Tips for Selecting Real Estate Marketing Automation Software

Software Advice™

Contents

Introduction

The Internet and the wealth of information it offers is most buyer's first step in getting property information.

The bad news is that there are often too many interested buyers (leads), many of which are not sales-ready. To separate the wheat from the chaff many buyers purchase a crop of leads from real estate websites, such as Zillow and Trulia. Others build an online presence that captures home-buyers' attention, creating their own, more targeted leads.

That's where marketing automation software comes in: These systems help track prospect behavior, automate workflows and qualify leads.

Given the valuable information marketing automation software can provide, it's no surprise that roughly one-third of those in the market for a new system are from real estate.

"[Agents are] looking for ways to automate what they do so they can actually spend more time with their clients—not doing paperwork or follow-ups that can, and should, be automated at this point."

— Vinny LaBarbera, imFORZA.com

This e-book will help realtors simplify the process of finding the right marketing automation system. You'll learn:

- **How to build a list of software requirements based on your marketing goals**

- **How to create a short list of products**

- **How to compare vendors to see if they are the right fit**

- **Tips for using marketing automation software to maximize ROI**

Determine Your Software Requirements

Buyers often jump to marketing automation software before thinking about how they'll actually use it. Let's back up a few steps: First, we'll explore the ways you can market yourself, which will help you uncover what functionality you need.

"While there are a lot of other things to consider further down in the decision-making process, first consider: What are you trying to achieve?"

— Chris Mack, founder of Spokal

The capabilities you'll need in a marketing automation platform will largely be defined by how you get leads, the marketing strategy you want to employ, the channels you use to reach potential home-buyers and the other tools you're already using.

Here are a few questions you can ask yourself to build and refine a list of software criteria.

How do you get leads, and what marketing strategy do you plan to use?

Outbound marketing (also called "push marketing" or "interruption marketing") is when a real estate agent contacts prospects, hoping for engagement. Tactics include advertising on search engines, paying publishers of websites to post your ads (known as "pay per click") or sending emails to a list of leads. Many agents who purchase leads from a third party (e.g., Zillow or Trulia) use this type of marketing.

Inbound marketing (also called "pull advertising") gets home buyers to find you, rather than you seeking them out. This is usually done by providing interesting, helpful content on websites, blogs or social media that engages home buyers, and/or by optimizing Web pages to rank higher in search engine results so buyers are more likely to find them (called "search engine optimization," or SEO). Some agents have adopted this marketing strategy to move away from the time-consuming nature of purchasing, and trying to engage with, a large number of leads.

Outbound Marketing	Inbound Marketing
Marketer-Driven, "Push" Marketing	Consumer-Driven, "Pull" Marketing
• Broadcast and print advertising • Social media advertising • Search Engine Advertising • Emails to purchased lists • Display advertising	• Blogging • Earned social media • Search Engine Optimization • Emails to opt-in lists • Pay per click

"[Inbound] leads are self-selecting. Instead of pushing out and trying to identify who you think might be in the market to buy, the people who are out to buy are basically coming and telling you that they are in the market. In theory, at least, you are skipping a lot of the time-wasters."

— **Chris Mack, founder of Spokal**
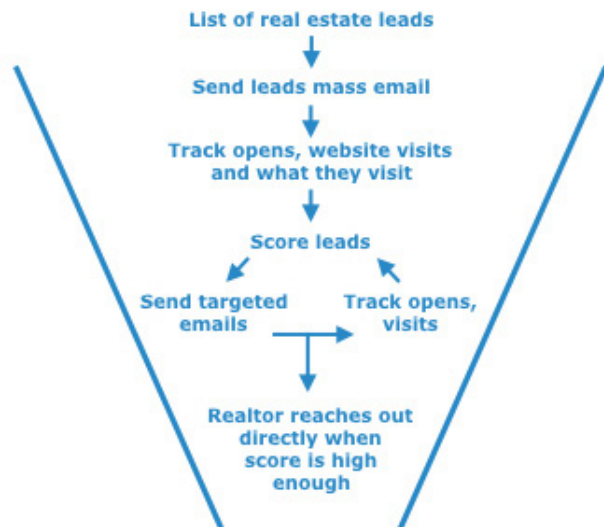
The easiest way to understand how marketing automation functionality supports these two strategies is to envision the marketing funnel associated with each.

