Greg Coticchia has published a very helpful article, entitled "What's a Lead?" in which he relates his own difficulties answering that question, as well as the difficulties that others are having.

In our day of "sales and marketing alignment", when "reducing barriers to transactions" is key, the answer to that question has much higher stakes. There needs to be a quantitative, data-based way to respond to it – *in a way that both sales and marketing agree upon*.

And we're not talking about "just a plain old lead". Nor are the old descriptors "hot", "warm", or "cold" quantitative enough for today's integrated systems. If we're going to ask sales and marketing to take responsibility each step of the way, we also have to answer (quantitatively) the questions, "what's a MQL" ("marketing-qualified lead"), "what's a SAL" ("sales-accepted lead"), and "what's a SQL" ("sales-qualified lead")?

Both parties need to determine *in a way that shows up in your data* what the transition points are between each step in the funnel. Data in one area will trigger one specific kind of follow-up; data in another will trigger a different kind of follow-up. Being able quantitatively to determine those trigger-points, and to make them happen within your technologies, will be a key to the success of your marketing automation effort.

So what's a lead? We should talk about it. One thing is for sure, as Greg concludes: "its a lot more complicated an answer than it was before".