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FREE BUYER'S GUIDE

The Lead Buyer's Guide

Pricing, quality, compliance, vetting, follow-up and scaling: a practical playbook for teams that buy leads, live transfers and data.

8 chapters · acquiralabs.com

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INTRODUCTION

Buy leads like an operator, not a gambler

Buying leads should be one of the most measurable investments a sales organization makes. You know what you spent, how many prospects you received and how many became customers. Yet many teams still treat lead buying as a gamble: they try a vendor, judge it on a few weeks of gut feel, then move on.

This guide is designed to change that. Each chapter covers one part of a lead program, from pricing models and quality to compliance, vendor vetting, follow-up, pilots and scaling, and ends with a short checklist you can use with your team or your vendors.

The principles apply across verticals, whether you buy insurance, lending, debt relief, tax resolution, solar, home services or warranty leads. Adapt the numbers to your own business. The process stays the same.

> **A note on examples.** Figures in this guide are hypothetical and are used only to illustrate calculations. They are not benchmarks, price quotes or performance promises. Compliance content is general education, not legal advice.

CHAPTER 01

CPL vs. CPA pricing models

When each model fits, and how to calculate your true cost per acquisition.

Most lead programs are priced in one of two ways. Understanding both, and knowing which number actually tells you whether a program is working, is the foundation of buying leads well.

Cost per lead (CPL)

You pay a fixed price for each lead delivered against your criteria. CPL is predictable and easy to budget, and it gives you direct control over volume. The risk is that CPL says nothing about what happens after delivery: a cheap lead that nobody answers is not cheap.

Cost per acquisition (CPA)

You pay when a lead becomes a customer, or reaches another agreed event such as a completed application. CPA shifts more risk to the provider, so the price per event is higher, and it requires conversion tracking both sides can trust. It is usually available on established programs with clean data sharing.

Calculating true cost per acquisition

Whatever model you buy on, track your real cost per customer:

STEP	FORMULA
Contacted leads	Leads delivered × contact rate
Qualified prospects	Contacted × qualification rate
New customers	Qualified × close rate
Cost per acquisition	Total spend ÷ new customers

Worked example (hypothetical): 200 leads at $35 cost $7,000. With a 50% contact rate, 40% qualification and 20% close rate, you win 8 customers. Your true CPA is $875. If better follow-up lifts contact to 60%, you win about 10 customers and CPA falls to $700 without changing the lead price.

Which should you choose?

Start on CPL while you learn a source and build reliable tracking. Consider CPA or hybrid pricing once you have consistent data and volume. In every case, make decisions on cost per acquisition, not cost per lead.

CHAPTER CHECKLIST

- [ ] Know your average revenue per customer
- [ ] Track contact, qualification and close rate by source
- [ ] Set a target maximum cost per acquisition
- [ ] Compare sources on CPA, never on CPL alone

CHAPTER 02

The lead quality framework

Five dimensions of lead quality and how to score any source against them.

"Quality" is the most used and least defined word in lead buying. Break it into five dimensions and you can evaluate any source objectively.

1. Intent

Did the consumer actually ask for what you sell? Review the ad, landing page and form they completed.

2. Fit

Does the lead match your criteria: geography, product, credit band, debt amount, vehicle age or whatever defines your ideal customer? Fit is set by you, not the vendor.

3. Accuracy

Is the contact information real and does it belong to the consumer? Ask which validation checks run and when.

4. Freshness

How long ago was the original inquiry? Ask for the submission timestamp, not just the delivery time.

5. Traceability

Can every lead be traced to a source, campaign and consent record? Traceability lets you pause weak sources and answer compliance questions quickly.

Scoring a source

DIMENSION	SCORE 1–5	EVIDENCE
Intent		Ads, forms, questions asked
Fit		Match rate against your criteria
Accuracy		Invalid and wrong-person rate
Freshness		Submission-to-delivery time
Traceability		Source IDs and consent records

CHAPTER CHECKLIST

- [ ] Define each dimension in writing with your vendor
- [ ] Track invalid and wrong-person rates separately from no-answers
- [ ] Ask for source IDs on every record
- [ ] Re-score sources every month

CHAPTER 03

Compliance essentials for buyers

Consent, TCPA, DNC and record-keeping basics every buyer should understand.

