



effective



WeChat



# WeChat Marketing for B2B

Understanding China's Super App and its Vast Potential for Industry

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# Introduction

Despite wide-sweeping digitalization and changing attitudes about communication, it is still not uncommon for B2B brands to struggle with generating value via social media marketing. Especially in highly technical industries, creating compelling content that speaks to both the algorithmic and user-driven incentives of any social platform can be a difficult puzzle to crack. This challenge can be all the more bewildering when the platform and target audience in question are foreign.

For western B2B companies, one social media platform in particular promises to be the golden key for marketing to a lucrative and growing pool of international customers. Of the 1.4 billion people in China, nearly 1 billion are regular users of WeChat.

Launched in 2011 by technology conglomerate Tencent, WeChat (Chinese: 微信, Wēixìn) is today the most commonly-used app in China. The expansive social platform has been described to non-users as many things. It has drawn partial comparisons to every western social app to ever receive a nine-figure valuation, been lauded as the Chinese app for everything, and criticized a pervasive tool for digital surveillance. But none of these compact descriptions truly do justice in capturing the vast ecosystem of WeChat's functions nor the unique value the app offers to users and businesses alike.

Barriers of the cultural, linguistic, and firewall variety have sequestered the Chinese internet off from outsiders, leaving apps like WeChat to flourish away from the domineering, globalizing influence of US-based tech giants such as Facebook and Google. The result is a platform fueled by incentives that can, at first glance, seem alien and impenetrable to the uninitiated.





# Introduction

But it would be a mistake to write off this powerful marketing tool as too foreign and too complicated to be worth the time and money. There are many ways in which WeChat is, by design, a highly effective channel for corporate messaging and customer relationship management.

Drawing from nearly a decade of experience crafting sophisticated WeChat marketing campaigns for European and North American industrial companies, this whitepaper aims to demystify China's super app and help B2B companies visualize how WeChat can be leveraged to strengthen their brand and customer relationships in the Chinese marketplace.

Not an exhaustive list of the many features and functionalities of WeChat, nor a treatise on cultural differences in digital communication styles, the guide begins with an explanation of the key behavioral design concepts that underpin how WeChat users interface with brands and each other, and why these design choices offer unique opportunities for industrial marketing. These concepts are then illustrated in-context through a series of case studies in diverse strategies for building followers, generating leads, and nurturing existing relationships.







## About effective GmbH

Founded in 1998, effective GmbH is a digital marketing agency that develops strategic international communication solutions for industrial companies. With offices in Mannheim, Germany; Shanghai, China; and Washington, DC, USA; effective GmbH employs a multilingual team with wide-reaching knowledge of diverse digital platforms, helping customers to optimize the visibility of their products all around the world.

## Part 1

# WeChat's behavior design and its impact on B2B marketing

From chatting with friends, to ride hailing, to news stories, to digital wallets, to multiplayer games, to delivery tracking, and so much more - WeChat may serve more numerous and wide-ranging functions than any other mobile app in the world. The success of this platform is in no small part due to an intuitive interface and clever product design that combine to create a consistent set of incentives and rewards for users regardless of function.

An “app for everything” is not an app where “anything goes,” but rather an app designed to encourage specific types of user behavior. Understanding these behaviors as the glue that holds the colossal structure of WeChat together is essential to developing a B2B marketing and customer relationship strategy that delivers results.

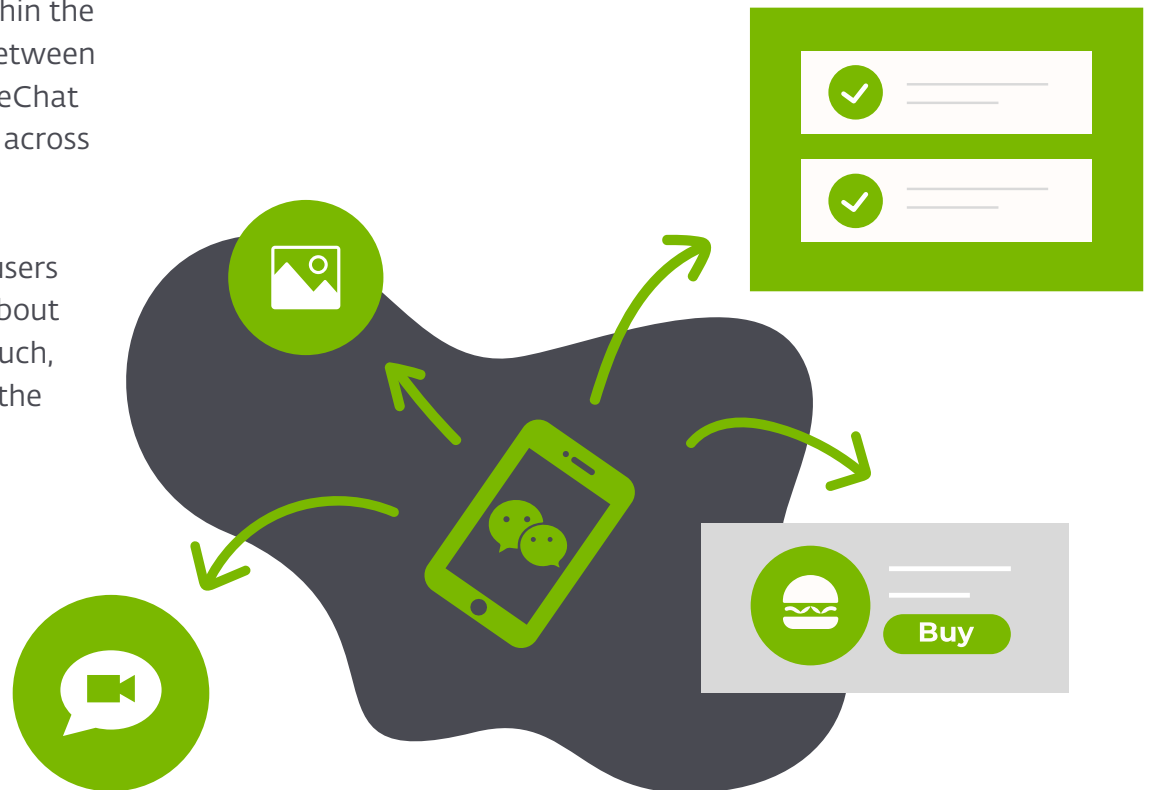


Here are three principles of experience design and user behavior on WeChat that make the app such a unique and powerful marketing tool for industrial companies:

## 1. Frictionless usability

If WeChat is China's super app, nimbleness is its super power. A wide variety of content formats, mini programs, shops, payment systems, and mobile websites can all be created, hosted, and distributed from within the WeChat ecosystem. While western smartphone users may toggle between dozens of apps and browser tabs in managing their digital lives, WeChat offers a singular, user-friendly interface with seamless compatibility across a diverse range of mobile activities.

This element of WeChat minimizes friction in the user-experience; users don't need to download new apps, create new accounts, or worry about compatibility issues when browsing or trying out new features. As such, there is one less useability hurdle standing between customers and the content they want to consume.





