this category are surging—that is, which accounts were visiting our website the most and engaged with our content, pricing pages, etc. This allows us to focus very tightly on a narrow range of accounts.

We then meet with the sales team to align and confirm whether these accounts are a good fit and create a joint account plan with weekly check-ins with the relevant account executives.

👁️ That's where the Demand Generation lens comes in.

Because of our approach, we know what content these target accounts are looking at, and we can tailor our outreach based on what that company is doing and what they are engaging with, including what specific web pages the account is visiting.

We want our ABM to feel thoughtful, ensuring that the accounts we are targeting have shown intent and making sure we understand what content they're looking at.

This also means we get more buy-in from our sales team. Because marketing now approaches sales with a list of high-intent accounts and is seeing results at an accelerated rate, the sales team automatically want to get involved and do more activity.

This change has resulted in us generating 300K in ABM pipeline in 8 weeks, more to come.

👤 Ilse V Rensburg and 197 others

16 comments · 2 reposts

ABM has been a new process for us since I wrote my first diary. And while we're still in the early days of implementing ABM and evolving our strategy... I'm really happy with where we're at so far.

Because we've created a strategy that incorporates our demand generation approach - but in a much more targeted way. Here's a quick rundown:

The first stage of any ABM activity is to have an ICP. Our target account list contains thousands of companies, so in order to be as targeted and strategic as possible, I felt we needed more information.

I wanted to run a revenue analysis and segment breakdown to get a better view and a more honed-in account list to base our activity on.

So we conducted a revenue analysis to look at the industries we get the most revenue from (where we have the best product market fit), then the company segment we get the most success with.

We then combined these criteria with the target account list. And voilà - we had a much better list, containing our targets and where we were most likely to win as a starting point for our ABM.

An important part of the target identification process came from changing who had responsibility for creating the lists.

Instead of sales dictating which accounts they wanted marketing to go after, we gave our recommendations to sales, who then validated them.

When we first started out, we did this process the other way around - but we found that this was too ad hoc and lacking any real strategic process.

Today, we use Qualified to come up with recommendations for tracking target accounts, measuring their level of engagement and identifying which companies are engaging with our ads and high-intent website pages.

This allows us to be hyper-focused and select the most active accounts.

When it comes to building out the account plans, there are a few key questions we start with:

- Have we spoken with the account before? If they were previously closed-lost, then why?
- What does current activity look like on the company level? What web pages are being visited?
- Can we use Qualified to identify any user activity so we can then tailor content per persona, e.g. a UK Sales Director has visited a blueprint on commission plans.
- What ads are being engaged with?
- What personas are most active?

We use the answers we get from asking these questions, paired with the most engaged assets we see from Qualified, to begin mapping to relevant activity we can use to engage the relevant persona.

At this stage, demand gen managers should work closely with the demand gen content team to understand if we should create any bespoke content. In other words, do the unique users need any hyper-personalised messaging and content?

We also consider the best channels and formats for distributing the content.

For example, could we:

- Ask any subject matter experts to connect with relevant contacts on LinkedIn?
- Use Mutiny for personalisation?
- Utilise a subject matter expert offering, such as offer 1:1 training with an expert?
- Send a Reachdesk gift?
- Create bespoke email sequences?

→ Create personalised paid ads?

→ Use display ads?

Each campaign will have a different combination of activity depending on the individual account circumstances - but then it's just a case of monitoring how the accounts react to the content.

Campaigns should be checked and optimised weekly and the monthly report should look at all activities and results per channel. This includes regular check-ins with the sales team to ensure both teams are aligned.

Any information that's been uncovered from initial conversations can be shared and then used in messaging.

These interdepartmental meetings also offer the opportunity to discuss what marketing can provide to the sales team. Such as personalised sequences and content to align with the marketing touchpoints when speaking with prospects.

It works both ways - we want to know what assets we might need from sales. For example, do we need product demo videos?

Here are a few examples of things that our marketing team would provide our sales team:

→ A sales enablement briefing document which includes account research, personalised sequences, relevant messaging and proposed campaign plan.

→ Content for a digital sales room.

And here are a few examples of things that our sales team would provide our marketing team:

→ Ask them to record personalised demo videos.

→ We can also look to loop in CSMs at this point and brief them a use case to walk through.

As I mentioned at the start of this entry, ABM is a new process for us at Cognism, so our reporting will be an iterative and developing process.

Ultimately, we want 1:one accounts moving into the funnel as quickly as possible but with enterprise that isn't always so easy... So we use different leading and lagging indicators:

→ Leading indicators

1. Engagement intent via Qualified (have they moved from warm to hot/ surging?).
2. How many touchpoints are we getting within a specific time frame?
3. Have the number of BOFU website visits increased since the campaign went live?
4. % of the account we have penetrated.

→ Lagging indicators:

1. MQLs.
2. SQO.
3. Pipeline.
4. Revenue ARR.

Of course, as with any ABM campaign - you want a certain number of these target accounts closing, as then you know you have your account selection process down. And that you're reaching them in a way that resonates.

If this is missing, it suggests you need to go back to the drawing board and reassess your process.

ENTRY 32

ABM early results



Alice de Courcy · 1st
Group Chief Marketing Officer at Cognism - Revenue Marketer and...
19h · 🌐

How do you raise awareness and create demand at scale when enterprise companies have 1.8x more companies targeting them?

Background:

We rolled out our new Enterprise ABM Program at the end of May.

Initial results have been promising – over 60% of accounts within our 1:one program have moved into opportunity.

Our flagship channel, LinkedIn, has been the primary vehicle of execution so far.

And it's worked because we've been super relevant with the ads and messaging we serve.

But with increased exposure, it gets much more complex to get the attention of Enterprise accounts. So we have needed to lift and shift our approach to channels outside of LinkedIn.

1. Targeted and relevant email nurture programs.

Personalised emails to the relevant stakeholders that diagnose their problem and serve the solution via personalised microsites and interactive demos tailored to their use case.

We then package these assets up into a sales enablement pack and pass them to our SDRs for them to use in their broader outreach moving forward.

2. Exclusive dinner events

Hosting dinners around key events like Forrester, SaaStr and Dreamforce informs our targeting and messaging – we are not inviting everybody, we are intentional with our outreach.

These dinners have worked especially well in engaging new and current contacts that we wouldn't normally have involved in the sales cycle.

By combining these initiatives with our LinkedIn activity, we've seen:

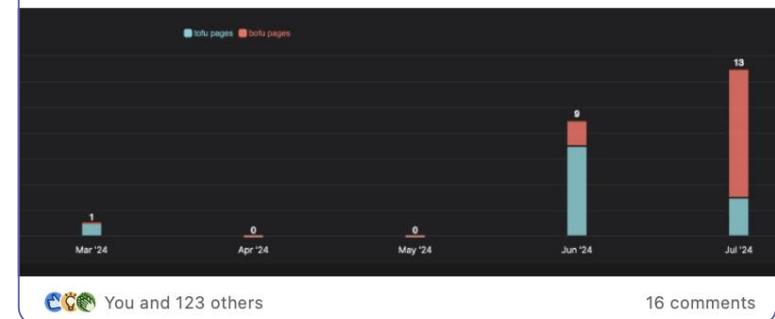
- More unique web visits to high-intent pages - we've seen a 400% MOM increase in high-intent web visits from 1 specific account (screenshot attached).

- MQLs move much faster through the funnel, especially from meeting attended to SQO

- A higher proportion of decision-makers coming into the deal who are already aware of Cognism

- Higher opportunity ACV

P.s If you're interested in more insights from me, I have a newsletter. I will leave the link to sign up in the usual place.



In the above post, I mention a few signals and results that show us that our ABM efforts are working – but there are a few other metrics you can use to identify that your ABM is having the desired impact.

Such as:

Penetration rate

We serve ads to accounts and measure the penetration rate. This validates our ABM approach.

The penetration rate is calculated on the number of marketing touchpoints it takes to move an account into opportunity.

As you can see from the graph, we launched the campaign in August and are seeing an incremental increase in penetration rate month-on-month.

US with EMEA Operations: Marketing Touchpoint - Er

This year

Salesforce_territory_segment_custom	Date	Column 1
US with EMEA Operations	September 2024	91.2%
US with EMEA Operations	August 2024	90.44%
US with EMEA Operations	July 2024	86.46%
US with EMEA Operations	June 2024	87.57%
US with EMEA Operations	May 2024	84.61%
Total		

As we want to build awareness and brand recognition at the 1:many stage, this is a good way to show our impact.

And then you can see in early July, the intent and touchpoints increased again, and the opportunity moved straight into the negotiation stage

This shows that ABM isn't just there to bring an account into the funnel; it's there to move deals in opportunity through each stage faster.

This shows that ABM isn't just there to bring an account into the funnel; it's there to move deals in opportunity through each stage faster.

