The Beginner's Guide to Real-time Sales

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Introduction

In sales and marketing, there's a truism you can't escape: speed is everything. The fate of your business depends on how quickly you can turn promising leads on your website into paying customers. The faster you make the sale, the faster your business grows.

Yet despite this, many companies put up barriers on the path to purchase. Lengthy contact forms on your website are a guaranteed way to turn hot leads into frigid ones. Even if leads are interested enough to reach out, they'll wait nearly two days, on average, to hear from you – more than enough time for your competitors to swoop in.

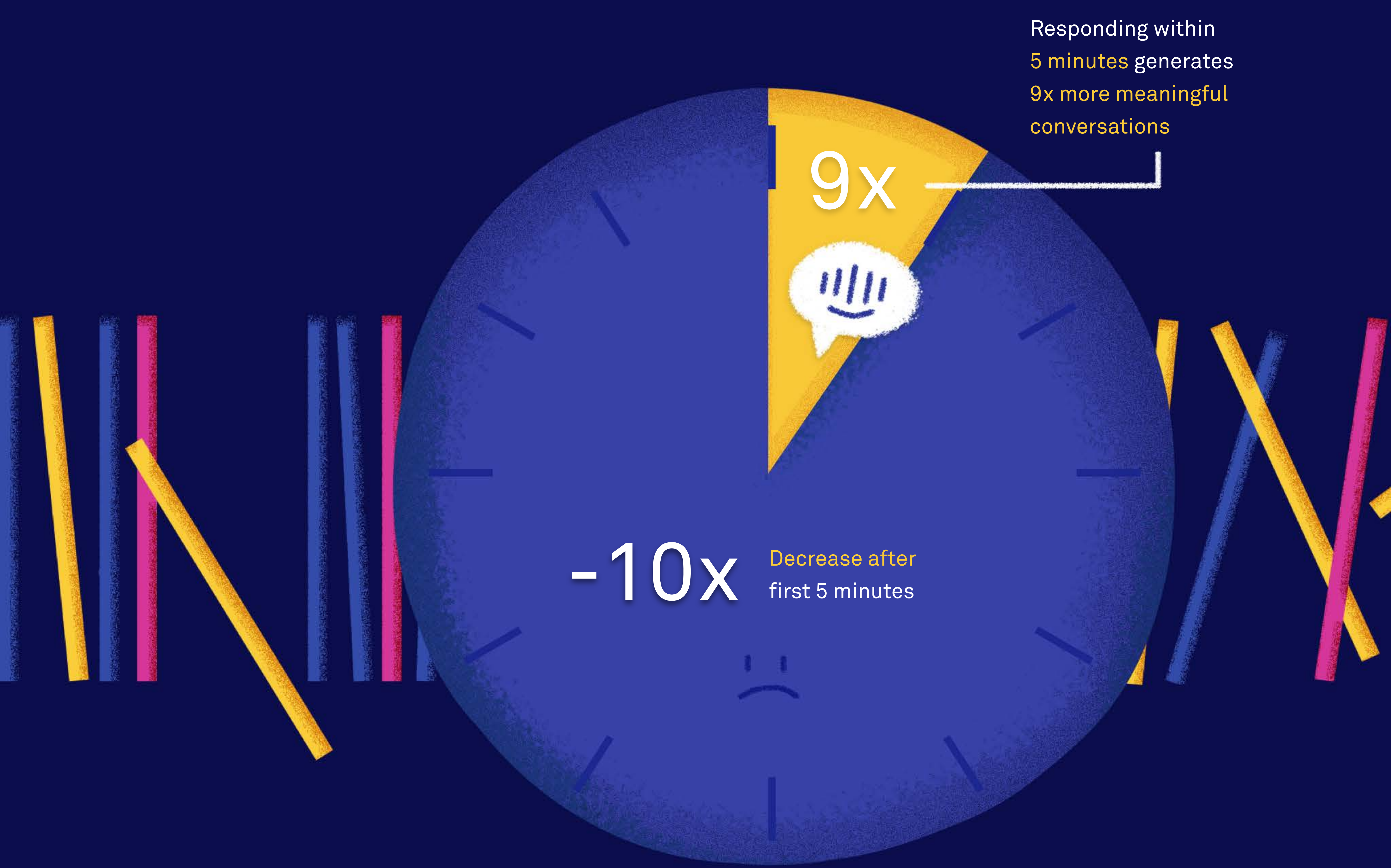
The fact of the matter is selling this way no longer cuts it. People now expect a real-time buying experience and the most effective way to give it to them is through live chat, whether that's through 1:1 conversations with a sales rep or automated in a chatbot conversation. Just as you expect to be looked after immediately if you're shopping in the real world, your leads expect proactive and timely treatment on your website.