Here are some of WeChat's core capabilities that offer a valuable marketing toolset for B2B companies and a frictionless experience for users:

## H5 mini sites

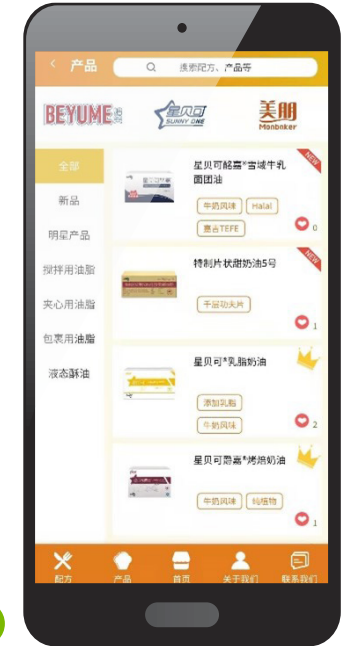
Businesses with WeChat Service Accounts can create an H5 page (a nickname stemming from HTML5, the programming language utilized) to serve as their mobile website.

Compared with the extremely limited customization options given to business profiles on Facebook, LinkedIn, and other western social media platforms, businesses have a tremendous amount of design freedom with H5 pages. Fullscreen graphics, responsive animations, and interactive elements such as chatbots, games, and quizzes are all possible with H5. And compared to a normal website, H5 pages are especially easy to search for and share within the WeChat app.

1



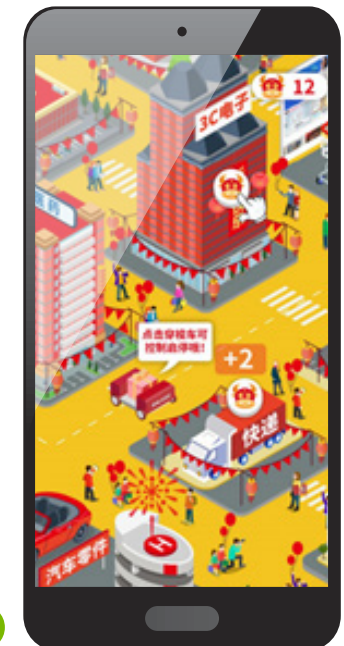
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3



4



1.2. A WeChat minisite developed in H5 for Cargill.

3.4. A Chinese New Year mini game developed in H5 for GALAXIS.



## Mini programs

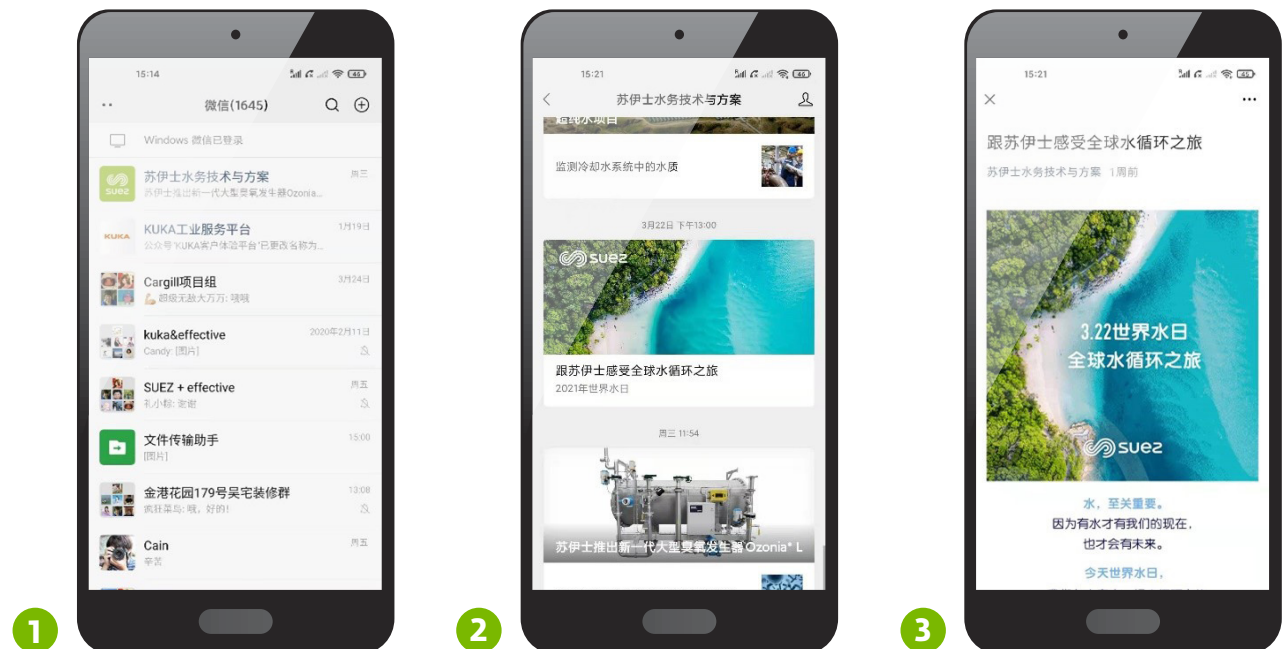
Mini programs are lightweight applications that use WeChat as an operating system. This means users don't need to navigate to an app store, download the program, and create an account in order to use a particular app-based service from their smart phone. From hailing a cab to ordering take-out to monitoring the status of a delivery, mini programs give users instant access to digital services.

WeChat's mini program functionality offers a particularly compelling use-case for companies looking to digitalize their customer loyalty or service programs with a custom mobile app. In addition to being comparatively quick and inexpensive to develop, mini programs may see much higher rates of adoption and retention. Where many smartphone users may be reluctant to download a new, standalone app for relatively infrequent transactions, WeChat eliminates this initial resistance by skipping the app store altogether.

## In-app content browsing

Unlike platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, or Reddit, the primary way of promoting content on WeChat is not by linking out to a URL that will be accessed via web browser. Rather, in order to provide a consistent and pleasant reading experience, long-form content published as a subscription or service article is also hosted and accessed within the WeChat ecosystem.

1. Articles published to WeChat by Suez appear directly beside private chats in a user's home screen. The user can read these posts from within the WeChat app.





## What this means for B2B

A seamless user-experience doesn't only benefit users, it also benefits the companies using WeChat's marketing tools. Because so many different types of brand interactions all take place within WeChat, businesses can capture valuable data about the users who view their content. Furthermore, the ease with which companies can deploy content and lightweight applications within WeChat opens a world of opportunity for creative micro-interactions designed to engage users in short bursts.

## 2. Diversified business model

The distinguishing characteristic of most western social media platforms is a centralized, algorithmically curated newsfeed: a steady stream of content that is constantly optimizing itself in order to maximize the time a user spends scrolling. After all, the more the user scrolls, the more ads they will encounter, and the more money the social platform can earn. Pioneered by US-led social media giants, this ad-driven business model defines the user experience and also limits the possibilities by which companies can hope to reach customers on these platforms without paying to promote their content.

