



## Intent Data Monitoring for Sourcing and Prioritizing Accounts

For many b-to-b organizations, the set of accounts that are a good fit for their solutions is too broad to be addressed effectively with marketing and sales resources

Today's buyers often leave extensive digital footprints as they're researching solutions to their business problems

Intent monitoring tracks the research behaviors of buyers, allowing organizations to focus their resources on buyers that appear to be in the market

The title of pop singer Jimmy Buffett's song "If the Phone Doesn't Ring, It's Me" suggests that the person the song is addressing is expecting a call from the singer. The logic, then, is that if the call doesn't come...well, that's the singer not calling.

B-to-b marketers want to know which prospective buyers they should expect a call from. Using third-party data that tracks the activity of buyers (intent data) across the digital landscape, marketers can discover when a prospect in the market for their solutions should be calling – but isn't. In this brief, we define intent data and explain how and why marketers are monitoring it to improve demand creation performance.

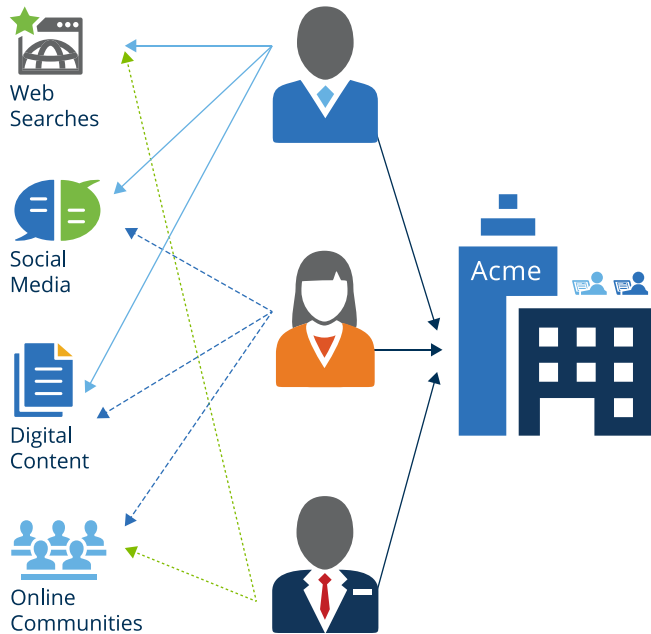
### What Is Intent Data?

Marketing automation platforms (MAPs) revolutionized b-to-b marketing by allowing marketers to not only automate a sequence of communications with prospects, but also track whether – and to what extent – those prospects consumed the content sent to them. The evidence of content consumption collected in MAPs has been interpreted by many b-to-b organizations as evidence of the prospect's interest in the seller's solution. This buyer behavior data has allowed organizations to focus their sales and lead development efforts on the prospects within the addressable market that exhibit interest in their solutions, often leading to dramatic improvements in sales efficiency.

However, buyer behavior data is not always reliable. Although the behaviors tracked in a MAP are those of individuals, not all buyers find the seller's Web site and content as they research potential solutions – so sellers may never become aware of a buyer's interest. Also, as every marketing and sales organization has discovered, one individual's interest in a solution does not necessarily imply organizational interest. This is where third-party intent data comes in. Intent data is prospect behavioral data (e.g. evidence of Web searches, Web site visits, content consumption, social media participation) collected across the digital landscape and aggregated for the organizations from which the behavior emanates. Intent data monitoring associates the digital behavior of multiple individuals with the organizations they represent – across all digital channels through which they conduct solution research. This multipronged approach provides stronger evidence of organizational intent to buy than approaches that use the behavior of any one individual within the organization.

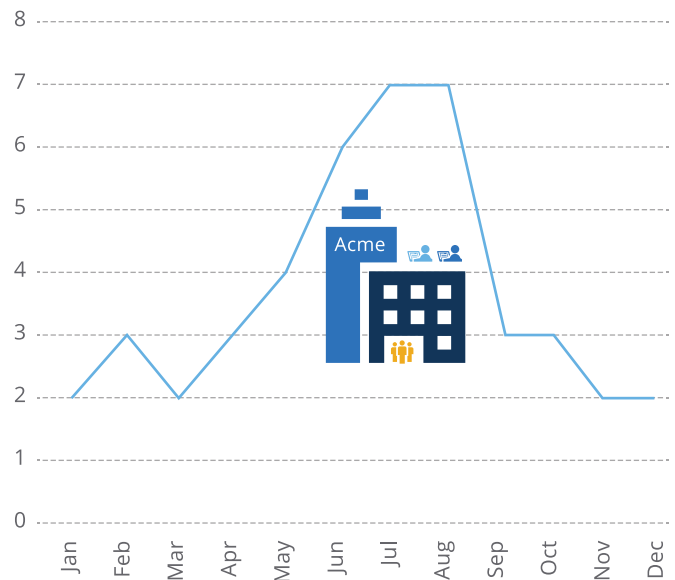
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## Intent Monitoring for Prospect Prioritization



