



# **B2B Trends: How Intent Data Can Boost Marketing Results**

**Expert B2B Marketing Tips For Getting  
More Out of First-Party Intent Data**

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# Executive Summary

B2B marketers have a data problem: there is too much of it and we don't know how to suss out the important information from the noise. This is not a new problem, but the industry is eyeing a new potential solution: first-party intent data.

First-party intent data, information that is shared directly between an individual and a brand, offers marketers the ability to assess interest in a solution with some level of certainty. Instead of estimating how likely a prospect is to convert, for example, we can directly ask them. Instead casting a wide net and hoping for the best, we can observe prospect behavior and signals and — with intent data in hand — weave an irresistible lure that lands a big account.

But before B2B marketers can realize the benefits of first-party intent data, they must ensure that their data house is in order. To find out how expert B2B marketers are approaching intent data within their organization, we held a webinar. Here's what they, and the audience of B2B professionals, had to say.

## ORGANIZATIONS ARE HAVING A HARD TIME FINDING READY AND EAGER PROSPECTS

When it comes to reading buying intent, it's difficult to know when a prospect is ready to buy. In fact, when polled by ON24, **29% of B2B marketers rate their**

**organization's ability to identify ready-to-buy prospects as "poor,"** with another 43% rating their ability as merely "ok."

There is a clear need for improvement. However, in the view of the expert panel, adding intent data into the mix may not be the immediate answer. Before adopting intent data, B2B marketers must know what data they need to use at which stage and for which goal, but they also have to make sure their organization is at the right maturity level across processes, technology and automation.

## BUYER BEHAVIOR IS CHANGING, BUT INTENT DATA OFFERS A SOLUTION

B2B marketers point to several issues holding them back from effectively identifying when prospects are ready to buy. Some issues are related to data, with 31% of marketers blaming poor quality data or, as 27% report, not having the data at all. However, **46% of marketers report that the most common issue is ineffective or absent processes to action data.**

B2B marketers also face the reality that buyer behavior is constantly changing. **Buyers are much more interested in researching and educating themselves before getting in touch with sales.** This means marketers and sales need to be much more buyer-

centric and acknowledge that buyers know what they want and when they want to talk. As such, **intent data can make the difference between engaging or annoying target audiences.**

## PROCESS IS CRITICAL TO INTENT DATA SUCCESS

The good news is that those who have taken action to tackle these hurdles — and that have built out solid processes — have seen good results.

**A streamlined process has helped 35% of poll respondents make the most out of data.**

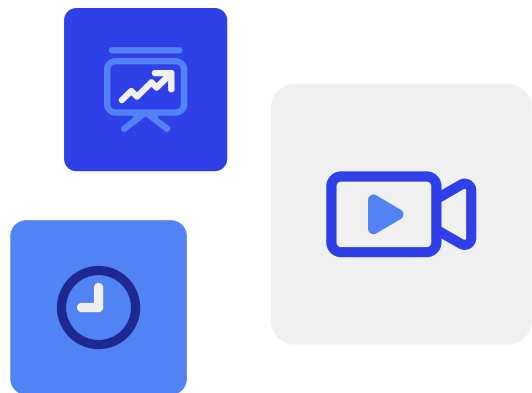
Furthermore, the panel of experts spoke about how vital it is that both marketing and sales know the part they play in the processes put into place. Intent data is not a silver bullet. There also needs to be alignment between the teams as to what happens and when, as well as their goals.

## HOW TO LEARN MORE

The webinar generating these insights is always-on and ready to view. [Register now to hear more.](#)

To sign up for future sessions, visit [www.on24.com/resources/upcoming-webinars](http://www.on24.com/resources/upcoming-webinars)

[Tessa Barron, VP Marketing at ON24](#), and [David Fortino, Chief Strategy Officer at NetLine](#), would like to thank [Matt Buren, Director of Sales Development at Bombora](#), for joining the discussion and providing valuable recommendations for today's B2B professionals.

