



eBook

Intent Is The New Lead

Why wait for the form fill when your buyer is actively researching?

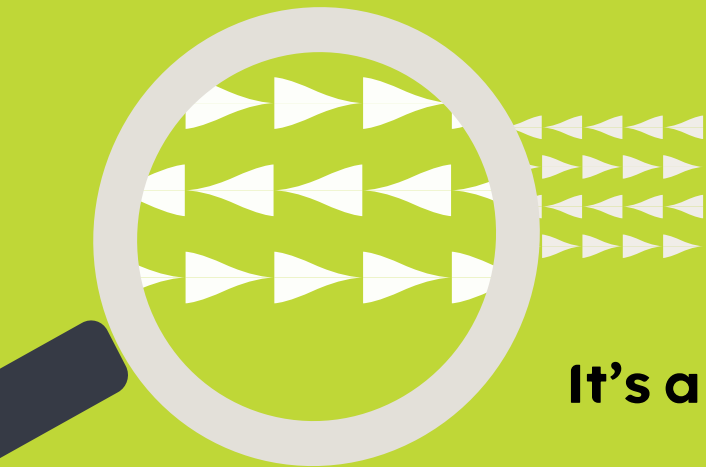




In this eBook, we cover why intent is so important and how you can start using it to drive better sales and marketing alignment, which in turn, leads to more conversions down the pipeline. (See *what we did there.*)

Table of Contents

It's a New Day. It's Time to Focus on Intent	3
It's All About Timing	4
But, What is Intent Really?	6
PIE, It's More than Dessert	9
Intent is the New Lead	11



It's a New Day. It's Time to Focus on Intent.

Once, in the sphere of demand generation, success was all about the lead; the number of forms filled, webinars RSVP'd and event seats warmed. Our entire universe revolved around these numbers. If someone took the time to respond to our marketing efforts, we thought it meant interest, a hand raiser, someone who wanted to be contacted. We'd happily drop off the lead list to sales and have them give it a go. But for all their follow up calls and emails, how many of those form fills could sales turn into opportunities? A handful if we were lucky. (Let's not even talk about closed won business.)

It's a new day. It's time to focus on intent and put the lead in the backseat. A more efficient marketing approach, intent helps marketing and sales teams identify which accounts are in-market while they're still early in the buyer's journey (not just at the point of a form fill). With this insight, we can personalize our outreach according to the account's interests and influence their mindset through the point of purchase. Focusing marketing efforts on intent signals paves the way to much higher email open rates, returned phone calls, and meaningful sales conversations than focusing on the lead on its own.

Is the marketing team popping confetti in the conference room because they've hit the target form fill open/lead rate? Sales might want to run the other way. Better yet, both teams should come together to put the cake down and pick up the intent data. This will turn out to be a more efficient and fruitful endeavor and cause to celebrate for everyone.

It's All About Timing

A low conversion rate to opportunities is a red flag. It signifies that teams may not be focused on the right accounts, which can create mistrust between sales and marketing. Marketing may feel like sales isn't paying attention to the leads they are passing over after all their hard work to execute the campaign. And sales may feel that marketing doesn't understand what they need to land new business.

Consider this typical scenario:

Marketing has just completed a campaign and handed sales 156 leads with which to follow up. They proceed to clean and qualify the list to match the ideal customer profile (ICP) and subsequently narrow down the list to 86 leads. Then, sales takes an even closer look and whittles it down to 64 target accounts (those who are the best fit based on their needs and revenue potential). However, only 47 of them have contacts with purchase authority. Done scrubbing? Not quite yet. Sales will need to identify if any of these target accounts are showing buying intent and if they are ready to take a meeting. That leaves sales with 8 target accounts with real buying intent. That's less than 1 percent from that original 156 that sales and marketing passed over to them.

