

# Intent data:

Stop leaving warm leads on the table,  
and join the data revolution





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# Foreword



David Rowlands,  
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Intent data is not a new concept for B2B marketers. In fact, they already have a pretty good understanding of what it is, so why is it not being used to its full potential?

The answer is twofold: confusion or trepidation around how to use it; and an incomplete understanding of the benefits it can deliver.

With that in mind, we thought it was high time that B2B marketers heard from the best in the business about just why you need to start thinking about intent data seriously. By reading this report, you'll learn:

- › Why now is the time to start looking at intent data seriously.
- › The benefits of intent data. Specifically, how it can help you target dynamic audiences in a timely manner and help you to stop leaving warm leads on the table.
- › The challenges that marketers face when it comes to using intent data, and the steps you can take to get on the right track.
- › The impact of the pandemic on intent data's importance.

With more and more of the buyer journey happening on the buyer's terms, it's about time marketers learnt as much about their audience as humanly possible, so they can deliver the right message at the right time in the right channel. With that in mind, can marketers afford not to look at intent data?



# The Dun & Bradstreet perspective



**Adam Leslie,**  
European sales and  
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Buyer behaviours have changed entirely. Think of any reasonably sized purchase you have made, such as a holiday, and you more than likely searched a few sites, read a few reviews, watched a few video tours and narrowed it down to two or three options without engaging a single provider. It's the same in the business world, where the majority of the buyer decision is made before the organisation is engaged.

Getting in front of the right accounts at the right time is a challenge that every marketer faces. We spend vast sums marketing our products (the beginning of the process), but we then do very little to aid the middle and largest part of the buying process described above. Instead, we 'wait' for the

far smaller subset of businesses to make contact with us (the end part of the process).

Waiting for the leads to come to you means you are missing revenue, so we created our buying intent solution – D&B Buyer Intent – which allows organisations to identify their in-market audiences that are displaying early-stage buying signals by mapping billions of digital content engagements across the web to more than 420 million companies in the Dun & Bradstreet Data Cloud.

At Dun & Bradstreet, we have put this solution to work to help find our own in-market prospects, and the results show a 13% uplift in conversion rates. It was very easy to put into action – here are a few pointers:

## **1. Pick a simple use case and value measurement:**

For our own Dun & Bradstreet test and learn process, we measured incremental sales, number of email opens, click throughs, sales qualified leads and conversions. These were easiest to measure and would gain the most internal traction.

## **2. Pick the easiest initial implementation option:**

Providers such as Dun & Bradstreet can offer intent signals direct to a salesperson via an app, email or CRM, and, to marketers, it can link straight into an MAP or CDP for easy activation. This removes the internal hurdle of acting on time-dependent information and gets you live with minimal spend.

## **3. Test two or three paths of action with a small focused group:**

Prove success with early adopters in sales, and expand from there; test nurture emails that will help the recipient during the research phase.

To get started, Dun & Bradstreet can provide you with a free reach report so you can understand the exact leads you would have received and give you the business case material you need for the start of the new journey. Simply contact us at [marketinguk@dnb.com](mailto:marketinguk@dnb.com) for more information.



## Section 3

# Self-serve and digital-first: The modern B2B customer journey

There are perhaps very few B2B marketers still plying their trade that will remember the early days of the B2B customer journey. It was a relatively simple and straightforward affair. The telephone was the preferred method for first point of contact. Email was typically used to iron out the kinks. And face-to-face interaction was key to clinching the deal.

The modern reality is so far removed from this linear past that it's easy to look on this bygone era as some fantastical *Mad Men*-esque episode, complete with dapper suits, boardrooms choked with cigar smoke, and Scotch in the mornings. Nowadays – along with more casual work dress, smoking banned indoors, and pre-afternoon drinking increasingly frowned upon – the B2B customer journey is almost unimaginably complex, predominately digital, and increasingly self-serving. In short, it's very, very different.

