Transforming the CRM From a System of Record to a System of Insight

Data-driven strategies to increase sales and marketing effectiveness and drive actionable intelligence in the CRM

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Executive Summary

Over the last two decades, customer relationship management (CRM) systems have become the center of the universe for enterprises and small- to medium-sized businesses (SMBs) alike. A steep upfront investment, the CRM promised to digitize go-to-market motions and give sales managers visibility into pipeline and forecasting management, including quote-to-cash, territory management, and customer 360 efforts.

Yet, throughout the last 20 years, the majority of CRM data intended to drive these motions has been largely left untouched (or forgotten), and as a result, many companies never achieved what everyone believed CRM was capable of: empowering sales and marketing teams with a system of data-driven insights to better understand their total addressable market (TAM)—and to, ultimately, prescribe the next-best actions for sales.

Without systems and processes to cleanse and enrich data for real-time accuracy, CRM information stays stagnant and unreliable and can lead sales and marketing teams down the wrong path. Instead of selling, sales reps waste precious time on manual data entry and pursue the wrong prospects at the wrong time—and to make matters worse, they may even rebel against the CRM, seeing it as a burden versus a system of actionable insight.

The result? A costly problem—with analysts citing CRM implementation costs reaching up to $100 million. And that doesn't include long-term costs of bad CRM data linked to limited agility, lower sales output, low morale, and dissatisfied customers.

The digitized go-to-market motion undeniably starts with the frontline seller and marketer working together with high-quality CRM data, actionable intelligence, and data-driven insights to find the next best customer. Arming your sales and marketing teams with confidence in your CRM is the key to unlocking the value the CRM was intended to create. With accurate and complete data in your CRM, your sales and marketing teams will be able to leverage trusted insights to identify and target the best-fit accounts, segment audiences for personalized communication, capture high-quality leads, automate sales motions, increase pipeline performance and forecast accuracy, maximize renewal, upsell, and cross-sell opportunities—and ultimately, displace the competition.

Transforming your CRM data into a strategic asset and building a system of insight starts with a continuous commitment to maintaining data quality, completeness, and actionability. Regardless of where you are in your journey with your CRM, it's never too late to focus on your data. And, even if you think you have good, clean data, there's always more you can do to enable your sales team to get to the right customers, *faster*.

> The digitized go-to-market motion starts with the frontline seller and marketer working together with **high-quality CRM data, actionable intelligence, and data-driven insights** to find the next best customer. Arming your sales and marketing teams with **confidence in your CRM** is the key to unlocking the value the CRM was intended to create.

Henry Schuck
ZoomInfo founder and CEO

The CRM Data Problem: An Insight Gap

The challenge with building go-to-market initiatives on a data sinkhole.

Businesses dedicate massive budgets to technology each year—in fact, "global IT spending is expected to cross into $4 trillion territory next year," according to Gartner.[1] While the CRM is often the first and largest investment companies make toward digitizing their operations, most quickly realize the value of a CRM is inextricably linked to the quality of data extracted from the CRM. Seventy-one percent of marketers report that their systems run on old, outdated data, and 57 percent have no standard operating procedure for keeping data up-to-date.[2]

Companies continually push data into the CRM from various sources but fall short of building systems and processes to clean, complete, and maintain actionable data—essentially leaving it to sit there and spoil. Without systems and processes to cleanse data for real-time accuracy, rectify outdated data values, fill in missing data, detect new records, and flag or remove invalidated records, CRM information continually decays and loses its utility to both sales and marketing. Having sales and marketing teams then run go-to-market motions with 30 to 50 percent of bad CRM data[3] creates frustration, erodes trust, and weakens the ability to rely on and derive value from the CRM.

Data debt, "defined as the accumulated cost associated with the suboptimal governance of data assets in an enterprise," accrues, hurting ROI of data initiatives and investments in new technologies. But surprisingly, only 26 percent of companies have a plan in place to address data debt.[4]

Until companies prioritize CRM data quality and overall data hygiene and maintenance, data debt will continue to compound, limiting strategic growth initiatives and organizations' goals of becoming data-driven. Untrustworthy data not only hinders AI-driven insights that predict next-best sales actions to close business faster, proactively reducing risk and providing reliable win-probability, but it also hurts sales productivity, efficiency, and effectiveness.

> Data quality tools are the processes and technologies for **identifying, understanding and correcting flaws in data** that support effective information governance across operational business processes and decision making. The packaged tools available include a range of critical functions, such as profiling, parsing, standardization, cleansing, matching, enrichment, and monitoring.[5]

[1] Gartner. (2020, January 15). Gartner. Gartner Says Global IT Spending to Reach $3.9 Trillion in 2020. https://www.gartner.com/en/newsroom/press-releases/2020-01-15-gartner-says-global-it-spending-to-reach-3point9-trillion-in-2020.
[2] Demand Gen Report & ZoomInfo. (2019). 2019 State Of Database Quality & Accuracy Report. ZoomInfo. https://www.zoominfo.com/content/2019-demandgen-report
[3] DataFox. (2018). Oracle Buys DataFox. https://www.oracle.com/assets/datafox-general-presentation-5178158.pdf.
[4] Highlights from our 2020 global data management research. (2020, February 18). https://www.edq.com/blog/highlights-from-our-2020-global-data-management-research/
[5] Gartner IT Glossary, "Data quality tools," https://www.gartner.com/en/information-technology/glossary/data-quality-tools.

As a result, sales reps often view the CRM negatively, as a tool that forces them to burn precious time on manual data entry—or a way for management to merely track their sales output—and that lacks the actionable intelligence they need to get to the right customers, faster. The end result is low CRM user adoption—in fact, when companies have a CRM adoption rate of less than 75 percent, it leads to a noticeably lower win rate of forecast deals.[6]

And the stakes are high—CRMs' full potential can be reached with clean, complete, and actionable data that supports high-performing sales and marketing teams and the AI-based initiatives that are necessary to displace the competition. When implemented and adopted to the fullest, CRM systems that are loaded with actionable data can produce the following benefits:

- **Sales effectiveness:** Drives more informed conversations, more resonant messaging, and more timely interactions, leading to better conversion rates and higher revenue.
- **Sales efficiency and productivity:** Reduces time spent scouring the web for the right information, pursuing and personalizing messaging, or leveraging incorrect contact information. Increases time in conversations with buyers. Enables automation, eliminates menial tasks, and maximizes resources and manpower.
- **Revenue gains:** Achieves first-mover advantage. Incremental lifts in sales effectiveness, efficiency, and productivity boost revenue per sales rep, resulting in better bottom-line results.
- **Next-gen marketing programs:** Powers account-based marketing, personalization at scale, identification of best-fit accounts, development of an ideal customer profile (ICP); and lead, contact, and account scoring for optimal prioritization and results.
- **Data-driven go-to-market orchestration:** Triggers automated sales and marketing motions that fire on all cylinders, powered by actionable insights and consistent, verified data.
- **A single, centralized source of truth** established for all go-to-market teams to rely on with confidence.

