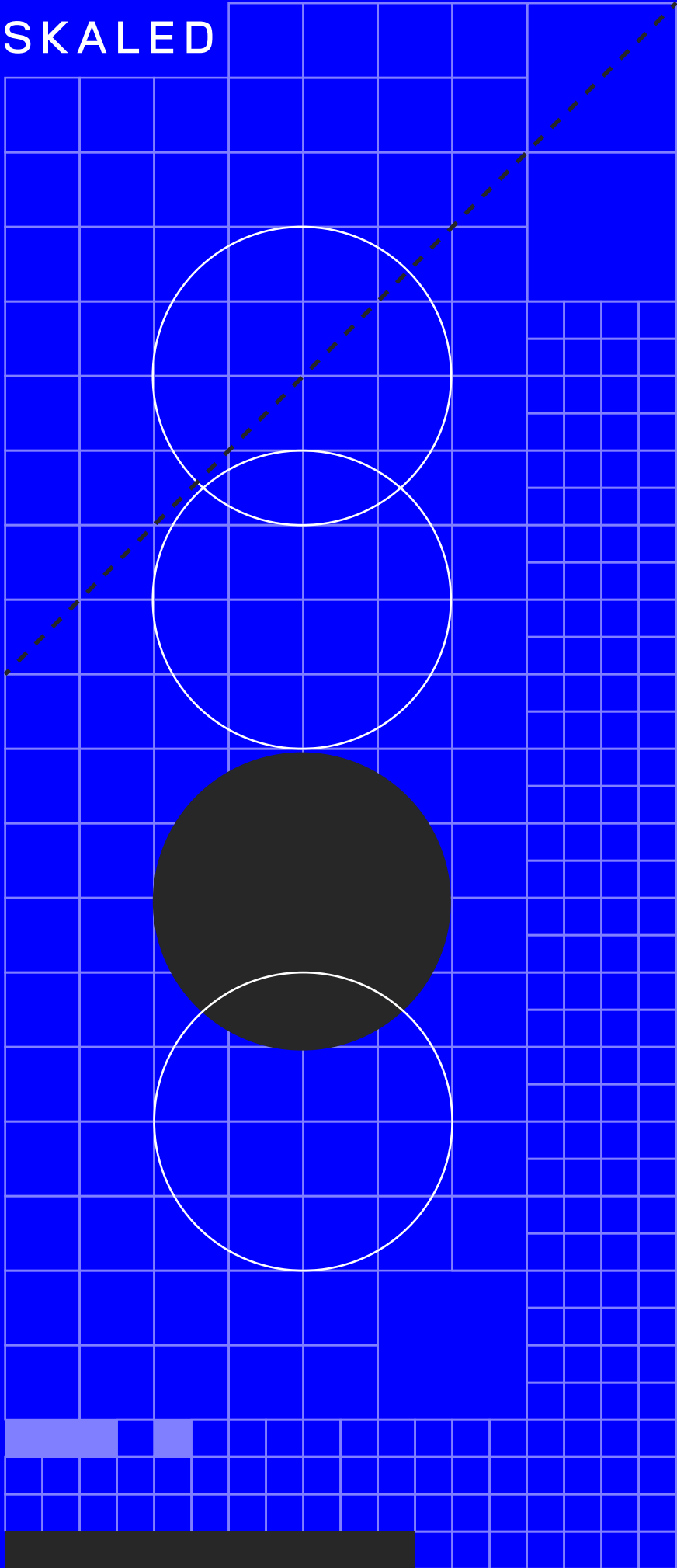
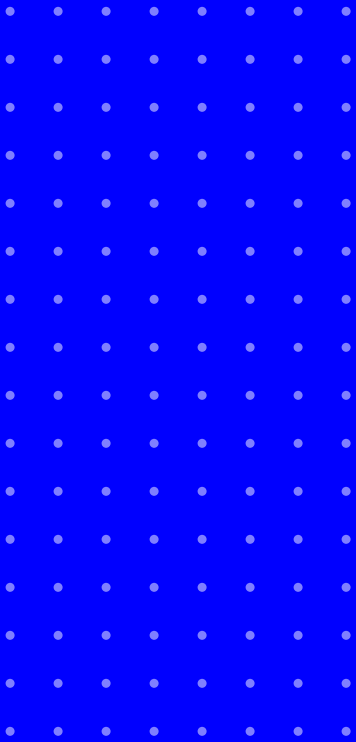




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Four Trends
Transforming the
Landscape of
B2B Marketing

2021

Setting the Stage for the Future of B2B Marketing

Today, buyers want to be tended to, not marketed to. B2B marketing is evolving rapidly to meet the demand for better engagement and more personalized campaigns. Constant disruption is driving teams to shift their focus toward more innovative lead generation, data-backed targeting, and a move back to in-person events.