The challenges imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic have only served to intensify these radical shifts, hammering home the need for B2B brands to either fundamentally change – or, in most cases, dramatically adapt – the way they collect, interpret and use customer data.

B2B marketers aren't mind readers, after all, and some of their best tried-and-tested methods, such as physical trade shows and conferences, just aren't options currently. It all points to a new data-driven era, where the customer possesses almost full reign over their buying journey, from the platform/device they use, the location they use it from, the way they engage with brands and, eventually, the specifics of the transaction itself.

"The B2B buying journey can span across large periods of time and involve multiple decision-makers," says Chris Attewell, CEO, Search Laboratory. "As a result, the research phase often involves a lot of back and forth, with individuals consuming content that will help them to understand which product or service, and which brand, is right for them."

How then, do B2B marketers ensure they ease themselves into a position where they're being considered as the 'right brand', not just during the research stage, but throughout the customer journey? And before even that, how do they work out who these prospects are, and whether they'd actually be interested in the products and solutions being offered?

***"The research phase often involves a lot of back and forth, with individuals consuming content that will help them to understand which product or service, and which brand, is right for them"***

**Chris Attewell**, CEO, Search Laboratory



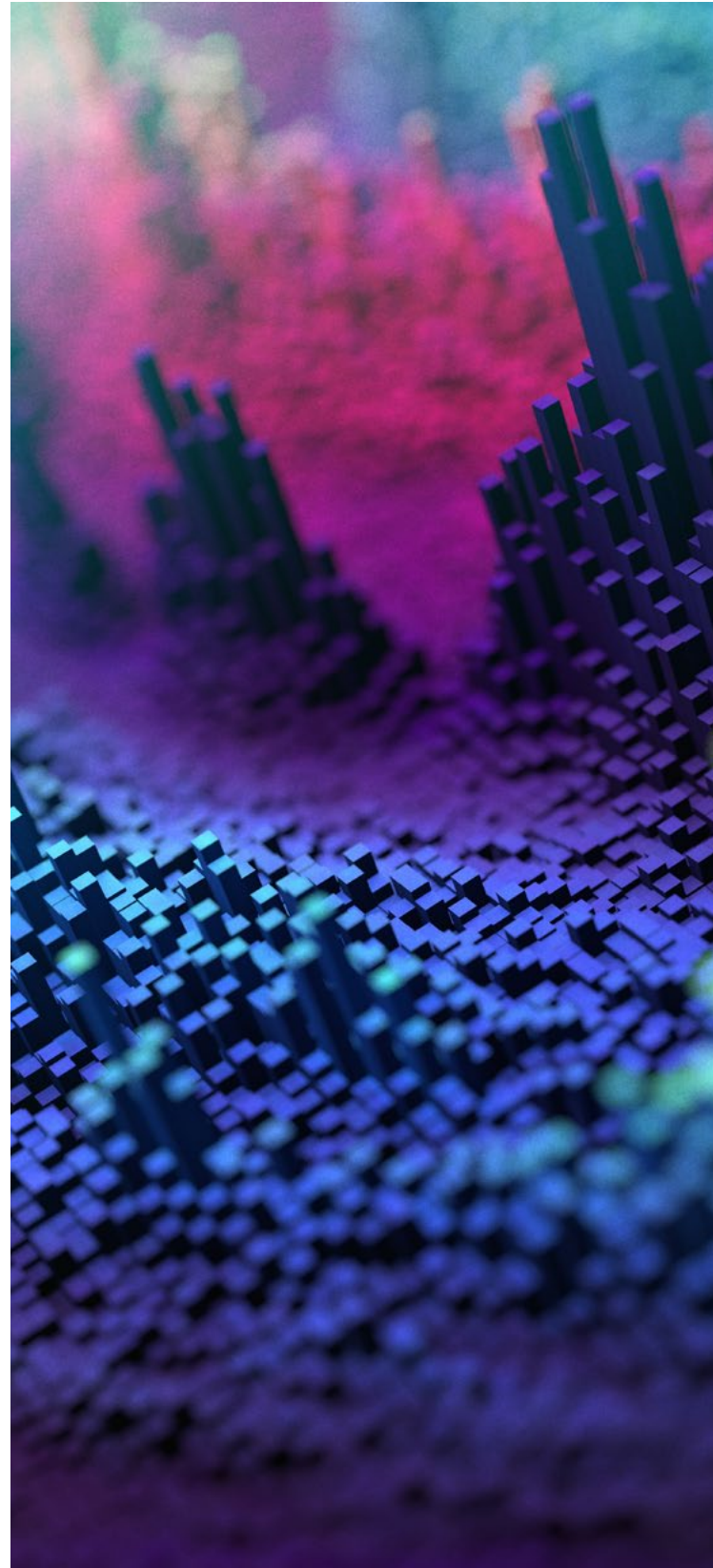
### 3.1. Enter, intent data

Increasingly making waves in B2B circles, intent data has recently emerged as an extremely valuable method for tapping into the subtle buying signals of prospects. Cited by many as the next big thing in data-driven sales and marketing, it's a highly intelligent method that allows B2B brands to easily piece together the virtual breadcrumb trail left in the wake of a typical customer journey.

Where it goes one step further than mere behavioural data, however, is in its ability to accurately predict what prospects are likely to do next in their unpredictable journey – hence the use of *intent* in intent data.

“The information a B2B decision-maker needs changes throughout the buyer journey,” Chris explains. “Intent data informs marketers of the exact information prospects are looking for when they make certain searches, or land on specific pages. Knowing this means you can optimise content so that users get the right information from your site, rather than a competitor’s.”

