BUYING GUIDE

From the Black Box to Revenue Metrics - Translating Buzz into Results

INTENT DATA.IO
THE RIGHT PEOPLE AT THE RIGHT TIME

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Executive Summary

The case for intent data is clear. If only 3 percent of the potential buyers for any given product or service are in the market at any given time (while 40 percent are poised to begin and 56 percent aren't interested), identifying and focusing on those buyers, and those close behind them, is the key to efficiency and effectiveness in revenue growth. That's been the Holy Grail of marketing and sales for years. After all, how many times have you heard a sales rep say, "If I'm sitting at the table, I win more than my fair share of deals. Just get me to the table!"

That's the promise of intent data. And practice shows it's more than just a theory. Fifty-percent increase in close rates and an 82 percent reduction in sell cycle have been attained.

It's a hot topic, and a lot of ink has been spilled on it. Yet black box solutions prevail, databases masquerade as intent data, theoretical predictive tools compete against actual activity observations, and most data only reports on account activity (missing the critical contact component). That simply doesn't reflect the day-to-day realities of increasingly personalized sales and marketing. To top it off, most data today is sold based on partnership integrations - not the actual quality/value of the data.

So with all the hype, bluster, smoke and mirrors, and even well-intentioned misrepresentation, the challenge is to know whether intent data might offer you value, and if so, how to compare options, pick the right one and implement it.

Pro Tip: It sounds simple, but it's often overlooked. Intent Data provides leads. Leads require active followup. You'll need a machine to optimize the value!

That's what this guide provides.

We dig into the world of real intent data and lots of other products with similar claims. We provide the tools you'll need to compare and select, and we'll explore use cases and tactics for implementation and execution.

And of course, we'll talk about privacy.

Behind all the technical jargon and differentiation, you've got one goal. Business growth. And that probably means qualified leads first and foremost. Any of these tools will provide leads.

Let's dig in.

Intent Data - **The Basics**

Let's start with some definitions. This is more complicated than it seems because there aren't any commonly accepted definitions for what intent data really is. And it might surprise you to know that you've already been using it even if you haven't subscribed. Generally, people talk about three types of intent data: **first-, second-, and third-party data.**

First-party intent data is the information you observe and collect in interactions with customers, prospects and visitors who interact with your website, email and social channels. Savvy marketers use this information to segment communications, score leads and create effective workflows. Salespeople use this data like "digital body language" to understand what's happening in the deal and sales process. If you have an email program, email tracking, website trackers, marketing automation, social listening and similar tools, you're already collecting, and hopefully using first-party intent data.

There are also software vendors to help you extract more insight from your first-party intent data. Idio.ai and PathFactory, for instance, help to orchestrate engagement around your content and facilitate prospects' buying journeys based on observations of their engagements on your site.

Second-party intent data is like first-party intent data, but it's collected by another company. Common examples of this include review sites and publishing networks. Typically users register for access to information and grant the right (probably embedded in the Terms and Conditions of Use/community membership) for the owner to share/sell their contact details and information on their behavior. In some cases, this is done anonymously (just account-level information but no contact information) and in others, the sale of this information as leads includes individual contact details.

G2 Crowd and TechTarget are two well-known providers of second-party intent data. G2 Crowd has massive traffic and the appeal of peer-to-peer reviews (in addition to $100M in backing). Many tech companies rely on G2 Crowd's information on account-level intent data to adapt their ABM. TechTarget uses its expansive network of sites and content to observe actions indicating intent. Many marketing and sales teams particularly value these leads which include information on the specific contact who's looking and taking action.

Third-party intent data is like the Wild West. The premise is to observe actions taken everywhere on the internet—not just on a single site or network of sites. The challenges are daunting. How can one company observe and aggregate signals from the entire internet? Further, how can they associate those actions with any identifiable attribute?

In order to overcome these challenges, third-party intent data typically uses one of three approaches:

- **Reverse IP Lookup** - As long as a company has a static IP address (not common among SMBs), then observations of "surges" or indicative activity from the address are interpreted as indications of account-level intent.

- **Media Exchange / Publishing Members** - In exchange for free, anonymous data, some publishing sites agree to provide "non-personally identifiable information from a publisher's website visits." That means account-level information. In some cases, cookies can be used within the network to identify actions which can be correlated to known users on your site. In other words, if they've converted on your property, and you've cookied them, their actions on sites that are part of the publishing network MAY be personally identifiable to you depending on the service you have.

