Take Your Data
to the Next Level
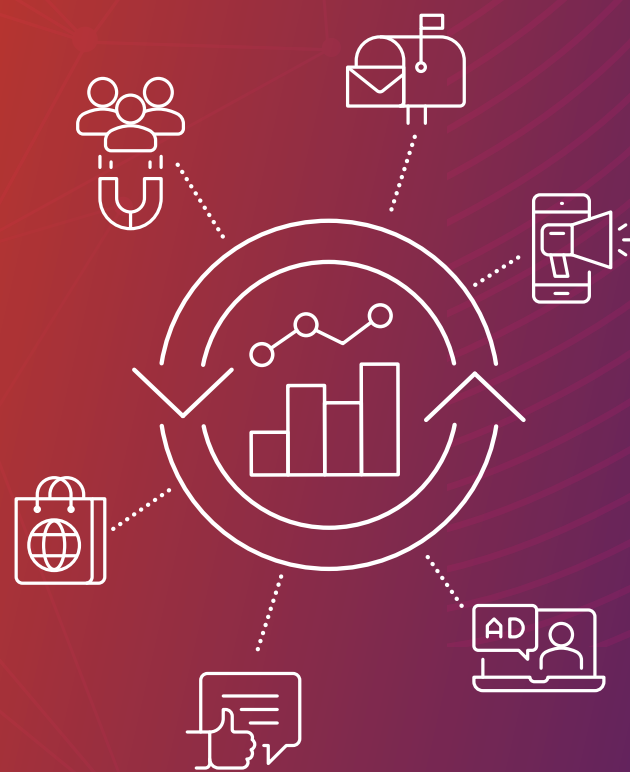
The Marketer's Guide to Running
a Comprehensive Data Test

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> "Data is now the foundation of all successful B2B Marketing and Sales."

By now, most marketers recognize that data is one of their most important assets. But **obtaining, managing and making sense of your customer data is also one of the greatest challenges** facing B2B marketers today.

There are so many data solutions out there, with different constellations of offerings, that it's hard to know which work, and which don't. Ultimately you want a solution that will be a multiplier for your business—not make things worse by flooding your systems with more bad data!

Data tests are critical for evaluating data vendors. By providing a sample of your own data for them to enrich, you can see for yourself how they perform. But how do data tests work? What should you expect? And how can you prepare to ensure you make the right decisions?

This guide provides a few quick pointers to help you through the process, based on our own extensive experience running countless data tests for hundreds of clients.

STEP 1:

Choosing which vendors to compare

You can't test every data solution out there. Whittle down your list to a handful of relevant vendors—or better yet, just two or three.

Narrowing down vendors requires research, but here are some of the most important things to consider:

Existing customers

Who are they helping, what problems are they solving, and how? Is any of it relevant to your specific business challenges? This is simple to do —just check out the customer page on their website, and look for case studies.

What do they *really* do?

Look beyond the catchphrases: what do they say they do—and more importantly, what *don't* they say? Do they provide data on the account and person level, or just one? Is it a Sales or Marketing tool, or both? Beyond raw data, what *data management* tools do they offer, if any? What scoring do they offer, if any?

Will they integrate?

It's critically important that a data solution easily and fully integrates into your existing systems, particularly CRM and Marketing Automation. Set the bar high—after all, you're trying to make your life easier by alleviating your data woes, so the last thing you want is a vendor that doesn't integrate well into your Marketing Automation, or only delivers cumbersome csv files for you to sift through and upload. *Automation is key!*
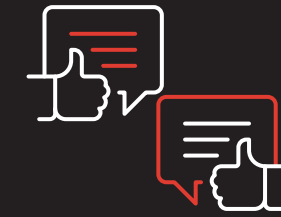
Third-party validation

What are industry analysts and experts (e.g. Forrester, Gartner, SiriusDecisions, etc.) saying about them? Industry reports aren't everything, but they can help you separate the more sophisticated offerings from more rudimentary ones.

STEP 2:

Define success

Before you conduct the test, you need to decide how you will define success or failure.

