

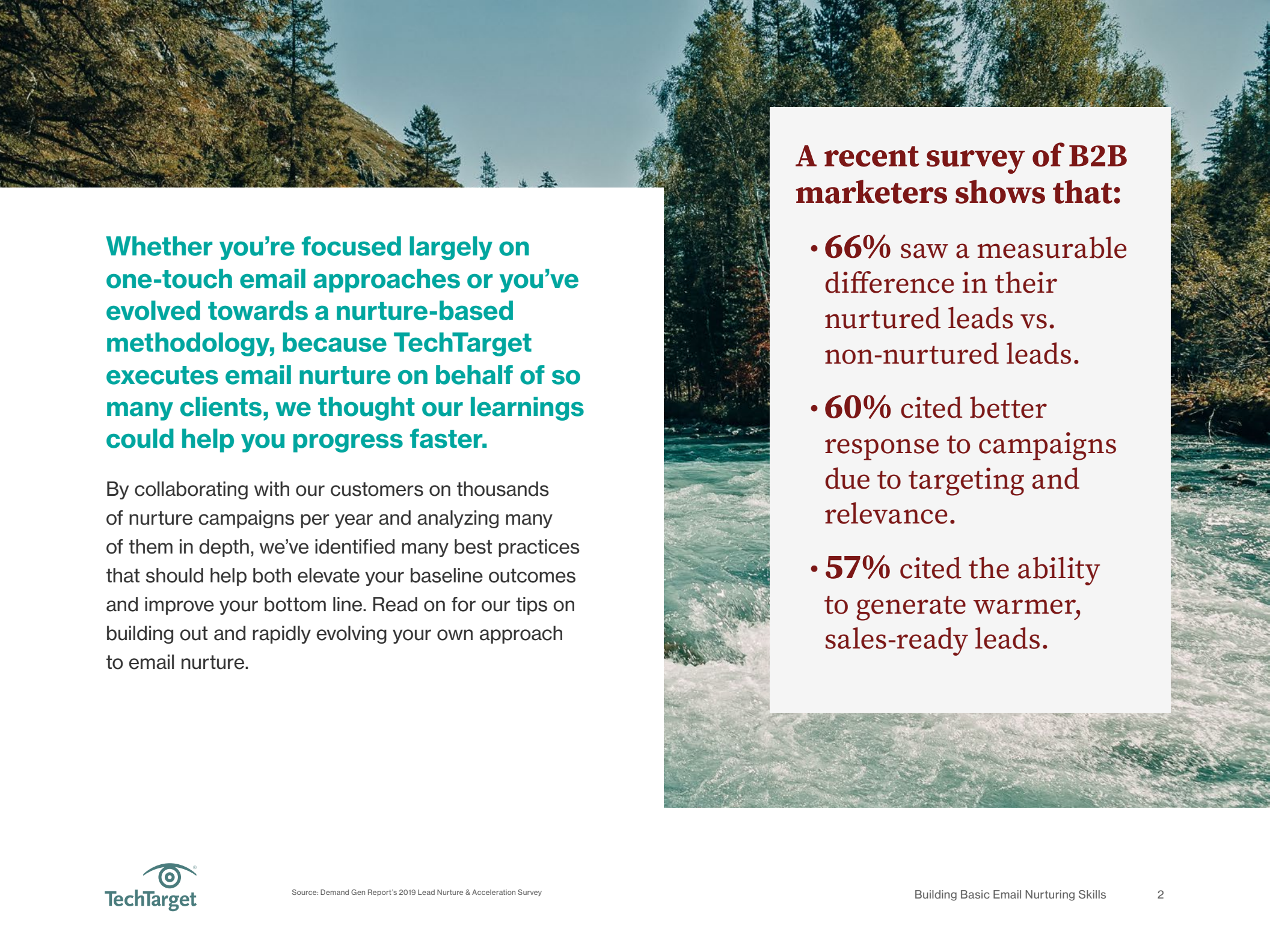
A person in a red shirt and grey vest is fishing in a misty lake. The person is standing in the water, holding a fishing rod. The background is a dense forest reflected in the water.