This guide walks you through the fundamentals of acquiring, qualifying and converting leads through live chat. Its actionable advice is designed to help you grow your business faster, all while providing a seamless, real-time buying experience.

02

Why every minute matters

Time kills deals. According to research from InsideSales.com and HBR, you're 9x more likely to have a meaningful conversation with a key decision maker if you respond within five minutes.



03
The three steps to real-time sales

The three steps to real-time sales

Acquire

One of the most common concerns we hear from marketers and salespeople when it comes to adopting real-time selling through live chat is this:

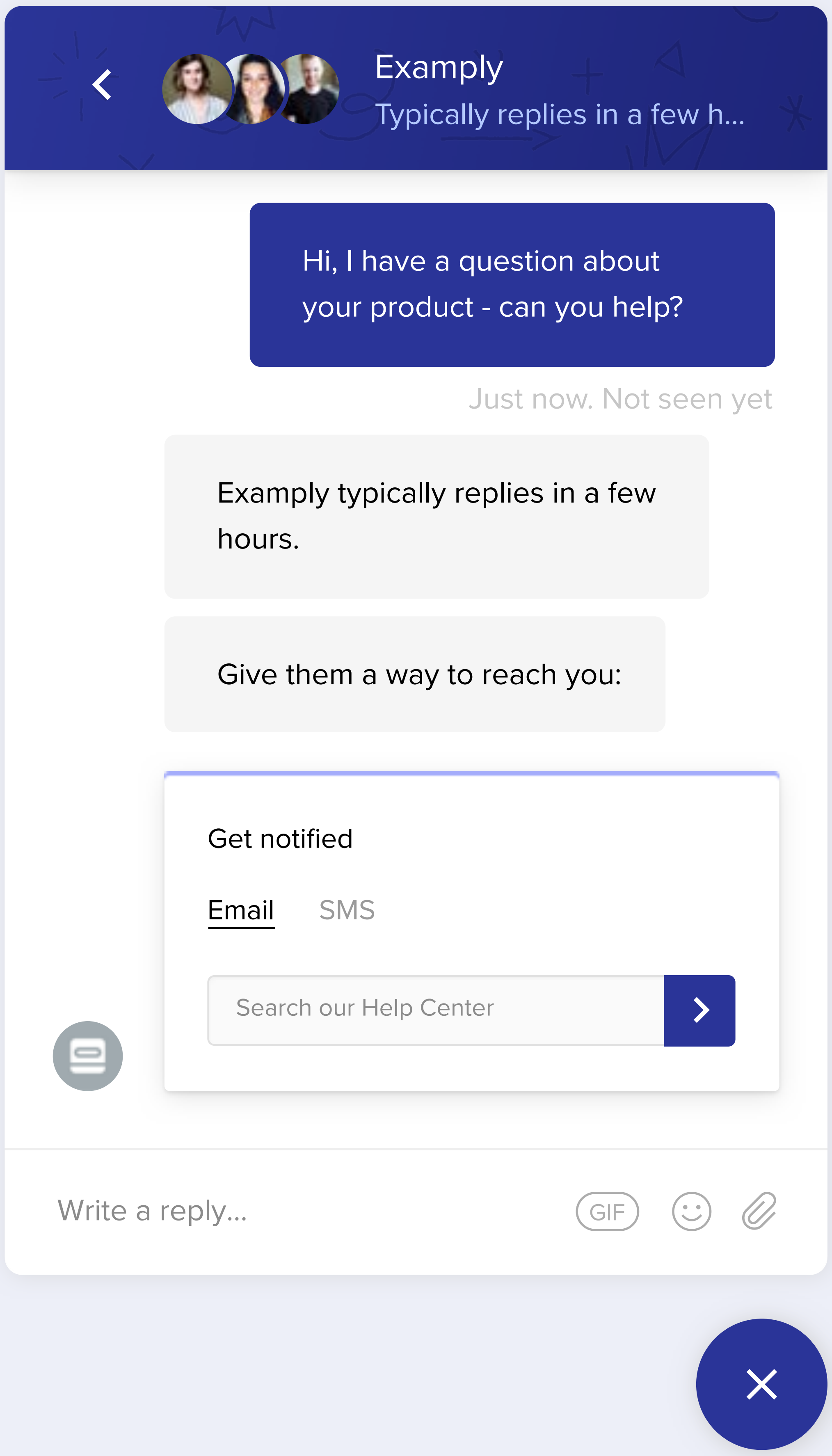
How the heck do you filter out all the random visitors who are never going to become customers?

