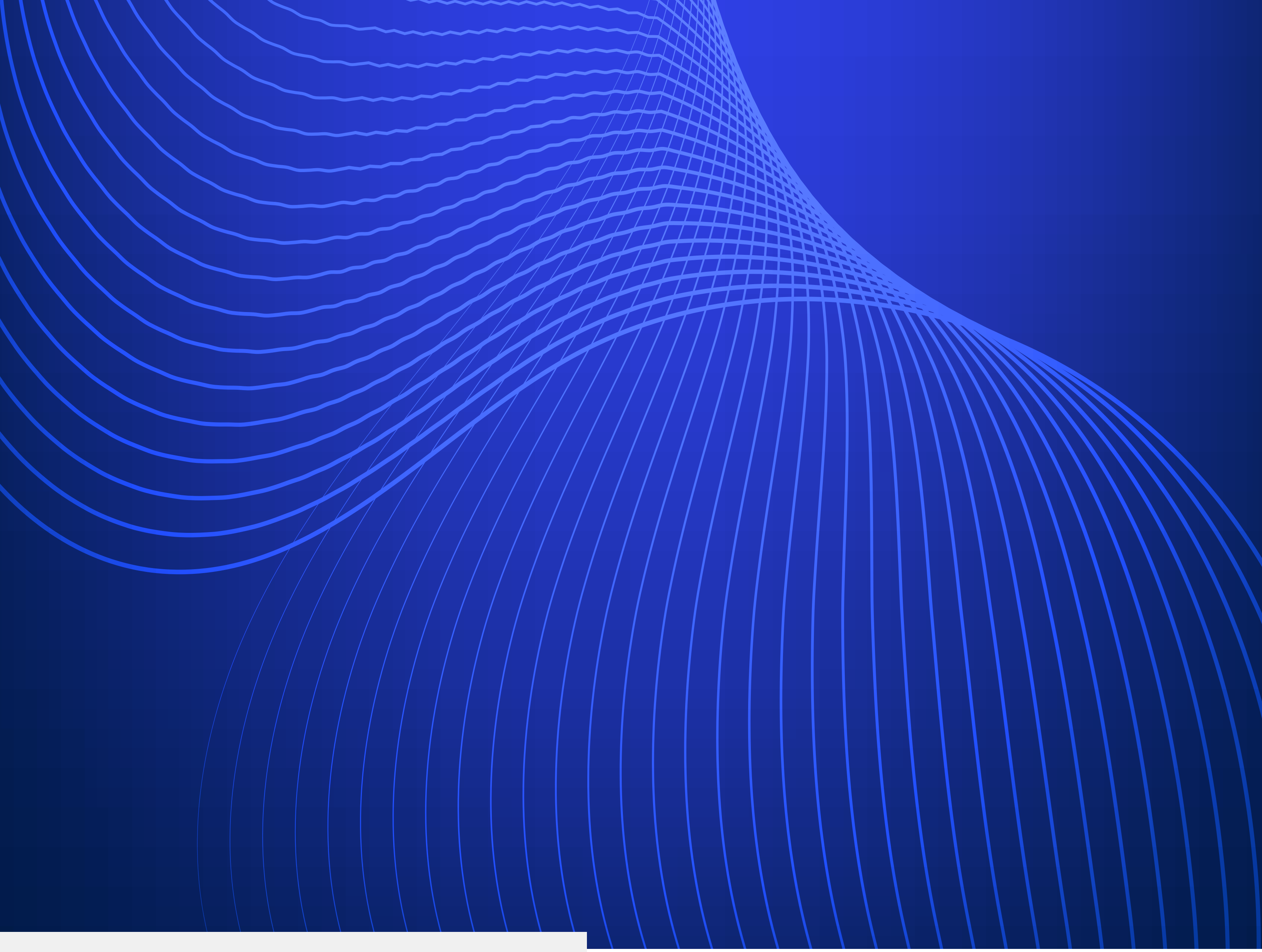


THE B2B MARKETER’S GUIDE TO PROSPECT ENGAGEMENT AND CONVERSION

FRESH TIPS TO REACTIVATE AND INTEREST YOUR BUYERS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We've all seen it: A lead or account attends a webinar, downloads a ton of resources and it looks like they're really interested. But when it comes to attending an event or taking that first call with an SDR — they're nowhere to be found. They ghost you.

