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MARKETING AUTOMATION IN THE PROCESS OF COMMUNICATION ON THE B2B MARKET

AUTOMATYZACJA MARKETINGU W PROCESIE KOMUNIKACJI NA RYNKU B2B

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Summary: In the perspective of the ever-growing and evolving requirements of the modern customer, there is a justified need for the better, faster and highly personalized matching of marketing activities for him/her. This challenge becomes even more difficult to implement when the client is a business entity and the marketing activities concern the B2B market. The solution, or at least an alleviation of the problem, seems to be the tools of marketing automation. However their use requires specific competences of marketing employees and an awareness of the possibilities and limitations from managers. This article presents the results of a survey conducted in a group of 100 Polish B2B market companies, the purpose of which was to identify the level and scope of applicability of marketing automation tools, characterize their advancement and the typical approach to their maintenance and further development. In terms of solutions functionality, the results of this analysis were referred to the state of the American business market. The summaries prepared on the basis of the analysis results can help in mapping further research, as well as in preparing dedicated and specialized courses and training for Polish entrepreneurs.

Keywords: marketing automation, B2B market, information technology, market analysis, development prospects.

Streszczenie: Wobec wciąż rosnących wymagań współczesnego klienta pojawia się uzasadniona potrzeba lepszego, szybszego oraz silnie indywidualizowanego dopasowania do niego działań marketingowych. To wyzwanie staje się jeszcze trudniejsze, kiedy klientem jest podmiot gospodarczy, a działania marketingowe dotyczą rynku B2B. Rozwiązaniem, a przynajmniej załagodzeniem problemu wydają się narzędzia stosowane w ramach automatyzacji marketingu. Wymagają one jednak specyficznych kompetencji pracowników marketingu oraz

świadomości możliwości i ograniczeń ze strony osób zarządzających. W artykule przedstawiono wyniki badania przeprowadzonego w grupie 100 polskich przedsiębiorstw rynku B2B, którego celem była identyfikacja poziomu i zakresu stosowalności narzędzi automatyzacji marketingu, charakterystyka ich zaawansowania oraz sposób podejścia do ich utrzymywania i dalszego rozwoju. W zakresie funkcjonalnym wyniki tej analizy zostały odniesione do stanu rynku przedsiębiorców amerykańskich. Wypracowane na tej podstawie podsumowania mogą pomóc w formułowaniu kierunków dalszych badań oraz w przygotowywaniu specjalistycznych i dedykowanych kursów i szkoleń dla polskich przedsiębiorców.

Słowa kluczowe: automatyzacja marketingu, rynek B2B, technologia informatyczna, analiza rynku, perspektywy rozwoju.

1. Introduction

Modern consumers search for information on a multichannel basis, using a variety of devices, communication methods and information sources. Marketers must connect and match multi-channel communication with a specific customer and their specific needs, for which it is necessary to use new technologies. Marketing automation systems is the answer to these needs. They enable data collection and responding in real time, as a result of which profiles of all acquired contacts are built and reaction scenarios are prepared to reach the appropriate recipients at the right time and with matching offers.

The B2B (*business-to-business*) market includes all entities that buy goods and services for the production of other products and services, and which are then sold or delivered to other market participants (Mruk and Rutkowski, 1999). Working with a corporate customer often requires contact with many people from a given company, which means that the purchasing process may take longer than in the case of sales on the consumer market (B2C – *business-to-customer*). B2B is often a network in which manufacturers, wholesalers and distributors participate, and each of them is an important element of the final product sales process.

In a business-to-business relationship, the buyer strives to streamline a certain process to save time and money. Decisions are based largely on the logic, financial analysis and financial credibility of the supplier, mainly taking into account the price of the product and potential profit. The B2B market is often oriented towards building long-term business relationships. Sales in this market are more focused on people who will use a given product or service than on the product itself. In this situation it is very important to show specific results from marketing a given product or service in marketing communication. Business customers have specialist knowledge, so presenting only the features, properties or benefits, often interpreted differently by the supplier and the recipient, is not enough.

In addition, marketers must be prepared to bear a higher sales cost than on the consumer market. This is usually associated with a longer sales process in which a large number of people are often involved, and business partners are also

chosen very meticulously and are rarely changed. All this means that the better use of information resources brought by communication on the B2B market can significantly affect the efficiency of the entire sales process. Due to the above, the use of new technologies, including marketing automation, is a significant support that should be used in this process.

The purpose of this article is to present the current state of use of marketing automation tools and the awareness of the need to use them in Polish B2B companies. The article presents the results of a survey conducted in 100 Polish companies in 2018 regarding the degree of sophistication of the tools used in marketing automation, as well as the opinions on the challenges and benefits associated with their use.

The specific objectives of the research focused on the following aspects:

- knowledge of the functionality of marketing automation systems,
- effectiveness and impact of automation on an enterprise's marketing activities,
- learning plans, determining development trends and the frequency of reaching for tools to automate marketing on the B2B market.

2. Marketing automation in theoretical frames

Automation has become a very popular topic in the field of marketing. Modern enterprises, in order to stay on the market and not lag behind the competition, must constantly generate new ideas and original marketing activities. Current marketers have to constantly improve their skills and look for new solutions to support their actions and make decisions in order to play an important role on the market. Marketing automation systems are some of the possibilities in this area.

According to the definition of SALESmanago, the creators of the first marketing automation system in Poland: "Marketing automation is a segment of IT systems used for marketing and sales management. It streamlines, automates and measures all marketing and sales activities, at the same time combining them with an individual recipient and their effect. The main goal of marketing and sales automation is to increase the sales volume by perfectly matching the messages sent to the needs, interests and capabilities of potential customers" (SALESmanago, 2015). The definition focuses on the technological nature of solutions and the main purpose of their use.