> Sales tech won't be ready for AI until sales organizations solve their data problems; this is a messy proposition for any part of a business, but even more so in sales given the dirtiness of its data.[7]
>
> – Craig Rosenberg
> co-founder and chief analyst at TOPO

[6] "Sales Operations Optimization Study: Sales Ops Best Practices and Benchmarks." Miller Heiman Group, www.millerheimangroup.com/resources/resource/2018-sales-operations-optimization-study/.
[7] TOPO. (2020). Insights and Research for Marketing, Sales Development and Sales. TOPO. https://blog.topohq.com/market-trends-drive-sales-technology-investments/

The importance of high-quality data, actionable intelligence, data-driven insights, and agile go-to-market motions cannot be overstated—but data needs to be cleansed, enriched, and delivered to the right people and systems at the right time, in the right form, to unlock the value the CRM was initially intended to create.

Most of the frustration encountered by sales and marketing teams has little to do with the functionality of the CRM and everything to do with the state of the data that's driving the workflows, processes, and motions. All too often businesses approach data management with a mindset of, "Let's bring as much data as possible into the CRM, and they will find what they need," versus, "How can I make my sales team more successful by delivering the right individuals the right data and insights at the right moments?"

Read on to learn how to transform your CRM from a system of record to a system of insight.

> The big picture: A company's ability to leverage the CRM as a system of insight will determine whether they can truly become a data-driven enterprise, a requirement to compete in today's ever-changing market with growing investments in AI and machine learning, real-time intent data, account based-marketing programs, and more to deliver an end-to-end customer experience.

BEFORE AND AFTER:

The CRM's Journey From a System of Record to a System of Insight

System of Record	System of Insight
Not strategic	Strategic all-in-one platform
Cost center and back-office system	Consolidates sales tech stack
Data is not intelligent, only includes basic contact information	Integration hub that houses the single source of truth on customers and prospects; eliminates data silos to promote cross-functional alignment
Burdensome to sales	Automates sales motions
Not a trusted data source	Houses, cleans, and maintains robust data leveraged across the organization
Doesn't serve up actionable insights	The quarterback of your go-to-market motion leveraging AI and machine learning to serve up actionable insights and suggested next-best action sales activities
Users update manually and search for data on an ad hoc basis	Drives go-to-market orchestration for sales and marketing teams
Hard to achieve ROI	

4 Types of Bad CRM Data

While bad data is certainly an infamous hallmark of the CRM, in reality, data problems come in a variety of forms and flavors:

1. **Incomplete Data**
    - Lack of foundational data coverage of the TAM (i.e., companies and contacts outside a TAM, not meeting ideal buyer profile)
    - No contextual data to target specific audiences or segments within the TAM (i.e., missing firmographic company data such as revenue, employee size, industry, geolocation, and/or contact titles, departments, job function, management level)
    - No linkages between companies and their locations, or parent and child accounts (i.e., subsidiaries linked to parent, and ultimately, parent company; multiple locations or branches linked to parent)
2. **Poor Data Quality**
    - Incorrect or outdated data caused by sourcing bad data or data decay (i.e., people change positions, companies grow out of segments)
    - Invalid or defunct records (i.e., companies go out of business, get acquired by another business, contacts leave a company)
    - Poorly or inconsistently formatted data values (i.e., U.S., United States, USA)
    - Duplicate or orphaned records (i.e., same contacts with different emails or contacts without an association to a company and/or incorrect association to a company)
3. **Data Silos**
    - Data living in applications or systems that does not easily integrate with the CRM (i.e., data from multiple third-party sources or first-party data aggregated by a company)
    - Disparate data points from disparate sources are matched to the wrong master records (i.e., data is stored in databases outside of CRM, requiring a team of engineers to integrate the external data back into the CRM)
    - Difficult to unify and maintain data from multiple sources into a single source of truth (i.e., different sources lead to duplicate records and a lack of confidence when dealing with conflicts)
4. **Not Actionable**
    - Missing deep sales intelligence to drive go-to-market prioritization or to trigger actionable workflows (i.e., dynamic sales signals—intent, funding, technology adds or drops, news of executive hires, and more—must be captured in the CRM in order to take the next-best action)
    - Lack of live connections between sources of actionable insights and CRM accounts and contacts (i.e., since data is dynamic, companies need to integrate data in a way that receives live updates)
    - No ability to parse insights into structured data to trigger workflows (i.e., sales intelligence data needs to be stored in a format that can be operationalized)

Stabilizing a Data Foundation

Diagnose and address data issues that undermine CRM effectiveness.

Maintaining your CRM data isn't just a one-and-done process—it requires continuous, proactive data hygiene, monitoring, and enrichment practices to make your data reliable and actionable. But the more you fail to dedicate time and resources to your CRM data, the more data decay will start to creep in, which can be very costly to overcome if ignored for too long.

TOPO found that getting data in order is a challenge for many:

> "The overwhelming biggest challenge with data is cleaning and appending existing data. A sizable portion of contacts regularly go out-of-date as people change roles and companies, and it is difficult for organizations to keep up with the changes. It is acting on the data that makes teams successful. However, inaccurate data is not actionable.[8]"