- **Using Data From Ad Networks and Widgets** - Bidstream data (from ad exchanges) is one common source. Third-party data providers build on this because it can provide an enormous number of signals (as in billions/day). Customers who take a deep dive are often less enthusiastic when they discover the accuracy limitations of most of this data and are further concerned when they learn that simply being served an ad (not actually clicking it) is interpreted as intent.

The popular free website tools from AddThis and/or similar tools are another source. Websites accept use terms when they use the free tools that allow developers to collect and monetize all of the observed activity of the widgets and tools.

If users of publishing networks, widgets and ads on sites and haven't agreed to have their data shared, they might be unhappy to learn that it has been!

Well known third-party intent data sources include Bombora (typically sold through integrations with ABM tools or through Everstring and its partners) and TrueInfluence.

Pro Tip: Privacy is an understandable concern when it comes to Intent Data. Lattice Engines CEO Shashi Upadhyay provides a powerful primer in his LinkedIn article here (and we've included highlights in the Privacy section of this document here.)

There is **another third-party intent data methodology** that uses multi-variable linear regression analysis to correlate observed actions with a specific contact. This is the method that the LeadSift engine of IntentData.io data uses. This is distinct in several ways:

- It's built on all publicly available information that's independently observed and collected. Therefore there can be no potential violation of Terms of Use of data from various sources which might create an exposure.

- It provides the actual info of the individual taking the action when the action is individual in nature. IntentData.io also can provide company-level signals, such as recently funded and new office, which are inherently account-level in nature. In those cases we suggest a likely decision maker for outreach.

- It observes the activity across the entire public internet, not a limited network of sites, or those with specific installed tools.

Pro Tip: Understanding the nuance here is important to make the right choice. Are your typical buyers using static IP or not? Is the size of your targets small enough and typical buyer so easily identified that you can easily reach the right person? And is there only one buyer involved in choosing your product?

As a business person comparing tools and sorting through claims and technical jargon, there are two key points to take from this.

Account Data Versus Contact Data

Do you sell to accounts or to people? If your CRM stops at the company/account level, then most third-party intent data will work fine for you. However, if you actually engage with individuals—people with priorities, problems, aspirations and objectives—and use accounts as a tracking tool, then third-party intent data which cannot report on the actual engaged contact will often disappoint.

In other words, if you sell to IT leaders at enterprise companies and you know only that "some person" at CitiBank has engaged with "cybersecurity," then you're faced with an undesirable choice: Blasting the entire IT team with information that will likely be irrelevant to them (at great cost) or calling the switchboard to ask who in the IT department was searching. Not much of a choice.

Is there value in knowing that an unidentifiable person/people at an account are taking action? Of course. And if your typical account only has 10 employees, then that may be all you need. But in an era of increasingly personalized marketing and sales, it's simply inadequate to not know who the people are.

Now, you might say, "But lots of third-party data providers include contact details." That's correct. But the devil is always in the details. Remember that the background data is built on "non-personally identifiable" information. It's that simple.

In an implied acknowledgment of the fact that that's simply not enough, various data providers will "append" or "overlay" contact details on the intent signals. In other words, knowing that you really want to speak to a particular title/role/function/seniority, they'll search unrelated data sources to find the contact details of people who match your ideal buyer and send those to you as though that's the person who took the action.

They typically can't and don't know who actually took the action, but they report the data as though they know precisely who it was and many buyers may not be getting what they were led to believe they would.

But not every company needs to know who the individuals are. If you have a list of the key players at each target account, then you may be comfortable simply knowing the account is active enough to let you toggle on LinkedIn ads, personalized direct mail and other approaches.

Select the option that provides the info you need **and make an informed choice**.

The Data Sources

What range of sources do you want or need? And what strength of signal do you consider indicative of actual intent?

Behind fanciful names and grand assertions, the source of most third-party intent data is a real "black box." That means that users interpret and react without really understanding the context. They're told, "This person has intent to buy what you sell."

Make sure you're clear where the data is sourced so you can gauge the accuracy and relevance and incorporate it correctly into your marketing and sales process.

Granularity and Volume of Data

Better is Better . . . Not More

Volume of data is not a proxy for quality or value, although it's often sold that way. How many BDRs would you need to manage 1,000 intent data leads/day? Or to thoughtfully incorporate the data into your account-based marketing (ABM), conversational marketing and other strategies?

