



Intent Data Applications and Challenges in ABM Across the Account Lifecycle



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Introduction

The need to lead with data in marketing

Digital has become the destination for B2B selling and buying. As such, buyers today demand a digital-first engagement because they are more comfortable conducting most of their research themselves before interacting with a seller. This places more responsibility on marketers to closely follow buyers and guide them to make informed buying decisions. In this pursuit, marketers need to become not just more data-driven but adopt new data sources that help them accurately track the buyer's journey and further orchestrate them with personalized engagement.

B2B buyers
spend only
15% of their
buying journey
interacting with
brands.
Gartner

The rise of the era of independent research in B2B buying leaves out 85% of the buying journey from the view of the sellers. However, there is also a clear advantage for marketers to leverage the digital footprints buyers leave during their research process. Today, marketing technologies have evolved so much that there are a host of signals available for marketers to leverage at every stage of the buying journey. One such signal that is becoming popular with marketers is intent data. Primarily liked by marketers for its ability to help surface in-market accounts, intent data has become the guiding light for marketers practicing Account-Based Marketing. Let's understand why intent data has found such a special place among ABM marketers, how they are currently leveraging it and its complete potential.

01 Intent data for ABM success

As budgets shrink, markets become unfavorable and the mandate to do more with less becomes increasingly more vocal, marketers need clear signals to guide their marketing force. The need for precision in every area of revenue marketing from understanding buyer journeys to personalization efforts has brought more dependence on intent signals.

Amidst all the praise for intent data applications in ABM programs, there are two observations that highlight the need for smarter use of intent data.



Intent data aligns ABM teams

ABM is a trusted B2B marketing program that relies on the close collaboration of the sales, marketing and customer success functions. Increasingly, we see these teams using intent data to collectively enhance the targeted nature of ABM programs. Across both sales and marketing functions, intent data has become a popular source for identifying in-market buyers, while CS teams prefer intent data for its ability to help identify churn signals.

While this clearly highlights that organizations can use intent data to foster cross-functional collaboration of revenue teams, it is important to be able to apply it at every stage of the account lifecycle to drive ABM performance.



Combining intent data

Today, many organizations either concentrate on their own engagement data or rely on intent data from different providers. For ABM programs, this often means either a strong emphasis on generating first-party engagements, mainly through ads, or a direct use of third-party intent data. This narrow approach to data usage can prevent marketers from uncovering vital buyer insights. To truly understand the buyer's journey, it's essential to integrate both engagement and intent data, capturing insights at every stage of the funnel and engaging with buyers effectively.

Let's understand the applications of intent data across the customer lifecycle and how its strengths can be optimized through contextualization.

02 Intent data use cases across the ABM lifecycle

The first step in any ABM program is selecting a Target Account List to run after. Then, you need to build relationships before taking your solution to these named accounts. It becomes imperative to track these accounts to know when they are searching for solutions similar to yours. This is where intent data becomes highly effective. However, intent data has become a critical signal for marketers to impact the complete set of growth motions.



Acquisition

The primary use of intent data for ABM is identifying accounts that are actively looking to make a purchase. Having precise insights into which accounts are researching and what solutions they are interested in can give you a significant edge over the competition. It's no surprise that many marketers rely heavily on intent data to kickstart their ABM strategies.

According to Bombora, 65% of ABM efforts are dedicated to acquisition efforts. This underscores the need for application of intent data in acquisition motions. Intent signals ensure you have the two most important sets of intelligence that drives ABM: timely identification of in-market accounts and personalization insights.



Net New Acquisition

ABM, by definition, focuses on pursuing a specific list of named accounts. However, relying solely on a limited number of accounts can make it challenging to meet revenue targets or achieve predictable growth. In such situations, intent data can be a game changer. By identifying look-alike accounts that resemble your existing customers and demonstrate high intent, you can broaden your ABM list beyond your Target Account List (TAL).

Meeting your pipeline goals or exceeding them becomes easier when you set up your systems to capture intent signals on fresh ICP accounts. We'll discuss this later in our section of intent data contextualization.

5% of your target accounts are in-market.