Our Sales Organization Is Highly Confident in CRM Data

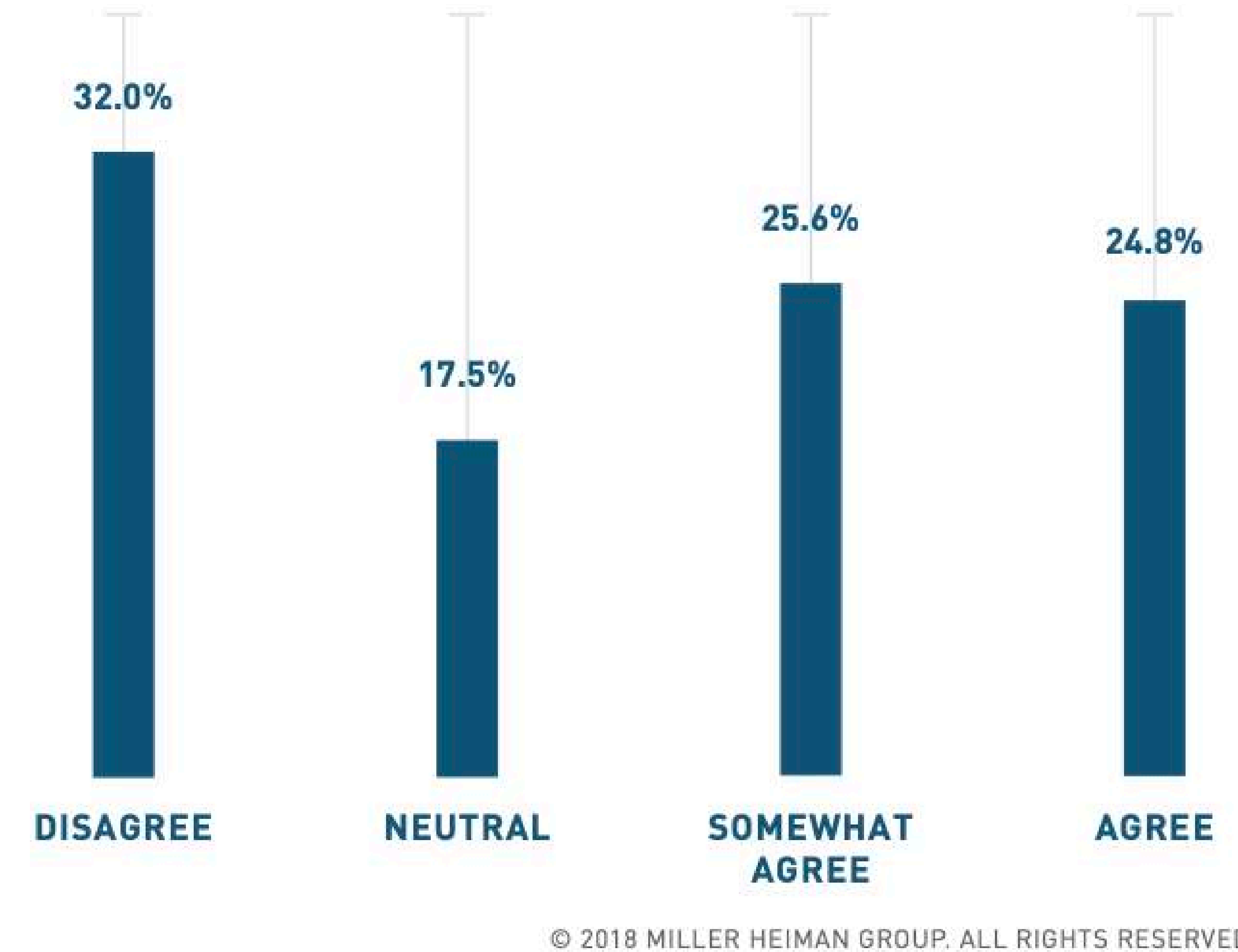


Figure 1. Represents inputs received from 1,200-plus participants in the 2017 World-Class Sales Practices Study. Only 24.8% of study participants surveyed expressed high confidence in the quality of the data in their CRM system.[9]

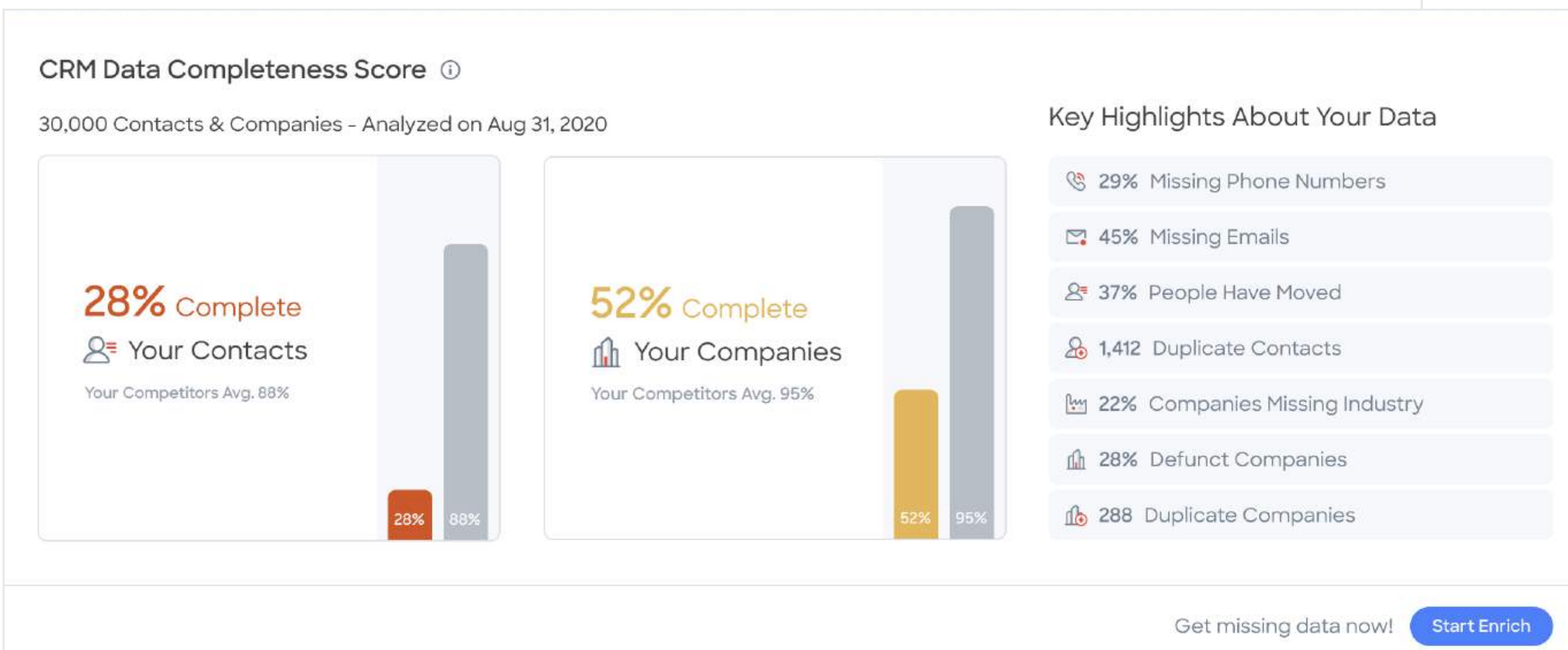
[8] Wittlake, E., & Cohen, J. L. (2020, March 24). DATA MARKET GUIDE. TOPO. https://webinars.topohq.com/datamarketguide-1/
[9] CSO Insights. (2018). 2018 Sales Operations Optimization Study. CSO Insights. https://www.allbound.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/2018-Sales-Operations-Optimization-Study.pdf

To repair, maintain, and make the data in your CRM actionable, follow these steps:

Step 1: Assess the health of your CRM database—regularly.