Outbound marketing funnel: A steady source of leads are nurtured through.
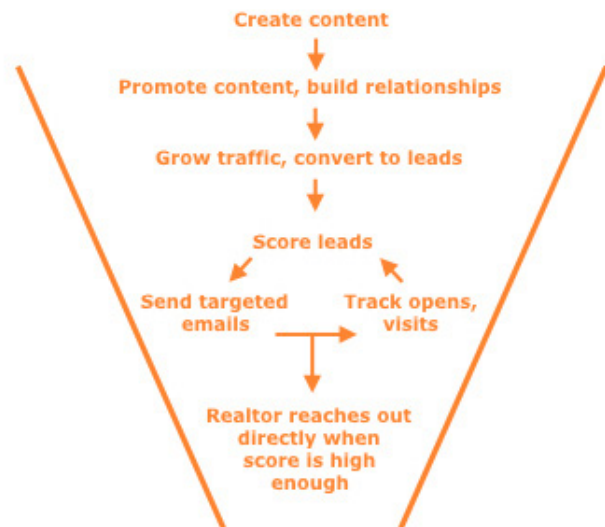
Inbound marketing funnel: Content is generated and distributed, catches the interest of home buyers and allows realtors to build relationships with them.

Outbound vs. Inbound Marketing

Outbound Marketing

List of real estate leads

↓

Send leads mass email

↓

Track opens, website visits and what they visit

↓

Score leads

↙ ↘

Send targeted emails   Track opens, visits

↓

Realtor reaches out directly when score is high enough

Inbound Marketing

Create content

↓

Promote content, build relationships

↓

Grow traffic, convert to leads

↓

Score leads

↙ ↘

Send targeted emails   Track opens, visits

↓

Realtor reaches out directly when score is high enough

Source: Spokal

Who it's for: Realtors who already have a source of leads or work with purchased lists.

Valuable software features:

- Send mass, drip and targeted emails

- Landing page creation

- Lead scoring/segmentation

- Track email opens and site visits

Who it's for: Realtors looking to acquire leads by creating interesting, relevant content.

Valuable software features:

- Website/content management

- SEO tools

- Landing page creation

- Send drip and targeted emails

- Lead scoring/segmentation

- Track email opens and site visits

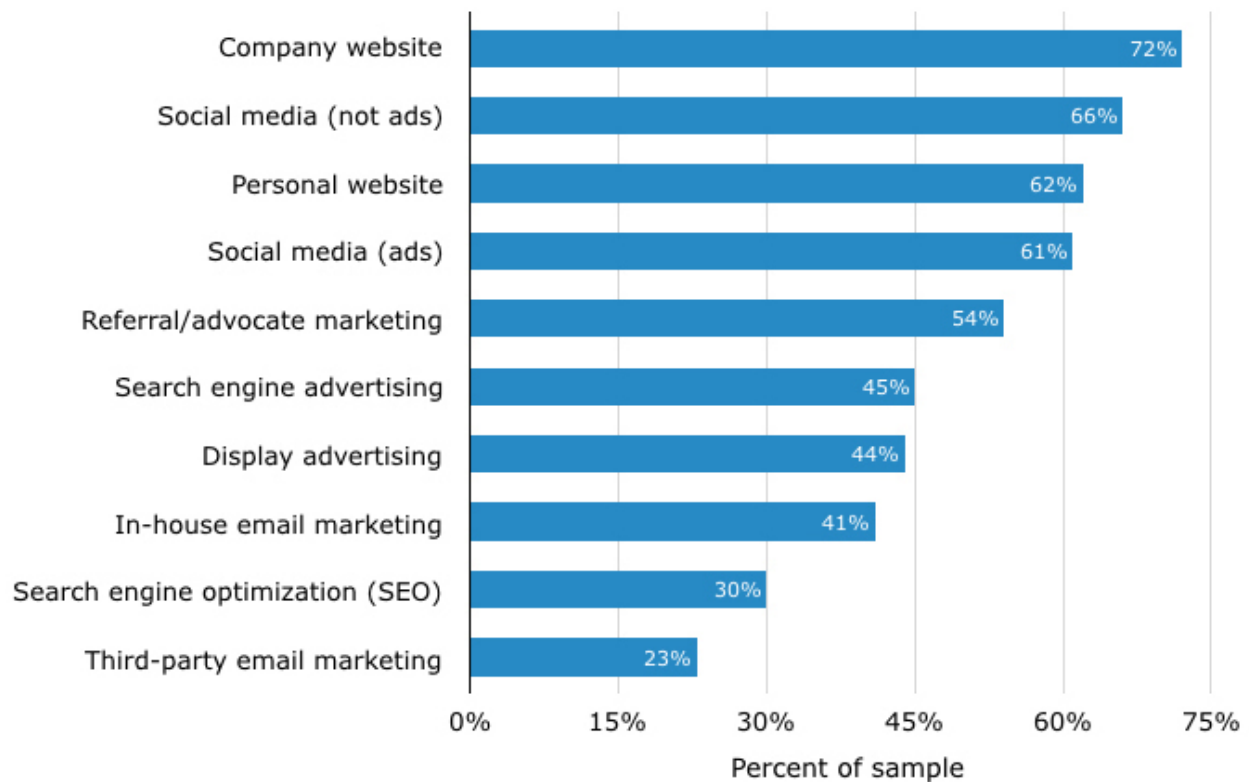While many marketing automation systems support both outbound and inbound marketing strategies, some focus primarily on outbound marketing. And not all vendors will use the terms "outbound" or "inbound" to describe what their software does. If you intend to practice inbound marketing and want to be able to create content from within your marketing automation system, be sure to look for a system with the features listed above.

What channels do you use for your marketing activities?

You'll get the most benefit out of software that manages all of your marketing channels from one place. However, different systems may support different channels.

To help prioritize your list of software requirements, look for a system that supports the digital marketing channels you use (or plan to use) and helps measure their effectiveness. Here's what we found when we asked a group of real estate agents about the channels they opt for:

Digital Marketing Channels Used by Real Estate Agents

Channel	Percent
Company website	72%
Social media (not ads)	66%
Personal website	62%
Social media (ads)	61%
Referral/advocate marketing	54%
Search engine advertising	45%
Display advertising	44%
In-house email marketing	41%
Search engine optimization (SEO)	30%
Third-party email marketing	23%

Percent of sample

And here's a look at how marketing automation functionality can help, no matter what channels you use:

Marketing Channels and Associated Software Functionality

Websites

MA platforms offer tools to personalize websites and landing pages based on customer browsing and buying history. For instance, landing page and Web form templates can be customized with images and other marketing content.

Email

Many systems offer mass and drip email marketing functionality—but targeted email functionality can vary depending on what the system is designed to respond to. For example, some systems might automatically email website visitors, while others may send emails to social media users who mention your brand.

Social

Not all vendors offer social media tools. Among those that do, both the tools and social media platforms supported can vary. For instance, some might offer social listening tools, while another might have tools for social promotions.

Advertising

Most marketing automation platforms don't directly offer advertising functionality. However, some offer integration with advertising software. You can also use insights from the lead information your system provides to guide your online advertising strategy and track the leads that flow from it.

Mobile

Many systems optimize marketing communication for home-buyers viewing content on tiny screens. And some platforms even offer automated SMS text messages—e.g., if a prospect contacts you through your website, the system will send an automatic reply.

What other tools are you using?

A final point to consider before you start comparing vendors: What other tools will your marketing automation system need to integrate with?