BOFU web visits

To supplement this, we then look at the increase in BOFU web visits. For example, we had no demo or pricing visits from a target account this year until the campaign went live in June.



Then we had 2 demo and pricing visits in June and 10 demo and pricing visits in July.

With this data and the intent signals, we can show that marketing brought the account into the funnel and helped move them through it.

ENTRY 33

A deep dive into Cognism's 1:one ABM tactics



Alice de Courcy · 1st
Group Chief Marketing Officer at Cognism - Revenue Marketer and...
15h · 🌐

How we drive demand with personalisation in 1:one ABM campaigns.

To explain this, it helps for me to first outline how we select accounts for our 1:one programs.

We start by honing in on where we already win: industries, use cases and company role headcounts etc

At this stage, we just want to try to get a temp check for their intent and try to build trust through content. So we start with broad, always-on targeting in 1:many campaigns.

Using tools like Qualified, we are then able to pick out trends or accounts which are engaging at a higher rate that we can put forward for 1:few campaigns.

This is when we ramp up some of the personalisation in our campaigns. Diving into their specific use case and tech stack. For example one of the programs we run that is very successful, is where we target Lean Data customers (a strategic partner of ours), with our integration and enrichment feature.

From here we use Qualified to assess how engaged and warm the accounts are.

- 👉 Are they visiting TOFU pages more than BOFU pages?
- 👉 What BOFU pages are they looking at? Is it our pricing pages or competitor comparison pages?

Then we can validate the account by cross referencing with the account owner to see if this is the right time and worthwhile going after on a 1:1 basis.

This time with the AE also gives us context and insights into what the use case will be so we can create ads and microsites with the right messaging, aligned to their use case.

Moving to the 1:one campaigns themselves. How are we personalising these to make the most impact we can? Here are just three examples:

👉 Using Gong calls - have we spoken to this account before, if so, what's the use case? Who did we speak to? What kind of language and terminology do they use? What department or region in this account does it make the most sense to target? What objections are we likely to face that we could circumvent with content on our 1:one personalised microsite/s?

👉 Using Cognism prospector - Identify what tech stack they use. How do we integrate with these tools? Can we position ourselves as an easy add-on based on their current setup?

👉 Creating personalised interactive demos front and centre on microsites which call out the company name and their pain points, along with how Cognism can help to solve it. Plus social proof that speaks to these same pain points and evidence of our effectiveness in addressing them.

Another important part of this process is the feedback loop.

Has the account moved into opportunity? If so, update all ads and messaging across initiatives to align more accurately with the use case and to bring in other stakeholders to the deal.

If the account hasn't moved into opportunity yet, where can we improve ads or messaging? Where can we support SDRs more to get traction in the account? Do we have an event or dinner coming up where we can personally invite stakeholders to it to unlock conversation?

You and 80 others

11 comments

1:one ABM is truly at the heart of account-based marketing. While 1:many and 1:few are still important parts of the process, it's in 1:one where the real depth of personalisation and precise targeting happens.

We implement various strategies within our 1:one framework. Let's get into it.

1:1 ABM: Building Custom Microsites

Once we identify a target account, we craft a personalised microsite specifically for them. These microsites prominently feature the company's name in the headline and address key challenges we believe they're facing.

The next section explains how we can solve these issues. For example: "We created this microsite to demonstrate how Cognism can help [insert company name] drive more pipeline and accelerate revenue growth!"

Below this customised introduction, there's a tailored demo video, designed to directly highlight how Cognism's product would address their unique needs.

To drive the message home, we restate their challenges beneath the video, saying something like, "Companies like yours are facing challenges such as..." followed by social proof that demonstrates our ability to deliver results.

These microsites perform exceptionally well, generating strong engagement with our target accounts. Here are the outcomes from one of our recent personalised microsites:

- Average time spent on the page: 5.6 minutes.
- Over 70 visits since August.
- 150+ views of the interactive demo.

This engagement clearly indicates that there's interest in our solutions!

ABM: Email Nurtures

We share these microsites with the account's decision-makers through personalised email nurture campaigns.

The goal is to foster a connection between the decision-maker and their assigned sales rep by providing the rep with tailored email templates and messaging that offer real value.

These emails have much higher open rates compared to the standard emails our reps typically send.

Here's an example:



Targeted Paid Ads

Our ABM ads are crafted from thorough research, paired with our product's advantages. Our goal is to pinpoint the specific gaps in the target account.

By analysing previous Gong calls, we get a clear picture of their pain points, which we then reflect in our ads.

Here are some approaches we take with our 1:one ABM ads:

- We incorporate relevant social proof into emails, showcasing similar use cases and addressing challenges that align with the target account, reinforcing the value we bring.
- We include the account rep's photo in the ads. For accounts that were previously in discussions, this personal element can remind decision-makers of the rep, encouraging them to re-engage, especially if the timing is more favourable now. This also helps to add a human touch to our brand.

→ We tailor ads for different departments. Instead of focusing solely on the sales team, we create ads that resonate with other teams that could benefit from our product. If the sales department wasn't interested before, we've successfully reconnected by targeting the marketing team's needs instead.



And yes, we have solid proof that our ads are effective!

We measure ad performance through dwell time - the average time viewers spend on the ad before moving on or clicking.

For our 1:one ABM ads, the average dwell time is 5.2 seconds, compared to 3.7 seconds for our always-on ads.

Additionally, the click-through rate for our 1:one ABM ads is significantly higher at 1.45%, versus just 0.82% for our always-on ads.

This clearly demonstrates that personalised ads drive much stronger engagement.

Hosting Exclusive, Customised Dinners

Once we had a clear understanding of our target accounts, we developed an in-person event strategy, with a focus on bespoke dinners.

As I mentioned in entry 26, we don't attend many events; we're very selective because of the high cost and uncertain ROI.

However, these in-person gatherings provide a great opportunity, as they bring together numerous decision-makers in one place.

We invite key decision-makers from our target accounts to join us alongside other enterprise leaders, offering them the chance to network and connect outside the formal event structure. Plus, who doesn't appreciate a complimentary dinner?

At the Forrester event, we partnered with LeanData to host an exclusive, invite-only dinner, and invited several of our target accounts.

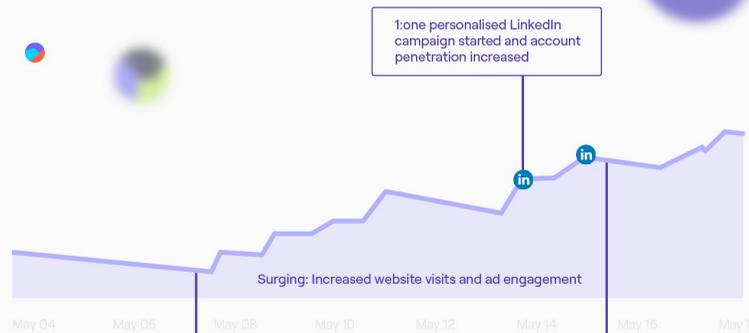
Afterward, we followed up by sending them a copy of my [Diary of a First-Time CMO: Volume 1](#). We also launched personalised LinkedIn outreach and intensified our account penetration efforts, resulting in a \$75,000 opportunity.

Similarly, at SaaStr, we co-hosted a dinner with Gong, which sparked six new conversations with senior decision-makers at enterprise companies.

These dinners not only helped convert conversations into opportunities but also opened the door to discussions with new accounts and customers.

Examples of activity impact

Size: 1001-5000
Industry: Computer Software



ENTRY 34

Values I hire for



Alice de Courcy · 1st
Group Chief Marketing Officer at Cognism - Revenue M...
1mo · Edited · 🌐

Always be hiring

One of the biggest investments you make as a marketing leader is your team.

When you're busy, it's easy to allow yourself to lift out of those hiring decisions because you need to focus elsewhere, but these choices are so critical to the business.

So how do you make sure that your 20th hire is just as strong as your 3rd or 4th hire?

One way I keep consistency is by making sure I am still on every last round interview.

Another crucial element for me is that you need to deeply understand the parts of your team DNA that got you to where you are and which are crucial to your continued success.

There are three core tenets of my marketing team that I like to index on:

Velocity. I want to hire people who are action biased and can show that they ship things consistently. I have said it before but I strongly believe that where a lot of teams fail is that an idea is only as good as it's execution and so much just sits collecting dust and never makes it's way into the world.

Adaptability. If you join a scale-up, you need to be ok with change and more than being ok with it, you need to be the type of person who embraces it and thrives on it. This will not always be a fit for candidate preferences and so it is important to both be transparent about it but to also test for it.

Nice. It is one of our core company values and I strongly believe a real reason for our success. I am always looking to hire people that will be additive to this culture and work very hard to weed out anyone that would be a threat to it. One of the questions I like to ask to test for this is: 'how would people you work with today describe you?'