After unrelated contact details, the most common concern cited by users of intent data is the process of activation—or turning the leads into conversations, pipeline opportunities and revenue. Absent critical details of context, that's a process of brute force and expensive ads.

For instance, it's common that third-party intent data is sourced based on "topics." That's convenient up front—you can rely on someone else to decide what fits into that topic and you don't have to spend the time doing the detailed work to configure the algorithm according to your specific needs.

What's in the Data?

But what are the components of a "topic"? What's the taxonomy? If you select "Demand Generation" as a topic, does that include engagements with content on PPC? Marketing automation? Intent Data? TechTarget? Predictable Revenue?

Of course, you don't know. The price of the upfront convenience is opacity and lack of information. The alternative is intent data that's reported with the contextual details included for each lead. For instance, if you're trying to understand who's in the process of researching CRM, capturing every social interaction with SalesForce.com could provide a great lead volume or largely irrelevant data. If everything is aggregated under a topic, you'd never know.

In contrast, if you knew that someone took action with online content around specific terms like "pipeline management" and "best CRM" and "client tracking for HVAC contractors" you'd understand a bit about where they are in their buying journey. If you knew that they followed John Barrows or Bob Apollo, you'd understand something about the kind of sales force they have. And if you knew which specialized service a current customer was researching, your success team would know exactly how to approach the upsell opportunity to delight them and prevent churn.

Unlocking the Value of Data

It's that rich insight and context that represents the real value. The fact that some anonymous user took action behind an IP address doesn't help sell. Even the fact that a qualified buyer with the right title downloaded a whitepaper on a certain category of software doesn't necessarily provide all the context you'd like.

But seeing multiple people (as frequently happens when you know who the contacts are individually) from the same company engaging with related but different specific terms can help the marketing team to determine the problem they're trying to solve, the types of solutions they're considering, the competitors on the shortlist, and the various people on the buying team.

Pro Tip: Consider the relative value of data that provides the specific context of the action versus signal, which is aggregated under a topic with opaque components. Consider your marketing and sales approach. If you try to provide value rather than just play a numbers game, then you might need more context and insight.

Enabling Activation

That's where data is translated into revenue. That's the connection that normally impedes activation. On the one hand, companies simply show ads to anyone they can identify with an appropriate title and hope someone bites. On the other, they can build ABM workflows and sales templates and scripts which speak specifically to the issue prospects/customers have.

Parsing the Signals - The Anatomy of Detailed, Contextual, Contact-Level Data

The two key discriminators in third-party intent data are the important account (anonymous user) versus contact-level identification, and the source of the data. We've discussed those at length, but let's dive into what they mean in terms of actionable data that is fed into your CRM and marketing automation.

Granular, contextual intent data should provide the following:

- First & last name
- Work email & phone
- Title
- Company name & website
- City/state/country
- Industry
- Company size
- Twitter handle & LinkedIn profile.

> **This contextual information contrasts sharply with opaque "topic" feeds.**

It should also provide the following signals:

- Competitor engagement
- Key term engagement (in other words, took action on an article optimized around one of your key terms)
- Company recently funded
- Key role changes (e.g. CFO)
- Industry conference/Trade show engagement
- Influencer engagement
- New office
- New product
- Hiring
- Key contacts
- Social follows (prospect followed company & company followed prospect)

Signals should be refined with granularity to provide the context important to personalizing marketing and sales. For instance:

- Identifying the competitor, event or influencer with which engagement occurred
- Identifying the key term with which engagement occurred (and thereby problem to be solved, stage in buying journey, etc.)
- Specify the roles for which hiring is a leading indicator

Types of Services

While second-party data (like TechTarget) and typical third-party data (like Bombora) are probably the best-known intent data varieties, the buzz and lack of clear definitions in the space means that there are lots of adjacent solutions which are often conflated with real intent data. Further, some of these services overlap, and some vendors (and their customers) might feel strongly that they're miscategorized here.

Pro Tip: There are lots of overlapping services and solutions targeted at certain size companies at different stages in maturity. Define your goals first, then look for products that fit. Don't buy buzz.

These other product categories include:

Static Databases - These are valuable tools for marketing and sales, and teams have relied on them for years. Common examples include DiscoverOrg, ZoomInfo, LeadIQ and LinkedIn Sales Navigator. Quality and range of data vary by source. The gold standard has been periodic telephone verification. Today that's combined with technology-enabled mining and verification as well. Generally, these tools compliment rich intent data and you will likely use both. Recently, some databases have begun to incorporate some account-level third-party intent data as they recognize the market expectations are evolving from static to contextual information.