The traditional approach has been to get your visitors to fill out a lengthy form and get a sales rep to follow up days, or even weeks, later. But there's a better way to acquire all those important details on your website entirely through messaging.

Live chat allows sales reps to engage leads at the exact moment when they're most engaged – on your website. And with live chat, you're able to qualify a lead and gather their data at the same time. No forms, no call backs, just qualified sales conversations in real-time.

On average, we found that website visitors who chat are 82% more likely to convert to customer and pay 13% more than those who don't.

Of course, there will always be times when a visitor reaches out and you're not there to respond. In those cases, if you have a messenger like Intercom, the Operator bot will automatically ask the visitor for their contact details so you can follow up.



The key to real-time sales is being proactive. The conversations on your website should never be one-way traffic.

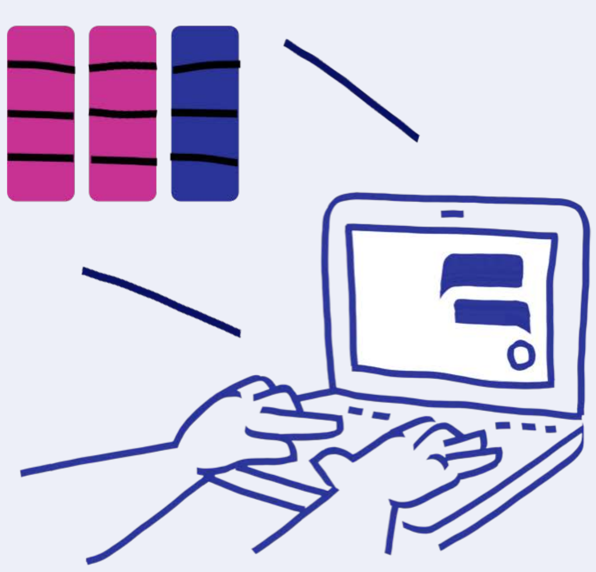
You should proactively reach out to visitors on your website based on who they are and what they do using auto-messages.

So, where on your website do you acquire your visitors' details? This won't always be your homepage.

In fact, visitors are 45% more likely to convert on pages where the intent to buy is high, like your pricing page.

You'll also need to make sure you target each message to send to the right prospects at the right time and understanding the behavior of visitors to your website will help inform that.

For example, visitors who check out your pricing page numerous times could be considering making a purchase. Send them a message while they're on your pricing page, offering to help answer their questions and capturing their details so your sales team can follow up.



Where you chat matters

↑ 45 %

Visitors are **45% more likely** to convert on pages where the intent to purchase is high, like your pricing page.

As well as your own website, you should seek to target traffic from third party sources, like partner referrals. For example, if you have a Product Hunt post about a free trial or offer, you would want to target traffic coming to your website via this link because you know these people are more likely to convert.

These are just examples, of course, so depending on your business, you can make your targeting as simplistic or specific as you need to.

Now that you’ve acquired your visitors’ information, it’s time to make sure they’re a good fit for your business.

Qualify

There is more to qualification than deciding who is or isn’t a good fit for your company. Properly qualifying leads is the difference between landing lots of business deals and wasting your energy going after the wrong people. It’s a bit like dating – your aim is to find someone who is a good match for you, and discover whether you are a good match for them.

