7 Ways to Automate Your Marketing Funnel

TWILIO SendGrid

Introduction

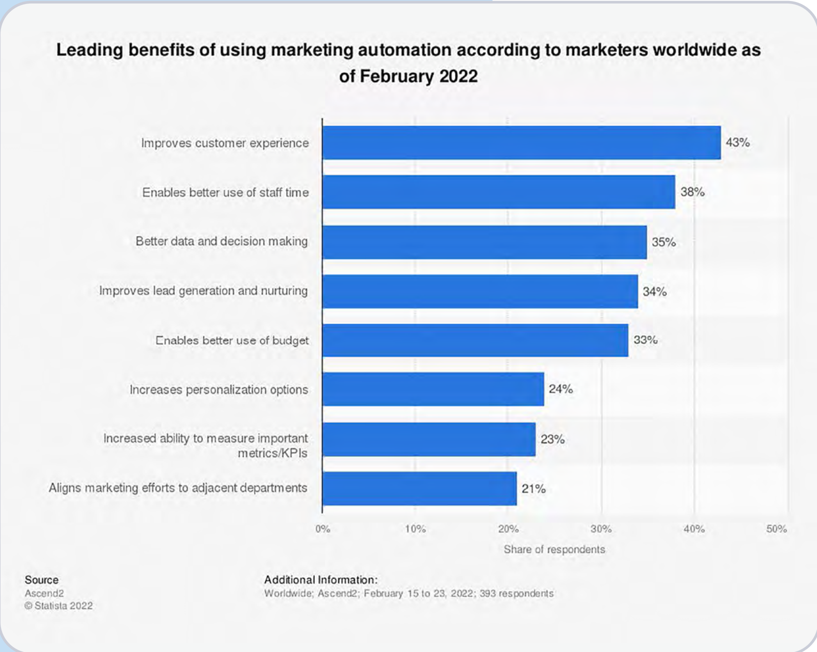
"Doing more with less" can seem like a Herculean effort, or a recipe for burnout. It's become a popular piece of advice in recent months, as companies wrestle with an unsteady global economy, inflation, and rumblings of a recession. So, how do you take the concept of "doing more with less" and turn it into a savvy business strategy instead of just grasping at straws?

In a word: automation.

By automating the routine, repetitive tasks that are inevitably tied to marketing workflows, businesses can increase employee bandwidth and efficiency. Instead of being bogged down by manual data entry, uploading CSV lists, or individually sending reminder emails to customers, teams are able to focus on more strategic work – like campaign ideation or experimentation.

Recently, Gartner surveyed over 200 CFOs to understand how companies will approach spending in this current climate. And their responses reflected a recurring sentiment: that "technology is a 'must' investment under any economic condition," and there will be a particular focus on automation to stave off the ill effects of inflation. This ties into what Morgan Stanley referred to as inflation armor or "deflation enablers," which are, "*The companies that help customers boost productivity and reduce costs through automation, efficiency or their own declining cost curves, while maintaining strong barriers to entry.*"

In this guide, we dive into the benefits of marketing automation, the technology and data needed to implement it, and how to get started.



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The 5 Steps to Setting Up Marketing Automation

Marketing automation, at its core, hinges on two things: having the right data and the right technology. When we talk about marketing automation, we're talking about triggering specific events or interactions based on real-time customer behavior or traits.

When a customer clicks on an ad, opens an email, or engages with a live chat bot, these are all data points that can be used to power automation (and on top of that, personalization). Below, we cover the 5 fundamental steps to setting up marketing automation workflows.

1. **Collect, clean, and consolidate your customer data**

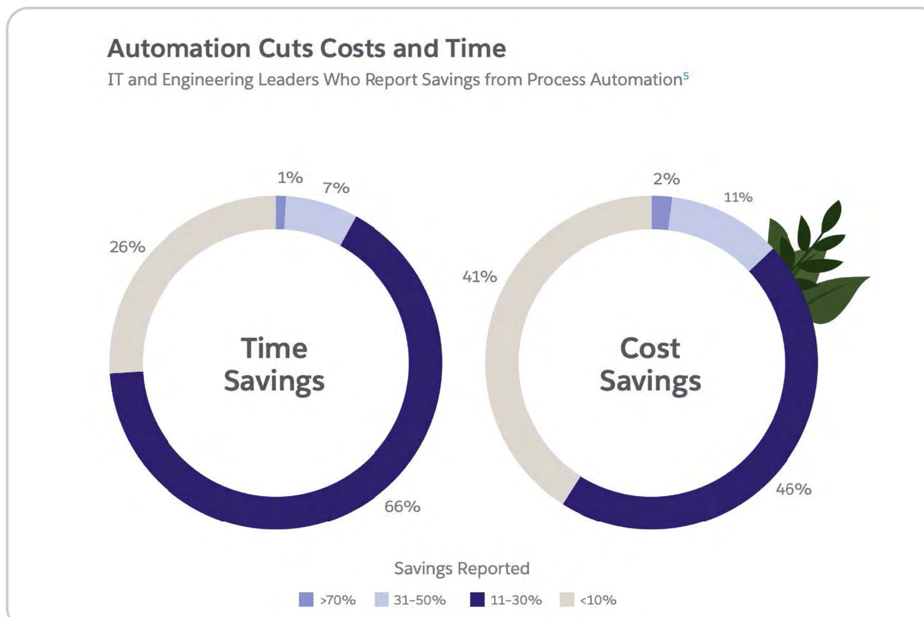
Marketing teams use a range of tools – 21 different advertising and marketing platforms, on average. For enterprises, that number jumps up to approximately 120 different solutions. It's understandable how this happened: different platforms tend to be married to different customer channels. And as consumer behavior becomes increasingly omnichannel, it becomes necessary to have a solution for email, SMS, social media–the list goes on. But this also presents a problem: a fragmented customer view between teams.