Building Basic Email Nurturing Skills

Scaled-up Learnings from TechTarget's
Marketing Services Teams

By **Fiona O'Connor**, Content Marketing Practitioner, TechTarget
and **Rick Nendza**, VP, Content Product Marketing, TechTarget





Whether you're focused largely on one-touch email approaches or you've evolved towards a nurture-based methodology, because TechTarget executes email nurture on behalf of so many clients, we thought our learnings could help you progress faster.

By collaborating with our customers on thousands of nurture campaigns per year and analyzing many of them in depth, we've identified many best practices that should help both elevate your baseline outcomes and improve your bottom line. Read on for our tips on building out and rapidly evolving your own approach to email nurture.

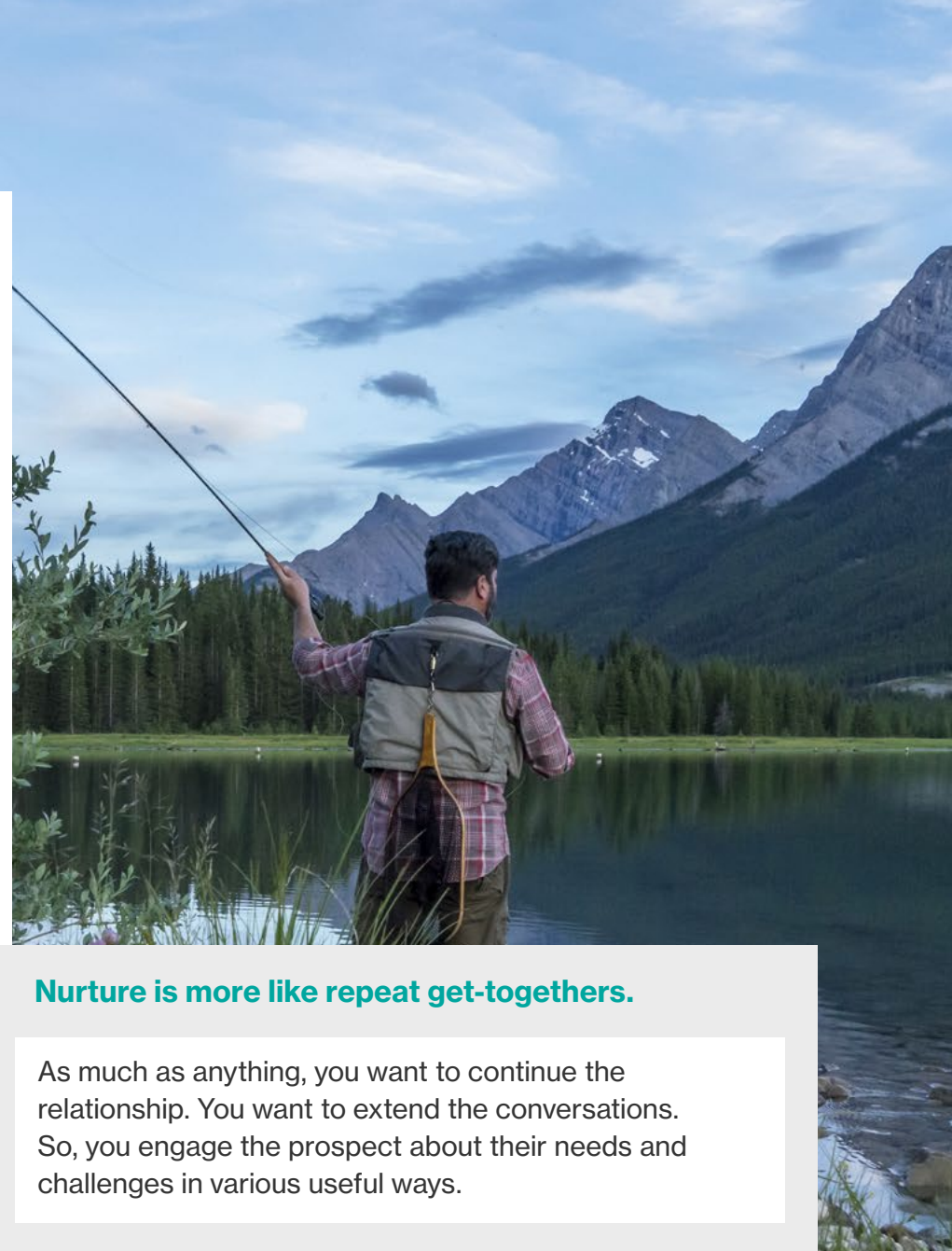
A recent survey of B2B marketers shows that:

- **66%** saw a measurable difference in their nurtured leads vs. non-nurtured leads.
- **60%** cited better response to campaigns due to targeting and relevance.
- **57%** cited the ability to generate warmer, sales-ready leads.

Defining Nurture Marketing

There are a lot of definitions of nurture out there. Before jumping in, here's our working definition of what nurture marketing is and how it works. Simply put, nurture is a marketing approach that B2B organizations deploy once accounts and prospects have become available to them for outbound activity.

At its most basic, the goal of nurture is to build greater awareness of and consideration for your brand and solutions to a targeted group of accounts and individuals within your total addressable market (TAM). It's focused on cultivating additional engagement with your company and measured by prospect actions that help you identify interest. The premise being that if these accounts and people know you better, they are more likely to consider you for a purchase and signal their intentions through an uptick in their engagement with your outreach.



Lead gen is like asking someone out on a single date.

When trying to get a prospect to initially enter your database, you need content and messaging that emphasizes response over everything. You don't want them thinking too much about it.

Nurture is more like repeat get-togethers.

As much as anything, you want to continue the relationship. You want to extend the conversations. So, you engage the prospect about their needs and challenges in various useful ways.

Some Out-of-the-Box Best Practices

While there are many outbound channels, like social, phone and even text messaging, email is the most utilized in nurturing efforts. You can accelerate and expand your success by avoiding unnecessary pitfalls. There are many components that make up successful nurture emails. We've selected several foundational elements at the individual execution level that can dramatically impact overall campaign or program performance.

Email subject lines

An email's subject line is the first thing that your prospect will see. From the subject line, prospects will decide if they want to open the email or ignore it. Given its prominence, a subject line may well be the most important element of all!

- Tease what's in the copy, but don't give it all away. You want recipients to open the email and learn more.
- Utilize personalization wisely. Will a prospect's first name or a target company's name matter more than mentioning a key element of the content you're offering?
- Keep it short: Our analyses prove that 60 characters or less is the ideal.
- Avoid pushy, overtly salesy language, as it disengages recipients and can trigger spam filters.
- Utilize the A/B testing built into most marketing automation platforms to rapidly select the best of two approaches.