While your CRM is a treasure trove of customer and prospect data, let's face it: All data has an expiration date. While a standard audit assessing existing databases can highlight inconsistencies and inaccuracies, a one-time data fix is no match for data decay.

Before you take any action to improve your CRM database, first figure out what state your customer and prospect data is in. You need to know what you're working with before you formulate a plan to better maintain and manage your data.



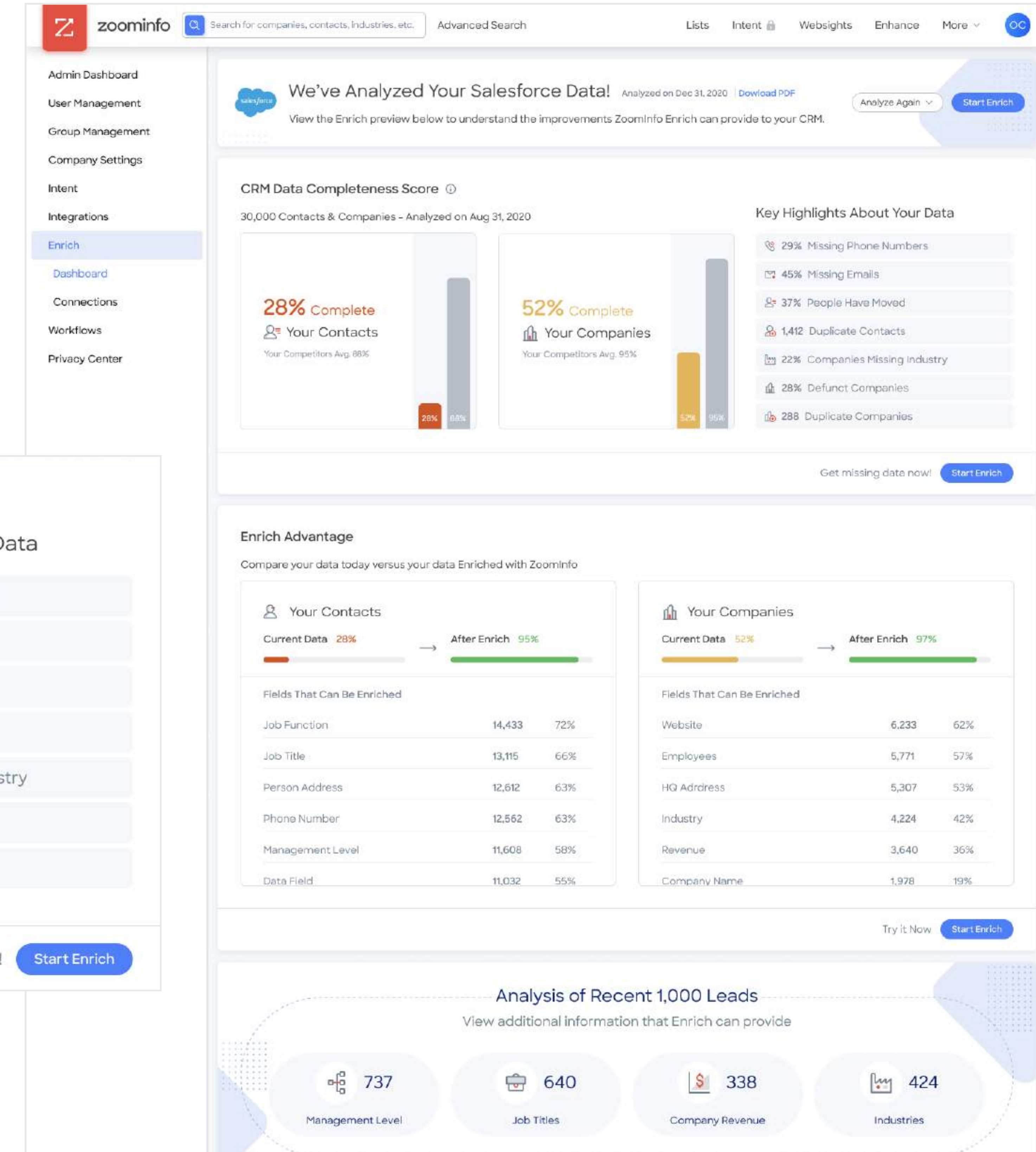


Figure 2. Represents a ZoomInfo CRM database health assessment that identifies companies' CRM data completeness, including missing phone numbers and emails, duplicate contacts and companies, missing industries, and more, followed by enrich capabilities. Source: ZoomInfo

Since a manual CRM health assessment is time-consuming and labor intensive, many companies partner with a B2B data provider to audit and analyze the state of their CRM data. For example, a data provider can automatically compare your data to what's in their database to identify bad, missing, and duplicate data. They can also provide a summary of where your database has the most gaps and formulate action items to help you improve real-time data collection, cleansing, and organization.

Kickstarting your data hygiene and monitoring with a clean slate will help ensure your CRM database is functioning at its best and that you stay in compliance with the latest data privacy regulations. But remember: This isn't a set-it-and-forget-it initiative. CRM data quality requires ongoing maintenance.

A CRM health assessment and clean-up will help answer:

- How complete are the records in the database?
- How accurate is the data?
- Is the right data being captured and integrated?
- Does data support business objectives?
- Does data meet compliance requirements?

> What happens to companies and people over time? They change, just like anything. A company grows, shrinks, makes acquisitions, or gets acquired. A company invests in new technologies and gets rid of old technologies. People are getting promoted, they're leaving companies, they're leaving departments, they're taking on bigger roles and bigger organizations. All of these are constantly happening to people and companies, and yet, what's happening in CRMs is stagnant.

Henry Schuck
ZoomInfo founder and CEO

Step 2: Acquire the right data sources to build a strong CRM foundation.

For your CRM to be a true system of insight, sellers and marketers need to view it as a valuable, enabling asset. To achieve that, you will need to source account and contact data to cover your TAM from a broad variety of high-quality sources. And for most, this is an uphill battle—only 16 percent of marketers have a solid data acquisition strategy in place.[10]

But no matter where your data comes from or what shape it's in, it needs to be consolidated, cleansed, verified, and complete in order to be actionable. There are two main types of data you need to collect: **third-party and first-party data**. The combination of both ensures the broad coverage and depth of insight you will need to add value to the sales process and accelerate next-gen marketing programs like account-based marketing.

