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Marketing Automation Report 2021

Lead Generation and Lead Qualification Through Data-Driven Marketing in B2B

**A Study by Aioma and the Institute of
Marketing Management**

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Management Summary

2020 was a turbulent year that brought many far-reaching changes. During the Corona crisis, digital value chains became the “saving anchor” for many companies. Exhibition fairs, conventional advertising, and physical meetings lost importance. Sales through online shops increased rapidly, digital platforms and customer portals gained prominence, and sales and marketing became more digitalized. In addition, many organizations were forced to pursue their digitization programs comprehensively and uncompromisingly. In 2020, it became apparent that people and companies can adapt quickly if necessary. In general, technologies can change rapidly, but organizations more slowly. In the future, marketing automation will be critical to interactive success between customers and companies with their numerous digital touchpoints such as websites, online shops, social media, search engines, and newsletters.

This study examines what Swiss companies think about marketing automation, whether they use it, and how they use it. It is aimed at marketing and sales specialists involved in the process of automation and digitization. Around two-thirds of the 402 specialists who took part in the survey during the fall of 2020 work in business-to-business (B2B), and the others are split 15 percent each into business-to-consumer (B2C) and hybrid types (B2B2C).

Almost all the companies use email, social media marketing, and search engine marketing, while the majority uses customer relationship management (CRM), digital analytics, and a content management system (CMS). Forty percent of respondents use marketing automation, of which a quarter use software extensively, and one-third use it to a limited extent. This study reveals that “successful” companies – those who are better at achieving their online strategy goals – frequently use these marketing technologies. Successful companies are three times more likely to use a marketing automation tool than those unsuccessful at achieving their goals, and companies with large budgets twice as often as those with small budgets.

Marketing automation encompasses several benefits: For half of the companies surveyed, it saves time on repetitive tasks and personalized communication. For 45 percent, it increases efficiency and the return on investment (ROI) in marketing. For 39 percent, it leads to higher lead quality, and for over one-third, it results in more leads or conversions. Marketing automation improves responsiveness and collaboration between marketing and sales at one in three companies. For half of all the companies, the most valuable marketing automation software function is integration into existing systems – CMS, CRM, and ERP (enterprise resource planning). Marketing automation is also used to qualify, score, and nurture leads. Rules (workflows) ensure the distribution of content via emails and social media channels.

The collection of high-quality customer data and the limitations of the current systems present a challenge. Lack of skills and know-how are also major issues, as are inefficient processes. One of the factors preventing companies from introducing marketing automation is usually a lack of internal expertise. For one in four companies, insufficient data quality, lack of prioritization, and budgeting issues are also significant obstacles – especially among smaller companies. To determine whether marketing automation delivers the desired benefits and successes, it is essential to measure key performance indicators (KPIs). For half of the companies surveyed, this is the measurement of conversion rates along the customer journey, followed by the number of sales-qualified leads (SQL) and the number of leads or contacts generated. Marketing automation will become part of the digital business strategy for almost every second company in the future. Over one-third confirm that marketing automation will have a more prominent role and become part of future digital marketing. Ten percent believe that marketing automation will replace personal communication – at least to some degree.

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	4
Foreword by Aioma	5
Background	5
Marketing Automation Is Not Just About Business Efficiency	5
Marketing automation must address customer needs	5
Challenges without Marketing Automation	5
The key to successful marketing automation	6
1 Introduction	7
1.1 Study description	7
1.2 Sample	7
1.3 Human and financial resources	8
1.4 Goal achievement	8
2 Digital Marketing	9
2.1 Digital fitness of companies	9
2.2 Use of marketing technologies	9
2.3 Online marketing goals	12
2.4 Challenges with online marketing goals	15
3 Marketing Automation	17
3.1 Definition of Marketing Automation	17
3.2 Advantages of Marketing Automation	17
3.3 introduction Barriers of marketing automation	19
3.4 Use of marketing automation software	20
3.5 Marketing Automation Software Features	21
3.6 Key Performance Indicators	24
3.7 The Future role of marketing automation	25
4 Conclusion	26
4.1 Summary	26
4.2 Marketing Automation – Recommendations and Checklist	27
5 References	30
6 List of Figures and Tables	32
7 Authors	33
8 Research Partners	35
9 Further Education Programs	36

Foreword by Aioma

BACKGROUND

This study is intended to increase knowledge among B2B organizations about the possibilities of marketing automation. It also serves to analyze the latest developments in online marketing for B2B companies. These insights will be incorporated into Aioma's software product to drive automation further so that companies can focus on the essential task of closing deals. This is **B2B marketing on autopilot**.

As a thought leader in marketing automation, Aioma helps B2B companies grow through predictable revenue. In addition, Aioma empowers B2B organizations to sell more through better marketing. Clients generate qualified leads on an ongoing basis through automated and personalized content and email marketing.

MARKETING AUTOMATION IS NOT JUST ABOUT BUSINESS EFFICIENCY

The **automation of recurring processes** is one of the core marketing automation tasks, as this study empirically confirms. For example, email campaigns and the collection of lead addresses can be standardized with marketing automation. However, the advantage of marketing automation is not only the short-term increase in performance through isolated, automated processes. With marketing automation, it is possible to **acquire customers early in the customer journey** (lead generation), collect information about their interests and needs, and actively guide them through the customer journey (lead nurturing). In this sense, marketing automation also enables and promotes the development of long-term, qualitative customer relationships.

MARKETING AUTOMATION MUST ADDRESS CUSTOMER NEEDS

Marketing automation is successful when customers are offered an **individualized buying experience to suit their needs**. To do this, a company must know its customers' needs in the various phases of the customer journey. Next, **relevant content** must be created and distributed that precisely serves these needs and offers the customer relevant information at the right time and through the appropriate channel. Every customer has an individual customer journey and expects tailored information; it is therefore no longer sufficient to bombard each customer with the same advertising message. The content should not be prepared in a promotional style but focus on a clearly defined customer need. The more precisely you know the phase your customers are in and the challenges they face, the better you can **address them in a tailored, individual way**.

CHALLENGES WITHOUT MARKETING AUTOMATION

Depending on the phase of the customer journey, marketing specialists face different barriers. Marketing automation can help them overcome these hurdles and make their marketing activities and processes more efficient. For example, marketing automation can help **close gaps in the team and data quality, supplementing existing knowledge and data**. The situation is similar in later phases of the customer journey. Here, too, marketing automation helps digitize, simplify, and accelerate processes and obtain clear metrics.

1. Strategic Know-How is the Foundation

Before starting with marketing automation, it is important to define a **strategy**. Part of this strategy is an overview of the customer journey – or different customer journey variants – for various types of client. This way, initial assumptions are made about the buyer base, which can then be tested and optimized through marketing automation. Typical customer questions in the buying process, problems, and use cases from the customer's perspective provide valuable input for creating the strategy. Furthermore, the **objectives** in digital marketing should be formulated clearly. An analysis of the current situation is necessary, to expose the fundamental problems lie is necessary in any event. Are the greatest levers to be found in lead generation, lead conversion, lead qualification, or even in measurability?

2. The Quality of the Data is Vital

To inform customers in a targeted manner, **data** about their interests and needs are required. If this data is not available or not of sufficient quality, marketing automation often fails. Accordingly, data from various sources such as digital analytics, CRM (customer relationship management), CDP (customer data platforms), DWH (data warehouse), or BI (business intelligence) should be combined in a central cockpit to form **meaningful customer profiles**. This enables depicting how far customers have progressed in the buying process and what steps are yet required to complete the purchase.

3. Stay in Touch and Increase Reach

Ongoing customer contact – where companies follow up at the right place and time – is vital for a successful buying process. However, this often involves a great deal of effort. In addition to direct one-to-one contact, as a company, you always want to introduce new users to the digital platforms. To do this, it is essential to use search engine optimization and advertising as well as the appropriate social media channels. The result is **comprehensive, personalized communication** that promotes long-term users and customer loyalty.

THE KEY TO SUCCESSFUL MARKETING AUTOMATION

Marketing automation is successful when it is used as a tool to achieve **clearly defined goals**. The focus must always be on the customer and their needs. This implementation pattern shows which companies use marketing automation only for small, isolated tasks and which companies exploit the full potential of marketing automation.

Used correctly, marketing automation enables:

- Transmission of relevant **customer information**,
- **Localization** of the customer along the customer journey,
- Delivery of the appropriate information at the right time,
- Long-term **relationship of trust** between customers and the company
- **Efficiency and performance benefits** as a welcome bonus.

As you read this study's findings, we wish you new insights, inspiration for your activities, and success in designing and automating interactions with your customers.

Marc Gasser

CEO, Aioma AG

1 Introduction

Together with the Institute of Marketing Management (IMM) at the Zurich University of Applied Sciences (ZHAW), Aioma conducted a marketing automation study. The aim was to determine what the surveyed companies think about marketing automation, how they use it, and which KPIs they use to measure its efficiency. The study also examined what successful companies do differently in terms of achieving online marketing objectives. The majority of the 402 participating companies operate in the business-to-business (B2B) sector. This study is aimed at marketing and sales professionals involved in process automation.

1.1 STUDY DESCRIPTION

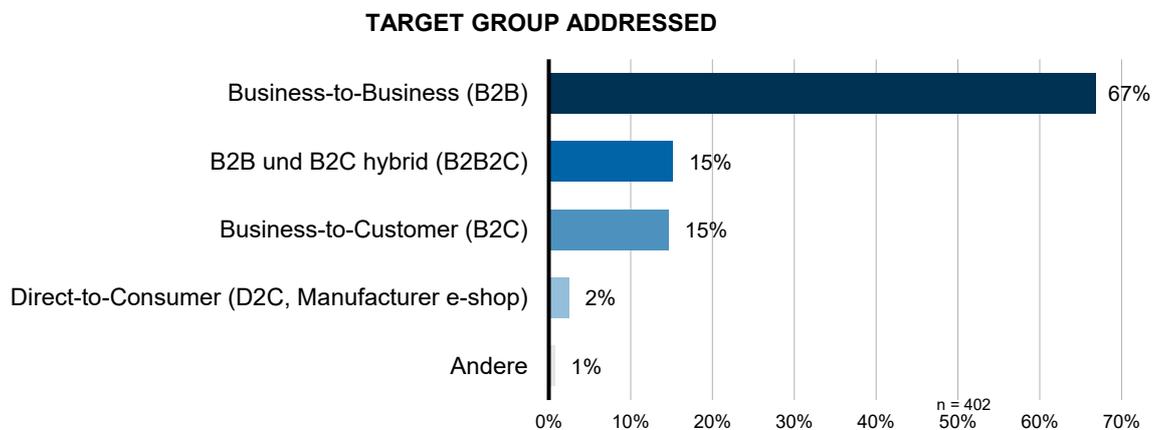
The target audience of this marketing automation study were marketing and sales professionals and executive management members of business-to-business (B2B) companies with 50 or more employees. The study was conducted over two months from **4 August 2020 - 2 October 2020** through a quantitative survey and data was collected using SurveyMonkey software. From over 1,000 initial contacts, **402 participants** answered most of the provided questions. The sample size (n) is 402 unless otherwise noted. The survey was promoted within Aioma's customer database and network and through its authors' channels, marketing automation experts, consultants, and extensive IMM network.