Retention

While every other marketer talks about using intent data for acquisition motions, it is quickly gaining popularity in retention programs. Marketers can set up whatever system they have in place for tracking intent data to identify existing customers researching competitor brands or solutions. At a basic level, these churn signals can be acted upon by setting up an always-on marketing workflow for such segments of accounts and continuously adding such churn-intent customers to the workflow. And engaging such accounts with various other churn-specific tactics.



Upsell and Cross-sell

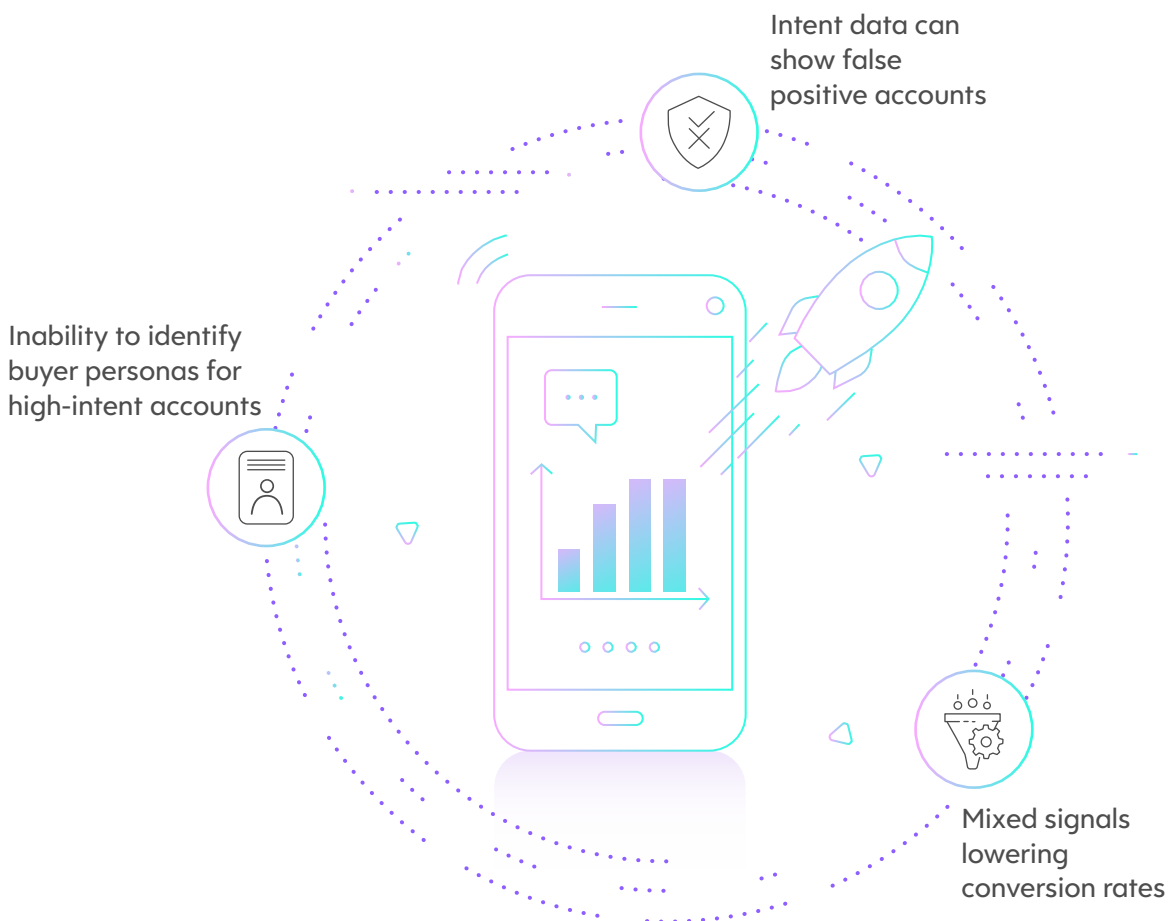
Imagine if you could pinpoint which of your existing accounts are exploring your other products or services. This could transform your cross-sell and upsell efforts. Intent data can make this possible by revealing which solution categories your customers are actively researching, provided you configure it to track this information effectively. Whether they are searching a separate offering or a bunch of solutions you provide, the opportunities for upsell and cross-sell are much easier to identify with intent data.

