



# Intent Data is Broken. Whats Next?

How next-generation intent can overcome the industry's most significant structural challenges.

# How The Next Generation of Intent Can **Overcome** the Industry's Greatest Structural Challenges

While Google presents its' search results in 149 languages, into 219 countries, and Wikipedia delivers content in 290 languages, why is it that the intent data you buy is almost exclusively identified in English and from North America? Well, at best, it may be from other continents, but most vendors can't tell you which ones.

Meanwhile, we must recognize that companies don't make purchase decisions, so they can't have a swell of intent. Over recent years, we've all studied changes in buyer decisions and the expansion of participants into defined groups responsible for specific decisions. In this reality, how can it make sense that a company can have a swell of intent signal when the decisions are decentralized and regionally based? The truth is that most sizable companies have multiple divisions and lines of business, making autonomous decisions between separate buying groups, making different decisions on related topics at any point in time. And, those decisions are typically spread across continents, making it impossible to appropriately target the signal because the object of intent data vendors is to identify a global company rather than

regional buying centers.

Finally, how would your marketing decisions change if you realized that your intent buying signals don't indicate purchase intent or propensity? Interest for sure, but that interest can reflect a myriad of things other than a purchase: employees researching the approach of a competitor, interns studying for an exam, a sales team researching a mid-stage prospect, and more. The interest options, outside of purchase, are pretty limitless.

So, are you getting what you paid for? No. Sure, your vendors and a ream of whitepapers told you that intent signals are a company swell of actionable purchase interest, that they're predictive of future behavior, and guess what, it's all wrong.



**“Investing in a B2B intent data provider doesn't guarantee immediate improvement in revenue engine performance. Organizations also need to ensure their internal marketing and/or sales processes leverage this data properly. Effective intent data providers work with their clients to help them derive maximum insights and value from their investment.”**

**The B2B Intent Data Providers Landscape, Q1 2023,  
Forrester Research**

# The Greatest Cost Of Your Intent Data Is The **Misfired Marketing Investments** You Make Because Of It

At its core, the intent data industry is broken. Much of the market promotes minimally viable, remedial technology that simply adds up content consumption of companies and informs you when one of those companies ‘surges’ or ‘spikes’ in recency or frequency of a topic. When those signals are errant, marketers spend time and money pursuing false opportunities, and the cost of that pursuit scales with the size of your program.

Let’s illustrate these points using a few simple use cases...

You’re the Head of Marketing for a division of your company in North America. Acme company is one of your best target accounts, and your intent vendor just identified them as surging on a topic you’re keenly interested in, widgets. It’s your lucky day, right? Well, not so fast. Your vendor can’t tell you that the intent signal came from the UK, not the US. So, any investment in marketing to this target account is a waste. Meanwhile, not only did you need to know that the signal came from the US, you need to understand if it came from



Charlotte, North Carolina, or San Jose, California. Why? Because Charlotte would indicate an acquisition marketing strategy to a new buying center, but the buying center in San Jose is an existing customer, and the signal would indicate a retention play rather than acquisition.

You’re the Head of Marketing for a division of your company in EMEA

Again, Acme company is your best target account, and the issue of geographic

resolution to a buying center is still plaguing you, just as your North American counterpart. And, like your counterpart, many of your signals are errant and drive you to invest time in money pursuing false opportunities. This time, though, you realize that you're getting far fewer intent signals. Why? Well, most of your target accounts speak languages other than English. You need to identify country and language-specific buying center intent in French, German, Italian, Spanish, Dutch, Swedish, and more. And, since most intent vendors focus their efforts in North America, any signals that you do get are for buying centers that are thousands of miles outside of your region. For you, we also need to calculate the opportunity cost of missed purchase intent.

## An Industry In Need Of Transformation

Suppose you had a magic wand and wanted to improve your marketing capabilities and identify needs and prioritize your sales marketing investments; what would that state of nirvana look like? Let's take a look at the areas you should consider before your first wave of the wand:

Let's illustrate these points using a few simple use cases...

**Increase Actionable Signals** - In an account-based strategy, we talk about marketing to companies, but the reality is that we sell to buying groups. When



intent indicates that an account is in market, the first step should be to identify which buying center is leading the effort. Most intent vendors fail here, ascribing more significance to a surge in company-level signals than this buying center actually represents. This collection of individuals is tasked with identifying solutions to a business problem experienced by one or more parts of a company.