Combatting data silos–and the blindspots they create–comes down to having the right data infrastructure. Businesses need to build data pipelines to send the data that exists in individual tools and consolidate it in a central repository (like a data warehouse or a data lake). But that comes with a whole other slew of requirements, like:

- Ensuring accuracy (e.g. establishing a tracking plan to avoid duplicate data entries).
- Staying compliant (e.g. adhering to data residency laws and privacy regulations).
- Establishing data democratization (i.e. everyone in the organization can access and activate the data you're collecting).

Businesses can build this infrastructure in-house, but it requires a considerable amount of time and resources. It's important to consider how much engineering bandwidth you're able to allocate toward data management, and the delays that can occur when marketing teams can't autonomously access data.

As an alternative, businesses can invest in a customer data platform (CDP), which automates the process of collecting, cleaning, and consolidating data–and can save thousands of engineering hours in the process.



Source

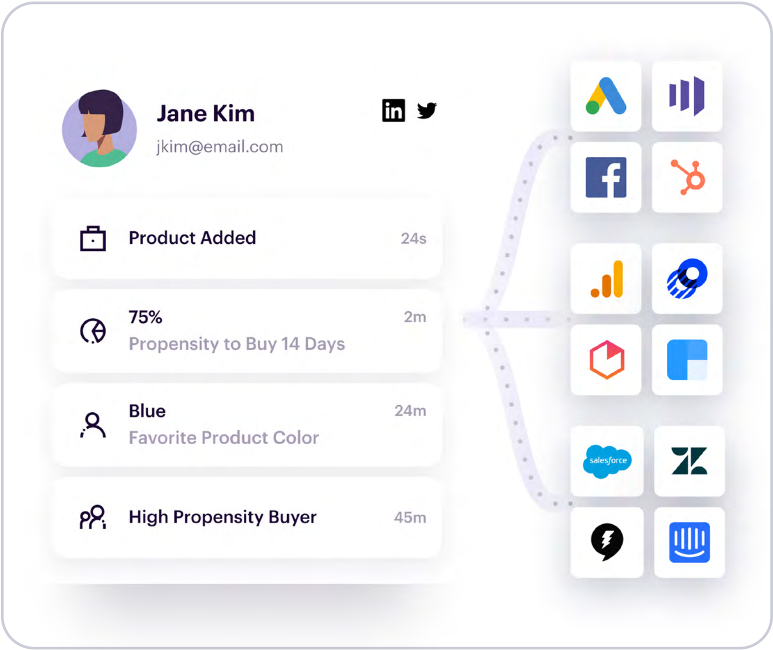
2. **Create unified customer profiles**

A follow-up to consolidating customer data would be creating unified customer profiles. This is a visual representation of an individual's–or if you're in B2B, perhaps an account's–interactions with your business. Unified profiles use identity resolution to recognize a user across devices and channels (even stitching together anonymous user data to a known profile).

This holistic customer view is essential for understanding how people interact with your business *in real time*. It's an integral step in instituting automation, as it highlights what channels you should be focusing on and when you should be triggering interactions. Because, what's the point of automation if you miss that window of opportunity with a customer?

With unified profiles, you can automatically exclude current customers from ad campaigns as soon as they complete a purchase (saving your marketing team precious ad spend, and the time-consuming labor of manually updating audience lists). Or you could orchestrate unique customer journeys that evolve with a person's behavior (e.g. determining which interaction should be triggered based on whether or not they opened an email, viewed a product page, or requested a demo, etc.).

As you collect more data, you can start to spot patterns in customer behavior and recognize intent, like whether someone has a high propensity to buy or is a churn risk. The result is more targeted, impactful automation flows–which we dive into in the following sections.



With an enriched customer profile, businesses can start to get more granular with their audiences, like identifying high-value buyers or seeing which products a person prefers.