Data Sources Feeding the CRM

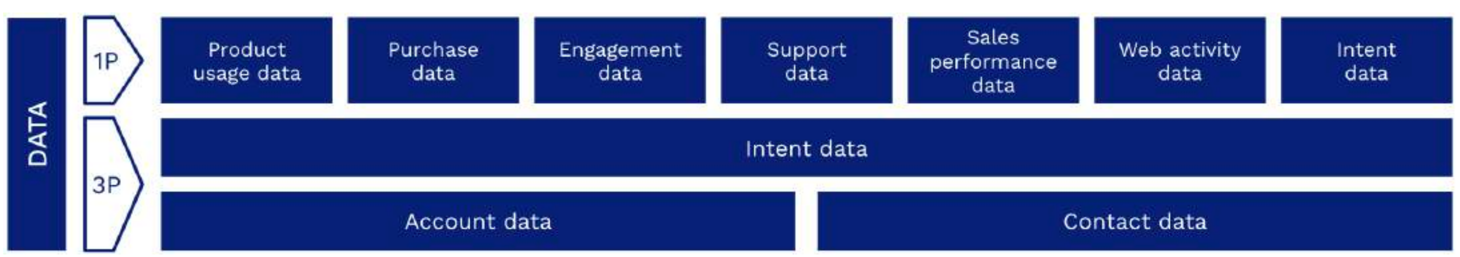


Figure 3. Represents a variety of data sources that flow into the CRM, providing actionable insight to be leveraged for AI and automation for marketing campaigns and sales outreach. Source: ZoomInfo

Third-party Data

Third-party data is data you acquire from sources outside of your company (i.e., subscriptions or purchased lists) and funnel into the CRM. It includes firmographic data (i.e., data that categorizes companies such as location, number of customers, industry) and contact data, but also richer context and insights about the tech stack, investors, funding rounds, reporting relationships, locations, merger and acquisition activity, hiring, news, awards, and events, among others.

More specifically, third-party data providers are completely focused on sourcing and verifying data, which can help cleanse and complete your first-party data—a huge time and cost savings for go-to-market teams who are focused on filling the pipeline and tracking down leads. The advantage of using a third-party is that these companies are solving complex data challenges and developing cutting-edge AI and machine learning technology, which very few sales and marketing teams can replicate on their own due to time, skills, and budget constraints.

Third-party data provides access to insights in two key areas:

- **Context:** By acquiring sources of account and contact intelligence, you can develop deep, rich context for every record (i.e., using firmographics, technographics, funding, news, and more).
- **Intent:** By acquiring sources of actionable insights and intent, you can create triggers for timely engagement and get out in front of relevant sales opportunities quickly (see definition on p. 12).

First-party Data

First-party data is *data that your company produces through its day-to-day activities, and this data is acquired, generated, and housed in a variety of internal systems* (i.e., ERP, advertising, marketing automation, customer-facing applications, analytics platforms, etc.).

What's notable about first-party data is that it's very specific to a company's business and outreach activities. For example, organizations can collect first-party data from sales reps' inboxes and calendars, lead forms on the website and via email campaigns, and anonymous website visitors. But when all of this data comes together, it provides valuable context and fills in blanks that often can't be sourced from any third party.

[10] Demand Gen Report & ZoomInfo. (2019). 2019 State Of Database Quality & Accuracy Report. ZoomInfo. https://www.zoominfo.com/content/2019-demandgen-report

Why Intent Data Is So Important

Intent data, also referred to as behavioral data, indicates when prospective buyers conduct research activity that can help you identify early buyer interest before they fill out a form on your site or engage with your sales or marketing teams. There are many forms of intent data including content consumption spikes from third-party websites; anonymous website visitors and pageviews; category, vendor, and competitor pageviews on review sites, and participation in social groups, forums and communities that indicate a need or interest in a particular solution category or topic. These types of insights can also be used to score and prioritize leads and accounts and provide real-time visibility into customer upsell and cross-sell opportunities.

But leveraging intent data to the fullest means combining it with other types of data to get a complete picture. That's where B2B data intelligence comes into play—it empowers sales reps' efficiency by allowing them to quickly access real-time intent data and account- and contact-level data, all within the same view to then automate prospect outreach to coincide with the buyer's need to purchase.

For example, a list of prospect accounts can be monitored and communications can be triggered automatically and simultaneously to all accounts with a common intent signal or other actionable signal. Pre-written email templates can be sent out, and pre-recorded voicemails can be used to reduce the time spent on manual prospecting efforts. B2B intelligence can not only automatically track all these events, but it can also generate analytics directly into the CRM to 1) help the rep prioritize based on which accounts are the most likely to respond and 2) see how well the outreach performed in the end. Again, all of this takes place right within the CRM, allowing reps to keep all of their work in one tool.

Third-party Data

Examples of account intelligence:

- Firmographic
- Technographic
- Hierarchical
- Location
- Industry
- Keywords
- Similar companies
- Employee growth
- Products and services
- Number of employees by department
- Funding rounds
- News

Examples of contact intelligence:

- Office and mobile phone number
- Work and personal email address
- Work location
- Job title
- Job function
- Job level
- Org chart
- Relationships
- Web references (i.e., media mentions and articles published)
- Work history
- Education
- Social profile links

Examples of intent insights:

- Conducting research on specific topics
- Leaving reviews on vendor comparison sites
- Anonymous web visitors
- Curated prospect scoops, including pain points, upcoming or ongoing projects, news, funding, events, or technology purchases

First-party Data

Examples of first-party data:

- Website analytics (i.e., visits, bounces, referral sources, website visitor behavior, pages viewed, content downloaded, event registrations)
- Email engagement (i.e., opens, clicks, conversions, responses)
- Call activity (i.e., dials, connects, SMS)
- Conversational intelligence (i.e., topics or competitors mentioned)
- Advertising data (i.e., reach, clicks, conversions, clickthroughs)
- Chat sessions
- Sales enablement (i.e., content shared)
- Transaction data
- Contract data
- Products and services purchased
- Product usage (i.e., daily active users, monthly active users)
- Onboarding and implementation data
- Support data
- Email subscription preferences
- Account or contact status information (i.e., customer, former customer, prospect, partner)
- Compliance and privacy data (i.e., removal requests, consent management, notice provided)
- Social (i.e., connections, relationships)
- Sales performance (i.e., average ACV per deal, average win rate, ACV won, ACV per demo, average sales cycle)

Elevated Data Insights: Marriage of Third- and First-party Data

Even if companies collect both third- and first-party data, it's the synergy between the two data types that matters most. Integrations between B2B data intelligence platforms, CRM, and other go-to-market systems can make this unification seamless.

The combination of third- and first-party data allows you to be much more specific with your targeting when building lists. For example, let's say you want to hone in on accounts at companies with 5,000-plus employees, in the food and beverage industry, showing intent on the topic, "food traceability software," excluding former customers, and only including accounts in which you are the account owner—you should be able to easily do that with filters and picklists, without leaving your CRM.