"The last thing most agents want or need is something that requires them to remember another login, application or workflow. Marketing automation tools should seamlessly integrate into the most commonly used real estate applications to make the transition and implementation very easy for the agent."
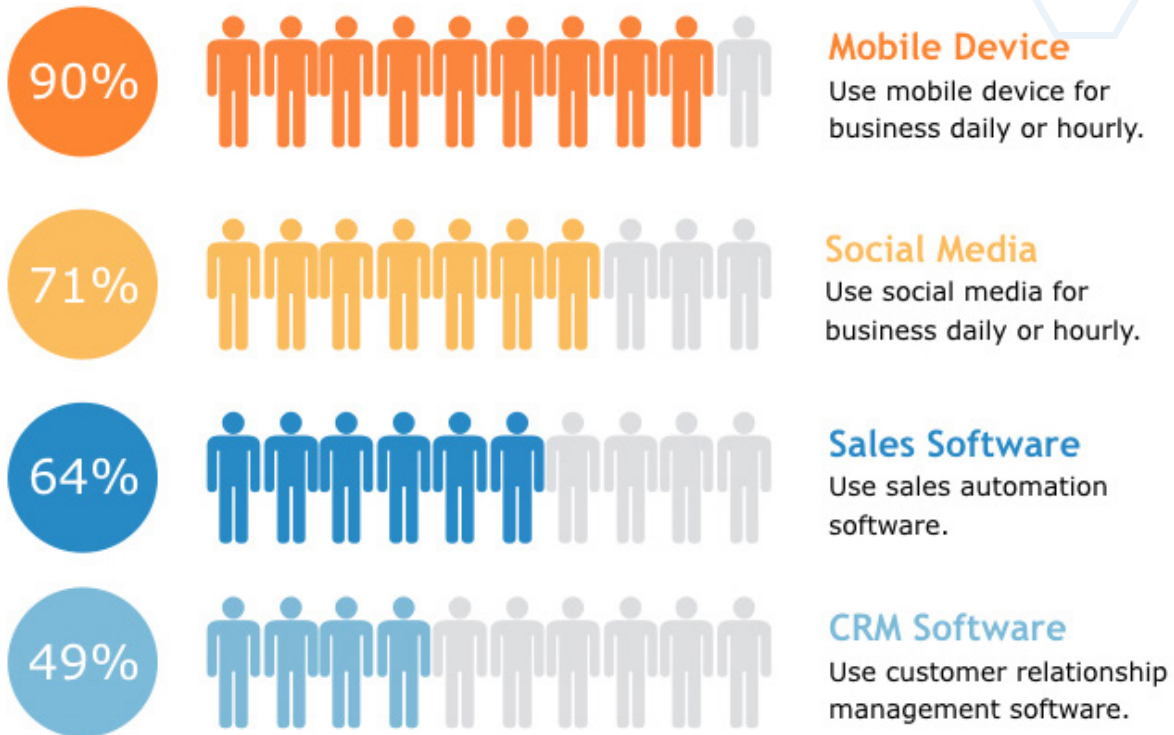
— Vinny LaBarbera, imFORZA.com

For example, **if you're already using a customer relationship management (CRM) system, you'll want to know whether—and how well—a new marketing automation system will synchronize with that data**. You may even want to look for systems that offer native integration with the CRM you use.

If you get leads from a third-party provider and don't already use a CRM system, look for software that offers an easy way for you to import those leads. For instance, the system should allow you to upload a list of leads rather than forcing you to manually enter them all.

Or perhaps you're with the 90 percent of real estate agents who told us they conduct business on their mobile device on an hourly or daily basis. In this case, **you may want to consider a system with a mobile app so you can access your system while on the go**.

Other Tools Real Estate Agents Use

90%

Mobile Device
Use mobile device for business daily or hourly.

71%

Social Media
Use social media for business daily or hourly.

64%

Sales Software
Use sales automation software.

49%

CRM Software
Use customer relationship management software.

N = 151

Comparing Vendors

Once you've narrowed down your list of criteria, you're ready to start comparing vendors. As we've said before, there are a lot to choose from. To make the process more manageable, start by creating a short list of vendors with products that meet your requirements.

Creating a short list of vendors

We've compiled examples of vendors that offer at least some of the functionality discussed above. **We've included vendors that offer more comprehensive systems, as well as others that offer less extensive options for smaller teams, independent realtors and the budget-conscious buyer.**

(These tables do not represent a ranking of products, but rather a sampling of available offerings on the market. All of the information is publically available online, drawn from product brochures, data sheets, vendor websites, instructional manuals, case studies, knowledge bases and support forums.)