Buyers want value and quality information, not stagnant resources and generalized campaigns, and Marketing needs the tools to provide it to them. Combatting content fatigue requires an adherence to technology and data to enable the buyer's journey in unique ways. It requires a deviation from the traditional methods of lead generation and an eye on new intent signals. For companies creating solutions for marketers, understanding the trends and challenges shaping B2B marketing is vital.

In speaking with leaders from Gartner, Fortinet, CIENCE, and Datasite, we've uncovered some of the most pressing trends driving innovation in B2B marketing from industry titans to rising startups.

- Interactive content, account-based marketing (ABM), and data-led campaigns are dominating lead generation
- The ascending demand for intent data is producing a need for actionability and problems with operationalizing insights
- Martech consolidation is producing highly efficient systems while increasing pressure for platform synthesis
- Hybrid events are imposing new event planning strategies and budgets

““”

Modern marketing is about meeting the buyer where they're at in terms of adoption and strategy. You have to understand where the buyer is at in their journey in terms of the problem you're solving and meeting them there instead of two or three phases away.

– Kevin O'Malley, VP of ABM,
Gartner

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Interactive Content is at the Front of Lead Generation



For years, content downloads, email subscriptions, and event registrations have been the centerpiece for attracting new buyers. Names, email addresses, job titles, etc., are traded in for unique insights and resources to fill the pipeline with marketing qualified leads (MQLs). You know the drill.

However, as a primary strategy for getting the attention of potential buyers, this may soon become an antiquated tactic in digital marketing.

“” One thing I see going away is the download and whitepaper mentality, and the ‘register for our webinar’ as anything more than a component of engagement. ... That model doesn’t work anymore. – Doug Cullen CMO, Head of Corporate Strategy, Datasite.

According to [WPForms](#), 50% of marketers regard form fills - be it from a general page on their site or their blog - as their primary source of leads. Yet, only 25% of leads are ready to advance to sales. Those numbers aren’t bad, and it still shows content’s prowess for filling the sales pipeline. On the other hand, it’s signaling a transition in how marketers handle that information: it’s a point of engagement, not buyer intent. Which is why marketers are shifting content innovation.

Quality writing and unique design are critical but they aren’t an encompassing solution. The mode of delivery is concentrated on creating more interactive assets. “Interactive” refers to the culmination of resources into text, video, graphics, animation, and a full experience for enjoying content. It’s been a staple for B2C companies, giving their customers an engaging way to explore products, and now it’s emerging in the B2B sphere. [Ion interactive](#) reports 53% of content marketers are leveraging interactive content in their lead generation efforts. And, it’s paying off: some of them see [2x the amount of conversions](#) in interactive content than in passive content.

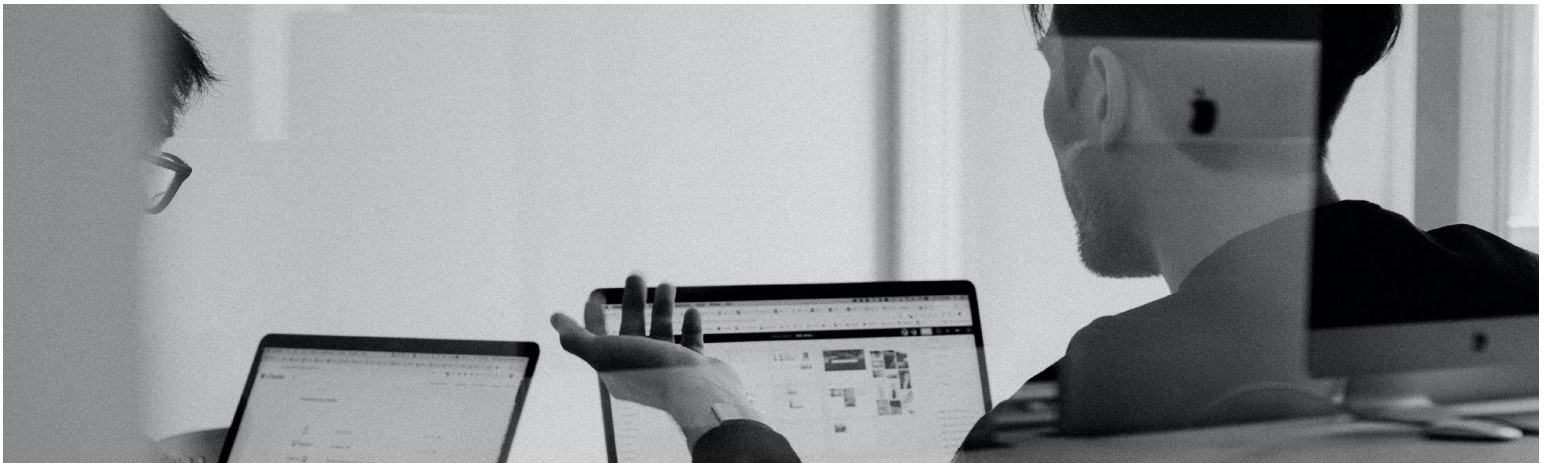
Interactive Content is at the Front of Lead Generation