However, while the technology exists for B2B brands to start exploring the power of intent data today, many marketers and salespeople aren't savvy to its widespread benefits, or are unaware of just how simple it is to get up and running.





## Section 4

# Data parties: Which one should get your invite?

Intent data can be split into three separate categories: first, second and third-party. For B2B marketers hoping to gain more useful insight into the customers' needs, challenges and behaviours, each type of data possesses its own pros and cons.

### 4.1. First-party data

First-party data represents all those valuable nuggets you collect from your own users on your own website or any other owned channels, such as email, social or mobile apps. This data is typically captured and displayed via analytics tools, such as Google Analytics or your own CRM system, and can be broken down into two sub-categories:

#### **Known first-party data**

When someone has visited your site or app and shared their information via an online form.

#### **Anonymous first-party data**

When someone has visited your site either for the first time, or hasn't completed any contact forms. Their company can often be mapped using their IP address – although, with remote working becoming more prevalent, this method is becoming increasingly unreliable.

First-party data isn't typically associated with intent data – or at least isn't its biggest selling point – considering one of its main objectives is to identify prospects who haven't yet engaged with your brand. However, first-party data still has an important role to play in the intent data process, as Vincent DeCastro, president at The ABM Agency, points out.

"First-party data is important because it allows you to understand how accounts or organisations are interacting with your brand," he says. "Are there certain pages an account is consuming on your website? Have they engaged with certain product-offering emails? This sort of thing is invaluable in understanding how an account moves down to the lower sales funnel."

In a way, first-party data actually provides more qualified information than second and third-party data, as you have full visibility on exactly who is browsing your wares, along with other vital insights, such as their company or even job title.

"First-party data is without a doubt the most valuable data a marketer can get," stresses Chris. "You own the data and can therefore do more with it, and it also provides an exact picture of your audience, as it is your audience's data."

Of course, you wouldn't be here if all you were interested in was learning about first-party data. The hidden power of intent data comes from combining first with second and third-party insights – the areas you don't have control over, the areas you can't predict. And that's what makes it such an exciting proposition.

