STONE UPON STONE: HOW XELLA SETS A SOLID FOUNDATION FOR LEAD GENERATION WITH EVALANCHE

Three historically growing brand websites, the task of making marketing measurable and the challenge that suddenly no face-to-face events were possible and webinars were on the agenda instead: In order to meet these diverse challenges and to steer the hitherto poorly structured lead generation in an orderly direction, the building materials expert Xella Deutschland went in search of a solution. With the help of the marketing automation software Evalanche, it was possible to establish a structured and comprehensible lead generation process, automate old manual processes, and gain deeper insight into the effectiveness of marketing measures.

Xella Deutschland produces building materials made of autoclaved aerated concrete and calcium silicate blocks under the brands Ytong, Hebel and Silka, and is a solution provider for mineral, non-combustible insulation systems under the Multipor brand. The company is a German company in the Xella Group, which is a European provider of efficient and sustainable wall solutions for the entire building envelope. Xella Germany's products are compatible with each other and fulfil the most diverse requirements of high-quality building constructions. Xella Deutschland's focus on topics such as sustainability and digitalisation of the construction industry, make the company based in Duisburg one of the key players in future-oriented construction.

PROJECT FACTS

Industry:
Building and insulation materials

Company:
Xella Deutschland GmbH

Size of company:
More than 1,500 employees

Project priorities:
Lead generation, Sales support

Contributing systems:
Evalanche, GoToWebinar, CMS, Marini DataEngine, Leadtributor

Highlights:
Integration ability / Best-of-Breed

Goals:
Automation of lead and customer processes

Challenge:
Brand diversity, complex forms, certificate dispatch after webinar, lead qualification through customer service

Results:
Qualified leads, simplified forms, measurable marketing measures

STARTING POSITION

Xella Germany is one of the pioneers in digital services for the implementation of construction projects. Therefore, it was only natural that the company decided to make its marketing even more digital and measurable in 2019. In this context, it was important for the company to review and automate existing processes. When, in the spring of 2020, the Corona pandemic meant that many face-to-face events, such as construction trade fairs, were suddenly no longer possible, there was more need then ever to go digital. Xella Germany saw an opportunity here to continue to attract new customers through virtual alternatives such as webinars and with the help of marketing automation. In this way a virtue was made out of necessity.

REQUIREMENTS

A technological solution was needed in order to generate legally secure leads with the help of the alternative event format, and not lose sight of the goal of making marketing processes more digital and measurable. This solution should not only enable the newly planned lead generation process, but also the desired transparency of the marketing measures themselves. In addition, Xella Germany wanted to standardise and simplify the existing lead generation process. Up until now, this had been done via three separate brand websites, which represent three separate, independently organised and operating sales teams: Ytong and Silka for the product area building materials, Multipor for insulation materials and Hebel for commercial and residential construction. The objectives were to determine where each lead came from, what happened to them in the lead process and who finally processed or closed them.

Better data collection via the sales forms

Another concern was to place lead generation on an improved data basis: To completely revise the sales forms – by this we mean integrated web forms through which relevant data of prospective customers is collected. This adjustment was necessary for two reasons:

1. Up to this point, the generated leads could not always be correctly assigned to the respective brand in the CRM system. They were received via a specific brand website, but sometimes the requirements for a construction project were assigned to a different product area. It also took a great deal of effort to keep track of who exactly had dealt with the enquiries from the sales department and whether a project had resulted from them.

2. Furthermore, the forms collected too much data all at once, so that prospective customers did not fill out the forms completely, filled them out incorrectly or broke off the data entry. In any case, this significantly reduced the quality of the database and thus also the downstream communication processes, such as the direct processing of customer enquiries by customer service or the forwarding of leads to sales.

Consequently, in this case the chosen marketing automation software should also offer a solution to correctly and carefully capture valuable lead information and make it accessible for further measures.

Highest priority for data protection

The software solution that Xella Germany was looking for to meet these requirements needed to be easy to integrate into the existing IT landscape as well as compliant with the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). "Initially, we carried out a proof of concept with, according to Gartner, one of the leading B2B marketing automation platforms," recalls Cornelia Link, Digital Marketing Manager at Xella Germany. "However, our data protection officers abandoned this quite quickly due to data protection criticisms." A professional article in the business network Xing finally drew Cornelia Link's attention to Evalanche and so she contacted Stefan Rottmann, Sales & Channel Manager at SC-Networks GmbH. "After initial discussions with SC-Networks, the decision was made in favour of Evalanche," explains the project manager. "We felt in good hands right from the start and even our data protection officers rated Evalanche A1 for GDPR compliance."