Once you have your team in place, there are multiple ways you can go about qualifying your leads through live chat and they can all be equally as effective when done right.

1. You can use a bot, like Intercom’s Operator, to ask questions on your behalf, based on the data that’s most important to your business and then create separate qualification paths for different leads.
2. You can manually qualify your leads on your website as they engage via live chat.
3. Or use both! Many of our leads are qualified using a mixture of both methods.

Regardless of your preferred platform for qualification, all effective qualification processes should start with prioritization so you know who to devote your 1:1 time to. So, how do you prioritize? Kick things off by sitting down with your team and defining the characteristics of your ideal customer. **Here are some questions to guide you:**

What’s their goal for using your product?
Beyond simply asking about their use case, it’s important to understand the whys.

What’s their level or title?
For example, are they the CEO or an intern?

What industry do they work in?
Is it B2B, eCommerce, or B2C?

How many people does the company employ?
Less than 10? More than 100?

Where is the business located?
Are they local/international?

At what scale do they want to use your product?
For example, if they have a B2B messaging service, do they hope to send over 50 messages a month?

When do they want to implement your product?
What is their timeline?

When you have a high-level sense of the types of leads you want to talk to, your team can then select the most important qualification data you need from each prospect in order to filter the most promising leads. This data should also act as an additional guide for matching your leads with the right people on your sales team.

At a bare minimum, we recommend collecting the following data:

- Name
- Email
- Phone
- Company name
- Company industry
- Company size
- Company website

That said, there will be times where this data is hard to gather so here are some of our tips to keep in mind when you're in conversation with leads initially, whether that's through live chat, lead form, email or anywhere else:

If in doubt, leave it out
Asking your leads a large volume of unnecessary questions will turn them off. Only add data that's absolutely required to help your team understand who each lead is and whether they're a good fit for your business.

Be personal
Remember that leads are human and you should speak to them that way, no matter what platform you are using. Never write a response or ask a question in a way that you wouldn't say out loud on the phone or in person. Have a conversation with the lead rather than asking a series of yes/no questions.

Give context
When you are asking questions, be sure to provide context so the lead can understand why you are asking that. It will help avoid question fatigue and by sharing that context, you'll provide a better experience and build trust early on in the relationship.

Know when to stop
With that said, you need to know when to stop asking questions too. Time is expensive for both you and your lead. For example, a live chat conversation should be very different from a phone call in terms of pace. Most of us look to live chat when we're short on time. Providing your lead with friendly, human and personal responses while still gathering information will build rapport fast. Once they're on the phone with a member of the sales team, they can dive deeper into use case, timeline, budget and more detailed context that will inevitably take a little longer.

Aim for a fast response time
Our reporting tools have shown time and time again that a fast response time equals a higher likelihood of closing the deal and longer term success. This all starts with those responding to incoming chats. If you're a smaller company, this can be a big competitive edge for you when you're fighting for every lead.

If you are using Intercom, you can also use Operator to automatically gather this information for you and route it to the right place. Operator can automatically identify and separate leads from customers, so new conversations will always go to the right team.

By asking visitors if they are customers or not, Operator qualifies all those who answer ‘no’ and can also tag or add them to Salesforce if you have these functions enabled.

When our sales team at Intercom introduced Operator to their workflow, it dramatically changed the state of their inboxes – more than two-thirds of anonymous leads answered the question Operator asked and about half were existing customers. Needless to say, they weren’t looking to talk to the sales team, meaning a dramatic drop in the number of conversations the sales team were having to engage in and significant time savings for the whole team.

Once you’ve acquired your visitors and qualified your leads – manually or automatically – it’s time to convert them to customers. Depending on your company’s size, this might be continued by a salesperson or sometimes, like at Intercom, an account executive will take over at this point to act as a more consultative seller.

