DEMAND MARKETER'S GUIDE TO INTENT ACTIVATION

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Synopsis:

- What is intent data and what are its different types
- Best practices and steps for activating intent data's potential
- Main challenges encountered by marketers working with intent data

Introduction

The impact of the economic softening in late 2021 and 2022 has greatly affected marketing. Pressure to identify priority accounts and continue delivering exceeding results despite changes in buyer behaviour and tighter budgets have forced marketers to look for new avenues to drive outcomes.

In this scenario, intent-based marketing has enjoyed increased attention as a data-led approach to track engagement and brand interest, as well as to inform campaigns. According to a forecast by Gartner, 70% of B2B marketers were estimated to be utilising intent data in some capacity by the end of 2022.

This demonstrates that expectations for driving results with intent data may be high, however, effectively leveraging intent data remains a challenge as misconceptions surround its activation and potential outcomes. For example, some common myths surrounding the role of intent signals in sales qualification may lead to inaccurate or mistimed campaigns, amounting to increased churn rates and low engagement.

However, these hardships do not seem to discourage the market from paying great attention to the potential of intent data. Indeed, a 2022 study by Digital Journal declared that the industry of buyer intent data processing tools is anticipated to rise steadily and significantly between 2022 and 2026.

In face of such projections, high expectations, and many misconceptions, this guide presents **a roadmap for successful intent activation in 2023 and beyond.**

What is intent?

Intent data is behavioural information on prospect activity that indicates a propensity to buy a solution. For example, an account with multiple prospects searching online for 'cloud security services' or interacting with/downloading related content demonstrates intent signals. It is important to understand that although prospects are taking these actions, intent data is aggregated and aligned to the Account or Domain level, not at the prospect level.

There are multiple sources for detecting intent signals, typically grouped into three categories: first-party, second-party, and third-party intent data.

First-party intent data

This refers to data collected from proprietary or owned websites, including metrics from analytics software, content engagement rates, form responses, etc. Because this data originates from prospects who have already interacted with the brand, this type of intent data can usually be associated with buyers at the early stage (Top of Funnel—TOFU), and the middle of the sales funnel (MOFU).

The analysis of first-party intent can fuel market segmentation and retargeting campaigns, as well as the identification of the leads more likely to convert, improving the timing and relevance of campaigns.

Second-party intent data

Proprietary information acquired by partners with whom a business has established a content syndication or co-marketing campaign, for example. One possible application of such data is to gauge the efficiency of your syndicated content, while also helping you expand your target audience by acquiring insights on prospects. Publisher networks and review sites are some of the prime sources of second-party intent data.

Third-party intent data

This data is collected through providers that specialise in gathering intent data from a variety of sources, such as cookie and pixel systems. Mostly composed of information on top of funnel (TOFU) leads, third-party intent data can offer insights into pain points, topics of interest, and preferred channels, to name but a few. However, strategies must be planned with awareness of the fact that this data is also available to competitors.

As demonstrated, each category of intent data has its own capabilities and challenges, and should therefore be cross-referenced to ensure the accuracy of any insights derived.

To help further detail and sort this acquired information across sources, **intent data is often split into four intent types:**

- **Informational:** In these touches, prospects indicate their intent to gather information on a particular topic. This kind of interaction can reveal the challenges being faced by them, as well as the solutions they are currently looking for, informing content strategies.
- **Navigational:** Registered when prospects search for a specific brand or company, this type of intent reveals interest in a particular brand, which may offer insight into their preferences and expectations.
- **Investigational:** Further down the buyer's journey, these prospects have locked on a selection of different providers and are currently comparing their offers.
- **Transactional:** Here, prospects are categorised to be sales ready using strategies such as keyword signaling, according to the validity of the sourced information.

Improve your personalisation and cater to the needs and preferences of different market segments with our **Definitive Guide to B2B Market Segmentation** ⟶

The do's and don'ts of intent-based marketing

To help you get the best performance out of intent, here are **eight best practices for working with B2B intent data:**

Do's

Overlay multiple sources of data

As previously discussed, each source of intent data has its own benefits and disadvantages. Therefore, intent information acquired from a third party should be paired with insights collected from first and second parties. However, this requires some caution, as different providers label, tag, and manage their data differently, which, without careful data cleansing and matching, can lead to a polluted database.

Use intent data to craft resonating content marketing

Since intent data, especially third-party, can reveal the major challenges and pain points being faced by your audiences, it serves as an incredibly useful asset to guide content marketing strategies. Be sure to leverage insights from intent data to ensure the relevance of your content to the needs and interests of your target accounts, earning your brand reputation and trust. Capitalising on trends will also help to drive content performance and, therefore, demand.