IMPLEMENTATION

After the decision was made, the initial implementation started in March 2020. Stefan Rottmann recommended the consultant Isabel Skelton, freelance lead marketing manager and Evalanche expert, to the Xella Deutschland team. Her task was to support the company in the strategic and practical introduction of the marketing automation solution. The implementation really took off in June 2020. The focus of the introduction was the realisation of the webinars as alternatives to the cancelled live events. The first sessions were already planned for August 2020. The objective was to use the webinars

1. to generate legally compliant contact data of the participants (leads),

2. to be able to further develop these and convert them into prospective customers, and

3. in special cases, to automatically send out certificates of participation.

To achieve this, Xella Germany, SC-Networks and Ms Skelton ensured the technical connection of the GoToWebinar webinar tool, which was already in use, to Evalanche, enabling automated and smooth invitation management and subsequent lead processing.

From webinar participant to qualified lead

In order to better engage with participants after the webinar and generate more customer enquiries, Xella Germany developed a lead nurturing campaign with Evalanche. This was intended to further engage interested participants with useful content. Since the sales department had no legal basis to call seminar and webinar participants after the event due to a lack of advertising consent – unless a prior customer relationship already existed – there was no specific permission to follow-up and convert participants into prospective customers. This changed radically when Evalanche was engaged and advertising consent was obtained via an automated double opt-in process as part of the webinar registration. "First, we developed a campaign with two follow-up emails that participants received after the webinar," explains Cornelia Link. "The first email summarised the webinar again in terms of content and made the presentation and webinar recording available to participants and those who had registered but not attended. With the second email, prospective customers were sent their certificate of attendance." Xella Germany then expanded this campaign to include brand interests, as the digital marketing manager explains: "So we looked at what content was interesting for the participants and how we could generate more customer enquiries by adding more of this kind of content. In the end, a total of ten different campaigns were created. In some campaigns, participants now automatically receive up to five follow-up emails." The automated follow-up of webinar participants via nurturing campaigns now offers Xella Germany the chance for webinar participation to result in a targeted customer enquiry.

Multi-level follow-up campaigns can be easily implemented in the Evalanche Campaign Designer.
Source: Xella Deutschland
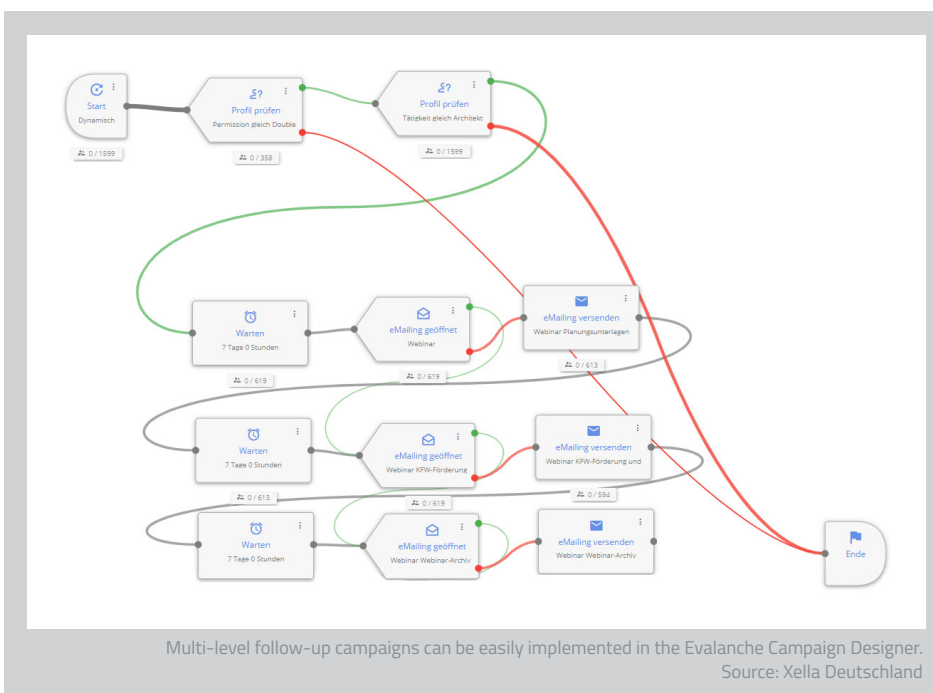
Avoiding duplication and data overwriting

Most leads in the construction sector have long customer journeys of several months to a year before the decision is made to buy Xella building and insulation materials. It can be that the same person, such as an architect, makes multiple enquiries to Xella Germany during this time. Previously, this has resulted in the profile data being overwritten each time and no correct and complete lead history being available at the end. With the help of DataEngine – a no-code platform from Marini Systems, solution and implementation partner in the Evalanche ecosystem – the enquiry history can now be mapped much better, so that the sales staff and the customer centre have all the information they need to process the lead further. In addition, it is possible to use further enquiry touchpoints for lead generation with the help of the DataEngine: For example, if prospective customers click on a Facebook ad and fill out a form there in order to download a piece of content, their details are automated and sent directly to Evalanche, thanks to the DataEngine from Marini Systems.