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### Intent Activity Level



### Intent Monitoring for Prospect Prioritization

For organizations that collect and score prospect behavior in a MAP, intent data provides two advantages. First, in most cases, multiple individuals within an account researching solutions constitute stronger evidence that the organization intends to make a purchase than a single individual demonstrating that interest. Second, when digital evidence encompassing multiple research channels and media outlets is combined, the case for inferring buying intent grows even stronger. When organizations use intent data to infer organizational interest in a solution and first-party MAP data to associate that interest to specific individuals within those organizations, they can provide their lead development reps (LDRs) and sales teams with stronger selling opportunities than would be possible with either of these tactics used in isolation.

Intent monitoring is also valuable as an early warning system to help account-based marketing (ABM) teams detect potential interest within targeted accounts in topics related to the organization's solutions. When organizations place heavy bets on marketing and selling into a relatively small set of accounts, all possible buying cycles must be surfaced in time

for the selling organization to effectively position its offerings. This strategy ensures that there are no uncontested losses in those accounts, and that competitors won't have the opportunity to unduly influence deals. By monitoring intent signals, ABM teams have a better chance of noticing when their target accounts may be entering or accelerating a buying cycle.

### Intent Monitoring for Prospect Sourcing

One of the most promising uses of intent monitoring is as a prioritization layer on top of propensity, or look-alike, monitoring. In this use case, organizations apply look-alike modeling (see the brief "Predictive Analytics Applications: Predictive Prospect Sourcing") to identify the accounts within an addressable market that are most likely to buy, and then use intent monitoring to track this subset of accounts (just as account-based marketers do). When look-alike modeling results in a set of accounts that is still too large to address effectively with LDRs and sales resources, intent monitoring can provide further prioritization, allowing organizations to focus their outbound marketing and sales efforts on the subset of high-propensity targets exhibiting an acute level of interest in related subjects.

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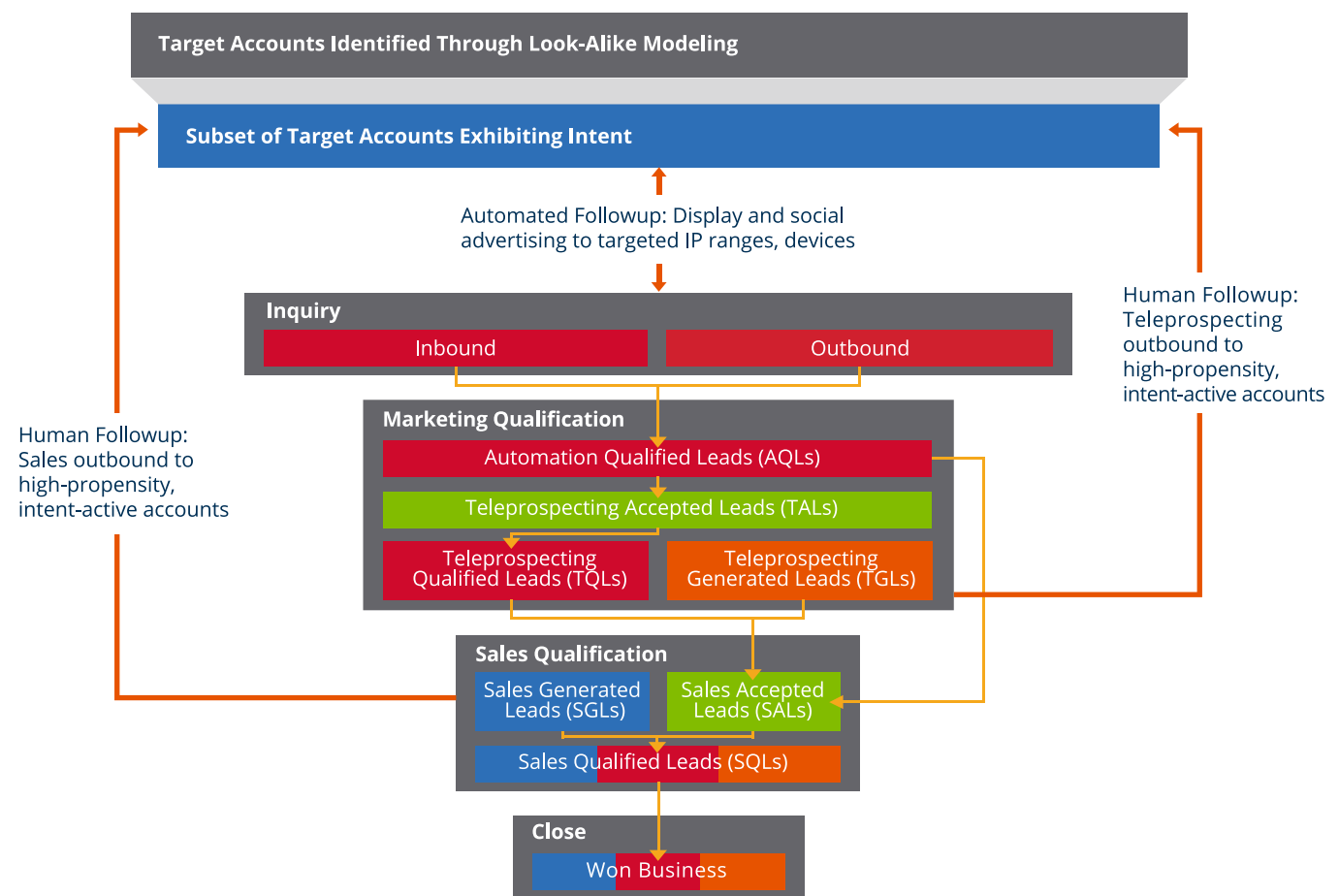
Many organizations use intent monitoring as a standalone application to source prospects. In this application, the organization doesn't conduct propensity modeling, but targets accounts that exhibit surges of interest in related subjects. However, this interest may or may not indicate that a buying process is in flight or imminent. Moreover, even when intent signals do indicate the start of a buying process, the data alone doesn't indicate that the organization exhibiting the intent behaviors is an appropriate prospect for any given solution. Whether these organizations are in the right vertical markets or geographies and have the necessary resources are just some of the questions not answered by intent. As a result, intent data when used as a standalone application may not be sufficient to trigger marketing and selling activities.