While all these look like you could simply achieve them by purchasing intent data from a vendor, there are certain nuances to using intent data. Understanding these nuances and acting on them is critical to successful use of intent data for revenue motions.

03 Challenges in using intent data for ABM

A key challenge for marketers using third-party intent data is that vendors often supply raw, unfiltered data. Organizations must ensure that the intent data they acquire is relevant to their specific topics or keywords. For businesses with multiple product offerings, it's crucial to tailor the intent data to each product to avoid being overwhelmed by irrelevant information. Without this level of specificity, your ABM program risks being diluted by extraneous data.

While intent data is seen as the key to the puzzle of identifying quality prospects, there are inherent challenges that marketers need to solve while using it.





Inability to identify buyer personas for high-intent accounts

Intent data typically comes as anonymized information at the account level. To advance high-intent accounts through the funnel and reduce the sales cycle, it's essential to understand the buyer personas within those accounts. This is where many marketers encounter difficulties.

Targeting entire accounts can be time-consuming and resource-intensive. To make your ABM program more effective and scalable, you must focus on targeted marketing efforts. So, how can you refine your list of buyer personas, particularly in large accounts, to achieve greater precision?



Intent data can show false positive accounts

Marketers need to be aware of the potential for false positives when using intent data. False positives often occur when organizations target overly broad categories of intent signals. To mitigate this, intent topics should be focused on specific business areas, and it's important not to rely solely on intent data. It is just one part of the overall picture. Organizations should develop their own processes to refine the intent signals from third-party vendors. Without this, the misalignment between sales and marketing efforts is likely to increase.