Another definition of this concept draws attention to the usefulness of tools for collecting information about customers. "These are systems whose main assumption is to track the recipient's behaviour on a given website. The information obtained as a result of the above allows to identify the needs of the recipient, and precisely indicate which elements of the subject offer arouse the greatest interest of potential customers. Thanks to this information, it is possible to adapt the message to the needs of a particular person, and in addition, by sending it in a timely manner, increase the impact of the message" (Świerczak, 2013). This definition highlights the role that marketing automation plays in managing customer information and personalizing the customer approach. This is an extremely important feature characterizing these solutions.

The next definition highlights the possibility of improving the process of marketing activities: “Generating demand with the help of marketing automation is a set of activities thanks to which the process of demographic and behavioural targeting and the process of communication with the customer are carried out to prepare them for purchase in the future. The IT system controls the sales cycle by determining the level and type of interest in purchasing based on tracking the behaviour of the potential buyer, which indicates their buying intention” (Siroker and Koomen, 2013). This definition highlights the important aspects of marketing automation in relation to the B2B market – improving the communication process and preparing the customer for future purchases.

In turn, another definition, in addition to the previously mentioned process improvements, also draws attention to the personalisation of communication with the recipient. “Marketing automation is a technology thanks to which enterprises can improve marketing processes, organise tasks more effectively and fully automate the strategies used, along with a very accurate assessment of their effectiveness. (...) the idea of marketing automation is also to make personalised messages of various types, e.g. a product and price offer tailored exactly to what a given consumer is looking for on the websites” (Peszko, 2015).

It follows from the above definitions that marketing automation is a way to support multifaceted and multidimensional marketing activities and decisions, especially in the field of:

- increasing efficiency: by automating processes or their parts, operations are carried out faster and more accurately, the risk of human error is eliminated, and work can be carried out without interruption, in continuous mode and real time;
- increase conversion¹: thanks to careful analysis of data collected about customers, it is possible to provide accurate information in real time. This in turn significantly affects a good brand and a positive image of the company with the customer, which is crucial in B2B market communication;
- cost reduction: first of all, a well-planned communication and promotion strategy influences the optimisation of the actions taken, in addition, marketing automation systems do not require technical moderation inside the company, because they are available online, without generating additional costs associated with their maintenance;
- increase in sales: caused by sellers receiving sales contacts ready for purchase thanks to the lead nurturing process². Therefore, sellers do not waste time contacting people not interested in the offered products and can spend it instead on conversation with potential customers.

¹ Conversion – the performance of a specific, intended action by the recipient of online advertising. For example: purchase of a product or service, registration on a website or forum, downloading files and/or information, signing up for a list of subscribers.

² Lead nurturing – consists in acquiring a potential customer (lead) and consistent, multi-stage lead to purchase (nurturing), from which the customer should be satisfied.

To sum up the above, marketing automation refers to marketing and sales activities, enabling the creation of campaigns with the character of lead nurturing. Activities that are part of the marketing automation process include: multi-faceted analysis of the customer base, creation of a customer reference profile, definition of the overall lead definition, design and implementation of the lead nurturing program, constant monitoring and optimisation of operations. This solution requires the mutual cooperation of three areas: the website of the promoted product or service, the CRM (*Customer Relationship Management*) system and the marketing automation system. The effectiveness of this cooperation is conditioned by the further development of both their mutual integration (manner, degree and flexibility of connections) and each of its individual elements (both in terms of technology development as well as methodological solutions and good practices used).

3. Development prospects for marketing automation

According to the research entitled *Global Marketing Automation Software Market Size, Share, Development, Growth and Demand Forecast to 2023*, carried out by *Research and Markets*, the global marketing automation market will record approximately 8.5% in annual increase in size. In 2023 its projected value will reach USD 6.93 billion. For comparison, the marketing automation market in 2009 was worth only USD 100 million but four years later, in 2013, its worth was already USD 750 million.

The above research shows that marketing automation systems are already widely used. Organisations are wondering how to use them, not whether it is worth using them at all. They are treated as tools that not only make it easier for marketers to work, but also as a long-term, profitable investment. The requirements set by the European Union also motivate organisations to increase automation and use advanced algorithms in their daily work. An example of such a condition is the regulation on the protection of personal data (GDPR), which defines how and under what conditions customer data can be processed. Meeting these requirements is possible only with the use of IT systems and tools of the appropriate class and level of security sophistication. Therefore, both large international corporations as well as medium and small enterprises use marketing automation tools.

Currently there are several hundred different systems for marketing and sales automation on the market. The *B2B Technology Marketing Community Group* conducted a research aimed at determining the most important functions of marketing automation systems. The research was carried out in a group of 900 American companies. The survey respondents indicated that the most important features include (Figure 1): lead nurturing and its service, integration with other communication and marketing systems, analytical and reporting tools, management of marketing campaigns and the possibility of conducting marketing activities via e-mail.