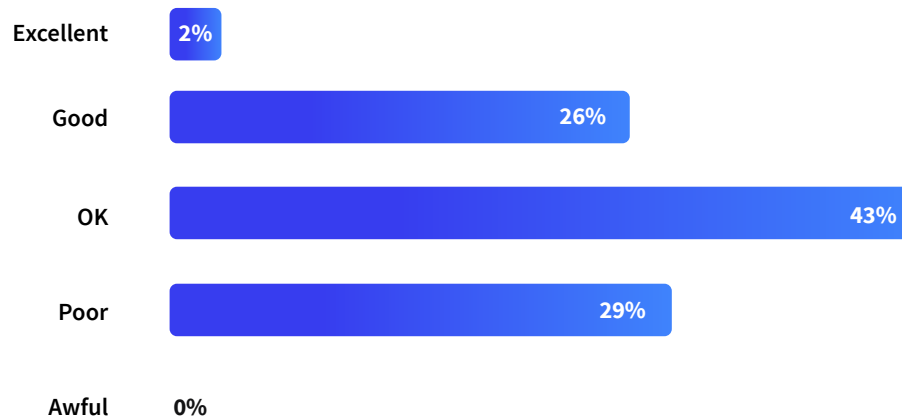


# Is Intent Data Right For Everyone?

B2B marketers use data to identify prospects, the stage of the buying cycle a prospect is in and anticipate when a prospect is ready to buy. However, marketers are inundated with data that is hard to manage and decipher.

Does all of this data help identify prospects that are ready to buy? An ON24 poll of B2B professionals shows us that the answer is mixed.

**How would you rate your organization at identifying prospects/accounts that are definitely ready to buy?**



According to our poll, **71% of marketers say they are “okay” or better at identifying leads ready to buy**, but only 28% of these respondents rate their ability as “excellent” or “good.” By contrast, **29% of marketers say they are “poor” at identifying ready-to-buy accounts.**

So, is the answer to incorporate even more data? Is it worth adding to the already huge challenge of managing data by adding intent data to the mix? Here’s what our panel of experts had to say.

## MARKETERS MUST KNOW WHAT DATA TO USE AND WHEN

Acknowledging that, yes, we as B2B marketers are dealing with a deluge of data, Tessa suggests that the focus should not be on whether it's worth it to add more data into the mix or not.

Instead, marketers should think about what data to use and when using that data is most beneficial. As she says, there are a lot of names out there you don't have in your database. Many of these unknown contacts may be in the market for the solution you provide, so intent data has an important role in revealing those people to you.



**[THIRD-PARTY] INTENT DATA IS VALUABLE IN THAT ANONYMOUS STAGE BEFORE YOU KNOW WHO YOUR PROSPECT IS. FIRST-PARTY DATA BECOMES CRITICAL LATER ON IN THE FUNNEL WHEN YOU'RE TRYING TO UNDERSTAND WHO ACTUALLY IS READY TO BUY FROM YOU. IT'S ALL ABOUT KNOWING WHAT DATA YOU'RE GOING TO USE AT WHAT STAGE AND FOR WHAT GOAL, AND FIGURING OUT YOUR PROCESS TO OPERATIONALIZE THAT ACCORDINGLY."**

## INTENT DATA IS NOT A SILVER BULLET

There are some problems when relying too much on intent data, specifically third-party intent data. David provides two reasons why. The first is getting stuck in the loop of securing and retargeting against third-party data sets exclusively. He believes that in doing so, marketers are not able to get to the first-party side of things, specifically in identifying the people within an account that have intent.

The other issue is the ever-prevailing issue of the relationship between sales and marketing. If intent data fails to deliver on its promise, there is the potential of marketing losing its integrity.



**THIS ONE GETS TRICKY QUICKLY BECAUSE MARKETING'S REALLY SELLING A LOT OF THE HYPE ASSOCIATED WITH INTENT. AND, IF THAT INTENT TRULY ISN'T DISCERNED AND/ OR FELT THROUGH SALES EXECUTIONS, THERE'S A DISBELIEF IN WHAT MARKETING'S DELIVERING, NOT ONLY WITH THAT INITIATIVE, BUT ALSO WITH EVERY OTHER INITIATIVE."**

## MARKETING MATURITY IS THE FOUNDATION FOR SUCCESS

When asked whether marketers should consider using intent data, Matt's answer is both *yes and no*. This is based on the idea that all organizations are different and are at different stages. In his view, some data is a waste, and depending on the processes organizations have in place, even existing data may be significantly underutilized.

