

WHY DO B2B
BUYERS STRUGGLE?
**THE ANSWER IS
IN THE DATA**

ABERDEEN **pja**

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Executive Summary

For years now, we've heard that B2B buyers are most of the way through the buyer's journey before they are willing to speak to a sales person.

However, recent findings from our 2nd annual B2B Buyer Survey (conducted in collaboration with [PJA Advertising & Marketing](#)) revealed that **buyers actually tend to reach out to vendors at the beginning of the buying process.**

What's more, buyers are especially willing to speak to vendors early in the buying process IF the vendor can actually help them make a buying decision.

Traditionally, companies have pursued an SEO-oriented, inbound marketing strategy to capture the attention of buyers who have embarked on their buying journey. The problem is that this approach leaves a lot to chance.

Today, by leveraging the power of intent data, vendors can identify and engage prospects at the very beginning of their buying journey. As a result, vendors can now uncover active new deals, increase their consideration percentage, and close more business.

SOS: Buyers Need Help!

When asked to describe their most recent B2B purchase, respondents to our B2B Buyer's Survey painted a very telling picture:

It was awful. Many times, decisions are made to feel relief - not to get the best product.

Large purchases are usually a hassle. This was no different.

The process took too long; it added a ton of cost.

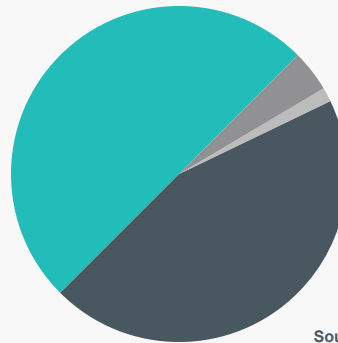
Requires huge time for stakeholder engagement and a committed team to ensure success. It is very draining.

Yikes. B2B buying can be a painful and rarely rewarding struggle. And this struggle has several causes.

First, buyers just don't know what they need. 50% of our survey respondents said that their needs were either partially, not well, or poorly defined.

Q. When you're involved in a purchase, how well defined are the business needs?

50%
say they have
incomplete, unclear, or
poorly defined criteria



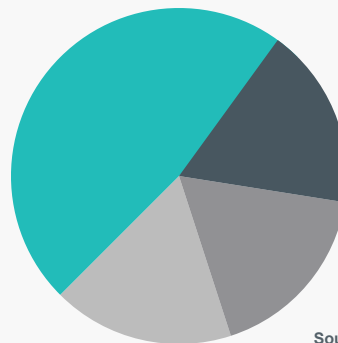
Poorly Defined - 1%
Not Well Defined - 7%
Partially Defined - 42%
Well Defined - 50%

Source: B2B Buyers Survey, Aberdeen 2019

It should come as no surprise then to discover that buyers have difficulty getting a purchase over the finish line:

Q. How frequently do you initiate a purchase process then halt or postpone the decision?

53%
say they postpone
decisions on at least
half of purchases



More Than 75%
More Than Half The Time
Half The Time
Less Than Half

Source: B2B Buyers Survey, Aberdeen 2019

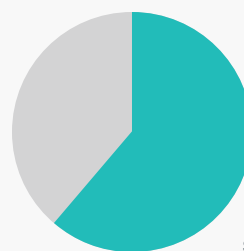
Interestingly, when buyers can't complete a purchase, they don't fault their own inability to define their needs. Instead, they blame vendors:

Q. When you've canceled or postponed a purchase, what are the most common reasons?

66%
See no
differentiation
between solutions



57%
Decide that no
vendor meets
needs



Source: B2B Buyers Survey, Aberdeen 2019

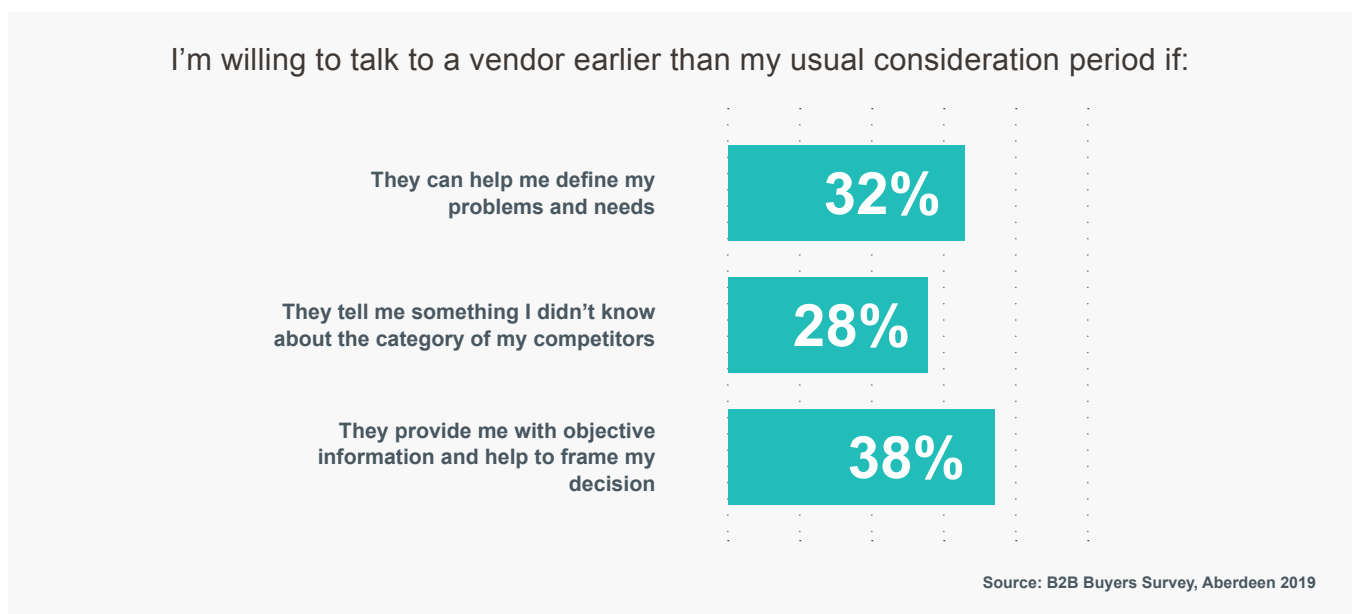
Beacon of Hope: Vendors Can help

The funny thing is, buyers look to vendors to help them alleviate the inevitable pain of the buying process.

First of all, 73% of B2B buyers say that they reach out to vendors early in the process.



