



Buyers Guide to B2B Contacts

8 Questions to Ask Before Buying Business Contacts

As B2B organizations contend for dominance in an increasingly competitive environment, they can gain a critical advantage with access to all possible buyers in key vertical markets. After all, having contact information for business prospects gives marketers and sales reps a leg up on the competition as they connect with prospective buyers.

There are important considerations for you as a client of business contact services. Below are 8 questions you'll want to ask before making your purchasing decision.

1. How do you acquire contacts?
2. How do you ensure data accuracy and quality?
3. What is the projected growth of your database?
4. What level of value do you provide?
5. How can you help me reach my target markets?
6. What data fields are provided?
7. What rights do I have for use of the data?
8. Are your records CAN-SPAM compliant?

NetProspex drives B2B lead generation through direct access to targeted decision makers with verified contact information. Thousands of B2B organizations rely on targeted contacts from NetProspex to fuel high-performing marketing campaigns and create consistent sales pipeline.



What is crowd-sourcing? Collecting user-contributed data from multiple people and storing it in a centralized database operating in the cloud.

1. How do you acquire contacts?

B2B data companies can use a number of tactics to gather contact information about business professionals. But not all approaches are created equal. Ask your vendor where and how it found the contacts in their database. Options include:

- » Publishers' lists
- » Web-scraping technologies that crawl the web to find contacts published on websites
- » Crowd-sourcing

It's fair to say that the first two options are dated when it comes to compiling lists. With today's cloud-computing technologies – coupled with the need for real-time, up-to-date contacts – crowd-sourcing is considered the most effective and comprehensive. Through crowd-sourcing, data is collected from multiple people and stored in a centralized database operating in the cloud.

Contact details for those in mid-management decision making positions are typically unavailable from public-facing sources such as company websites, which tend to publish only general contacts such as “info@” or the C-Level management. Because crowd-sourcing is essentially a co-op where a community of users trade large sets of contacts in exchange for new contact records, it provides a deeper range of contacts than any other single source. Specifically, a crowd-sourced database can contain every level of contact, from C-level executives to mid-management with titles such as director, VP, and manager.

Ask: What is your coverage within organizations?

2. How do you ensure data accuracy and quality?

Bad data comes in several forms:

- » Duplicate records include two or more of the same contact.
- » Obsolete contacts are no longer in the position or at the company where they are listed as working.
- » Incomplete contacts are missing fields such as job title, phone number, or email address.
- » Incorrect contacts contain inaccurate phone numbers, job titles, or other information.

Does your vendor rely on customers to report bad data as its core method of validation?

Your contact provider should explain what happens after information is acquired.

- » How does it verify or validate the information it is providing to its customers?
- » How often does it re-validate that information and how long does it maintain it between validations?
- » Make sure contacts are verified continuously, not “once and done”, as contact quality degrades over time.

Quality matters. As marketers look to improve and refine marketing automation and employ sophisticated lead scoring, the key to success in these programs is data quality. According to a report by SiriusDecisions, The Impact of Bad Data on Demand Creation, for every 1% of data quality improvement marketing can generate 5-6% of incremental revenue.

Marketing processes are dependent upon correct information at the contact, demographic and company level for customers and prospects. Missing information such as job title or email address can stop a record in its tracks before even entering a marketing process, though it may be a quality lead. These bad records taking up space in databases cause your conversion rates to suffer.

As contact information decays at the rate of 2% per month (per NetProspex research), marketers are dealing with databases of records aggregated over time. Target contacts can change jobs, desks, and companies unpredictably.

Ask: How is information verified, when the average life span of a business contact is two years?

In today's world of multiple contact sources, this challenge is one that plagues marketing teams, as the data directly affects the results of their campaigns and programs.

The same study by SiriusDecisions indicates that 25% of an average prospect database is inaccurate, with best-in-class organizations achieving a 90% accuracy rate (10% inaccurate.)

3. What is the projected growth of your database?

As your business grows, you'll need even more new leads for your sales team. Find out if your data vendor will be able to provide new contacts in your target audience next month, next quarter, or next year.

As people are hired, and leave jobs, business contact information changes in real-time.