1.2 SAMPLE

Two-thirds (67 percent in Fig. 1) of the respondents are active in the **business-to-business (B2B)** sector and target B2B customers with their marketing activities. Fifteen percent of the surveyed companies target hybrid customer groups (B2B2C) and another 15 percent **business-to-consumer (B2C)** customers. Only two percent of the sample are in the **direct-to-consumer (D2C)** business, i.e., manufacturers of products and service providers.

Four further entries were made in the open text field under "other." These being agencies, consultants, B2C retailers, B2B wholesalers, or manufacturers who directly supply B2B.

Figure 1: Which customers do you want to reach with your marketing activities? (Multiple answers possible)



1.3 HUMAN AND FINANCIAL RESOURCES

Figure 2 shows that 41 percent of participating companies have one or two **full-time employees** working in online sales and marketing, while 25 percent have between two and five full-time positions. Thirteen percent of the companies (which are generally larger) have more than ten full-time positions.

Figure 2: How many full-time equivalents do you employ for online sales and marketing in your company?

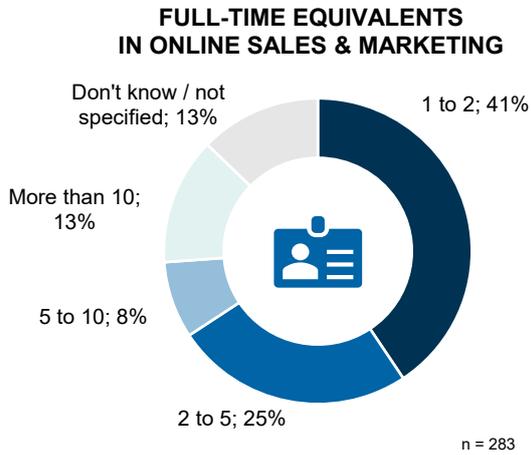
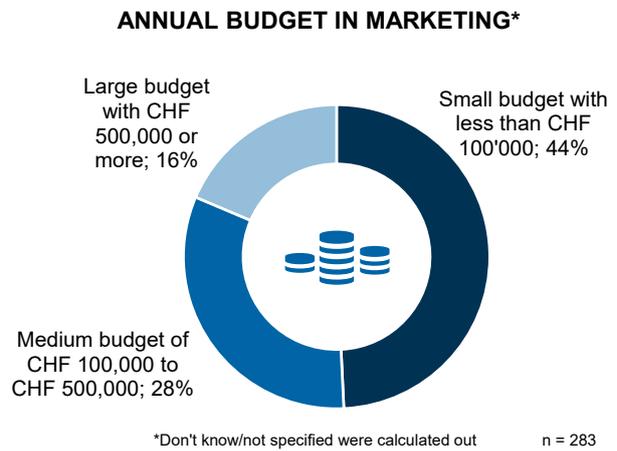


Figure 3: What are your annual budgets for online marketing?



The annual marketing budget of the participating companies was also surveyed (see Fig. 3) and almost 50 percent – mostly Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) – have a small **online marketing annual budget** of less than CHF 100,000. Twenty-eight percent have a medium-sized budget of CHF 100,000 to CHF 500,000, and 16 percent – mostly financially strong companies – have a marketing budget of more than CHF 500,000.

1.4 GOAL ACHIEVEMENT

Regarding how successful the company's online strategy is in **achieving its goals**, one in ten stated they were very successful (see Figure 4). One-third considered themselves successful, while 39 percent said they were moderately successful. Nine percent stated that they were moderately unsuccessful in achieving their goals, and two percent were not successful. Eight percent gave a different answer (see Table 1): Some have not yet established a strategy or not (yet) measured goals. Individual respondents also indicated that this was project-dependent or difficult to measure. The information on goal achievement is used in Chapter 2 to filter out what distinguishes successful from less successful companies when implementing marketing automation.

Figure 4: How successful is your online strategy in terms of achieving your goals?



Table 1: Other online strategies

#	Other answers	Number
1	No strategy or still too early for a statement	8
2	The targets have not been measured so far	6
3	Product or project dependent	3
4	Not relevant/no priority	3
5	Currently difficult to measure	2

2 Digital Marketing

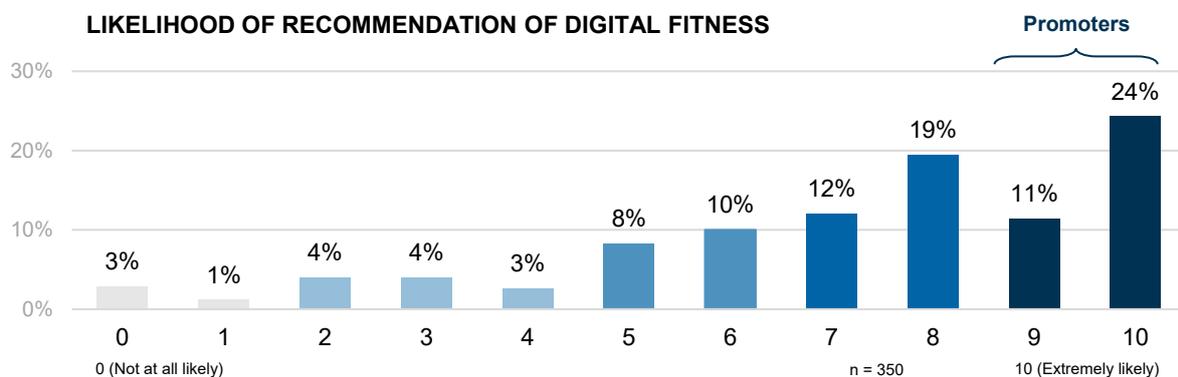
The first part of the survey deals with general questions about digital marketing. These were divided into the following four sections: (1) Digital fitness of the participating companies, (2) Use of marketing technologies, (3) Online marketing goals, and (4) Challenges faced.

2.1 DIGITAL FITNESS OF COMPANIES

To measure digital fitness, i.e., the company's digital maturity level, the 402 participants were asked to rate their company in terms of **digital fitness**. One in four people said they were "extremely likely" to recommend their company to others (with a value of 10 on a scale of 0-10 in Figure 5). Forty-two percent were "likely" to do so (rated 7-9), while 15 percent of the respondents submitted a value between 0 and 4 and would certainly not recommend their own company for its digital fitness.

The proportion of **promoters** with 9 or 10 who would recommend their company in digital terms accounts for 35 percent of the respondents. The **net promoter score (NPS)** for digital fitness is therefore two percent (promoters - detractors = 35 - 33 percent). According to their assessment, since the value is positive, there are more promoters than detractors of digital maturity in this sample.

Figure 5: How likely are you to recommend your company in terms of digital fitness?

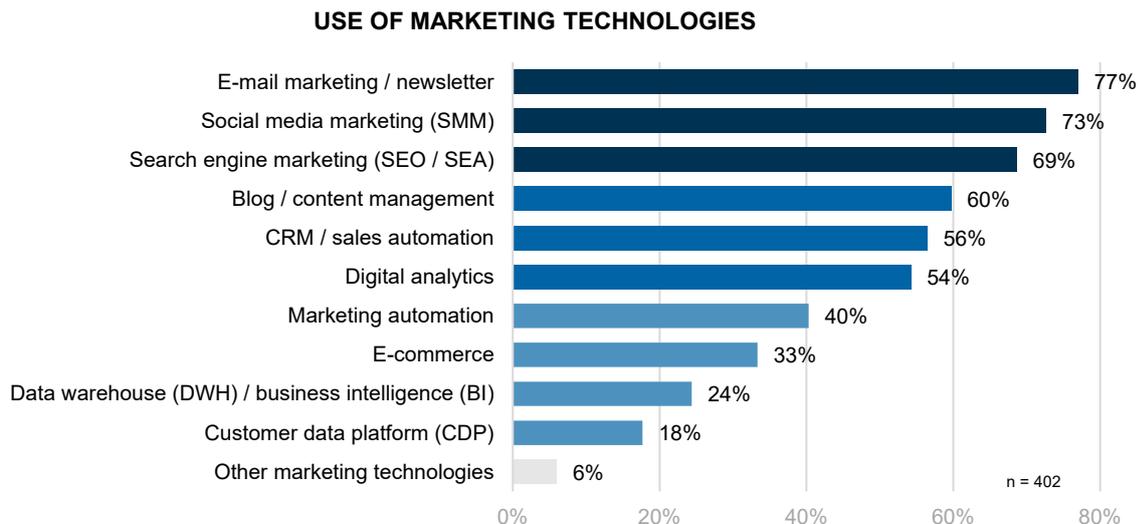


2.2 USE OF MARKETING TECHNOLOGIES

One important question in the study focused on deploying and using various digital marketing technologies and tools (see Fig. 6). This indicated that newsletters and **email marketing** are most frequently used, with 77 percent mentioning this. This study confirms that email and newsletter marketing is a relevant marketing tool for almost all companies (Kreutzer, 2018; Zumstein & Steigerwald, 2019). For marketing automation, established email technology is also essential, as discussed below and as various sources support (Wicki, 2018; Hameed, 2020; Schoepf, 2020).

Three-quarters of the participating companies also actively use **social media marketing (SMM)** such as Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, XING, YouTube, and Twitter in their digital marketing mix. Precise (re-)targeting of the group(s) makes social media an important channel for marketing automation.

Figure 6: Which marketing technologies does your company actively use? (Multiple answers possible)



This study also confirmed that **search engine marketing (SEM)**, with its two disciplines of search engine optimization (SEO) and search engine advertising (SEA), is one of the most important digital marketing instruments. These tools were actively used by 69 percent of the 402 companies surveyed. **Blogs** and **content management** (content marketing) are also actively practiced by two-thirds of these Swiss companies. High-quality and up-to-date content on the website, social media, newsletters, and blogs, together with the data, form the basis for marketing automation.

More than half of those surveyed actively use **customer relationship management (CRM)** and/or **sales automation**. A similar number use a **digital analytics tool**, such as Google Analytics, Adobe Analytics, or Matomo to automatically collect, store, and analyze web data (Zumstein et al., 2021). Around 40 percent already use **marketing automation (MA)** technology; which is further discussed in Chapter 3. This is a higher proportion than in previous surveys (Hannig, 2017; PwC, 2018; Wicki, 2018).