Cornelia Link, Digital Marketing Manager at Xella Deutschland

CMS meets Evalanche

The sales forms also had to be optimised in order to generate further advantage in the customer acquisition process. "Before we could turn our attention to the forms, we had to overcome a technical hurdle," explains Cornelia Link. This was because all companies in the Xella Group used a standardised content management system with preconfigured modular forms. However, these could not be coupled with the Evalanche form fields. "The data from the forms did not arrive automatically in Evalanche, which led to a considerable amount of extra work, especially at the beginning," the project manager continued. To solve this challenge, reprogramming within the CMS was necessary. Finally, however, a suitable connection to ensure a smooth data flow was created relatively quickly.

Elements of the sales form

After Xella Germany had solved the challenge with the building blocks, the company was able to revise the sales forms. The goal was to significantly reduce the number of form fields in the sales forms in order to increase the conversion rate. In order to continue receiving as much information as possible – depending on how deep the enquirer had already arrived in the sales funnel – a multi-stage enquiry process was necessary, which could be realised in combination with Evalanche and the CMS via mirror forms. Cornelia Link explains: "We sifted through all the forms and then divided them into three data areas, so that all the relevant information can be collected consecutively. Now prospective customers always see the same registration page at the beginning. Here we ask for general data such as name, company, job title and whether there is a planned construction project relating to the enquiry. Depending on the data entered, the prospective customer is then shown a suitable second and, if necessary, third page, where we obtain additional data on a possible construction project." In this way, Xella Deutschland ensures that it always obtains correct data from the prospective customer which is relevant to the sales process and stores it correctly in the marketing automation system.

Uniform web presence with personalisation options

After the three brand websites were merged into one website in the course of a parallel website relaunch in July 2022 and the entire company has since been accessible via www.xella.de, the integration of Evalanche has been simplified even further. Now the mirror forms have been replaced by API forms that are integrated via script. In this way, Xella Deutschland was able to offer personalised forms for the first time: If a user has made an enquiry via a form and fills in an enquiry form again the next time they visit the website, they are shown a personalised form pre-filled with the existing data, depending on their consent to cookies. Then only the fields need to be filled in for data that Xella Deutschland does not yet have. If no data is available or the prospective customer has not consented to cookies, a normal, non-personalised form will appear.

SIDE NOTE: INVOLVE SALES PARTNERS AND CUSTOMERS – WITH SOLUTIONS FROM THE EVALANCHE ECOSYSTEM

The Hebel brand from Xella Germany stands for large-format, reinforced wall, roof and ceiling panels made of autoclaved aerated concrete for commercial construction. We have a franchise system with hebelHALLE, an experienced partner in the field of commercial construction for medium-sized companies. Previously, Xella Germany had to hand over the leads generated via the website to the hebelHALLE sales partners manually which was very time-consuming – without knowing how the potential customers would be supported in future. Thanks to an integration of Evalanche and the Leadtributor tool, the collaboration now automatically works digitally, and thus smoothly: The data obtained is automatically transferred from the marketing automation solution to the sales software. The Leadtributor tool then assigns the data to the respective hebelHALLE sales partners based on the postcode. The partner "picks" the lead and automatically sends their feedback as to whether they are processing it or consider it "not relevant". If there is no picking by the assigned hebelHALLE partner, the lead moves on to the next one. The data is synchronised between the lead contributor and Evalanche with the help of the DataEngine from Marini Systems.
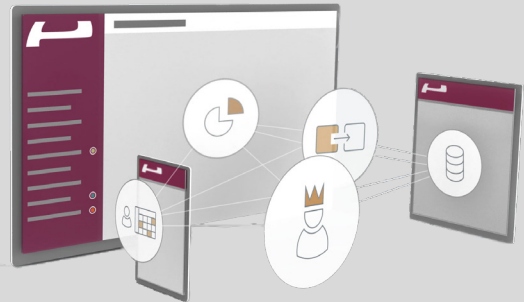
It works in a similar manner with an extranet for another franchise company of Xella Germany – Ytong Bausatzhaus – whose core business is the planning and realisation of single-family houses made of Ytong aerated concrete. The DataEngine functions here as a central data hub.

Xella Deutschland customers can be included via an NPS survey (Net Promoter Score), in which customer satisfaction and willingness to recommend further are also queried in this way. Here, aggregated reporting of the survey results takes place at sales region level and the survey data can be transmitted to the sales staff of the respective postcode area according to the categorisation stored in the DataEngine.