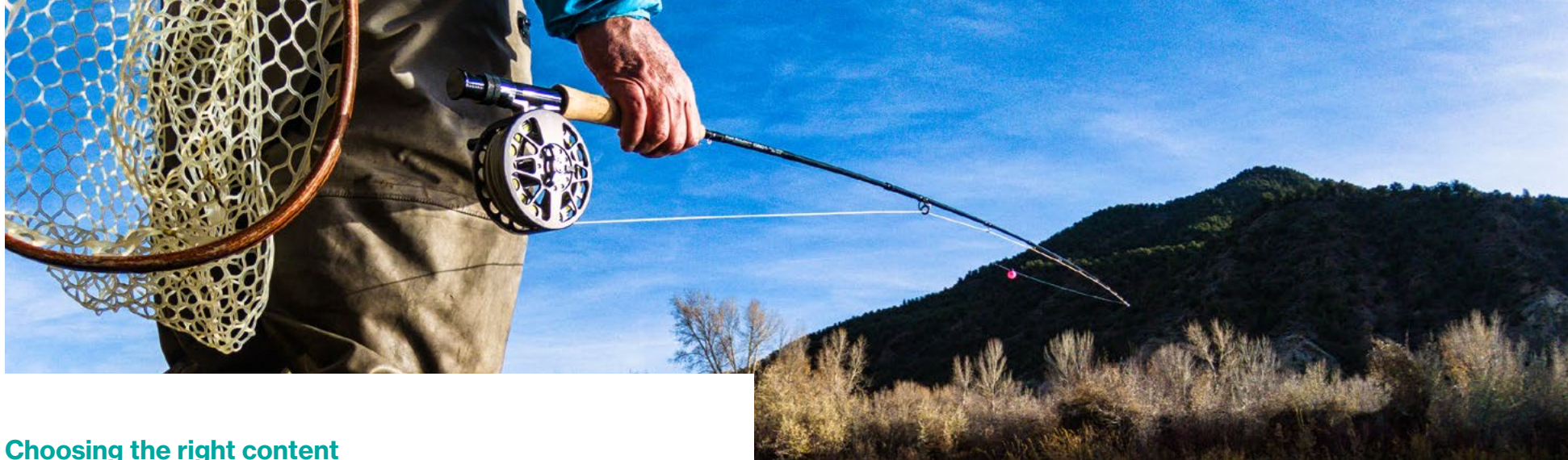


Calls to action (CTAs) and offers

When you've succeeded in getting a prospect to open your email, the next most important measure of success is to get them to take the action you want. Your email copy must be clear and should be constructed to entice a reader to follow up on your "call to action" (the button you want them to press or link they should follow).

- In most cases, have one offer per email and CTAs pointing to that offer alone. Keep it simple. Be clear and concise about the specific action you want the prospect to take.
- Make sure the offer is relevant and compelling. Few people want to have to talk to a sales rep simply to "find out more." If you are offering a rep, explain the topics you'll discuss and the special value that could bring.
- Make the CTA attractive and easy to spot. With only seconds to engage, you have to prominently showcase your offer so it's noticeable at a glance.
- Highlight the offer in multiple locations, including high up on the page or email. Use callouts and options that include buttons and hyperlinks in images so it can't be missed.
- To increase involvement of the prospect, consider using interactive elements such as a short survey or interactive checklist as the purpose of one email in a longer series. Then you can share the learnings with the prospect later on.