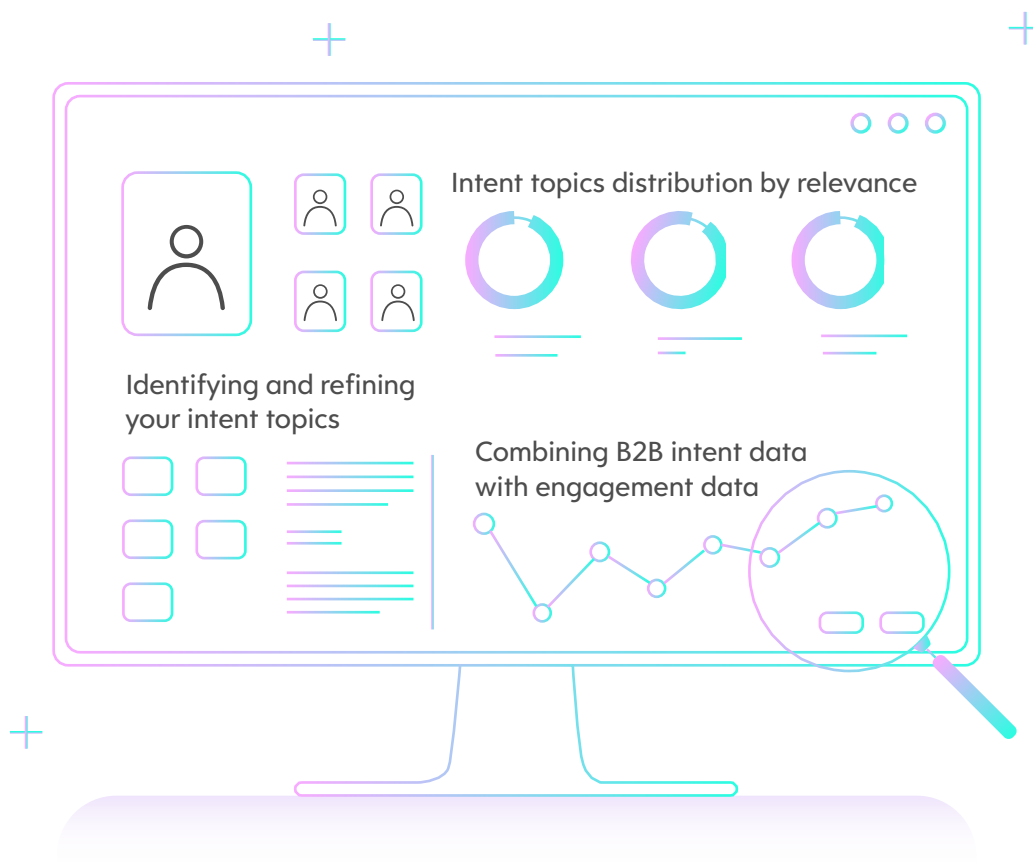
Mixed signals lowering conversion rates

Since intent data mainly indicates research activity, there's no guarantee that all high-intent accounts will be suitable prospects. You might find accounts that don't align with your targeting criteria demonstrating strong interest in your chosen topics. Additionally, consider that an intern or other employees outside your target personas may be exploring solutions in your category without any intention to purchase. This could also lead to an increase in intent for the account. If you include these accounts in your in-market list without proper validation, you risk sending your SDRs and sales teams on a fruitless search. Everyone's revenue KPIs get hit and team alignment hurts.

04 Contextualizing intent data

Although intent data has emerged as a crucial signal of buying intent in B2B marketing, it doesn't always indicate immediate purchasing intent. There are many reasons an account might be actively researching and engaging with topics related to your solution. Since the data is anonymized at the contact level, we have no insight into the personas of the individuals conducting the research.

Intent data will help you sharpen your ABM program only if you make it contextual to your business. The gaps arising from using intent data without any filters and processing could be fixed by aligning your intent signals with your ICP. Organizations need to develop stronger intent strategies to face the ABM execution challenges. Below are some of the ways marketers can look at refining their intent strategy for their ABM program.





Identifying and refining your intent topics

It is essential that any B2B intent data you obtain from your provider focuses on topics relevant to your solution. Identifying critical business topics and keywords should be one of the first steps when sourcing third-party data. While you may not have a perfect set of keywords right from the start, there should be a process in place for continuously refining these topics.

Your vendor may either provide only raw data or offer processed data as well. In either case, it's beneficial to have your own system or process for filtering intent signals based on your relevant keywords. This will enable you to create a more targeted intent-based ABM program.



Intent topics distribution by relevance

You may have numerous keywords or topics that you consider relevant to your offering, but not all of these will carry the same weight. Start by categorizing your topics based on their relevance and assigning different scores to each category. This scoring mechanism will help you ensure that incoming intent signals align more closely with your Ideal Customer Profile (ICP). This is just one foundational approach to enhance the relevance of intent data for your ICP. You can also develop more advanced and robust scoring systems or utilize a platform that supports such customization.