 You and 149 others

8 comments · 3 reposts

I went to a C-suite off-site quite recently and one of the topics of conversation was how to keep everyone on the Cognism boat moving in the same direction.

How do we reinvigorate the team to continue growing the business and with the same level of motivation as we had in our early start-up days?

This had us asking ourselves, 'What was the core thing that got us to this point?'

And what we could all agree on was the word 'velocity'.

What we meant by this was that the people who were involved in Cognism's growth in its infancy all cared about its success and pushed for it.

There was just this sheer focus on getting things out into the world and iterating on it quickly. Acting on enough information to make data-driven decisions but not blocking ourselves with unnecessary red tape.

And that's something we know is important in the Cognism DNA. It's something we want to preserve and encourage as we go forward.

Therefore, this has become one of our core Cognism values.

Velocity is now something we interview on, measure our internal teams on - and we keep it in conversations regularly, with our CEO, James, mentioning it on almost every town hall.

For example, if we were in an interview setting, here some example questions for how we might suss out if someone would fit our values:

- We are nice = "If asked, what would your colleagues say about you?"
- We find solutions = "Can you provide a time where a process or idea was no longer working and you proposed a new solution to fix it? What was the outcome?"
- We know our customers = "Can you give me an example of ways in which you ensure you stay close to your customers and truly understand their needs and requirements?"
- We bleed Cognism = "Can you give an example of when you played a pivotal role in a team and you were particularly proud of your role and contribution?"
- Velocity = "Can you give examples of projects you've run, where you were required to get something live fast, the deadlines you were required to hit and how you achieved it?"

Having this value embedded in our processes is what keeps it alive and at the forefront of everyone's minds.

TEAM ENTRY 5

Kaspr vs Cognism positioning



James Isilay · 1st
CEO @ Cognism | Helping salespeople find phone numb...
[Visit my website](#)
5mo · Edited · 🌐

In 2022, **Cognism** acquired a French startup called **Kaspr** for €21M. The acquisition has been a tremendous success and the final payout milestone was just hit!

Here's a breakdown of the deal and how we approach acquisitions:

BACKGROUND:

Acquiring overseas companies has been an important strategy for Cognism.

Two years ago, Cognism acquired Kaspr - France's leading PLG Sales Intelligence Company.

When we first looked at Kaspr they were \$1.5 million ARR.

As of today, they have hit \$8 million ARR.

Why did Cognism do the Kaspr acquisition?

There are two reasons:

1. To gain the number one sales intelligence asset in France
2. To acquire PLG expertise (**Allan B.** who founded Kaspr is now heading Cognism's new PLG initiative)

Acquiring a French company did not come with any of the stereotypical negatives typically thrown at such acquisitions.

The French government is one of the MOST most pro-tech governments in the world.

French talent is exceptional and Paris is a joy to visit on a regular basis (if you needed any other reason to do M&A in France).

France now has 28 Unicorns, in the last 10 years French startups are estimated to have created over 1 million jobs. The French tech scene is booming!

So what made the Kaspr acquisition successful?

I would put it down to the following points :

1. Expertise

Phil Garlick Garlick, a Cognism board member and former Head of Corporate development at ZoomInfo, negotiated and structured the deal. Having an experienced industry corporate development expert on our board helped execute the deal without heavy banking fees.

2. Earn Out

We structured eight milestones by date with pay-outs at each milestone. Each payout was hit!

3. In Person Meetings

The teams had similar "Be Nice" cultures and ensuring the teams met in person helped us connect as teams. Cognism invited Kaspr to our summer party and it was reciprocated multiple times with one highlight being the Kaspr team taking me to an incredible restaurant in Paris called Chez Lulu for my birthday.

4. Creating Space for the Companies to Align

Cognism did not immediately disrupt the Kaspr team and merge platforms. Initially, we swapped best practices across our own SLG and PLG teams. We now understand each others strengths and are working on a more in depth merger. Could we have moved faster? Maybe but I would say our teams were not as ready as they are now and an earlier more aggressive merge would have been negative on growth.

Want to see a copy of the template Letter of Intent we sent Kaspr?

Comment KASPR below and I will send it to you.



645

197 comments · 16 reposts

I wanted to include this post as I think it's great context for when I discuss Kaspr and why we acquired it. And who better to tell you that than our CEO, James!

One thing that's important to mention when covering Kaspr's growth journey is how we decided to position it versus Cognism.

For anyone not familiar, Kaspr offers a very similar product to us. And when we acquired the company, we had to work out a way to bring it into the Cognism family without cancelling each other out.

Recently, we defined a way to differentiate between the two companies.

Kaspr is for the individual contributors and small teams who want to self-serve, get instant access to the data they need, without having to go through a complicated company procurement process. It's designed to be easily purchased with a credit card.

This is a segment of the market that Cognism doesn't serve, so there are no toes being stepped on. Because Cognism is a more premium service designed for large teams and enterprises.

So Kaspr becomes a way for us to serve this portion of the market that doesn't fit Cognism's ICP.

Positioning these two companies in this way naturally leads us on to how we approach marketing for them

Cognism, as a higher-cost, premium product for large organisations, tends to have much longer sales cycles and lots of decision-makers involved.

Therefore it requires a more long-term approach, providing value to our ICP until they're ready to come inbound and talk to our sales team.

Whereas Kaspr can be purchased by a single person. It's more like a B2C model compared to Cognism's clear B2B.

Similar to many self-serve B2C products, Kaspr operates under a PLG approach, offering a free trial period. During this period, prospects can get credits to test the data and validate that it would have value for their use case.

What's great about this is that each company serves a clear audience.

And in some cases, Kaspr customers evolve into Cognism customers as their teams grow and they need more sophisticated solutions

In fact, Kaspr can almost act as an informant, if we spot that a company using one of Cognism's competitors supplements their data with Kaspr.

Then, we might be able to highlight a problem with their current data solution, which allows us to explore either expanding their Kaspr contract or swapping to Cognism to plug their data gap.

ENTRY 35

Kaspr's growth journey



Alice de Courcy · 1st
Group Chief Marketing Officer at Cognism - Revenue M...
4w · 🌐



How do you run the Cognism demand generation playbook in a smaller company? And can it still work?

It was an interesting challenge for me when Cognism acquired Kaspr in 2022.

Here is what we did:

👉 Working with external creators to create demand

People who are aware of Kaspr are always the cheapest conversions. A big part of this is done through creating demand and building the Kaspr name throughout the community, not just those in-market.

If you're relying purely on capture demand, scaling efficiently is always going to be an issue.

A lot of smaller companies will refuse to invest in external creators due to the difficulty of measuring exact ROI.

Kaspr has worked with creators of a variety of sizes (including through our affiliate programme), which has given us an outsized advantage in:

Creating great content that builds a large audience.

Validating our POV and ensuring we're talking about what our ICP cares about.

Exposing Kaspr to large communities in a way that builds trust with end users

👉 Money keywords

We doubled down on the same SEO strategy we implemented for Cognism, focusing on optimising for high intent keywords. The ones that people only search for when they're in-market. Kaspr pricing, Kaspr vs competitor, Kaspr reviews, etc.

Localisation

A lot of companies when expanding internationally will simply just translate and push pre-existing content to new regions and expect it to work the same.

Kaspr now has a fully functioning media machine in three languages, which allows us to tap into the specific needs of each market, and work with creators who have unique insights that other global competitors aren't tapping into.

We also run ads in all three languages, with key distinct localised messaging and positioning for each region. The nuances really matter.

We went big on capture demand efficiency

Cost per acquisition is crucial when scaling a PLG business, and with ambitious growth targets it's easy for this to start rising.

We've recently been going through the process of completely restructuring our Google campaigns, LPs and customer journey to make sure it's as streamlined as possible and can support increased investment while remaining efficient.

 You and 105 others

12 comments

When we acquired Kaspr, it was a successfully running business in France. It had a great product, and they'd been brilliant at building a community around the business.

However, there was very little awareness of Kaspr in international markets, and they were starting to run into issues on how they could scale beyond France.

It was my job to create a strategy that could open Kaspr up to a wider audience, developing a create demand strategy which would continue to feed the demand they'd been capturing. And find a way to bring it into the Cognism family.

At this time, we were working with Gaetano DiNardi on Cognism's money keyword SEO strategy (Entry 8).

So simply down to good timing, we also started to build this out for Kaspr. Which was foundational for a lot of its later growth. Because as time went on, we discovered how well an SEO strategy like this works for a PLG business.

Because there's only a tiny gap between someone searching for high-intent keywords to them signing up for a free trial.

So by increasing the number of high-intent prospects on the website, the more free trials you're likely to get. And the more people testing the product and liking its data quality means more people will sign up for Kaspr's paid version.