Promote data cleansing

Identifying trends and collecting insights from intent requires maintenance, especially given the abundance of data available. Combat inaccuracies by ridding your databases of stale data: duplicates, incomplete information, as well as the previously mentioned mismatched labels when working with multiple providers—all these factors may act as roadblocks for gleaning accurate insights from intent data. AI-powered solutions are already surfacing to help marketers address this concern regarding data-driven strategies.

Discover the latest tech to boost your marketing performance and cater to current buyers' needs with **The Readjustment of the Tech Market** ⟶

By **David Verwey,**
VP of EMEA

Use intent as an asset on an ABM platform

Intent data is more powerful when looked at from an account level. Although individual first party intent can show significant value for strategies such as personalisation and nurturing, investing in prospects from an account displaying high intent increases the chance of conversion. This is something that should be leveraged even when generating leads at an account level, as accounts demonstrating intent are often sources of better-qualified leads, depending on the strength of the data (which should be supported by multiple sources). Furthermore, marketers can uncover new ABM opportunities by observing similarities in intent data by industry.

Don’ts

Plan your campaigns with unfiltred intent data

When working with intent data, it is essential to consider that not all intent signals indicate intent to purchase. For example, in the case of content marketing, interaction with a case study demonstrates greater intent than downloading a guide. Scoring prospect engagement according to this can help you avoid sending unqualified prospects to SDRs too early, as well as reduce churn rates. Another strategy to avoid this mistake is to track intent over time, offering a much more reliable indicator of the prospect’s evolving needs, and level of continued engagement.

Rely heavily on intent for long-term campaigns

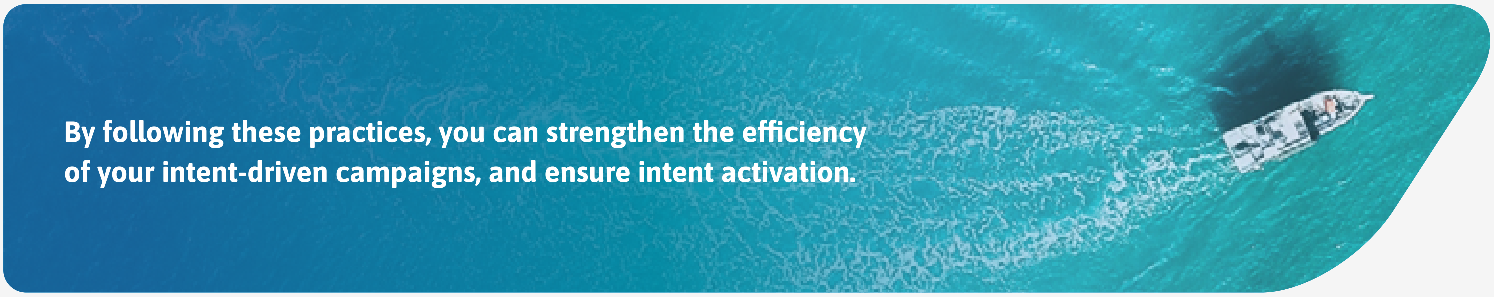
Fast decay times as a result of rapidly changing trends can often render intent data obsolete. By the end of a quarterly campaign, for example, prospect engagements at a first-party level tend to have changed their average intent, which may result in poor performance. Be sure to update your data pool frequently, to keep ahead of your leads’ current preferences, as well as stay in touch with your audience’s trends and concerns.

Silo intent data in marketing departments

Just like with any other data-driven approach, working with intent data benefits greatly from interdepartmental alignment. Make sure all teams—from salespeople to developers—have access to the insights offered by buyer intent. Sharing information between departments will allow teams to build out campaigns and strategies that have greater targeting and accuracy.

Hand over a list of leads displaying intent to SDRs

Despite the intent that a prospect or account is demonstrating, intent alone is not enough to indicate that they are sales ready and can be handed over to sales teams. These prospects are still in the early stages of the buyer’s journey, and thus require proper nurturing before sales outreach can begin. Therefore, your outreach should be planned by combining intent data with other information, suchas interaction with your content and website. Rather than actioning sales outreach immediately and risk driving prospects away, leverage insights gathered from intent data to explore strategies for enabling buyers to progress down the sales funnel.



8-step guide for intent activation

1. Define campaign objectives

Prior to launching your intent-driven initiatives, it is imperative to have clear sight of your campaign goals, in order to guide your course of action, as well as to offer relevant keywords for search, and to help define the most pertinent KPIs. This, in turn, helps lay the foundation for defining the ROI of intent-based initiatives.