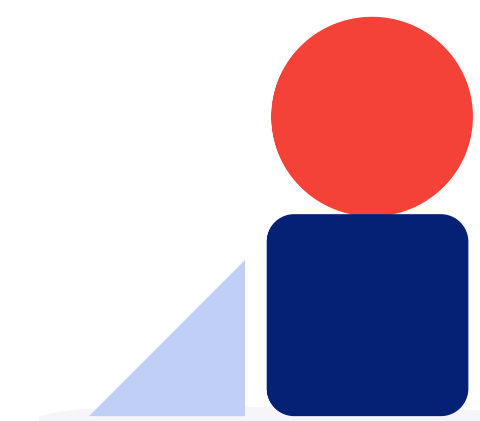
Without the integration of third- and first-party data in the CRM, reps would have to run multiple reports, cobble together separate spreadsheets, and run numerous import, mapping, and merging efforts to get the same result. And next month there will be another 100 accounts showing intent for food traceability software, and you will have to run the whole motion again. The CRM was not intended to force sellers and marketers to be data analysts. Implementing a foundational center of data and insights enables the CRM to provide users with this type of data analysis in an always-on, always accurate way.

Step 3: Clean your data, and fill in the gaps.

Collecting data from many different sources is beneficial to expanding and increasing company penetration within your TAM. The simple act of sourcing data can be messy—streams of data may enter your CRM without being checked for accuracy or completeness or updated to be consistent with your system, resulting in duplicates, inconsistencies, and overall bad data.

> With so much data to clean, where do you start? The key is to begin by focusing on cleansing and filling in the most *basic* contact and firmographic data *(Note: Later on in your data clean-up process, you will enhance data with unique attributes and real-time updates.).* This sets up your CRM database on a solid foundation from which you can build in more detailed, deeper data points to empower your sales and marketing teams.

For example, up-to-date contact and firmographic data will, at the very least, enable a sales rep to reach a customer via a phone number or email address and know where their company is located and what industry it's in. Without that basic data, none of the more robust data points (i.e., acquiring funding, M&A activity) can be leveraged.



[11] Demand Gen Report & ZoomInfo. (2019). 2019 State Of Database Quality & Accuracy Report. ZoomInfo. https://www.zoominfo.com/content/2019-demandgen-report

To relieve you from the heavy lifting, you can establish a live link from your CRM to a B2B data intelligence platform that automatically cleans data and verifies it in large quantities at the point of entry and on an ongoing basis, no matter where it's sourced from. For example, the technology scans data to see if a contact still works for a given account or if an organization is now defunct. If your system is unable to validate any records, it can flag and remove them.

Inevitably, there will still be gaps across accounts and contacts. Minimizing those gaps is critical, as both marketing and sales teams rely on data for every part of their go-to-market motions. Missing information equals a missed opportunity. Filling in your data gaps doesn't just mean adding missing data though—go through this checklist to ensure sourced data ends up in the right places:

- Use your B2B data intelligence platform to **match** data to your CRM records, **map** data values to the appropriate fields in your CRM, and write to blank values, overwrite existing values, or write to an entirely new field.
- If there are duplicate contacts or accounts, **merge** all data for each account and contact into your master records to create a single source of truth.
- **Standardize** all picklists and field values across all fields, in all systems, as this will help establish a consistent taxonomy.
- Flag or **remove** defunct accounts and invalidated contacts.

6 CRM Data Quality Steps

1. **Verify:** Verify foundational records are active. Flag and remove invalidated records before enrichment.
2. **Deduplicate:** Merge and consolidate valuable data points from duplicate records, and remove duplicates.
3. **Create:** Create new company and contact records where no matching records exist.
4. **Merge:** Merge all data about each account and contact into master records and assign a master ID to create a 360-degree view and a single pane of glass for each.
5. **Standardize:** Standardize and normalize all field values across all fields in all systems and use picklists as often as possible to standardize field inputs.
6. **Comply:** Flag, filter, remove or otherwise govern the use of records that have requested removal, unsubscribe, specific preferences, and/or consent.

Building a System of Insight and Engagement

Evolution from data entry to engagement—and action.

Step 4: Enhance your records with rich context and actionable intelligence.

Whether you're working with new or existing data, enriching your CRM system of record with B2B data intelligence can automatically and continuously layer richer contextual data into your CRM—including technographics, firmographics, org charts, hierarchy data, intent, news, funding, and more—to enable highly-targeted segmentation and personalization. For example, you can make data come to life by indicating:

- whether a company has a benefits plan
- whether a company operates as B2B or B2C
- how many employees they hired in the last year
- how many employees they have in each department
- what their departmental budgets are
- how many hospital beds a facility contains
- the number of salespeople within an organization

Businesses can transform their CRM into a system of insight to enable data-driven workflows that fuel:

- Automatic audience creation and activation
- Campaign and list prioritization
- Recommendations for next-best actions
- Insights for effective engagement
- Automated engagement

> Sales reps spend a mere 34 percent of their time actually selling.[11]
>
> —Salesforce

[11] Salesforce. (2019). Third Edition State of Sales. Salesforce. https://www.salesforce.com/form/conf/state-of-sales-3rd-edition/

This level of specificity is a huge value-add for your sales team. Imagine the difference between a sales conversation when a rep knows which marketing automation platform a company uses and that they recently hired a new CMO, compared to a rep who doesn't have that information. Not only can the rep tailor their pitch to the new executive, but they can also better align your solution with the shortcomings of the prospect's current solution.

Company attributes are extremely helpful in starting to paint a more detailed picture of your prospects. But inherently, companies change and evolve and news breaks on nearly a daily basis. Automated data triggers can help your teams keep up with new signals of intent, new pain points or projects, or other favorable conditions for a purchase.

For example, you can incorporate data based on pivotal events such as funding rounds, mergers and acquisitions activity, new executive appointments, new office leases, or technology purchases or drops. Using a B2B data intelligence platform, these events will be automatically tracked, and you can trigger email alerts to be sent to a sales rep when it affects one of their accounts or contacts so they can upsell and bring in new business, saving time and effort on manual research.

Step 5: Leverage data for next-level personalization, targeting, and segmentation.

Today's buyers expect messaging that's customized to their pain points and delivered to them at the right moment. Smart sales and marketing teams prioritize these types of campaigns because they drive higher success rates in engaging high-potential prospects. Clean CRM data with B2B intelligence can facilitate this type of laser-focused targeting continuously at scale.

According to Forrester Research, personalization should be a priority for every company, but data is often an obstacle. "Customers expect engagement, tailored to their history, preferences, context, and intent. The result is highly personal content, offers, journeys, and connections with frontline resources. Firms have started to craft these experiences across narrow sets of channels and stages in the customer journey—such as personalized offers, website content, or alerts. Yet, few have robust data strategies to improve customer understanding across end-to-end journeys.[13]"

Personalization allows teams to go beyond improving one-to-one sales conversations. Data can facilitate the creation of highly segmented and personalized audiences based on unique attributes, such as a buyer's job level and function or a company's firmographics and technographics. It may also include first-party data. For example, you could create cadenced outreach, which might include messaging around a series of use cases for a vertical-specific audience of customers that haven't used your product recently. This is a much more relevant and targeted approach than simply pulling a list of all customers and sending out a generic message to all of them. This same tactic can be taken to maximize upsell and cross-sell opportunities and re-engage former customers.