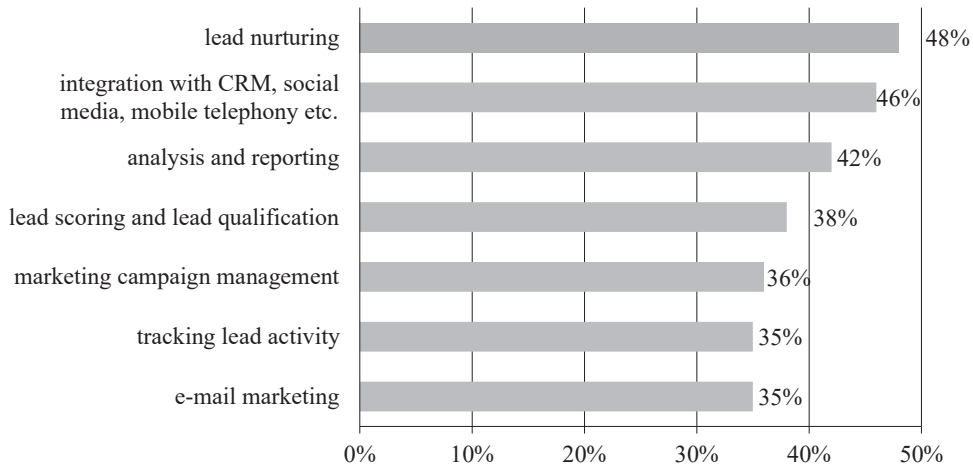


Fig. 1. The most important features of marketing automation systems according to the *B2B Technology Marketing Community* research

Source: (B2B Technology Marketing Community, 2014).

The above features first require support systems to acquire, collect and share relevant data and information. Data generated and collected in marketing is not only very diverse, but above all there is more and more of it. According to an IBM report, over the past two years, 90% of all data available worldwide has been created. This is the result of the huge number of owned mobile devices and the number of entries on social networks added every day. Marketing automation already uses machine learning mechanisms and artificial intelligence to deal with their processing.

By using machine learning technology, robots solve problems that were previously the sole domain of Man (Gibson, 2015). According to forecasts, by 2025 machines are to take over more than 30% of professions, including customer service employees and lawyers. Thanks to advanced algorithms, it is possible to automate cognitive tasks which will lead to a transformation affecting the functioning of many markets. The time is approaching for marketing intelligence systems with the ability to process data and generate recommendations for improvement using the principles of statistics, econometrics and probability theory. The use of Big Data technology in improving marketing processes allows to move away from retrospective analysis in favour of real-time analysis and predictive analysis, in order to generate immediate answers to the current and future needs of users, and not relying only on patterns from the past (Ayankoya, Calitz, and Greyling, 2014). Everything indicates, therefore, that we are already close to fully automated marketing strategies, in which the marketer's duties will focus on the monitoring and optimisation of the algorithms used.

In the near future, marketers' attention will be focused on user experience. All its stages will be designed and improved based on accurate and reliable data analysis to

maximise the value of each customer in real time (Sass, 2017). A loyal customer who makes regular purchases is currently very valuable. Therefore, it is worth spending time and using the available support tools to better understand the customer and personalise the offered product in such a way that as a result the customer will feel noticed. The result of these activities is an increase in retention and customer satisfaction, while increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of the marketing activities, which leads directly to increasing profits.

Undoubtedly, for companies deciding to implement automation this means a big challenge and the need to perceive marketing in completely new categories. Cooperation and the exchange of information between various departments and different positions of the organisation is necessary, and employees should acquire new skills and learn to use advanced technological solutions. This is an opportunity especially for those specialists who have competences in the field of data analysis and reporting as well as the ability to use IT supporting tools. People who have knowledge related to cybersecurity, in particular related to sensitive data management, are also increasingly sought after in this market. The question is, therefore, at what stage of the development of marketing automation Polish enterprises are currently, especially those functioning in B2B relations.

4. Analysis of B2B companies in the field of marketing automation

The subject of the research was the degree of use and impact of marketing automation tools in enterprises offering their products or services in business-to-business cooperation. By means of a diagnostic survey, in the form of an electronic questionnaire, representatives of 100 companies from such sectors as services and trade, pharmacy, media, automotive sector, IT systems, IT services and consulting services were examined. Such diversity of the research group allowed to look at the problem from a multidimensional perspective and in a more generalized way.

The survey was divided into four parts. The first survey related to demographic data. The questions it contained regarded the size of the surveyed enterprise, the province in which it was located and the year of establishment of the enterprise. They were designed to characterise the research group, but also to help determine how companies from various industries and with different experience deal with new tools for marketing automation. The second part aimed to find out the answers to questions about marketing automation in terms of the features used, the development strategy and the budget planned for its development. At this stage, it was important to understand the degree and satisfaction of using marketing tools to automate operations. Parts three and four contained questions about e-mail marketing and the lead nurturing process, respectively. The aim was to learn about the experiences of the respondents, the extent to which they use these two forms of marketing, as well as to learn their expectations and plans for the future.

4.1. Characteristics of the research group

The majority of respondents are located in Mazowieckie [voivodeship] province (75%). There were also enterprises from the Małopolskie province (13%) and Kujawsko-Pomorskie province (13%). The distribution of the studied entities within the group is presented in Figure 2.