As a major departure from ad-driven social platforms, WeChat offers a distinct content and marketing landscape. While WeChat does run some advertising, ads account for only a conservative portion of overall revenue. In 2018, for example, Tencent reported that 20 percent<sup>1</sup> of global revenue was generated via ad spending, while Facebook reported this figure to be over 98 percent.<sup>2</sup>

Tencent's business model is a diversified one, generating revenue through a variety of channels including:

**Official (public) account fees** – Chinese companies pay 300 RMB per year, while overseas companies pay 99 USD per year to maintain Service and Subscription Accounts on WeChat.

**Transaction fees** – Both digital and brick-and-mortar merchants can give customers the option of paying for goods and services via WeChat Pay for a low fee of just 0.6% per transaction. These fees quickly add up to immense sums, as WeChat Pay is currently used to process upwards of 1 billion transactions per day in China.<sup>3</sup>

**Value-added services (VAS)** – Though not a dominant function of WeChat specifically, VAS is highly important to Tencent's finances, generating as much as 50% of the conglomerate's overall earnings.<sup>4</sup> To enhance their experience within an app, users can purchase virtual goods and services



such as exclusive stickers, gifts, avatars, and game power-ups. In many cases, VAS function on Chinese social media platforms as a sort of social currency by which users can express themselves, their tastes, and their affiliations.

**Advertising** – There are two official WeChat advertising channels: Moments ads and Banner ads. Banner ads appear in the footer of articles posted by official accounts, and are only accessible to companies registered in mainland China. Moments ads appear to targeted users alongside the content posted by others in their network. While Moments ads are accessible to foreign brands selling consumer goods, they are currently not available for industrial companies.



1-4. Moments ads appear beside content posted by friends, in much the same way that ads on Instagram do. As of now, these ads are only available to B2C companies.



## What this means for B2B

Because western social media platforms are financed almost entirely by advertising, these companies are reluctant to show their users commercial and corporate content for free. As such, B2B companies often need to pay if they want to put their products in front of western social media users.

This is not the case on WeChat, whose parent company generates revenue through diverse sources. WeChat presents a more even playing field through which B2B companies can reach customers on the merits of excellent content alone.

## 3. Virality via word-of-mouth

In another departure from the newsfeed-centric social media experience, the WeChat home screen focuses the in-app experience on the user's active chats, subscriptions, and Service Account updates. Personal conversations with friends, group chats with colleagues, and thematic discussion threads are front and center in WeChat. This emphasis on conversation is also reflected in the way that content travels across WeChat.



**Tool**

**Notifications from official accounts**

**Internal group chat among colleagues**

**Group chats between an agency and clients**

**Private group chat**

**Chat with an individual friend**

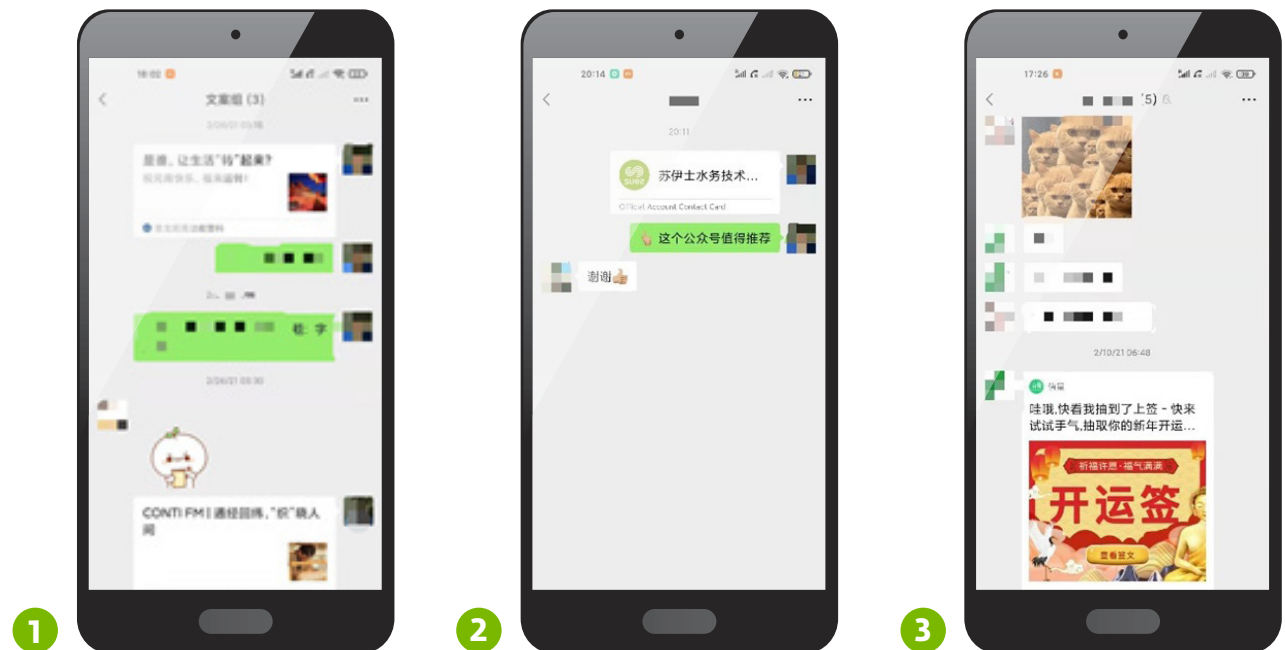
**Internal group chat among colleagues**



On platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn, users encounter all sorts of content within a single newsfeed – a status update from a close friend may be followed by a photo of an influencer they've never met, and a political news story may be followed by a humorous cat video.

Each of these sorts of content exist within WeChat as well, but the difference lies in the way content is delivered to users. Rather than presenting users with a continuous, amalgamated stream of content, the core features of WeChat function much more like a meticulously organized e-mail inbox with dedicated folders for distinct sorts of conversations, tasks, and information.

WeChat is designed in such a way to encourage users to consume content and discover new official accounts and mini programs via word-of-mouth and targeted sharing. Content may be sent to them by other users they already trust, whether friends or key opinion leaders, or they may arrive at a new account by scanning one of the QR codes they encounter over the course of their day.



Users can easily share articles (1), official accounts (2), and mini programs (3) within their private and group chats.



## What this means for B2B

For B2B companies looking to expand their reach in China, putting your content in front of a relevant audience is not about leveraging user data to create microtargeted ads that compete for attention against organic content. Rather, WeChat marketing is about breaking into the digital circles where your products and services might be organically discussed.

This communication environment based on word-of-mouth is tremendously powerful for B2B and industry, for whom recommendations by trusted professionals has always been among the most valuable sources of new business.

## 4. A platform without comparison

Forget everything you know about marketing on Facebook, Twitter, or LinkedIn – this experience won't be of much use on WeChat. The three design principles detailed here compound with language and cultural differences to make WeChat marketing entirely distinct from its western counterparts.

But WeChat's incongruities with western social media platforms should not be seen as obstacles to a successful Chinese B2B campaign. Quite the opposite, the communication environment on WeChat lends itself extraordinarily well to marketing highly specialized products and services to niche groups of professionals. The following chapter showcases examples from effective GmbH clients who were able to leverage the unique dynamics of the WeChat ecosystem to generate leads and strengthen their customer relationships in China.