3. **Map out the customer journey**

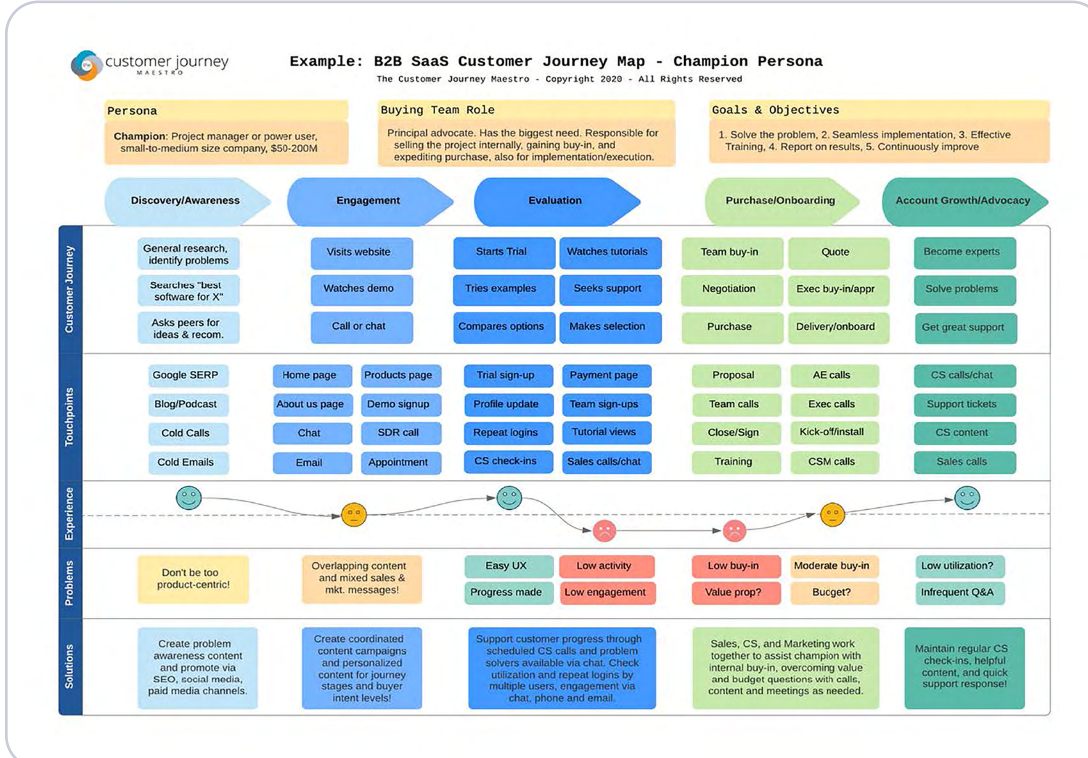
Before selecting which customer interactions are worth automating, we recommend having a visual representation of how prospects move through your funnel–also known as a [customer journey map](#).

A customer journey map plots out the interactions that occur between a business and customer across channels. These touchpoints are organized by funnel stage–which generally falls into the categories of Awareness, Consideration, Decision, and Retention–and correspond to specific goals and KPIs. For example, a SaaS company could have blogs, landing pages, and paid ads listed as touchpoints in their Awareness stage, and use impressions, ad clicks, or website traffic to measure success.

The goal of a customer journey map is to:

- Understand how each touchpoint influences behavior.
- Identify **critical conversion points** that move someone from one funnel stage to the next, and **the drop-off points** that point to funnel issues.
- Have a clear view of prospect's interests and ultimate goals.

By understanding how your funnel functions (along with what's working and what isn't), your business will be able to pinpoint what would benefit from automation.



An example of B2B SaaS customer journey map from [Customer Journey Maestro](#)

4. **Determine your goals and metrics**

Now that you have the data foundation, it's time to talk automation strategy. When considering what processes to automate, look to the metrics guiding your team. Along with overall conversion rates, what are you trying to optimize? This could be email open rates, customer satisfaction scores, the efficiency of advertising campaigns, demo requests–you name it. Determine the channels you want to focus on (based on your customers' behavior), how you plan on measuring success, and which routine tasks currently take up your team's time and energy.

Remember that when it comes to metrics, it's better to focus on what's actionable instead of something that serves as a vanity boost. For example, when we first started Twilio Segment, one of the metrics we focused on was Total Active Users. And while this number seemed great, it wasn't providing any information on growth week over week (or month over month). So, we decided to switch to Signups per Week, to better gauge how our marketing efforts were performing.

An example of the metrics companies may prioritize.

Industry	One metric that matters
B2B	Trial Started
Ecommerce	Order Completed
Consumer	Enagagement (e.g. "Friend Added", "Song Played")
Media	Subscription Created

Read more about choosing the "metrics that matter" here.

5. **Choose the right automation technology**

Last but not least, it's time to activate your real-time customer data with the help of a marketing automation tool. When choosing the right solution for your business, there are a few key components to consider, including:

- **Features**: Does the software's functionality support the goals you're trying to achieve? Does it work with all the channels that your customers engage with?
- **Integrations**: Can the software connect with the tools you already use?
- **Extensibility**: Will you be able to easily add new functionalities as your business and consumer behavior evolves?
- **Scalability**: Is the marketing automation solution the right choice today and for the coming years considering your growth plans?

