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eBook

15 Essential Questions to Ask When Buying a Sales Intelligence Solution

A lack of Account Intelligence leads to account blindness, hunch-based decisions, and omni-spam. Inject Intelligence into every step of the journey.

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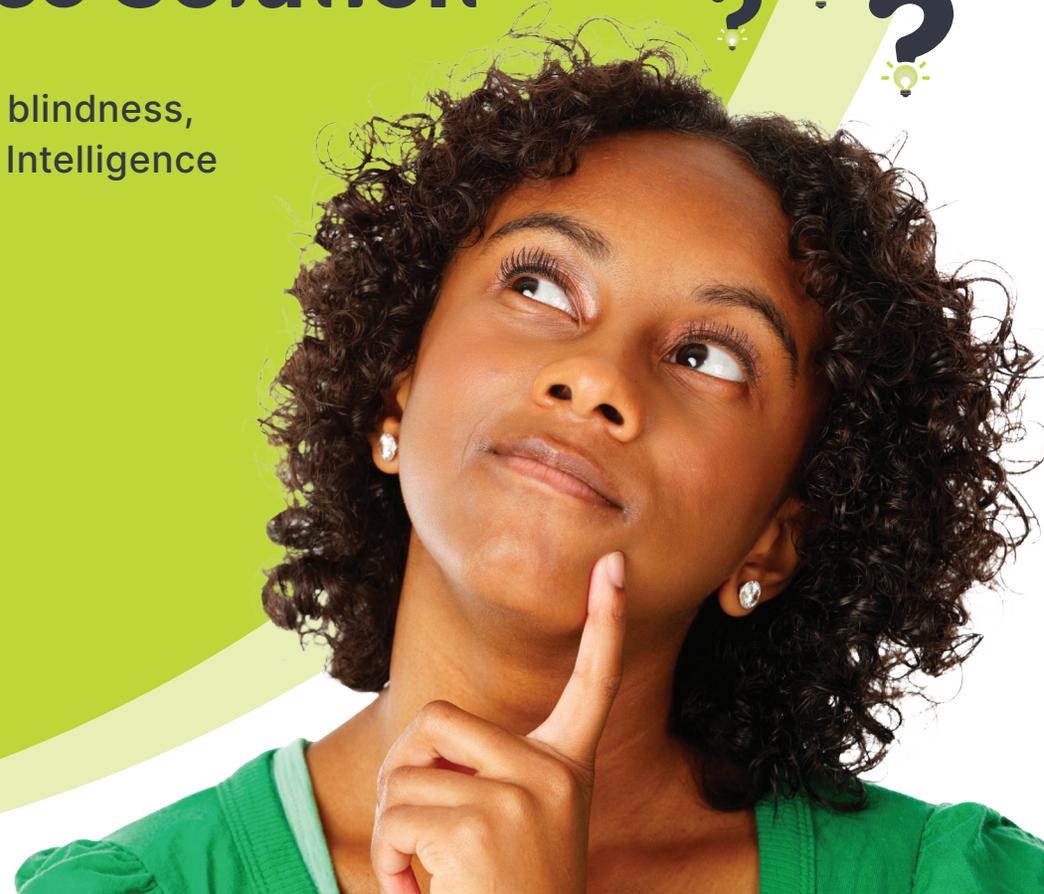
Introduction

Sales intelligence providers offer critical information to both marketers and sellers — anything from company news and market insight to the best people to call at the right companies (and their contact information).

They typically differ based on the methodology of data aggregation (how the data is collected), the interval between updates, the type of information collected and offered, and the way the information is packaged and sold.

It's a crowded market with a lot of options. TrustRadius, a software reviews site, lists 113 companies under its "sales intelligence" product category. Part of what causes confusion in an already crowded market has to do with categorization.

What do we mean? Let's start with a definition. For purposes of this report, sales intelligence providers enable marketers and sellers to identify the right targeted prospects at the right targeted accounts along with the information and insight needed to engage with those prospects.

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50% of sales time is wasted on unproductive prospecting. (VoiceSignals)

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Better Starts Now

Where you are is the perfect place to start.

Account blindness ends now. With the power of sales intelligence, you'll be empowered to:

- Fill pipelines with better leads — those with a higher close rate and a shorter sales cycle.

- Enrich existing data for a complete view of the prospect and their interests.

- Keep existing data clean and updated so sales and marketing efforts are directed at living, breathing prospects.

What's the best way to evaluate potential providers? Some may think these simple questions are enough:

- Number of companies profiled

- Number of contacts

- How often data is updated

Think again.Those three questions won't guide you to the right solution. If accurate, curated, and targeted data is important to you, there are more important questions you need to ask.

These 15 questions will lead you to the best sales intelligence provider for your needs. Ready for a more modern approach?

1

It's all about a clear picture.

Manual research. Web Crawling. Social Media. Crowd-sourcing. These are the four primary ways to aggregate data, each with their own advantages and disadvantages. Ask providers how many of these they use.

The ideal answer is "all four." Always.

More sources means you can identify areas of agreement and triangulate the most accurate data points.

The most accurate data comes from blending the four methodologies so that the final record is created based on the best and most recent data across all sources.

2: Do you allow unverified, user-generated data?

2

Some data providers are solely crowd-sourced.

Proceed with caution.

Quality suffers as users are incentivized by quantity of leads — not quality.

If user-contributed data is allowed, be sure the data is being validated in other ways like through an editorial team and an automated verification system.

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3: How often is your data updated?

3

Some data providers are solely crowd-sourced.

The ideal answer is continually. And you're looking for confirmation that they leverage crowd-sourcing, manual research, web crawling, and social media.