## Part 2

# Case studies in B2B WeChat marketing

Though most European and North American media coverage of WeChat highlights the app's unique toolset for marketing to consumers, B2B and industrial companies too have long found value in China's most popular social media platform. In industries with lengthy customer life cycles, WeChat is an indispensable tool at every step of the journey: from generating leads, to converting them, to finally retaining them.

In this section, we draw from real case studies of effective GmbH clients leveraging WeChat to build followers and leads in the Chinese market and turning these leads into loyal customers.



## 1. Building followers and generating leads

Accruing followers is one of the most frustrating aspects of starting to market on a new social platform. But savvy companies can leverage the social dynamics of WeChat to their advantage in order to build a relevant and engaged following relatively quickly. Strategic on- and offline campaigns can transform your company's WeChat account into your business's most versatile channel for lead generation.

### Online strategies for building a following: Excellent content

Though comparisons between WeChat and western social media platforms tend to be more misleading than illuminating, there is one aspect all these apps have in common: great content is the key to attracting followers. Content is king in China, too, and without excellent content for users to interact with, there is no reason for them to follow your account.



1-3. This user-friendly technical guide to trouble-shooting common operating problems was published by SUEZ Water Technologies and features playful illustrations and easy-to-navigate copy.



With an official WeChat account, companies are limited to posting either four times per month or once per day, depending on whether they choose a Subscription or Service Account. Each allotted weekly post allows Service Accounts to notify their followers of up to eight newly published articles. These articles are hosted within WeChat and link back to a Service Account home page.

Posts are comparable to e-mail newsletter updates, while the articles contained therein are comparable to blogs. But because WeChat articles are housed within such a sharing-centric platform, the most successful pieces of content are those that adhere to the app's overall communication dynamics: they should be written and formatted so that users can quickly identify the information most relevant to them.

Articles offering valuable technical or product information are generally well-received among industry customers – but such content is more likely to be shared among colleagues if it makes use of clever illustrations, useful photos, and digestible formatting that help users navigate directly to the information most relevant to them.



1-3. This article from Cargill entitled "4 Pictures to Help You Solve Common Issues with Oil Frying" uses a snappy title, illustrative gifs, and user-friendly formatting in order to speak directly to the daily concerns of their restaurant customer base.

In addition to articles, engaging games and quizzes are another type of content that can win customer attention. For significant company news, such as the launch of a new product, creative campaigns that gamify the customer journey can boost engagement above and beyond what a text-based article can do. From interactive quizzes, to virtual product demos, to educational adventures, a custom mini-game built for H5 can encourage followers to spend additional time learning and thinking about your products.



1-5. In this H5 mini-game, KUKA followers are encouraged complete a series of challenges designed to teach them about the unique features of their Quantec product.



Games programmed for H5 pages can also take advantage of the social aspect of WeChat to introduce an element of friendly competition. By rewarding users with virtual points or featuring high scores on a public leaderboard, entertaining mini-games may become an enduring topic of conversation within your customers' professional networks.



## Online strategies for building a following: Leverage your existing network

Fission marketing has recently become a buzzword in the Chinese marketing world, and for good reason. An astounding 77% of customers in China have shared or promoted products and services they've purchased through social media,<sup>5</sup> reinforcing the power of word-of-mouth virality on WeChat.

After setting up a WeChat Service Account, the first thing any company should do is develop a plan to leverage the contacts they already have in order to direct any WeChat users among their employees, partners, and customers to their company page.

If any of your employees or partners are WeChat power-users, ask them to share some of your best articles, H5 projects, or mini programs in any relevant professional group chats they may be a part of. Branded stickers can also add color to chat communications among colleagues and associates.



1. This mini-game from the H5 page of Freudenberg Performance Materials hooks players instantly and features integrated product knowledge at different intervals of game play.

A public leader score board encourages users to compete against their friends, and learn about Freudenberg products in the process.

2.3. Encourage your contacts to promote your WeChat account with custom QR codes that track which individuals were responsible for recruiting the most followers. In this campaign from GALAXIS, users were encouraged to share custom QR codes for an upcoming webinar. The users recruited the most registrants won prizes.



1.2. Encouraging your contacts to share gated content can be a powerful way to generate new followers. Certain PDFs (1) and H5 pages (2) can only be accessed after a user has followed the official account.

## Offline strategies for building a following: Strategic QR code placement

QR codes are scanned as many as 5 billion times per day in China<sup>6</sup>, making them one of the most effective methods of recruiting followers to Service Account pages.

These handy, scannable codes should feature prominently in company e-mail signatures, on business cards, in product brochures, and on the company website. It is also recommended to post the QR code on flyers around the office, especially in places where meetings with customers are held.



QR codes can also be enhanced with your company logo and colors in order to raise the level of brand recognition and help your code stand out in a sea of black-and-white pixels.

3. Don't worry about overdoing it with the QR codes. China is painted in these pixelated shapes, and typical Chinese consumers will scan QR codes several dozen times per day.

## Offline strategies for building a following: Creative exhibition marketing

Industry events such as trade shows or conferences are some of the most valuable occasions for building your WeChat following. Beyond ensuring that your exhibition stand features your QR code, special H5 pages can also be deployed as a clever experiential marketing tactic to accelerate follower gains and win valuable lead data.



1-3. For a trade show event, Aviage Systems deployed a quiz designed in H5 to incentive visitors to interact with the entirety of their booth. Answers to each question were hidden in the product information displayed at each booth section, thus encouraging potential customers to learn about all the different products in order to complete the quiz.



Not only can a strategic mini-games enhance an individual user's experience of your exhibition booth, but it can also encourage other visitors to gather round. Word of a novel booth concept will quickly travel as attendees see photos of your booth and your QR code being shared among their contacts.

4.5. Schunk attracted quite the crowd at one industry event by developing a live, multiplayer game projected on a screen above their booth. Attendees could join in the fun by simply scanning the QR code and immediately begin competing with other attendees.