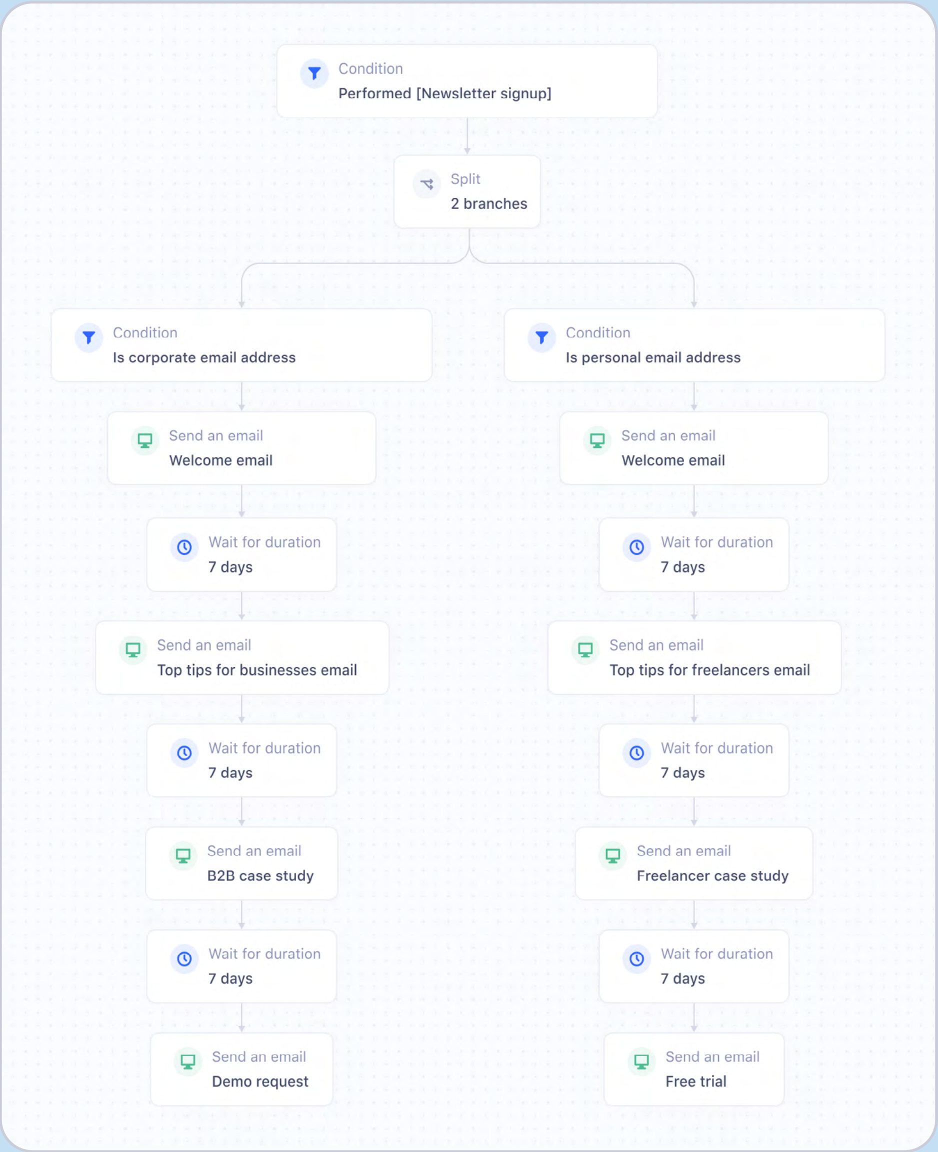
[Learn more about marketing automation tools, and how to select the right one for your business.]

What Should You Automate?

Wondering how your business can leverage automation? You can use it throughout every stage of the customer journey, including:

- **Awareness**: Ad campaigns.
- **Consideration**: Lead nurture, newsletter campaigns.
- **Decision**: Abandoned cart emails.
- **Retention**: Re-engagement and customer loyalty campaigns.

Here's a closer look at the many ways businesses can use automation—with some sample workflows to inspire your own campaigns.



1. **Lead Nurture Campaigns**

Not every user will be ready to convert when they first find your brand. Nurturing leads through every step of the buyer's journey can build relationships with your prospects and improve the likelihood that they become customers.

For even better results, you might want to cater your nurture campaigns based on factors like where they are in the buyer's journey, on-site behaviors, needs, industry, and more. Then, your business can auto-enroll new users into these highly-targeted nurture campaigns and bring them closer to conversion more efficiently and effectively than a one-to-one campaign.

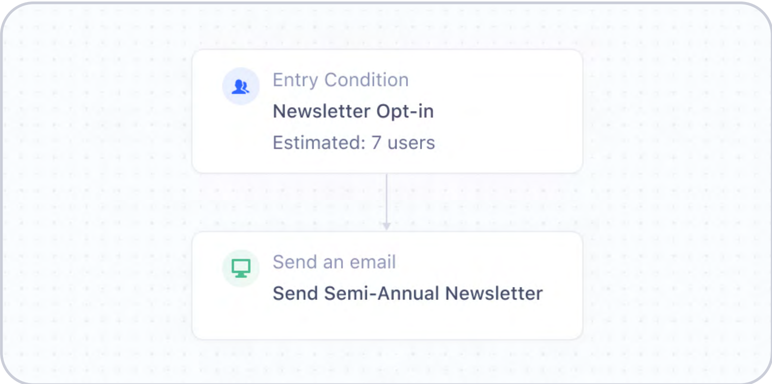
In this example, a SaaS company splits its newsletter signups into two distinct categories based on whether the user is interested in the tool for corporate or personal use. These two types of users will receive different content and resources based on their needs and use cases. This allows prospects to receive the information they need to feel comfortable purchasing the company's product, while allowing the business to continue nurturing leads and free up sales reps to pursue more strategic accounts.

2. **Newsletters or Company Updates**

Not all automations need to be complex. Some can be as simple as enrolling users who meet a specific criteria to receive a one-off message. For this reason, many businesses use automations to send:

- Company updates or essential widespread communication
- Updated terms of service or privacy policies
- Newsletters

Here's an example workflow a business might use to auto-enroll subscribers into an email newsletter. This allows your company to ensure the right recipients receive your important messages throughout the year, without you having to manually upload contact lists.

