

# DEMAND MARKETER'S GUIDE TO INTENT ACTIVATION



## Executive Summary

B2B buying is shaped by self-directed research, expanding buying groups, and fragmented digital journeys. 95% of deals land with a vendor already on the buying groups' day-one vendor shortlist, and 80% are won by the pre-contact favourite ([6sense, 2025](#)).

This article outlines how demand marketers can leverage buyer signals and intent data to improve discoverability, identify in-market accounts earlier, and activate more precise, scalable demand strategies across the funnel.

**Detect and interpret early buyer signals across independent buyer research**

**Combine different levels of buyer intent data to validate true in-market activity**

**Personalize campaigns and ABM programs using role-level and account-level insights**

**Strengthen activation with clean data, unified workflows, and cross-functional alignment**

Learn how to leverage intent data for early visibility, accurate prioritization, and continuous revenue performance.

**B2B** buying is categorized by risk-averse decision making and increasingly complex buying groups. Buyers rely on self-directed research cycles supported by consultants, vendors, and peer networks.

According to the [6sense Buyer Experience Report 2025](#), 76% of buyers hired external resources (consultants, analysts, distributors, or similar) in their purchase process. Buyers also reported an average of eight to nine prior purchase journeys in the same solution category. Today's buyers bring substantial experience and risk awareness into new buying decisions.

B2B buyer behavior has accelerated the importance of recognizing buyer signals, which form the foundation of [demand intelligence](#). As buying groups grow in size and purchase decisions become more distributed, interpreting cumulative signals is essential for activating strategies.

In this context, intent-based marketing is a valuable data-led approach to inform demand programs. In a [research study](#) of 416 marketers, 53% reported using buyer intent data to support lead generation activities.

Expectations for driving results with intent data are high. However, effectively applying [intent data](#) requires an informed, strategic approach.

**In this article, we explore different forms of buyer intent data and how to apply them for more effective demand strategies.**

## What is intent data?

Intent data is aggregated behavioral information that shows which individuals or accounts are actively researching specific topics, solutions, or vendors, indicating potential buying interest. It is collected from activities such as content engagement, website visits, search behavior, event participation, and third-party research, helping marketers and sales teams identify in-market prospects and prioritize outreach based on a proven interest.

## What are buyer signals?

Buyer signals, or buyer intent, are measurable behaviors from multiple stakeholders as they research challenges, explore solutions, and compare vendors. These include content engagement, search activity, events, peer discussions, product comparisons, and interactions across owned and third-party channels.

Individually, signals show interest; collectively, they reveal intent, buyer journey stage, and which stakeholders are driving momentum. As buying groups expand and decisions become more distributed, interpreting aggregated signals is essential for distinguishing casual research from true in-market activity and for activating timely demand strategies.

A [2025 Gartner survey](#) found that 61% of B2B buyers prefer a rep-free experience, making independent research and signal tracking more important than ever.

Modern intent activation now goes beyond identifying in-market accounts. It also shows whether your brand is discoverable in early research and the [dark funnel](#), helping teams improve visibility in AI-driven environments and earn a spot on buyers' day-one shortlists. In fact, buying groups now average nine stakeholders, while shortlists increasingly form before vendors detect any signals, reinforcing the need to establish presence early in the invisible evaluation phase ([Voice of the Buyer 2026](#)).

## What is buyer intent data?

**Buyer intent data** is the aggregated, structured output of buyer signals. It is captured and organized to indicate the likelihood that an account is progressing toward a purchase decision.

Whereas buyer signals represent individual behaviors, buyer intent data combines those behaviors across sources to reveal thematic interests, levels of urgency, and patterns of comparison that correspond to specific stages of the buyer's journey.

By translating separate engagement actions into actionable insights, buyer intent data enables demand marketers to identify in-market accounts earlier, personalize outreach with greater precision, and align activation strategies with the real dynamics of buying groups.

There are multiple sources for detecting intent signals, which this section explores below.

[Master buyer-centric selling for predictable growth](#)



### Zero-party intent data

Zero-party intent data refers to information that prospects intentionally and proactively share, typically through surveys, polls, reviews, event interactions, or conversational tools like chatbots. Because this data reflects explicit preferences, needs, and buying motivations, it provides highly reliable insight into a prospect's mindset earlier and with greater clarity than inferred signals alone.

### First-party intent data

This refers to data collected from proprietary or owned sources, including metrics from analytics software, content engagement rates, 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 (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 prospects more likely to convert. This improves the timing and relevance of campaigns.

## Second-party intent data

Second-party intent data refers to proprietary information shared directly by trusted partners, often through [content activation](#), co-marketing programs, or publisher networks. This data offers visibility into how new audiences engage with your content beyond your owned channels, helping you assess campaign performance and identify emerging interest among previously unreachable prospects and buyers on your radar.

Review platforms, curated publisher environments, and ecosystem partners are common sources that provide reliable, high-quality second-party intent signals.

