

| eBook

Targeting the Self-Directed Buyer:
Strategies to Navigate
the Modern B2B
Buying Journey





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CHAPTER 1:

Introduction

As buyers have become accustomed to researching products on their own, they have adjusted to frequently going through the entire buying process on their own. Once a purchase decision has been made, they finally reach out to close the deal. These are self-directed buyers.

Gartner reports that 75% of B2B buyers prefer a rep-free sales experience. Companies have to adjust their sales and marketing process to avoid losing market share to competitors that better match buyer preferences.

We'll cover why self-directed buyers have become the majority and how companies can better meet their needs by putting their product front and center, matching outreach to buyer intent, and building their brand to gain mindshare.

However, self-directed buyers tend to have higher rates of buyer's remorse. Guidance and product walkthroughs are valuable for setting expectations and creating long-term clients. So, how do you balance educating prospects with being more hands-off than before?



CHAPTER 2:

Why are B2B buyers self-directing their purchase decisions?

Self-directed buyers are usually buyers with buyer fatigue. They want to easily compare their options, see neutral opinions, and make a choice without feeling badgered. They've decided what they want before making contact with the sales team.

The fatigue is understandable. Buyers are overwhelmed with emails, calls, ads, and thoughtless outreach. The rise of AI and automation has increased the usage of untargeted spray-and-pray outreach. When buyers do talk to someone, sales reps have gained the reputation for not listening, continually reaching out, and wasting time trying to have multiple calls and repeated qualifying conversations without showing the product.

Buyers know the typical sales process and know it has a lot of steps and can be a pain.

Filling out a single form means you might have months' worth of outreach clogging your inbox and demanding your attention. When companies are expected to be biased and unhelpful, and outreach is vague and useless, why would a buyer try to engage with a product's sales and marketing?

Self-directed buying is a result of being overwhelmed and slow sales cycles. So is the solution to move to being an entirely self-serve purchase process? Not exactly.



CHAPTER 3:

Why B2B buying still rewards sales conversations

You need to adjust your sales and marketing. No more pricing pages with only a “call us” button. No more asking buyers to answer several qualifying questions before a call and having the account executive ask the same questions again in the meeting.

However, being a self-direct buyer has its downsides. Buyer in-decision is higher than ever. As covered in the book, [The Jolt Effect](#) by Matthew Dixon and Ted McKenna, buyers are struggling to trust their own companies and processes. Instead of worrying that a product won't deliver on their promises, they worry that their team will be unable to implement the solution.

Without having someone to walk them through how to use a product, buyers can frequently buy a product that either doesn't fit their actual needs or that they're unable to learn and onboard correctly. Sellers often assume buyers

know everything the product can do and how to measure its long-term impact. But without assistance and guidance during the buying process, the chances of being a continued subscriber drops.

Let's say you spend \$1,000 on a blender because you did your research and feel confident you're buying the best possible product. However, if you're not used to using a blender as part of your cooking routine, it's going to collect dust on your countertop. You could have gotten the same use out of a \$29 blender. But, if you're able to learn all the features and ways the blender works and how useful and easy it can be, you're going to use the high-end blender daily.

Doing a high level of research and education shouldn't be solely on the buyer. By using your outreach to educate, you can help them see your immense value.

You don't want your buyers simply filling out a line item for the type of tool they need. You want them to experience the full benefit range you have. So, what can you do to capture the self-directed audience without overwhelming them and getting lost in the noise?



CHAPTER 4:

Put the product front and center

Product-led offerings are rising in popularity. Putting your product directly in front of your audience helps them research, test, and move forward with your company. Free offerings, demo versions, and freely available walkthroughs let buyers know what they're getting.

You want to lower the barrier to entry for your product. Having first-hand experience easily makes outreach simple and benefit-focused. Additional follow-ups can focus on explaining and demoing unique features, training options for users, and answering questions.

Even if prospects can't try the actual product right away, consider building a self-directed demo someone can click around and play with. If you have a video demo, don't throw up a full-hour recording and call it a day. Break up the different sections and features so a prospect can watch what's relevant to them.

Product information should be efficient and easy to learn. Even if two products are nearly identical, the one that can

teach users all the benefits and use cases faster and more intuitively will win out. Marketing and sales should work on being better teachers and integrating learning strategies into their materials and outreach.

If someone wants to see the product, they're potentially interested in buying. Show them the product. Your team can still qualify, ask questions, and talk with the prospect, the focus should be on helping them understand the complexity of your product. Walk them through the potential set-up process and what will be required on their end. Can they plug and play, or is there a set-up and customization period before the full team can get to work?