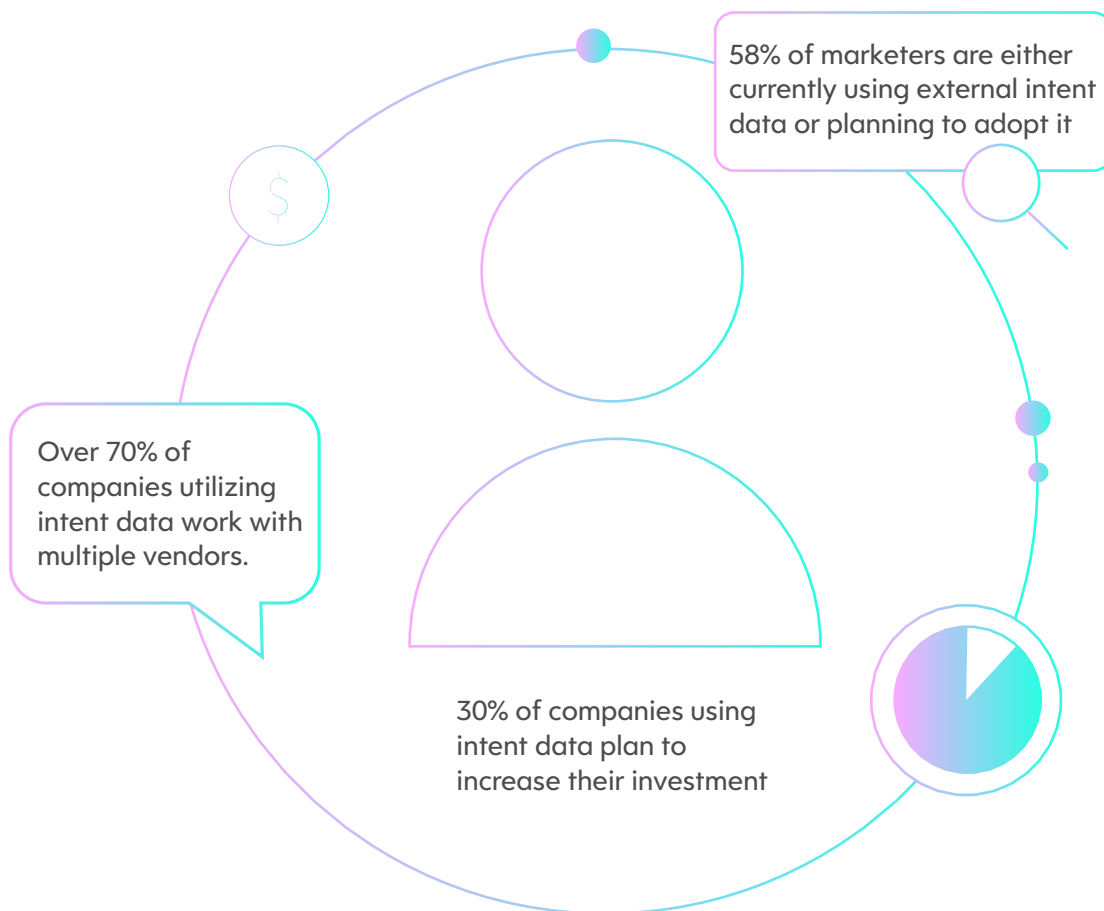
Combining B2B intent data with engagement data

Many organizations and marketers tend to rely solely on either their first-party data or third-party data. Some swear by their engagement data, while others prefer the convenience of using third-party data for their ABM execution.

What many fail to recognize is the value of combining both types of data. Engagement and intent data can be used to validate each other. On their own, neither provides a definitive indicator of buying intent. However, by integrating these two datasets, marketers gain sufficient intent strength to accurately understand the buyers' journey. This approach helps qualify the right accounts for marketing and SDR activities.

05 Should you invest in Intent data

According to Forrester’s Q4 2022 Global B2B Marketing Tech Tide Survey, 58% of marketers are either currently using external intent data or planning to adopt it. The role of intent data has evolved from basic prospecting to influencing the entire lifecycle of target accounts. Whether it’s aggregating intent signals to identify accounts for retention programs or uncovering cross-sell and upsell opportunities, intent data offers a wide range of possibilities.



Over 70% of companies utilizing intent data work with multiple vendors. While sourcing intent data from different providers might give you the comprehensive set of data to decode your buyer's journey, bringing all this data together and deriving coherent insights from them could be challenging. The best bet is to select the platform that is designed to help you configure your intent topics by relevance, recency and frequency of signals.

In an era of tight marketing budgets, where efficiency is paramount, intent data provides a crucial focused approach. Targeting marketing and sales outreach efforts exclusively at active buyers can lead to reduced spending by increasing efficiency. It's no surprise that 30% of companies using intent data plan to increase their investment, compared to only 10% that intend to cut back.

Users of intent data across various maturity levels have reported its benefits in different revenue functions. Despite these positive outcomes, there remains significant untapped potential. Most organizations, including even the most advanced adopters of intent data, have only explored a few basic use cases. To see greater revenue success with intent data, they must extend its use cases across the customer lifecycle.

Learn how BambooBox can help you maximize intent data benefits in your ABM program

BambooBox It Works is the only AI-first ABM platform designed for data-driven GTM teams. It aggregates your GTM data, continuously enriches it with external intelligence, and eliminates the need for multiple vendors. BambooBox unifies the buyer's journey, providing real-time insights and precise targeting for superior business outcomes.

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