2. Start with well-established ICPs and buyer personas

Ideal Client Profiles (ICPs) and buyer personas are fundamental assets to define your addressable market and locate accounts within your scope, rendering them indispensable to intent-driven strategies. Leveraging previously acquired data to locate the similarities between past and current clients is a great strategy for developing accurate ICPs and personas.

Common difficulties

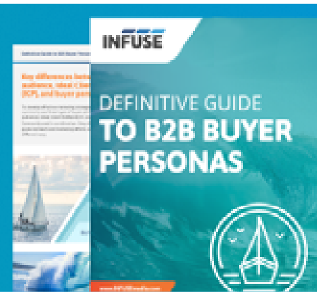
A common mistake committed by companies working with buyer personas is considering them a one-time effort. As the market and your audience evolve, buyer personas should be constantly revisited to ensure their adequacy considering current data. It is also important to create multiple buyer personas according to each audience segment the company is targeting.

Furthermore, B2B marketers often fall prey to the misconception that B2B purchases are mostly rational and logical, and may fail to take into account valuable insights derived from psychographics when elaborating their buyer personas.

Solutions:

- Create different buyer personas for each market segment
- Regularly update buyer personas
- Leverage behavioural and psychographic data when creating personas

Craft precise buyer personas to focus your marketing efforts with our **Definitive Guide to B2B Buyer Personas** ⟶



3 Source first-party data

Acquiring first-party data is attaining even more critical importance due to the forecasted phasing of third-party cookies. First-party data collates all information about your clients gathered from your company’s own sources. Intel collected from your own websites, CRM analytics, social media feedback, and outbound marketing stats, among others, can all constitute great sources. Remember to rate and rank these intent signals according to their positioning in the sales funnel.

Common difficulties

Companies can often encounter obstacles when creating their first-party data pool. ‘Dirty’ data, such as incorrect, incomplete, or duplicate information, may greatly affect its activation. Furthermore, first-party data can often get siloed in marketing departments, reducing their Return on Investment (ROI) and potential value by being kept from other teams that could otherwise benefit from it.

Untracked leads can also cause difficulties when collecting high-quality first-party data, which emphasises the importance of implementing strategies to track leads in the dark funnel.

Solutions:

- Cleanse your data pools often, purging incomplete and duplicate entries
- Employ tracking strategies, such as offering user-friendly share buttons with embedded Urchin Tracking Modules (UTMs)
- Share insights derived from collected data across all departments

Uncover strategic information on untracked leads with our **Definitive Guide to the B2B Dark Funnel** ⟶

4 Select a trusted third-party intent data provider

Companies such as Bombora, Cyance (now part of Expandi Group), Aberdeen, and G2 are some of the most widely-known intent providers. When selecting your tools and providers, make sure to check their compatibility with your present tech stack, since it will need to handle massive amounts of data and cross-reference them with existing information. Better integration will save time and enable more efficient processes.

Common difficulties

Notedly, intent data providers perform differently across different regions. Some of these companies work better with prospects and account activity generated from NAM, while others may perform better in EMEA. It is therefore important to consider this when determining which providers to work with—as well as the priorities of your intent needs and the scale of your campaigns across each region.

Solutions:

- Conduct research on the multiple providers available for your region
- If necessary, segment your data pools according to geographical region, hiring different providers for each segment

5. Match third-party data with your own

Analyse and understand similarities between first and third-party data—as well as second-party data, if you have access to it. Your company may already have information on the behaviour of your average customer prior to purchase, and cross-referencing this data with that from your intent providers can help you further refine your insights and more accurately select and engage target accounts.

Common difficulties

As mentioned previously, different intent data providers have their own unique systems to better organise and catalogue their data. This leads to a very common problem when working with multiple data providers, as well as when matching their data with your own—the variation in labels can lead to your data pool being clogged with inconsistencies and duplicates. Therefore, your team should be attentive and properly equipped to deal with the data cleansing necessary for this step.

Solutions:

- Update your tech stack to properly handle large quantities of data and conduct automated cleansing
- Adapt purchased information to your labeling system prior to merging databases

6. Analyse intent data to expand your target audience

Intent helps you find the 5% of your total addressable market (TAM) that is currently in-market for a new solution (LinkedIn and the University of South Australia, 2022). By coupling different sources of intent data, you may uncover accounts with a high probability of conversion that would otherwise go unnoticed. In-depth analysis of your audience's intent data may also reveal trends and patterns to help you earn buy-in from the remaining 95%.