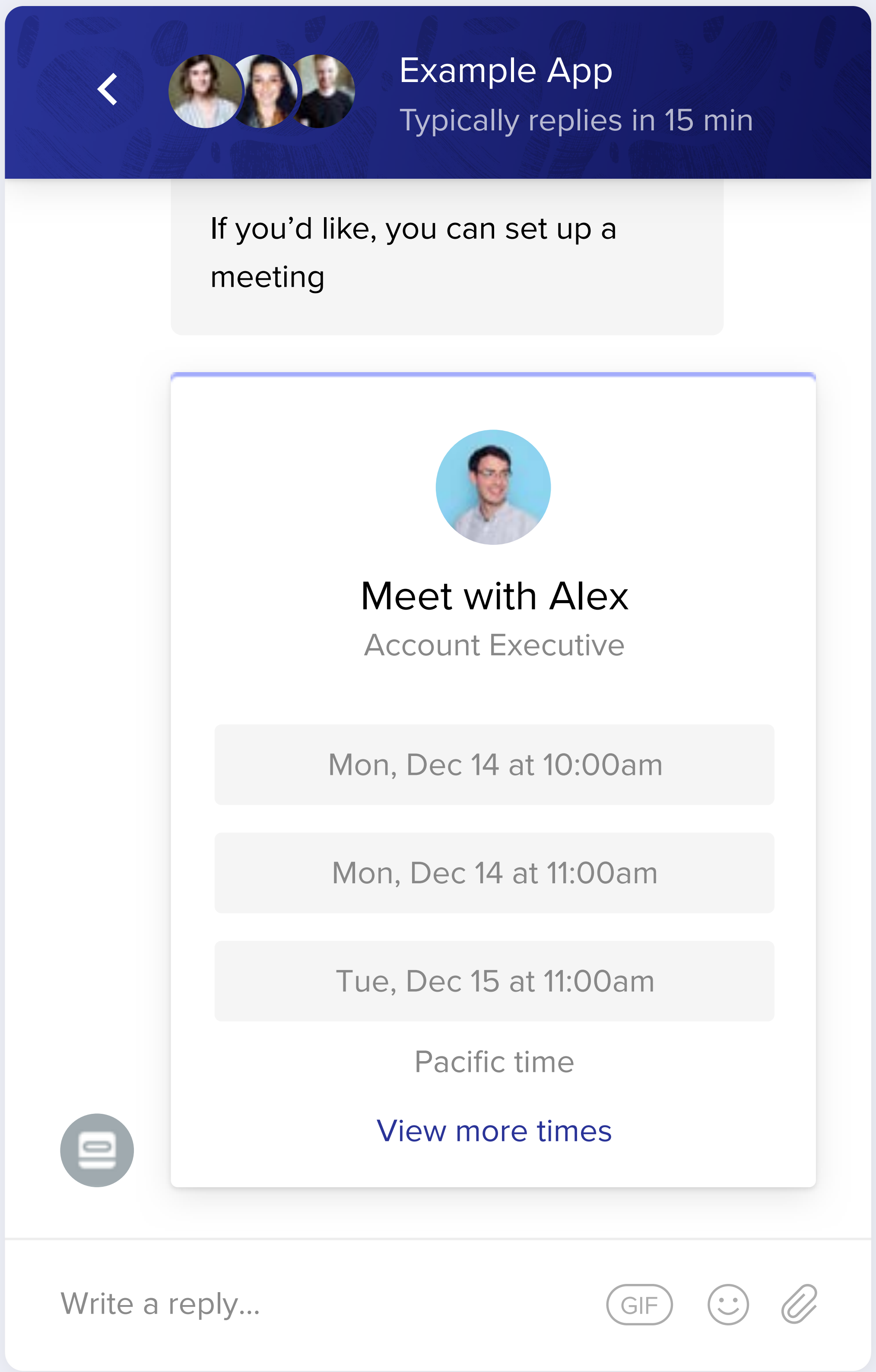
Convert

In sales, speed is everything so it’s important that once you’ve acquired and qualified your leads that you keep up the momentum when it comes to converting them. Chat is a great way to scale sales conversations on your website and identify valuable leads, but once you know you’re chatting with a valuable lead, getting them on a discovery call or giving them a product demo is typically the next step towards converting them to a customer. This is the approach we have been taking here at Intercom since introducing live chat to our sales funnel. Using apps in the Messenger, Visitor->Chat->Demo can all be arranged automatically in a matter of minutes to dramatically speed up your sales cycle.