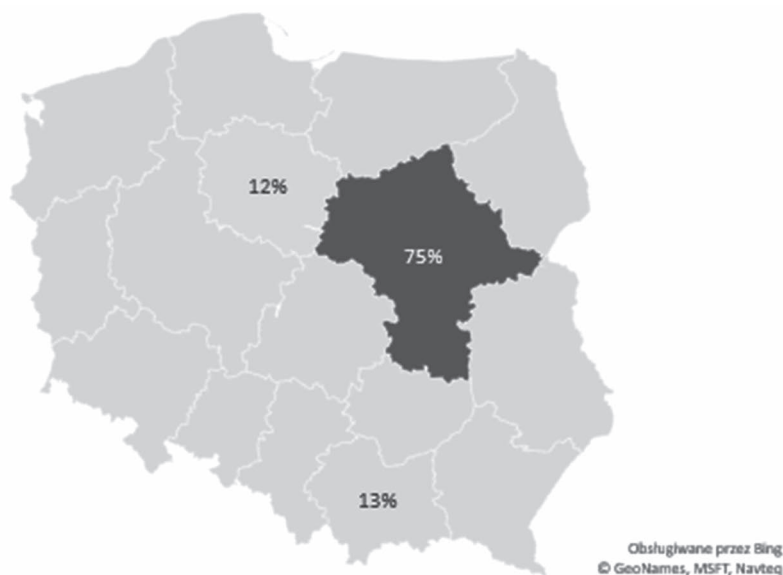


Fig. 2. Administrative location of the respondents

Source: own study.

Most enterprises fall into the small or medium category. Small enterprises with less than 10 employees constituted 12.5% of all respondents. The most numerous group were medium-sized enterprises whose resources ranged from 10 to 99 employees, and which constituted 50% of the respondents. Large enterprises or corporations employing between 100 and 990 employees, constituted 37.5% of the surveyed population.

It is important that the surveyed enterprises have several, or even several decades of experience on the market, because according to the survey about 50% of them started their activity before 2003 (Figure 3), and only 14% of the surveyed organisations are enterprises whose experience on the market was shorter than five years at the time of the survey. Therefore it can be concluded that the research group was dominated by experienced enterprises, highly aware of the specifics and market requirements.

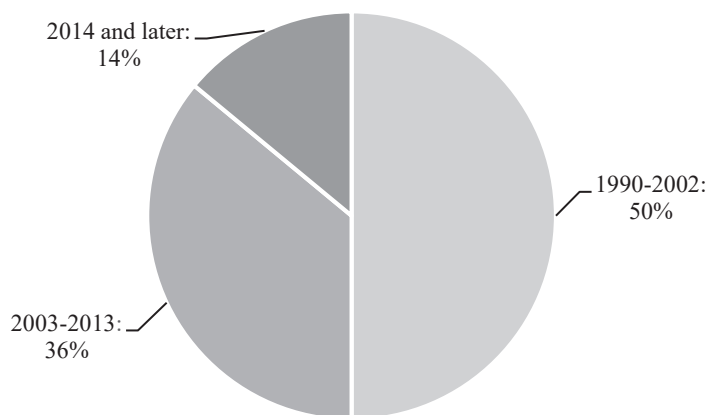


Fig. 3. Year of launching business activity by respondents

Source: own study.

4.2. Characteristics of marketing automation tools

The survey results show that over 85% of the respondents notice the need and benefits of using marketing automation tools. At the same time, 50% admit that there is no defined strategy for the development of this area of activity.

Among enterprises conducting B2B sales supported by marketing automation tools, 100% of the respondents use a CRM system and contact management. Over 83% indicated that they use a system for monitoring online contact behaviour, extensive analytical and reporting tools, lead generation and email marketing. More than half of the enterprises (67% of the population) also use the rules of marketing automation and lead nurturing, and 50% of the respondents indicated using contact analysis as well as notifications and alerts. Sales management, automatic segmentation and personalisation of offered products and content were declared by 33% of the population. Detailed results of these indications are presented in Figure 4.

Monitoring online contact behaviour, lead generation, CRM and contact management (indicated by 83% of the respondents) was indicated as the most sought after features of marketing automation tools. Lead nurturing process as well as email marketing were also highly rated (indicated by 67%). One-third of the respondents also pointed to sales management, extensive analytical and reporting tools, automation rules, automatic personalisation of offered products and content. By contrast, contact analysis, notifications and alerts, and automatic customer segmentation are less frequently appreciated features (17% of the responses). Detailed results of usefulness assessment of individual features are presented in Figure 5.

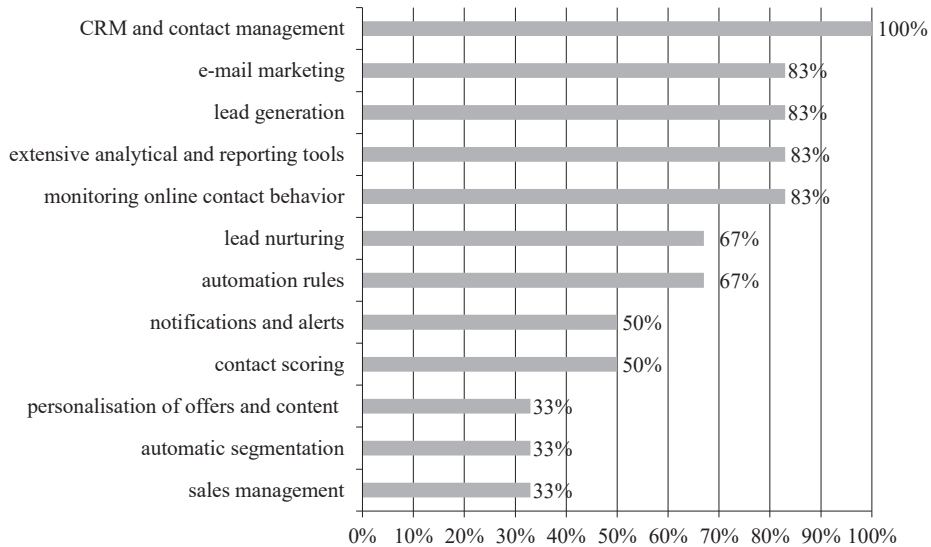


Fig. 4. Features used in marketing automation

Source: own study.