Using intent data is also gaining traction with marketers in terms of understanding the effectiveness of interactive content by helping them to focus on not just a single point of engagement, but an engagement journey. However, executing on intent data comes with its own challenges, such as Sales and Marketing collaboration and a definitive goal for both teams to work toward. Technology, analytics, and content are imperative, but communication needs to be prioritized to make intent actionable and produce [better quality leads](#). When Sales and Marketing are unified in metrics and lead quality, they see an [increase in revenue](#) and directly tie it to their collaborative efforts.

Better interactive content is also paving the way for better account-based marketing (ABM). The goal of this customer-centric program is to focus on precise target accounts and create content that works at every point in their specific journey. When done correctly, the ROI of ABM is astounding. In a [survey by ITSMA](#), 87% of B2B marketers reported that ABM outperforms their other marketing investments in terms of ROI. This approach takes highly personalized, multimedia, interactive content, and marketers are going to be looking for ways to up their content game and precise targeting over their competitors.

“There are two key parts to ABM: the target accounts and the campaigns for those target accounts. And there’s technology that allows you to be more effective in selecting those targeted accounts and what campaign you put against them. You also can’t overlook account data. Whether it’s ZoomInfo or the secondary data sources that allow you to get the most up-to-date information about an account, you better have an external source that gives you that information in pretty much real-time. As well as people data, which is a big part of ABM because ultimately, it is people that buy.”
– Kevin O’Malley, VP of ABM, Gartner

Interactive content is at the forefront of lead generation, but marketers need cutting-edge technology and data to create these ideal buyer experiences. Which leads to what might be the most important, current trend in marketing: intent data. While it’s becoming increasingly necessary for generating quality leads, you’ll find in the next section how versatile intent data really is.



The Escalation of Intent Data & the Operational Dilemma

Before the induction of buyer intent data, teams relied mainly on a signifying action or contact form fill to denote a buyer's interest in their products. Although it had its success, those actions typically contained one-time content consumers and unqualified leads. Whether the prospect in question wasn't at the right stage in their journey or they wanted quick access to a download, the level of qualification just wasn't there. With intent data, qualification is more precise, relating specified levels of interest and giving marketers better indicators for sending leads down the pipeline.

Buyer intent data combines a litany of information about a company or contacts at a company and their online activity. Paired with traditional data analytics like keyword searches, engagement, email open rates, behavioral data, and demographics, marketers can create a comprehensive picture of their buyers. Marketers are positioned to identify a buyer's place in their journey and the products/services they're looking for to improve targeting. Intent data is truly a game-changer. Marketing can develop more qualified leads, create content to match what their buyers are looking for, and develop a strategy that continually builds on itself.

Gartner projects that by the end of 2022, more than [70% of B2B marketers](#) will have third-party intent data playing a central role in targeting prospects or engaging with groups of buyers in selected accounts. With a prospect's level of intent, Marketing and Sales can develop personalized plans for that specific scenario and then recycle it with similar accounts. They can build play-by-play marketing campaigns for content, outreach messaging, and keyword optimization. Intent data is making B2B marketing less of a guessing game and more of an exact science for launching campaigns.

There is a catch, though. Buyer intent relies heavily on a combination of technology and communicating data repositories to deliver results. Anyone can go out and find more than a dozen technology companies producing intent data solutions - Bombora, LeadFinder, and Demandbase to name a few. But, the tool needs a succinct connection to your data sources, it needs to have widespread adoption from all teams involved, and its enactment needs to be founded in strategy. Without that, it devolves into another repository for information and not a tool for insight.