## 4.2. Second and third-party data

Second and third-party data can often be lumped together, as they represent information from external, non-owned sources. Second-party data is essentially someone else's first-party data – or 'known' third-party data – where users grant permission for the site or network in question to share their information with other companies. For intent data, second-party data typically come in the form of review sites or publishing networks.

Third-party data covers anything and everything in between. It's a pretty big internet out there, and third-party data is a veritable treasure trove of prospect insight, especially in providing vital context to user behaviour. When it comes to intent data, third-party often proves its worth early on, as Vincent explains. "Third-party data is mostly relevant at the beginning of the sales pipeline, allowing you to understand an account's interest before they actually start interacting with your systems."

But, as Chris warns, second and third-party data do come with caveats and limitations. "Second and third-party data is useful for enriching your own data and filling in any gaps to build up a much more in-depth picture of your audience," he says. "But, with the tightening of privacy laws and limits on cookies being tracked, they are becoming less accurate and less valuable."

## 4.3. Better together: Combining data for best results

For Barry Richards, strategy and planning director at Transmission, even though each type of data carries its own unique benefits, all three of them contribute towards understanding that all-important word... intent. The more bases are covered and the more angles are scrutinised, the better your understanding of the customer becomes, and the more accurate those intent predictions will be.

"They all reveal intent – in the broadest sense of the word," Barry says. "First-party data might be a contract renewal date, a concentrated spell of interaction on a website around a specific proposition, or responses to campaign messages and assets. Second and third-party data are likely to show research and topic consumption across B2B websites, which we can assume means they are showing interest in a proposition we have as well."

Vincent puts it best when he says: "True intent is a function of combining off-site and on-site data, and you want your target lists to reflect these nuances."





## 4.4. Context is everything

As Vincent describes, where intent data shines is in its ability to stitch together all of the above – what we'd typically refer to as 'topic' data – with context data. Context data is less about the *who* and more about the *why*. As in, *why* is this user taking this particular action? When B2B marketers can answer that question, it becomes infinitely easier to appeal to a key account or prospect.

As an example, picture two separate users who've just downloaded a whitepaper on marketing automation (MA). Thanks to known first-party data, we know one reader is a CMO, the other a journalist from a marketing trade publication. The CMO is more likely to be interested in hearing from the brand's sales team for a follow-up call or demo, while the journalist is probably researching for an article of their own, and may appreciate an interview with the brand's resident MA expert for thought leadership insight.

That's two people accessing the same piece of content, yet with different intent. And the data will help marketers assign the right time, budget and resource to encourage the right action for each individual prospect's unique need.

## 4.5. Act fast and avoid leaving warm leads on the table

Of course, that's just one example of intent data in action, but it underlines just how quickly B2B marketers can react once they have visibility on the data. Indeed, this is one of intent data's biggest draws – the ability to target dynamic audiences in real-time.

In B2B, speed can often be the all-important clincher in securing a B2B deal. "There's a reason for the saying 'strike while the iron's hot'," says Barry. "As we know when selling anything, if you have a warm lead, you act on it before it goes cold."

"Responding to changes in audience behaviour in real-time versus later can be the difference between making a sale and losing out to a competitor," supports Chris. "Using real-time data to influence your decisions – whether that's increasing paid media budget due to a spike in demand or fixing technical issues that have been flagged through a sudden increase in bounce rate – leads to budget being used much more efficiently and prevents opportunities from being missed."

***"Responding to changes in audience behaviour in real-time versus later can be the difference between making a sale and losing out to a competitor"***

**Chris Attewell**, CEO, Search Laboratory



## Section 5

# What's holding marketers back?

Despite its widespread benefits and ability to react at speed, many B2B marketers are still overlooking the potential of intent data and, in doing so, are ignoring people actively researching their organisations, such as the CMO or journalist researching their whitepaper. Instead, B2B marketers are pouring time, money and effort into trying to win over cold leads, leaving their warm leads to stagnate on the table.