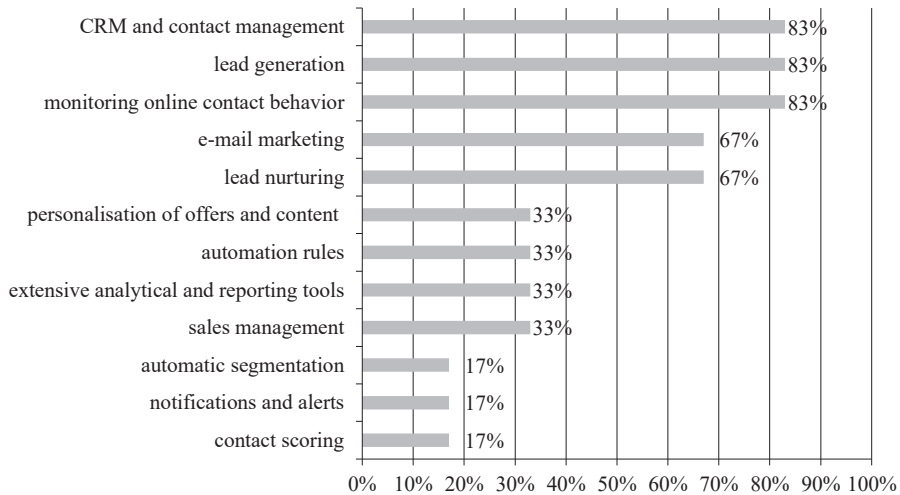


Fig. 5. Assessment of the usefulness of the features of marketing automation tools

Source: own study.

Among the most common benefits arising from the use of marketing automation tools, the respondents indicated an increase in effectiveness and better measurability of marketing activities (83%). Over 67% of the respondents also indicated the

acquisition of more leads, precise targeting and adaptation of marketing campaigns, as well as a better lead nurturing process. Among the benefits noticed, there is also an improvement in cooperation between marketing and sales departments (50% of responses), increasing consumer involvement, learning shopping habits of consumers (33% of responses), as well as an increase in sales by recovering abandoned shopping carts (16% of responses). Detailed results of the benefits noted are presented in Figure 6.

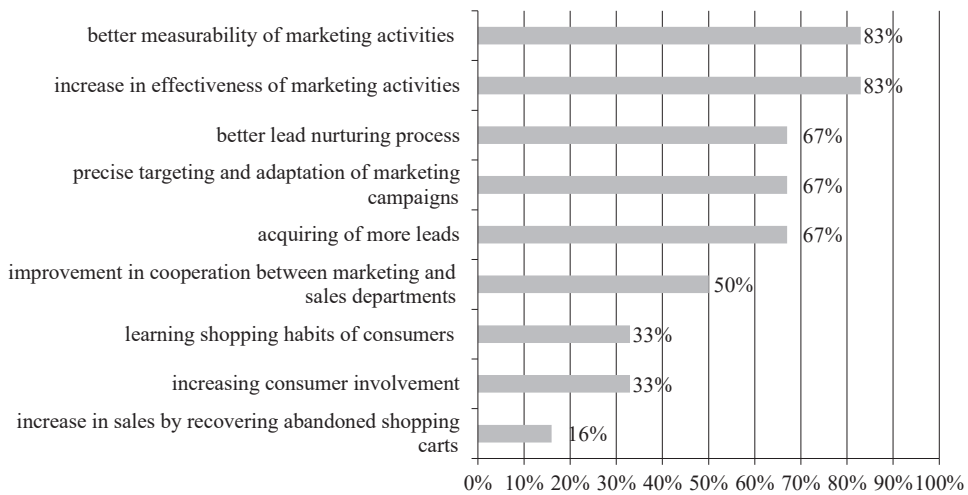


Fig. 6. Benefits achieved through the introduction of marketing automation

Source: own study.

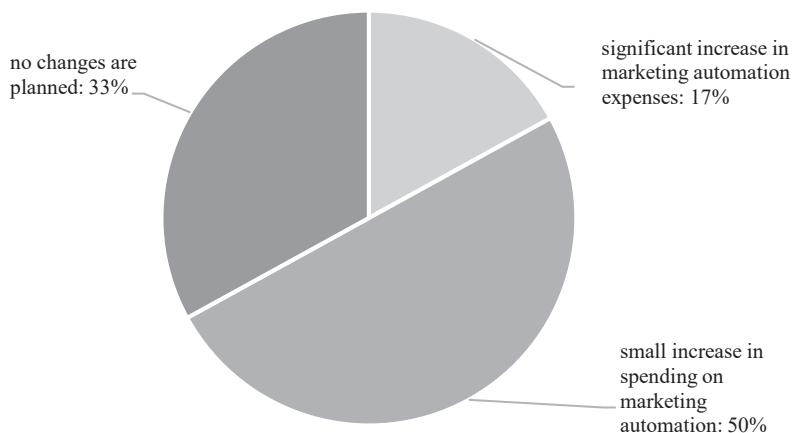


Fig. 7. Planned expenditure for marketing automation development

Source: own study.

Almost 17% of the respondents rated the effectiveness of the tools used to automate marketing as very high, while 33% considered this effectiveness to be high, and for the remaining 50% the effectiveness of these tools is at an average level.

As many as 33% of the respondents admit that they spend between 41% and 60% of the entire budget allocated to marketing expenditure on the automation of marketing activities; 17% spend in this area from 21% - 40% of the marketing budget, and 50% of marketing automation respondents spend up to 20% of the marketing budget.