Website De-anonymizers - A great website may convert 5 percent of visitors. That means 95 percent are visiting anonymously. This set of tools aims to help identify those visitors who you've cookied but haven't converted. These tools include Lead Forensics, Leadspace, Voogy and Visual Visitor.

When comparing these tools to other intent data sources, the questions to ask relate to range and reach. You could well argue that visitors to your site are the most engaged potential prospects, and maximizing that latent resource is the highest priority. That's a valid argument. Extended, however, it also applies to those researching elsewhere and interacting with competitors. Should you walk away from those prospects?

If only 3 percent of the market are active buyers, not everyone buying searches all terms, and great non-branded organic search terms ranking 1-3 have a CTR of 25 percent, then you're probably only seeing half to 1 percent of the total potential market on your site—if you've done a really great job at identifying all the key terms and creating compelling content to rank, get clicked and engage. Additionally, this omits the critical information regarding competitor interactions that's important for marketing personalization, sales effectiveness and churn reduction.

Predictive Tools - There's a lot of growth and activity in this space. Some of it is fascinating science, and some is more like traditional data with a .ai domain and claims of amazing data mining. Typically tools insert first-party intent data (from your own properties) with second- or third-party signals. 6Sense, for instance, has built upon Bombora account-level third-party data and a second-party anonymous activity on the *Forbes* publishing platform.

Sophisticated lead scoring is often part of this model as well. For accounts with large historical databases, predictive tools will often mine leads, win and lose data to identify attributes of prospects/customers that correlate to success. That can be used to prioritize inbound leads, filter intent data and focus on likely target accounts.

Data Enrichment - Tools like Clearbit offer rich contextual information on website visitors, in addition to their own prospecting tools. Through reverse IP lookup, they also provide de-anonymization. This kind of information is helpful if, for instance, your ideal prospect uses a specific type of software or is in a specific industry. Real-time information can be used to enable tailored experiences (e.g. chatbots) accordingly.

Enterprise ABM Platforms - One of the most compelling use cases for intent data is in ABM. Executing ABM at scale is difficult and complex. Some platforms provide integrated enterprise ABM coordination, and they often they incorporate third-party intent data as an element of their service. In some cases, clients can purchase some form of blended predictive/third-party intent data, but the real focus of these platforms is on their powerful, integrated, enterprise-size ABM platform.

With the right data, and some reasonable marketing automation, even small companies and their middle market siblings can create effective ABM engines themselves.

Orchestrated Intent Data - Selecting the right intent data solution for your business will depend as much on how you'll handle the data as the data type, vendor, granularity and context that you select. Data without effective activation is of zero value, and activation is hard. It's technically complex and requires creativity, agility and rigorous execution. Some companies can manage it. Others think they can and discover they're falling short. And some recognize they're better off bolting on a program. Some companies use a variety of third-party intent data sources and they work to integrate intent data into the demand gen process.

Get What You Expect And What You Need

You have lots of options. If you sell a product with a global universe of only 50 customers and you've got pods of product marketers and sales who are consistently cultivating dialog with the key 50 people at each account, then you might only need a good, accurate, verified database.

Maybe you're a manufacturer at capacity and can't scale fast enough to worry about grabbing market share, but want to grab the low hanging fruit of your current website visitors. You might just need de-anonymization.

Or maybe you've got so many unmined leads in your database from years of marketing and poor follow-up, that you simply need predictive tools to know which ones your reps should focus on.

Third-party intent data isn't the only answer, and it's not the best answer for every company and situation. Armed with an understanding of the landscape, however, you can make an informed decision based on your business situation and priorities.