One-third of the companies operate an online store and are active in **e-commerce**. One in four actively uses a **data warehouse (DWH)** or **business intelligence (BI)** system while **customer data platforms (CDP)** are used less frequently (18 percent). Unlike CRM, a CDP or DMP (data management platform) can link diverse sources of user and customer data and interactions, allowing companies to have a comprehensive view, better understand their prospects or customers, and respond in real-time. Database technologies such as DWH, BI, and CDP are less likely to be used by SMEs with low budgets (see Table 5). Among other marketing technologies, account-based marketing (ABM), IP (internet protocol) targeting, as well as content, video, and inbound marketing platforms were mentioned in an open text field (see Table 2). Some participants indicated offline marketing tools, such as a sales team, events, fairs, or trade shows (see Table 3).

Table 3: Other marketing technologies

#	Other – Marketing Technologies	Number
1	Account-based marketing, IP targeting	2
2	Content marketing and video marketing platforms, inbound	2
3	Affiliate, retargeting, paid ad channels	2
4	Social Listening	1
5	Bots	1
6	Product information management (PIM), product data exchange (PDX)	1
7	Virtual / augmented reality (VR / AR)	1
8	Audio analytics	1

Table 2: Offline marketing tools

#	Other – Offline instruments	Number
1	Field service	1
2	Events and fairs	1
3	No digital marketing for our own company.	1
4	Offline community management (own and third-party events, workshops)	1
5	Trade shows	1

Table 4: Actively used marketing technologies of successful and unsuccessful companies

Actively Used Marketing Technologies	Successful Companies (n = 168)	Ø (n = 157)	Unsuccessful Companies (n = 44)
Email Marketing / Newsletter	95%	93%	85%
Social Media Marketing (SMM)	93%	88%	76%
Search Engine Marketing (SEO/SEA)	92%	83%	67%
Blog / Content Management	85%	72%	55%
CRM / Sales Automation	84%	68%	42%
Digital Analytics (e.g., Google Analytics)	82%	65%	27%
Marketing Automation (MA; basic functions)	72%	49%	18%
MA for Lead Generation/Qualification and Retention	79%	62%	21%

A closer look at the companies that consider themselves “successful” or “somewhat successful” reveals that **successful companies deploy and use more marketing technologies** as opposed to less successful companies (Table 4). At 95 percent, almost all the successful businesses use **email or newsletter marketing**, compared to 85 percent of the unsuccessful ones. Further on, the gap widens: While virtually all successful companies actively use **social media marketing** (93 percent) and **search engine marketing** (92 percent), the unsuccessful ones use these tools much less (76 percent and 67 percent, respectively).

While 85 percent of successful organizations apply **content management** on their website or blog, only 55 percent of the unsuccessful organizations do so. Similarly, while 84 percent of the successful organizations use a **CRM** or a **sales automation system**, only half that proportion (42 percent) of the unsuccessful ones do so. One reason for these large differences is a lack of financial resources (see Table 5).

At 27 percent in Table 4, unsuccessful companies work three times less frequently with web data of **digital analytics** than successful ones. This seems remarkable, considering digital analytics is the prerequisite for measuring and controlling the success of digital marketing instruments. This research confirms that web analytics contributes significantly to the achievement of goals and the success of companies (Zumstein, 2012). In addition, digital analytics data is the basis for various analytics and artificial intelligence applications (Zumstein et al., 2021).

The widest gap is currently observable in regards to **marketing automation**: While 72 percent of the successful companies use its basic functions (e.g. workflows and automated email according to defined rules), only 18 percent of the unsuccessful ones do so. Successful companies use marketing automation for **lead generation, qualification, and customer retention** approximately four times more frequently than unsuccessful companies. Therefore, we conclude that the comprehensive and professional use of marketing technologies is directly related to a company’s digital success. Success in marketing and sales depends on a company’s particular goals, which we will discuss in more detail in Section 2.3.

The deployment and use of various marketing technologies is highly dependent on the investment, budget, and other organizational resources. Unlike large enterprises, SMEs with limited resources often cannot afford the breadth of professional enterprise solutions. Table 5 examines the extent to which the use of marketing technologies depends on the **size of the marketing budget**. It has become evident that email and social media marketing are used by almost all companies, regardless of the size of their marketing budget. However, differences can already be seen in search engine marketing. While almost all (97 percent) of the companies with a large marketing budget of over CHF 500,000 use SEO and SEA, only 77 percent of SMEs with a small budget of less than CHF 100,000 do so. With a smaller budget, large search engine ad campaigns such as Google ads are often out of question. Although most companies with small budgets operate content management (70 percent) and CRM (68 percent), the figure is significantly higher for companies with large budgets (81 and 86 percent, respectively).

Table 5: Use of marketing technologies by companies with small, medium, and large marketing budgets

Use of Marketing Technologies	Small Budget (CHF < 100k; n = 98)	Medium Budget (CHF 100-500k; n = 64)	Large Budget (CHF >500k; n = 37)
Email marketing / Newsletter	92%	94%	97%
Social Media Marketing (SMM)	85%	94%	95%
Search Engine Marketing (SEO / SEA)	77%	86%	97%
Blog / Content Management (CMS)	70%	80%	81%
CRM / Sales Automation	68%	72%	86%
Digital Analytics (e.g., Google Analytics)	57%	73%	89%
Marketing Automation (MA)	44%	50%	81%
E-Commerce	29%	42%	78%
Customer Data Platform (CDP)	14%	22%	43%
Data Warehouse (DWH) & Business Intelligence	13%	30%	76%

Legend for marketing technologies: ■ Used by all ■ Used by the majority ■ Used by some ■ Used by a few

Although free tools such as Google Analytics or Matomo are available for web and **digital analytics**, only 57 percent of companies with small budgets use them – for medium budgets, the figure is 73 percent and for large budgets, 89 percent (see Table 5). As far as measuring and managing success in digital marketing is concerned, many SMEs have room for improvement. Web analysis, the tracking of marketing technologies and instruments through digital analytics, is the starting point for marketing automation.

The extent to which the use of technology depends on the budget is also reflected in the **marketing automation gap**. While “only” 44 percent of companies with a low budget – and 50 percent with a medium budget – can afford a marketing automation tool, the figure for companies with large budgets is at 81 percent. This data shows that although marketing automation does not have to be expensive, SMEs in particular are afraid to utilize it. Many SMEs are caught in the **investment trap**: They do not want or cannot afford marketing automation. Additional technologies, and the creation of relevant content, are accordingly less likely to achieve their marketing goals. As Table 10 in Chapter 3.2 confirms, the **lack of a budget** is one of the biggest challenges SMEs face in getting started with marketing automation. SMEs are advised to start with lean, low-cost automation systems to avoid passivity while gaining valuable experience (see Fig. 12 in Chapter 3.3).

Another gap exists in **e-commerce**. While 78 percent of the large-budget companies surveyed operate an online store, only 29 percent of small companies with limited resources do so. **Database technologies** (such as a CDP, DWH, or BI) are used six times less frequently in small-marketing-budget businesses than in large companies with sizeable budgets.

2.3 ONLINE MARKETING GOALS

Another research question in the research examined the digital marketing objectives in the last quarter of 2020. The most important online marketing objective for 60 percent of the participants was **lead generation** (see Fig. 7). Acquiring new customers through online channels was (and remains) the overriding objective for digital marketing and sales. For half of the respondents, it was also relevant to **inform interested parties and customers** with news and information about the company’s products, services, or events.

Figure 7: What were your most important online marketing goals for the fourth quarter of 2020? (Multiple answers possible)



At 47 percent, **retaining customers** was the third most frequently cited goal in Figure 7. Marketing automation also contributed to this goal by using proven customer loyalty tools such as newsletters, social media, and mobile marketing in a targeted and automated way.

In e-business and e-commerce, **increasing the number of transactions or sales** was a frequent corporate goal (46 percent). Moreover, more than one-third wanted to **qualify leads for sales**, i.e. collect and prioritize contact data from interested parties through digital marketing. For 28 percent of respondents, performance was measured along the **customer journey**.

Only 20 percent measured **return on investment (ROI)** or return on marketing (ROM) in the fourth quarter of 2020. Even less frequently, 17 percent of respondents aimed to shorten and improve sales cycles in marketing and sales.

Other important online marketing objectives mentioned a few times under “other,” were increasing **brand awareness, brand recognition**, and **process optimization** (see Table 6). **Personalization**, for example, of products or content, was also mentioned several times in the open text field. Other participants again explicitly mentioned acquiring new customers and providing information. A few wanted to gain insight and increase the engagement rate in social media.

As some sales channels in B2B – such as face-to-face sales at **trade fairs, conferences, congresses**, and the **field sales team** – are currently restricted due to the pandemic, the pressure and need to sell digitally has increased.

Table 6: Other online marketing goals

#	Other Marketing Goals	Count
1	Increasing brand awareness and brand recognition	5
2	Processing optimization (e.g., digitize CRM and link it with sales)	5
3	Personalization (e.g., content, products)	4
4	Building up leadership	2
5	Acquiring new customers	2
6	Informing and generating insights	2
7	Increasing engagement rate (e.g., optimize return visitors, interactions, reach)	1
8	Reducing lead generation costs	1
9	Online shop structure	1

Table 7: Online marketing goals according to companies with small, medium, and large marketing budgets

Online Marketing Goals	Small Budget (CHF < 100k; n = 98)	Medium Budget (CHF 100-500k; n = 64)	Large Budget (CHF >500k; n = 37)
Generating new leads	74%	75%	84%
Informing interested parties/customers	59%	72%	41%
Retaining customers	47%	67%	59%
Increasing sales/transactions	58%	48%	76%
Qualifying leads for sales	38%	55%	38%
Measuring performance along customer journey	27%	42%	46%
Shortening and improving sales cycles	16%	23%	32%
Calculating return on investment (ROI)	17%	34%	41%

Legend for the marketing goals: ■ Very frequent goal ■ Majority goal ■ Occasional goal ■ Rare goal

Table 7 presents the online marketing objectives of the companies depending on the available budget. It is noticeable that “generate new leads” was the most frequently mentioned online marketing goal, virtually irrespective of the size of the company and its marketing budget. Surprisingly, SMEs with medium budgets wanted to inform existing or prospective customers more often than companies with large budgets. This could be related to the fact that companies with large budgets (76 percent) are significantly more transactional or sales-oriented than those with medium budgets (48 percent).

For large marketing budgets, performance along the customer journey was measured significantly more often (46 percent) than for small ones (27 percent). The same applied to ROI. Based on Table 7, it can be observed that companies with large marketing budgets have significantly more **sales and performance-oriented goals** than those with small or medium budgets.