Marketing Automation Software Comparison

	Salesforce	Hubspot	Marketo	Oracle Eloqua	Act-on	Silverpop	Infusionsoft
Content/ Blogging Platform		x					
Search Engine Optimization	x	x	x		x		
Mass Emails	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Drip Emails (Scheduled)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Targeted/ Triggered Emails	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Landing Page(s)/ Web Forms	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Lead Scoring/ Segmentation	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Tracks Email Opens, Clicks and Site Visits	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Offers Contact Database	x	x					x
Native CRM Integration	Microsoft Dynamics, Netsuite CRM, Salesforce, SugarCRM	Salesforce	Microsoft Dynamics, Salesforce	Microsoft Dynamics, Oracle CRM, Salesforce, SAP	Salesforce, Microsoft Dynamics, SugarCRM, Netsuite CRM, Infor	Microsoft Dynamics, Netsuite CRM, Salesforce	Infusionsoft
Mobile Optimization	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Mobile Marketing/SMS	x		x	x		x	
Social Media Funtionality (built-in)	Publishing, listening/ monitoring, analytics	Publishing, listening/ monitoring, reports	Sweepstakes, polls, share buttons & videos, lead capture via forms, analytics	Publishing, listening/ monitoring, analytics	Prospecting, lead capture via forms, publishing, share buttons, competitor monitoring	Publishing	With Grosocial: Promotions, contests, custom feeds, scheduling posts, content management

Note: You can click on the names of products in tables to view descriptions and user reviews.

Marketing Automation Software Comparison

	Spokal	Leadsius	Simply Cast	Hatchbuck	Jumplead	Nurture	Genoo
Content/ Blogging Platform	x				x		x
Search Engine Optimization	x				Analytics only		Analytics only
Mass Emails	via native MailChimp or ActiveCampaign integration	x	x	x	x	x	x
Drip Emails (Scheduled)		x	x	x	x	x	x
Targeted/ Triggered Emails		x	x	x	x	x	x
Landing Page(s)/ Web Forms	via Plugin	x	x	Online forms included, landing pages via integration	x	x	x
Lead Scoring/ Segmentation	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Tracks Email Opens, Clicks and Site Visits	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Offers Contact Database		x	x	x	x	x	x
Native CRM Integration	None	*Information not available	Microsoft Dynamics, Netsuite CRM, Salesforce, SugarCRM, Vtiger, Zoho CRM and more.	Microsoft Dynamics, Netsuite CRM, Oracle CRM, Salesforce, SAP, SugarCRM	Salesforce	*Information not available	Salesforce (via Genoo app)
Mobile Optimization	x	x	x	x	*Information not available	*Information not available	x
Mobile Marketing/SMS			x				
Social Media Funtionality (built-in)	Publishing, scheduling posts	None	Publishing, targeted messages, lead capture via forms, autoscheduling	Lead capture	Captures social contact information	None	Publishing, tracking, and reporting

Note: You can click on the names of products in tables to view descriptions and user reviews.

What about marketing software designed for real estate agents?

Many real estate agents (76 percent of the sample we surveyed) do use industry-specific software to manage their marketing activities. But is this the right approach? To help answer this question, we asked realtors how they feel about the software they use.

Real Estate Agents' Satisfaction Level With Marketing Automation Software

	Industry-Specific (76%)		Non Industry-Specific (24%)
39%	Extremely satisfied	21%	Extremely satisfied
59%	Somewhat satisfied	64%	Somewhat satisfied
2%	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	0%	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
0%	Somewhat dissatisfied	14%	Somewhat dissatisfied
0%	Extremely dissatisfied	0%	Extremely dissatisfied

N = 44   N = 14

As it turns out, while more realtors overall report using industry-specific software, there isn't a huge difference in levels of satisfaction. What's more, in both cases, no one reports being "extremely dissatisfied" with the system they're using. This suggests that marketing software designed for real estate agents isn't necessarily better than software designed for everyone.

What's more, many systems designed for realtors offer fully integrated direct mail and print advertising services. Given how many real estate agents rely on print and direct-mail advertising (58 and 47 percent of our sample, respectively), this feature might seem appealing.