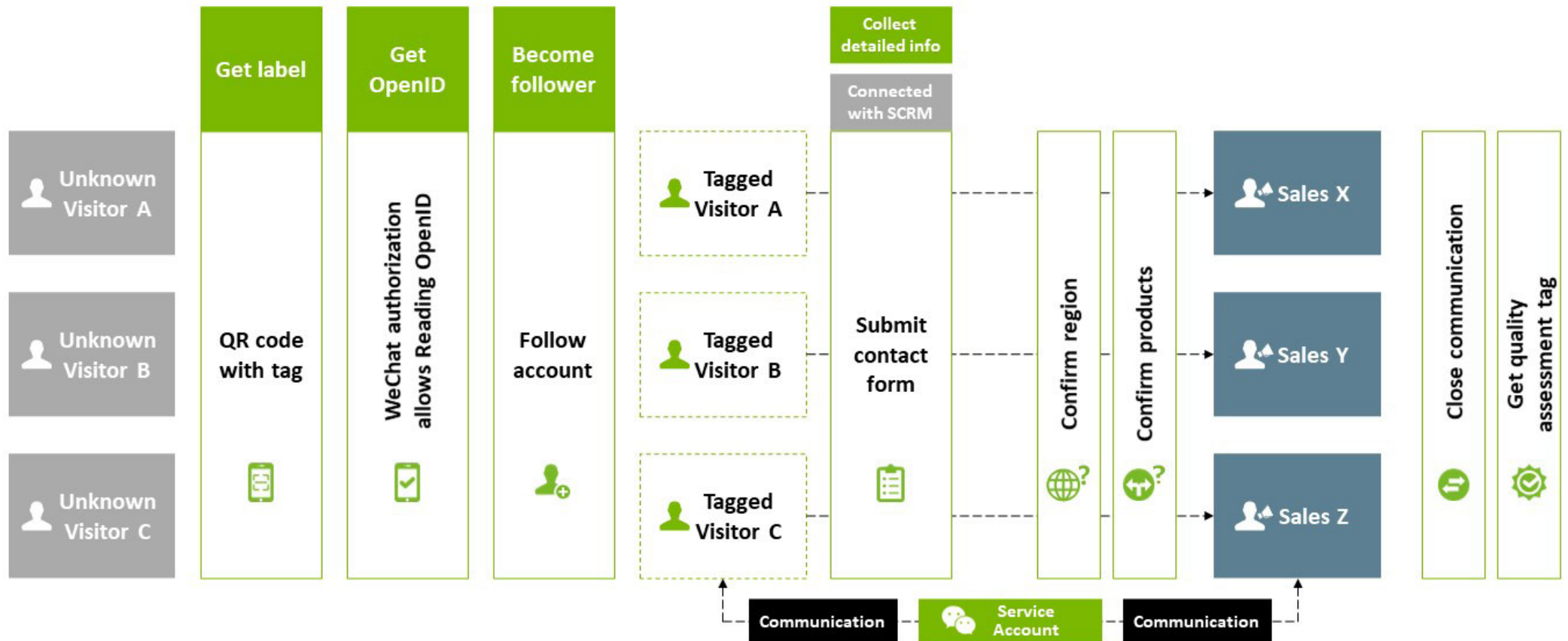
## Processing leads with integrated enquiry management

Because WeChat plays host to so many different events within the customer lifecycle, there is valuable data to be gleaned from their interactions with the content published to your official account. By developing a custom enquiry management system for WeChat, companies can uniformly process user data in order to craft a coherent customer experience. A custom EMS can essentially transform your WeChat Service Account into a CRM database.



1-3. SUEZ Water Technologies announces the launch of a digital service center in which prospective and existing customers can quickly connect with sales and support personnel from their WeChat accounts. This feature also includes both in-app live chat and a built-in enquiry management system which automatically evaluates and assigns new leads to sales representatives using data collected from their interactions with SUEZ's WeChat content.

As part of a post-exhibition workflow, industrial companies can also use WeChat as a way to follow-up with the contacts made during the event. Surveys built with H5 can be easily distributed among new followers and contacts to qualify their interest in your products, gather more contact information, and connect them to sales representatives.





## Nurturing relationships via integrated event management

Meetings, seminars, and training sessions – whether in-person or online – are among the most reliable methods of generating new leads and nurturing existing relationships. From invitation, to registration, to reminders, to post-event follow-ups, the entire event management process can take place within WeChat.

The ability to execute and track all event management activities within a single platform is advantageous both for organizational and marketing purposes. Not only does WeChat offer a convenient way for interested parties to share invitations and sign up for events, but it also gives event organizers a consistent stream of data by which to measure the effectiveness of their campaign.



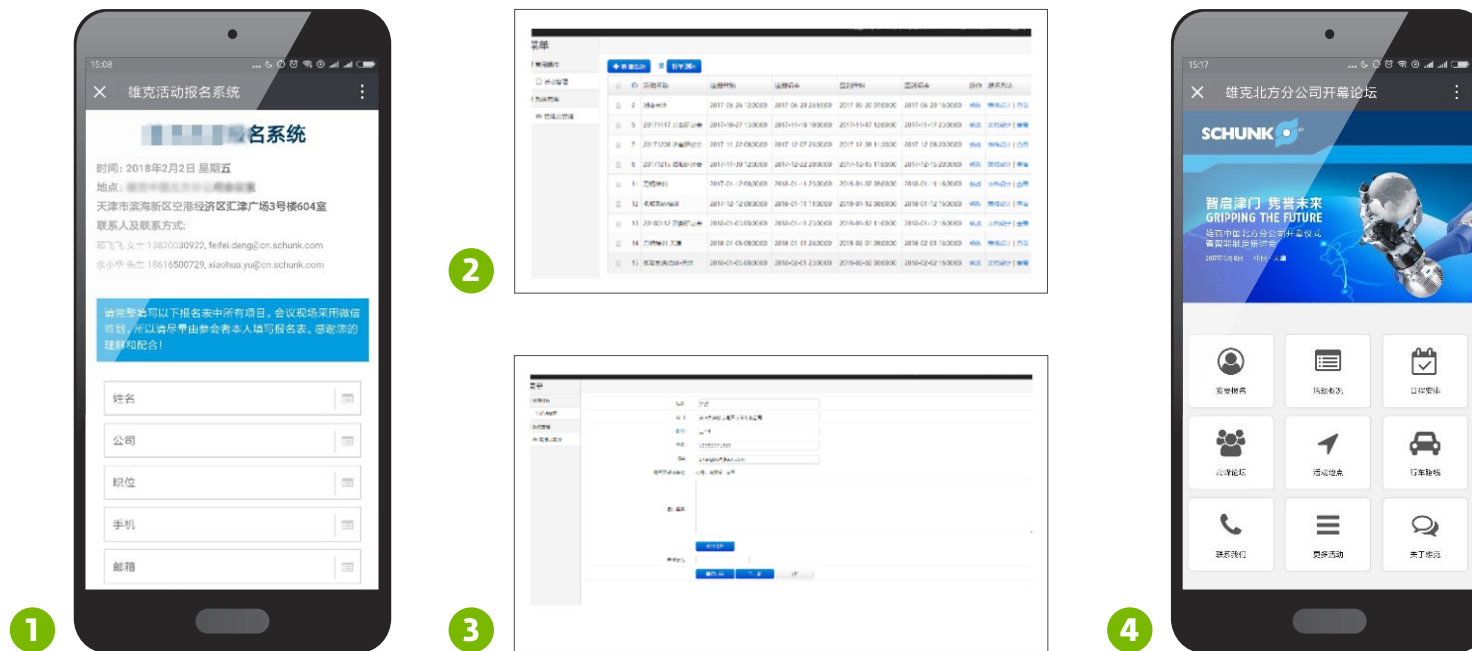
A typical WeChat event management solution may look like this:

**Event promotion and registration** – QR codes are shared via Subscription Account content and among user chats. Interested parties can simply scan the code to register.

**Registrant administration** – Once users have scanned the code to register for an event, their information is transmitted to a custom-built event management system. Admins can approve their registrations and qualify leads.