"I think a lot about sites where we have a position to run reverse IP lookups and/or the identity graph and understand who those individuals are and run outbound campaigns back out to those people that are already in-market. That's a well-known strategy we've embraced, and we've had success with. It's not like the wild crazy 'this is a solution to everything,' but it's a solid part of the mix. And you're a fool if you're not taking advantage of it."

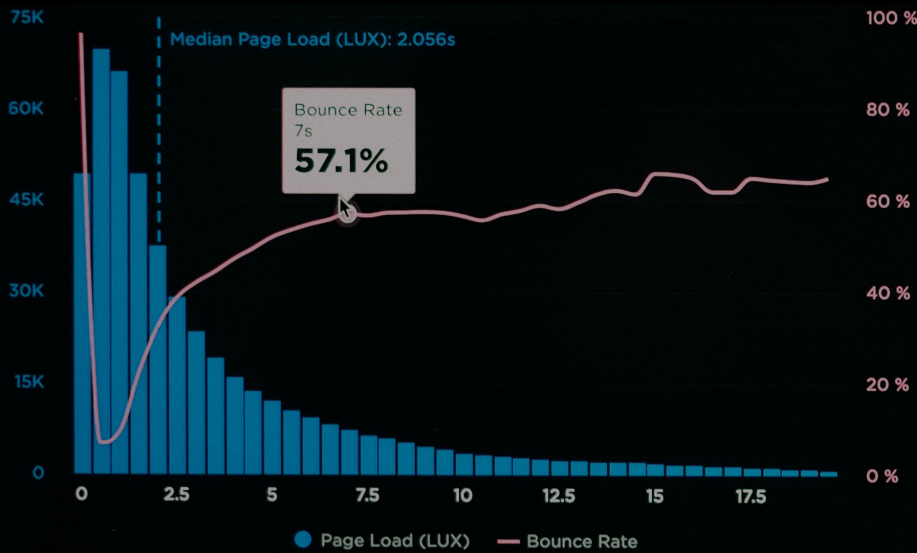
– Eric Quanstrom, CMO at CIENCE



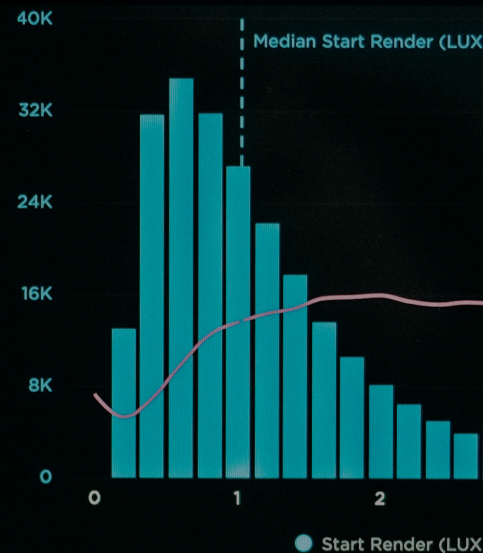
The Escalation of Intent Data & the Operational Dilemma

USERS: LAST 7 DAYS USING MEDIAN ▾

LOAD TIME VS BOUNCE RATE



START RENDER VS BOUNCE RATE



“The number one challenge with intent data is operationalizing it. Marketing will say, ‘Hey, someone in this company is searching for cybersecurity.’ That doesn’t narrow it down a whole lot. You have to combine it with other things that you’re seeing in your data.”

– Kevin O’Malley, VP of ABM, Gartner

“It’s not quite there for where I’d like it to be. I think it’s a super interesting and big problem. I’ve gone deep with six or seven different companies, and I’ve been left with a bit of an ‘eh’ feeling. I love the notion, I mean, it’s a dream. We’d love to get the dream, but when you dive into it, it just doesn’t seem ready or good enough.” – Doug Cullen, CMO, Head of Corporate Strategy, Datasite

There’s a lot of hype around intent data right now. While some companies are boasting a huge benefit from it, others aren’t so sure. Whether the problem revolves around quick decay rate, application of account to individual data, in-market fallacies, or issues of influence, the ROI has been a let-down for some.

In short, there’s an upside and a downside of the current state of intent data. Some are finding it to be incredibly useful while others are seeing it fall short of what they’re looking for. However, dissension around intent data might be an indication of its place in the B2B sphere, a place of development for companies who sell to marketers.