These results confirm the goals and success factors of online marketing practice found in other studies (CMI & MarketingProfs, 2020). Table 8 summarizes the differences between successful and unsuccessful companies in providing content and activities along the customer journey.

Table 8: Content and activities along the customer journey

Content and Activities Along the Customer Journey	Successful Companies	Ø	Unsuccessful Companies
Using metrics to measure content performance and ROI	95%	80%	62%
Delivering content at the right time and place	93%	71%	37%
Prioritization of information needs over advertising messages	88%	66%	50%
Proof of ROI	84%	59%	25%
Building loyalty of customers	84%	63%	39%
Maintaining lists of subscribers, leads, prospective clients, and customers	83%	68%	51%
Providing optimal experiences along the customer journey	83%	52%	23%
Documenting of the content marketing strategy	69%	41%	16%

Source: Adapted from CMI & MarketingProfs (2020) (n = 1,020 CMOs).

What distinguishes successful from unsuccessful companies in Table 8 is – in addition to the use of data and metrics – the **provision of content** at the right place and time. Successful ones were significantly more active in content management and marketing with 93 percent than unsuccessful ones with 37 percent. In addition, unsuccessful firms documented content marketing strategy four times less frequently (16 percent) than successful businesses (69 percent).

Less successful companies measured ROI significantly less and maintained fewer lists of prospective customers and sales leads. Those that are successful along the customer journey were also almost four times more likely to offer an optimal “**customer experience**” (83 percent) than those that were unsuccessful (23 percent).

2.4 CHALLENGES WITH ONLINE MARKETING GOALS

When asked about the biggest challenges in defining and achieving online marketing goals, 38 percent of the participants cited collecting **high-quality customer data** (see Fig. 8). This refers to customer data that helps qualify a lead for sales – a sales qualified lead (SQL) – and relevant information such as position, company size, sales potential, budget, and location. For larger companies with a corresponding budget, the quality problem with customer data was significantly lower than for SMEs (see Table 9). Second on the list of challenges was the **limitations of the current systems** (31 percent). With their numerous and complex marketing and information systems, larger companies experience technical and functional limitations more frequently.

For 30 percent of respondents, **lack of internal skills and know-how** was a problem (see Fig. 8) and affected the companies to a similar extent, regardless of the marketing budget (see Table 9). **Inefficient processes** caused problems for a quarter of the companies surveyed. However, this inefficiency was lower in smaller companies with a lower marketing budget than in medium-sized or even large companies.

Regular market cultivation was a common challenge for every second small company with limited resources but for large companies with more financial resources, handling the market was not a problem. The larger an organization, the more likely it will have the financial and human resources to cultivate the market continuously.

With 41 percent agreeing, large companies were challenged by **coordinating sales and marketing activities** significantly more often than medium-sized (31 percent) and smaller companies (21 percent in Table 9). Access to existing **customer data** in their own company was a challenge for just 18 percent.

Figure 8: What are the biggest challenges in current online marketing goals? (Multiple answers are possible)



Table 9: Challenges in achieving marketing goals according to companies with small, medium, and large marketing budgets

Challenges in Achieving Goals	Small Budget (CHF < 100k; n = 98)	Medium Budget (CHF 100-500k; n = 64)	Large Budget (CHF >500k; n = 37)
Collecting high-quality customer data	53%	48%	35%
Limitations of current systems	29%	31%	43%
Internal skills and know-how	34%	38%	41%
Inefficient processes	20%	38%	27%
Regular market development	46%	31%	5%
Coordination between sales and marketing	22%	31%	41%
Access to existing customer data	19%	25%	22%

Legend ■ Major challenge ■ Medium challenge ■ Minor challenge ■ No challenge

In an open text field “other challenges”, **scarce resources** in the technical, staffing, and financial areas were mentioned several times. **Data analysis and integration** was a significant issue for a small number of participants.

Content creation and targeting were also explicitly mentioned. Three participants also reported an insufficiently developed IT infrastructure or the ongoing challenge of finding the best technological setup. Twice, the **Corona crisis** was mentioned as this had upset marketing planning and objectives in 2020.

3 Marketing Automation

The second section of the survey collected data concerning marketing automation, with a focus on the main benefits, barriers, usage, and valuable features of marketing automation software. Other key performance indicators (KPIs) and the future role of marketing automation were also examined.

3.1 DEFINITION OF MARKETING AUTOMATION

Marketing automation is understood by Hannig (2017, p. 5) as the IT-supported execution of recurring marketing tasks to increase the efficiency of marketing processes and the effectiveness of marketing decisions. In other words, marketing automation is a software-supported method for automating marketing processes. In this process, user profiles are enriched with information based on their usage and customer behaviour. This data foundation is used for individual communication through automated campaigns. Marketing automation aims to optimise resources, as the automation of repetitive tasks saves time and money (Sanderson, 2017).

Typically, marketing automation solutions combine functions from **digital analytics, email marketing, social media marketing, and retargeting** to focus on **workflows for lead management**. Lead management, in turn, includes lead generation and a **lead nurturing process** that result in qualified sales leads.

From a process perspective, marketing automation begins with the receipt of a lead – such as an email address – after a **web form** has been filled out. From this moment on, a user profile is stored, which can be enriched with individual data for further interactions with websites, emails, digital ads, or social media posts.

Marketing automation solutions usually offer a **scoring function** that can verify the maturity of a contact, customer journeys can be tracked on the company websites, and suitable interactions can be evaluated.

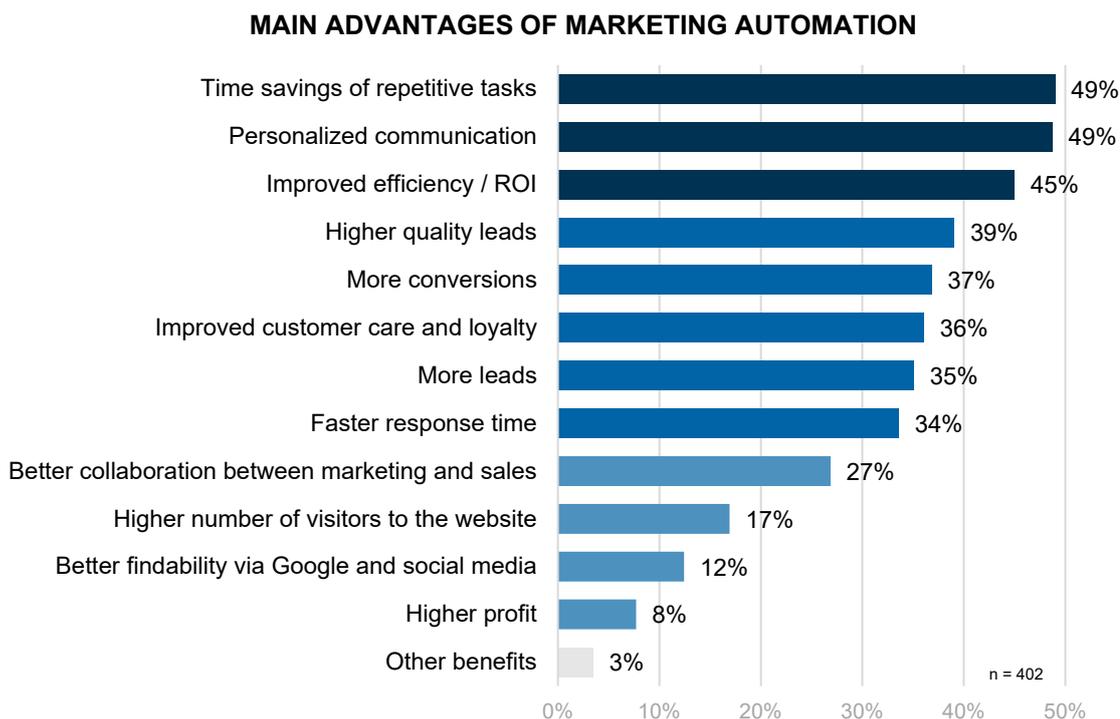
3.2 ADVANTAGES OF MARKETING AUTOMATION

When asked about the main benefits of marketing automation (MA), the following two points (see Figure 9) were elicited from half of the participants: Firstly, the **time saved on repetitive tasks**, such as the automated sending of emails or mobile messages, depending on a set of rules and the data used was mentioned. Secondly, the relevance of information was increased through **personalized communication** by the individual adaptation of campaigns, messages, content, or product suggestions to the needs or interests of a person or target group. Personalized targeting is based on data from user clicks, information, and interaction behaviour or on their interests and characteristics, such as age, gender, location, and function. The findings confirm the definition and objectives of marketing automation according to Hannig et al. (2017, p. 30).

Nearly half of the respondents recognised improved marketing efficiency and a **higher return on investment (ROI)** as a further advantage of pursuing marketing automation. Other studies and the specialist literature confirm these findings (e.g., Hannig et al., 2017; CMI & MarketingProfs, 2020).

More than 39 percent mentioned they had increased the **quality of leads** thanks to marketing automation. Higher quality – such as a marketing qualified lead (MQL), sales accepted lead (SAL), or sales qualified lead (SQL) – translates into a higher probability of acquiring a prospective customer.

Figure 9: In your personal opinion, what are the main benefits of marketing automation? (Multiple answers possible)



Every third user realized a higher **number of conversions** and **leads** as a key benefit of marketing automation. Firstly, this study confirms that marketing automation results in better lead management when generating and processing new contacts and prospects (Hannig et al., 2017; PwC, 2018; Schoepf, 2020; Wicki, 2018). Secondly, it shows that marketing automation is an effective approach that supports the primary objective of digital marketing, namely the acquisition of sales leads.

Every third respondent who successfully used marketing automation reported improved **customer care and loyalty**. The automation of information and communication, therefore, serves to acquire new customers at the beginning of the customer journey and to retain customers and maintain relationships at the end of their journey.

In addition to the time-saving effect, automation in marketing also led to **faster responsiveness** for 34 percent of respondents. While employees generally do not respond to user or customer inquiries at night or over the weekend, an uninterrupted operation is achievable with the aid automated applications via email, contact forms, online shops, chatbots, or messenger services.

For one in four participants, marketing automation led to **better collaboration between marketing and sales**, which reconfirms earlier research findings (Hannig et al., 2017). Particularly medium-sized and larger companies with their own sales and marketing departments, growth, professionalization, division of labour, and specialization caused marketing and sales to become distant or estranged from each other. However, due to digitization and automation, marketing and sales have been increasingly coming together again. Marketing and sales must work closely together in an agile manner in day-to-day operations, as their areas of responsibility and activity are increasingly merging. This is obvious for technologies (e.g. marketing automation, website, online shops, social media, CRM, DWH, and BI) and data (e.g. digital analytics, lead, and customer data), which should be shared and not managed in silos.