Another important limitation of intent monitoring stems from its heavy reliance on the ability to track solution research behaviors to Internet protocol (IP) addresses associated with prospect accounts. When individuals regularly work outside corporate networks, their research behavior is difficult to associate with an organization. Many small businesses, for example, receive dynamically assigned IP addresses that trace back to an Internet service provider rather than the organization.

## Considerations for Human Followup: Top-Down vs. Bottom-Up

In most prospect-targeting exercises, organizations use what they already know about their likely buyers to organize their search for new prospects for followup by LDRs and sales

## Intent Monitoring and the Demand Waterfall®



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resources. Attributes describing prospects by vertical market, size and other variables are used as filters to screen potential prospects (see the brief “Targeting: It’s All Relative”). This top-down approach mirrors the process of filtering a list of potential accounts and also can be used with intent data. If organizations know the search terms, Web sites, content assets and other resources that prospects are likely to utilize, a top-down approach can identify the accounts that are displaying interest in the appropriate resources.

However, the top-down approach has limitations. Organizations may not always know in advance the full variety of search terms and resources their prospects use when researching solutions. Moreover, individuals researching solutions, particularly new concept and new paradigm solutions, may struggle to find the most appropriate search terms and content – making their intent signals misleading or difficult to detect. In this case, a top-down use of intent data may produce false negatives (failing to identify some or all of the intended target prospects) or false positives (erroneously identifying inappropriate accounts as prospects). Therefore, SiriusDecisions advises augmenting a top-down approach with a bottom-up approach that entails two additional steps. First, survey individuals in current prospect accounts to collect information on the search terms and digital resources they used when beginning their solution research. Second, work with intent-monitoring providers to identify additional intent signals that correlate with top-down-derived intent signals.

## Considerations for Automated Followup

Another common use of intent monitoring is for triggering delivery of digital assets – including display

advertising – to prospects that are exhibiting intent. To this end, some intent-monitoring providers (see the SiriusDecisions Marketplace™ for our list of providers) enable automated delivery of display advertising to accounts exhibiting intent, while others integrate with ad targeting services. This targeting is nearly always aimed at unknown individuals who are known to be working within the ranges of IP addresses from which the intent signals are emanating.

Intent data also can be used to deliver content to known prospects captured in a MAP or sales force automation system that are associated with intent-producing organizations. For example, intent monitoring may reveal a surge of relevant intent signals coming from a target account, triggering the delivery of content to prospects at the target organization that are held in the MAP database.

## The Sirius Decision

Without question, the collective solution research behaviors of many individuals within a target organization are a more reliable indicator of that organization’s purchase intent than the behavior of any one individual. Additionally, intent monitoring promises to help lesser-known brands avoid uncontested lost sales. Because the use of intent monitoring is still new in b-to-b, however, the evidence for its efficacy is still limited. Organizations should experiment by conducting low-stakes pilots (see the Core Strategy Report “The SiriusDecisions Predictive Application Evaluation Framework”), such as using intent monitoring to trigger digital content to known contacts, then expanding its use as efficacy is proven.