It is also worth paying attention to the plans and further development of marketing automation class systems. Half of the respondents said that they plan a small increase in spending on marketing automation, 17% predict a significant increase in these expenses, and in 33% of cases no changes are planned (Figure 7).

4.3. E-mail marketing

All of the companies surveyed take advantage of the opportunities offered by e-mail marketing.

Newsletters are the most frequently chosen form of email marketing by the surveyed enterprises (88% of the studied group). E-mails to increase customer engagement (75% of the studied group), welcome messages, and cross-selling (50% of the studied group) are next in order. The least popular forms of e-mail among the surveyed B2B entrepreneurs are up-selling messages, reactivation e-mails, birthday emails and saving abandoned shopping carts. Detailed results are presented in Figure 8.

In e-mail marketing, having a good quality contact database is an extremely important element. There are many entities on the market that deal with the sale of their data resources profiled for the industry and/or jobs. Having one's own database, however, gives full control over its quality and content, as well as a greater degree of certainty as to customer interest in the product on offer. The usefulness of database resources increases the possibility of contact segmentation due to the selected criterion or criteria of this division.

According to the study, the most commonly used criterion for database segmentation is the industry (38% of the responses). Other companies to share their contacts most often use information about recent visits to the site, location, as well as purchase history (25% of the responses). Less popular, but also used criteria of division are revenue, division into existing customers and prospects, gender and loyalty to the company/brand (13% of the responses each). Other enterprises (38% of the responses) do not use segmentation at all. Detailed results are presented in Figure 9.

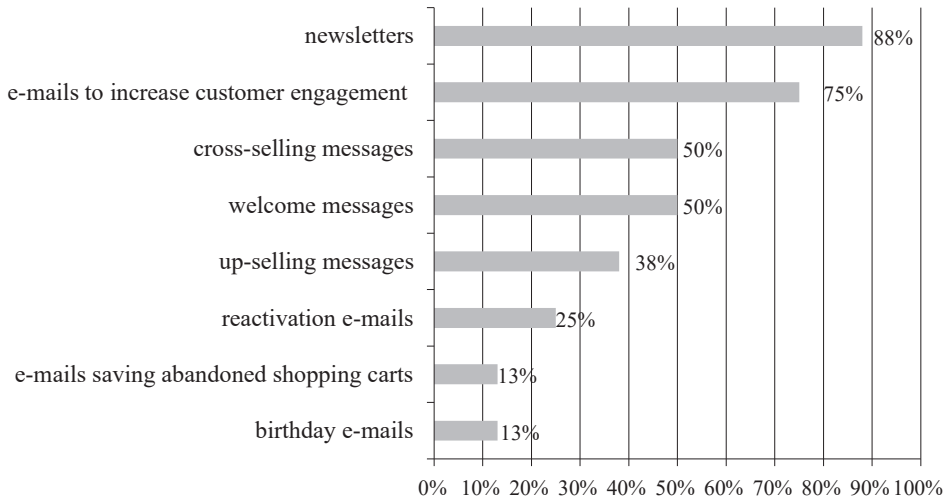


Fig. 8. Types of e-mail marketing used by respondents

Source: own study.

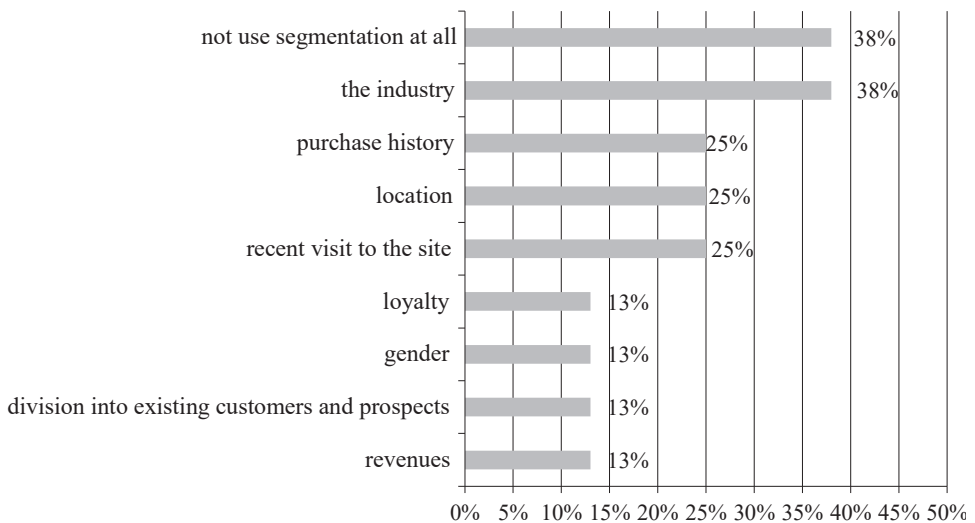


Fig. 9. Contact database segmentation criteria used

Source: own study.

In the survey the respondents were asked to provide the results of their e-mail marketing activities. Open rate (OR) is in the range of 1%-24% for 50% of respondents. This means that for every 100 emails sent, they record an average of

one to 24 open emails. As many as 12.5% of respondents said that they did not have information about OR, which means that these activities are not monitored by them, and 25% of those surveyed estimate their results at the level of 25%-49% of openings, and 12.5% of them assess them as excellent, within 75%-99%.

4.4. Lead nurturing process

The fourth and final part of the survey contained questions about the lead nurturing process as part of marketing activities. According to the survey, around 37% of the surveyed enterprises do not use lead nurturing, but 63% use its potential in their marketing activities.