**Make It Insightful** - While intent data can help identify companies and score a topic's use within it, it can't predict their propensity to buy. Intent data is backward-looking, creating significant marketing latency issues. Marketers who use intent data without predictive analytics may miss out on potential opportunities or be tardy in outreach to prospects because they lack insight into the

timing and likelihood of a purchase.

**Consider Global Implications** - We live in a global, multilingual world where large-scale success means reaching markets outside our home country or language community. As a result, intent solutions increasingly must leverage data in languages other than (American) English. This includes capturing intent data in multiple languages with full geographic context to indicate buying center locations, as well as marrying this intent data with predictive analytics to prioritize accounts and identify the next- best action across all channels.

**Use Your Data** - Intent data is interesting because it comes from sources outside of your firewall. While it can fill your

“blindside” to some degree, you need to first blend that data with what you already know about a target account. Without first integrating that intent data with your CRM and Marketing Automation systems, you could find yourself marketing over the top of your sales team, using inappropriate content while they’re in a late-stage conversation.

**Focus On Context** - This is probably the biggest shortcoming of 3rd party intent: Because 3rd party intent providers don’t actually ‘own’ the data they are providing, the quality of their data is compromised by lack of context and the strength/ weakness of their partners. Understanding who is generating each engagement and where and within what environment that engagement is happening is essential in evaluating whether there is ‘true intent’. It is important to point out that there is often no direct correlation between contacts being provided and the individuals from the account that are actually generating activity.



# Making Intent Work in Enterprise

Blinded by a lack of geographic specificity and English centricity, the enterprise struggles to succeed with intent data. They need to know how buyers engage in multiple languages and regions globally and correlate that external learning with what they know in their sales and marketing systems.

Much of today's intent data fails to support the enterprise cases in two ways: it's not readily available across the enterprise, and it lacks the nuance and detail necessary to satisfy more sophisticated use cases or even context to support personalization at scale. Today, enterprises have data spread across lines of business, teams, geographies, and platforms.

While combining intent data and predictive analytics has value for B2B organizations of all sizes, it's particularly important in complex organizations. In enterprises where numerous business units, messages, and marketing lines are the norm, managers face the challenge of coordinating marketing activities across numerous products, industries, geographies, channels, and partners.

Enterprise organizations have come to the realization that simply putting lots of diverse data into a data lake won't miraculously create meaningful insights — not without further integration, transformation, enrichment, and orchestration. Delivering connected data across the enterprise environment isn't trivial, especially with

growing data volumes, complexity, and the need for a high speed of ingestion. Inadequately integrated data leads to poor business decisions, bad customer experience, reduced competitive



**“Most large intent providers are capturing an increasing proportion of their signals from English-language research taking place in EMEA, APAC, and LATAM, but only a handful of providers are capturing a significant volume of signals in local languages from those locations.”**

**The Forrester Wave™: B2B Intent Data Providers, Q2 2023, Forrester Research**

advantage, and slower innovation and growth. However, with growing data volumes and complexity, delivering new business initiatives has become more time-consuming, expensive, and challenging.

# Intent and Predictive:

## Better Together

Mature ABM is fundamentally a data challenge. This is a common stumbling block in realizing success. Without the guided and optimized direction of the next best action, the process of identifying, approaching, and engaging with prospects becomes an amazingly complex web of decisions. Only with a solid understanding of audience needs, their propensity to act, and a determination of the best engagement approach, can marketing become more than another top-down, low performing campaign.

Neither intent signals nor predictive models can provide all of the insights needed to identify likely buyers and deliver the right messaging at the right time. Put the two together however, and the two tools have superior ability to understand a target account, define an orchestration plan based upon their current situation, and deliver exponentially greater power to drive response and accelerate sales. Combining intent data and predictive analytics can give marketing and sales teams the explicit, company-level information they need in order to discover in market accounts and pinpoint their topics of interest. This allows you to market with your audience — not at them, allowing for more effective personalization.

Armed with actionable insights into buyers' needs and specific stages in the buying process, marketers are better able

to provide high-value, relevant content timed to the buyer stage. Only then can you engage with the authenticity and credibility B2B buyers require.