Compliance is not only the provider's job. As the business that contacts the consumer, your team carries real responsibility. This chapter covers the essentials. It is general education, not legal advice, so review your program with qualified counsel.

Consent

Consumers must agree to be contacted in the way you plan to contact them. Consent language should be clear, appear before the form is submitted and identify who may contact the consumer and by which channels. If your company is not covered by the consent, you should not rely on it.

Consent records

Ask for proof of consent for each lead: the disclosure text shown, the timestamp, the source page and, where available, a third-party certificate such as TrustedForm or Jornaya LeadID. Store these records with the lead so you can retrieve them quickly.

Do Not Call and suppression

Scrub against the national Do Not Call registry and applicable state lists where required, honor internal do-not-contact requests immediately and keep suppression lists synchronized across every dialer, texting tool and CRM.

Calling and texting practices

Respect calling hours in the consumer's time zone, identify your company clearly, honor opt-outs in every channel and be careful with automated dialing and prerecorded messages, which carry stricter rules.

Questions to ask every provider

- What exact consent language does the consumer see?
- Does it cover my company and my intended channels?
- Which consent records come with each lead?
- How quickly can you retrieve a record for a specific lead?
- How are opt-outs and complaints communicated to me?

CHAPTER CHECKLIST

- [ ] Review consent language before launch
- [ ] Store a consent record with every lead
- [ ] Scrub against required DNC lists
- [ ] Have counsel review your outreach process

CHAPTER 04

Benchmarks that matter

Which metrics to track by vertical, and how to set realistic targets.

Published "industry averages" rarely match your program. The most useful benchmarks are the ones you build from your own data, by source and by vertical.

The core funnel

METRIC	DEFINITION	WHY IT MATTERS
Valid rate	Usable leads ÷ delivered	Data quality
Contact rate	Reached ÷ valid	Reachability and speed
Qualification rate	Qualified ÷ reached	Fit with your criteria
Close rate	Customers ÷ qualified	Sales effectiveness
Cost per acquisition	Spend ÷ customers	Overall economics
Payback period	Time to recover spend	Cash flow

Vertical-specific outcomes

Choose the event that represents real value in your industry: a bound policy in insurance, a funded loan in lending, an enrolled client in debt relief, a signed contract in solar or home services, a retained client in tax resolution.

Setting your baseline

Run each new source for a fixed volume and time window with a consistent follow-up process. Record every disposition. After the test, your numbers become the baseline every future source is measured against.

Reading the numbers correctly

- Compare like with like: real-time against real-time, exclusive against exclusive
- Allow enough time for your normal sales cycle before judging a source
- Separate your own execution metrics (speed to lead, attempts) from source metrics

CHAPTER CHECKLIST

- [ ] Pick one value event for your vertical
- [ ] Report every metric by source
- [ ] Build baselines from your own tests
- [ ] Review execution metrics alongside source metrics

CHAPTER 05

Vetting a lead vendor

A practical checklist, including the red flags that signal a low-grade source.

A short, structured vetting process saves months of wasted spend. Use these questions before you sign anything.

Sourcing and intent

- Where does your traffic come from? Can I see the ads and landing pages?
- Do you generate leads yourself, buy from publishers or both?

Product definition

- Are leads exclusive or shared? How many buyers can receive a shared lead?
- What exactly qualifies a lead for my campaign?
- How are duplicates defined and removed?

Delivery and operations

- How are leads delivered (API, CRM, file or live transfer)?
- What is the typical delay from submission to delivery?
- What happens when a delivery fails?

Commercial terms

- What is the return or credit policy, the window and the evidence required?
- What reporting will I receive and how often?

Red flags

RED FLAG	WHY IT MATTERS
Will not disclose traffic sources	You cannot judge intent or compliance
Vague definition of "exclusive"	Leads may be resold
No consent records available	Compliance exposure
Guaranteed conversion promises	Results depend on your team too

CHAPTER CHECKLIST

- [ ] Ask every vetting question in writing
- [ ] Request sample consent records
- [ ] Get exclusivity and return terms documented
- [ ] Walk away from undisclosed sources

CHAPTER 06

Speed to contact & follow-up

How response time and cadence change what the same leads are worth.