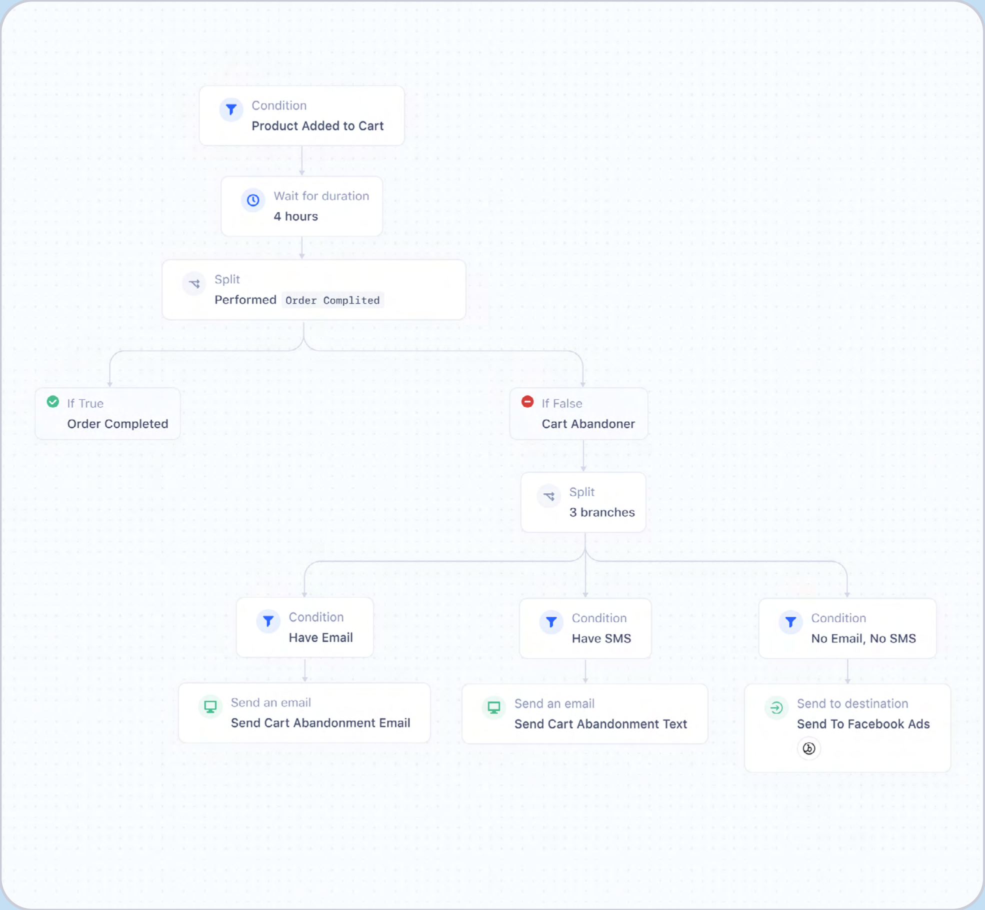


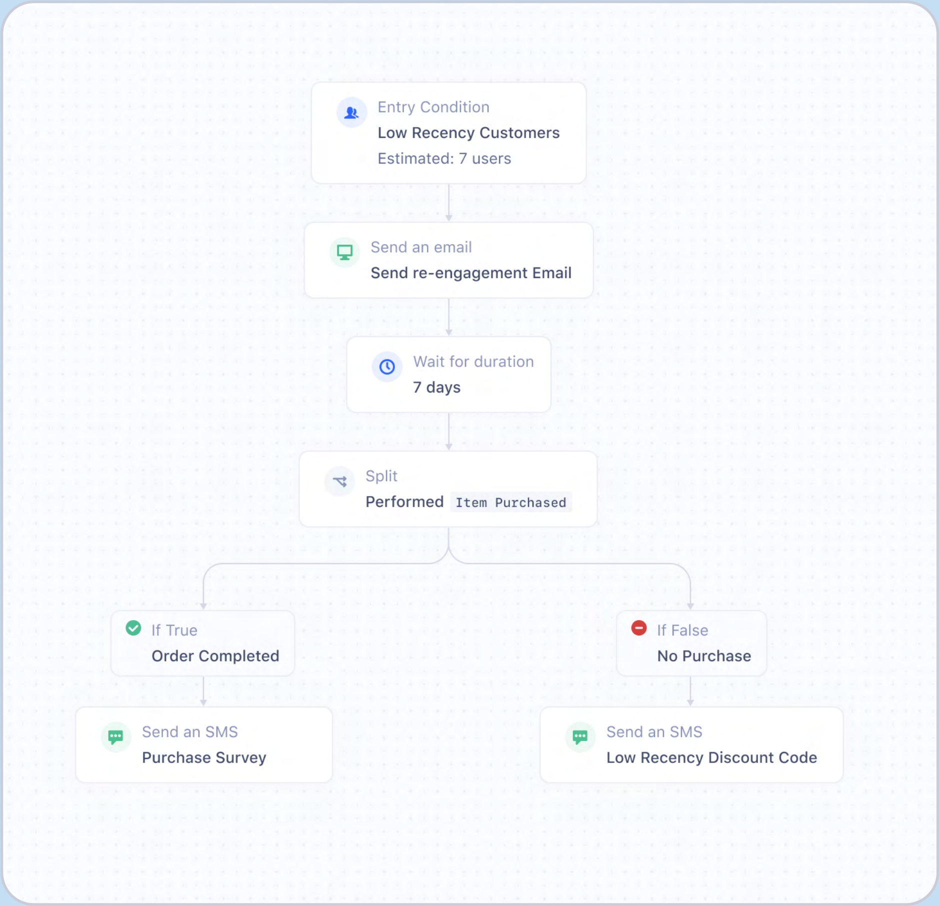
3. **Cart abandonment**

We've all done it–put an item in our cart and then changed our mind for one reason or another. But, imagine the business impact if you could convert even just 10% of cart abandoners.