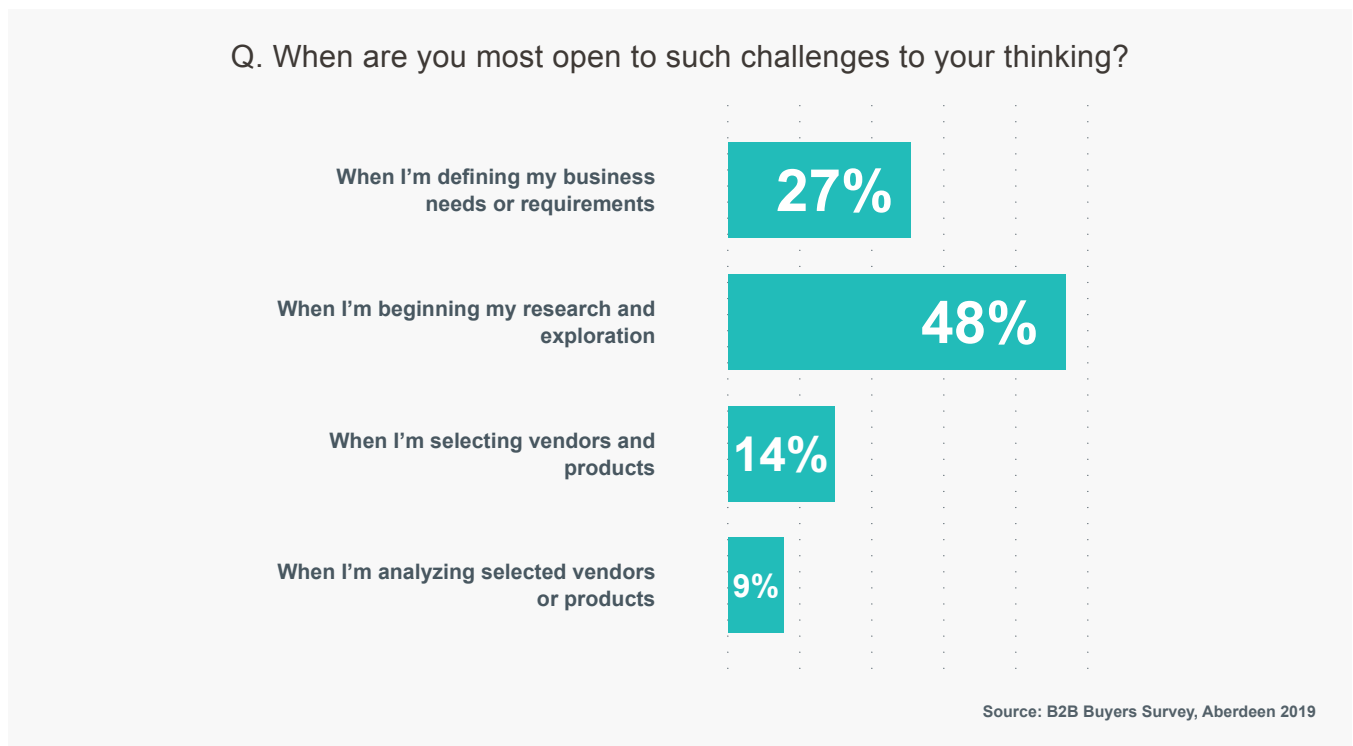
Second of all, they are more willing to speak with a vendor “earlier than usual in the consideration process” if that vendor can help them frame their decision:



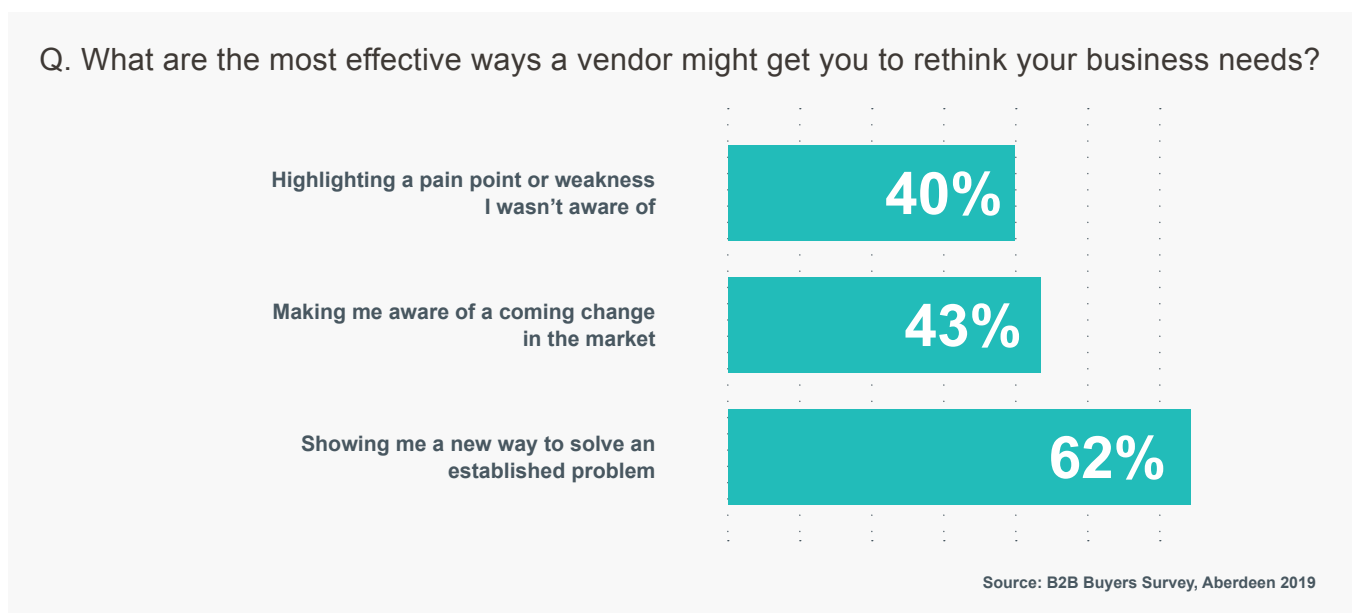
In many cases, the best way for vendors to help buyers frame their decision is to challenge their assumptions about what they really need.