Common difficulties

It is not unusual for in-market accounts (5%) to become the sole focus for strategies. However, although the remaining 95% of your market may not currently be signaling buying intent, such information may help you devise engaging campaigns that efficiently influence this audience, contributing to increased brand awareness.

Solutions:

- Leverage intent data not only to focus your Account Based Marketing (ABM) efforts on high-intent prospective accounts, but also to discover new accounts that may be in the market for your solutions
- Launch brand awareness campaigns to attract leads from these accounts into your sales funnel
- Employ proper lead nurturing strategies to cater to later stages of the buyer's journey

Combat **The Dangers of Focusing only on BOFU** to avoid neglecting leads in the early stages of the sales cycle, delivering a seamless client experience ⟶

7 Leverage intent data to expand account pools within an ABM framework

Intent data is particularly valuable for account based marketing strategies. It helps you identify target accounts that are actively researching or displaying intent signals related to your offerings. By aligning your marketing efforts and resources towards these accounts, you can improve engagement and generate higher-quality leads.

Pairing intent data at an account level with a company's first-party data set enriches the available data on specific accounts, which can grant the business a robust view of these accounts' interests, and offers useful guidelines for marketing and sales outreach.

Furthermore, leveraging intent information offers great insights into each decision maker's needs and motivations, allowing you to further personalise your marketing efforts to attend to specific demands.

Common difficulties

A common difficulty when implementing ABM is locating the key decision makers within an account. As the average number of members involved in buying committees increases, this process continues to represent a challenge for marketers.

Solutions:

- Glean insights on the target account's organisational structure and apply job title filtring on prospects to identify decision makers
- Assess your target accounts' purchasing capacity and budget prior to engaging them with campaigns

Harness the full potential of ABM with
The Rise of ABX: How to Achieve True ABM ⟶

8 Enhance nurturing and content marketing strategies with intent data

Intent data allows you to gather feedback on the effectiveness of your marketing campaigns in real time, granting insights into the type of content that resonates most with your target audience.

By monitoring intent signals and analysing the response to your marketing efforts, you can identify content gaps, understand which topics or formats are most relevant, and optimise your content strategy accordingly. This ensures that your content is aligned with the interests and needs of potential clients, improving engagement and driving better results.

Intent information also offers valuable insights to help you make data-driven adjustments, refine your targeting, messaging, and channel selection, and optimise your campaigns for better performance over time. Therefore, intent data can serve as a reference to plan your nurturing cadences and content marketing strategies.

Intent data can also be leveraged for TOFU campaigns and content marketing planning, fostering brand awareness and building trust. This is where intent blends perfectly with demand generation strategies—however, keep in mind the short decay time of this type of data and constantly update your planning to ensure your campaign is still in sync with your audience's current needs.

Common difficulties

The performance of nurturing sequences can be compromised by a lack of alignment between marketing and sales teams, jeopardising the accuracy and timing of campaigns—possibly resulting in prospects being 'passed' to sales before adequate nurturing. In an era when personalisation is increasingly important for priming audiences, this can lower the chances of your campaign striking a chord with key stakeholders.

Solutions:

- Book regular meetings to share collected insights and align marketing and sales strategies
- Leverage collected information on your prospects and target accounts to ensure a client-centric, personalised experience

Top challenges for intent data activation

By **Michele Guarino,**

Director of Global Digital Paid Media at Veritas Technologies LLC

Although a promising approach for marketers to improve their efficiency, intent-based marketing will most likely face tough challenges in the years to come.

Apart from overcoming the common mistake of businesses considering prospects or contacts displaying intent signals as being sales qualified, marketers need to consider the rapidly-changing nature of intent data when planning their long-term strategies. Intent providers must also strive to offer a friendly, accessible user experience for marketers and salespeople to action intent data and understand its implications.

Furthermore, although intent data has driven positive outcomes for Veritas, the globalisation of our intent efforts highlighted some weaknesses, such as tracking difficulties, that led our marketers and stakeholders to reassess budgets for intent-based initiatives.

Understanding the geographical imbalance of intent data

Major intent providers perform with disparate efficiency in distinct regions.

Therefore, a certain provider may have rich intent data from NAM, but not enough information on accounts from the APAC region. This means that businesses cannot rely on a single provider to collect intent data on a global scale, and must source adequate providers for each region.

Ensuring data privacy and compliance

As the perceived value of data continues to rise, so does the average user's concern for their data safety and privacy. This perception also increases as governments worldwide are drafting data protection laws, and the different compliance requirements in each region have proven difficult for marketers (especially at global businesses) to keep track of.

This challenge becomes even bigger if (and when) Google decides to eliminate cookies from its Chrome browser. Without cookies, marketers will lose their main third-party source for collecting data.