Luckily, automated cart abandonment messages can help. By reminding users what they left behind (and even sweetening the deal with a discount or free shipping code), your brand can win back those users and convert them to paying customers.

Here's an example cart abandonment workflow from a skincare e-commerce website. If a user fails to checkout four hours after adding an item to their cart, the company sends them an email or SMS containing the exact products they were considering. Should the company not have the user's contact information, it can still share this data with its advertising platform(s) and serve more relevant ads with the products the user left behind–allowing the company to put this data to good use, even if it doesn't have the individual's contact information.





4. **Re-engagement Campaigns**

Re-engagement campaigns are a great way to stay top-of-mind with dormant audiences and convince them to come back to your brand. This can drive additional revenue for your business and help you increase customer lifetime value.

In this example, an e-commerce company is looking to re-engage customers who haven't made a purchase in the last three months. Users who meet this criteria are sent a re-engagement email that contains the company's newest best-selling products to try to win them back. If this email doesn't result in a purchase, users then receive an enticing 40% off one-item deal via SMS one week later to try to convince them to convert. Using this simple workflow, this e-commerce business can win back customers and drive revenue the business would have otherwise failed to capture.

5. **Appointment Reminders**

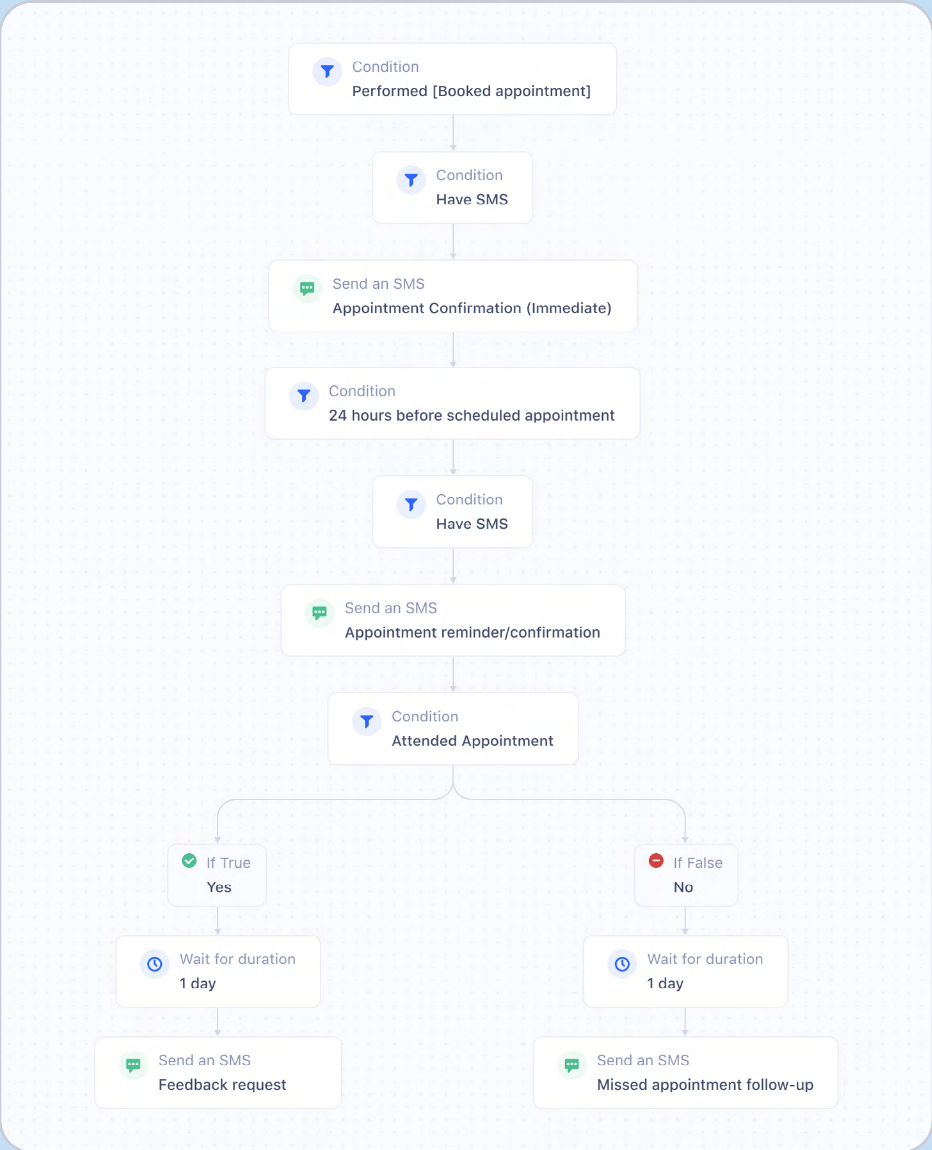
Missed appointments mean missed revenue. Luckily, a friendly call, text, or email is often all it takes to remind customers of their appointment and reduce no-shows.