Furthermore, in [last year's](#) B2B Buyer Survey, we found that *65% of those surveyed would be more likely to work with a vendor who challenged their way of doing business by highlighting a pain point or organizational need they weren't aware of.*

Unsurprisingly, buyers are much more open to such challenges at the beginning of the buying process:

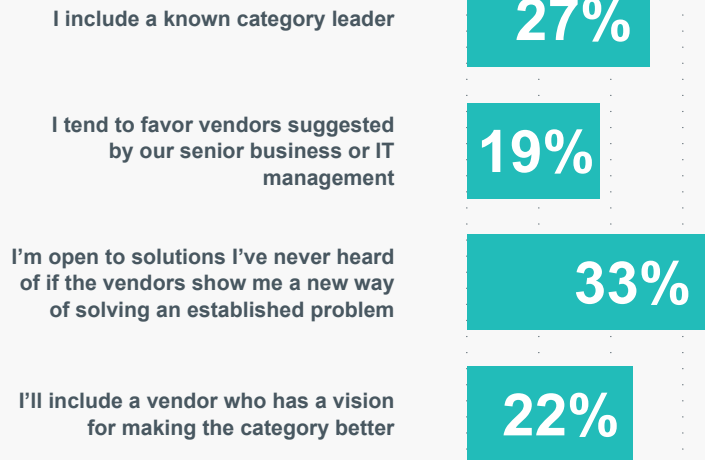


And such challenges are most effective when they involve showing buyers a new way to solve an established problem:



Finally, it's worth noting that challenging buyers can really broaden their horizons. New entrants and challenger brands can raise their profile in the eyes of buyers:

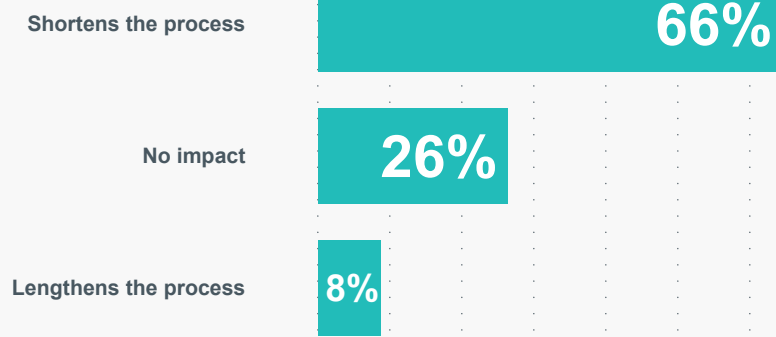
Q. How do you typically go about creating a final consideration set?



Source: B2B Buyers Survey, Aberdeen 2019

The good news is that when vendors successfully show buyers how to solve stubborn problems in new ways, and thereby help them frame and make a buying decision, it shortens the (otherwise painfully long) process:

Q. If a vendor shows you a new way to solve a problem, what impact does it have on your ability to make a decision?



Source: B2B Buyers Survey, Aberdeen 2019

How to Begin at the Beginning

The beginning of the buyer's journey is a critical inflection point. Not only is it the point at which buyers are most open to interactions with vendors, it is the point where those interactions can have the greatest impact.