Use Cases

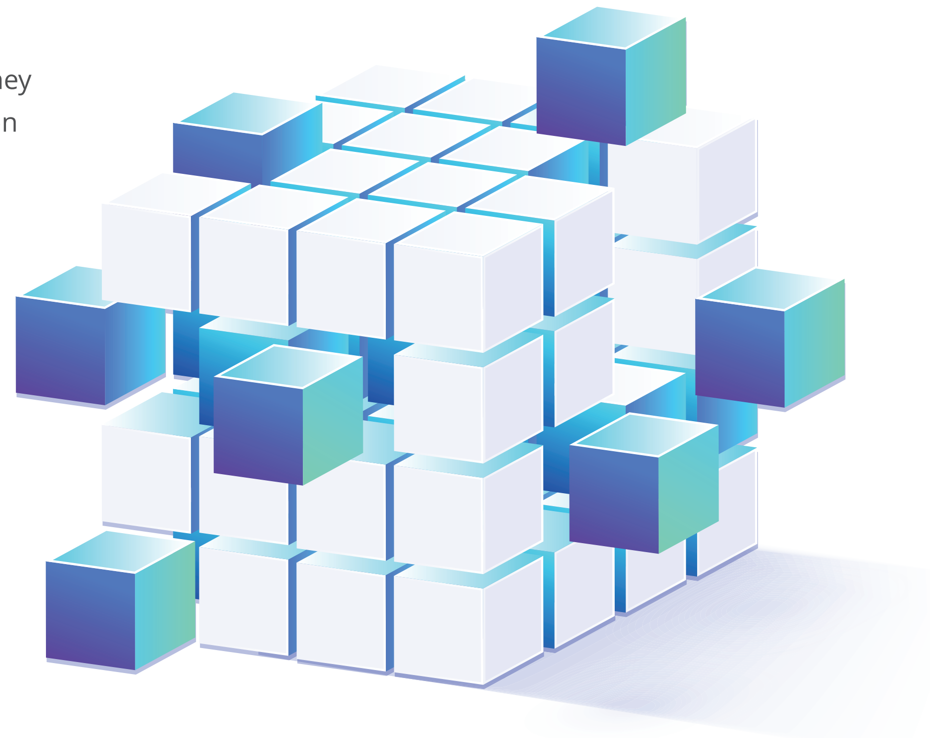
Beyond Leads

Most folks who are new to intent data visualize a land of milk and honey. Qualified leads galore will occupy a sales team dialing for dollars and securing orders just waiting to be written.

Reality is somewhat different.

These leads are a form of raw intelligence. They need to be analyzed and processed. Activation is key, particularly for companies that see them simply as sales leads.

There are several common use cases for contact-level third-party intent data.



Demand Generation

This is the default application for most rapid-growth companies. And the most common buyers of third-party intent data are demand gen teams. Demand gen folks integrate it into their programs in various ways.

The simplest and most common is to provide likely leads and prioritization guidance to the BDRs & SDRs to help them focus on the most active/promising leads for outbound prospecting and inbound follow-up.

Another interesting demand gen application is enhancing conversational marketing. By incorporating contextual information from granular third-party contact-level intent data, chatbots can be personalized for website visitors attracted to the site by outbound BDR prospecting. Particularly when combined with firmographic insight, this will create a natural and compelling prospect experience to accelerate the sales process.

Custom audiences for nurturing and conversion ads can also be very effective. By targeting those specific users (email match rates are often higher than expected >50 percent) who have demonstrated intent, targeted ads are more effective than when shown to a broad audience.

Event Marketing

Event marketing is all the rage these days. You're not a legit, rapid growth tech firm if you don't have your own event or sponsor others while aspiring to have your own. Huge portions of marketing budgets are directed at events, and filling seats is the imperative. Third-party intent data can be used by both organizers and sponsors.

Organizers can use the data by observing direct event signals (hashtag, website, social, speaker profiles, etc.) they can match against unknown, past and registered attendees. They can use that information to focus direct outreach and nurture conversion ads to custom audiences according to the details of the profile.

Organizers can also use broader signals to identify folks that would probably want to attend if they knew of the event. What are the problems that the event will help attendees solve? What are the hashtags, influencers and key topics that will be involved? Those leads are a great custom audience for a different type of awareness ad nurturing and perhaps special offers on registration.

Sponsors can use intent signals to identify leads likely to attend and target them in advance with offers and messaging. Sponsors can also target leads who are interacting with competing sponsors. In both cases, the data will provide leads for outbound prospecting as well as paid ad nurturing.

Account-Based Marketing (ABM)

Recognizing current activity and inertia from accounts on long target lists helps to prioritize efforts. Identifying key players involved in a complex buying discussion broadens the audience for nurturing ads with tools like Triblio and Terminus. Receiving context on the specific actions of each player helps strategic sales teams understand where each player is in their thinking and buying journey—even the problem they're trying to solve. Observing competitive interactions provides critical sales intelligence.

The Achilles heel of most ABM is the disconnect between account-based intent and the individuals that are engaged in the discussions and planning.