A higher number of **visitors on the website** (17 percent) and better **findability on search engines** such as Google and social media (12 percent) were only seen as an advantage by a minority of respondents and are, it would seem, not central to marketing automation. A few marketing automation tools, such as the inbound marketing software Hubspot or Aioma, currently offer a CMS and SEO, supporting a better ranking on search engines as a welcome bonus.

Only eight percent of respondents viewed **higher profit** as a major benefit of marketing automation. This would suggest that while marketing automation is a technological and professional tool from the operational perspective of digital marketing, its strategic influence on a company's business and revenue model often remains limited. In other words, marketing automation can be used to make numerous marketing and sales processes more effective and efficient, but this has no direct influence on the value proposition itself, i.e., on the value of a product or service for the customer.

Among other benefits, **scalability** and increased **processing speeds** were mentioned in an open text field by four participants. They also reported that marketing automation led to an improved customer journey and higher measurability of marketing success.

3.3 INTRODUCTION BARRIERS OF MARKETING AUTOMATION

Regarding what participants see as significant obstacles to introducing marketing automation, one third reported a **lack of internal expertise and know-how** (see Figure 10). There is often a shortage of qualified employees in the labour market and in the companies themselves, regardless of their size and budget (see Table 10). This shortfall – identified in former studies (Hannig et al., 2017, p. 28) – has not eased in recent years.

For a quarter of the companies surveyed, insufficient **data quality** was a major obstacle to marketing automation, confirming this as one of the greatest digital analytics challenges (Zumstein et al., 2021). In particular, medium-sized companies often do not meet the data and technological requirements to begin automation projects in marketing and sales.

For one in four organizations, the introduction of automation was not a **priority**. Here, other projects or activities have priority for management, marketing, or sales. As mentioned above, one in four lacked the necessary **budget** for marketing automation – even more so in the uncertain times of a pandemic. This affected SMEs more often than large organizations (see Table 10).

Any business wanting to introduce marketing automation requires a clearly defined **strategy**. However, this prerequisite was absent for 21 percent of the surveyed companies (29 and 24 percent, respectively, for those with medium and small budgets (see Table 10).

Figure 10: What do you see as major obstacles to introducing marketing automation in your company? (Multiple answers possible)

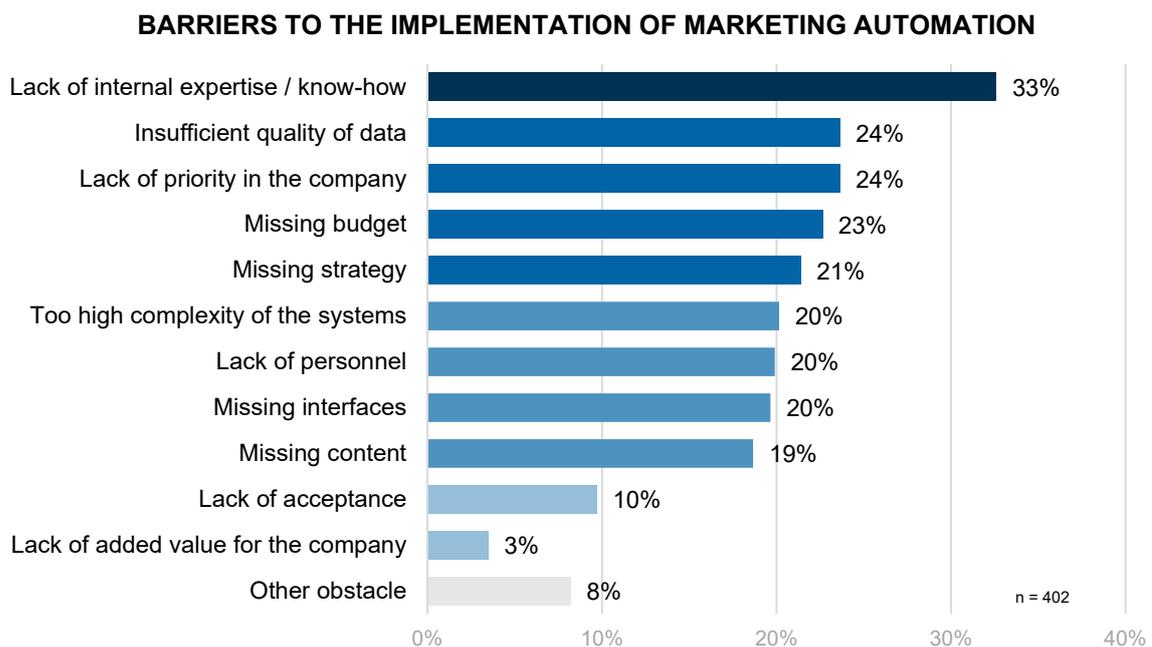


Table 10: Challenges in the introduction of marketing automation according to companies with small, medium, and large marketing budgets

Challenges to MA Introduction	Small Budget (CHF < 100k; n = 98)	Medium Budget (CHF 100-500k; n = 64)	Large Budget (CHF >500k; n = 37)
Lack of internal expertise / know-how	40%	49%	46%
Insufficient quality of the data	28%	40%	35%
Lack of priority within the company	30%	37%	24%
Lack of budget	41%	28%	14%
Lack of strategy	24%	29%	19%
Complexity of the systems too high	20%	31%	32%
Missing interfaces	19%	31%	30%
Missing content	32%	22%	16%
Lack of acceptance	9%	22%	11%
Lack of added value for the company	7%	3%	11%

Legend: ■ Major challenge ■ Medium challenge ■ Minor challenge ■ Rare challenge

For one in five, high **system complexity and technical interfaces** caused problems, and for medium and large companies, the number was even higher, confirming earlier empirical findings (Hannig et al., 2017). Those who want to operate marketing automation successfully need related **content** provided through various online channels such as email, website, blog, and social media (see Table 8).

However, every fifth company lacked the appropriate content. This increased to every third company on a small budget. Likewise, these findings are confirmed by the findings of CMI & MarketingProfs (2020) and Hannig et al. (2017, p. 28), where 33 percent observed significant challenges in providing relevant content. One in ten lacked **acceptance** for marketing automation within the company; however, practically all respondents recognized the added value of marketing automation for the company.

3.4 USE OF MARKETING AUTOMATION SOFTWARE

Another analysis examined how companies used software for lead generation, lead qualification, and customer retention. As shown in Figure 11, one third already use marketing automation software, but are **limited to a specific range of functions**. Small and medium-sized companies often use intuitive, lean, and cost-effective marketing automation systems, such as Drip, Autopilot, or Active Campaign (see Figure 12).

Figure 11: To what extent does your company use marketing automation software for lead generation, lead qualification, and customer retention?

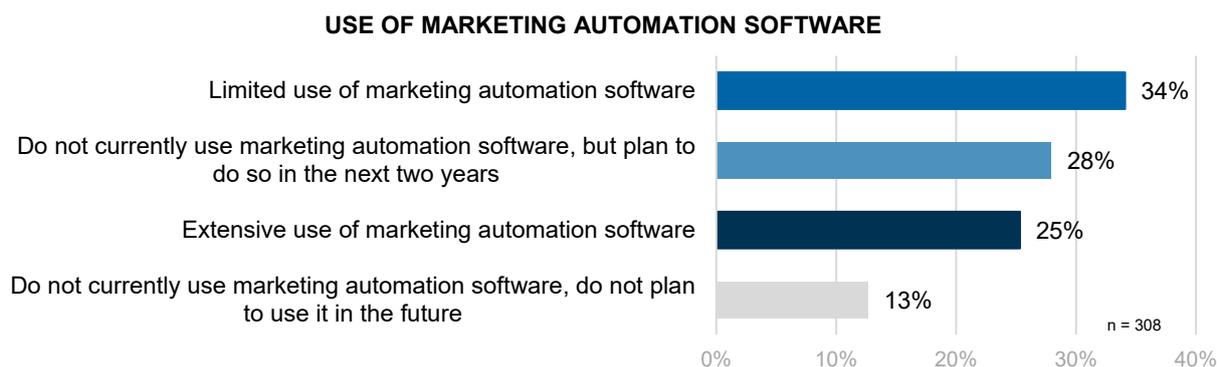
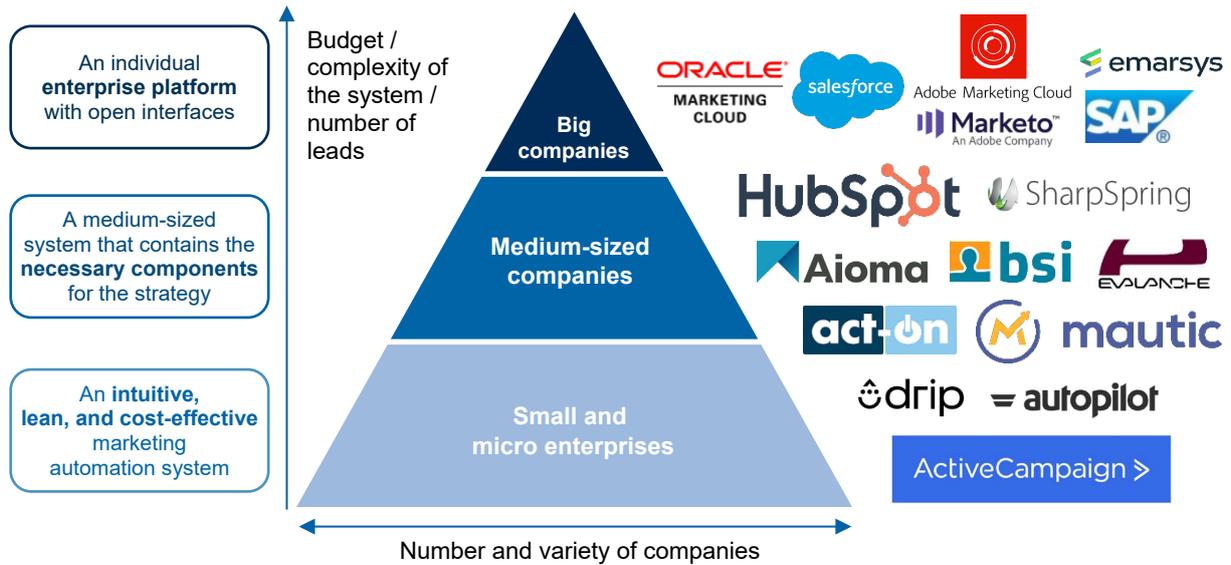


Figure 12: Marketing automation software for small, medium, and large enterprises



Source: Following Schoepf (2020, p. 47)

As visible in Figure 11, every fourth company stated that it already uses marketing automation extensively – more than indicated in previous studies (e.g., Hannig et al., 2017; Wicki, 2018). In particular, medium-sized companies often use an automation system that contains the necessary components for the strategy. The clear market leader of marketing automation and outbound systems is **Hubspot**, but there are numerous other MA tools, such as act-on, evalanche, SharpSpring, BSI or the leading and **free open source system mautic** (see Figure 12).