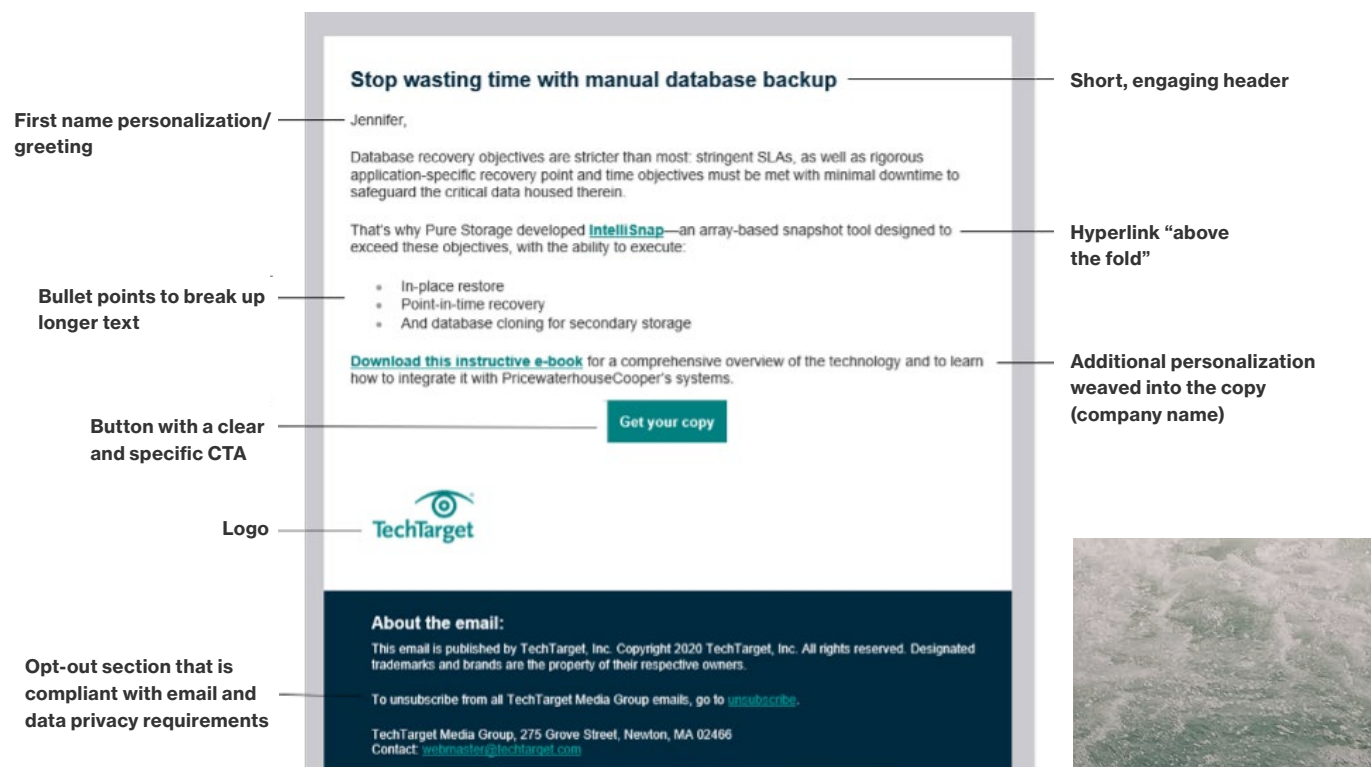
Choosing the right content

Whether you choose to execute a continuous stream of touches or a defined and limited set, most nurture efforts should be anchored by a variety of content offer types. The purpose is to expose prospects to a range of content that will increase the likelihood of their engaging with one or more over time. Taken together, the content should enable new prospects to become much more familiar with your brand and the relevant solution. Individually, your assets should address different aspects of the buying process from different angles. Thus, an important part of developing your nurtures includes mapping out the buyer's journey and developing content by type and stage with reference to it.

- **Try to utilize a mix of content types for the various stages.**
To serve the buying team's needs and preferences, you will want to include top-of-funnel, foundational content along with mid-to-lower funnel assets, such as product information and demo offerings in various formats, including whitepapers, case studies, infographics, long and short videos and webinars.
- **Establish a cadence for your approach,** including content that addresses needs from the awareness stage through to the decision stages. Align your content to the buyer's journey in an order that logically tells your story and delivers as much information a buyer could need as you can.
- To increase your chance of finding real content winners (by testing), **limit overlap between the content that's used in your direct nurture vs. content syndication on publisher networks.** Conversely, when you have content that performs really well, maximize this success by distributing it via more channels.

The anatomy of an effective nurture email design

A strong nurture email always has a simple, clean design with readable fonts and branded colors. It avoids excessive use of photography or other art, especially when that obscures key messages.



Pro Tips:

- Be consistent with your branding and always include your logo and brand colors.
- Be conscious of image size – if too large, it can trigger spam filters.
- Ensure your message isn't pushed "below the fold" (meaning below what can be seen on the screen immediately upon opening the email) by a header image that's too large.
- By testing on various devices, check that the email includes responsive design (it automatically adjusts its size) across browser and device type.



Elements of a Strong Nurture Campaign Strategy

Nurture stream cadence and length

When building nurture campaigns, the quantity of messages to be sent can be a challenge. Throughout our consultation of thousands of campaigns, we've found that there is no magic formula for how many messages is exactly right. Our evidence shows that all nurture serves as a form of "air cover" for sales activity. As such, more is almost always better. More email touches increases the likelihood that an account and a given prospect will be familiar with your brand when your sales reps pursue and successfully connect with them. Of course, automation makes any team capable of over-sending. You'll want to stay aware of how many times you send the same message and content to the same person. If it feels like too much to you, it's probably too much for them!



Pro Tips:

- Cadence strategies vary, but our experience shows it's best to reach out to your prospects at least once a week. Less than this and you will be easily missed.
- For new prospects (new names), we recommend trying a minimum of 10 touches be sent over two months.
- Use your buying cycle to help inform the appropriate cadence. If your cycle is short, e.g., less than three months, then a quicker cadence with all key messaging included may be required. If your cycle is longer, still plan your campaign to deliver on all buyer needs (material for each stage of the process). You can also experiment with different clusters of delivery over a longer total period of time.
- If you struggle to build quality content, there are creative ways to build emails leveraging alternative content like blogs, repeating the same content offers with new messaging, or offers of "lite" services such as "customized" product demos.