“One of the biggest barriers marketers face in using their data more efficiently is when channels are looked at in silos, with separate strategies that work toward channel-specific KPIs,” says Chris. “This prevents data from being shared between teams and analysed as part of the bigger picture, which is crucial to identifying how intent changes across the customer journey.”

“B2B marketers need to integrate their technology stack to build a 360-degree view of the customer journey, including intent at different stages,” he advises. “Only then can they create an integrated digital strategy that utilises intent data to drive leads and conversions, rather than superficial improvements in channel performance.”

## 5.1. Three common hurdles in adopting intent data

### 1. Piloting:

Many (but not all) intent data providers don't provide free (or reduced cost) trials for companies to test whether intent data is right for them, instead only offering expensive annual subscriptions.

### 2. Scale:

Most intent platforms work best at scale, so if a B2B company is looking to identify a small number of accounts (e.g. if they're taking a one-to-one ABM approach), then they can be costly.

### 3. Matching:

On average, most intent data platforms will match up to 20% of a given account list, where B2B marketers are looking for specific accounts from their account list to be in market. This will make the exercise costly, especially if brands aren't willing to use the new accounts unearthed by the platforms that aren't already on their list.

**Barry Richards**, strategy and planning director,  
Transmission

## 5.2. The importance of the CDP

The key to overcoming these obstacles is being realistic about your own limitations when it comes to data-driven marketing. As we've explored, the real power of intent data lies in combining the insights of first, second and third-party data to create more accurate and context-informed pictures of your prospects and accounts.

However, many marketers have tunnel vision when it comes to data, and get bogged down in known first-party data. There's a multitude of customer data platforms (CDP) out there that are built with intent data in mind, and will often encourage reticent B2B marketers to take the first step on their intent data journey.

"CDPs represent the way forwards when it comes to operationalising intent data," says Barry. "They allow organisations to unify all intent signals with firmographic (and technographic) data, helping brands create 360-degree views of their key accounts."

According to Barry, marketers should focus on creating a scoring system to identify and prioritise accounts based on their ideal customer profile (ICP) and propensity to buy, which can then be used for any of the following:

1. ABM account selection and prioritisation.
2. Sales enablement.
3. Analytics and account-based reporting.
4. Connecting brand to demand.
5. Activating attractive segments.

For Steve Kemish, Propolis Hive expert for Execution & Campaigns, marketers looking to dip their toe in the intent data waters should start off small. "Start by using intent to help feed into your content production," he says. "Use it as a zeitgeist to know what's current and popular and build confidence with intent data that way."

And, once B2B marketers have built their confidence and have a few tried-and-tested use cases under the belts, the possibilities for intent data become extremely exciting. As Barry explains, the sophistication of modern marketing technology means B2B brands can use intent data to rapidly respond in a number of ways. "With today's marketing platforms having APIs into all other marketing platforms, it's possible to set up a regular flow of data from, for example, an intent platform through to a programmatic or MA platform," he says.







## Section 6

# Three areas where intent data shines

### 6.1. Tapping into unknown prospects during the research phase

We've all heard the commonly-cited stat that 70% of a customer's journey is complete before they even interact with a salesperson. While the accuracy of this stat can be scrutinised, there's no arguing that before a prospect engages with your website or reaches out directly, they will possess existing (and strong) opinions about the product or service they're interested in.

Indeed, people increasingly look to peer review sites and marketing community networks for opinions and experiences to help inform their purchase decision. By using the predictive capabilities of intent data, marketers are able to sift through the wealth of insight afforded by these third-party platforms, helping them focus on relevant account and prospects.

"B2B marketers using intent data have an opportunity to spot buyers during the research phase, much earlier in the buying cycle," says Barry. "If they can broach a conversation at this stage, they may have an opportunity to influence what those requirements look like, or at the least be included on the buyer's shortlist."