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For example:

What data is important to you **beyond the basics** like industry, company size or job titles? e.g. Installed technologies? Specialties and expertise? Job role/function?
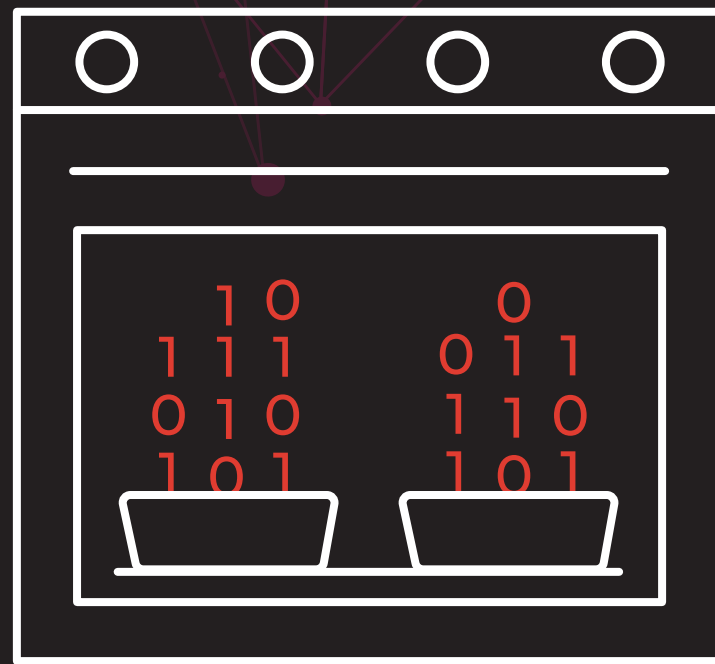
Do you want to go further and identify your **target buyer personas**? If so, which ones?

Are you interested in **intent data**? If so, which topics are relevant to you?

Every vendor has a standard data set they typically deliver, which naturally will be slanted towards their own strong points. **Be specific about what you want to receive; don't let them decide for you!**

STEP 3:

The data bake-off
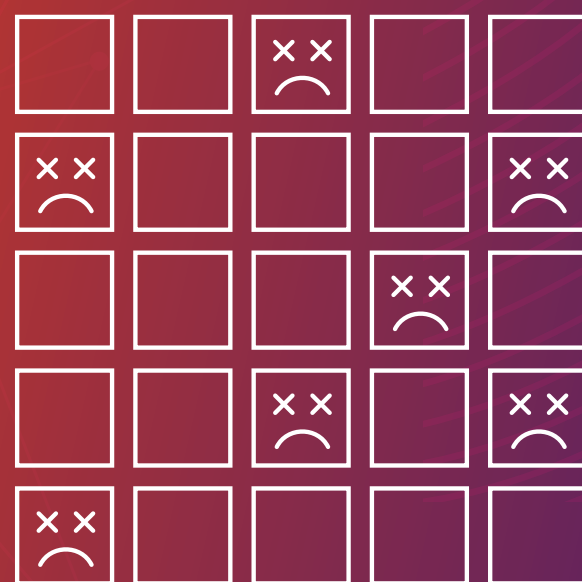
Provide vendors with samples of your data and see what they can do with it.

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TIP

Your data sample must be representative, so don't manipulate it in any way.

Broadly-speaking, the process is the same for any vendor. You'll need to provide a representative sample of your data for them to enrich and send back to you—usually between 5,000-10,000 records. "Representative" means warts and all—including both good records and (known) bad records.

If you manipulate the sample—say, by excluding records you know are inaccurate—the test won't be representative, and will provide little value, as it won't help you know how the vendors will actually perform once you let them loose on your entire database. The most common (and easiest) way of doing this is to download a full list to Excel and use the "random" function to pick your sample.

STEP 4:

Evaluate the results

Beyond your expectations (Step 2), there are a few additional aspects we recommend you consider in any data test.

Match-rates

Possibly the most important—
how many of the records that
you provided were they able
to successfully enrich vs. how
many were they unable to
"match" to their own database?

No vendor will be able to provide a 100% success rate for either
of these, but comparing success rates will help you understand
just how comprehensive their respective data coverage is.
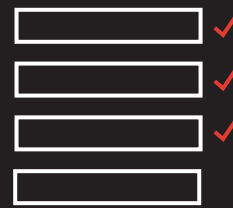
Population rates

Of the records they enriched,
to what extent were they able
to populate the data fields
you need?

Company and person-level data

If you've provided both,
it's worth evaluating them
separately, as some vendors
specialize in just one type of
data—but sometimes still claim
to provide both. If both are
important to you, find a vendor
that's strong in both areas.

Analytics and reports

What insights do they
provide? How clearly do they
deliver them? Transparency
is crucial, especially since
data is so hard to quantify
and visualize to begin with.
The ideal vendor won't throw
a bunch of indecipherable
data at you—they'll use clear
analytics to highlight what's
important to you.

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