



SELECTING PROVIDERS

Comparing B2B Purchase Intent Vendors

Know What You're Buying

By Andrew Briney

Confused about the dizzying array of options in the B2B tech market for so-called “purchase intent data?” You’re not alone. We’ve entered classic Gartner Hype Cycle territory with intent data, and lately seem perched atop the “peak of inflated expectations.”

Fortunately a few early adopters have cycled past the hype to a point where they’re seeing positive early results. Now, with so many possible ways to apply intent insights to day-to-day marketing practices, the rest of us can’t wait to get started.

But hold on. Before we get ahead of ourselves, let’s take a step back and make sure we’re looking at this burgeoning market with open eyes and a clear head.

True purchase intent activity tends to coalesce around the most granular content that ranks the highest in search.

Purchase intent data is exciting because it promises to give you a crystal ball into who exactly is in market for your products. It extends beyond insights gleaned through traditional inbound/outbound demand marketing to capture and organize data from across the Web into dynamic purchase signals.

The applications of intent are many, from improved prospect scoring to e-mail conversions, programmatic ad targeting and account-based marketing.

Internal vs. External Intent

The first thing to know is there are really two kinds of intent data: Internal and External.

Internal data refers to your company’s first-party information, drawn from your CRM system or inbound traffic to your website/hosted content.

These data insights are valuable but limited in scope. In response, marketers are now turning to **external data** sources, and that’s what we’ll focus on in this paper.

External intent is determined through third-party behavioral signals from across the Web: B2B content communities, publisher sites and social networks, based on activities like browsing, downloads, video/streaming and the like.

Today’s hot topic is how reliable or valuable external intent is, and how to apply it in practice. A good way to break it down is by going to the most common source of intent activity: Google search.

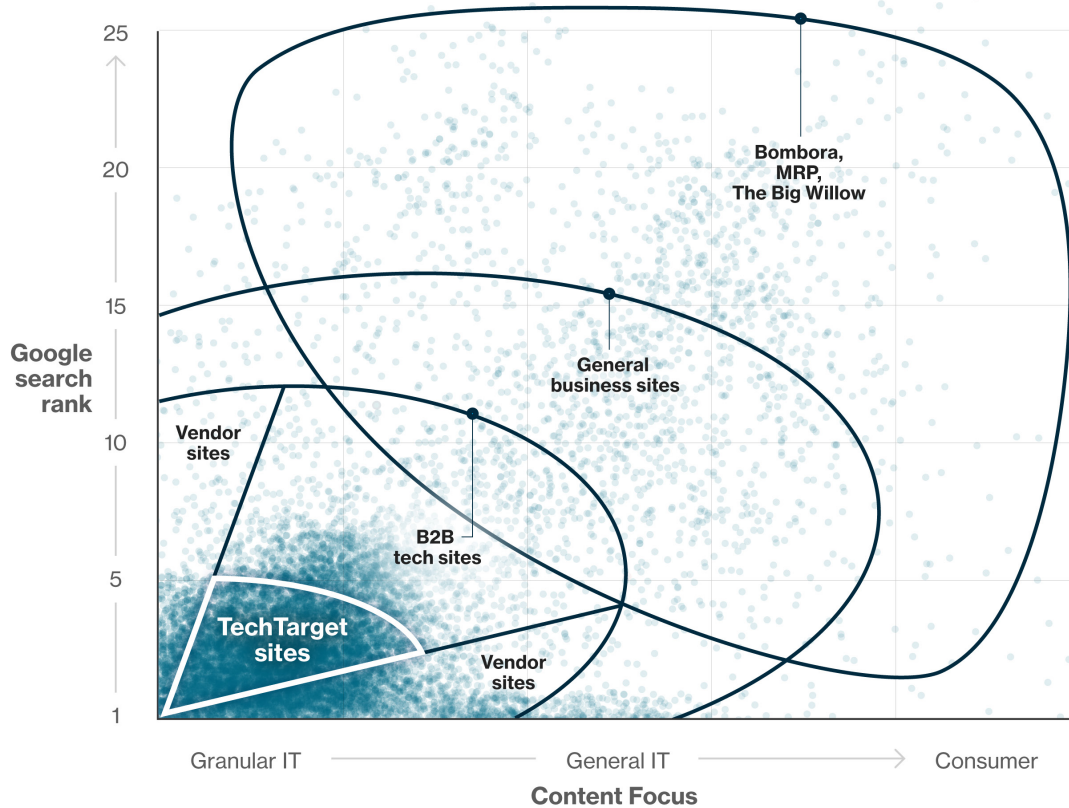
It’s well known that 80% of enterprise tech buyers start their solution search on Google, and each buyer conducts an average of 12 searches before engaging with vendors.¹ The graph on p. 3 depicts the pattern of *how* they use Google and *where* they click *after* they get to a search results page.