Book meetings with your best leads

Once you’ve identified a lead is a good fit, you should aim to book a meeting as soon as possible. This could be in person, on the phone or over video chat depending on your business and locations.

If you're using Intercom, you can use the Google Calendar Meetings app to let your visitors automatically book time with you right inside the Messenger. This way, you can avoid the annoying email back-and-forth, and let people choose from the times both of you are actually available.



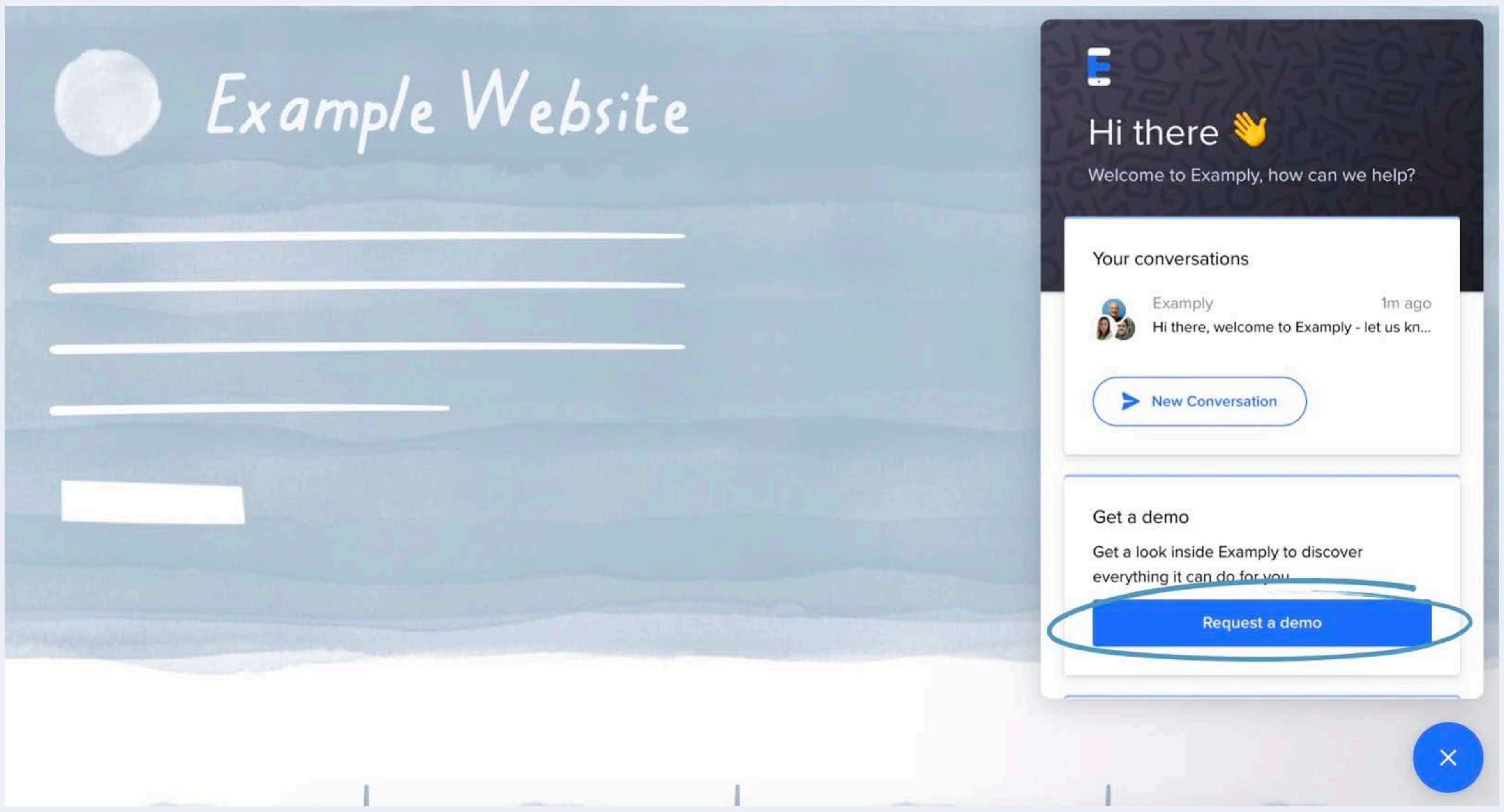
If you're ready to jump on a call right away with your lead, you can use the Google Meet app to instantly move from chat to a video call without leaving the Messenger or use the Aircall app to kick off a voice call if video isn't needed.

