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5 STEPS TO FUTUREPROOF YOUR DEMAND

with First-Party Data Ahead of Cookie Changes

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Synopsis:

- **Why first-party data enables more qualified insights into buyer behaviour and their challenges when determining purchases**
- **5 steps on how to collect, analyse, and strategise first-party data to futureproof your organisation**
- **How to leverage lead intelligence and partners to enrich your audience database**

Update

On July 22nd, 2024, **Google announced that, instead of phasing out third-party cookies on its Chrome browser, it will develop an 'approach that elevates user choice'**.

In this new approach, users will be able to configure their cookie permissions within Chrome for their entire web experience, potentially allowing users to opt out from third-party cookies for all websites. This change is significant, as it may decrease the available audience for third-party cookies if most users decide to block them by default.

Despite this, the futureproofing recommendations in this article remain valid. **Chrome has 65% of the browser market share** (Stat Counter, 2024), and this new policy might encourage most of these users to opt out from third-party cookies entirely.

Since **announcing the death of cookies in early 2020** (CNBC), Google has postponed the technology's phase-out three times, with the most recent delay in April 2024. Currently, **Google plans to end the use of cookies in 2025**.

Facing these unexpected delays, B2B organisations have been reluctant to invest in alternatives to cookie-first strategies and third-party data. Unfortunately, this delay in investment may set marketers back when the switch does eventually take place, as most B2B organisations depend on third-party cookies to inform their campaigns.

According to a **2023 Adobe study**, 75% of marketing and client experience users 'rely heavily' on third-party cookies and 45% of leaders are spending over half of their marketing budgets on cookie-based activations.

Given the integral role cookies play in driving strategies, organisations should seek alternatives now. Acquiring first-party data and building a proprietary database (or partnering with first-party content providers) for targeting buyers is crucial for futureproofing audience datasets. A **study by Google and Boston Consulting Group (2021)** found that utilising first-party data for marketing almost tripled revenue and generated a 1.5x increase in cost savings.

This article discusses how to prepare for the eventual phase-out of third-party cookies, by acquiring first-party data and gleaning actionable insights to protect and optimise your targeting strategies.

WHAT IS THIRD-PARTY DATA?

Third-party data is information on your audience and buyers acquired and shared via external parties (usually advertising networks). This data is commonly collected via cookies, which are stored on the user's device and register their data.

Third-party cookies facilitate targeting strategies by tracking user behaviour across websites, compiling information from multiple website visits to create an 'advertising profile', which then serves ads according to their interests.

However, the way third-party cookies inform this profile and assess **buyer intent data** is misaligned with the **latest insights on B2B buying behaviour**.

Additionally, browsers such as **Mozilla** and **Safari** already block these cookies by default due to privacy concerns.

First vs. third-party data

The goal of data is to understand a target audience and the behaviour of key buyers to plan campaigns that engage them effectively by addressing pain points and interests.

Below is a table that breaks down the characteristics and benefits of both B2B user datasets:

Category	First-party data	Third-party data
Source	Collected via owned media channels, such as an organisation's website and social media profiles	Collected via advertising networks or data brokers, which compile user behaviours across multiple sites in their remit

Data quality	Enriched by a user's behaviour on proprietary media (opt-in media ecosystems), first-party data is actionable and can determine a prospect's intent and alignment with qualification criteria	Focused on consumed topics and keywords across websites, assessing buyer intent and brand recognition can be difficult
Personalisation	Data can be attributed to specific prospects, allowing personalised follow-up and database enrichment. This can also support the audit of **buyer personas and Ideal Client Profiles (ICPs)**	Personalisation is limited as this data can not be attributed directly to an individual prospect
User experience (UX)	Data can directly inform UX strategies for specific audiences and on an account level (**Account Based Experience, ABX**)	Data can provide surface-level insights into an audience, however, cookies and generic retargeting methods can often be deemed invasive
Longevity	Insights on a prospect's behaviour across owned media can inform future demand generation strategies	Commonly associated with short-term behaviours, this data is more valuable if utilised to inform retargeting and foster brand awareness, rather than long-term strategies
Privacy compliance	Data is obtained via owned or partner-driven channels and is privacy compliant	Data is often not obtained willingly and privacy compliance relies on the quality of the advertising network or data broker, which can lead to litigation risk

Third-party data has the benefit of being readily available, however, it is often not as reliable as first-party data for gleaning insights from your audience and understanding your prospects' objectives and challenges.