Offer safety nets like cancellation windows or money-back guarantees. You want to provide risk protection so a prospect is less scared of getting it wrong. You want to make them confident in themselves that they're not going to make a mistake, fail to adopt your product, and they're in trouble for the year. Knowing they're not at risk with their own company if they move forward, they'll be more likely to choose you over a competitor and give it a shot. Customer success can then be the hero to keep buyers happy long-term.

A delightful sales process means being able to find the answers you want, the details you didn't know you were missing, and the support you would like. Lean into education.



CHAPTER 5:

Use Intent Data to create relevant outreach

Marketing frequently has a bad reputation. But what people hate is the irrelevant messages, the annoying and constant nature of ads, and the pop-ups slowing down your browser. No one's going to enjoy seeing the same 30-second YouTube ad over and over or clearing the same spam out of their inbox.

But when done with creativity and value, marketing can connect with your buyers. Intent data is the necessary tool to match your outreach to the buyer.

» What is Buyer Intent Data?

Intent data refers to the digital signals that indicate a prospect's interest in a product or service. These signals can be collected from various sources, such as search engines, social media, and website behavior. Maybe someone is reading a lot of product reviews or visiting your website over and over again. Those are examples of intent data signaling they're invested in finding a new solution.

One of the key benefits of using intent data in the B2B industry is that it allows marketers and sales teams to understand their prospects' behavior and interests in real-time. By analyzing intent data, you can find self-directed buyers earlier in their buying journey and connect them with useful and relevant information.

Examples of Intent Data with SalesIntel

Data providers, like SalesIntel, have multiple types of intent data your team can use to connect with prospects. Layering intent data helps your team have multiple confirmations of which companies should be the top priority for outreach.

The first example of intent data is [PredictiveIntent](#). SalesIntel's PredictiveIntent combines signals from our proprietary data engine through website visitor tracking, company news, and publisher data. By combining a mountain of data with AI models, PredictiveIntent surfaces companies interested in specific topics and products relevant to your sales offering.

The second example of intent data is [VisitorIntel](#). Another SalesIntel tool, VisitorIntel tracks companies with multiple users visiting your site repeatedly. Based on the frequency of website visits, these companies are likely to be researching and interested in buying your product.

Intent data is complex. Your team can use different keyword bundles, intent levels, product intent, and types of intent data to segment and prioritize prospects. Multiple data sources can increase your confidence in a prospect's buyer level.



How does Intent Data Help connect with buyers?

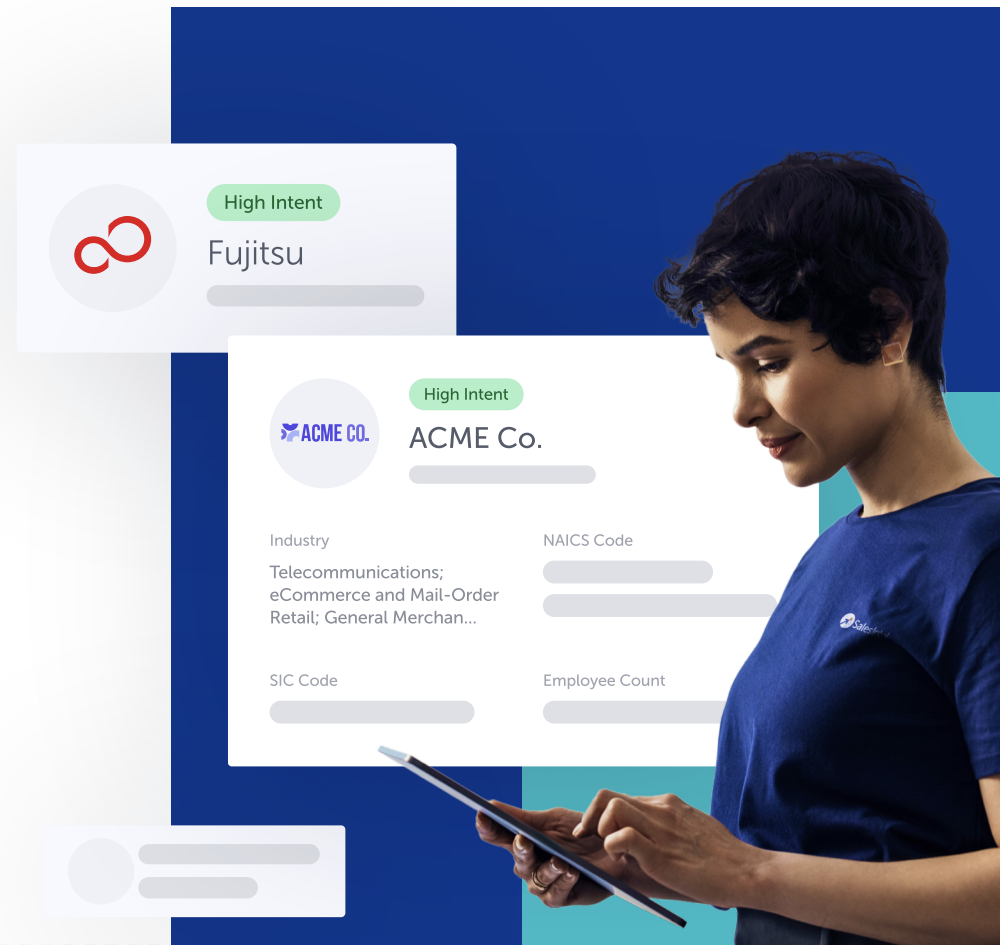
Intent data helps you align outreach with prospect needs. If a prospect has lower intent (but not zero), they need more education. How can your product help them? How is your product being used by others in their space? What should they know about your product category?