Two companies can buy identical leads and see completely different results. The difference is almost always speed and follow-up.

Speed to lead

Interest is highest right after a consumer submits a request. The longer the gap before your first call, the harder it is to reach them and the less they remember the inquiry. Route new leads instantly, alert the assigned agent and aim to call within minutes.

A sample follow-up cadence

TIMING	ACTION
Within 5 minutes	First call, followed by a short personalized text
Same day	Second call at a different time of day
Day 2	Call and email with a clear next step
Days 3–5	Daily call attempts at varied times
Days 6–14	Lighter touch: call, text and email every few days
Day 15+	Move to long-term nurture

Adapt the cadence to your vertical, consent and regulations, and always honor opt-outs.

Routing and ownership

Every lead needs a named owner. Route by state and license where relevant, cap how many new leads each agent receives at once and reassign quickly when an agent is unavailable.

Measuring execution

Track time to first attempt, number of attempts per lead and contact rate by agent. These numbers often explain "bad leads" faster than any vendor review.

CHAPTER CHECKLIST

- [ ] Route leads instantly with alerts
- [ ] Call new leads within minutes
- [ ] Use a documented multi-day cadence
- [ ] Track speed and attempts by agent

CHAPTER 07

Running a lead pilot

How to structure a test, size the budget and read the results.

A pilot is a controlled experiment. Done well, it tells you whether a source deserves more budget. Done poorly, it tells you nothing.

Before the pilot

- Write down criteria, states, delivery method and acceptance rules
- Agree return terms and reporting with the provider
- Prepare your CRM fields, routing and dispositions
- Brief the agents who will work the leads

Sizing the budget

Choose a volume large enough to produce several customers at your expected conversion rate, and a window long enough for your sales cycle. If you expect a 4% close rate, 100 leads may produce only four customers. That is enough to spot operational problems but too few to judge economics confidently.

Running the pilot

Keep everything consistent: the same agents, cadence and scripts for every lead. Check delivery and data quality in the first days so issues are fixed early rather than discovered at the end.

Reading the results

QUESTION	WHAT TO LOOK AT
Did delivery work?	Timing, completeness, failures
Did leads match the order?	Fit rate against your criteria
Could we reach them?	Valid and contact rates
Did they convert?	Qualification, close rate and CPA
What would we change?	Filters, states, cadence or format

Decide in advance which result means scale, adjust or stop.

CHAPTER CHECKLIST

- [ ] Set success criteria before the first lead
- [ ] Keep the follow-up process identical
- [ ] Size the pilot to your sales cycle
- [ ] Decide scale, adjust or stop in advance

CHAPTER 08

Scaling your program

A four-phase framework to grow from pilot to full-scale acquisition.

Scaling is where many good programs break. Volume grows faster than the team, follow-up slips and results fall. Grow in phases instead.

Phase 1: Prove

Run a controlled pilot on one source, one vertical and a handful of states. The goal is a reliable baseline CPA and a smooth operational workflow.

Phase 2: Stabilize

Lock in what worked: routing, cadence, scripts and reporting. Increase volume modestly, around the level your current team can work at full speed, and confirm CPA holds.

Phase 3: Expand

Add one variable at a time: new states, a second lead format such as live transfers or aged leads, or a second source. Measure each addition separately so you know what is driving results.

Phase 4: Optimize

With consistent volume, refine continuously. Tighten or relax filters, rebalance states, negotiate pricing or CPA terms with proven sources and retire sources that fall below target.

Keeping capacity in step

SIGNAL	ACTION
Time to first call rising	Add agents or reduce volume
Contact rate falling	Review cadence and lead age
CPA rising on one source	Investigate before cutting
Agents idle	Add volume or aged inventory

CHAPTER CHECKLIST

- [ ] Scale only after a stable baseline
- [ ] Match volume to agent capacity
- [ ] Add one variable at a time
- [ ] Review sources monthly against target CPA

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Ready to put this guide to work?

Acquira Labs delivers real-time leads, live transfers, aged leads, data and managed SMS programs across more than fifteen verticals, priced on CPL or CPA.

Tell us your vertical, target states and monthly volume, and we will reply with availability, pricing and a recommended launch plan.

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