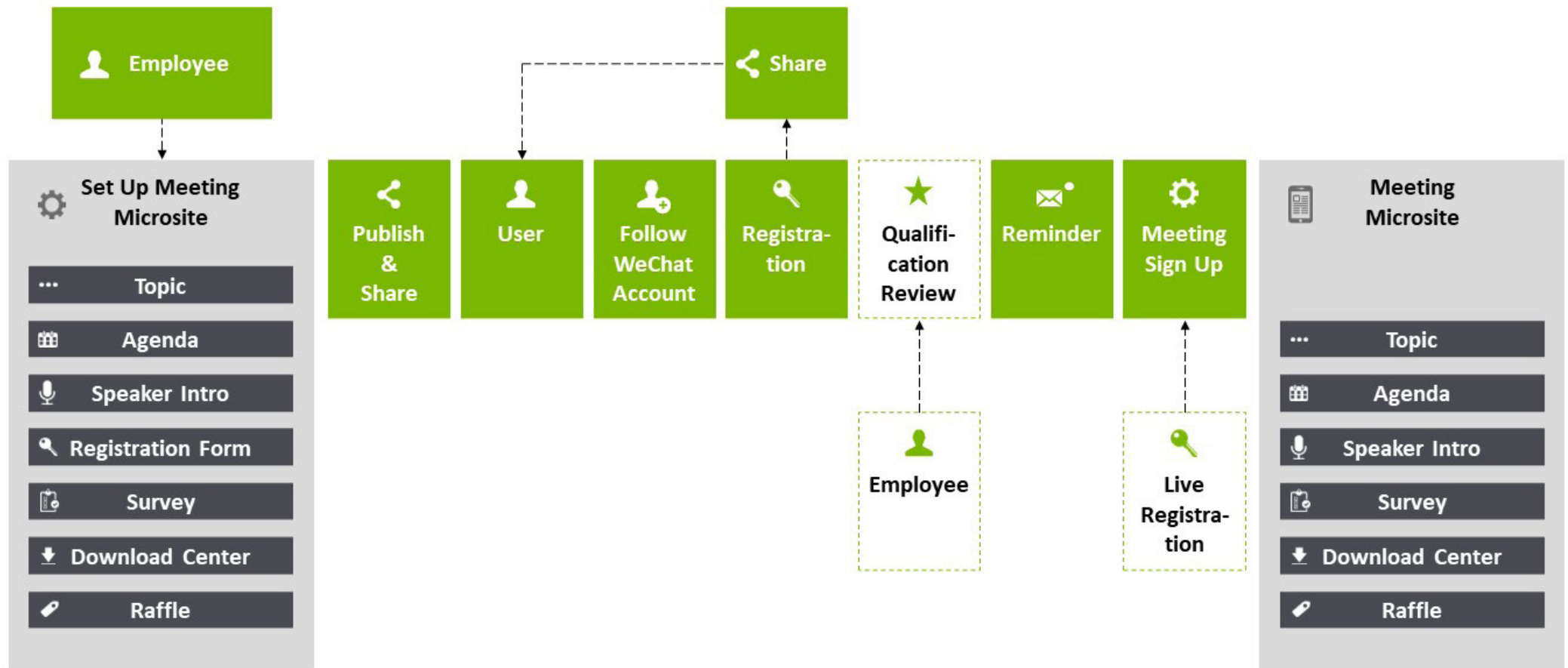
**Monitoring attendance** – Track which registrants actually show up for the event by scanning their registration codes upon arrival.

**Create a microsite for the event** – Provide attendees with access to an H5 microsite that includes the event agenda, all relevant literature, and a post-event survey.



1-4. Schunk used a custom-built WeChat solution to execute an event. From registration (1), to event calendar administration (2), to approving registrants (3), to a custom microsite built for the event (4) - each and every step of event management was integrated with WeChat.

## Workflow of Wechat Meeting/Event Management System



## 2. Converting followers into loyal customers

WeChat is more than a marketing platform through which companies can increase brand awareness among customers. It is also an invaluable tool for nurturing existing customer relationships. In terms of content marketing, WeChat enables B2B companies to strengthen customer ties with content that builds emotional investment, conveys unique professional insight, and is uniquely catered to their needs and industry. WeChat can also serve as a unique selling point in and of itself, acting as a user-friendly customer service portal that simplifies ongoing maintenance and support requests.

### Customer-centered content

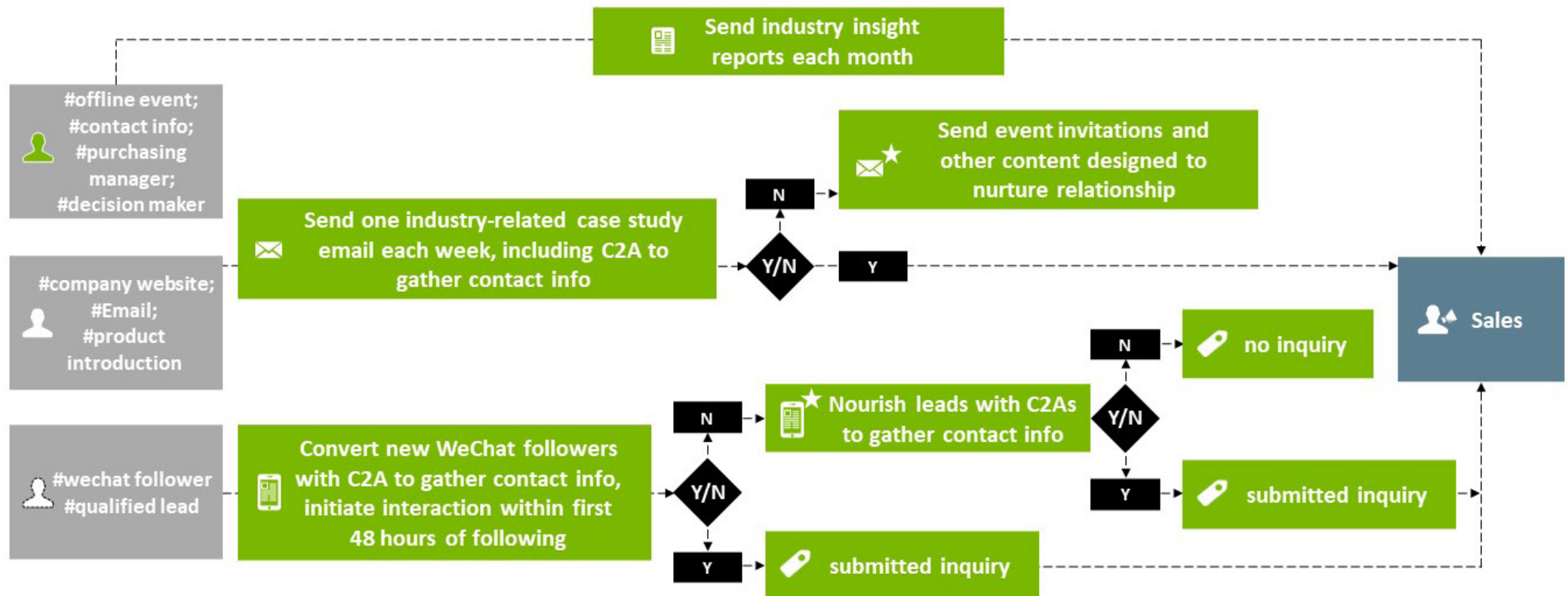
B2B companies whose products are used in diverse industries often struggle to create a unified social media presence that can simultaneously speak to the very different needs of their customers. On platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, some industrial companies may resort to creating separate accounts dedicated to each sector.