Sound familiar? It's happened to all of us. Regardless of whether you are on the sales or marketing side of the scenario, the problem (and sad) part of all this is it shows just how wasteful traditional B2B marketing really is for everyone involved. But it doesn't have to be like this. Both teams can be proactive in controlling pipeline and providing the best opportunity to turn an account into a customer.



4.4%

of top-of-funnel inquiries

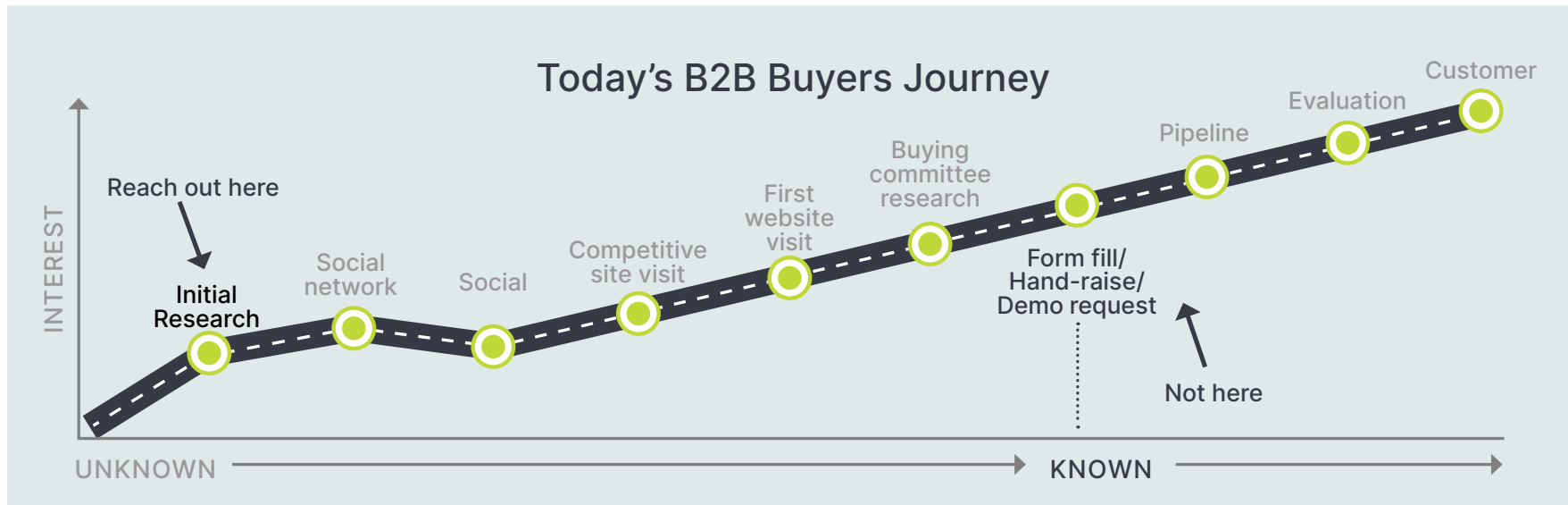


.03%

move to closed/won.

Source: SiriusDecisions

Take Action: Sales and marketing teams need to have their eyes on the same prize. Make sure they are working to accomplish the same targets and goals and that they are attending status meetings together as a unified group.



It's All About Timing

With conventional B2B marketing, we only ever see one part of the buyer's journey: the part where the buyer raises their hand and says, "Hey Sales, I'm ready to hear what you have to say." The problem with that is, they're well into their purchase path and have already conducted brand research, before they've made themselves seen.

The fact is, today's buyers are sophisticated. They like to conduct their own research before even thinking of speaking to a sales person. With so much data readily available on the web, scrolling through websites, browsing resources, and researching competitors are all typical behavior. All the while, buyers are developing their product criteria and opinions on your brand.

If you only conduct outreach when they raise their hand, then you're missing a huge opportunity to help guide the narrative of your brand value. So understanding the buyer's intent while they are in the research stage of the purchase journey can be monumental in reaching your target customer.