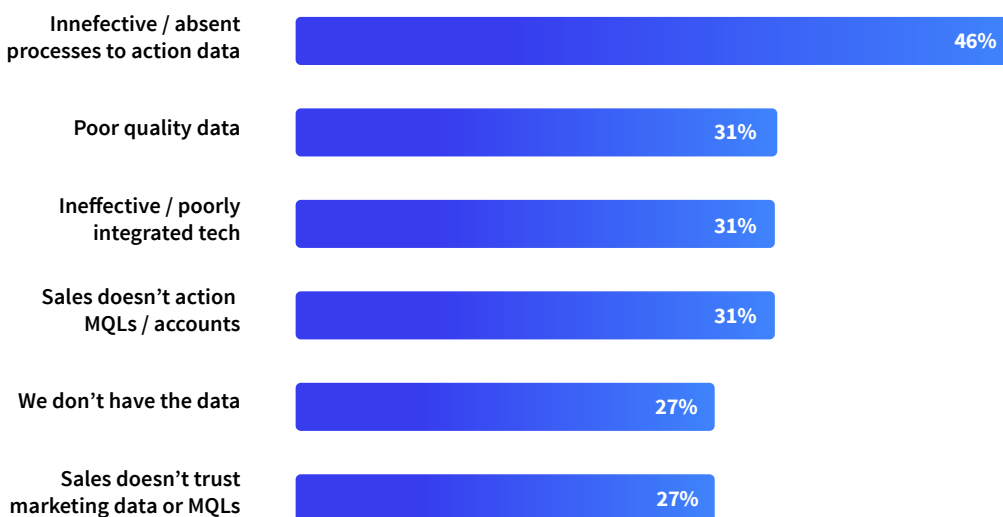


**IT CAN BE BASED ON THE MATURITY OF YOUR ORGANIZATION. DO YOU HAVE A SALES TEAM THAT CAN ACTION THE DATA? DO YOU HAVE MARKETING AUTOMATION THAT YOU CAN FEED THINGS INTO TO BE ABLE TO TAKE ACTION WHEN DATA HITS CERTAIN LEVELS?"**

# How Intent Data Can Help Marketers

Using intent data isn't necessarily straightforward and can present challenges. But it's also clear marketers need intent data to identify and convert sale-ready accounts.

## What challenges does your organization have in identifying and converting sales-ready contact and accounts?



**According to 46% of ON24 poll respondents, the biggest challenge in identifying sales-ready accounts is ineffective (or lack of) processes to action data.**

There are other significant issues as well, with 31% saying both poor quality data and ineffective or poorly integrated technology affects them. Surprisingly, 27% say they lack data entirely.

These data challenges have knock-on effects. In fact, **27% of our poll respondents say sales doesn't trust marketing data or MQLs** and another 31% reporting that sales doesn't take action on MQLs at all.

These are significant challenges that marketers must overcome. Our panel of experts have a few opinions on how intent data can help.

## INTENT DATA CAN HELP TO REDUCE THE NOISE

Although buyer behavior had already started changing before the pandemic, COVID-19 accelerated the shift. Matt reports seeing engagement decrease across the board as buyers have changed the way they want to be sold to. This includes buyers educating themselves on the solutions suppliers have to offer before they want to have a conversation with sales.

The problem comes in following old methods of engagement when buyers are simply not interested. Intent data helps to reduce the noise by focusing on those who are in market, while avoiding annoying everyone else.