Building out an SEO strategy (mostly in English as a language that generally carries through Europe) also helps us to capture demand in other regions. This opens us up to other markets and helps to inform future expansions.

The next step was to build a create demand motion to continue this flow of prospects for years to come. For us, that meant creating a dedicated content machine for Kaspr.

I felt it was important to get a well-known face to help us introduce Kaspr to a wider audience. So, we brought in Shabri Lakhani, a well-known sales subject matter expert with a strong LinkedIn following.

Working with her helped us to build Kaspr's thought leadership content with expertise and authority.

Not only this, but her connections to other influential sales leaders meant she could hook us up with podcast guests, building this channel..

So now we had a demand creation media machine underway, alongside our SEO demand capture motion.

Another super-important element of the Kaspr growth story, which differs quite a lot from our approach at Cognism, is the affiliates programme.

Again, much more suited to Kaspr's PLG model, we utilised influential people on LinkedIn. We offered affiliates a code for their followers to test Kaspr (getting 25 mobile credits per month versus the usual 5).

This makes much more sense versus Cognism's bigger swing influencers, as Kaspr's cost per acquisition needs to be much lower (it's a lower-priced product than Cognism).

It's much easier to validate working with a network of affiliates who you pay through an affiliate programme based on the number of people they bring in. Versus a potentially large monthly contract value to work with a big influencer.

I think what this whole process of growing Kaspr has taught me is that while we can apply a lot of the principles we've applied at Cognism, at Kaspr, it does require a different approach. It's a different model, and different things work better.

It's about creating a new demand generation engine for a smaller PLG company rather than replicating the Cognism model.

It's been an interesting challenge but I feel we've found our feet with Kaspr's marketing.

BONUS ENTRY 9

How we use the Cognism product for marketing internally

This entry might seem a little self-serving, and maybe it is. But you wouldn't be a marketing leader for a product you don't believe in...

So I just want to share a little about how we use Cognism internally. Luckily for us, we're able to benefit from our own data - which is always nice!

People generally know Cognism for its sales use case, but there are many marketing use cases. We frequently use it for our marketing processes.

Here are a few examples of how we use Cognism for powering marketing:

- ABM list building (1:1 and 1:Many).
- Job triggers and company events.
- Better job title targeting.
- Meta ads.

Let me break down each one a little:

ABM (1:one and 1:many)

For 1:one ABM, we use Cognism Prospector to build a list of decision-makers that we want to target with personalised content.

We can upload that as a contact list into LinkedIn, which means more accurate targeting - ensuring we hit the right people with ads.

And we can give that contact list to sales to ensure they're aligned with the people we want to talk to.

For 1:many, we tend to focus more on creating account lists rather than contact lists but it works in a similar way.

The benefit here is that we can create account lists in a more strategic way versus natively in LinkedIn. For example, we can generate a list of accounts within our ICP that have offices in certain regions with sales teams of a certain size.

This allows us to target audience segments that we wouldn't have access to otherwise.

Plus, the more data you have on the prospect, such as email, phone number, and LinkedIn URL, the higher the match rate on LinkedIn. Because of the data we can pull, we have a 90%+ match rate!

Job triggers and company events

Job join triggers are notifications when a person starts a new role at a target account or joins the target company.

We can upload a target account list as a CSV into Cognism and then use the job join filter to find all the people that have either been promoted into a new role or joined the company. Then we can layer that list into our targeting.

Similarly, if we want to know if a company has recently gone through a funding round or acquired a new business, we can filter our lists using this data.

Better job title targeting

Prospector's job title targeting is a lot more granular than LinkedIn's.

This came into play when we tried to target the RevOps persona. Because there wasn't a single job title within LinkedIn targeting that used the words 'revenue operations'.

But we can build a list in Prospector, searching for people who have job titles that include things like 'revenue operations'. This allows us to target job titles that otherwise we'd have missed.

Meta Ads

All of the examples I've shared above are very LinkedIn-centric - but what's great is that each of these contact and account lists can also be used for Meta. Which means targeted ads on platforms like Facebook and Instagram.

Where this is especially helpful is during our ABM campaigns, as we can create a surround-sound experience with our ads across different platforms.

ENTRY 36

Implementing AI in marketing



Alice de Courcy · 1st
Group Chief Marketing Officer at Cognism - Revenue M...
1w · Edited · 🌐

I'm under no illusions that AI will be a part of our future, so I want to be in the first wave of B2B marketers implementing and utilising AI solutions in processes.

Which is why I've tied myself to an AI related OKR. If part of my success as a CMO is measured against how well I encourage my teams to adopt AI tools into their daily processes then it makes it a focus and priority.

It also signposts to my team that I don't view using AI as a lazy shortcut, but rather view it through a lens of finding ways to accelerate processes and experiment.

Here are a few of the ways in which my team is already using AI:

📄 For SEO keyword identification

Our SEO team is testing various free AI tools for identifying new keywords to target. They fed objection-based Gong call transcripts into 4 free AI tools:

ChatGPT
Google Gemini
Claude
Perplexity

For us, Claude came up trumps with the most helpful keyword suggestions.

👉 To speed up content creation

Our DG content team are testing AI tools to transcribe and summarise long form content such as videos or podcasts, making it easier into other written forms of content, such as social posts, newsletters or blogs.

These tools include:

Descript

APEXE3

Chat GPT

Depending on the content input, different tools come out on top.

APEXE3 is great for content that lives online, such as YouTube videos. Feeding the content into the AI results in summaries within a few short minutes. Then you're able to ask it questions or give it prompts to extract specific insights.

Descript can quickly transcribe your offline podcast recordings and has an AI chat function allowing you to pull insights and core takeaways in seconds.

📄 For processing research data and sales enablement

The product marketing team are trialling APEX as a tool to make searching through existing research and messaging much easier and user friendly.

Once research and messaging is loaded on to the tool PMM can easily find answers across multiple sources.

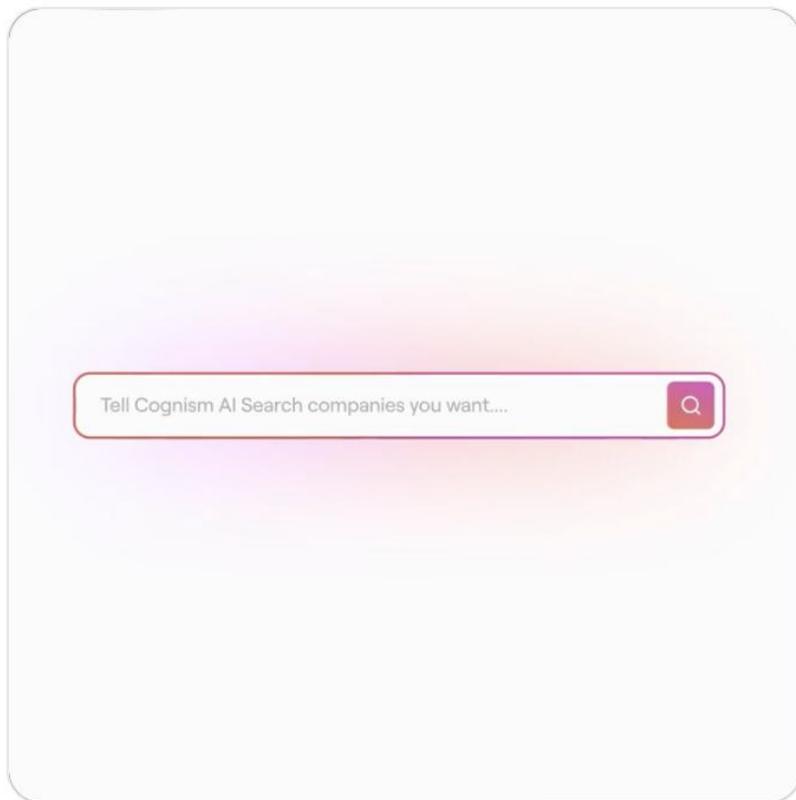
We have also introduced Crayon AI to slack globally to enable sales to ask questions about competitors which will search our Crayon platform for answers.

📣 As of today, we have released our own AI search feature at Cognism.

You can now type or say what end search result you're looking for Instead of manually searching for the right filter. Not only making it much easier to use our product, but also saving you precious time 🕒

For more information on our new AI search feature, check out the link in the comments.

[#b2bmarketing](#) [#demandgeneration](#)



👍👍👍 158

18 comments · 6 reposts

Understandably, whenever there's a technological breakthrough, people have doubts and reservations.

At one time or another, people felt this way about having a mobile phone instead of a landline.

But now, very few would look back and regret the choice to have a mobile phone.

No doubt AI will be the same. And it will likely open just as many doors and give us the same (if not more!) freedom that having a mobile did.

That is, as long as the robots don't figure things out before we do...!