So how can we engage these no-shows — or at least try and figure out who's serious and who's wasting time? To answer this question, ON24 and NetLine sat down with marketing expert Jesse Walsh, Manager of Segment Marketing at Vidyard. This report summarizes their thoughts and the input shared by the audience.

Here are a few highlights from the discussion:

ENGAGEMENT IS NOW HARDER TO COME BY

After the digital overload of the past year, B2B marketers are finding it harder to encourage engaged contacts to take the next step with sales. In fact, 7**0% of audience respondents say this relationship evolution has become much or somewhat harder in the past year.**

In the face of this challenge, our experts say that it's important to redefine what you consider valuable engagement and engagement that's indicative of being sales-ready.

According to Forrester, **80% of B2B buyers want to self-educate rather than talk directly with a sales rep.** In the face of this, pay close attention to buyer persona and prioritize your prospect having the customer experience *they want.*

PERSONALIZATION IS KEY

B2B marketers are challenged in a number of ways when it comes to driving engagement from prospects who have gone silent. According to our audience, these challenges are **low database response rates (60%), not enough resources in marketing (31%) and running out of creative ideas (20%).**

According to our experts, **personalization** is a great tactic marketers can use to combat these challenges. For example, using video to send prospects short, personalized messages can help boost engagement and invigorate your message.

Other personalization options include responses to downloading an asset, invites to an upcoming event, asking for feedback and much more.

DON'T GIVE UP! THERE IS ALWAYS A TIP OR TRICK TO TRY

It's true that B2B marketers are finding their own approaches that **work well** in getting a response or starting a sales conversation, such as **personalized/targeted content (60%) and running frequent demos or webinars (30%).**

Nonetheless, our experts are aware that B2B marketers can still find themselves in a position where they feel they have tried everything to re-engage ghost prospects. But, don't despair! There are a number of tips and tricks you can turn to, even if you are working with no engagement data.

For example, our experts suggest using a "Choose Your Own Adventure" approach, modeling the behavior of unknown prospects on existing data, incentivizing, recycling the funnel and a number of other tips. Our experts also remind B2B marketers that through each of these tactics, it's important to remember the end goal of engagement — conversion.

HOW TO LEARN MORE

The webinar generating these insights is always on and ready to view.
Register now to hear more.

To sign up to future sessions, visit **www.on24.com/resources/upcoming-webinars**

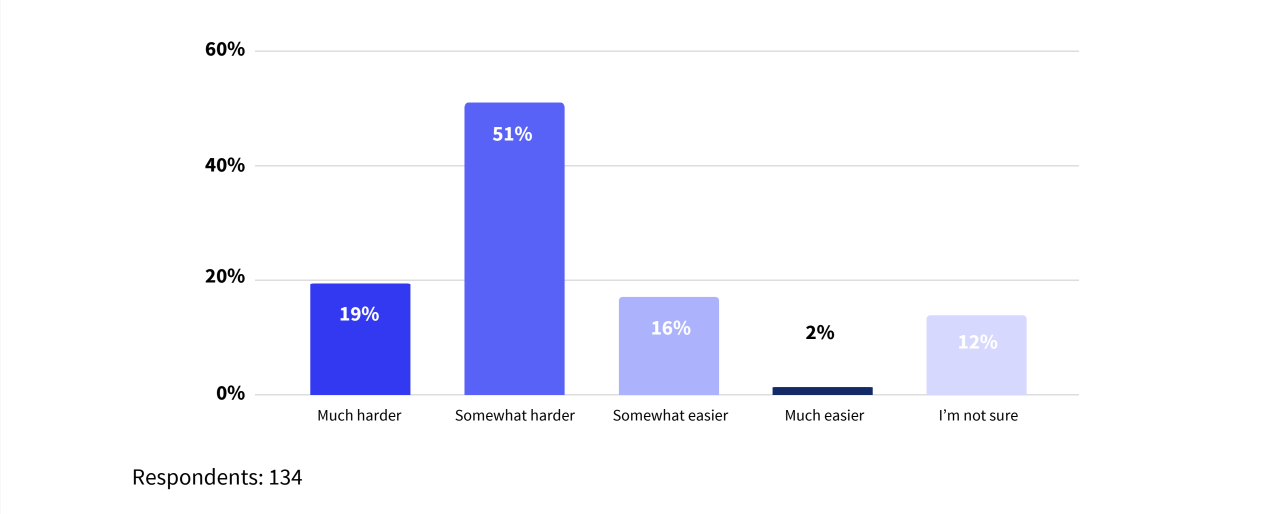
Tessa Barron, VP Marketing at ON24 and David Fortino, SVP Audience and Product at NetLine would like to thank Jesse Walsh, Manager Segment Marketing at Vidyard for joining the discussion and providing valuable recommendations for today's B2B professionals.