However, whatever goals you're trying to achieve, you don't necessarily need a real estate-focused marketing automation platform to do it. For example, there are ways to add MLS property listings to websites using plug-ins for regular marketing automation platforms. And third-party services can be used for direct mail and print advertising.

Internet marketing experts agree: You should look for software that best supports most of your digital marketing goals, rather than sacrifice important functionality for a few capabilities that could be accomplished using other tools.

"They need to be doing Internet marketing, not 'realtor marketing.' … Don't try to buy something that does everything."

— Tara Jacobsen, owner of MarketingArtfully.com

"I'm not sure I really see the benefit [of industry-specific software]. To me, the quality of the site and the quality of the content is what needs to stand out."

— Chris Mack, founder of Spokal

Software Advice™

"[Realtors] want to focus on driving traffic, capturing leads and then nurturing and closing those leads. Anything that helps them do these things—preferably together—is going to save them time and money in the long run."

— Vinny LaBarbera, imFORZA.com

Other considerations

Choosing software with the right capabilities is critical to achieving your marketing goals. However, there are some other things to consider when comparing vendors—especially once you've made a short list of products.

For example, you'll want to evaluate:
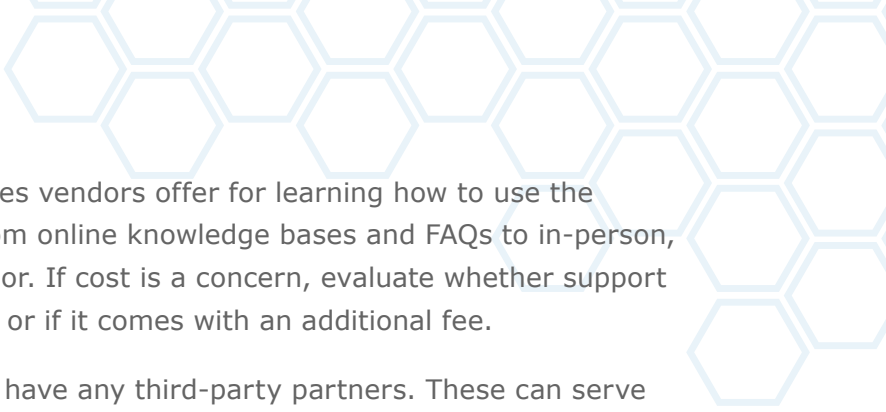
Implementation and ramp-up. How easy is it to use the software, and how long will it take to get it up and running? Again, it's important to note that inbound marketing is usually a slower process than outbound marketing. Since it takes more time up front to generate the marketing content used to attract leads, it may also take longer to see a return on investment.

Whichever strategy you use, you should evaluate the steps needed to get each system operating as well as the learning curve for using it.

"Everything looks great in the demo, but nothing's that easy when you set it up."

— Chris Smith, co-founder of Curaytor and author of Conversion Code

Service and support. See what resources vendors offer for learning how to use the software. These may include anything from online knowledge bases and FAQs to in-person, instructor-led courses taught by the vendor. If cost is a concern, evaluate whether support and training is included in the base price, or if it comes with an additional fee.

You may also want to ask vendors if they have any third-party partners. These can serve as another resource for integrations and support. For instance, many partners offer tips on marketing in general, and some even offer information specific to real estate (even if the vendor doesn't provide industry-specific software).

And while some marketing automation systems may not offer native CRM integration or out-of-the-box social media functionality, many partner with other vendors who do. These vendors often provide apps or plug-ins that can be added to the base software package. Many vendors even have an app marketplace where you can find tools to customize your system.

Here are some ways to learn more about a given vendor's implementation, support and customization options:

- **Demo a system**

- **Consult software reviews**

- **Speak to vendors**

- **Consult online forums**

- **Talk to others who currently use the software**

Best Practices to Get a Return on Investment

Having the right system is only half the battle. The other half is using it successfully. The good news? There are some things you can do to start out on the right foot. Here are some of those best practices:

Focus on content quality. If you're pursuing an inbound marketing strategy, start generating content as early as possible—even before you implement your system. After all, you'll need to have material to populate that system with.