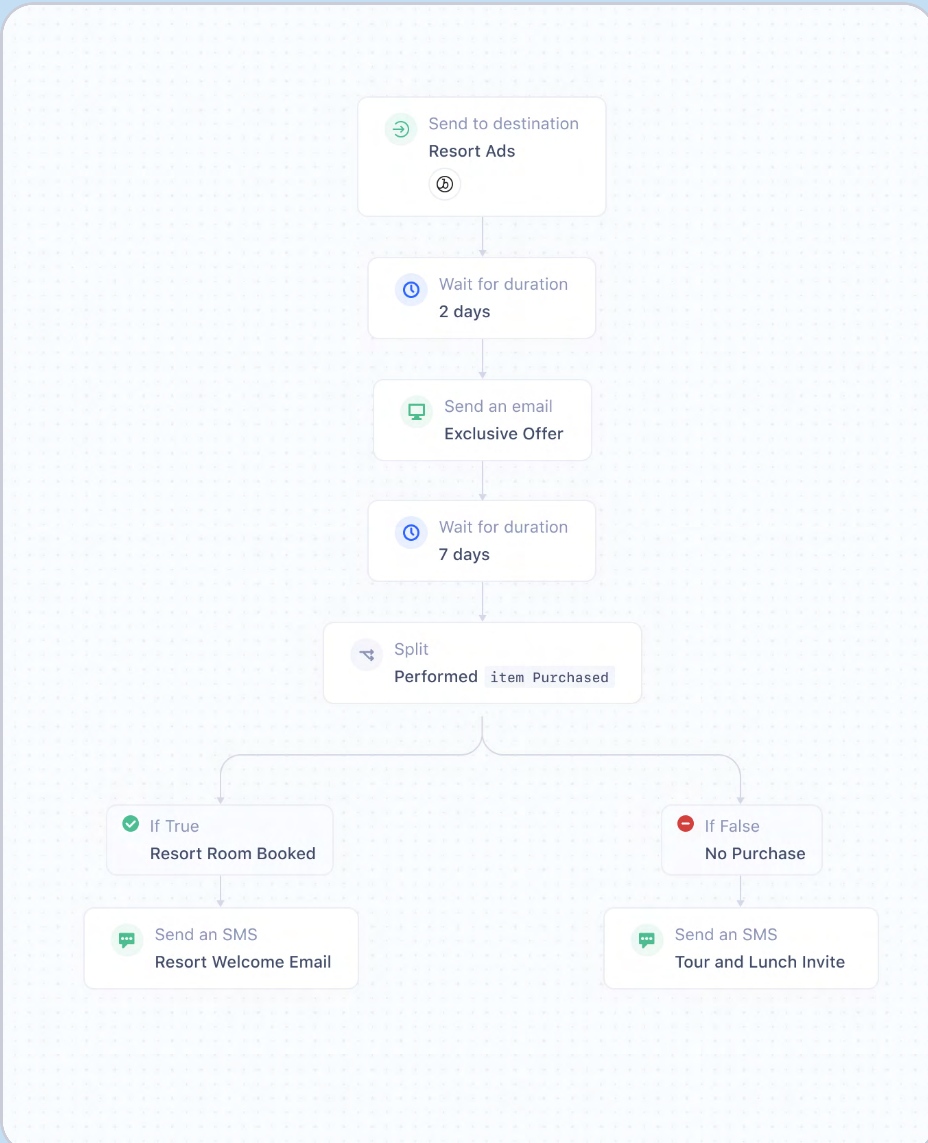
Instead of wasting your employees' time and resources by manually confirming appointments, use automation to confirm attendance via email, SMS, or phone. This frees up your staff to tackle more pressing business priorities, while ensuring your customers keep their commitments. Plus, you can also add automations to request feedback after an appointment, or give customers the ability to reschedule if they miss it.

Start automating your appointment reminders.

Learn how in our blog post, How to Send Appointment Reminder Texts (7+ Free Templates)

[Read now →]