**AS MARKETERS, YOU NEED TO FOCUS ON THE “WHO.” YOU’RE GOING TO HAVE A SPECIFIC SEQUENCE OR CADENCE OF MESSAGING THAT’S GOING TO GO OUT TO THEM, BUT YOU DON’T KNOW IF THEY’RE INTERESTED OR NOT. SO, YOU’RE POTENTIALLY WASTING YOUR MARKETING AND SALES TIME AND MONEY ON COMPANIES THAT ARE PROBABLY NOT INTERESTED IN YOUR TOOL. SO, YOU’RE JUST LOOKING AT WHAT POTENTIAL BUYERS COULD BE LOOKING FOR AND TRYING TO AVOID GETTING MARKED AS SPAM IN THAT INBOX BECAUSE YOU HIT THE WRONG PERSON WITH THE WRONG MESSAGE AT THE WRONG TIME. THAT’S WHERE INTENT DATA REALLY GETS LEVERAGED THE BEST. FROM WHAT I’VE SEEN IT POINTS YOU IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION AND KIND OF SETS YOU ON YOUR WAY.”**

## INTENT DATA CAN HELP ORGANIZATIONS BECOME MORE BUYER-CENTRIC

With these changes in buyer behavior, Tessa thinks there is pressure on marketers to be more buyer-centric than they have in the past. This is particularly true now that so much is done in the virtual space, making it even more important that marketers remind their counterparts in sales about what the buyer wants and when or if they want to talk.



**DIGITAL MAKES AUDIENCES A LOT LESS CAPTIVE. THEY CAN ESCAPE YOU AT ANY TIME. SO, IT’S THE MARKETER’S JOB TO BE THE VOICE OF THE CUSTOMER INSIDE OUR ORGANIZATIONS... [WE NEED TO] HELP EXPLAIN TO OUR SALESPEOPLE AND TO OUR LEADERSHIP THAT JUST BECAUSE WE’VE SAID THAT THIS ACCOUNT IS SOMEONE WE WANT TO SELL TO, IT DOES NOT MEAN THAT THEY WANT TO BUY FROM US. THAT’S REALLY WHERE INTENT DATA CAN HELP DRIVE THE FOCUS BACK ON THE BUYER AND ON THE CUSTOMER WHERE YOU CAN SAY, ‘WHILE YOU MIGHT PRIORITIZE THIS ACCOUNT, WHAT THE DATA IS TELLING US IS THAT WE SHOULD ACTUALLY BE FOCUSED ON THESE.’”**



## INTENT DATA CAN HELP IMPROVE UNDERSTANDING OF REAL BUYER NEEDS

It's apparent that poor-quality data, absent data or a lack of efficient processes to action data keep organizations from identifying and converting sales-ready contacts or accounts. Another data-related problem may be that the data available is being misinterpreted.

David says the B2B industry itself is to blame for data misinterpretation. In his view, marketers prefer to chase benchmarks rather than understanding how audiences and buyers interact with a brand. Once marketers stop holding themselves hostage to benchmarks, they can interpret intent better and gain a better view of the customer.