## Third-party intent data

Third-party intent data comes from providers that collect signals across websites, cookies, and pixels. It mostly captures TOFU prospects and can reveal interests, pain points, and preferred channels. However, since this data is also accessible to competitors, strategies must account for its shared nature.

Third-party intent data is typically divided into four categories, each offering unique insights:

Category	Definition	Source
<b>Informational</b>	Shows prospects researching a topic, highlighting their challenges and content needs	Publisher networks, content activation platforms, educational content hubs, topic-based media sites
<b>Navigational</b>	Captures searches for specific brands, revealing preferences and expectations	Search engines, comparison sites, brand-specific publisher pages, review platforms
<b>Investigational</b>	Indicates prospects comparing multiple providers, deeper in the buying journey	Review sites, analyst platforms, product comparison portals, marketplace directories
<b>Transactional (High intent)</b>	Identifies sales-ready prospects through signals like keywords, based on the data's reliability	Ad networks, programmatic platforms, e-commerce signals, high-intent keyword aggregators

**Note:** Always ensure that third-party intent data is sourced ethically, respecting privacy regulations and user consent.

## Firmographic and technographic data

[Firmographic](#) and technographic data provide insights that strengthen segmentation and improve the precision of activation strategies.

Firmographic and technographic data are considered first-party only if collected directly from your own interactions with accounts; otherwise, they are third-party.

Firmographic attributes can include industry, company size, revenue, growth stage, and geographic footprint. These data points help identify which accounts align with your [ideal client profile \(ICP\)](#) and how their structural characteristics influence buying behavior.

Technographic data details an account's current technology stack, integration requirements, adoption maturity, and potential gaps or dependencies.

When combined with first, second, and third-party intent signals, these data types enable more accurate prioritization, more relevant messaging, and more effective personalization across segments. This is particularly helpful for strategic [Account Based Marketing \(ABM\) programs](#).

[Explore 6 ways to revolutionize your B2B digital experience](#)



## 7 best practices for using B2B intent data

61% of the buyer journey happens outside of observable channels ([6sense, 2025](#)), meaning that intent data should be treated as partial visibility rather than a complete picture.

AI-assisted research, peer networks, and community interactions rarely generate trackable signals. Marketers should use buyer intent data as validation for dark-funnel activity and pair it with broader discoverability initiatives to ensure their brand is present long before intent becomes detectable.

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

### 1 Overlay multiple sources of data

Each source of intent data has its own benefits and disadvantages. Therefore, intent information acquired from a third party should be paired with first-party insights to validate activity and enrich data.

However, this requires some caution, as different providers label, tag, and manage their data differently, which, without careful data management and matching, can lead to a polluted database.

### 2 Use intent data to craft resonating marketing content

Since intent data 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 apply 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. Optimizing content for SEO and AEO will help to drive content discoverability and, therefore, demand.

Intent insights should guide the development of proof-oriented content that supports early shortlist formation. Case studies, ROI narratives, and technical validation materials help buying groups justify decisions and strengthen internal consensus.

[Learn how to win market share by increasing discoverability](#)



### 3 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, and mismatched labels when working with multiple providers. All of these factors may act as roadblocks to gaining accurate insights from intent data.

Effective intent activation depends on disciplined data governance and consistent integration across platforms. Without unified taxonomies, shared tagging standards, and coordinated workflows, intent data becomes fragmented and loses reliability.

Strong operational foundations are essential for any AI-driven or signal-driven program to scale effectively. Importantly, effective data cleansing also ensures your CRMs are targeting the right buyers and not sending to empty inboxes.

When managing data, integration across tools is key, as using multiple platforms can create silos. CRMs, analytics tools, and intent platforms must integrate smoothly. Modern APIs help, but marketers still need workflows and routines to ensure data flows effectively and avoids redundancy.

#### How to identify in-market B2B accounts using intent data in ABM

Intent data becomes more powerful when analyzed at the account level. While individual first-party signals remain valuable for personalization and nurturing, monitoring engagement activity across multiple members of a buying group provides a stronger picture of account-level intent.

When enough signals accumulate, they indicate real buyer intent, helping marketers prioritize accounts and trigger more targeted strategies rather than focusing on generating a small number of leads per account.

Accounts showing high intent are often the source of better-qualified opportunities, especially when data is verified across multiple sources. Additionally, patterns in intent signals across industries can reveal new **ABM opportunities**, helping teams expand their focus beyond the initial set of known prospects.

Personalizing by role is a baseline expectation. Competitive advantage comes from adapting in real time as buyer signals shift across functions and personas. Buying groups expect tailored value proof, not just tailored messaging, and intent data can reveal which stakeholders require deeper enablement to build internal consensus.

To operationalize this, our Demand Accelerator pairs buyer intent with account intelligence, turning fragmented signals into actionable ABM workflows.

[Learn how it works](#)



[Explore 8 reasons why your ABM program is not working and how to fix it](#)



## 4 Plan your demand programs to capture high intent signals

When working with intent data, it is important to consider that not all intent signals indicate intent to purchase. For example, in the case of content marketing, interaction with a case study may demonstrate 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.