Good content drives engagement. To establish yourself as a valuable, credible expert and stand out from the competition, you'll want to provide information that home buyers care about and want to engage with.

Here are some ideas to help you get started:

- Identify home buyers' pain points and talk about the solutions

- Share local or neighborhood-level trends, information and knowledge

- Speak about the unique needs of specific demographics

- Provide advice for those just starting to think about buying

Start small, and be patient. It takes time to learn new software, and even longer to become proficient in using it. Automated marketing campaigns can quickly become too complex to manage, especially for first-time software users. Before launching into anything complicated, start small and try out simpler campaigns.

For instance, you might test a campaign with just a small segment of users or only on one channel. This will not only help you understand how to use the software, but can also shed light on how often to contact prospects, which types of communication work and what audiences respond well to outreach. Only once you're comfortable with the software should you ramp things up to larger audiences or undertake multi-channel campaigns.

And remember, inbound marketing generally takes longer to show a return on investment than outbound marketing. Remain patient, and stick with it.

"It generally takes six to 12 months before you start seeing a decent return [with inbound marketing]. Once we've got the site up and running and it's established and it has traffic, we can stop putting work into it for a month or two—and it's still going to deliver leads regularly."

— Chris Mack, founder of Spokal

Use the capabilities you paid for. Many marketing software users don't use the full range of capabilities. Instead, they fall back on only the basics, such as mass emailing tools. If you fail to use the very things you bought the software for, it won't do much to help you with your marketing goals—and may even make things harder.

Here's an example: Buying a home is an emotional process, and even Internet-savvy home buyers want to feel like a real person is helping them through it. Leaning too heavily on automation without offering a personal touch could drive potential buyers away. To prevent this, use the full range of software functionality to create relevant and interesting materials—and distribute them at the right time, to the right people.

Lead segmentation and lead scoring can help you decide what messages to send to certain prospects. Web behavior tracking can tell you what content they're most likely to find interesting, and when they're most likely to engage. And social listening tools can help you understand what people are talking about, so you can send appropriate and timely follow-ups.

"Emails are meant to start conversations, because conversations are going to be what leads to closings. Certainly, you want drip emails for your new leads—but after a certain point, it doesn't really work. You have to have a [dialogue], not a monologue."

— **Chris Smith, co-founder of Curaytor and author of Conversion Code**

Conclusions

As you can see, there are many things for real estate agents to consider when selecting marketing automation software, and it can be a confusing process. Because vendors offer different functionality, it's important to decide how you're going to use the software before comparing specific vendors. To recap:

- **Look for software with capabilities that align with your marketing strategy (outbound vs. inbound)**

- **Make sure your system supports the marketing channels (e.g., websites, email, social media) you intend to use to reach potential home-buyers**

- **Consider how well the software will integrate with the other tools you use, such as your CRM system or mobile device**

- **Examine what types of support vendors offer to help you along the way**

- **Keep in mind the complexity of the system—don't pay for functionality you don't intend to use**

While selecting a system may seem overwhelming at first, carefully weighing your options and selecting the right fit is the most critical step to seeing a return on your investment.

If you're struggling, our team of marketing automation Software Advisors can help answer any questions you may have. Call us at (888) 234-5187 for a free consultation.

Created by:

Luke Wallace

Luke Wallace is a market research associate at Software Advice. He joined the company in 2015 after working as a researcher for various industries, including automotive, business consulting and technology. He has degrees in psychology research and interdisciplinary computer science and has an extensive background in innovation and design strategy.

At Software Advice, he researches topics, technologies and trends related to the customer relationship management (CRM) market.

🔗 Software Advice profile

✉ lukewallace@softwareadvice.com

📞 (512) 375-4080

Find me on:

In just fifteen minutes, the experts at Software Advice can help you narrow down the right software for your organization.

(888) 234-5187

Compare Marketing Automation Systems

Software Advice™ is a trusted resource for software buyers. We provide detailed reviews and research on thousands of software applications. Our team of software advisors provides free telephone consultations to help buyers build a shortlist of systems that will meet their needs.

Software Advice is a Gartner company. Gartner (NYSE: IT) is the world's leading information technology research and advisory company.