Also, keep in mind that timing is everything when leveraging intent data. What a buyer searches for this week is not necessarily what they'll be searching for the next week. Therefore, it's of pivotal importance to have a strategic plan in place and ready to go for when you obtain intent insights.

But, What is Intent Really?

We get it. Intent feels like one of those buzz words that's thrown into the ring of marketing fads, where every marketing gladiator aims to land victorious with their own interpretation, but we're all left battered in the end. In the words of D.H.Lawrence, it's like ". . . getting rather drunk on your own self-importance, and afterwards coming dismally sober again and being rather unpleasant." But this is not that. Intent is real, and it is powerful. So let's break it down real quick.

In its simplest terms, intent data tracks online behavior and activity through artificial intelligence and machine learning. In fact, for years, it's been used in business-to-consumer (B2C) marketing with great success. Business-to-business (B2B) is finally catching on. And we're increasingly using it to give our organizations the winning edge over our competitors. The key is knowing how and when to use that data and making sure we're leveraging the right combination of data.

Types of Data that Show Intent



First Party Data

Consumer engagement with your own content

Website, emails, asset downloads, social media, form fills, RSVPs, and sales activity



Third Party Data

Consumer engagement with external digital content

Industry publications such as assets, webinars, videos, and onsite searches

First and third party intent signals can fall into five categories:



1. **The competitive dive:** Who is consuming your content and the content of your competitors?



2. **High-value keyword search and sustained interest:** Who is researching keywords related to your product or service? Additionally, who is maintaining sustained or a spiked interest in those searches?



3. **Technographic alignment:** What organizations are in a competitive technology? Which ones are hiring for roles with experience in the technology your product leverages. Are they in technologies that you partner or integrate with?



4. **Who is in the news:** What's the media saying? Stay on top of recent organizational developments, including if they've had recent funding, executive hires, product releases, or financial reports.



5. **Social media engagement:** Check out the contact's social feeds. What groups and companies are they following? See if they've had recent interviews or public speaking sessions that relate to your product. Read their blog posts for content that aligns with your company's value.

Dig deeper to find strong intent signals

Intent falls on a spectrum; it's not binary. To understand a buyer's intent, we must consider their behavior holistically, according to the five types of low or high intent. But we must also distinguish between soft and strong intent.

To do that, we need to dig deeper about who the consumer is. It's not just about the contacts that are conducting the research, it's also about who those contacts are—what role they play in the organization's buying process. That's why understanding what their company titles are is so important.

Also, we must understand the value of the content our contacts are consuming. Not all content is created equally, and the deeper the level of content consumption, the more likely the contact has a higher intent to buy. Understanding what pages on your website your target accounts are looking at and how they are getting there will not only confirm buying intent, but it will also illuminate what your messaging should be.

Take Action: The specificity of keyword searches and how closely they align to your product or service are strong indicators of buying intent. For example, instead of identifying "marketing" as a keyword, use "B2B marketing," or better yet, "account-based marketing."

The Intent Scorecard: Identifying Strong Buying Intent Signals

Rate each item from 1 - 5 (1 = low affinity and 5 = high affinity. Then add up the ratings for the final score.)

RESEARCH

- Contacts are reading about the same topic across multiple days.
- They are researching competitor information.
- The articles they are reading tend to be older, showing they are performing vendor research versus just perusing the news of the day.
- Content consumption has been as recent as the past week.
- Google keyword searches are specific and are words my organization cares about.
- Score**

PERSONAL AND COMPANY QUEUES

- They are involved in speaking engagements, blog posts, or interviews whose subject matter are supported by or related to my product.
- The account's company is in a rapid growth period.
- The company is hiring for possessions that relate to my value proposition.
- The company has had a recent product release.
- They have undergone a recent merger or acquisition.
- Score**