***"By using the predictive capabilities of intent data, marketers are able to sift through the wealth of insight afforded by these third-party platforms"***



## 6.2. Personalised and automated web experiences for anonymous visitors

Just because someone visits your website, doesn't mean they're completely anonymous. Of course, as already explained, IP address tracking can, in some circumstances, be used to work out which company a user belongs to, but that's often where the virtual footprint will end via that method.

However, despite the fact these users remain 'anonymous', you can still track their behaviour while browsing your website, such as dwell time on particular pages, or different pieces of content being interacted with (such as a product demo or an infographic).

Content can then be tailored to a user's specific website behaviour, and some areas can even be automated, such as a pop-up chatbox if someone has visited a particular webpage multiple times. "The ability to automate some of your marketing outreach in a programme has massive advantages in developing an always-on engine for your organisation," says Barry.

*"The ability to automate some of your marketing outreach in a programme has massive advantages in developing an always-on engine for your organisation"*

**Barry Richards**, strategy and planning director, Transmission

## 6.3. Personalised emails that keep 'em sweet

Hopefully, modern B2B marketers realise that the days of batch-and-blast email campaigns, often based purely on job titles, are defunct. After all, B2B job titles are a sticky subject in themselves – they differ from sector to vertical, change regularly, and often don't provide insight into the seniority or decision-making prowess of the person in question.

This is where intent data comes into its own. By combining known data (such as the dreaded job title) with contextual third-party data, marketers can make accurate assumptions about how much buying power someone wields, the topics they're interested in, or whether they match up to their ICP. Email content can then be tailored accordingly to match the individual needs of the account in question.



## Section 7

# The start of an exciting journey

Right now, we're only scratching the surface when it comes to intent data. We're only really beginning to explore its potential in ushering in a new age of data-driven sales and marketing.

"If you think about where intent data is right now, it's mainly focused at an organisational level," says Vincent. "When you start to think about how much of this data is sourced, it's being self-reported and gathered through form submissions."

"Looking forwards, I suspect intent data will start to incorporate more granular detail," he adds. "Being able to identify departments within an organisation, for example, will greatly increase both a B2B brand's ability to target from a marketing perspective, but also allow sales to zone in on the people who are most receptive."

But, as with any new method, technology or approach in B2B, marketers must be cautious not to treat intent data as a silver bullet to all their problems and challenges. Intent data is one step in the wider digital transformation

journey, which is why it's so important to integrate it properly with the rest of your tech stack in order to adapt to the increasingly digital buyer/seller landscape.

It's clear that the pioneers are already reaping the benefits of intent data, but, as the technology becomes more widespread, we will see it used in even more sophisticated ways to help business achieve their goals.

"Using intent data to dynamically change or personalise your marketing content and comms is really exciting," concludes Steve. "This will help turn intent data from an interesting, yet not-actioned piece of insight, into a valuable jewel where B2B starts to deliver highly targeted and relevant content and messages, at scale."







# About

## B2B Marketing and Propolis

### **Powered by the community, for the community.**

Established in 2004, B2B Marketing is now the number one go-to resource for B2B marketers across the globe.

Right from the start, we had a clear mission that remains as strong and clear today: to provide marketers at business brands with the tools, insight and inspiration they need to grow and succeed – as both individuals and businesses.

To do this, we need to continually evolve to make sure we are delivering what you need.

### **This is why Propolis was born.**

We're proud to serve as the focal point for the B2B marketing sector, and to be a force for greater connectivity, enabling marketers and leaders to share experiences and learn from one another.

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## Dun & Bradstreet

Dun & Bradstreet is a leading global provider of business decisioning data and analytics and enables companies around the world to improve their business performance.

The Dun & Bradstreet Data Cloud is comprised of over 420 million business records that span across the globe delivering the world's most comprehensive business data and insights to improve performance. The Data Cloud fuels solutions and delivers insights that empower customers to accelerate revenue, lower cost, mitigate risk, and transform their businesses.

Since 1841, companies of every size have relied on Dun & Bradstreet to help them manage risk and reveal opportunity.

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