Companies that replied that they do not use lead nurturing were asked about the reasons for this decision; 33% of them indicated that the reason is the lack of an appropriate organisational unit, but as many as 67% indicated a lack of awareness of this need.

We also asked our respondents about what they think are the most important goals of a lead nurturing strategy. Among the proposed answers were: increase in conversion, increase in sales opportunities, better acquisition of leads, increase of brand awareness and improvement of lead segmentation. At the same time, the respondents' opinions on this topic are divided, as shown in Figure 10, where 83% of the respondents believe that the most important goal of the lead nurturing process is to increase conversion and 67% said that this is better lead acquisition. Over 50% of the respondents believe that the main goal is to increase sales opportunities, while one-third consider increasing brand awareness as an important goal, but only 17% of them have the need for improvement in lead segmentation.

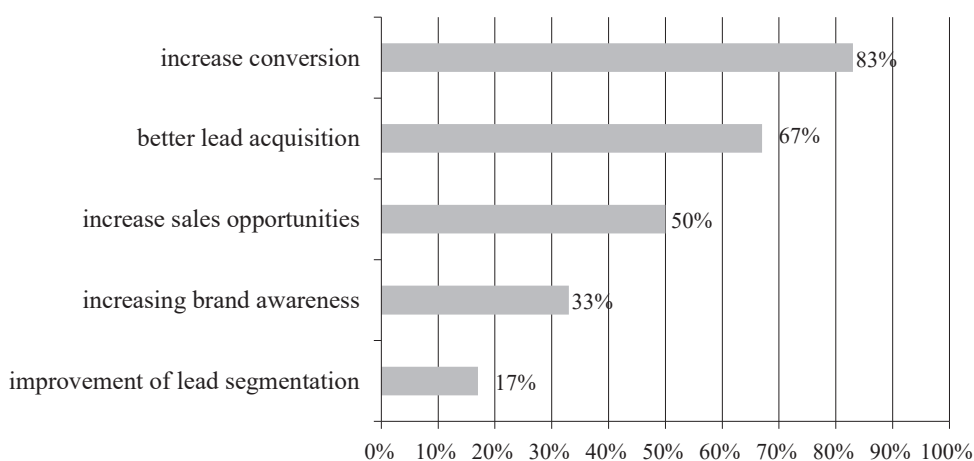


Fig. 10. Key goals of the lead nurturing strategy

Source: own study.

Marketing automation tools are designed to support marketers in their daily work. However, for this to be possible, it is important to know the biggest challenges they face. According to 80% of companies surveyed, the most difficult element in the lead nurturing process is creating valuable content. Other elements creating problems are the integration of data from many channels and the preparation of a lead nurturing process plan (40% of the respondents each). Other, smaller problems but nevertheless difficult ones include targeting, personalising the campaign, as well as the correct segmentation of data. Detailed results are presented in Figure 11.

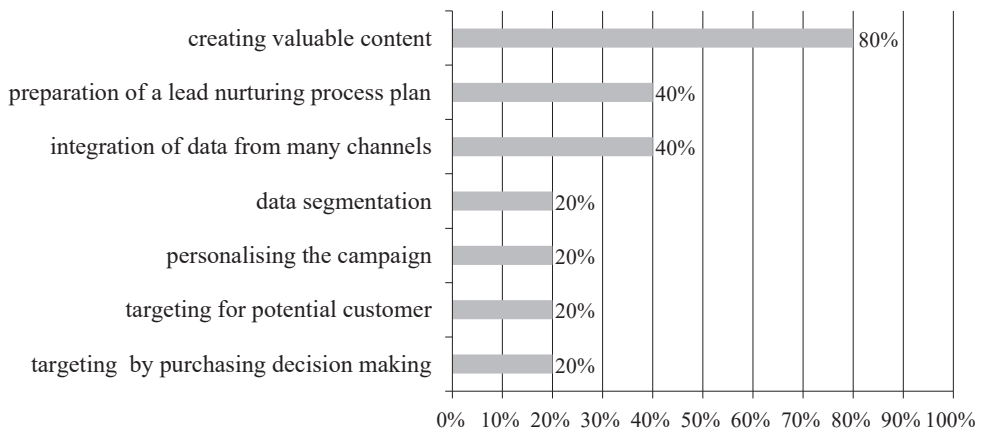


Fig. 11. The biggest challenges and problems in the lead nurturing process

Source: own study.

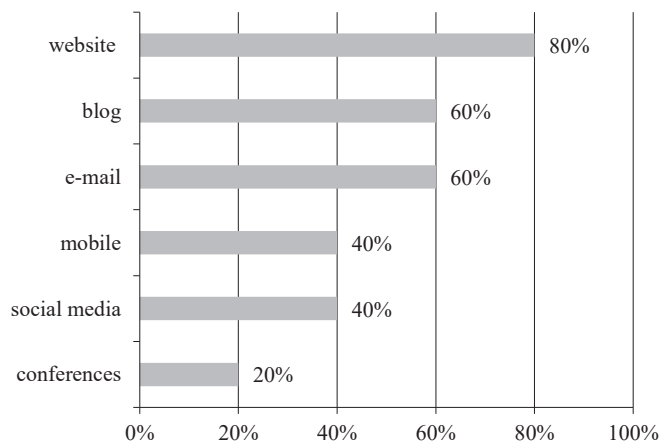


Fig. 12. The popularity of information channels in nurturing campaigns

Source: own study.