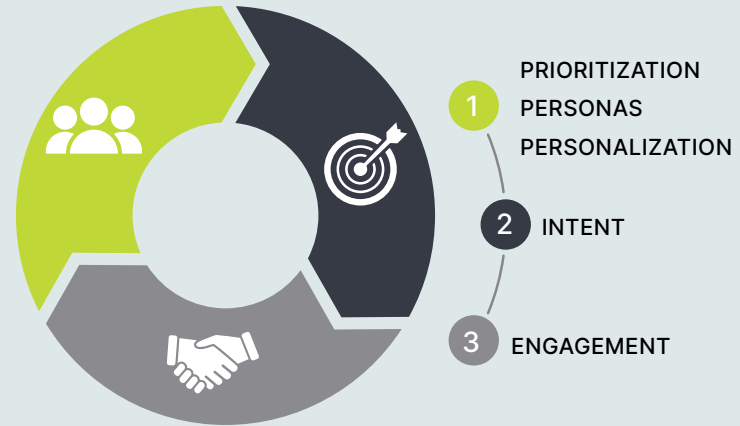
MARKETING ENGAGEMENT

- There is a recent spike in their engagement with one or more marketing channels.
- They have been completing form fills (for webinar attendance and other high value content) and are engaged in our email nurture campaigns.
- They are engaged on our site as a result of our personalized advertising.
- They attend sponsored events.
- They are engaged in our field marketing events.
- Score**

Total Score: _____ 0 - 25: Low Intent | 26-49: Moderate Intent | 50-75: Strong Intent

PIE, It's More than Dessert.

Yes, pie can be oh-so-delicious. But P.I.E. with intent, well that's downright irresistible. When you've got P.I.E. on your side, you know how to take action on intent and turn it into opportunities. In this chapter we explore the portmanteau: prioritization, personalization, personas, intent, and engagement.



Prioritization: For most of us experienced ABM'ers, we are working off a target account list. This is the list that everyone in the company rallies around. It has all the accounts your company will be targeting and focusing on. Now the hard part with that is the list can consist of thousands of accounts. You can't possibly treat all of those accounts the same, and you shouldn't be! One of the most important things you can do with your target account list is segment it to prioritize the accounts within it. That way, you can understand how to treat the accounts within your larger campaigns and outreach.

Personas: Once you understand what accounts you should be prioritizing (all within the target account list of course!), you'll need to understand who from those accounts you should be reaching out to. Personas allow sales and marketing to have a combined understanding of who will be in the buying committee. Outlining the goals, challenges, and KPIs (key performance indicators) of each persona is going to help you engage with them in a more personalized way because you'll specifically address the value proposition they most care about.

Personalization: Alright, so you've prioritized your target account list, figured out who your buying committee is, and what specific persona you need to target. Now you need to make sure you are personalizing your outreach to capture their attention!

How many ways can you personalize an email? Well, many. In fact, the levels of personalized segmentation can feel like a spiral to nowhere fast. So we've put together a checklist of the three main categories of intent to, hopefully, uncoil your personalization plan across your marketing strategy (including email, website, and advertising channels). You can leverage one or all three of these to make a lasting impression on your accounts.

Intent

A clear understanding of intent signals can support your ABM efforts from planning to execution, leveraging intent across persona identification, prioritization, personalization, and engagement. Leveraging intent across keyword searches, web engagement, and email engagement are great ways to reach your ABM goals. There are also other categories of intent that are worth exploring, as provided in the intent check list.

To start, you can use intent signals to build your target account list. Then you can further leverage intent to segment your accounts by order of priority and personalize your outreach. Intent can also power your understanding of who should be targeting at each account. At Demandbase, we use a combination of Demandbase (shocker), LinkedIn Sales Navigator, ZoomInfo, and our marketing automation system (MAS). By using these technologies, we can identify our target contacts by researching their keyword searches and locations. This data tells who is in the account's buying committee, and those people form our contact list.

Once you've built out your lists, you can integrate intent signals in your account-based marketing campaigns. From building zero-waste advertising and personalized website experiences to multi-channel nurturing campaigns that include email, direct mail, and field marketing, you can use intent for personalization at scale. Make sure your outplays focus on what is most important to that account. You want to be as helpful as possible, so outreach should be timely. The key here: You want to stay top of mind to your account!