> **More than 60 percent of buyers say sellers who are knowledgeable and address their needs have the most positive impact on their buying decisions.[12]**
>
> —Forrester Research

[12] Casey, S., & Wizdo, L. (2020, May 4). What B2B Buyers Crave. Forrester Research. https://www.forrester.com/report/What+B2B+Buyers+Crave/-/E-RES158856?objectid=RES158856

[13] Forrester Research. (2020, January 15). The Five CRM Trends In 2020 That Will Shape Engagement, Relationships, And Revenue. Forrester. https://www.forrester.com/report/The+Five+CRM+Trends+In+2020+That+Will+Shape+Engagement+Relationships+And+Revenue/-/E-RES159222

Typical requirements for these account-based approaches include the development of your ideal customer profile and target account list, which commonly requires a lot of manual data work and maintenance. With the help of AI, you can streamline the creation of your target account list and ICP. AI can analyze your won and lost accounts and uncover detailed attributes of your ideal customers and buyers, find other accounts and professionals that look like them, and continually update and integrate the models over time.

With an AI-generated ICP, you can easily prioritize the accounts and segments where you'll see the greatest impact. You can run tailored campaigns or sales outreach with messages that will resonate with any subgroup of your target accounts that you'd like (e.g., you can pull lists by industry, company size, number of employees). Ideally, the more current your ICP is, the more targeted your outreach is and the sharper your segmentation will be when it comes to finding the right customers. You can even develop additional ICPs as needed—AI will start to gather trends in the data and suggest new groups of like customers from which you can develop another ICP.

Step 6: Automate and orchestrate motions based on intent and actionable insights.

With B2B data intelligence layered onto your CRM system of record, it's easy to automate sales motions, campaigns, and programs based on intent and automated triggers. For example, you can design automated triggers based on 'if, then' rules. So *if* a few of a rep's cold prospective customers just received rounds of funding, *then* you could set up an automated nurture stream for key contacts at each of those accounts with relevant messaging and content (i.e., congratulations on the new funding, we find that companies that acquire new funding need XYZ, here's how we can help). This approach is not only effective because funding is a favorable event, but also because it creates an area of common ground, and it demonstrates your sales reps are plugged in to the relevant events and situations at the account.

Or perhaps a batch of customer renewals are coming up. With the help of B2B data intelligence, the CRM would've already automatically tracked all interactions with those customers and could have triggered a series of emails based on pre-populated templates. Managers can set up an AI-powered playbook requiring that if an account manager hasn't scheduled a meeting with an account within 90 days of their renewal, they will receive an alert for a task reminding them to reach out. Here, automation eliminates the manual effort of locating contact information and writing emails to the right customers and tracks all activities to enhance the 360-degree view of the customer. Plus, this data intelligence can speed up the process of identifying and capitalizing on upsell and cross-sell opportunities with existing customers.

> **Improving sales rep productivity must be an ongoing pursuit for sales operations, sales enablement and sales leaders. However, sales organizations should move beyond a focus on increasing activity (e.g., 'sending more emails and making more phone calls') and seek to add insight and intelligence to buyer and customer interactions (e.g., when to send, what to send, how to send, whom to send to).[14]**
>
> – Forrester SiriusDecisions

[14] Forrester SiriusDecisions. Technology-Enhanced Selling: A Sirius Introduction. Forrester SiriusDecisions. https://client.siriusdecisions.com/research-articles/t/technologyenhancedsellingasiriusintroduction?contenttype=

When data is optimal, you can orchestrate a digitized go-to-market strategy that runs automated sales and marketing motions across multiple channels and targets audiences that are showing intent. Going after the right people at the right time with the right message gives you the best chance of closing deals, and the automation of these actions makes it possible for your teams to engage with many more likely-to-buy customers simultaneously.

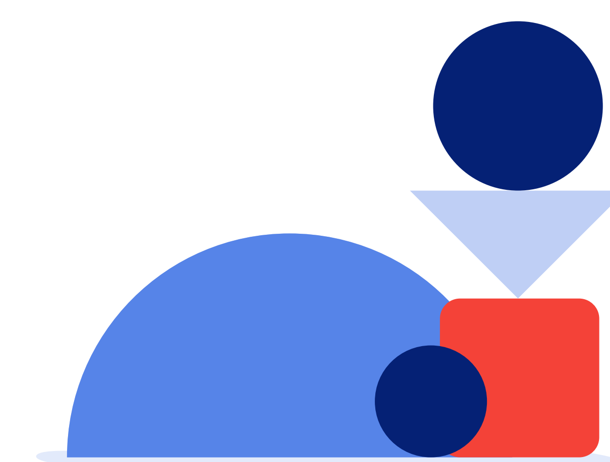
Step 7: Practice ongoing data hygiene.

As mentioned, keeping data clean and accurate is not a one-and-done process. It's like owning a car—for peak performance, it needs gas and routine maintenance over the lifecycle of ownership. Since data hygiene requires continuous attention, many companies defer their in-house responsibilities to B2B data intelligence partners, which can adequately handle all the changes and the volume of data, so nothing falls through the cracks.

> **Data hygiene is a two-part process: data maintenance involves ensuring data is up-to-date and accurate with the latest changes, while data enrichment continuously adds context to account and contact records. Both are required to stay on top of clean, accurate data.**

It's important to note that different data points require different frequencies of maintenance and enrichment. For example, firmographic data is relatively static and doesn't need to be updated more than once a quarter. In contrast, technographic data should be monitored more frequently, on a weekly or even daily basis. Contact data also changes often—knowing that a contact is no longer with a company can save sales reps time and effort, and prevent emails from bouncing in marketing campaigns.

Within your CRM, you can also monitor your entire universe of accounts and buyers and leverage B2B data intelligence to stay on top of daily business changes that result in actionable events and new priorities. For example, you can automatically pull in data from new contacts, email interactions, and calls and meetings, all from reps' inboxes and calendars. And when that data is brought into your CRM, it can be enriched and made actionable.



Key Takeaways

To repair, maintain, and make the data in your CRM actionable to create a true system of insight, follow these steps:

Step 1: Assess the health of your CRM database—regularly.

Step 2: Acquire the right data sources to build a strong CRM foundation.

Step 3: Clean your data, and fill in the gaps.