I'm kidding.

But honestly, I do feel as though anyone not willing to embrace AI will come around eventually.

So why not hop on the bandwagon early and see if we can make our lives a little easier and our marketing engine that bit more efficient?

Here are some of the ways we've already been testing and incorporating AI into our marketing workflows:

SEO keyword identification

I mentioned this in my post above, but I wanted to give some more detail as I think this is one of the easiest ways that marketing teams can dip their toes in the water with AI.

Content is one of the most obvious use cases for AI, and many of the initial tools on the market were purpose-built to ease the content process.

Our SEO team has been testing various free AI tools for identifying new keywords to target - initially just out of curiosity to see if the AI would identify anything that we missed.

Our SEO strategy is based on what we call ‘money keywords’, which are essentially BOFU keywords. Keywords that you’d only be searching for if you had some level of intent to buy a product. An example for Cognism would be ‘contact data provider’.

We want the content that comes up in search results to answer the questions our buyers need and help them making a purchasing decision.

Equally as important, we need the search results to settle any possible objections that arise during their research.

With this in mind, we fed objection-based Gong call transcripts into free AI tools to find the one that best fit our requirements – here were the results:

ChatGPT

Results were quite generic and not super useful in identifying new routes for keywords.

Google Gemini

At this stage in Gemini’s AI development, it was unable to understand the task and therefore couldn’t complete it.

Perplexity

Keyword suggestions were more long-tail and content-focused, which would be very useful for certain content projects. However, it was less so for our money keyword strategy.

Copy.ai

Copy.ai suggested a lot of keywords that we already use. It would be helpful for those starting out with SEO work but didn’t help us to advance ours beyond our current setup.

Claude

Claude came out on top with much more interesting and helpful keyword suggestions. It was much more product-focused than the other AI tools, which made it far more valuable.

From this trial and error process, there was one obvious winner to keep testing – Claude.

The team has taken some of the keywords suggested by Claude’s AI and run them through Ahrefs Keyword Explorer. From this, they then whittled 40 keywords to 10, then picked out a handful to publish each quarter.

SEO content drafting

Another valuable tool with some AI features for SEO is Frase.

We’ve moved beyond just trying it out and have fully integrated it into our SEO content workflow.

You enter your keyword – either by writing directly in the platform or by pasting your content from another source – and Frase will show how it compares to existing online content.

It provides suggestions on where to focus your optimisation efforts. For example, it can recommend supporting keywords to include, the ideal number of times to use them, how many subheadings you need, and the optimal length for your article to be competitive.

Although Frase offers the option to generate AI-written content, we prefer to have our internal team handle the writing, as AI-generated content can often lack uniqueness.

While quality remains our top priority, Frase speeds up the optimisation process significantly by reducing the amount of manual research required.

Speeding up demand generation content creation

As I mentioned earlier, there are a lot of content use cases for AI. And SEO isn’t the only place where we’re incorporating AI into workflows.

Our demand generation content team has also been experimenting with different AI tools. For things like:

- Speeding up podcast outline creation.
- Transcribing podcasts and video content.
- AI-generated video snippets.

These tools include:

- Descript.
- APEX A.L.I.C.E.
- ChatGPT.
- Claude.

Depending on the goal and content input, different tools come out on top. Here's a summary:

Speeding up podcast outline creation

As with any content creation process, the most challenging part is often facing a blank page.

It becomes much simpler when you have a foundation to build on. That's where AI chat tools like ChatGPT are useful.

You can provide prompts about the specific topics and points you want to address, asking it to generate a podcast outline with relevant guest questions.

While the questions ChatGPT generates are rarely the exact ones we end up using, they offer a starting point for our content managers. This helps streamline the process and saves time.

Transcribing podcasts and video content

We have a full media machine that we like to maintain with regular content, including:

Our demand generation content team has also been experimenting with different AI tools. For things like:

- Live events.
- Podcasts.
- Social media platforms.
- YouTube channel.
- Blog.
- Newsletter.

Repurposing long-form content into smaller, short-form pieces helps us ensure that we are distributing content efficiently across the media machine.

For example, we have a subject matter expert on our podcast, then we transcribe the podcast, allowing us to pull out sections we can share on social media or in newsletters.

If we had to manually transcribe this content, it would take hours.

But Descript allows us to do this in a matter of seconds to minutes.

The transcripts aren't always 100% accurate, but we always correct them before we use them.

Not only this, but Descript also has an AI search bar function. Which means you can ask it to review the transcript it has created and pull out the main takeaways. So you can share short sections of the text, as well as video.

AI-generated snippets

Continuing with the theme of repurposing content, the next tool we're using is Goldcast.

(Although we're switching over to Sequel as our webinar platform very soon. Nothing against Goldcast, we just felt that being able to host live events on our own website was too big a difference to pass up).

With Goldcast, you can edit recordings from live events and have it select and cut specific sections into snippets. These snippets can then be shared on social media profiles or embedded in blog posts.

The platform can automatically identify key takeaways or follow your instructions to extract the parts you want.

Additionally, Goldcast allows you to upload custom video templates, so you can insert the AI-generated snippets into pre-designed, branded formats, ensuring all videos stay on-brand.

Processing product marketing research data

What's the most frustrating part of product research?

Most would agree that it's sorting through the massive amount of marketing data this process generates, which often feels overwhelming.

One solution our team has found helpful is APEX, a tool that simplifies navigating through existing research and messaging.

You can upload documents, YouTube videos, or reports, and APEX will scan them, allowing you to ask for specific insights. Once the research and messaging are in the system, PMM can quickly find the answers.

A unique feature of APEX is its ability to scan images, something many other AI summarisation tools lack.

ENTRY 37

Mistakes we made expanding into DACH

A screenshot of a LinkedIn post by Alice de Courcy, Group Chief Marketing Officer at Cognism - Revenue M... The post is titled "Mistakes we made expanding into DACH" and discusses the challenges of entering the DACH market. The text is as follows:

Alice de Courcy · 1st
Group Chief Marketing Officer at Cognism - Revenue M...
4d · 🌐

Not every marketing venture is going to be immediately successful.

Though that is generally what you'll hear about, as we all like to share the things that have gone well rather than the things that were a flop, a slow burn or just a bit average.

While we now have a very successful and efficient engine functioning in DACH, that wasn't exactly the case when we first landed there. There was a fair amount of trial and error before we got it right.

We made a combination of these mistakes:

1. Entering a market too quickly without deeply researching the ICP and nuances of it for the market
2. Our regional strategy did not go far enough
3. Scaled up spend over too short a time period

But we learnt quickly and turned the ship around to grow DACH by 194% in year 2 of our expansion and have continued to reap the rewards, with marketing regularly bringing in 65-70% of the region's pipeline and revenue.

Here's how we did it:

We took the time to build a dedicated regional media machine and demand creation strategy.

DACH has it's own:

Podcast - we have a sales persona podcast called B2B Sales On Air that is in German, and features local influencers and subject matter experts.

LinkedIn posting strategy - we share targeted posts to users in the DACH region, sharing insights from our DACH media machine, e.g. blog or podcast insights.

Blogs - not just translated copy from our UK blog, instead this is content created specifically based on the interests, needs and pain points for the region. Similar to the podcast, using insights from local SMEs.

Live events - we run a series of live events in partnership with SDRs of Germany.

Partners. We found SME's and partners that mean something in the DACH region, building authority and audience share through these connections

During the timeframe when we moved into DACH, the economy was booming and Cognism in general was in a 'growth at all costs' phase.

As a result, we scaled our marketing campaigns from one day to another without full knowledge of our most efficient and effective channels yet.

The benefit of this was that we learned very quickly and gathered enough data to scale back spend and get much more efficient. But at the time it did inflate our CPL.

DACH is now one of our most efficient regions and rapid iteration and learning has helped to drive this performance.

So while we did jump in before we were what we would now call 'market ready', it did mean we are now one of two major players in the market.

You could say we failed fast, learned faster and now have a functioning arm of Cognism in DACH well ahead of other competition.

I wish expanding internationally were as simple as applying the same strategies we use in existing markets to new regions. Unfortunately, that's rarely the case.

There are too many variables involved. Each expansion requires its own tailored business strategy. Even then, you have to be prepared to adjust your approach as you discover what does and doesn't work in a new market.

When Cognism decided to expand into the DACH region, we had a strong, efficient operation in the UK and saw an opportunity to tap into Europe's largest economy. We had already acquired Mailtastic, a German company, so we thought we had a solid foothold in the region.

However, we quickly realised that we didn't have everything figured out. We had assumed we could replicate the same actions we took in the UK in DACH, and it would all work the same.

But marketing to our target personas - sales and marketing - was far more challenging in Germany than we anticipated.