Move leads through your funnel with demos, content and video calls

To be successful in sales in 2018, you need to be where your prospects are and remove any friction with taking the next step – whether that's a call, a demo or an order. That means live chat needs to allow people to buy things the way they want to buy them, and as a business, it's your job to provide them with the actions that will help them get there.

Some leads may strike up a conversation and be forthcoming when it comes to qualification but still not be in a position of making the decision to buy. This is when it's crucial that you can show them the value of your product. One of the most successful ways of demonstrating this is to book a demo with your lead.

At Intercom, we use the Book a Demo app in our Messenger to let leads pick a time and date for a demo that suits them. This also means the sales team gets to spend valuable time working demos and less time playing phone or email tag to schedule them.



If you're ready to go right away or want to add to your demo, the Daily.co and Upscope apps let you screenshare from within the Messenger.

Of course, not everyone you get on a call with or do a demo for is going to be ready to purchase right away. Does that mean you ignore them? Hell no.

The best sales teams take these cold leads and keep them warm with a series of messages tailored to their interests. If you use Mailchimp or Campaign Monitor, you can invite your website visitors to subscribe to your newsletter straight from Messenger home.

This gives you a new way to acquire your visitors' details, grow your subscriber list and nurture more leads into customers.

Convert trials with payments in the Messenger

Not every business will be in a position to offer free trials but they are a great way to get prospective customers trying out your product – especially those who are in two minds about whether or not to purchase.

Business owners often worry that if free trials are an option, conversions will suffer and it's a legitimate concern, but you have to consider the value of customers willing to pay for your product versus those who aren't or maybe don't need to. On average, some of the best SaaS businesses see a free-to-paid conversion rate of 25%, but in all probability, it's less than 10% for the majority.

Part of that seemingly low number is because today's B2B sales cycle is complex for the buyer and the seller. The more hoops you make your prospects jump through during the sales process, the greater the odds of losing them. It's essential that any salesperson today makes the transition from free to paid as smooth as possible and introducing live chat is how we have simplified the funnel here at Intercom. With live chat, you're connecting with prospects when they want to connect and move through to qualification and conversion instantly.

So when it comes to converting trial users to paid customers, the smoothest transition is to use the Stripe Subscriptions app, which takes all of 30 seconds to complete the process. So if one of your hottest prospects is coming to the end of their free trial, your sales team can convert them into a paying customer with the click of one button in the Messenger.

If you give your prospects a smooth ride then they are more likely to go the distance.

Here's what Dave Carlson, CEO of Shopventory, had to say: "The Stripe Subscriptions app in Intercom's Messenger is a huge win for our sales team. The app has reduced friction for our customers and helped our sales team dramatically increase conversions. Instead of sending our customers a list of instructions to upgrade in the product, we simply send the app right inside the Messenger and customers can confirm the upgrade right there and then."