Evolving privacy compliance legislation across the world after the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), California Consumer Privacy Act (CCPA), and similar regulations make third-party data a legal risk since some servers do not audit their datasets, which **can contain information from suspicious sources utilised to defraud users** (Mozilla).

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How to collect, analyse, and strategise with first-party data: Five steps

Shifting from a third-party toward a first-party-driven marketing approach requires careful planning and patience.

The steps outlined in this article serve to facilitate this transition and ensure that your first-party database and targeting methods are built in a structured and actionable manner.

#1 Optimise your UX and digital presence for first-party data collection

Generating high-quality, first-party data requires a rich digital brand experience. Ideally, you should leverage an omnichannel strategy to glean first-party data from the same buyers across marketing channels, rather than relying solely on your website.

For example, in the case of social media, you can grow and engage your audience by promoting gated assets relevant to their needs, such as a whitepaper, to generate demand. You can then further engage these prospects via **lead nurturing** emails and **targeted display** to build trust and keep your brand top of mind.

Below are four strategies for building a rich digital brand experience:

- **Audit your current digital brand presence:** Analyse metrics and user behaviour via analytics and your Customer Relation Management (CRM) system to determine optimisations to your website and other client-facing channels you own
- **Craft content that addresses key buyer pain points:** Set the groundwork required for demand generation, by publishing content that addresses key pain points and includes opportunities (such as gated assets) for conversions to collect first-party data
- **Design lead nurturing cadences and track intent data:** Enrich your first-party data on prospective buyers by tracking their behaviour across your site and gleaning insights from engagement with nurturing materials
- **Survey bottom of funnel (BOFU) leads:** Gain actionable first-party data of engaged and qualified prospective buyers to inform your future efforts, as well as enrich your **buyer personas and Ideal Client Profiles (ICPs)**

With your digital presence geared for engagement, you will naturally generate first-party data, which you can then analyse for unique insights.

DISCOVER 4 STEPS FOR BUILDING B2B CLIENT JOURNEYS THAT DRIVE CONVERSIONS ⟶

#2 Analyse your current first-party database and identify knowledge gaps

After optimising your digital presence and collecting data, wait at least three months to have enough information to provide actionable insights.

Once you have compiled this data, identify common traits between your prospects and clients, such as:

- Do your prospects match your buyer persona/ICP?
- Do your prospects exhibit behaviours that indicate brand interest (**buyer intent data**)?
- How many prospects in your pipeline match your qualification criteria?
- What content and topics do prospects engage with the most?
- What content pages have UX issues (high bounce rate, low time on page, etc.)

Asking these questions is key to analysing and filtering your database to make it actionable (**lead intelligence**), which can then inform necessary optimisations to your digital presence and UX.

Compiling data as lead intelligence allows you to identify what is missing in your first-party database. From this, you will be able to develop a deeper understanding of your buyers and be better informed to drive your demand generation success.

DISCOVER 3 REAL-WORLD SCENARIOS WHERE INFUSE DEMAND STRATEGISTS LEVERAGED LEAD INTELLIGENCE TO DRIVE ROI ⟶

#3 Address gaps in your first-party database with surveys and partnerships

After analysing your first-party database, you may find gaps in your tracking such as a lack of clarity on how buyer pain points shift across the buying journey. For example, the challenges at the top of the funnel may be clear, but as prospects reach the end of the buying cycle, there is a lack of data insights on their top challenges and how to engage them.

Conducting surveys is a simple way to engage these prospects with queries on specific knowledge gaps you would like to address. However, fielding this direct feedback requires establishing strong client relationships (and often incentivisation). Client surveys should also be conducted routinely to fuel analysis and demand performance, making this a valuable strategy but also a difficult one to implement without support.

Collaborating with partners that own opt-in media ecosystems combats this issue as they are able to supply relevant, full-funnel data insights on prospect behaviour, including their top challenges and their intent.

Therefore, partnering is an effective strategy for bolstering your first-party database after your own enrichment processes. Given their flexibility, partnerships are often cost-effective, agile, and can be scaled easily—to include other networks and content publications that are valuable for engaging your buyers, for example.

How to find a relevant first-party data and content partner

There are many B2B content distributors available, which can make it challenging to determine the most relevant one for your audience.

Here are some factors to consider when deciding on a first-party data content partnership:

- What publications does the partner have in my industry? Does my audience engage with these publications?
- How many profiles do they have in my audience? Does their data cover elements that will not be redundant in my own database (such as unique buyer intent signals or behaviours)?
- How does the partner track data? Is it privacy compliant?
- How does the partner engage and nurture prospects? How are they routed toward my solutions?
- Does this partner have a solid brand reputation and voice in the market?
- Does this partner have good financial health?
- What is this partner’s technological readiness, and do they train and enable their teams?