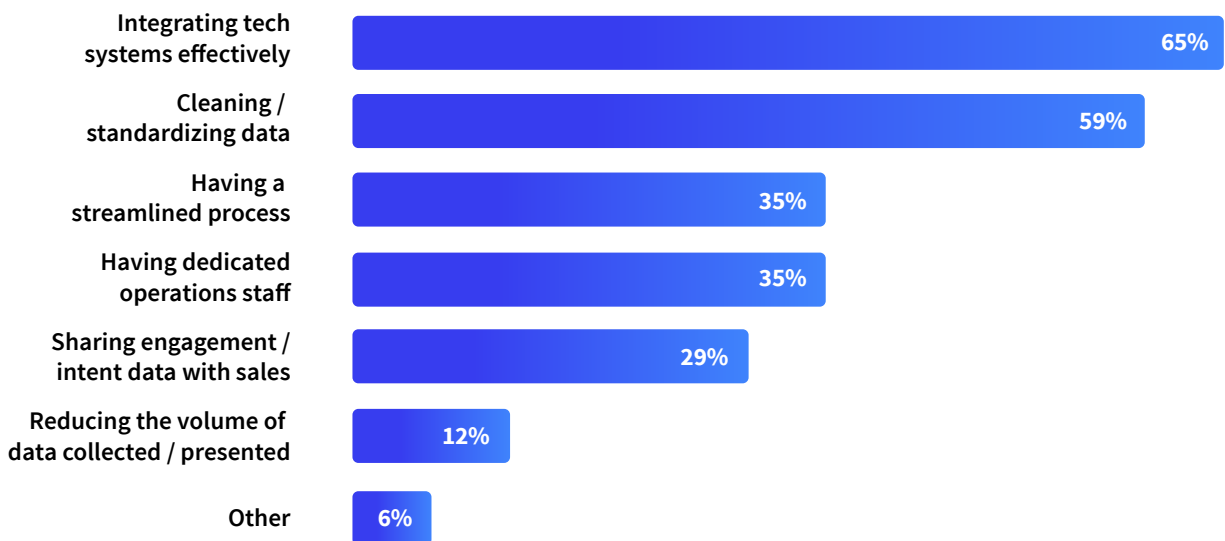
**YOU NEED TO UNDERSTAND WHAT'S YOU NEED TO UNDERSTAND WHAT'S BEING OFFERED TO YOU AS A MARKETER AND HOW YOU CAN RATE AND/ OR SCORE THOSE SPECIFIC INTENT ELEMENTS DIFFERENTLY BECAUSE THEY'RE NOT ALL THE SAME. BEYOND THAT, ASCERTAINING FIRST-PARTY INTENT REALLY COMES BACK TO UNDERSTANDING THE TRUE MOMENT AND THE PSYCHE OF THAT BUYER AT THAT SPECIFIC MOMENT. WHAT WAS THEIR PAIN POINT? WHAT IS THE URGENCY? AND, PREFERABLY, WHAT IS THE TIMELINE TO ADDRESS THAT THERE ARE ARTFUL WAYS THAT YOU CAN ASCERTAIN A LOT AROUND WHAT PEOPLE ARE THINKING, WITHOUT THEM ACTUALLY EVER THINKING THAT THEY'RE BEING PROSPECTED? BY DOING THAT, YOU CAN ASCERTAIN A TON."**

# Success Happens When Everyone Is on the Same Page

What are marketers getting right when it comes to intent data?

According to research from SharpSpring, one of the biggest areas of improvement for martech is the ability to integrate tools. As proof of what integrated martech can achieve, **65% of poll respondents say integrations have helped them to realize value out of the data they collect.**

## What has worked well for your organization in making the most out of data?



An additional **59% of respondents say that cleaning and standardizing data helps drive value as well.**

However, **only 35% of respondents say that dedicated operations staff has led to data success.** Similarly, just 29% of respondents say sharing engagement and intent data with sales helps and only 12% report that reducing the volume of data collected is beneficial.

## HAVING A PROCESS IS KEY

Only 35% of poll respondents say a streamlined process helps their organization to get the most out of data. Nevertheless, when Matt was asked what steps marketers should take to help sales turn MQLs or use data and turn it into meetings and revenue, he pointed to having a process.



**[ALIGNMENT IS ALL ABOUT] UNDERSTANDING AT A HIGH LEVEL, USING YOUR OWN DATA, DRINKING YOUR OWN KOOL-AID OF 'THIS IS HOW WE'RE GOING TO ACTION THESE LEVELS OF CONTACTS.' AND, ONCE YOU HAVE THAT AGREEMENT, IT'S WORKING CLOSELY WITH OPS TO BUILD OUT PROCESSES FOR YOUR TEAM. THAT WAY EVERYONE IS ON THE SAME PAGE, YOU KNOW THAT YOUR PROCESSES ARE IN PLACE AND THAT SALES KNOWS WHEN IT'S THEIR RESPONSIBILITY TO TAKE IT OVER."**

As a result, neither sales nor marketing feels that they are doing more of the work than they should. Furthermore, efforts are all aimed in the same direction.



**THAT WAY, NO ONE'S LEFT HOLDING THE BAG. EVERYBODY HAS THEIR JOB; EVERYBODY'S WORKING TOWARDS HELPING PEOPLE WITH OUR RESPECTIVE PRODUCTS."**

## NOT ALL ACCOUNTS ARE CREATED EQUAL

Expanding on Matt's point, Tessa gives a real-world example of the processes at ON24 in planning. She sees two different buying behaviors: those in a silo with individual decision-makers and the segment with a buying committee that needs consensus.