In the enterprise tech space, the pattern of Web activity typically looks a lot like this scatter grid. For any given tech segment, there are tens-of-thousands or even millions of these hits happening every month. But activity tends to coalesce around the most granular content that ranks the highest in search.

¹ Think with Google: <https://www.thinkwithgoogle.com/articles/the-changing-face-b2b-marketing.html>

Sources of B2B Purchase Intent Insights

In the Age of Big Data, it's actually "little data" that matters most when searching for purchase intent accuracy. Solutions that propose to crawl the Web looking for intent take in vast quantities of information, but in the process often completely miss the most important intent signals.



No surprise there – Google considers over 200 factors when assessing content relevancy, and highly ranks pages it deems most relevant to a search inquiry.²

The strongest intent signals cluster at the intersection of *relevancy* and *rank*. So while there's a lot of activity happening beyond that, the less specific the content, the lower it ranks and the more dispersed the activity becomes.

Vendors Offering Intent Data

Now let's look at where different *sources* of intent data live within the grid above. Earlier we explained *internal* intent signals. As a group, vendors' own Web sites tend to show up as small slices on the margins of search page results, representing their traffic from both organic content and paid AdWords. While some vendor content appears high in search, obviously any single vendor captures only a portion of that traffic.

² Backlinko: <http://backlinko.com/google-ranking-factors>

The primary source of *external* intent data comes from third-party content communities – both B2B tech and business-focused publishers. There is a big difference in the quantity and quality of buyer activity across these publisher networks. Together they generate the lion's share of relevant intent activity, but not in equal amounts.

Because TechTarget content is both highly specific and highly ranked, its purchase signals offer a truer predictor of intent.

For example, over 90% of inbound buyer traffic to TechTarget's network of 140 Web sites originates from very granular keyword searches and clicks on highly ranked content. It's only a portion of all activity happening across the Web, but because TechTarget content is both highly specific and highly ranked, its purchase signals offer a truer predictor of intent than what lies further out on the graph.

Beyond these publisher rings lie the rest of the great blue ocean of the Internet, and in the last year we've seen the rise of startups such as **Bombora**, **The Big Willow** and **MRP/Prelytix** that scan these outliers looking for intent.

While these companies typically scan a large volume of information, very little of it ends up being core purchase signals. More commonly the intent signals in these scans are incidental keyword matches on sites that aren't dedicated to enterprise IT buying. Notably, many of the publishers in the inner rings of this graph prevent their sites from being included in these scans.

Applying Intent in Practice

Understanding the complex relationship between online content, Google rank, buyer behavior and intent signals is only the first step in deciding whether (and how) you can apply this data to your marketing programs.

The next steps are:

- 1 Asking questions to providers about the source and methodology they use to identify and rank account activity
- 2 Resolving data and list outputs to a format that integrates with your marketing stack and empowers your workflow
- 3 Using the data to refine list and audience targets
- 4 Executing data-powered display and demand gen campaigns
- 5 Assessing improvements in marketing ROI: conversion rates, deal velocity, pipeline creation, etc.



For more information about B2B Purchase Intent, and guidance on applying it to your marketing programs, contact us at Intent@techtarget.com

About TechTarget

TechTarget (NASDAQ: TTGT) is the Web's leading destination for serious technology buyers researching and making enterprise technology decisions. Our extensive global network of online and social media, powered by TechTarget's Activity Intelligence™ platform, allows technology sales and marketing teams to leverage real-time purchase intent data to more intelligently engage technology buyers and prioritize follow-up based on active projects, technical priorities and business needs. With more than 140 highly targeted technology-specific websites and a wide selection of custom advertising, branding, lead generation and sales enablement solutions, TechTarget delivers unparalleled reach and innovative opportunities to drive technology sales and marketing success around the world.

TechTarget has offices in Atlanta, Beijing, Boston, London, Munich, Paris, San Francisco, Singapore and Sydney.

To learn how you can engage with serious technology buyers worldwide, visit techtarget.com and follow us [@TechTarget](https://twitter.com/TechTarget).



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