DEFINING ENGAGEMENT

Before putting valuable time and effort into engaging leads or accounts that appear to have ghosted, it's important to lock in an effective process of defining engagement that genuinely indicates being sales-ready.

According to an ON24 poll of B2B marketers, it is not getting any easier to guide engaged prospects to a sales conversation. So, it is crucial to be able to spot the key engagement signals:

In the past year, has it become harder to drive engaged contacts to speak to sales?



In fact, some 7 in 10 respondents say it has become somewhat (51%) or much (19%) harder to drive engaged contacts to speak to sales.

CHECK YOUR EXISTING ENGAGEMENT METRICS FOR BUYER SIGNALS

It is no secret that clicks and visits used to be the keystone markers of digital engagement. But, increasingly, as digital's share of engagement grows and grows, it's becoming harder to decipher nuanced buying signals from these two basic metrics. Tessa says:

> "Digital has made it really difficult to decipher intent from content consumption, buyer readiness from competitive scoping, or someone looking for help from someone who's price shopping. It's really difficult to read between those superficial lines."

In these circumstances, Tessa emphasizes that it's important to have different levels of data that allow you to pick through the noise and figure out what matters.

MAKE ENGAGEMENT METRICS SPECIFIC TO YOUR ORGANIZATION

David adds that the process of defining and redefining engagement should be specific to the needs of your company. Often, benchmark data relating to organizations or peers with different products, sales cycles and customer segments can lead to chasing, well, ghosts. In David's words:

> "There's a ton of data that you're trying to interpret. I balance third-party data with the need to really better understand first-party data, that is, when users are expressing intent, and they're deciding to go beyond those high-level KPIs and actually share data with you."

In moments when you feel that you aren't seeing the engagement David describes, it's important to remember that your prospects are most likely going through a serious case of digital fatigue. Jesse talks about this crowded marketplace:

> "I don't think any of us should feel bad that we are seeing a lower response rate right now, as we're all pumping our efforts into a smaller inbox funnel that we used to, when we had so many different ways to be able to engage with our prospects."

SEPARATE ENGAGEMENT FROM BUYING INTENT

Understanding the difference between marketing engagement — which David notes as being aligned with preliminary research and top-of-funnel-oriented datasets — and sales engagement is crucial. David says:

> "Using content as a way to supplement where your buyers are somewhat stalling, is a phenomenal way of trying to extract moments of true engagement versus just high-level KPIs. There should be a way to connect a more proactive dialogue, which then is giving a tipping point to both marketing and sales."

According to **data from SiriusDecisions**, most B2B buyers want to self-educate rather than talk directly with a sales rep. In dealing with this, Tessa talks about how behavior differs between buyer personas, like company size. In the case of ON24, she finds that large companies have a higher conversion rate to an opportunity than mid-level companies. This might be due to mid-level marketers tending to be more scrappy and keen on self-discovery.

Tessa adds that understanding the most meaningful buyer signals can be counterintuitive — where B2B marketers might think that an email response is more indicative of being sales-ready, engagement with third-party channels like advertising, content syndication, and website visits is a huge indicator a prospect is actively searching for your solution. She says:

> “You cannot expect a buyer to follow the expected stages and that they will align with different channels. Your efforts need to be always-on, integrated, and every single channel needs to offer an opportunity for your buyer to raise their hand.”