Large enterprises with the appropriate budgets often use an **enterprise platform**. These include cloud solutions by emarsys, Oracle, SAP, SAS, Salesforce, or Adobe Marketing Cloud (which acquired Marketo). The list of marketing automation systems in Figure 12 is limited, while the **Marketing Technology Landscape 2020** (Brinker, 2020) provides a comprehensive overview of all marketing technologies.

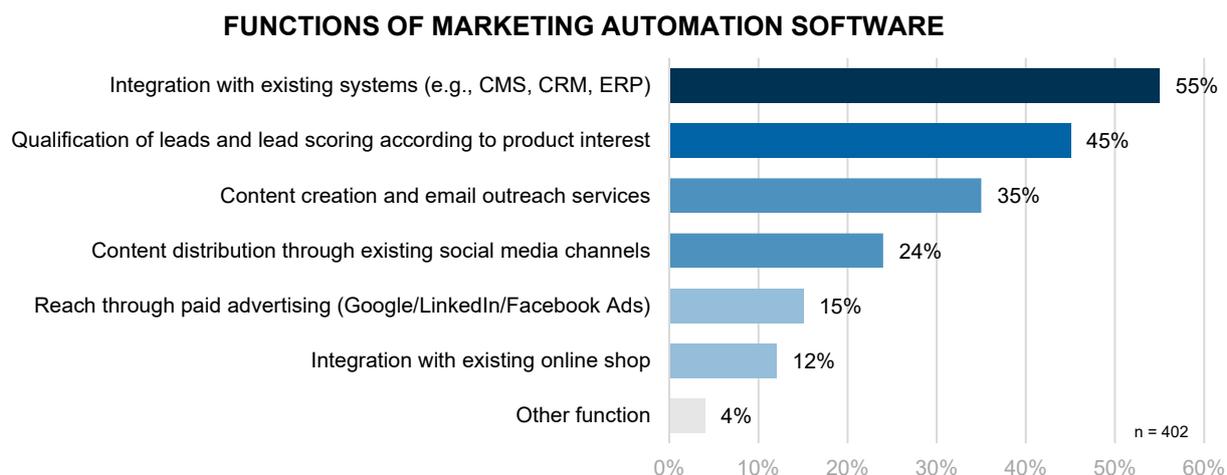
Currently, a quarter of the companies surveyed do not use any marketing automation software but are planning to **introduce** this in the coming two years. This shows that many companies in Switzerland are now addressing the issue and actively driving it forward. Marketing automation still has great potential, especially for SMEs, and only 13 percent **not currently use any marketing automation software** and have no plans to do so in the future.

3.5 MARKETING AUTOMATION SOFTWARE FEATURES

In addition to the deployment and use of marketing automation, participants were asked which functions in marketing automation software were the most valuable to them. The functionalities and the application possibilities discussed below are decisive in their selection, use, and further development (see list of 30 use cases in Table 11). More than half the participants indicated that the ability to **integrate with existing systems** such as CMS, CRM, or ERP was an important feature (see Figure 13). A clean connection to relevant systems is crucial in every case, especially in e-commerce, where full integration is necessary. According to the Online Retailer Survey 2020, every second company has a fully integrated CMS, CRM, and product information system (PIS), and 38 percent have an ERP (Zumstein & Oswald, 2020, p. 36).

Lead qualification and lead scoring the core functions of marketing automation software, as confirmed by 45 percent of businesses in this study and 46 percent in the 2017 Hannig study. Lead qualification is conducted using various criteria such as demographics, behaviour, reactions, and interests – or based on the dialog with the prospective client. The main benefit of marketing automation lies in this often-complicated process and in evaluating behaviour-based data from various marketing channels, actively contributing to the marketing and sales goal of lead generation.

Figure 13: In your opinion, what are the most valuable functions of a marketing automation system? (Multiple answers possible)



For more than one-third of the companies, a function for **creating content and email workflows** was crucial. This function allows automated personalized content to be made available to the user by email at a predefined time via a defined process (workflow). This result confirms earlier study findings, in which emailing was used regularly by up to 95 percent of respondents.

For one quarter, the distribution of content via existing **social media channels** was essential for marketing automation software. With this feature, messages are shared automatically via the company's own social media profiles such as LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram, based on data and tailored to the target group.

Among valuable features the fifth place was related to an increased reach through **paid advertising** such as ads on Google, YouTube, LinkedIn, Instagram, or Facebook. Addressing potential customers via social media and search engines has once again become much more critical since the onset of the Corona crisis, both in B2C and B2B. According to a study by the Association of Swiss Advertisers (SWA/ASA), advertising expenditure in the areas of social media, search, online video, and online display has increased, while all other advertising expenditures (print, sponsorship, out-of-home, TV, radio, cinema and direct marketing) have been cut by the majority of Swiss companies (SWA/ASA, 2020).

Further 12 percent stated that MA software needed to be integrated into an existing **online shop**. The possibility of automatically sending reminder messages to prospective customers or online shopping cart "abandoners" is of great potential for e-commerce and being used by a growing number of online retailers (Zumstein & Steigerwald, 2019, p. 13).

Under "other functions," further entries could be added in an open text field. Several respondents cited the automation of **manual workflows and sales processes** and the associated efficiency increases. The linking of customer information across different channels and **personalization** were also mentioned frequently. This includes the dynamic publication of content, trigger-based communication, and customer-specific processes.

Various **applications (use cases)** are possible with the functions of a marketing automation solution, depending on the industry, products and services, and marketing and sales objectives. Table 11 lists 30 possible ideas for specific marketing automation use cases. This list is not comprehensive but is intended to inspire projects and applications.

Core applications include standardising emails in response to contact requests (Entry 1 in Table 11), automating the sales process (2), providing content on registration (lead magnets such as e-books, whitepapers, or studies (5), developing a lead scoring system (6) and performing lead nurturing (7). Other marketing automation use cases range from automated call-back services (3), form completion reminders to welcome emails (4), personalized offers or discount codes (12 to 14) to suggestions for repeat purchases (17), referrals (18), and product reviews (19).

Table 11: Possible applications (use cases) in the field of marketing automation

#	Applications	Description
1	Automated standard emails to contact requests	Automatic responses to inquiries in contact forms based on individual templates. Reduced time delay increases the probability of conversion and purchases.
2	Automation of the sales process	Modelling the existing sales process in MA software to analyse in which phase of the customer journey a (potential) lead is currently located.
3	Automated call-back service	In case of missed calls, an automated email is sent to inform the caller about the call-back attempts or announce the next call-back attempt.
4	Form completion reminder	A prospective customer cannot always fill out a form completely. If the user's email address is already entered, they will automatically be reminded to fill out the form.
5	Free content (lead magnets) for registration	Free documents, e-books, whitepapers, studies, support, videos, configurations, or other content will be sent after an email registration.
6	Development of a lead scoring system	A lead scoring system makes it easier to identify leads that are ready to buy. Leads are managed with appropriate priority through the lead nurturing process (in #7).
7	Implementation of lead nurturing	Prospects receive automated and regular information and contact opportunities. The sales team can focus its time and energy on customers who are ready to buy.
8	Sending internal notifications	As soon as a prospect contacts the firm by phone or email, their sales team receives contact information with customized comments to follow up immediately.
9	Assignment of out of office emails	In a notification of absence, there usually is an email address of the deputy employee, which can be included in lead nurturing.
10	Sending sequences of welcome emails	Automated welcome emails make a good impression and ask whether the customer was satisfied with the registration or purchase.
11	Sending of personalized newsletters	With marketing automation, profile information flows into the newsletter and these become dynamic, individualized information mailings based on the recipient's interests.
12	Sending birthday greetings	If the birthday is known (after automated follow-up), an email with congratulations and a coupon or discount code in No.13 may be sent.
13	Sharing discount codes or vouchers	Discount codes are sent out for special occasions (e.g., an anniversary), campaigns (e.g., customer acquisition or retention), and promotions (e.g., sales, Black Friday).
14	Sending seasonal offers	With seasonal greetings and special discounts, e.g., Christmas, New Year, Easter, or other holidays, new customers can be won and existing customers reactivated.
15	Reactivation of cancelled shopping carts	If an online shop user is logged in and leaves the filled shopping cart, an automated email reminds them after a certain time.
16	Retargeting of prospects and leads	If an online shop user has looked at a product, they can be approached again by remarketing, e.g., on search engines, social media, or online media.
17	Suggestions for follow-up purchases	Automated reminder emails to existing customers are particularly suitable for post-purchase consumable products or recurring events.
18	Suggestions for recommendations	Customers can be encouraged (e.g., two weeks after purchase or delivery) or rewarded with discount codes to recommend the products or services to friends.
19	Suggestions for product reviews	Customers are automatically invited or rewarded with a discount code to rate products or write reviews in an online shop.
20	Measurement of customer satisfaction	When automated web forms are used for customer satisfaction surveys, companies receive valuable feedback, suggestions, and ideas for improvement.
21	Management of business cards	Those who enter business cards of contacts/customers into a CRM or MA system do not lose valuable data and take advantage of the opportunity to expand their network.
22	Clean-up of contact lists	Recipients who no longer open emails can be automatically reactivated and given the option to continue receiving the emails or unsubscribe.
23	Recovery of forgotten passwords	In the case of forgotten or lost passwords, an MA system saves time when customers can reset passwords themselves via an automated web form.
24	Gaining followers on social media	Customers are automatically directed to the company's social media profiles (LinkedIn, XING, Facebook, Instagram, etc.) to attract them as followers.
25	Promotion of events and activities	Via emails, contacts can be automatically made aware of Facebook, XING, or LinkedIn events (such as webinars) or reminded of them.
26	Management of event registrations	Registration forms support event registration and operations through automatic confirmations, reminders, and appreciation emails afterwards.
27	Automation of payment management	Outstanding invoices can be managed via an automated process. An automatic reminder can be sent for all payments.
28	Management of appointments	Appointments can be managed automatically, confirmed, and appointment reminders sent immediately beforehand.
29	Organization of applications	Processes concerning applications become easier when job postings on the website are linked to an automated form and emails.
30	Automation of routine tasks	For new or transferring employees, workflows in marketing automation tools can be used to organize professional on boarding and facilitate familiarization.