The Influence of Martech Consolidation on Marketing Teams



“You saw Terminus acquire Sigstr and then a chatbot, and they’re starting to build a platform. Demandbase just acquired Engagio, and today they announced they acquired DemandMatrix and InsideView, so they’re consolidating. Martech leaders are starting to bring in a lot of these platform-level tools.” – Jaime Romero, VP of Corporate Marketing, Fortinet

Marketers are seeing an expansive consolidation of the Martech stack, not just in data collection tools - although that’s probably the most prolific - but in the entire stack. From solutions in content and project management to social media and advertising, purveyors of industry are condensing the options quickly.

The rapid growth of marketing technology is a major influencer. In July of 2020, new marketing software and applications were emerging left and right. Included in [Martech’s 2020 Marketing Technology Landscape](#) report was a total of 8,000 marketing technology tools, which means [980 new solutions](#) were added to the list. Their list from 2011 had less than 200 solutions on it. In nine years alone the market grew an astonishing 5,233%. But as the list grows, martech goliaths are managing a strategy of acquisition and application expansion.

It’s a common narrative. When a solution comes out that can augment a bigger company’s product and serve their clients in new ways, they acquire it. The ultimate goal is to build a better system for addressing the challenges marketers face. Marketing in B2B touches numerous areas of the company and because of that, there’s a need for technology that houses all the tools they need. In turn, that consolidation also helps improve the consolidation of marketing data as a whole.

With data dispersed throughout systems - be it analytical data, customer data, project information, and so on - creating precise campaigns and standard operating models is challenging. However, when the data is consolidated with precision and appropriate access is assigned, marketing and sales are positioned to correlate online conversion data, produce insightful reports, better understand customer data points with enrichment, and more.

Technology and data are the backbones of modern B2B marketing. And, as the trend for data consolidation moves swiftly through marketing departments, the demand for synthesis of tech stack and data will continue to grow.

Hybrid Event Strategies Take Center Stage

Before 2020, most companies were used to a webinar here and there. Yet, few were ready for the foray of virtual events that would overtake event marketing. [Bizzabo's Post-COVID-19 Event Outlook Report](#) showed that more than half of the businesses they surveyed moved their entire event strategy to virtual environments. Despite their popularity, the average percent of no-show attendees was significantly more than in-person events. Looking forward, with 2020 in the rearview, a return to in-person events has widespread anticipation.

“I think a pendulum swing is coming back around. Let’s be honest, April, May, and June of 2020, there wasn’t a single CMO dusting off the old virtual events playbook and figuring out what platforms to use, how do they get into the mix, and of course, all the associated deluge of webinar topics done to the nines. It felt like everyone was in the pool all at once. So, I think there will be a pendulum swing back away from some of that, because there’s a common-sense acknowledgment that digital events are nothing like in-person events, and not even remotely close.” – *Eric Quanstrom, CMO at CIENCE*



Hybrid Event Strategies Take Center Stage

The sentiment is shared among marketers and event professionals across numerous industries. 96% of those surveyed in Bizzabo's report acknowledged the unrivaled superiority of in-person events over virtual events. And while in-person events return, companies are prioritizing hybrid technology to mediate the gap in preferences.

“ I think the word of the year is going to be ‘hybrid.’ Hybrid working, hybrid computing, hybrid event strategy. Everyone is trying to figure out how to balance the digital and the real world. – Kevin O’Malley, VP of ABM at Gartner

Nearly [60% of event marketers](#) have their eyes on hybrid event solutions and that hybrid is a keystone of their event strategy in 2021. Beyond 2021, hybrid events may become a staple of event marketing. People want autonomy for choosing whether to attend in-person or enjoy at home. And with recordings and post-event digital resources, attendees to the in-person event gain a level of access that wasn't available before the pandemic.

Virtual additions won't be the only thing changing as convention centers and event halls open back up. Besides safety protocols, in-person events are expected to be smaller and, effectively, more expensive. With budgets shifted into hosting hybrid events, there will be a need to accommodate dual event planning to secure ROI.

“ The events I've been seeing through Q3 and Q4, prices went up. There's none of this discounting or 'let's just get toes in the water.' And, I'm seeing that across the board with various event promoters that are reaching out to marketers like myself and my peers. It's been a big topic of discussion. – Eric Quanstrom, CMO at CIENCE

The entire model of event hosting and planning is going to evolve over the coming year. There's potential for mass conventions to be on the docket, but for the time being, it seems that marketers are focusing on keeping events small, safe, and worth their efforts.



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