Ask most ABM tools to provide that intent, and the answer is often some version of, "That's technically impossible," or "We'd love to, but that's illegal." That's frustrating for companies that work hard to identify ideal target accounts but know that in order to succeed, they have to create personalized marketing and create compelling, authentic, sales interactions.

Certainly, there's some value in knowing that "person A" in a target company has taken action (even if you don't know who they are) and using that as a justification to show ads, or initiate direct outreach to the people who hold titles that are most likely to be involved in a buying decision. But was it them? Are they even aware of someone's research several layers below? Are they a good fit?

Great practitioners of ABM speak of the difficulty of managing the process at scale. It's all dependent on personalization, and third-party intent data, which doesn't provide contact details and identify other players likely involved in the process, is simply providing a whiff of the smoke and inferring that there's fire.

In contrast, contact-level third-party intent data fuels the ABM process with granular, actionable intelligence, as well as insight into the thoughts and buying roles of the 6.8 buyers that CEB predicts are involved.

Pro Tip: Contact-level third-party intent data that provides granular contextual information creates amazing opportunities for elusive marketing and sales alignment. The tools that marketing normally owns now provide real-time, actionable insights to help salespeople win and save deals. Struggling with silo competition and inefficiency? Intent Data might provide exciting results.

Strategic Sales

How many deals in your pipeline are stagnant? Why are they? How many of your deals end in no decision? How often does a different player emerge at the last minute to disrupt a "done deal?"

These are common scenarios, aggravated as buying teams grow and consensus decisionmaking becomes more popular.

Salespeople selling complex deals always need more information about what's happening with key players. Who is working in the background? What are various players thinking? Who's onboard and who is looking for alternatives? While third-party intent data can't replace highly skilled, creative salespeople, contact-level data and granularity of insights can prove to be a treasure trove for skilled and insightful salespeople.

Success, Loyalty and Churn Reduction

What would you do if you knew current customers were researching competitors and related solutions? Would you ignore it? Or how would you react if you knew that they were searching for a product or service that you also sell, but they've never bought and may not remember you can provide as part of an integrated offering?

These scenarios—reducing churn and increasing cross/upsell among existing customers—are huge priorities for many rapid-growth companies. But the data, the intelligence upon which preemptive actions can be taken, is often missing. Too often churn awareness arises when the non-renewal notification arrives, and the upsell is a scramble to discount to avoid letting the camel's nose under the tent.

Detailed, contact-level intent data enables success team efforts in both areas.

Competitive Monitoring

Google News and press releases are the common currency of product marketers working to understand and parse the competitive landscape. They are helpful but barely begin to capture the texture of complex business environments.

Detailed intent data provides a rich source of aggregate information and lots of opportunity for deep-dive analysis (e.g. around specific topics, events, industries, competitors, etc.).

This is critical insight that can enrich the competitive marketing capability for companies in industries where multiple vendors and good products create a sense of parity for many buyers.

The End Result: **Marketing and Sales Alignment**

It's a fond dream among CEOs and CROs, and one rarely realized. Imagine a team of growth and product marketers working collaboratively with inside, field and channel sales, and even supporting the customer success team.

The functions, goals and KPIs for the teams are fundamentally different. That's why it's such a vexing problem—one that has defied a great solution for thousands of companies and many years.

Will great contact-level third-party intent data fix that on its own? Absolutely not. A toxic culture will take more than collaboration to repair. But in most companies, teams of good people want to work collaboratively—they just need the glue to enable it.

In those cases, the detailed insights available through intent data can simultaneously invigorate marketing demand gen AND provide the tools and insights they need to explicitly support their sales and success colleagues.

The natural collaboration fosters alignment. And that could provide as powerful a boost to your growth as the data itself.

What to Expect When You Buy

A Solid Foundation

Do you understand your buyers? Do you know what a good prospect looks like? Do you have a clear sales methodology (that's different than a process)? Do you have well-developed battle cards and strong competitive information? Do you even have a process for identifying target accounts? Do you know the business issues your buyer is trying to solve? What business resources do you have to work the leads? How will marketing and sales collaborate? What ad budget do you have for PPC nurturing ads?

These are questions that you'll have to answer as you launch the process, and it's best to chew on them in advance.

If you select a data solution that's simply a database or one that requires you to select three or six or 10 "topics," then you can delay this work until you're receiving leads. They'll have to be answered eventually, though, so why not now?

You may find that the process of thinking through these questions, the resulting introspection and the conclusions you draw will reveal a landscape that suggests a different version of intent data (perhaps even a reboot of the growth function).