THE ADVANTAGES

The new enquiry forms provide the customer service agents with all relevant data about the enquirer.
Source: Xella Deutschland

"We have more than fulfilled our goal of making marketing more measurable and digital," says Cornelia Link happily. "Through the integration of Evalanche, we can not only acquire leads, but also make their potential more concrete in advance. Our sales department only receives leads that are ready for a sales meeting, which means significantly better closing rates." However, there are also advantages for upstream customer service: Admittedly, in the beginning it was necessary to develop new processes and allocate the data obtained. However, in the meantime, automation has eased the workload considerably. Customer service staff now see all relevant lead information at a glance and know immediately what next steps to take.

Optimisation of lead generation

"We have managed to rebuild the whole lead generation process. We have dissolved the separation of the individual brand websites and focus much more on the interests and the individual building project," Cornelia Link explains. "A prospective customer enters all the important information into the sales form. Our customer service receives this data first. Based on the data, the employees know straight away whether they should pass the prospective customer on to a sales representative or process the enquiry directly." In addition, Xella Germany – prompted by the pandemic-related restrictions – has specifically expanded the digital communication channel of the webinars and successfully integrated it into the lead generation process.
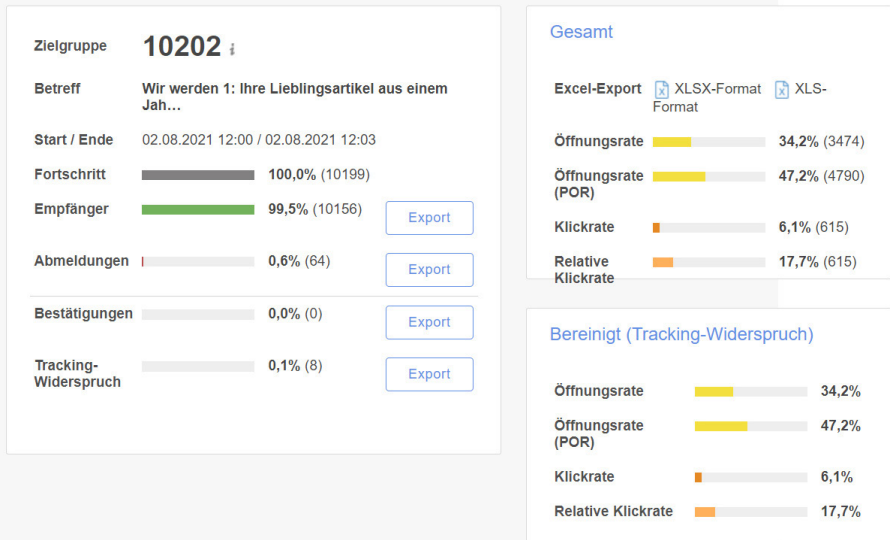
Certificates for architects could be easily integrated into the follow-up process – both automated and professional. Source: Xella Deutschland

Automatic dispatch of certificates as a digital plus

Numerous architects always take part in the events of the Xella Bauakademie, including the webinars. They usually needed a certificate of participation for the Chamber of Architects. Previously, certificates of participation were always given out either as a printed copy for face-to-face events or by email for online events. In any case, the creation and dispatch was done manually and was therefore very time-consuming, depending on the number of participants. "With Evalanche, we implemented a marketing automation solution that digitises the dispatch of certificates. Participants automatically receive an email with a personalised link. When a participant clicks on it, they generate a PDF document online containing their name, which can be conveniently downloaded," Cornelia Link describes the process.

Conclusion and outlook

The marketing automation solution has simplified and accelerated marketing and sales processes at Xella Deutschland. At the same time, the digitalised and automated measures are easier to track and the success of campaigns is easier to measure. "By integrating custom-fit software solutions such as Evalanche, our CMS and GoToWebinar, we have suceeded in making our customer acquisition more transparent and even more effective and efficient," says Cornelia Link happily. "And yet we have challenged Evalanche again." As the Xella Group uses SAP throughout the company, it was logical to check whether SAP Marketing Cloud should be used as an automation solution. The group's IT department then determined during use case tests that it would be considerably more costly to replicate the processes of one of the Xella Group's largest national companies, which were already so well established, with SAP Marketing Cloud. "For this reason, we will now connect Evalanche to our SAP system and once again combine the best of both worlds," explains Cornelia Link. This will make lead generation, qualification and customer communication processes even faster and more effective for the entire Xella Group.

The evaluation options in Evalanche allow for the greatest possible transparency and ideal measurability of initiatives. Source: Xella Deutschland