While most partners should share this information with you, it is valuable to have these questions prepared ahead of time (to name but a few). Guide this process by first deciding why you seek a partnership to enrich your database and demand generation strategies. This will then serve to anchor your evaluation process.

#4 How to launch your first campaign with a first-party data partner

After selecting your partner, establish a trial agreement to ensure that the partnership is the right choice, as well as to determine optimisations for the next campaign. To determine its success, focus your pilot campaign on a few key objectives to indicate performance.

Below is a framework to conduct a pilot campaign with a partner:

Content pilot with a first-party data partner

Pilot stage	What to evaluate
#1 Content curation and selection	How does the partner evaluate content? How is the content matched to your ideal audience(s) Does the partner edit your content or offer a content creation service?
#2 Content distribution	How does the partner segment their audience to identify key buyers? What publications does the partner own? Do they match your industry? What marketing channels are employed?
#3 Conversion	What questions does the contact form include? What is the follow-up process after a conversion? What protocols are in place for privacy compliance?
#4 Hand-off	How does the partner verify and route prospects to your organisation? How is the prospect data recorded and transferred to your organisation?
#5 Final evaluation	Do the delivered prospects match your qualification criteria? Does the data enrich your first-party database (or is it redundant)?

Evaluating partners carefully and conducting trials is key to avoiding wasted spend and time with inefficient campaigns.

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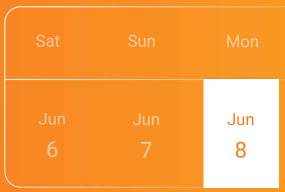

#5 How to continuously enrich your first-party database

To ensure that your organisation has a robust first-party database, you must first establish processes to manage the flow of new data insights.

Below are six recommendations for establishing dataflows to refresh and feed your first-party database:

- **Run ongoing nurturing campaigns with prospects and clients:** For prospects, develop touchpoints that help to evaluate their response to specific themes and pain points. For clients, develop nurture cadences focused on your solutions and utilise Net Promoter Score (NPS) questionnaires and surveys to determine their satisfaction with specific products and their overall experience.

- **Find a trustworthy partner and launch a content campaign per quarter:** By engaging your target audience via partners, such as with a long-term 10+ touch **email nurture**, you can generate demand and collect data insights to inform your Go-to-Market (GTM) strategy.

- **Perfect your lead intelligence methodology:** By collecting actionable lead intelligence from nurturing and outreach campaigns, you can glean valuable and timely insights into your audience's challenges. This first-party data is particularly valuable for informing updates to your Unique Value Proposition (UVP) and messaging.

- **Establish alignment and data sharing across client-facing teams:** By pooling data insights from marketing, sales, client success, and other client-facing teams at your organisation, you can gain unique insights and suggestions for enriching your first-party database. Establishing an internal communication channel for interdepartmental alignment and scheduling frequent alignment meetings is ideal for ensuring a consistent flow of insights.

- **Utilise AI to analyse campaigns in bulk and generate synthetic data:** Synthetic data (based on authentic data), extrapolates common patterns in your target audience, allowing you to craft trial campaigns for different segments, as well as test different channels and messaging.

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- **Adopt an Account Based Experience (ABX) approach:** ABX is account-focused outreach that engages accounts and their entire buying group with a personalised brand experience. Therefore, it is well suited for collecting rich, first-party data that can inform your overall efforts for other accounts in the same niche.

EXPLORE HOW TO DRIVE QUALIFIED DEMAND WITH ABX IN 3 STEPS ⟶

Key takeaways

Below are four takeaways to keep in mind when establishing your first-party database to support performance and ensure its longevity:

- **Build a rich brand experience supported by demand generation programs:** A rich brand experience will enable your website and channels to drive first-party data collection. Meanwhile, demand generation will allow you to continuously field valuable new insights from audience engagement
- **Conduct surveys with BOFU prospects and clients:** Surveying qualified prospects and loyal clients is the best way to obtain first-party data and insights on your audience's key challenges—as well as overall brand sentiment and feedback on your solutions
- **Leverage lead intelligence when engaging teams and analysing campaigns:** Focusing on lead intelligence as a method for collecting and analysing data and insights helps to determine actionable steps to take for your GTM and demand strategy
- **Partner with a first-party data providers and content distribution networks:** By engaging with a network that includes rich profiles relevant to your niche, you can quickly enrich your first-party database and inform future campaigns

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