On WeChat, this issue can be resolved with innovative customer segmentation tools that make it possible to classify customers based on their industry, location, language, and how they interact with your content. By segmenting your audience, customers in the plastics industry will only receive notifications about your new articles relevant to their sector, rather than needing to sift through content about food and pharmaceuticals.



## Using marketing automation to deliver micro-targeted content

Process runs automatically according to predetermined rules and triggers



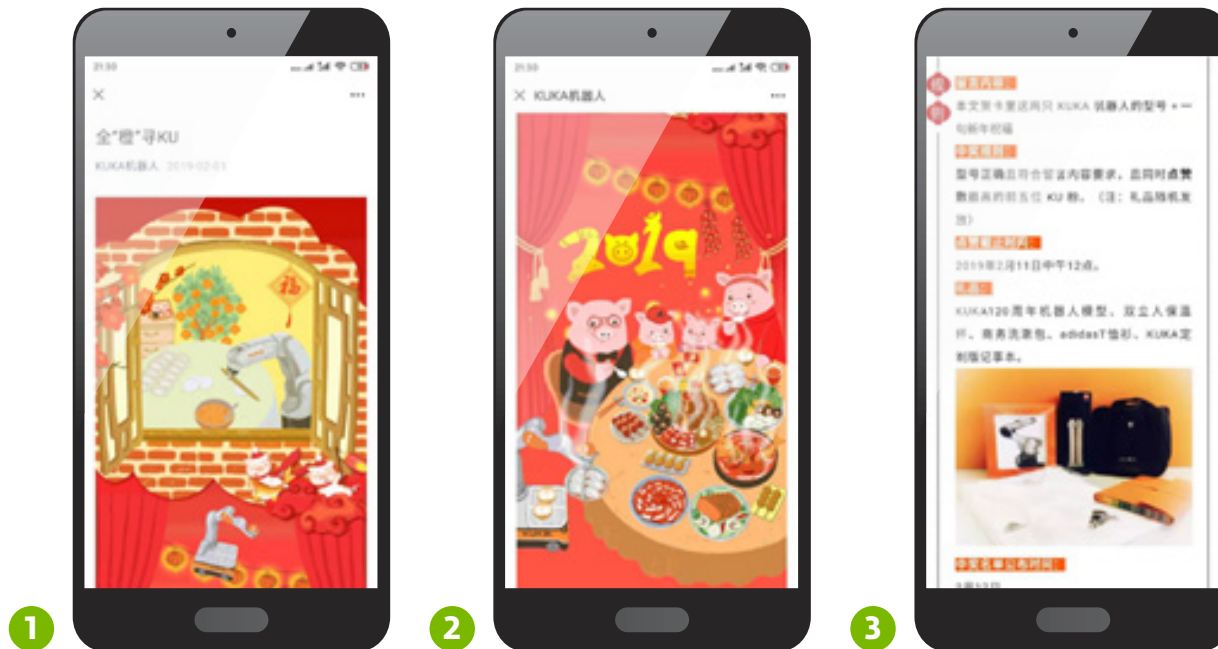
WeChat can be integrated with 3rd-party or bespoke marketing automation tools that allow you to segment your followers based on their WeChat activity and sales history. As such, you can define the customer journey on an individual basis, including the type of content they see, when they see it, and when they are to be contacted by your sales team.

Beyond segmented content, WeChat is also an excellent platform for building emotional ties to your brand through company announcements. Because an important aspect of user behavior on WeChat is showcasing tastes and affiliations, important corporate milestones make for powerful content that encourages your followers to celebrate with you.



1-3. This article from SUEZ showcases important company milestones, reinforcing their pride in the company's history and reputation. A sleek design scheme with integrated video conveys professionalism which customers are likely to reward by sharing and engaging with the content.

Major holidays such as the Lunar New Year are another excellent occasion to use WeChat articles to send thoughtful messages to your customers. Clever, light-hearted illustrations will help strengthen positive brand associations and encourage sharing. Furthermore, celebratory occasions are also the perfect opportunity to announce contests and giveaways that can help grow your following.



1-3. KUKA uses WeChat articles to send its followers a custom, branded new year's greeting. The delightful animation primes readers to participate in an upcoming contest and giveaway.



## User-friendly after sales support and resource libraries

From paying bills to scheduling service visits, from accessing product data sheets to monitoring the delivery status of replacement parts, WeChat H5 pages and mini programs can be developed to serve as a portal through which active customers can interact with the core functions of your business.

Housed within WeChat, these customer service portals offer unparalleled convenience and access. Without the need to download a separate app, customers can have your entire library of downloads, training materials, certifications, and safety sheets at their fingertips. WeChat customer service portals can also host all previous servicing logs and allow customers to book appointments, order replacement parts, and monitor servicing requests.



1-5. KUKA's service portal mini program grants customers instant access to invoicing, product manuals, certifications, troubleshooting guides, and training materials. Furthermore, the customer can instantly to book a number of appointments through the mini program, including equipment servicing and training sessions, and monitor the status of their requests in real time.

These after-sales service portals and resource libraries are only accessible to users who follow your WeChat service account. As such, these features can be hugely beneficial to keeping followers.



1-4. SUEZ uses H5 to create a centralized resource library for existing customers. From the microsite homepage (1), customers can instantly access all downloads that may be relevant for their daily operations (2) as well as the entire library of training videos (3). Training videos can be viewed from within WeChat (4), without the need to navigate to another app or browser.

