



The Engagement Imperative

Why B2B Marketers Must Engage Audiences
and Drive Better Data Insights

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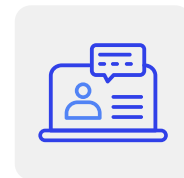
Overview

For years, marketers believed they were in control of the buyer's journey. They had orchestrated nurtures with choreographed email sequences, adapted buyer-driven journeys and have realized that personalization, based off of behavior and engagement, results in improved outcomes.

However, most marketers still struggle to have the appropriate mechanisms in place to listen to and act on engagement data. Today's work-from-home world has increased the number of digital signals generated and proven that marketers will need to lean on digital tactics for some time.

Engagement is more important than ever. Third-party intent data isn't delivering on its promise, as teams become desensitized to too many signals or intent being flagged too late. We're also staring down a cookie-less future, impacting how marketers can analyze and understand audience behavior on the internet.

To remain relevant and outpace competitors, marketers must prioritize the creation of — and take action on — first-party data. And, increasingly, first-party data that is actionable and rich with insights is created through engagement on digital channels.



Why B2B Organizations Need First-Party Data

Every B2B marketing organization depends on the data it collects, analyzes and acts on. This information provides an organization with insights into its audience, telling it what content connects with prospects, informs the business of which services customers love and provides both sales and marketing teams with instruction of what they ought to do next to take the business to the next level.

But the data a lot of digital marketers use today is second-hand — information provided by third-party vendors. Yes, third-party data does have its uses, but depending on this information is becoming increasingly untenable.

Understanding Third-Party Data Today

HOW MARKETERS USE COOKIES

Today, marketers often collect third-party data through digital trackers called “cookies.”

Often, these snippets of code are used to enhance a user’s experience across the internet. For example, if someone visited a website for a service, a cookie would

make a record of that visit. This information can then be used to present additional content and experiences for that user elsewhere.

In the B2B world, this information can be valuable. This data can be used, for example, to create and cater digital experiences for healthcare providers, manufacturers and more.

Why Third-Party Data Is Useful (And Why It's Falling Out of Favor)

Third-party data helps marketers identify and connect with audiences receptive to — or actively interested in — a solution on a mass scale. This information, provided by third-party data providers, can help organizations research and segment new audiences, identify new channels and fill in any gaps in first-party data profiles.

Third-party data is a map in the proverbial marketing journey. It provides teams with a big picture and a lot of information. But for a marketer to map out a successful journey, they'll need specific information on the route they should follow.

This is where first-party data comes into play. This information provides you with specific direction on how to approach an account because that account is actively communicating with your team.

The combination of first and third-party data has been a potent one, up until the last few years. But use of cookies to gather information third-party data is starting to fall out of favor. There are two primary reasons for this: privacy on the internet and government regulation.

IT'S A PRIVACY-CENTRIC WORLD AND MARKETERS ARE JUST LIVING IN IT

In 2020, Google, the largest search engine service in the world and one of the most influential technology companies to have ever existed, announced something staggering: it would remove third-party cookies in Google Chrome — one of the most used web browsers in the world — by 2022.

In its post describing its initiative, dubbed “The Privacy Sandbox”, Google outlined its goals for this shift. These goals include making ads more relevant to internet users, as well as combating several bad consequences of cookies like fingerprinting, spam, fraud and more.

And Google is not alone. Apple, too, has taken extraordinary measures to protect the privacy of iOS users and Mozilla, developer of Firefox, a popular web browser, is also offering more privacy protection for its users.

But it isn't just tech firms turning against the cookies that third-party data providers rely on.

GOVERNMENTS ARE CRACKING DOWN AS WELL

Governments are also cracking down on what information can be collected, where and how explicit companies must be in communicating their use of cookies.

In 2018, the European Union passed the General Data Protection Regulation, or GDPR. This law regulates how companies collect, process and control personal data for European citizens, and has levied fines on the scale of millions of Euros while also inspiring other regulations like the California Consumer Privacy Act and more.

The Rise of First-Party Data

So the crackdown on cookies is going to impact how B2B marketers — and digital marketers in general — connect with and communicate to audiences. But there is a solution: first-party data.

First-party data cuts out the middleman and gives marketers direct access to audiences. Armed with this information, marketers can more accurately understand and create content that resonates with their audiences.

Often, this means creating quality branded experiences like [webinars](#).

FIRST-PARTY DATA 101: UNDERSTANDING THE THEORY

If we think about each marketing tactic we create as an experience — one where we have to gather an audience through a promotional strategy — we can then think about two critical elements essential for collecting actionable first-party data. These are:

- How we interact with and keep audiences engaged
- The Call to Action we want our audience to take after the experience

This also gets back to the fact that not all measurement or data is created equal. In fact, it helps to classify metrics under three categories:

WHAT FIRST-PARTY DATA IS

First-party data is any information collected by a company directly from a source. There is no third party involved. For example, a user responding to a company's survey can be considered first party data. Conversely, a survey ran through a service that then shares the results of that survey is considered third-party data.