The Intent Check List



Personal

- Self-Authored Content
- Speaking Engagements
- Panel Sessions
- Interviews, Blog Posts & Bylines
- New Role or Anniversary

Company

- Funding
- New Product Release
- Merger and Acquisitions
- Partnerships
- Financial Reports/10-Ks

CRM

- Past Conversations
- Sales Cycles
- Previous Customers
- Marketing Program Engagement (*e.g., website content, advertising & events*)

Take Action: Organizations targeting accounts showing intent and utilizing P.I.E. can see an increase in **conversion rates of 25-65%** (Demandbase did, you can too!)

Engagement

When someone comes to your website, you know they're interested in something you're providing. But what? If you understand exactly what they're interested in, you can leverage that insight in your outreach. Websites have peaks and valleys of content value. Some are higher in value than others. For example, higher-value pages would be a contact me page, a demo request page, customer case study page. If someone is visiting those pages, they are demonstrating strong intent signals.

By understanding how content aligns with the conversion journey, you can more efficiently create personalized experiences that meet your accounts where they are, grabs their attention, and drives their interest to the point of purchase.

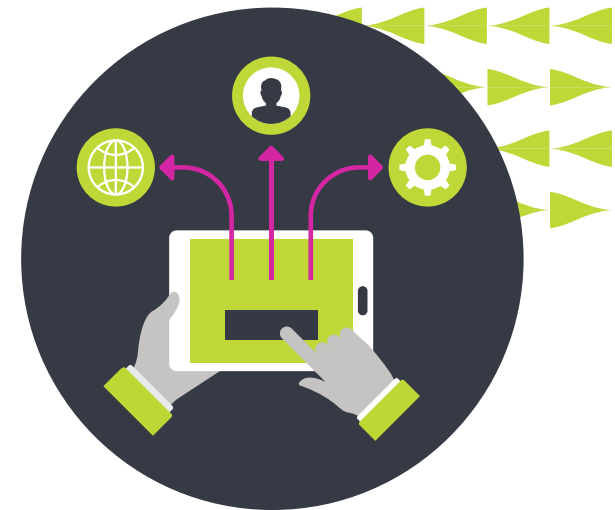
To wrap this up, by leveraging intent data to showcase the value proposition your accounts care about, you will provide a more consultative value, guiding them through the buyer's journey in a personalized, more efficient way. Make sure to eat the whole P.I.E. when leveraging intent to develop new accounts and nurture them through the purchase process!

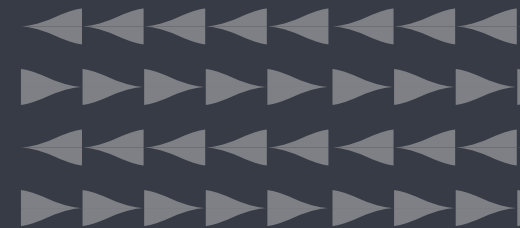
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The days of casting a wide net are over

Happily, the old days of relying just on the lead are so over! Using the intelligence that forms can provide is fine, but it can't be your only play. Today, there is much more insight available than a form fill to guide the efforts of marketing and sales teams. In fact, you can qualify a lead before it ever ends up on a spreadsheet. This means that sales reps can focus on daily activities that yield more results. Talk about efficiency.

Of course you want to be more productive. Of course you want your daily activity to yield more results. You want to spend your time landing fish, not tossing lines out into still waters day after day. In today's B2B world, it's all about the intent, not just the information in a form fill. Intent makes everyone happy, marketing and sales alike.





Demandbase is Smarter GTM™ for B2B brands. We help marketing and sales teams spot the juiciest opportunities earlier and progress them faster by injecting Account Intelligence into every step of the buyer journey and orchestrating every action. For more information about Demandbase, visit: www.demandbase.com.