Tapping into a community of business people – via crowd-sourcing – for contributions to a business directory results in a reliable and continual flow of new records.



Ask: How will you support me when I experience a problem importing or using this data?

4. What level of value do you provide?

It's one thing to gather and sell data to customers. It's an entirely different situation to help clients get the most out of every contact acquired. Consider your data vendor a partner, and look for qualities like transparency and a dedicated support team.

Also ask:

- » Can you share best practices for generating new business from these contacts?
- » Will you work with me to generate the right set of contacts for my specific business needs?

Look for:

- » Published address on company website. Does the company show you where its offices are located? Call and ask about their offices and other questions that give you a sense of the legitimacy of the company.
- » A dedicated support team and support line.
- » A best-practices resource library.
- » Ability to use a suppression file (to ensure you purchase only net-new contacts.)
- » Word-of-mouth references. Ask around. Talk to current customers.

Asking these questions will ensure you separate legitimate companies from data providers trying to make a quick buck. When troubles arise, the quality of this data immediately impacts campaign performance, and the ROI of your purchase.

"For marketers, it is key to put the right message in front of the right people. Using good segmenting, you increase relevance, reduce costs, and boost click-throughs and conversions." - MarketingProfs

5. How can you help me reach my target markets?

Available targeting criteria varies among contact data providers. Some vendors are only able to provide standard lists under one heading (e.g., "IT decision makers"). Others allow you to choose your ideal customer profile using a range of criteria, including job title, industry, company size, location, SIC code, and more.

Multiple layers of targeting criteria allow your sales force or marketing campaign to better connect with those people whose problem you solve by bringing those contacts to life. Ensure your contact vendor works within your target personas to develop prospect lists that suit your exact campaign needs.

6. What data fields are provided?

Full business-contact records are key to converting prospects into leads. Full contact information allows for a multi-channel approach throughout the buying funnel. Only with access to up-to-date, direct-dial phone numbers for every contact can you build your campaigns to include a phone call from sales alongside a targeted email follow-up.

Demographic criteria (i.e. job title) is essential for lead scoring. Eloqua's 2011 Marketing Automation Benchmark Report reveals that companies that employ consistent data hygiene create 7 times the number of inquiries and 4 times the number of leads. Combined with lead scoring, marketers can achieve up to 11x lead generation "lift."

Ask: What fields can I filter by? Do you capture industry information? Do you house company size?

7. What rights do I have for use of the data?

Today's marketing world requires building an opt-in database of prospects. You've got to start somewhere, and purchasing a targeted list of contacts is a proven method of building an engaged audience. When you can purchase a list and own the information, you're able to send multiple offers and valuable content to the list to build the relationship with the prospect. Ask whether the information is yours to utilize in your marketing mix continuously over time, or whether it's a rented, one-time use.

8. Are records CAN-SPAM compliant?

The CAN-SPAM laws require commercial emails to follow certain guidelines. These are set by the FTC, allowing B2B organizations to market to new prospects within clear compliance rules:

Understand the law so your emails are delivered.

- 1. Don't use false or misleading header information.** Your From, To, Reply-To, and routing information – including the originating domain name and email address – must be accurate and identify who initiated the message.
- 2. Don't use deceptive subject lines.** The subject line must accurately reflect the content of the message.
- 3. Identify the message as an ad.** The law gives you a lot of leeway in how to do this, but you must disclose clearly and conspicuously that your message is an advertisement.
- 4. Tell recipients where you're located.** Your message must include your valid physical postal address.
- 5. Tell recipients how to opt out of receiving future email from you.** Your message must include a clear and conspicuous explanation of how the recipient can opt out of getting email from you in the future.
- 6. Honor opt-out requests promptly.** Any opt-out mechanism you offer must be able to process opt-out requests for at least 30 days after you send your message. You must honor a recipient's opt-out request within 10 business days.
- 7. Monitor what others are doing on your behalf.** The law makes clear that even if you hire another company to handle your email marketing, you can't contract away your legal responsibility to comply with the law.

Best practices and a basic understanding of the law will ensure your business email follows all legal regulations, and reaches the inbox of your recipients.

For a full guide to CAN-SPAM compliance, please visit:
<http://business.ftc.gov>

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