In particular, our marketing persona proved difficult because email data doesn't hold the same value in Germany as it does in the UK and US. With the double opt-in requirement for email marketing, selling through email is a much tougher task.

We hadn't fully considered how our ideal customer profile might not fit with the DACH market.

(This could have been avoided if we'd gone into this region marketing first, rather than putting sales boots on the ground first. But I will chat about this a little later in the diary.)

While we could still focus on our core persona (sales), we wasted time and effort trying to reach marketers without realising we needed to adapt our ICP for this region.

Once we understood that we couldn't sell or advertise our email data asset the way we do in the UK, we shifted focus to LinkedIn audience targeting.

Even the use case for Cognism was different for the sales persona. In DACH, we could only promote cold calling, as again, email wasn't a viable option like it was in the UK.

We also had to quickly learn how strict DACH is about GDPR and compliance. Our MDRs regularly reported that GDPR was one of the first questions prospects would ask them.

Simply saying, "Yes, we are GDPR compliant," wasn't sufficient. We had to collaborate with our legal team to create a one-pager detailing exactly how we acquired our data to prove our compliance.

It's easy to assume that, because the UK and Germany are both in Europe (and at that time were both in the EU), the regulations would be similar. But these small differences had a huge impact on how we conducted business and what information we needed to have at hand.

Another mistake we made, which we can acknowledge with hindsight, is where we set our base in Germany. Rather than setting up shop in Berlin, the capital, we opted for Cologne, which is where our first hire was from.

But this made it much harder to hire the rest of the team we needed, as the talent pool generally was based in Berlin.

Now we have managed to make this location work, and to this day we have an office in Cologne. But the lesson we'll carry into future expansions is to always set up in the capital, or at least the tech or talent hub.

It might sound like I'm being negative about this experience, but actually that's not how I feel at all. Yes, we could have had a smoother entry into the region.

But actually, we acted fast, learned at hyper-speed and now we have a very successful DACH engine. One that regularly outperforms benchmarks!

I think what's important about this endeavour is that we adapted quickly. You can never know everything before an expansion. It's always going to be - at some level - a risk.

But we learned so much from this it and we've applied our learnings into our more recent expansions.

In terms of the cost of learning what we needed to and getting experience under our belts, I think we got a good deal.

BONUS ENTRY 10

How we nailed expansion into France



Alice de Courcy · 1st
Group Chief Marketing Officer at Cognism - Revenue M...
2d · 🌐

Failing fast and learning is good...as long as you don't repeat those mistakes again next time.

In comes our expansion into France.

If you saw my last post, you'll have seen my explanation of the trial and error process we went through to get the successful engine we now have in DACH.

We learned so much during this initial expansion - which we could then apply to our next venture, Essentially everything we had done wrong in DACH, we got right in France.

In fact, we managed to get up and running in France in half the time it took us to get there in DACH.

This is how we achieved it:

✍️ We ran R&D spend in France before we officially moved into the market.

We only committed to the move once we reached benchmarks for opportunities from the small amount of spend.

🇫🇷 We went marketing first, building a website and prioritising SEO

Based on our experiences in DACH, and the demand generation engine we had seen so much success with in both the UK and DACH, we had proved the need for a marketing first approach.

Warming up the region first, before any sales boots were on the ground in France.

We wanted to build some brand equity and traffic to our website before anything else. This resulted in a scaling number of organic inbound requests which further validated we had a market ready for expansion.

👉 We waited to hire French SDRs until we had proven the need for a local sales team.

We were lucky to have some people who spoke French in our London office, so all inbound demand from this region was routed straight through to these SDRs and AEs.

Again, avoiding unnecessary investment before it was required.

📊 We built out a regional demand creation plan

Similarly to DACH, we took the time to research pain points, use cases, industry trends, local subject matter experts and influencers plus, importantly, local legislation.

And this gave us all the insight we needed to build out a tailor made demand creation strategy for the region.

💰 We scaled our spend rationally

Our budget started small and grew as we gained confidence in the machine we had built in France and our capacity in general grew.

Our focus here is scaling this spend efficiently, maintaining benchmarks for CPL as we slowly increase investments.



7 comments

If you've read entry 37, you'll now know about a few mishaps we had along the way when we took on our first EU expansion.

But the good thing about this is we learned a lot of 'what not to do's' which we could then apply to our expansion into France.

Our circumstances going into the French region were not dissimilar to DACH. We'd acquired Kaspr, a French business which was already operating successfully in France.

And we had reached a place in DACH where we had a stable and effective engine.

So it felt like the right time to expand into France. However, this is where we approached things a little differently.

One of the most important things we decided when going into France was to go [marketing-first](#).

I'll explore this in another entry - but essentially what this meant was that we put no sales boots on the ground until we had the signals to say we were ready to do so.

This meant building a French version of our website and prioritising SEO so we could capitalise on any existing demand.

We wanted to build some brand equity and traffic to our website before anything else. This resulted in a number of organic inbound requests which further validated that we made the right move.

We also ran some R&D spend, testing the waters. Only committing to the move once we reached benchmarks for opportunities from the small amount of spend.

Ultimately, this time around we had learned to be led by inbound demand.

This meant for a short period of time, when we had no French sales people, that we were directing our inbound demand to our SDRs in London.

We were lucky to have some skilled workers who spoke French in our London office, so all inbound demand from this region was routed straight through to the right SDRs and AEs.

Again, avoiding unnecessary investment in the region before it was required.

One of the most important things, I'd argue, in our approach and strategy towards our French expansion was building our media machine.

Similarly to DACH, we took the time to research pain points, use cases, industry trends, local subject matter experts and influencers plus, importantly, local legislation.

And this gave us all the insight we needed to build out a tailor-made demand-creation strategy for the region.

We work with a lot of local influencers and companies for our lives and podcasts, helping to give our content authority and credibility while also increasing our reach.

We've also invested a lot in demand gen tactics and channels to start with and are now slowly moving more and more spend towards demand capture. As we've 'warmed up' the market.

BONUS ENTRY 11

Finding and working with subject matter experts in new regions

A big part of our create demand strategy is working with subject matter experts and influencers. Because working with subject matter experts gives our content the authority and credibility we need to build trust with our audience.

We want our content to be unique, not a mishmash of other content available online. And we want it to be timely – what does our audience need to know and learn to be successful right now?

We create content that has this value by getting insights from experts on the topics our ICP cares about.

We work with SMEs in two capacities:

Internal SMEs:

We have so much expertise in-house, and because our core personas are sales and marketing, we can capitalise on our internal sales and marketing experts in our content.

External SMEs

Working with external SMEs gives us the opportunity for further reach.

If people recognise someone they've been following on LinkedIn creating content with us, they might be more likely to engage with the content.

Plus SMEs sharing the content on their own channels can get it in front of new, relevant audiences.

We have had a lot of success building our media machine in the UK working with SMEs, so we wanted to replicate this strategy in other regions.

Especially since using local subject matter experts makes it easier to create dedicated thought leadership content specific to the region.

But how do you go about finding the right local SMEs to work with in a new region?

Well, because we prioritise marketing in a region (before putting sales boots on the ground), we always have a native speaker in each region working to create content.

Let's take France, for example. We hired an SEO Content Manager in the region before anything else. Meaning we started to build our SEO engine and media machine before officially entering the French market.

One benefit of this is having local knowledge and someone who understands the language and can talk to SMEs.

Our Content Manager did the necessary research to determine the prevalent industry influencers and subject matter experts in the region.

Essentially looking for those influencers who are most active and have engaged followings in the region and industry.

Arguably a much easier and faster route to finding the right SMEs is asking your ICP who they follow and trust.

Here are a few of the things we look for when selecting local SMEs:

- What audience do they appeal to?
- How engaged is their audience?
- Could they be a good ambassador for the brand?
- What kind of content do they produce themselves – only written, or are they comfortable on camera to do videos or podcasts too?
- And importantly... How much do they cost to work with?

After identifying a few options who fit the bill, we held some introductory meetings and interviews to see if our goals aligned with the SME. Not everyone posting on LinkedIn is open to working with businesses.

But if there's alignment in what kinds of content we'd like to create with them, what their pricing structure is, and what we'd like to achieve with the relationship - then it's a go-er!

However, as with any any business relationship, I'd always advise to have a probationary period.

TEAM ENTRY 6

Warming up a region with marketing



Liam Bartholomew · 1st
VP Marketing at Cognism
now · 🌐

Expanding businesses into new regions is a daunting task. I've been at **Cognism** during a few of these expansions now, and there is a lot to learn from trial and error... But the biggest takeaway that I want to share with you is:

Warm up a new region with marketing activity first, before you invest in a team on the ground.

Why? Because there's a lot of risk with starting in a new region. What worked in one place has no guarantee of working in another. And moving into a new country is expensive! Especially if you miscalculated the demand...