3.6 KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

The 402 companies were asked about the relevant key performance indicators (KPIs) used to measure the effectiveness of marketing automation. Among the useful KPIs the measurement of **conversion rates** along the customer journey (48 percent in Figure 14) was mentioned first. Almost one in two saw conversion rates (and sub-conversion rates) as the most critical marketing automation KPI. This was less than in previous studies when the conversion rate was mentioned by up to 83 percent (Hannig et al., 2017, p. 30). The conversion rate is defined according to the context and strategic goals of digital marketing and sales, as discussed in Chapter 2.3.

As highlighted in Figure 15, the following KPIs can be defined as conversion rates, for example:

- **Downloading** apps or documents, such as product brochures, flyers, studies, white papers, annual reports, or other lead magnets, on the website.
- **Registering** for a newsletter, blog, membership, or downloading a document.
- **Contact** via contact forms, emails, or telephone.
- **Request** an offer or the use of a service or product configurator.
- **Ordering** or purchasing a product or service in the context of e-commerce.

The number of **sales qualified leads** (SQL) was mentioned by 43 percent of respondents – the same proportion as in Hannig et al. (2017) – followed by the number of **leads generated** (41 percent in Fig. 14). A lead or marketing qualified lead (MQL) represents a measurable interest in a product or service in the two initial phases of the customer journey in Figure 15. An SQL is already in the closing phase and a ready-to-buy prospective client with a high purchase intention, and suitable for a purchase or contract conclusion from a sales perspective.

For almost every third company, **open and click rates** were important KPIs. Clicks and click rates provide information about the interests and needs of potential customers, especially in the initial attraction phase. This, for example, can be seen in clicks on advertisements in search engines (SEA), online media, social media, or call-to-action buttons. The analysis of open rates is relevant when sending emails or newsletters, SMS (WhatsApp), messages on social networks, and push notifications in apps.

Generated **revenues and sales** came fifth with 29 percent. Although this is highly relevant from a business point of view, it is only one of the measurement points in lead nurturing workflows (see Figure 15).

An intensely discussed marketing figure that was confirmed here is **customer satisfaction**. Customer satisfaction can be measured with the net promoter score (NPS). This was considered useful by 27 percent of the participants. Less frequently measured was the length of the sales cycle.

Other useful KPIs mentioned by two participants each were the number of **MQLs** generated, **cost per lead** (CPL), **cost per sale** (CPS), and **cost per acquisition** (CPA). The ROI mentioned above was used by some companies to measure the efficiency of marketing automation.

Figure 14: What do you think are useful key performance indicators to measure the effectiveness of marketing automation? (Multiple answers possible)

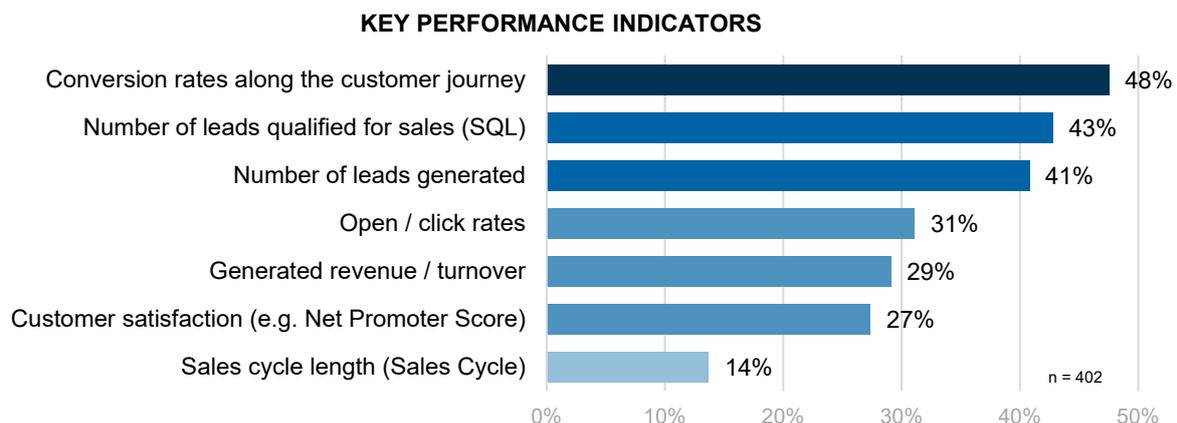
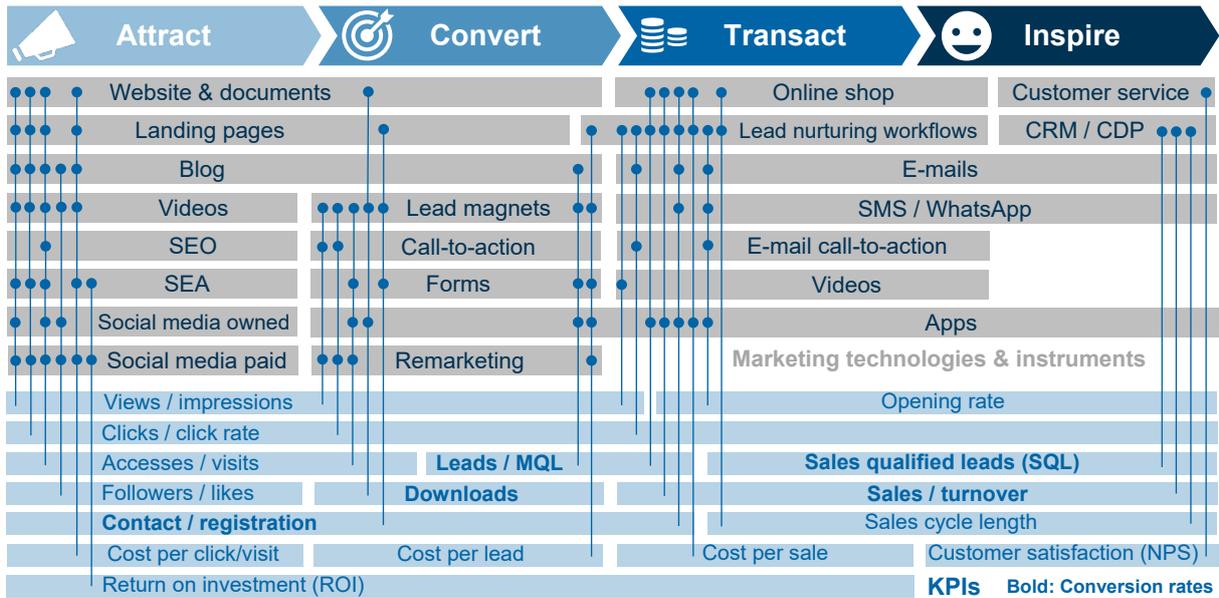


Figure 15: Key performance indicators of marketing automation along the customer journey



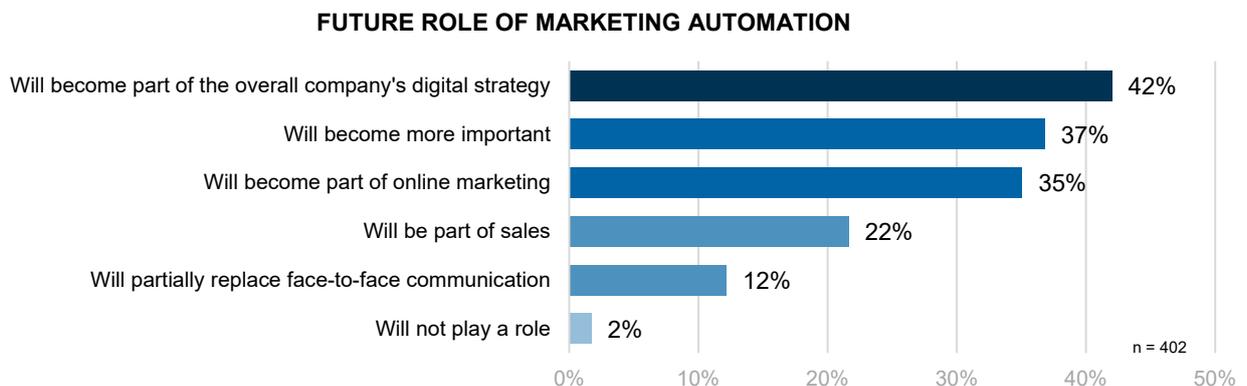
3.7 THE FUTURE ROLE OF MARKETING AUTOMATION

This study’s final objective is to evaluate what future role marketing automation will play for the participating companies. For 42 percent, it was clear that marketing automation would become part of the **digital strategy of the entire company** (see Figure 16). A holistic view of marketing automation is necessary because this system is (or will become) an essential part of a modern IT architecture. Another 37 percent stated that marketing automation was becoming more **important in general** – and for 35 percent, it acts as an essential aspect of **online marketing**.

For almost every fourth respondent, marketing automation was **part of the sales operation**. This statement confirms that marketing and sales are increasingly converging in omnichannel management, especially in content marketing and lead management. For 12 percent, marketing automation will at least partially replace **personal communication**. Only two percent said that marketing automation would play no role in their companies.

Many new solutions offer configuration and related content as subscription-based **software as a service (SaaS)**, meaning functions are individually tailored to the company according to prevailing best practices. However, with so many contact and data points, marketing cannot be controlled by rules. To reach consumers at the right time, through the right channel, and with the relevant message, there is an additional option, namely data-driven marketing using machine learning and deep learning.

Figure 16: What role will marketing automation play in your company in the future? (Multiple answers possible)



4 Conclusion

4.1 SUMMARY

Use of marketing technologies: Around 40 percent of the participating companies already use marketing automation, and almost all use social media marketing and search engine marketing (SEO/SEA). Every second company actively operates a blog and content management while sales automation, customer relationship management (CRM), and digital analytics are used by half of those questioned. Data warehouse (DWH), business intelligence (BI), and customer data platforms (CDP) are used less frequently, especially among SMEs.

Online marketing goals: For 60 percent of the participants, the overriding goal of digital marketing is to generate new leads, followed by sharing information with prospective clients. Customer retention and increasing sales and transactions are also online marketing goals for one in two. For nearly one in three, performance along the customer journey is recorded.

Main benefits of marketing automation: The main advantage of marketing automation is the time saved in repetitive tasks and personalized communication. Another benefit is also improved efficiency and increased return on investment (ROI). Marketing automation has again proven to generate additional and higher quality sales leads and increase conversion rates along the customer journey. Marketing automation supports customer care and increases customer loyalty, and for one in four companies, it helps marketing and sales teams work better together. This is an important requirement for companies and must continue to evolve since digitalization means that marketing and sales operations will become linked increasingly.

Challenges in online marketing goals: Collecting high-quality customer data is a challenge in B2B marketing. The technical limitations of current systems are also challenging. Internal skills and expertise are also often lacking, and there are constraints caused by inefficient and manual processes. Access to existing customer data within the company is seen as a challenge by 18 percent, and alignment between sales and marketing by 22 percent. Some respondents reported that a fundamental lack of resources – both technical, financial, and human – is one of the biggest challenges.