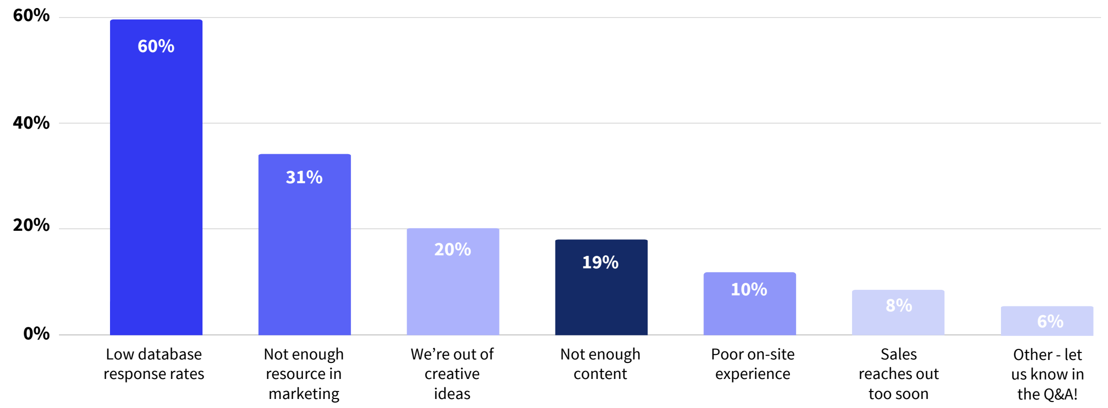
David adds that if you are marketing at a company with a self-service derivative, this can be a great way to allow enterprise folks to raise their hand via the path of least resistance. In David’s words:

> “Be flexible and cognizant of the fact you need to have content that allows the buyer to go down the path they want, not the path you want.”

SPARKING A RESPONSE

Even with the best strategy for identifying sales-ready, highly engaged prospects, B2B marketers can still wind up with no-shows and drop-offs. Here are a few challenges that marketers polled by ON24 are experiencing when it comes to engagement:

What problems have you faced when it comes to driving engagement?



Respondents: 80

The biggest problem our marketers are facing today is low database response rates (60%). Other challenges include a lack of resources in marketing (31%), being out of creative ideas (20%), and not having enough content (19%). So, what do our experts have to say about sparking a response from prospects that you're struggling to keep engaged?

SEND PERSONALIZED VIDEO

Jesse offers advice from the perspective of Vidyard, and talks about video as a great tool for reigniting engagement. When presented with engaged leads that haven't taken the next step or raised their hand before, Jesse and her team will have any SDRs or BDRs familiar with the account generate a quick personalized video.

Depending on the value of the account, this could be personalized down to the individual or on a larger scale according to buyer persona. Jesse says:

> "Here's where you can really empower your sales team to do a little bit of digging into the prospect and see what aligns with them. Then the call to action for you is to talk more about this asset that the lead is interested in."

USE DATA TO MAKE YOUR OUTREACH RELEVANT

Granted, the level of personalization cited is a goal that many B2B marketers do not feel they can realistically reach at scale. As such, Jesse offers more detail about the type of datasets that Vidyard pulls in to achieve this personalization. When a hypothetical lead opens a session and indicates interest in an asset, an SDR will reach out and offer a related resource, drawing on their industry, role and challenges during the conversation.

But how do you motivate and enable sales to do this research? Jesse assures that research doesn't have to be in-depth beyond a website or LinkedIn crawl, and that a more scalable approach can be having a speaker make the follow up:

> "From that, you can track who watched the entire video, embed a CTA at the end of it, and you've filtered down quickly at scale the leads that you're going to pass to SDRs."

It's also worth remembering that most content can be thoughtfully repurposed in a way that saves precious time and energy among your sales and marketing teams.

SEND PERSONALIZED INVITES FROM REAL PEOPLE

From ON24's perspective in the virtual event space, Tessa reminds marketers that an invite to an upcoming event can be a great way to spark engagement. As well as adding urgency to your call-to-action, it shortens and defines a nurture pathway for your SDR, with checkpoints along the way such as registration. Tessa says:

> "We have seen improved conversion rates from webinars and virtual events when the SDR has reached out before the event happens to say: 'Hey, let's have a prep conversation.' It helps break some of that stalling that can happen in follow-up."