Unfortunately, the beginning of the buyer's journey has traditionally been shrouded in mystery, at least from the vendor's perspective.

Based on the idea that only the buyer really knows when the process has begun, marketers have had to rely on two things: luck and educated guessing.

The luck angle has usually been covered by email marketing: Blast your target accounts with emails and hope that you get lucky and reach someone who is currently in-market for a solution like yours who will not only open your email, but also click through.

The educated guessing front has been covered by content-driven, inbound marketing strategies: Produce enough quality content to either (a) develop ongoing relationships with prospects so that they think of you first when in-market or (b) rank so well in Google that prospects easily find you when they begin their research.

Now to let you in on a little secret: the emergence of actionable buyer intent data changes everything.

The Evolution of Intent Data

For years, the only buyer intent data—that is, data that signaled the intention of a buyer to purchase a certain product or solution—was effectively limited to actions that buyers took on your site: IE, filling out a form.

Eventually, a market for intent data emerged. Tech publishers and technology reviews sites either sold access to their data or leveraged their SEO clout to get sponsored content in front of researching buyers.

And, finally, Bombora created a co-op of sites that would, at least at a very high level, provide companies insight into research being conducted around certain topics.

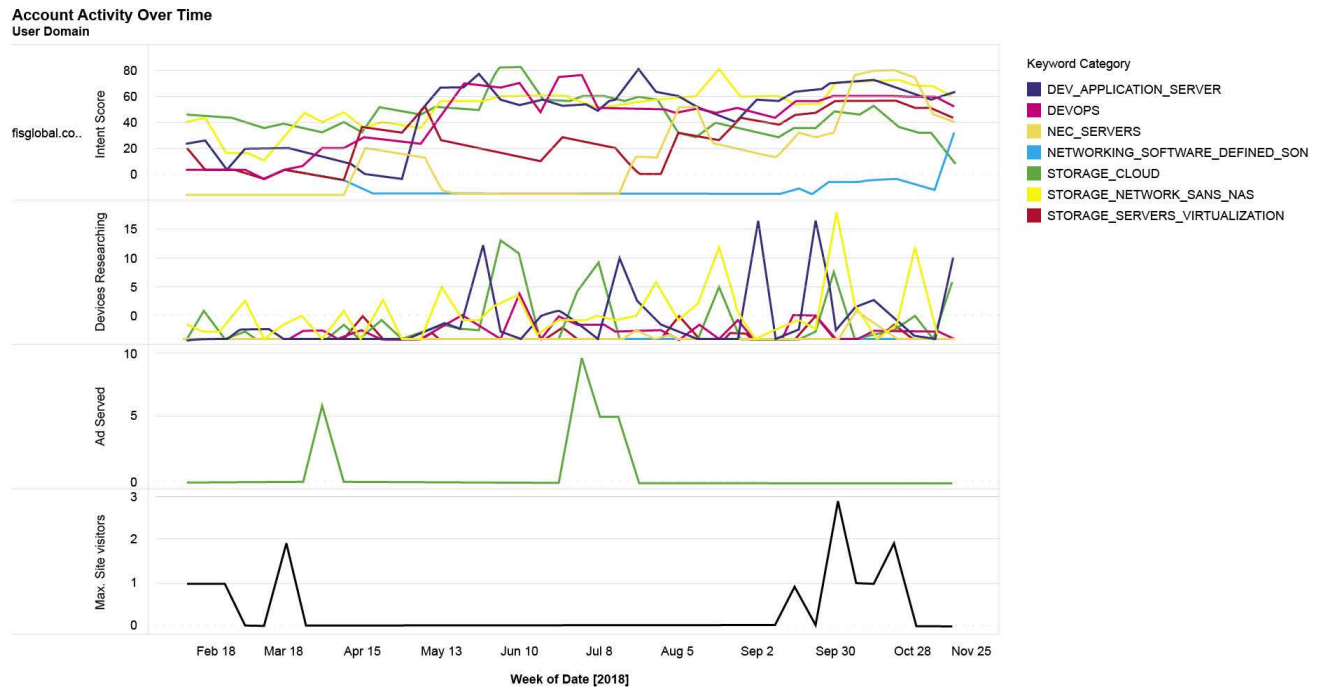
There were two related problems to these approaches. On the one hand, they were only collecting a fraction of web research activity. On the other hand, they didn't provide marketers any detailed visibility into sites or URLs visited by researching accounts, let alone any clues as to who the researchers themselves might actually be.