Step 4: Enhance your records with rich context and actionable intelligence.

Step 5: Leverage data for next-level personalization, targeting, and segmentation.

Step 6: Automate and orchestrate motions based on intent and actionable insights.

Step 7: Practice ongoing data hygiene.

Building a CRM System of Insight

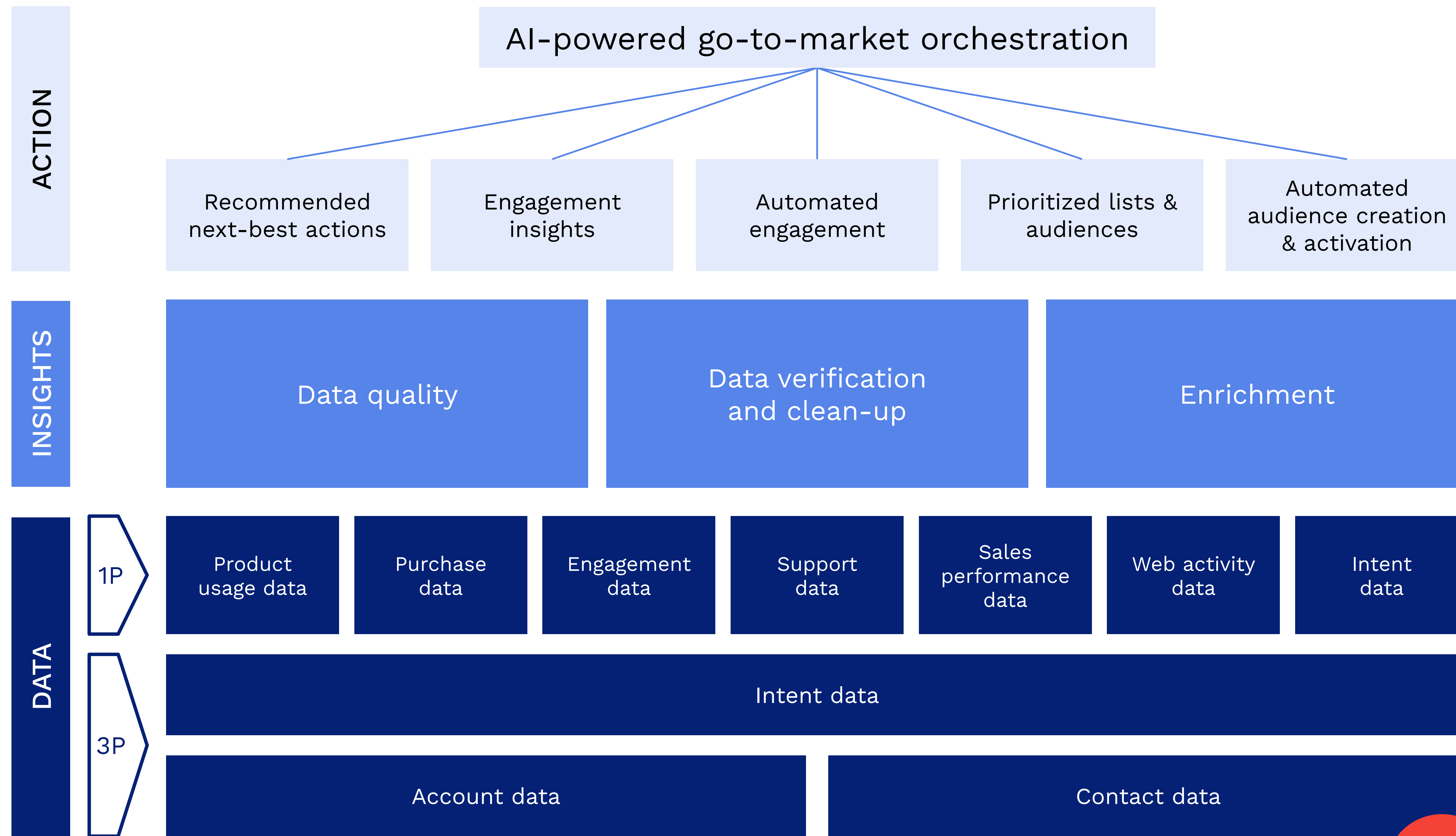


Figure 4. A trusted CRM system of insight data comes down to three phases: data, insights, and action. The right data must be collected from the right sources, and then verified, cleaned and enriched to enable you to activate sales and marketing motions as part of your broader go-to-market strategy. Source: ZoomInfo

Conclusion

Creating a system of insight with your CRM not only takes dedication to data quality, but it also requires smart decision-making with your technology stack. Layering your CRM with a B2B data intelligence platform doubles the power of your data, leading to efficiencies across the sales process and high ROI.

A fully-optimized organization that relies on clean CRM data can run successful go-to-market orchestration that leverages personalization and hyper-focused targeting. Instead of segments of 10,000, you can deliver 10,000 segments. Reps won't dread using the CRM—they will make it even more central to their day-to-day than it's ever been to fuel improved sales productivity, effectiveness, and efficiency with automated motions, prioritization, and insights into their highest-potential customers.

In an unpredictable economic climate, investing in actionable data and business intelligence will ensure your go-to-market strategy is ironclad and can pivot and respond to changing buyer demands. High-quality data and deep B2B data intelligence and insights feeding your CRM will empower you to penetrate new markets, define new ICPs, develop new product solutions, and pivot messaging in real-time to maintain positive prospect and customer relationships. A strong data foundation will allow you to keep your business going, no matter what comes your way.

Over the next few years, committing to good CRM data will not be an option—it's a necessity for the lifecycle and sustained success of your CRM system. Make it a priority to improve your CRM data once and for all—and get on track to become that leading company that finally displaces the competition.

Is bad CRM data slowing you down? Take your go-to-market motion to the next level with B2B data intelligence. We can help.

Learn More

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About ZoomInfo

ZoomInfo (NASDAQ: ZI) is a Go-To-Market Intelligence Solution for more than 20,000 companies worldwide. The ZoomInfo platform empowers business-to-business sales, marketing, and recruiting professionals to hit their number by pairing best-in-class technology with unrivaled data coverage, accuracy, and depth of company and contact information. With integrations embedded into workflows and technology stacks, including the leading CRM, Sales Engagement, Marketing Automation, and Talent Management applications, ZoomInfo drives more predictable, accelerated, and sustainable growth for its customers. ZoomInfo emphasizes GDPR and CCPA compliance. In addition to creating the industry's first proactive notice program, the company is a registered data broker with the states of California and Vermont. Read about ZoomInfo's commitment to compliance, privacy, and security. For more information about our leading Go-To-Market Intelligence Solution, and how it helps sales, marketing, and recruiting professionals, please visit www.zoominfo.com.

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