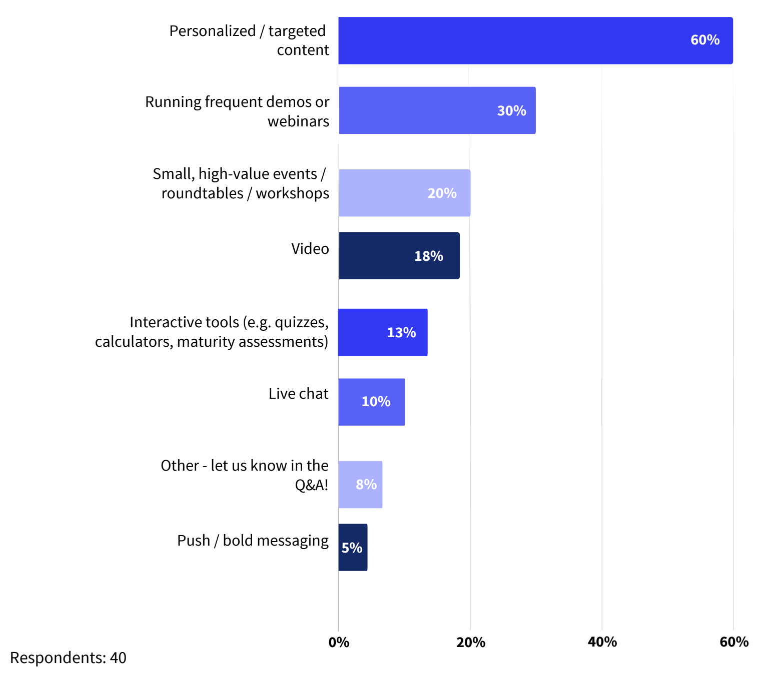
Jesse adds that this kind of invitation call-to-action is a great way of engaging prospects with a "Choose Your Own Adventure" approach. Offering more than one path — "I'd love to chat with you at this webinar, but if not here's a link to some of the resources that will be discussed" — not only means covering your bases but doubles the potential to personalize your next follow up.

Another way to generate highly personalized prospect data is through polling. David talks about how the addition of polling in any environment — be it a webinar or website content — means you can solicit specific feedback and pain points rather than making assumptions based on behavior.

PRACTICAL TIPS AND TRICKS

When it comes to reigniting engagement, there are a number of tactics and approaches that can work and keep on working.

What has worked well for you in getting a response or starting a sales conversation?



As emphasized above, respondents to an ON24 poll are also finding that personalized/targeted content (60%) is working well in getting a response or starting a sales conversation. Frequent demos or webinars (30%), small, high-value events/ roundtables/workshops (20%) as well as video (18%) appear to be successful tactics.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU HAVE NO ENGAGEMENT DATA

What can you do when you have little to no engagement data on prospects?

In this scenario, Tessa circles back to the idea of "Choose Your Own Adventure." This means that from the start of a relationship, a prospect's self-selection can help you identify what they are interested in and how they need to be nurtured.

Tessa also posits an approach used by ON24, which is modeling engagement data based on first-party data from similar personas. ON24's own platform collects business interests and pain points at an anonymous level, creating a word cloud that allows marketers to model potentially relevant messaging. Tessa gives a hypothetical example:

> "Based on results from my webinars last year, 500 people with the same title told me their number one pain point was X. I'm going to optimize what I send to them and what I nurture them with accordingly."

David also notes that NetLine's Audience Explorer tool, which allows marketers to deep dive into B2B content consumption behaviors, is a great place to go to formulate some of those models.

PROVIDE OFFERS THAT ACTUALLY HELP

Audience Explorer is also an example of a tool or offering that, in David's opinion, genuinely wants to help, a motivation that will naturally drive engagement. David says:

> "Sometimes it's not about prospects volunteering first-party data off the bat, but about giving them tools that invest in their future success and deliver value that compels them to want to learn more."