You're really better off doing this first.

Building a Custom Algorithm

This is going to take some work. The alternative is to select a data source that only asks you to pick a couple of topics and take whatever leads you get. That's easier up front for sure, but you can probably guess at the back-end implications.

Plan on providing lists (names and URLs) of customers, competitors, influencers, events, target accounts and key terms that would indicate intent at different stages in the buying journey. You'll also pull together important hashtags, details on your ideal buyer (job titles, functions, seniority) and firmographics (size, industry, location). This free template is available to help with the process.

All these factors are baked into the algorithm. That takes a bit of time, and it takes a bit of patience. Databases let you sift through verified names immediately. Third-party intent data based on topics just spits out the topic data. But a custom algorithm takes time to learn and to mature.

Similarly, your interaction with the data will lead to lessons learned. In some cases, you'll gain insight to tweak the algorithm to yield better optimized results over the first month or two. In other cases, you'll have even more radical revelations—some companies even realize they've been incorrectly positioning their product or trying to sell to the wrong target group.

Integration - Yes or No?

Many intent data services tout native integrations with common CRM and marketing automation platforms. There's no doubt that immediately reflecting intent signals in alerts to salespeople can be incredibly valuable, particularly within target accounts and ABM playbooks, as well as pending opportunities. It's at the core of "operationalizing" your data.

But should all intent data be flushed into the CRM, particularly when it's not opted-in and can't be included in marketing email campaigns until there's interest established? Some of it will be noise, particularly if you're collecting "leads" that have been shown an ad exchange ad. Some may have potential, but aren't a great fit. Some might provide great competitive insight when viewed as trends and in aggregate but not as individual records in the CRM.

Indiscriminately adding records to a marketing automation system often involves a carrying cost. That cost depends on the platform, but there's often an incremental cost per thousand contacts. Third-party intent data could easily add >2,000/week.

Consider a system that will let you create multiple, segmented delivery options. Perhaps one campaign that filters target accounts and pending deals is immediately fed into the CRM, while a list of bottom-of-the-funnel signals is reviewed in a CSV by the BDRs every day, and a list of all data is reviewed as a CSV by the marketing team weekly. You may even find that sorting, filtering and pivot table options are critical to understanding large scale-trends and spotting opportunities.

You'll decide what's right for you, but as a guideline, any data requiring ACTION should be imported. The Account-Based Marketing Intent Data Onboarding Workflow provides a helpful visualization. Any data benefiting from ANALYSIS may be better off delivered in a format to facilitate that.

Activation

How will the leads be nurtured? What's your process for outbound prospecting (methodology, steps, cadence, etc.)? What's a good call-connect rate depending on the stage in buying journey? Who will create the copy and graphics for the Facebook nurturing and conversion ads? Who will integrate the intent data with your chat playbooks? How many contacts should you be touching per account in order to increase success rates?

These are the kinds of questions you'll face as the data starts to come in. For companies accustomed to second-party intent data leads, this will be a bit of a transition. For companies familiar with static lists, this creates an entirely different usage approach. And for companies that have grown accustomed to account-level intent data, there's a whole additional set of steps that are required to unlock the value embedded in granular context and specific contact details.

The Privacy Question

If you're using or considering intent data, certainly privacy is a pressing question today.

There are three elements to consider.

- How your data is sourced and what exposure you might have
- How you use the data
- The "Creepy Factor"

> Lattice Engines CEO Shashi Upadhyay lays out the considerations in his article "Why your Intent data is becoming illegal and what to do about it" Highlights include:
>
> "If you care about GDPR compliance, make sure your Intent provider is not using AddThis as their primary data-source....From a compliance perspective, Intent providers relying on bidstream stand on very weak ground...While providers based on bidstream and AddThis can promise higher volume of Intent data, they can't deliver on compliance with consent requirements."

Data Source

Is the data you're using collected in any way that violates Terms of Use of other sites or tools? By using it are you creating potential exposure for your company?

It's likely that the data you're using or considering is probably OK. Opaque and convoluted Terms of Use may make it difficult to ascertain, especially if they're several levels removed for data acquired through publisher networks and website applets.

And you can always use the *New York Times* cover story test:
Have you satisfied yourself that the source of your data isn't on the edge of what's appropriate?
Would you be completely comfortable justifying your research, confidence and use of it?