Information changes constantly. We know that 91 percent of data in CRM systems is predicted to be incomplete, stale, or duplicated each year. (**Findstack**)

Broken intel wastes time and budget everyday. The faster you know about these changes, the faster you can adjust your sales strategy and marketing outreach.

If you can't connect the dots to the accounts...
they'll stay dots.

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4: How can we test your data for suitability?

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Testing data involves two things.

Accuracy and relevance. Although 100% accurate data doesn't exist, you want to make sure you're getting as close as possible to it.

Don't overlook relevance. Make sure that the type of data provided aligns with the type of data you need.

If you sell primarily to large organizations, it doesn't matter how many data records you have access to if they are all for smaller companies. You want the vendor to have the data for the personas and companies YOU need.

Put accuracy and relevance to the test. Compare a sampling of your up-to-date records with the same records by the service provider.

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5: Do we have to buy the same data over and over again to always have the most up-to-date information?

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Check for loopholes.

Make sure to know what exactly happens to the data you pay for after you download it so that you're not caught off guard with unexpected fees to keep it up to date.

Your research should also cover reviews and testimonials from third-party sites that can give you peace of mind regarding the practices of the data provider you choose. Getting stuck with harsh contract auto-renewals can become a very costly headache.

We're living in a SaaS world, and DaaS (data as a service) is the next natural progression.

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6: What's the process to make sure we don't download duplicate data into our systems?

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Don't be duped. Literally.

The most sophisticated sales intelligence platform will have a way to flag for duplicates.

With no protections in place, even a slight difference in job title, a secondary email address, or an abbreviation can result in a completely new record.

Ask about the duplicate checking process to ensure it's both robust and easy.

7: How do we make sure not to over-write our own existing data if it's more recent?

7

Preventative and proactive measures should be prioritized over reactionary fixes.

One cause of dirty data (data that's inaccurate in one or more ways) is when good data gets overwritten by bad data.

Ask each sales intelligence provider to show you the process for rejecting an overwrite when needed. And you will need it.

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8: Do you offer an API in case we want more control?

8

Change is inevitable.

Your data needs today will evolve, and ideally, your chosen sales intelligence solution will do so with you. And what happens then?

When — not if — your information needs change, APIs will allow you to integrate the data in new ways to support changes in your systems and processes over time.

You can use APIs to have the data flow into in-house solutions unique to your company or into systems that the sales intelligence provider doesn't integrate with natively.

You can't swarm opportunities you can't see.

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? 9: What level of detail can we search on?

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Harness your company's unique needs.

To find the perfect leads, you might want to filter based on a combination of dozens of search criteria. Among them, perhaps you want to know which companies have recently expanded operations or which companies or contacts you have a connection with.

Outline what is most important to you and don't be shy to ask for it.

The more search criteria a sales intelligence solution offers, the better you can identify your ideal prospect.

The only way to get better is to get smarter.

10: Can salespeople access sales intelligence from within the CRM?

10

Work smarter, not harder.

If you use a CRM, the last thing you want is for your salespeople to have to go to a different system to conduct searches.

That's a fast-track to poor adoption.

The best sales intelligence solutions enable salespeople to use the data (search, retrieve, import) within their CRM instead of having to log into—and learn—a different system.

Slow and steady doesn't win the race. Streamlined and smart wins.

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11: Are you compatible with our CRM without customization?

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Find your match.

There are various levels of "compatibility." One vendor might use the term to indicate that their data can be integrated (but that no integration is built in).

Ask for a clear definition of compatibility and whether any customization is required.

What you want to hear is that integration to CRM is native, meaning no customization is required for use within your specific CRM system.

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12: Can you describe the deployment process and timeline?

Detail and confidence are key.

Ask sales intelligence providers to describe their best practices and review any documentation that describes the process.

If they don't have it documented, take notice. It's likely that they expect you to carry the burden of success.

? 13: How long have you been around?

13

Look for longevity.

Resellers are common, and these companies often come and go.

On the flipside, there are companies with a long legacy who may not have state-of-the-art solutions.

Look for a company with at least 5 years of operations, a strong leadership team, and a good market presence.

A history of consistent product and technology enhancements is a good indicator of continued innovation.

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? 14: Who will I call when I have a problem or need help?

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You deserve the royal treatment.

Ask whether you'll get assigned a success manager or an account manager.

Also find out what support resources are available on their site. You'll want to confirm that they have a comprehensive offering of guides and knowledge-bases.

Providers should have a full menu of support articles and videos. The best will even offer a learning center or course catalog for customers.

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A good sales intelligence solution should be reliable and easy to use.

However, that doesn't mean that you or your team won't want a little help from time to time.

The answer to this question indicates the company's commitment to high-quality service and support.

You might want to also ask about renewal and adoption rates. Each are indicators of overall value as well as their level of support and usability.

Insight removes friction and accelerates everything.

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DON'T BRING HUNCHES TO A DATA FIGHT

B2B sales has changed for good. The stakes are higher, the competition fiercer. Hunch-based selling just won't cut it. Buyers expect sellers to be informed and add value at the right time, in the right way. Anything else is just noise.

Sales intelligence injects crucial intel into every step of your sale, so you can sell smarter and leave your flat-footed competitors wondering what happened.

But not all sales intelligence solutions are created equally. So choose wisely. Your sales and marketing effectiveness depends on it.

Want to kick the tires?

See how Demandbase Smarter GTM™ would work for you and your team.

Schedule a Demo

Thank you!

Demandbase is Smarter GTM™ for B2B brands. We help marketing and sales teams spot the juiciest opportunities earlier and progress them faster by injecting Account Intelligence into every step of the buyer journey and orchestrating every action. For more information about Demandbase, visit www.demandbase.com.