High-level list creation considerations

The criteria you use to select targets to nurture can be as important as your email components themselves. At a minimum, a good understanding of your ideal customer profile (ICP) should enable an honest understanding of your list's overall potential and the maximum effective size within your overall TAM. Within this, you'll want to understand key buyer personas to make sure you have access to the names you need and that your planned content addresses the major differences between them.

Pro Tips:

- Be wary of over-filtering to constrain your targeting too much. You don't know what you don't know about who will respond to what. Over-filtering can shut out potential buyers or leave you unaware of in-market segments you didn't realize would be interested in your solutions.
- If you're targeting only by a very specific niche market topic – maybe your solution's a totally new idea – consider including more established market topics to connect with the people who might be replacing what they have with your new concept. Don't place too big a bet on your ability to create adequate share of mind solely on your niche alone!
- If utilizing highly targeted ABM lists, make sure you continuously evaluate them and compare the accounts not on the list to those that are. Narrow ABM lists shouldn't be your targeting set, because, again, you don't know whether or not there are other accounts that might really want what you have.

Following up with those who haven't engaged

Whatever the prospecting list, even the best responding emails and most robust programs may generate no response from the majority of the names. Don't be discouraged. It's a marketing reality. But since this leaves you with many contacts who have never responded during the period of your program, you should consider having a plan for how to go after those "sleeping" accounts and people on your list.

Pro Tips:

- As part of your program, include sales outreach (phone, email, social) to sub-segments of your list, both during and after your campaign.
- For those who don't engage with your first heavy campaign activity, develop a continuous cadence as an effort to keep them "warm" with your brand. Newsletters can be a great way to do this.
- Personalize more, by developing messaging and even content that more specifically addresses the needs of a certain persona.

Measuring nurture success

Since we strongly believe – and all our evidence shows – that nurture serves well as air cover for sales, measuring success will look different than either transactional email or aggressive burst-oriented lead gen.

- **Open rate is a great relative measure for comparing one email to another.** It can inform you about who's "seeing" your messages (whether your email is getting through and if your subject lines are working). Make sure to watch out for bots and preview panes results that can confuse this approach with false positives.
- **While quantity of clicks is important, we prefer to use click through rate (CTR) to help us grow success over time.** Once you set a baseline, you can see if certain messages provide a lift, while continuing to test and optimize.
- **See if expanding to a bigger, less focused list degrades performance in any way.** Often this can drive more total conversions.
- **For maximum impact, sales outreach should be coordinated with your nurture.** Include downstream sales data on meetings and opportunity creation in success evaluation.



Conclusion

According to **Demand Gen Report**, only 8% of B2B marketers think they are doing an excellent job in their current nurturing initiatives. Through collaboration with our customers on thousands of nurture campaigns every year, we've found that often quite simple and quick-to-implement changes can make a substantive difference in nurture performance.

As they have for hundreds of companies like yours, TechTarget's experienced team of campaign performance analysts and database marketers can help you bolster your nurture performance in a variety of helpful ways.



To learn more about powering your company's nurtures with tech's best purchase intent data, visit techtarget.com/priority-engine or talk to your TechTarget sales representative today.

About TechTarget

TechTarget (Nasdaq: TTGT) is the global leader in purchase intent-driven marketing and sales services that deliver business impact for enterprise technology companies. By creating abundant, high-quality editorial content across more than 140 highly targeted technology-specific websites, TechTarget attracts and nurtures communities of technology buyers researching their companies' information technology needs. By understanding these buyers' content consumption behaviors, TechTarget creates the purchase intent insights that fuel efficient and effective marketing and sales activities for clients around the world.

TechTarget has offices in Boston, London, Munich, Paris, San Francisco, Singapore and Sydney.

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About the Authors

Fiona O'Connor is a content marketing practitioner at TechTarget. Her focus is to craft content that educates and inspires our customers, helping them chart a path to success. Having spent her career in B2B marketing, Fiona leverages her personal experiences to explore the challenges customers face and share solutions through conversation and storytelling.



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