**BECAUSE OF THOSE TWO BUYING BEHAVIORS, IT HAS ACTUALLY BUBBLED UP TO US HAVING DIFFERENT INTENT SIGNALS ALL THE WAY AT THE TOP OF THE FUNNEL, DIFFERENTIATING THOSE FOR EACH SEGMENT, AND USING THAT TO DICTATE THE PLAY THAT HAPPENS AFTER. THAT UNDERSCORES THAT INTENT IS ONLY AS GOOD AS WHAT YOU PLAN TO DO WITH IT. AND, WHAT YOU PLAN TO DO WITH IT IS ONLY AS GOOD AS THE GOAL THAT YOU ULTIMATELY HAVE, AND RATIONALIZING THAT AGAINST REAL BUYING BEHAVIOR. I THINK SOMETIMES WE LOOK AT THIRD-PARTY INTENT AS THIS MAGICAL SUPPLIER, BUT IT'S AN INPUT INTO A PROCESS THAT YOU HAVE TO WORK OUT BEFORE INTENT EVER ENTERS THE EQUATION.**

## FIRST-PARTY DATA GIVES YOU THE "WHO"

So, what about first-party data? David believes that after decades of misuse of third-party data across both B2B and B2C and that the focus on data privacy and privileged permissions have helped marketers to come to an epiphany about the value of first-party data.



**THE INVESTMENT INTO FIRST-PARTY DATA IS ABOUT VIABILITY IN THE FUTURE, QUITE HONESTLY. YOU REMOVE THE BUSINESS FUNDAMENTAL PERSPECTIVE, AND THEN IT'S OBVIOUS, RIGHT? WELL, IF I'VE GOT FIRST-PARTY ACCESSIBILITY, THAT MEANS I DO KNOW THE 'WHO.' I KNOW THAT PERSON'S SPECIFIC ROLE, NOT JUST THAT THEY WERE WITHIN A SPECIFIC COMPANY AND HAD A SPECIFIC TOPIC OF INTEREST. SO, IT ALLOWS MUCH MORE ACTIONABLE POINTS OF ENGAGEMENT, VERSUS BEING STUCK IN THIS LOOP OF TARGETING PERSONAS WITHOUT EVER ACTUALLY GETTING TO THE PERSON, HOPING THAT SOMEDAY YOU'LL FIGURE OUT WHO THAT PERSON MIGHT BE. FIRST-PARTY DATA REALLY ALLOWS YOU TO ADDRESS THAT CHASM BETWEEN THOSE TWO FUNDAMENTAL IDEAS.**

# Final Takeaways

Here are our experts' top tips to take away regarding using intent data.



## UNDERSTAND YOUR BUYING JOURNEY

Tessa's top takeaway is to make sure you are doing things in the correct order. She advises that marketers plan first and understand their buying journey so that they can then understand which stage of the journey the buyer is at and then find the source of data that matches up with that stage.

“You may discover that for a certain segment of your buyers third-party intent is maybe all you need. For others, maybe it's not useful at all. So, I think that it is critical to have [clarity on] the journey, and then input intent and any data source accordingly, versus the other way around.”



## BE HONEST WITH YOURSELF

Expanding on Tessa's point, Matt warns that marketers need to be honest with themselves and consider whether their organization is ready to delve into first-party intent data. It's possible that their organization is not mature enough or lacks the technology needed to use data effectively.

“I think it's really just being honest with yourself, and making sure that everyone that should be involved is involved in asking, ‘Do we have what we need in place to be actionable with this data?’ Because if you don't, it's just data going into the void.”



## BE REALISTIC ABOUT TECH AND TOOLS

Creating consensus with the other, David adds one last takeaway that builds on the others. And, that is to be realistic about the technology and tools you have and what they can do and what skills are needed to use them to their fullest potential.

“In reality, it's all the work that you have to do, and the technology itself doesn't do too much. So, just be realistic about what those tools really do, and the amount of investment in the process that it takes to become successful by using them.”