Activity metrics — where we look after counts of actions taken

Impact metrics — that are the result of the actions we took

Business metrics — where we show how our contributions help the overall organization

The Impact category provides us with the first-party data that will reveal behavioral insights into our audiences.

HOW MARKETERS CAN COLLECT ACTIONABLE FIRST-PARTY DATA

A webinar attendee is a signal to a marketer. That signal: that a visitor is interested in what you have to say. But that is a very weak signal. What's more important is the behavior of attendees during that experience.

That's why it's important to set up experiences designed to collect data on how attendees interact with your experience.

[Polling is a great example](#). It captures first-party data and provides contextualized information for sales and marketing to act on.

Here's an illustrative hypothetical. Let's say you created an experience where benchmarking research is shown. It is natural, during the course of that event, to ask attendees how they compare to the industry benchmark.

Based on the information attendees provide, you can action at least three separate plays.

For example, if someone responds that they are doing better than average, we could invite them to [apply for an award](#), invite them to speak on an upcoming webinar or participate in a local roundtable.

Additionally, if someone says they are doing about the same as the industry benchmark, a sales follow-up could focus on how to take their program to the next level. This could be an important signal for a product or service you offer designed for those scenarios.

Finally, an audience member who reports that they are below industry average could receive an empathetic message filled with content related to how to remove roadblocks and help them achieve the benchmark standard.

FROM FIRST-PARTY TO PERSONALIZATION

Better First-party Data

Traditional first-party data would include form fills, but augmenting this type of information with behavior signals, like time on event or questions asked, can provide deeper insights.

Engagement-aligned Programs

Moving from a focus on the delivery mechanism or tactic for marketing will allow marketers to think about the type of engagement they are trying to create instead. By focusing on this, programs can include a diverse mix of tactics.

Personalization Promise

Many personalization programs have failed because tactics are personalized off of poor quality data. By improving data quality, personalized tactics will be more relevant.

Four Steps to Drive First-Party Data

Driving first-party data is a matter of understanding how audiences engage with digital content. Let's break these steps down.

1. Understand Engagement Data

The first step is to understand what engagement data is. There are three core data categories we capture in marketing:

- **Activity Metrics.** These are counts of actions taken and include metrics like number of emails sent, number of programs run, e-books written.
- **Impact Metrics.** These are results of the actions taken and include metrics like length of attendance, engagement score, survey responses and content downloads.
- **Business Metrics.** These demonstrate the business impact of a series of activities and include metrics like pipeline generated, new opportunities and account impact.

Not all metrics and data are created equal, but all of these data categories play an important role in how you measure the effectiveness of your marketing.

For the purposes of engagement, impact metrics are prioritized. Aside from the count of the actions itself, it is these behavior signals that show us how audiences engaged with the marketing tactics.

2. Set up Sensors

With an understanding of the different types of data categories, it is important to translate this into how to have the appropriate sensors set up to capture the signals. To do this, you must separate out the tactic or delivery mechanism being used and think about what engagement techniques will be used during the experience.

For example, if a landing page is being created, an engagement technique could be to deploy a chatbot to help guide the prospect to share information or recommend additional content. In a webinar, engagement techniques could include Q&A with the presenter or polling.

Plotting out the engagement techniques that will be used is most critical in this step. Additionally, it is important to keep in mind that audience engagement techniques will vary by the persona being marketed to. For example, how you would engage a C-suite executive in marketing would be different than a software developer. Leveraging persona research can help to inform these decisions.

3. Listen for Signals

With sensors deployed and tuned to looking at impact data categories, marketers must now tune to what they are gathering. BANT serves as a guiding principle (Budget, Authority, Need, Timing) and is one of the best signals to look out for.

For example, polling questions used in a webinar can be used to understand where a company falls in its maturity level of deploying new tactics. The information here can also be used to decipher which of your products would be appropriate for a potential buyer — information that is critical for marketing to this person again or for sales to follow up on.

Additionally, “Timing” can be uncovered with questions related to how the topic is prioritized for annual planning.

4. Act on Engagement Data

The best way to act on engagement data is to act on it in the moment. Consider how to personalize CTAs in experiences based on behavior during an event. In a webinar, a presenter can verbally present next best actions for audience members based on polling responses or direct them to the appropriate content included in the experience.

With sales, sharing this information with them immediately is critical, but more important is having playbooks prepared for them to be able to act on this data. For example, simply sharing with a sales team member that one of their prospects asked a question might not lead to action from the sales team member. Instead, be more prescriptive- based on the question that this person asked, it is recommended that content related to this topic be shared.

Taking Engagement to The Next Level

Engagement is the currency of marketing.

It is up to you to understand how to earn and spend this currency, as well as make smart investment decisions. Risky moves can lead to eroded trust and a lack of funds.

Marketers must also share engagement with sales and make sure that they are informed about how to act on the data. Sales must treat the result with the same level of respect and empathy as marketing.