This idea could be extended into the possibility of giving away an element of your product or service for free. After all, anything that allows your prospect to continue their journey with your service can be seen as a win-win. Incentives might be a more traditional approach, but Jesse and Vidyard are experimenting with a version of this approach to engage contacts that on paper should be highly interested, but aren't raising their hand:

> "We will offer the prospect an asset, and something else. It's kind of an 'engage or move on' tactic, sometimes called a 'wake the dead' campaign on our end. It's a bit of a risk because you will have to opt them out after taking that gamble, but it adds urgency and puts value on your assets."

David offers an alternative perspective that this approach hasn't worked well for NetLine. While it has been successful with existing customers and growing relationships, this isn't the case when seeking engagement that ultimately results in a business outcome from new prospects. In response, NetLine has focused more on incentives that will start a dialogue with prospects.

STRENGTHEN THE MESSAGE FOR YOUR FINAL OUTREACH ATTEMPT

Even having put time and effort into sparking engagement using the tips above, you might find yourself in a situation where you feel like nothing you are doing is working to re-engage a prospect.

At this point, David suggests "before-you-go" themed marketing — this might even be the subject line to your last attempt. David cites that this has a 77% higher engagement rate than any prior message, but that whether this engagement leads to a business outcome is inevitably hit-or-miss.

Feeling at the end of the road with your attempts to engage might also be a good time to return to the start and circle back to top-of-funnel-oriented initiatives. In David's words:

> "We're almost resetting their experience with us, and allowing that to inform back into the funnel, back into nurture, back into dialogue with reps and BDRs, and so on."

Jesse agrees that if, after doubling down with your sales team to consider all routes to re-sparking that connection. If you still aren't having success, it might be a good time to face the music and start recycling a prospect back to the top of the funnel.

DON'T FORGET THE END GOAL OF ENGAGEMENT

As you get creative with the above tips and tricks and try to re-engage your ghosts, it might become easy to forget the end goal of your efforts. In Tessa's words:

> "I think as marketers we can get caught up in our own marketing. We're not a public service — we are absolutely trying to educate our prospects and we want to put them first, but there has to be a reason for it. And the reason is that they're ultimately interested in becoming a customer."

Jesse agrees, noting that because marketers are working with more data than they have in the past, it can be easy to get lost in vanity metrics like attendance, registration and overall engagement. Jesse says:

> "It's important to stay focused, and it can be hard because it's more challenging than simply saying, 'this is getting high attendance rates.' It's about pushing them through to what we all need them to do."

Often, the best events have nothing to do with the event itself and everything to do with how the event allows you to empower your sales team. Tessa notes that any type of engagement should enable a conversation for follow-up. This is why it's important that both sales and marketing have a unified understanding of what triggers and data points indicate engagement behavior.

In her words:

> "It's not a new martech, it's the basics of great demand gen. It is having a plan, enabling your AEs and SDRs and creating an experience that ultimately triggers what happens after."

FINAL TAKEAWAYS

Here are our experts' top tips to take away regarding sparking engagement from seemingly unreachable prospects.

LEAD YOUR OUTREACH WITH CONTEXT

David's top takeaway applies whether you're reaching out via email, video, content or otherwise — acknowledge what you already know about a prospect's pain points and what they have shared with you:

> "It creates an understanding that you are paying attention and that you have at least some level of commitment to where they stand at that moment and trying to provide value."

PERSONALIZE WHEREVER POSSIBLE

Jesse's top takeaway is personalization, whether this is on an individual or mass scale:

> "People are being reached out to non-stop, so the best way to stand out and get that attention that you need is to appeal to that personal vanity and their interest in their own situation."

WHEN THINGS DON'T WORK, QUESTION THE OFFER AND THE CHANNEL

Tessa encourages marketers to ask, for example, if an SDR isn't able to spark a meeting from an email: is it the offer, or is it the email?

> "It speaks to having an omnichannel strategy that allows for someone to opt-in, whether it's to a demo, a webinar, booking a meeting, or participating in a conversational ad via LinkedIn. Each of these touchpoints is an experience and creates a journey that ultimately leads to conversion."