For prospects with high-buying intent, you can assume a basic level of knowledge and focus on what differentiates you from the competition. How are you unique? What sets you apart? What are the more technical or complex benefits of your product?

SalesIntel users have seen a 25% reply increase in their awareness campaigns and a 40% reply increase in their consideration campaigns after using intent data to match the right message to the right prospect. You don't need to be pushy and repetitive. You can be relevant.

Over 90% of executives say they're willing to pay attention to unsolicited messages if they're to their business. Immediately showing you understand their business, and their industry, and have fresh ideas to help them grow their business is what moves the deal forward.

Instead of waiting for buyers to show up after doing their research, intent data lets you initiate contact, start the education process, and grab attention.



CHAPTER 6:

Actively build your brand

Being product-focused helps prospects once they arrive on your site. Intent data helps you proactively start conversations and educate prospects already engaged. Building your brand grabs the attention of self-directed buyers at the top of the funnel.

Companies are frequently scared of spending a lot of time and energy on social media. A BDR working on LinkedIn for an hour can look similar to a BDR goofing off. Social media impact is notoriously difficult to track and justify.

As buyers are researching, having your whole team be active on social media can grow the top of your sales funnel. Start with your executive and leadership teams sharing more frequently and more honestly. You want to humanize your brand and establish emotional connections by admitting your losses and sharing your lessons. If all your posts are boasting about how much success you have, people aren't going to connect with you. You feel insincere and unrelatable.

Your BDRs can act as brand ambassadors and amplifiers for leadership and your marketing content. Putting real faces to the brand and at the top of the funnel makes your company approachable. Sincere LinkedIn conversations are memorable. With the investment, companies can see over 30% of their demo requests or product trials start with learning about their brand on social.



The sales team doesn't need to push. If someone shows mild interest, you can suggest a call or conversation but directly leave the option open to decline. Tell them a call isn't necessary if that wouldn't be beneficial for their research process. Make prospects comfortable. Your team can use conversations on social media to uniquely tailor the start of the sales process for each buyer.

As you practice being active on LinkedIn and social media, you'll learn what resonates, what grabs attention, and what makes you buyers feel comfortable continuing conversations. You're going to where the buyers are without pitching them, so when they're interested in buying, you'll be the first option.



CHAPTER 6:

Navigating self-directed buyers successfully

Adjusting and changing your sales and marketing is challenging. New strategies push everyone out of their comfort zone and can be tough for leadership to buy in on. But, buyers are changing their processes, and sellers have to adapt.

Start by making the research and testing process easy for self-directed buyers. Put the product front and center. Don't hide information. Focus on educating prospective buyers over "selling" them. Buyers are scared they'll buy the wrong product for their needs, so help them make informed and confident decisions.

Instead of giving up on sales and marketing outreach, intent data signals which companies you should prioritize and what your messaging should be. You can still be proactive in finding new business, but you have to be as relevant as possible. Optimize your sales process and make intent data available to your marketing and sales teams to direct their efforts.

Finally, expand your brand presence on social media. Explain to leadership how time building the brand connects back to your key initiatives and buyer preferences. Marketing and sales efforts are rarely a 1 to 1 when it comes to an action resulting in a sale. Use surveys to ask where people heard of you and track the long-term impact of brand campaigns.

By combining all three approaches, you're able to actively target and engage buyers throughout the sales process while still letting them take the lead. Just because buyers want to work through everything themselves doesn't mean you can't find ways to help.