## Loyalty rewards programs

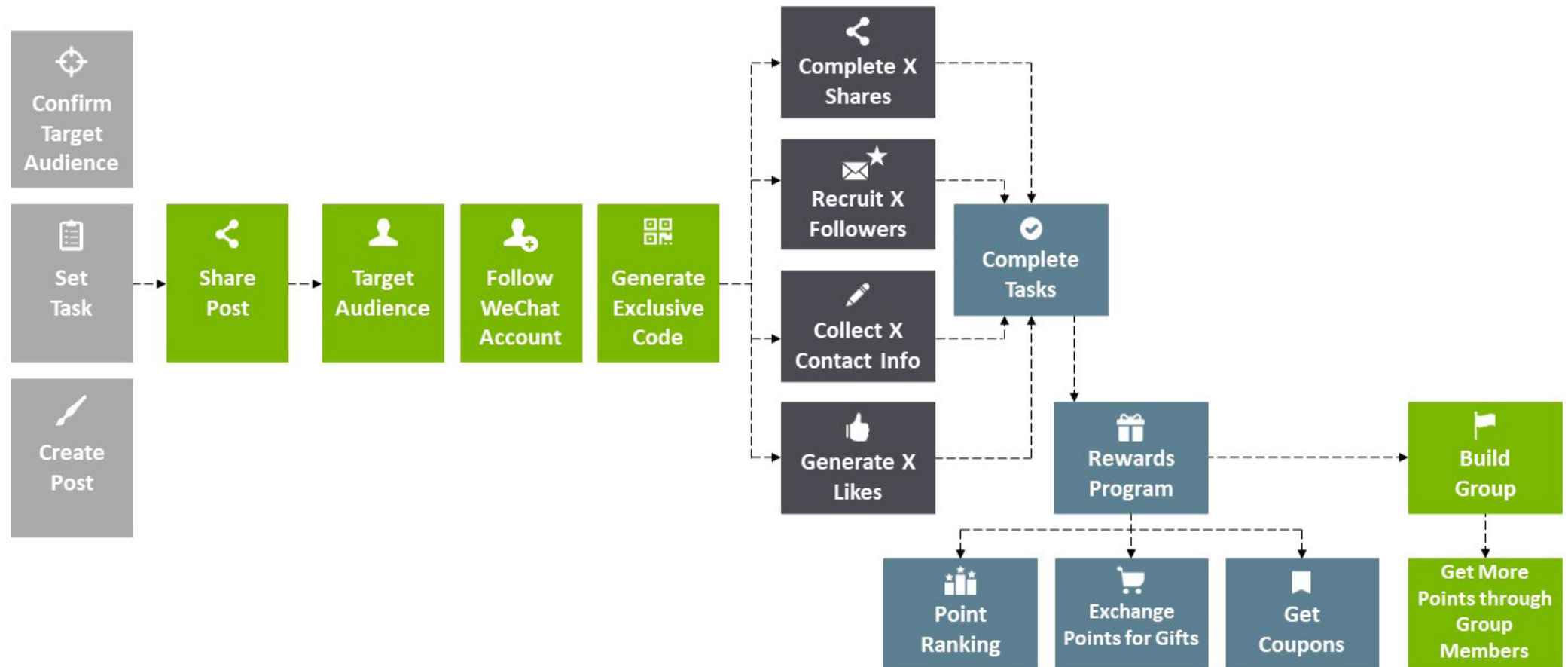
A robust WeChat-integrated customer service portal can act as both a unique selling point for your business and a major driver of customer retention. But creative WeChat-based loyalty rewards programs can further incentive customers to engage with your content and stay up to date with news about your products and services.



1-2. Lincoln Electric deployed a clever rewards program to encourage customers to repeatedly purchase their new welding wire product. With each package of welding wire delivered, the customer received a unique QR code. By scanning the code, the customer would gain points that could be accumulated in exchange for discounts and other rewards.



## Example of a WeChat Customer Rewards Program

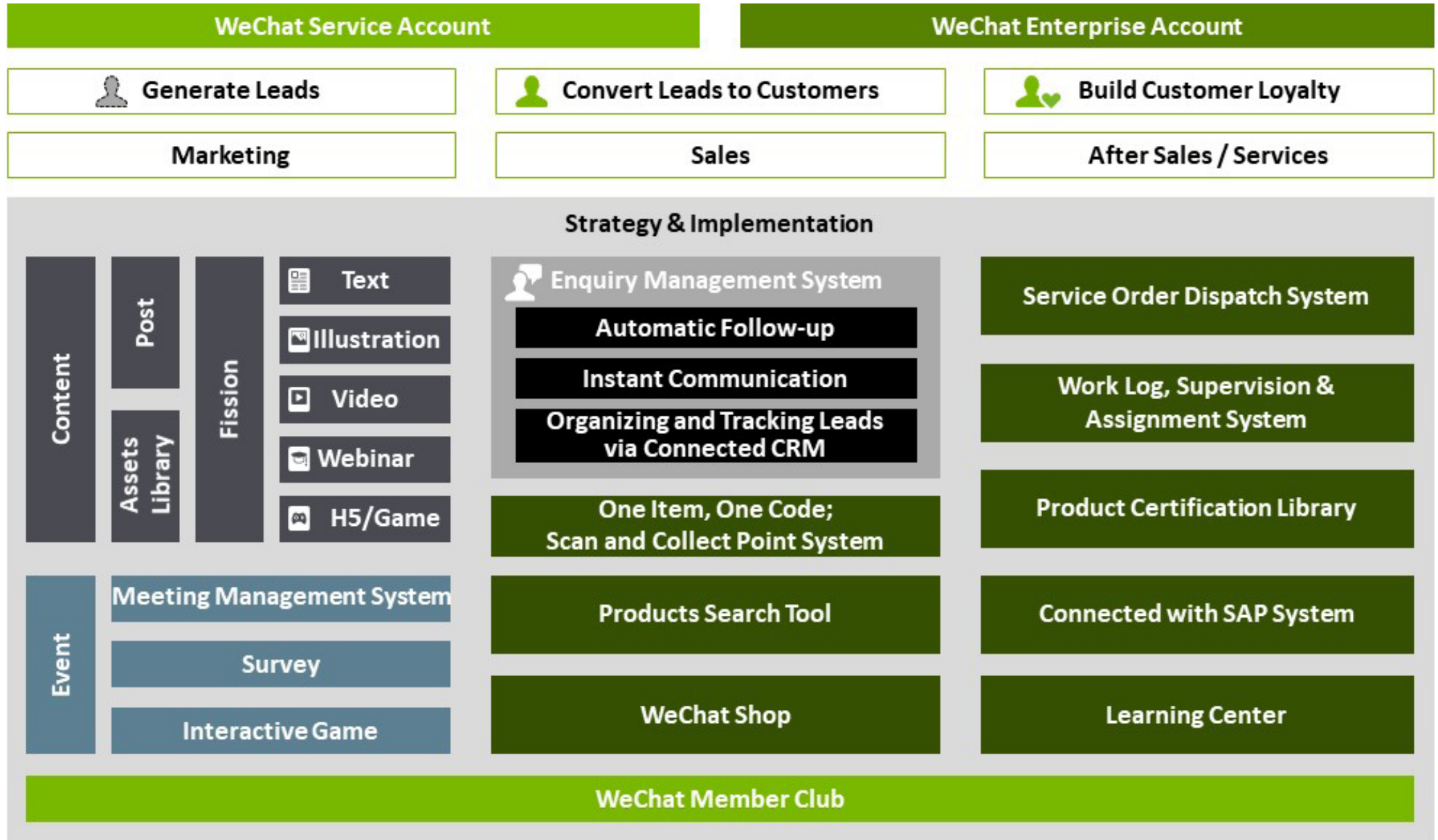


# Conclusion

Though WeChat may be misunderstood by many non-users, its importance to B2B marketing in China is irrefutable. Not only is the app a gateway to virtually the entire Chinese population, but built into its fabric are a number of powerful marketing tools absent from western social media platforms. Leveraged strategically, these features can help industrial companies establish a strong reputation and pursue valuable leads in the lucrative Chinese marketplace.

In addition to a clear vision for your brand and goals, successful WeChat marketing for B2B companies invariably requires specific cultural competences and technical know-how. From strategy to content creation to mini program development, the Shanghai branch of effective GmbH can support your social media marketing strategy to build meaningful customer relationships in China.

# Our WeChat Marketing Services



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