At the very least, make questions around the data source part of your product/vendor comparison process. If you're comfortable with the candor of the answer, that may be a good proxy for the appropriateness of the data.

Data Use

Third-party intent data provides you a golden opportunity to be an even more responsible marketer by focusing your message in a way that will be genuinely helpful to people who are currently active.

That being said, they haven't opted-in to your mass email list, nor consented to certain other uses of their data. It's up to you and your team to use the data responsibly to create a better experience for prospects and customers and drive mutually beneficial results for your company.

Don't Be a Creep

The granularity of context and individual contact details make high-quality third-party intent data incredibly powerful. It means that you can actually put helpful information in front of the right people when they need it. Using a Challenger Sales™ approach (or other outcome-based methods), great marketers and salespeople will do exactly that.

Remember, these prospects don't know what you know, and clumsy sales execution like saying, "Wait, you said you were buying from me, so why are you still taking action on my competitor's content?" will sour prospects quickly and obviate the value of the data.

Use the information carefully to help, not harass. Use empathy.

Pro Tip: IntentData.io data is publically available and GDPR- and ICO-compliant. However, it's up to you to use it responsibly and within the guidelines your organization has for compliance with applicable marketing and data privacy laws

Subscription Considerations

Some intent data is sold by the lead (e.g. very specific second-party intent data). Most is sold on a subscription basis, and providers generally seek to lock customers into the longest feasible subscription.

That may earn you a discount, but what's in your interest as the buyer? What's a reasonable subscription duration?

How Fast Does Your World Change?

The answer to that probably depends on some other questions. How frequently do your prospects' online behaviors change? How confident are you in the quality of the data you're considering? Have you compared it side-by-side in a controlled test against other options? What might AI bring to the intent data space in the near future? What new signals might be collected and reported that would be helpful but aren't currently available from any provider? Which collection methodology supports the fastest adaptation? Do you generate the same number of PPC and inbound leads per week or month? Why does that vary?

The digital world is extremely fluid. Just in the intent space, early 2019 has seen both new Series A funding for a Scandinavian company with interesting potential, and consolidation as Aberdeen acquired Mintigo.

As you look to strike the optimal balance between economy of time and money (subscription discounts for longer duration and avoiding researching too frequently) versus flexibility to respond when circumstances change you should **plan for long enough to prove the concept, but short enough to preserve your options.**

How Long Does it Take to Know if it Works?

Generally, it takes a minimum of three months to have a full sense of how effective intent data will be for your organization or to compare data solutions side-by-side. A really robust algorithm that's custom built for your company, ideal buyer and buying journey details will take some time to tweak and mature. Some sites offer the opportunity to select a topic and get an immediate sampling of the representative leads you'd expect from a pre-built topic cluster, and the incongruity of some of those initial samples may give you immediate cause for concern. During that initial three months, you'll have a chance to experiment with different activation options (custom audiences for social ads, BDR outreach, etc.) and by the end you'll certainly have a good sense of likely value, and the resources required to fully unlock that value.

And then you need some time to actually execute at scale. Plan on three months for a reliable indication and six months for fully developed operational insights and measurable, meaningful results.

Why a One-Year Subscription?

Intent Data is a bit different than the SaaS products many mid-market tech companies are accustomed to buying. There's no good freemium version (at least with custom-built algorithms), and it takes time to let leads work through your process.

Find a vendor that's realistic about how long you'll need to get proficient, but confident enough in their data (or free of opportunistic investor backing that demands long-term lockups) to provide quarterly subscriptions with cancellation prior to any renewal, for any reason.

Pro Tip: There's no reason to commit to long-term subscriptions for intent data. Technology is changing, buyer behaviors are changing and markets are fluid. But be realistic: understand that you'll have to work at this for three to six months to really assess the value and unlock the important lessons and best practices for your systems and prospects.

Conclusion

Intent data, in its many varieties and versions, offers enormous potential value to rapid-growth companies.

But it's an evolving space where traditional list vendors circulate with both legitimate AI groundbreakers and investor-backed opportunistic businesses.

If you're responsible for demand gen performance or carry a P&L, we hope that this guide has provided some clarity and insight into your options and how you might select the one best suited for your requirements.

It might not come as a big surprise that we believe contact-level, granular and contextual third-party intent data is often the best answer. It draws from activity around the entire internet, yet delivers the critical information that's necessary for both sales and marketing to unlock the value.

However you decide to proceed, take stock of your full range of options and make the right decision for your business and objectives not simply based on the most seductive claims.