So, a new model arose, one based on the data trail provided by ad networks and the demand side platforms (DSP) connected to them. This approach featured breadth (essentially including every site that sells display ads) and detail, including the URLs visited as well as the device IDs conducting the research.

Visualizing the Buyer's Journey

How exactly does buyer intent data change everything? This actionable information allows vendors to map out the actual buyer's journey undertaken by specific accounts.

Consider the example below:



As you can see, using this methodology, we can not only see the increasing interest from one specific account across a range of topics, but also see the increasing number of devices involved in conducting this research. What's more, we can also drill down into each category area to show which specific URLs were visited by specific devices.

There are two lessons that this technology and approach offer us.

The first lesson is, for lack of a better word, philosophical:

The buyer's journey is not generic or formulaic; it is specific and comprehensible.

Because it is comprehensible, you don't have to make broad assumptions about the buyer's journey. You can map what actually happens.

The second lesson is practical.

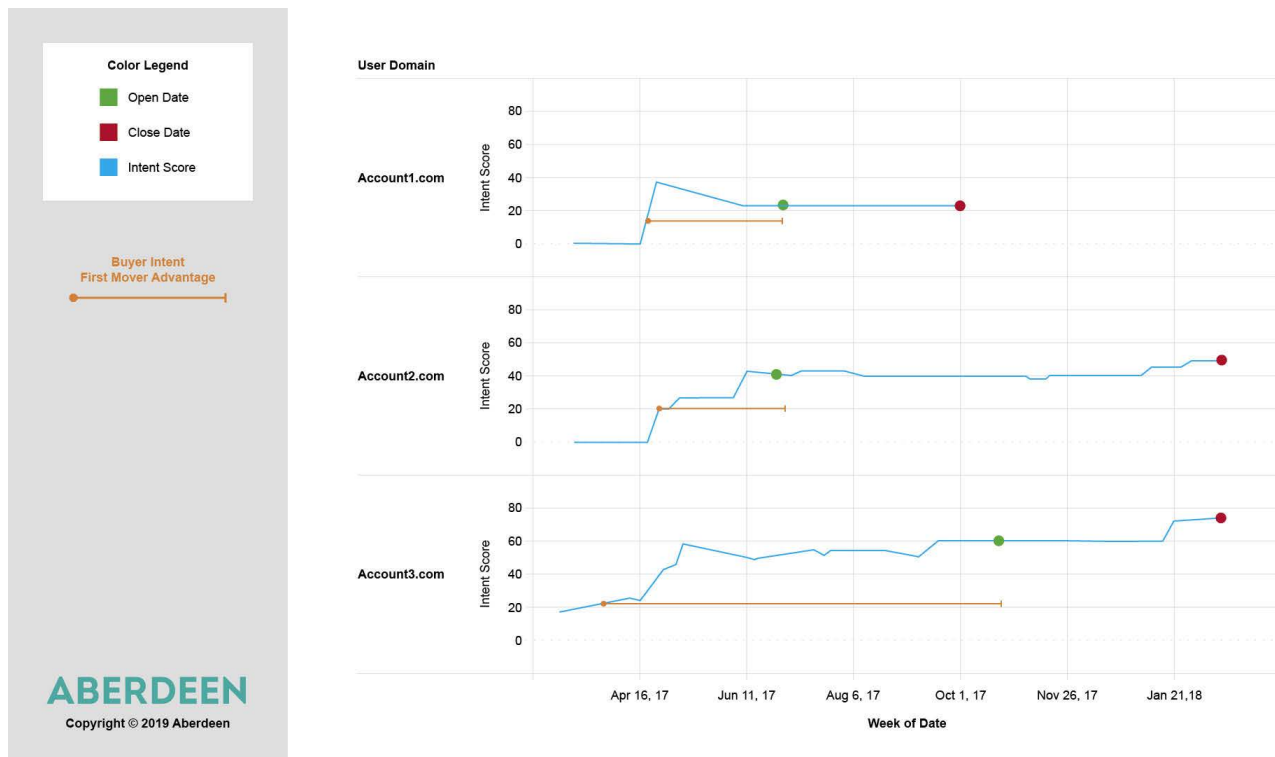
By tracking buyer behavior in real time, you can determine when an account has initiated their research.