6 **Onboarding**

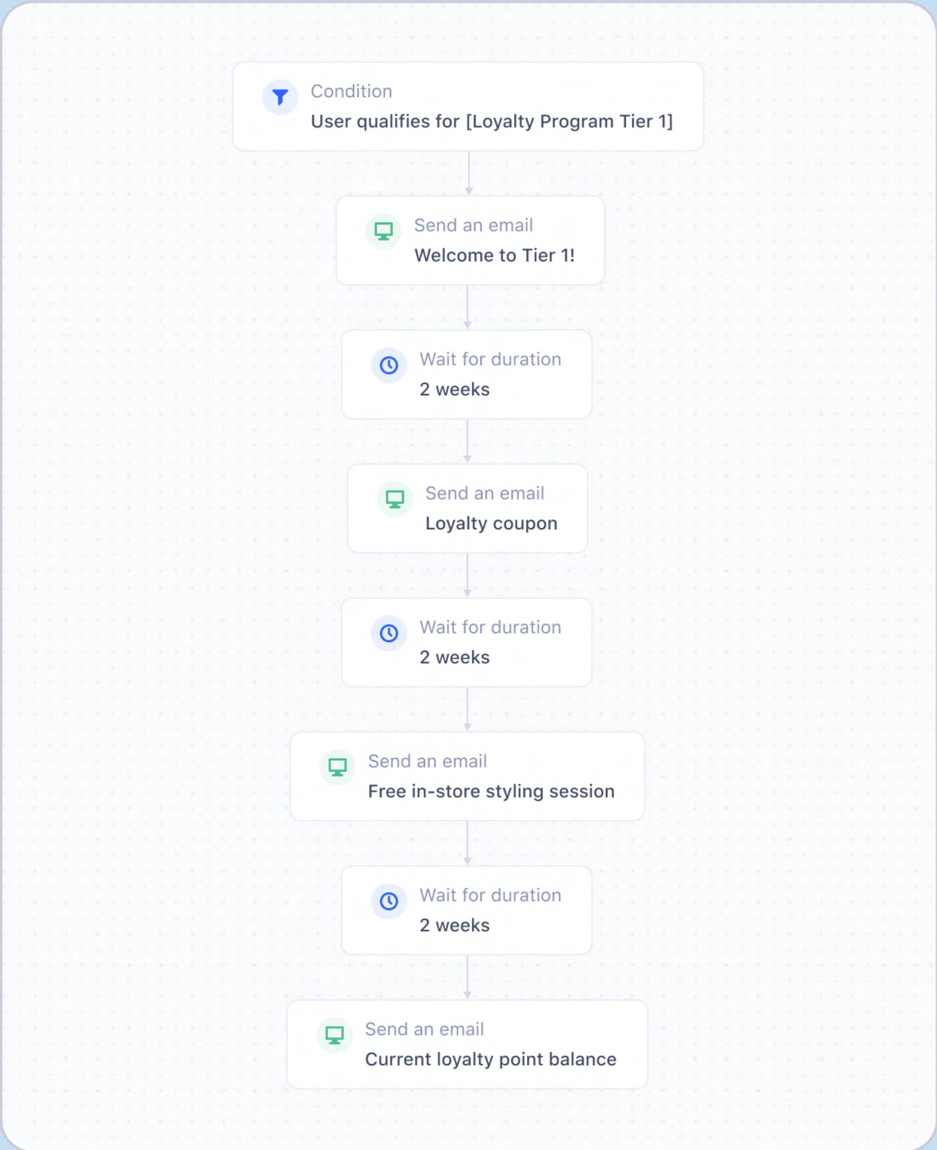
A strong onboarding process sets your customers up for a long, successful relationship with your company. Between in-platform tool tips, welcome emails, explanatory blog posts, video tutorials, and even custom discount codes, there are many ways your business can educate and engage new users. By segmenting your audience based on factors like on-site behavior, interests, membership plan, you can build customized onboarding processes that help each individual find the value in your product or service quicker.

In this example, a vacation resort company enrolls its newest users into an onboarding workflow. After receiving targeted display ads, new users receive an email with a code for a 20% off room rates to entice them to book a stay. If the user decides to book, they'll receive a welcome email and information about their reservation, while users who don't book are invited to an in-person tour and free lunch to learn more about the resort and its amenities.

7 **Customer Loyalty Campaigns**

Your best customers are often your most loyal customers. And, investing in that loyalty can drive sales and revenue for your business. Discounts, free gifts, event invites, exclusive content, and premium access to sales are all ways to reward customers and keep them coming back for more.

In this workflow, a retail company sends automated emails to a customer who just qualified for the top-tier of their loyalty program. After sending a congratulatory welcome email, the customer will receive bi-weekly correspondences from the company with custom discounts, reminders to take advantage of their new tier's perks, and updates on their current point balances. This ensures top customers feel recognized, valued, and appreciated throughout their relationship with the company.



Conclusion

Automation is the secret to doing more with less. It allows your business to build and scale best-in-class customer experiences, while freeing up your employees' time to focus on more strategic initiatives. But to unlock the full potential of automation, you need the right tools.

With Twilio Engage, you have the capabilities of a customer data platform combined with omnichannel engagement (including native email and SMS[1] as well as over 400 out-of-the-box integrations). Your business will be empowered to:

- Collect and consolidate user data in a privacy-first way across every customer touchpoint
- Build unified, real-time customer profiles and audiences
- Create multi-step, multichannel customer journeys based on real-time customer behavior
- Deliver personalized customer experiences at scale from one unified solution

Twilio Engage can power even the most complex marketing automations, allowing your business to improve the ROI of your existing campaigns while increasing the LTV of both new and existing customers.

Start building data-driven,personalized marketing campaigns at scale.
Learn more about Twilio Engage.

1 Native email and SMS are currently only available with Twilio Engage in US, LATAM, and APAC.

Recommended Reading

The Ultimate Guide to Customer Retention

Learn top-notch strategies and tips to increase retention.

Get the Guide →

A Data-Driven Guide to User Onboarding

Learn how to leverage real-time data to optimize onboarding flows.

Get the Guide →

Customer Acquisition Cost (CAC): A Guide for 2022

A complete guide to calculating (and decreasing) your customer acquisition costs.

Get the Guide →

Twilio Engage

Twilio Engage is an omnichannel growth platform that empowers businesses to use any combination of tools, data integrations, analytics, and channels they need to build and optimize marketing campaigns. With the combined power of a native customer data platform (CDP) and over 400 out-of-the-box integrations, teams can now go from campaign idea to implementation in a matter of minutes – backed by real-time customer data.

Learn how to drive efficient growth and omnichannel campaigns with Twilio Engage.

Thanks for reading.
This content is co-authored by Twilio, SendGrid, and Segment teams.

If you would like to learn more about what Twilio can do for your business, please contact the SendGrid sales team.