Major obstacles to implementation: For one-third, the lack of internal expertise and know-how in implementing marketing automation is a significant barrier. For one in four, poor data quality or a lack of priority within the company are also challenging. SMEs lack financial resources as well as a planned, formulated strategy when introducing marketing automation. The complexity of marketing automation systems, staff shortages, and interface problems also cause problems for companies. A lack of acceptance and support within the company can also be an obstacle to implementing marketing automation.

Use of marketing automation software: One in four companies already use marketing automation extensively. Another one-third use just specific, essential functions of marketing automation software. One quarter does not use a marketing automation software but plans to do so in the next two years. One in eight respondents does not have any marketing automation software and has no plans to introduce it.

Valuable functions of marketing automation software: Integration with existing systems, such as CMS, CRM, or ERP, is seen as the most useful function of marketing automation software. B2B marketing considers lead qualification and lead scoring to be basic functions. It should include a workflow function to create content and distribute it via various online channels such as email, social media (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and Twitter), and search engines such as Google. The specific use cases vary depending on the organization.

KPIs for measuring marketing automation effectiveness: Marketing automation is most frequently measured by conversion rates along the customer journey. Other important metrics are the number of sales qualified leads (SQL)

or general leads. In emails and push messages, open and click-through rates are typically measured. Clearly, most companies are interested in the direct and indirect revenue and generated sales figures. Customer satisfaction measurement – such as net promoter score (NPS) – is a useful KPI for a quarter of the respondents. Numbers of marketing qualified leads (MQL), cost per sales (CPS), and cost per acquisition (CPA) are also sporadically cited.

The future role of marketing automation: Forty-two percent of B2B marketing specialists state that marketing automation will become part of their company's overall strategy in the future and will become increasingly important. Nearly one in four is making marketing automation part of the sales operation. One in eight companies anticipates that it will partially replace face-to-face communications. Only two percent assume that marketing automation will play no role in their company.

4.2 MARKETING AUTOMATION – RECOMMENDATIONS AND CHECKLIST

Rules cannot easily manage many contact points and the resulting data in marketing and sales. To reach users and (potential) customers at the right time, through the right channel, and with the relevant message, it is necessary to rely on **data and data-driven marketing** – ideally, supported by machine learning. Thanks to data-driven marketing, sales can be increased by up to 20 percent, and cost savings of up to 30 percent can be achieved (Tieben, 2020).

Regarding data and its use in marketing automation, the following recommendations can be derived from this research:

1. **Use of a content hub:** Content is stored in a content hub, like a data library. This content is categorized along the customer journey according to topics and products and published on the channels to identify the company. Since relevant content increases trust and confirms expertise, users can be actively guided through the customer journey at the right time and with relevant content. The published content of a content hub serves as a central point of contact for users interested in a particular topic. The user can read a blog article on the subject, watch a video, or download an e-book, whitepaper, or study. This content boosts the company's visibility and search engine optimization (SEO).
2. **Centralize customer data:** Customer data should be consolidated in a customer data platform (CDP) (see Recommendation 13 in Table 12). In addition to digital analytics data, user data, customer interaction data, customer master data, sales, and product data are essential for marketing. This leads to better customer data quality. Every interaction is analysed and continuously merged into an overall picture. In a 360° customer profile, it is visible which products and topics interest the potential customer and how similar contacts are doing. User behaviour and conversion rates can be analysed along the customer journey. Lead nurturing and lead scoring are necessary to focus on profitable sales leads. Data silos need to be deconstructed as this allows processes to be streamlined and workloads reduced.
3. **Distribute content for greater reach:** Marketing communication should communicate continuously, including but not limited to the corporate website and blog. Search engine advertising (SEA), email, and social media marketing (SMM) ensure top-of-mind awareness among prospective clients. Articles should be published automatically on LinkedIn, XING, Facebook, Twitter, and other relevant social media channels.
4. **Create flexible team structures:** Successful data-driven marketing requires qualified specialists and high-performance technology partners in every company.

5. **Benefit from new technologies:** Further developments in cloud solutions and machine learning-based automation allow holistic campaign creation and control.
6. **Carefully define marketing and sales targets:** In the short term, it makes sense to focus on historical and average performance values. In the long term, the focus should be on strategy.

The checklist in Table 12 below summarizes what companies should be aware of concerning marketing automation.

Table 12: Checklist with recommendations for various areas of marketing automation

Area	Recommendations
Digital Fitness 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The company's level of digital maturity must be evaluated internally and externally on an ongoing basis. 2. Employees must be made aware of digital issues and kept motivated. 3. Online presence must be continuously expanded with business-relevant content.
Marketing Technologies 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. For marketing automation, technologies and tools with high business impact (and minimal costs) must be considered first. 5. SMEs, in particular, should use marketing technologies more actively. 6. MA should be integrated with other technologies and systems. 7. MA should be used for various marketing and sales channels.
Online Marketing Goals 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. Relevant content must be provided at all touchpoints along the customer journey to convert prospective clients into leads. 9. The market should be developed regularly and systematically. 10. Information needs must be prioritized over advertising messages. 11. Lists of leads and prospective clients must be maintained systematically. 12. SMEs should define and measure performance-oriented goals and KPIs.
Data and KPIs 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 13. Digital analytics, CDP, and CRM systems are the data foundations for MA. 14. High-quality customer data must be collected from all systems and touchpoints. 15. Forms are elementary to capturing key user data. 16. Clean data mapping and constant data optimization assists MA. 17. Conversion rates should be analysed and optimized along the customer journey. 18. The number of leads, MQLs (marketing qualified leads), SQLs (sales qualified leads), and opportunities must always be measured.
Challenges 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 19. A sufficient budget must be allocated for marketing automation. 20. Internal skills and know-how must be expanded, for example, through further education and training. 21. There a constant exchange between sales and marketing should exist.
Uses 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 22. As many plausible use cases (applications) as possible must be examined. 23. Content is to be published in a personalized and segment-specific way. 24. Multi-stage lead nurturing campaigns lead to more acquisitions in B2B. 25. Marketing automation must be applied throughout the entire customer lifecycle, including reactivation.
Functions 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 26. MA should include active lead scoring. 27. MA software helps qualify leads. 28. Existing marketing (automation) systems must be continuously developed.
Strategies 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 29. MA should be an integral part of any business strategy. 30. MA should be combined in the marketing and sales strategy. 31. Marketing strategies must clearly be documented and communicated.

Table 13: Checklist for the introduction of marketing automation

Automate	Do not automate
1. Lead segmentation and scoring by product interests, sales phases, and topics.	1. Strategy and planning: marketing automation is software and not a strategy.
2. Communicate along the customer journey: emails, web pages, and ads tailored to the user.	2. Creativity, writing, and developing content and always providing new, up-to-date, and informative content.
3. Online ads, retargeting (SEA), and social media posts (SMM).	3. Standardize highly variable processes first.
4. Artificial intelligence, machine learning such as keyword analysis (SEO)	4. Customized marketing campaigns that are aligned with existing marketing automation solutions.

Table 13 contains eight content areas, four of which should not be automated.

The authors wish readers every **success in implementing** these measures in their companies and further developing their marketing automation strategies. The [authors](#) would be happy to receive feedback, additions, and suggestions regarding these research findings. They are also pleased to answer questions and are always open to input and suggested collaborations for the **Marketing Automation Report 2022**.

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6 List of Figures and Tables

- Figure 1: Which customers do you want to reach with your marketing activities? 7
- Figure 2: How many full-time equivalents do you employ for online sales and marketing in your company? 8
- Figure 3: What are your annual budgets for online marketing? 8
- Figure 4: How successful is your online strategy in terms of achieving your goals? 8
- Figure 5: How likely are you to recommend your company in terms of digital fitness? 9
- Figure 6: Which marketing technologies does your company actively use? 10
- Figure 7: What were your most important online marketing goals for the fourth quarter of 2020? 13
- Figure 8: What are the biggest challenges in current online marketing goals? 15
- Figure 9: In your personal opinion, what are the main benefits of marketing automation? 18
- Figure 10: What do you see as major obstacles to introducing marketing automation in your company? 19
- Figure 11: To what extent does your company use software for lead generation, lead qualification retention? ... 20
- Figure 12: Marketing automation software for small, medium, and large enterprises 21
- Figure 13: In your opinion, what are the most valuable functions of a marketing automation system? 22
- Figure 14: What do you think are useful KPIs to measure the effectiveness of marketing automation? 24
- Figure 15: Key performance indicators of marketing automation along the customer journey 25
- Figure 16: What role will marketing automation play in your company in the future? 25

- Table 1: Other online strategies 8
- Table 3: Offline marketing tools 10
- Table 2: Other marketing technologies 10
- Table 4: Actively used marketing technologies of successful and unsuccessful companies 11
- Table 5: Use of marketing technologies by companies with small, medium, and large marketing budgets 12
- Table 6: Other online marketing goals 13
- Table 7: Online marketing goals according to companies with small, medium, and large marketing budgets 14
- Table 8: Content and activities along the customer journey 14
- Table 9: Challenges in achieving marketing goals according to small, medium, and large marketing budgets 16
- Table 10: Challenges of marketing automation according to small, medium, and large marketing budgets 20
- Table 11: Possible applications (use cases) in the field of marketing automation 23
- Table 12: Checklist with recommendations for various areas of marketing automation 28
- Table 13: Checklist for the introduction of marketing automation 29

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8 Research Partner

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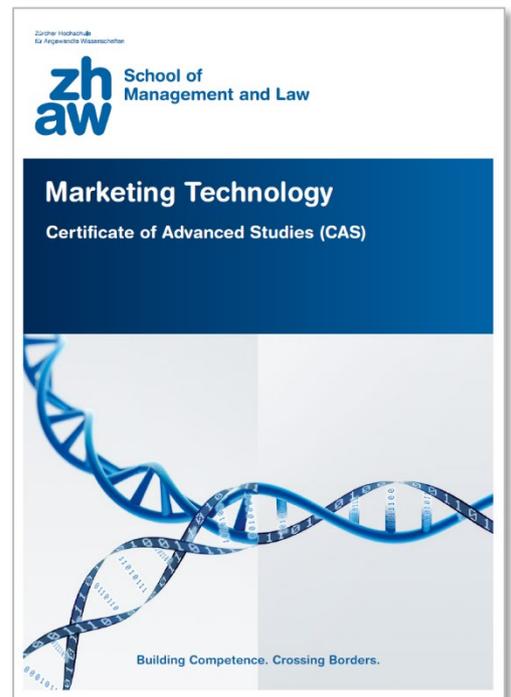
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