An easy way to mitigate this risk is to put some marketing spend in the region first and monitor how it's received. That could come in a number of forms, but here are a few of my favourite ways to test:

- 🏢 Attend a relevant local event and get chatting to your ICP in this region.

Do they have the same pain points as your home country? Is the use case the same? Are they already aware of your product category or do they need more education?

Yes, events can be expensive and their returns can be a bit spiky and diminish over time - but in the early days for brand awareness and testing the waters for demand in a new region, they can be a key player.

- 🌐 Build out an SEO strategy first to capture existing demand

We are lucky at Cognism that we're in a product category that's well established. So we can capitalise on the fact that we don't need to do a whole lot of product education before we can start to capture demand.

If you start to create SEO content for the region, targeting localised keywords - and you start to see some inbound demand coming in from those, it's a good sign that there's more where that came from.

■ Putting out feelers on LinkedIn

LinkedIn has always been our best friend when it comes to testing out new regions.

Of course you need to check that LinkedIn is a core channel in the region you're moving into - lucky for us it has been so far.

And it's one of the quickest ways to start testing if you can generate inbound requests from a new region.

Ultimately warming up a region is just about building a bit of brand awareness and kick starting some demand creation before you commit to going full gungho into a new country where risks can be high.

Once you have the signals that there is enough demand being generated, then you can begin to hire the headcount needed to manage the inbound requests - which is quite a nice problem to have.

I promised I'd go into a little more detail on how we came to learn that going marketing-first into a region was the way to go.

Liam explains a bit of this thought process above, but I can go a bit more in depth on our experiences doing both a sales-led and a marketing-led expansion.

I'll start at the beginning. At the time that we moved into DACH, we were only just starting to build our demand generation engine, slowly switching from lead gen which had been the norm for a long time.

As I mentioned in the first diary, I felt that we had a very efficient lead generation strategy in place. At the time, hadn't yet proven my theory that demand gen could work better.

So when the proposition came to move into the region, I didn't really have an argument to say that we should do this through a demand gen lens.

It was a bit of an 'if it ain't broke, don't fix it' type situation, whereby this process - by which I mean sales-led - had worked in getting us set up and running in the UK.

So we felt like this was our best bet when moving into DACH.

We started where I'd imagine a lot of people would start. Which was to hire someone in the region as our Head, who could build out a team. The idea was to get some local knowledge and expertise to help us.

And not long after this, we were hiring SDRs and getting set up with an office space.

Nothing might alarm you about this setup, because it didn't ring any alarm bells with us yet either.

But what ended up happening, which you'll remember from entry 37, was a lack of understanding and research on our ICP.

Which meant a lot of wasted time spent working this out as we went.

Whereas, when we expanded into France, we went marketing-led. We proposed warming up the region and testing the waters with content before we hired salespeople there.

Which meant starting with our website. Making sure we had a place to direct any traffic from existing demand in the region (which we knew existed because we had acquired Kaspr, which was a very similar product to Cognism).

We then had to build SEO acumen. And create some ads specific to the French region and audience.

During this phase, we tested messaging, creatives and content, and most importantly, whether our ICP matched our expectations.

And we did all this before we invested anything major, negating a lot of the risk that we had tangled ourselves in during our DACH expansion.

Essentially, by going marketing-first into France, we were creating demand before we tried to capture it.

And then, once we had too much demand for the existing team and infrastructure, we then - and only then - hired a French sales team.

Take a listen to this podcast episode on the topic!



ENTRY 38

Our updated content strategy



Alice de Courcy · 1st

Group Chief Marketing Officer at Cognism - Revenue Marketer and au...

1d · 🌐



How we build a repeatable content process:

We have gone through a number of iterations with our content process. But I'm really excited about the way we are managing that creative output now.

Some context, our old approach saw us moving too far away from 'what we want to be known for' - which we had inadvertently nailed in the past. So I wanted us to get back to the glory days of creating content around these subjects.

For our sales persona, that's outbound - specifically cold calling.

For our marketing persona, that's our switch from lead gen to demand gen, and how we scale our demand gen processes now that we have made the leap.

While I don't like to be held to a strict content calendar, we have found that in order to create what we call 'big rock' content pieces, we need to plan ahead.

These heavy lift content projects can take a lot of time to produce, therefore we need to plan out how we continue to output between big rock campaign delivery.

Essentially our content process looks a little like this:

🗨️ Our DG Content Managers map out the big rock content pieces they'd like to produce in the quarter. For example my Diary of a First Time CMO would be a 'big rock'.

💡 They then break these big rock pieces up into smaller content pieces that they can output over the months while they build towards the big rock.

E.g. We have a goal to create 'The Ultimate Guide to EU Expansions' in the New Year. And rather than output nothing until then, we are creating a bunch of blog titles and videos around this subject that will later filter into this bigger content asset.

 This is then mapped out and project managed on a roadmap built in Asana, with tags that make it easy to filter to find the big rock theme that the content is attached to. And with dates for when it will be actioned or published to clearly communicate to our DG Managers.

 Our DG Managers then go through various stages of testing this content to see which pieces perform best.

 Which creates a feedback flywheel as they report back to DG Content Managers on what content is resonating which then filters back into roadmap planning.

This process means we are always outputting within core themes of what we want to be known for - and the roadmap allows us to plan without being too rigid.

  You and 104 others

8 comments

Our content strategy has changed a lot over the years.

This is partly due to our business goals and resources changing over time. Our outlook and views on content have also evolved.

In entry 2 of this diary, I discussed the Easy Mode content strategy and promised to share how we've changed our approach since then.

To recap quickly, we found Easy Mode to be a very useful exercise. It helps you break free of restrictive content formats and challenges you to think about subject matter in a new way.

However, we found that in practice, it was a complicated framework to keep up with. And we didn't see the content translate to results in the same way that we had done in the past.

I believe this is because we had already nailed 'what we want to be known for' before we tried Easy Mode.

I came to the conclusion that we needed to bring things back to basics.

Asking ourselves, what is it we want to be known for?

For our sales persona, that's outbound - specifically cold calling.

For marketing, it's our switch from lead gen to demand gen - and wider demand gen strategies and tactics.

And across the board, we want to be known for EU data quality.

We've then created 'big rocks' around each of these core 'what we want to be known for' themes.

For sales and cold calling, it's our cold calling report, which we plan to update each year with our primary research into cold calling trends.

We also have the SDR Zone, which is a hub of outbound resources, including cold calling scripts and cadences - and soon, we will also host our 'cold calling live' events within the SDR Zone.

For our marketing persona, our big rocks have included my Diary of a First-Time CMO Vol.1 (and now Vol.2!), which details our demand generation journey.

Plus our Demand Generation Playbook, which we plan to update with our developing processes as we evolve them.

And then for our EU data quality big rock, we're working on 'The Ultimate Guide to European Expansion'.

What's great about big rocks like these is that they tend to catch people's attention much more than our other media machine activity. This is because they're huge content assets that (hopefully!) deliver a lot of value.

However, because they're large content assets, they can take a lot of time to build. Which means we could go months between delivery dates if we were to only work towards big rocks.

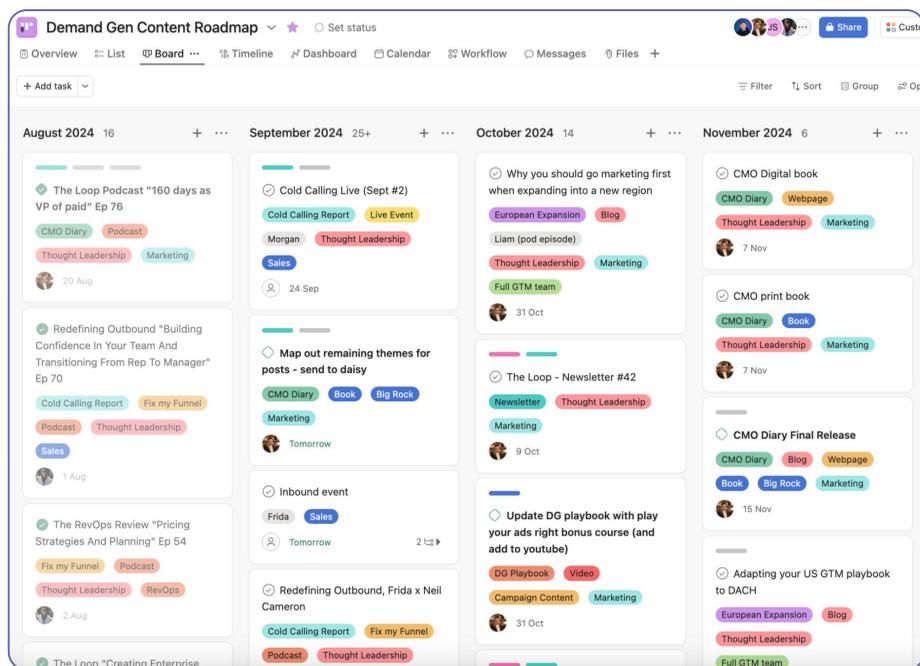
So instead, the DG team now works in a phased build towards a big rock.