**“Most marketing and revenue development teams are expected to pass to sales only those opportunities that meet strict qualification criteria to avoid wasting valuable sales resources. Intent data should not become an exception to that rule, as those signals on their own should not replace the qualification process.”**

**Brett Kankhe, Principal Analyst at Forrester Research**

While combining intent data and predictive analytics has value for B2B organizations of all sizes, as previously mentioned, it's particularly important for ABM success within complex organizations. Large organizations typically have abundant data on their target customers. Unfortunately, much of the data is unintelligible because it's disconnected. Investing in solutions that can ingest and unify the data allows organizations to pinpoint accounts that lie in the nexus of high predictive scoring and high intent. This enables marketers to sort and prioritize an enormous volume of target accounts so they can focus on the most valuable and deliver the right content through the best channels.

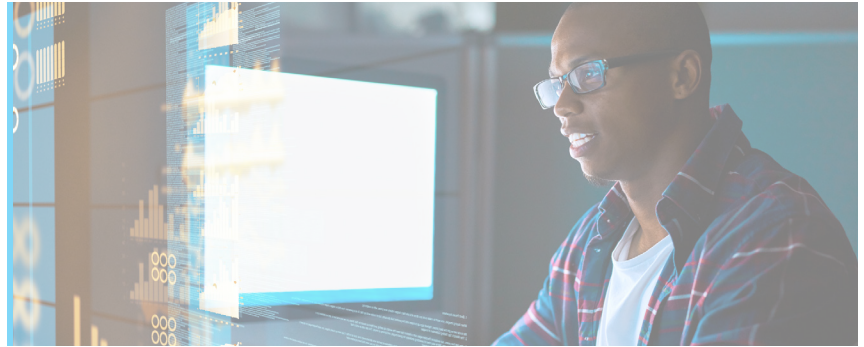
## Intent and Predictive: Better Together

Acquiring and utilizing third-party intent continues to face challenges from privacy advocates and government legislation as attention and concerns around online data collection rightfully grow. With the deprecation of browser's cookies and site data controls on the horizon, cookie-blocking technology like

Apple's Intelligent Tracking Prevention (ITP) and Firefox's Enhanced Tracking Protection (ETP) and far-reaching data privacy legislation like the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the California

Consumer Privacy Act (CCPA), organizations that rely on third-party cookies and programmatic ad engagement to source intent signals will be forced to rethink their approach.

While ITP, GDPR and CCPA will result in a great amount 'traditional' third-party intent data disappearing, the same can't be said for those providers with access to large networks of websites, and the ability to utilize first-party cookies to track, influence, and derive purchase intent from audiences. Most behavioral signals aren't tied to third-party cookies at all. Engagements like social interactions, content syndication, and outbound call activity are all important sources of intent. Augmenting these insights with intent and predictive scoring, allows for these invaluable data sources to be placed back into predictive algorithms, multiplying future success. Getting the most out of intent data, and the most efficient results, requires understanding the nuances in the data sources, how the data is collected



and how multiple signals can be combined.

## Focus on What Really Matters

The last thing you want to do is tell your sales team that an account is displaying high intent when that intent is not accompanied by fit, opportunity or timing. If a signal pertains to third-party content, do you know the exact nature of that content or if that content was viewed by multiple buying centers at an organization — or multiple times by one buying center? Do the individuals that engage with the content hold influence in the buying cycle?

The real secret to getting the most out of intent data lies in how 1st party data can support a 3rd party data strategy to drive additional opportunities. By utilizing a combined approach, you get full visibility into current prospects and customers and how they engage with a brand across your own channels - as well as insight into whether those accounts are actually in active research cycles for the products and services inferred.

Content consumption as a digital signal is only as strong as knowing the context and how finely it is categorized.

Unlike signals from 3rd party intent providers, 1st party data can identify specifically who is engaging. But with enterprise sales and complex sales cycles, you typically need multiple people from within a single buying center interested in your offering. Getting value from fast-flowing and rich enterprise data requires analyzing that data to create predictive models that further infuse intelligence into enterprise applications. An enterprise-class ABM solution can aggregate engagement at the account level to measure unified interest.



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