In response, many companies working in this sector have already started massive campaigns to gathe first-party data to futureproof their database for the possible end of cookies. However, preemptively building a database does not resolve the issue of intent data decaying rapidly.

Multiple tools can lead to data integration issues

Marketers are well aware of the existence of many different tools for a single purpose. The same is true for working with intent data. For example, it is common for integration issues to occur when working with CRMs and intent data, which may lead to data silos.

Therefore, in order to ensure long term usage of intent data, marketers need to be able to simplify integration processes. Unfortunately, many intent marketers hop between platforms to fulfill their work, but as intent data companies become more sophisticated, APIs are resolving this issue. Even so, marketers who require more than one platform for collecting and analysing intent data should plan routines and workflows to optimise time and avoid data silos.

The importance of education, onboarding, and proving ROI to gain stakeholder buy-in

The lack of detailed, accurate information on intent data and its capabilities creates a knowledge gap that can lead stakeholders to hesitate when discussing intent-based initiatives. This sheds light on the importance of educating professionals on this subject, as well as properly onboarding team members on the use of such data and related software.

Furthermore, marketers often struggle with directly tying deal success with intent data. In turn, this can make it difficult to prove ROI when pitching intent-driven initiatives to stakeholders. However, I expect to see progress regarding this issue as the industry, as well as marketers, evolve their tech stack and understanding of intent data to attribute revenue to intent signals.

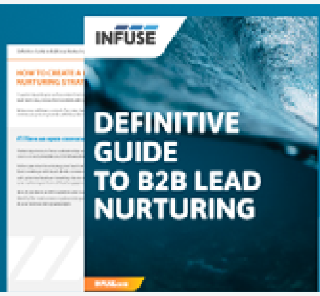
Conclusion

Overall, intent data empowers marketers to make more informed decisions, personalise their approach, and engage with prospects in a more relevant and timely manner. By leveraging these insights, marketers can improve the effectiveness and efficiency of their marketing campaigns, leading to higher conversion rates, increased revenue, and improved overall marketing performance.

However, marketers planning on working with intent data should be wary of the common misconceptions that surround the field, understand the particularities of processing intent data (e.g., its short decay time, providers' regional disparities, and lack of integration with existing software), as well as ensure compliance to local data privacy laws. Finally, marketers must also achieve stakeholder buy-in from the outset, and over time prove the benefits of proper intent activation by correctly attributing sales to intent-driven campaigns.

About the author

__Michele Guarino__ is the Director of Global Paid Media at Veritas Technologies LLC, with 14 years of experience working in paid marketing programs, SEO, sales enablement, and data visualisation.



Key Takeaways

Successfully implementing, tracking, and driving action with intent data requires knowledge of its misconceptions and complexities. **Guarantee efficiency with these 7 key takeaways:**

- **Ensure the accuracy of your ICPs and buyer personas:** Make sure you are collecting intent data from accounts, and ultimately prospects, from across the intent spectrum so you can focus on the accounts and prospects who will drive business outcomes.
- **Leverage different sources of intent data:** Be sure to cross-reference information from different parties, providers, and first-party data to glean more accurate insights.
- **Keep your intent data clean and up to date:** Avoid decaying intent data to inform your marketing initiatives and ensure that you are acting upon the latest intent signals.
- **Take advantage of intent data to craft resonating content:** Establish trust by creating content and promotion that addresses the current challenges of your audience.
- **Share intent-based insights across the entire organisation:** Avoid siloing intent data in your marketing department so sales and development teams can also benefit from this information.
- **Successfully activate intent data with an ABM model:** Intent is immensely valuable to help you qualify accounts. By leveraging intent data for your ABM strategy, you can then craft nurturing cadences and sales approaches that are more relevant and engaging.
- **Stay informed on the developments of intent-based marketing:** Data privacy compliance is constantly evolving across governments. Ensure compliance by keeping up to date with how these laws impact your data collection.
- **Update your tech stack to keep ahead of challenges:** Overcoming the challenges of intent activation requires technological capabilities, data expertise, and strategic planning for improved marketing outcomes.

Harness the potential of intent data with the help of our INFUSE demand experts, who will create a custom-tailored strategy for your business with our **INFUSE Triple Play Intent Program**.

Contact the team at **letstalk@infuse.com** ⟶
to exceed your marketing expectations

About the author

***Greg Campbell**, INFUSE Head of Strategic Growth, has over 15 years of experiencein the B2B Marketing space. He is widely experienced across multiple areas of marketing and sales, from demand generation to ABM, and has held leadership titles in several leading B2B businesses.*

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