What I mean by this is every content output has to be within one of the big rock themes, so that it's slowly contributing to a wider library of content that can later be used to feed a big rock.

For example, we plan to publish several blogs and videos about converting US marketing and sales playbooks for different EU regions.

This content will later be repurposed and rewritten to feed into our Ultimate Guide to European Expansions, while still allowing us to publish content in the meantime.

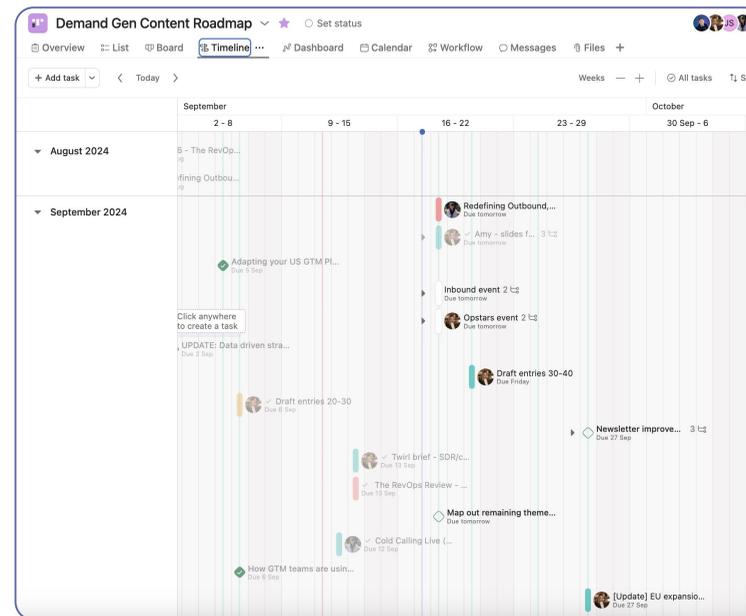
So this is how we have come to structure our demand generation content:



I realise this may look like chaos at first glance, but to me... it's colourcoded clarity!

How does it work?

The DG content team maps out their plans for the upcoming months with deadlines. This means that the DG managers can see what content is coming and when - especially with Asana's timeline view:



The tags help filter the board to find content that supports each of the relevant themes.

This method of planning content allows us to remain agile and flexible about what we produce and when, while still having enough foresight to plan for these larger content assets that we know pack a punch.

Plus, it allows us to see how we can filter 'what we want to be known for' into everything we do, from media machine channels to our big rocks

BONUS ENTRY 12

Distributing our demand generation content

Now I've shared our updated content strategy in entry 39, it's a good time to share some insights into how we distribute that content through our demand generation managers.

Our demand generation managers' main channel for pushing content is LinkedIn paid ads (although they also use other channels, like email, for example).

And we think about there being levels to this.

The first level of distribution on LinkedIn is organic social. This is where we test which content themes catch people's attention.

For example, this recent blog post our DG managers created on GTM AI:



I talk a lot about how we utilise SMEs throughout our demand creation process. Well, this is another of those instances! We test the content through our SME profiles, sharing posts that cover its themes.

For example, my post on AI:



We know from our audience's engagement with these posts whether they're interested in the subject matter.

If we get positive signals, the DG managers move onto our first level of paid activity. This is to simply put some cash behind the SME post, boosting its reach to new audiences as LinkedIn thought leadership.

This is light touch and minimum time investment but gives us a chance to further validate the topic. As a by-product, we also grow SME profiles.

If this thought leadership ad performs well, we proceed to the next level.

This is where we get creative with the ad, but it's still a low-lift. We call these 'ugly' posts, as the aim is to get the ad live as fast as possible to get quick results.

This time, these posts have CTAs to drive people towards the original blog piece that fuelled the SME posts.



What we look for at this stage is to gauge whether people like the ad, or whether they're actually clicking through and engaging with the long-form blog post.

An ad may get great engagement, with likes and comments. But this may be because the post is short. We need to figure out if our audience is interested in reading the content it's based on and willing to read the full article.

If we see strong click-through rates and time on page, then we have the validation we need to invest more time in creating a longer-term ad with proper creative.

This ad will run for a number of months, driving traffic towards the blog post.

Even further down this validation process, if the DG managers see long-term success in sending people to a specific content asset through paid ads, they may consider building an email content nurture around this same article.

Generally, we only do this when a content asset generates pipeline, as an email nurture takes more time to create.

A crucial part of this content production and distribution story, however, is the feedback loop. Which content pieces made their way throughout the entire validation process? Which ones could be improved? And which ones just flat out didn't work for our audience?

We hold monthly calls between the DG content and DG managers to share the recently published content pieces, discuss campaign plans and arguably most importantly, feedback on results. It's when both teams share important data points.

This feeds back into the initial planning stages for DG content and what they'll produce for the following months and quarters.

FINAL ENTRY

My big bets

Caveat, before I share these big bets... these are not big, bold, new ideas.

These are nitty-gritty.

Controversially (or maybe not!), I don't think I need a shiny new piece of tech next year, or a bigger team.

I actually quite like these times of focused efficiency because they force you and everyone on the team to get back to that start-up mode mentality. This is where some of the best innovation and execution happens.

Big bet 1 - Closer Sales and Marketing alignment

This is going to be big for us in 2025 because a number of important changes have been made to the way that the sales organisation is set up, which will give marketing a chance to become even more closely aligned.

In August, sales rolled out a new territory model. Under this new model, marketing can provide much closer coverage and support to sales in their territories.

Where a territory is focused on a specific vertical, we will work closely with our sales counterparts to expand our industry-focused campaigns and further align touchpoints and messaging within them.

With some of the territories having what used to be more 'minor' countries now a rep's sole focus, we have the opportunity to break out dedicated campaigns where it makes sense to do so. We'll test what is most efficient from a spend and impression share perspective at generating pipeline in these countries.

There's also a great opportunity for more meaningful feedback loops to be created on messaging and positioning that resonates in each territory enabling sales and marketing to be more targeted and specialised in their approaches.

In the same way that our DG managers are business unit owners of their regions, sales will be acting in the same way for their new territories. Meaning that both will be very closely aligned, sharing a joint destiny and revenue targets.

I believe that this type of collaboration will bring large efficiency gains and improve CW rates and ROI on marketing spend.

These are crucial things for us in 2025, when, like many other teams, we'll be expected to make more of what we already have.

Big bet 2 - Process improvements

On the topic of making more of what we already have, 2025 will be the year for creating wins through optimisations.

Some important lessons I've learnt over the last 12 months will drive these:

Process improvement 1 - more face time

People work better when they have more face time. I strongly believe that collaboration and learning in marketing happen much faster when people spend time together.

So, in 2025, we will build a structure and process to have time when we can all come together to brainstorm. This is how we drive innovation and push ourselves to set a new standard for B2B marketing.

An example of one of these initiatives is that we'll do a quarterly ad creative day. The thinking behind this is that right now a lot of ads are created in isolation.

We believe that by carving out time to come together on this single mission once a quarter, we will generate a higher level of creative output, ensuring consistency and collaboration that didn't happen before.

Process improvement 2 - Bringing back accountability

Reporting without reviewing means the impact of the data is lost.

In an effort to increase our team's output and efficiency, we drastically reduced meetings. There was overwhelming feedback from the team that they had meeting fatigue and would be more productive without them.

Process improvement 2 - Bringing back accountability

I have, however, seen that accountability diminishes without the requirement to present and talk to your number.

The importance of the data can be completely lost when it's not presented in a forum where colleagues can discuss it.

Process improvement 3 - incorporating AI into workflows

AI in workflows will become an expectation. If AI can augment a workflow or task without risking the quality of it, then we should be adopting it.

Each team will be OKR'd on this and it will become ingrained in how we operate as a marketing function. Best practice and learnings will be shared across functions and tool testing will be encouraged.

THE LAST WORD

Wow, and that's us at the end of my Diary of a First-Time CMO, Volume 2!

If you're reading this, thank you! I had such a positive response to the first diary, so I was excited to write another.

But with anything, you always worry it won't be as good as the first. So if you've made it to the end, I do hope you found it interesting.

I'd love to know which of the entries resonated with you the most, which you found the most useful, and what you'd have done differently if you'd been in my position.

Connect with me on LinkedIn or continue to get insights from me through my newsletter. I offer up some CMO tidbits every other week in The Loop newsletter (scan the QR code to go to the sign-up page!)



And if not, then you never know. I joked last time about writing a second diary, and here we are. So I guess what I will say this time is - maybe see you later!