When asked about the most effective information channels as part of nurturing campaigns, 80% of the respondents pointed to the website of an enterprise or organisation. Other equally-rated channels are e-mails and blogs (60% of the responses). Other media mentioned by respondents included social media, mobile and traditional conferences (40% and 20% respectively). Detailed results are shown in Figure 12.

5. Discussion of the results

The results obtained during the study show that respondents notice the need to use modern marketing automation solutions. A significant part of respondents, i.e. 85%, declare that they see the possibilities of their application and the benefits resulting from this fact. However, still half of them admit to not having a strategy for the implementation and long-term use of marketing automation technology. This indicates that these solutions are more innovative than a permanent work tool. In the long run, this may result in a decrease in the effectiveness of operations and, as a consequence, a regression in contacts with customers, both in enterprises and on the market.

The most frequently used features of marketing automation by the surveyed enterprises are monitoring of online contact behaviour, extensive analytical and reporting tools, lead generation and e-mail marketing. Among the most effective functions, in addition to those listed above, CRM and contact management as well as lead nurturing were also indicated. When comparing these results with the indications of American entrepreneurs, it can be seen that Polish entrepreneurs attach much greater importance to e-mail activities than to the implementation and improvement of the lead nurturing process. This would indicate that our marketing automation market is at an earlier stage of development and that more time and experience is needed to convince Polish entrepreneurs of the effectiveness of its new functions.

Thanks to the marketing automation tools in the surveyed companies, the effectiveness and measurability of marketing activities has increased, and the effects are rated as high or even very high.

Over half the respondents declare that they allocate 20% to 60% of the marketing budget for automated marketing activities, and plan some increase in these expenses in coming years. Unfortunately, the other half has these expenses at the level of 20% of the marketing budget and in most cases such entities are still not planning any changes in this regard. This means that a large group of respondents does not see the necessity and benefits of developing marketing automation in B2B communication.

All the respondents use the opportunities offered by e-mail marketing. This is undoubtedly the favourite form of marketing automation among Polish entrepreneurs. They often communicate with their recipients via newsletters. These types of messages are not as demanding as other forms of e-mail marketing. The only thing needed to create a message is its content, which usually covers expert

articles or information about upcoming events and promotions. Such a message is sent cyclically based on the contact database, depending on the needs and without requiring any response in real time.

The recipient base has a huge impact on the success of e-mail marketing. To reach the right people with the marketing message and achieve the expected result, it is necessary to have a good quality database. So it is surprising that as many as 38% of respondents replied that they do not use any data segmentation. Therefore it can be assessed that they do not use their contact potential, flooding their customers with random messages. Another interesting result of the survey is the fact that almost 13% of the surveyed companies do not monitor the results of the e-mailing campaigns at all. They do not analyse the results of such campaigns or make any necessary changes to improve them. Such action is wasting the potential and time of the marketing team responsible for these activities. According to the study, the analysed company collects and monitors the results of its e-mail marketing activities. The newsletter opening rate in the company is around 13%-14% and the click rate around 4%-5%. The situation is very different when it comes to more detailed mailings. These messages usually relate to online and offline events organised by the company, as well as to the promotion of free materials available online. The results of such mailing campaigns vary, depending on what they relate to. The best result of the opening rate was around 40%, while the click rate was 27%.

According to the survey, 63% of companies use the lead nurturing process in their activities. It may seem that the above is a good result, but on such a specific market, being the B2B market, where the purchase process is usually much longer than on the B2C market, enterprises in particular should take care about educating their customers and prepare them for future purchases. It is rare that the customer who first interacted with the company is ready to order and buy. Enterprises that declared no lead nurturing process gave the lack of a realised need and the lack of an appropriate organisational unit to handle this process as the reason. This is where one can see the perfect use of marketing automation tools that would be able to reach people who need an extra contact to get started, or prepare them to make a buying decision.

The biggest benefits of using lead nurturing processes listed by the enterprises are as follows: increase of conversion of marketing campaigns, better acquisition and segmenting of leads, increasing sales possibilities as well as improving brand awareness among the recipients of such activities. The biggest challenges they face most frequently include: creation of valuable content, integration of data from many channels (both online and offline) and the preparation of a correct lead nurturing process plan. The most effective communication channels among the surveyed companies are website, e-mails, blogs and social media.

6. Conclusion

The Polish B2B marketplace recognises the need and benefits of using marketing automation. However, the approach to these solutions (contributing to their use) and the type of tools used (inclining towards those known and not requiring much commitment), indicates the need for further development and strengthening of this approach in the awareness and competence of employees and decision makers. Suffice to say that in this regard, American entrepreneurs were already using more advanced solutions five years ago.

However, it is good to see that Polish B2B entrepreneurs notice the opportunities and benefits that result from the use of marketing automation solutions. Although, it may be somewhat concerning that they treat them as a tool for carrying out on-going tasks, without spending time on developing a long-term vision or strategy for development. Unfortunately, this may be related to the broader context of the variability of legal regulations and the economic situation, in relation to which entrepreneurs focus on a given day and on coping with current difficulties more than on long-term planning for the future. On the other hand, in a situation of high uncertainty, all tools that effectively support the decision-making process become necessary and often save the organisation from incurring costs of serious decision-making errors. This is the reason for such a rapid progress and the development of information technologies focused on data analysis and reporting.

Based on the results of the study, it should be presumed that the Polish market of tools, methods and good practices in the field of marketing automation will develop. The population of users of these solutions is constantly growing, together with experience and confidence in the technology. The question now is to raise awareness and recognise the need to support marketing activities in such a way that the trend presented becomes a routine activity.

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