This makes it possible to engage buyers when it matters most: at the beginning of the buyer's journey.

Consider the chart below:

For each account here, we see the unfolding of the buyer's journey. The green dot shows when our client first opened an opportunity for said account. The red dot shows when the opportunity closed (either as a win or a loss).

The orange dot is the money dot. It indicates when research activity intensified for each account. And we know that to be the case because the amount of research they were conducting at that point in time diverged significantly from the baseline level of research they conducted before.



The Time to Act is Now

Knowing what buyers want and need at the beginning of the buyer's journey doesn't really help if you don't know when that journey has begun.

As our survey results clearly shows, at the beginning of their journey, buyers want vendors to help them understand what's possible. The content and messaging you put in front of buyers at this point must show them what's possible and why it matters.

As far as how to get this message in front of buyers, there are several options.

First, there are the traditional methods we've already discussed: email and inbound.

Intent-driven email

With intent data, you can take the wishful thinking out of these approaches. When you target accounts based on their intent behavior, you are no longer hoping that you'll catch them in "buying" mode when you launch your email campaigns. You can actively engage them when they are giving off clear buying signals.

Intent-driven content

Similarly, when you know not only what exact articles buyers are consuming online, you can create content that mirrors and builds on these articles. What's more, since you know which publishers have the most influence on the buying process, you now have very clear targets for pitching articles and guest posts. Finally, intent data can also give insight into which writers influence buyers, allowing you to engage them directly.

Second, there are also a couple other traditional methods that get a new twist thanks intent data.

Digital advertising

When you know what the real buyer's journey looks like, down to the URLs that buyers are visiting, as well as the device IDs involved in this buyer research, hyper-targeting of digital ads becomes an effective tactic.

Sales outreach

Cold calling and cold emailing are often a numbers game and end up being shots in the dark. When fueled by intent data, they essentially become surgical strikes: messages targeted at the right person at exactly the right time.

Getting Down to Business

That being said, to execute on any of the above, you will need a few things.

1. *Target account list.* Having named target accounts allows you both to determine the baseline of research activity in your solution and then monitor ongoing activity to identify sudden increases in research intensity.
2. *Accurate contact information.* Accurate contact information for your target accounts means up-to-date information. For this reason, it's recommended that you have an ongoing partnership with a contact data provider, particularly one that regularly refreshes their data.
3. *Content.* Specifically, you'll want content that provides buyers with objective information that helps them frame their decision. Ideally, as we have seen, this content will also show buyers how to solve established problems in new ways.
4. *Intent data.* Finally, you will need accurate, actionable intent data. For intent data to be actionable, it needs to be detailed (where are buyers actually going; what are they actually consuming, etc.) and timely. For this reason, you'll want an intent data provider who gives you granular insight but also does so in a way that allows you to strike while the iron's hot.

**Are you ready to start seeing results from intent data?
Learn how to identify and target the B2B buyers in-market
for your solution at Aberdeen.com/Intent**

Methodology

Aberdeen and PJA Advertising & Marketing surveyed more than 342 B2B buyers in late summer 2018. Out of our respondents:

- 32% were C-level, 66% were VP or above
- 24% were company size of \$500 mm+
- 75% reported being “the decision maker” in B2B purchases
- 90% had been involved in an enterprise-level purchase
- 56% had been involved in purchases of \$100k+