04

How Tradeshift increased sales opportunities by 32% with real-time sales

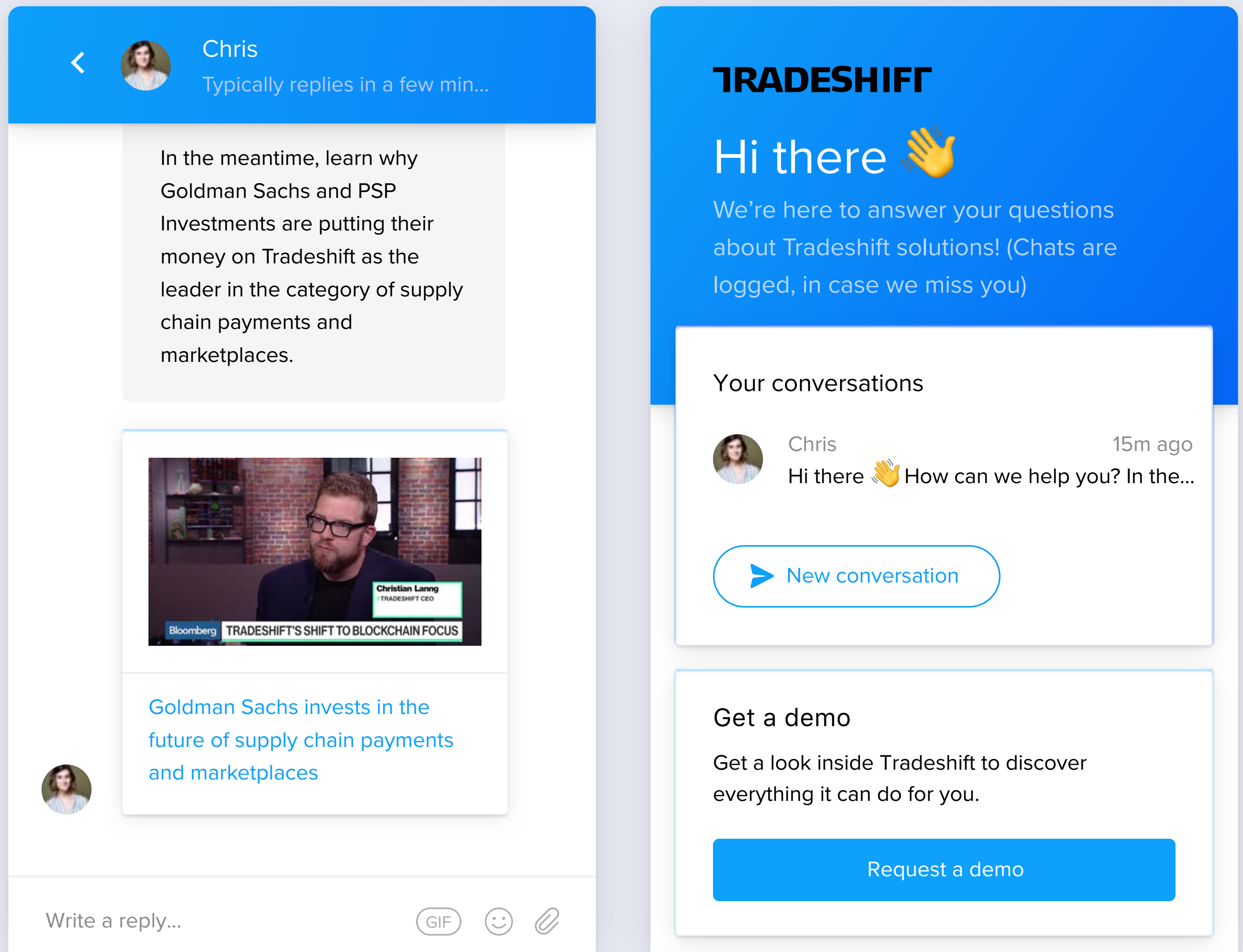
By Adam Cleveland, VP of Global Demand Generation

Tradeshift is the world’s largest business commerce platform that connects buyers and sellers. When I first joined Tradeshift, we were capturing visitors on our website the same way most B2B companies do – through contact forms. The only problem was, you can’t qualify leads using demographic data alone. That meant our sales reps were spending a lot of time following up with leads who didn’t have a great use case.

At the time, it took our sales team an average of 21 days to qualify a lead and identify a sales opportunity. With our business and website traffic growing quickly, it became clear to me that we needed a better, and faster, way to convert leads.

That’s when we decided to add Intercom’s live chat for sales product to our website. With live chat, our sales reps can qualify and convert leads in real-time, at the exact moment the lead is ready to connect. Today it takes our team just 3 days to surface sales opportunities – that’s one-seventh of the time it used to take!

We have a visitor auto message on our homepage to welcome new visitors. It’s a really pleasant, helpful interaction that gets the conversation going. Even if we’re not around, visitors can still book demos through live chat with Intercom’s Get a Demo app.



Overall we've seen more visitors request sales help, fewer leads drop off and a 32% increase in sales opportunities!

Apart from allowing us to move faster, live chat adds a human touch that's been missing from the buying experience. Giving our visitors the option to talk to people, not fill out forms, has been the best way we've found to get customer relationships off to the right start.