[Ready to turn raw intent into revenue?](#)

[Talk to us for a custom demand strategy consultation](#)



## 5 Rely on outdated 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 buyer preferences, as well as stay in touch with your audience's trends and concerns.

## 6 Do not silo intent data by department

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.

Intent activation should also extend beyond acquisition. Monitoring engagement patterns within existing clients can reveal early indicators of churn risk, expansion potential, or interest in adjacent solutions. Applying intent signals across post-sale motions strengthens account health visibility and supports more proactive retention and growth programs.

[Explore 5 steps to orchestrate marketing channels for demand generation](#)



## 7 Hand over a list of prospects 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, such as interaction with your content and website.

Rather than acting on sales outreach immediately and risking driving prospects away, use insights gathered from intent data to explore strategies for enabling buyers to progress down the sales funnel.

## UNLOCK THE POWER OF BUYER SIGNALS

Ready to turn buyer signals into revenue? INFUSE helps demand marketers activate intent at scale, targeting the right accounts at the right time

[Get in touch to see how it works](#)



## 7 essentials for effective intent data activation

Activating intent requires a strategic approach.

Here are some important considerations to achieve effective intent activation.

### 1 Define campaign objectives

Prior to launching your intent-driven initiatives, it is necessary to have a clear understanding of your campaign goals to guide your course of action, identify relevant search keywords, and define 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

ICPs and buyer personas are fundamental assets to define your addressable market and locate accounts within your scope. This makes them indispensable to intent-driven strategies.

Using previously acquired data to locate the similarities between past and current clients is a great strategy for developing accurate ICPs and personas.

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.

### 3 Analyze intent data to expand your target audience

There is a commonly referenced concept, 95:5, that explores how only around 5% of B2B buyers are in-market for a given solution at any point in time, meaning roughly 95% are not actively buying right now.

By combining multiple sources of intent data, revenue teams can surface the small share of accounts showing clear purchase signals and prioritize them for sales and marketing outreach.

At the same time, patterns in intent signals across the wider audience can guide brand-building and education efforts that keep the other 95% more likely to choose your solution when they eventually move in-market.

[Explore the 10 most effective top of funnel lead nurturing tactics](#)



## 4 Avoid interpreting intent signals correctly

Marketers must differentiate early signals from genuine buying intent and plan strategies around evolving data. Providers also need to make intent data actionable and easy to use for sales and marketing teams.

## 5 Geographic coverage gaps in B2B intent data

Intent data quality can vary by region. A provider may have strong coverage in North America but limited insight in APAC or EMEA.

Relying on a single source globally is risky, so businesses should combine providers to achieve comprehensive regional coverage.

## 6 Data privacy and compliance

Rising privacy concerns and global regulations make managing intent data more complex. Companies must stay vigilant to ensure compliance and protect user trust while still capturing actionable insights.

[Explore the agency guide to ethical demand generation](#)



## 7 Education and proving ROI

Knowledge gaps can slow adoption when implementing intent activation. Teams need proper onboarding on intent tools and strategies, while marketers must connect intent signals to revenue to demonstrate ROI.

As technology and attribution methods improve, knowing how to improve B2B campaign ROI with intent data will become easier.

## Key takeaways

- **Intent activation centers on early discoverability:** Buyer signals show where stakeholders encounter your brand before surfacing in measurable channels, making intent essential for validating visibility across the dark funnel and AI-driven research.
- **Strong intent strategies require a clear view of buying-group dynamics:** Interpreting cumulative signals across stakeholders, combined with firmographic and technographic context, enables accurate prioritization, targeted ABM activation, and role-specific enablement.
- **Operational discipline defines intent-driven performance:** Clean, integrated data, clear governance, and cross-functional alignment reduce signal noise, strengthen AI workflows, and support proof-based content and lifecycle revenue strategies.

## Frequently asked questions

### How do companies use intent data to improve their marketing strategies?

Companies analyze buyer behaviors and signals to target the right accounts, personalize messaging, and optimize campaigns for higher engagement and conversion rates.

### How does intent marketing influence B2B sales strategies?

Intent marketing provides visibility into which accounts are actively researching solutions, enabling sales teams to prioritize outreach and engage buyers earlier in the journey.

### How can I effectively use intent signals to improve sales?

Apply aggregated intent signals to identify in-market accounts, tailor communications by role, and trigger timely, omnichannel engagement to accelerate pipeline.

### What tools are available for analyzing intent data?

[INFUSE's Technology solutions](#) provide unified dashboards, predictive scoring, and workflow automation to analyze and act on intent data efficiently.



## ACTIVATE BUYER SIGNALS WITH A CUSTOM DEMAND STRATEGY

Turn real buyer intent into revenue momentum.  
INFUSE helps you interpret multi-source signals, prioritize  
high-value accounts, and build campaigns that convert.

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