springboards
by demandspring

The Buyer Journey Blueprint

Why buyers are in more control now than ever

What is a Springboard?

Let's be honest: marketing is not easy.

Faced with increasing pressure from both the C-Suite and Sales to drive significant pipeline and revenue contributions, most Marketing organizations are going through a tremendous transformation. Whereas previous approaches emphasized branding and creativity, this transition has put a premium on strategy, content, technology, and analytics.

Keeping track of marketing trends and understanding the latest technologies can be a handful for you and your organization when combined with other day-to-day responsibilities.

Our Springboard guides are meant to help you breathe a little easier.

Springboards provide critical information on specific topics that Marketing executives and those responsible for contributing to marketing-driven pipeline need to understand. Consider them a springboard to help you confidently and successfully dive headfirst into the marketing practices your organization needs to drive revenue marketing success.

Buyers in the Driver's Seat

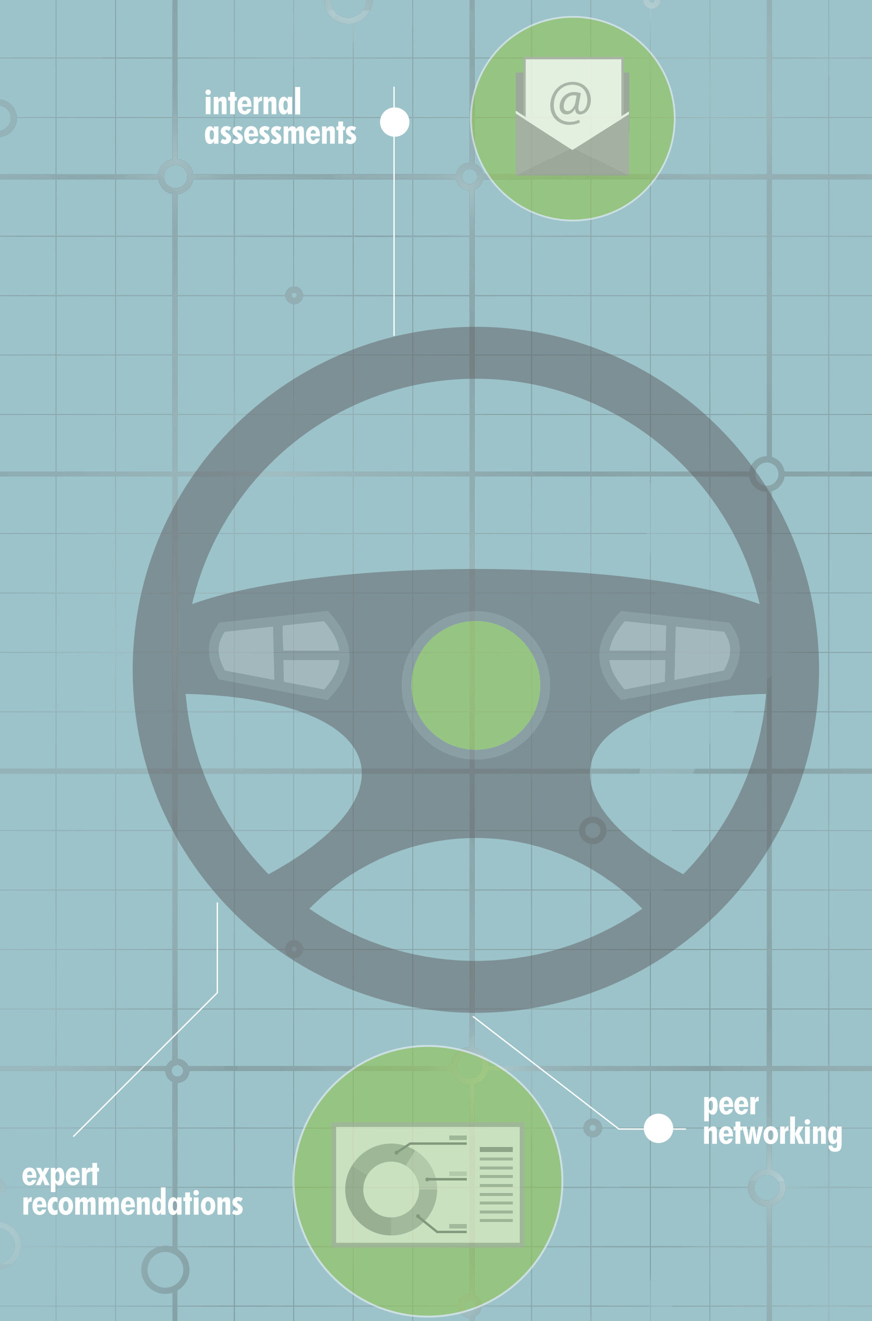
Though it may not be as ominous as the rise of the machines in the Terminator movie franchise, we can thank the Internet and the rise of digital and social channels for creating a fundamental shift in the way people research and buy products.

'I'll be back,' certainly applies.

That's because buyers now delay conversations with vendors and look instead to other trusted online sources to educate themselves on available products or solutions.

Take for example a June 2015 Gartner survey, which revealed that a company's sales and marketing efforts now influence just 32% of a B2B buyer's journey. Just one-third of the journey!

How are buyers spending the other two-thirds of the journey? Well, they're devoted to conducting internal assessments and peer networking, along with seeking out recommendations from external experts.



So what does this mean for B2B and B2C marketers?

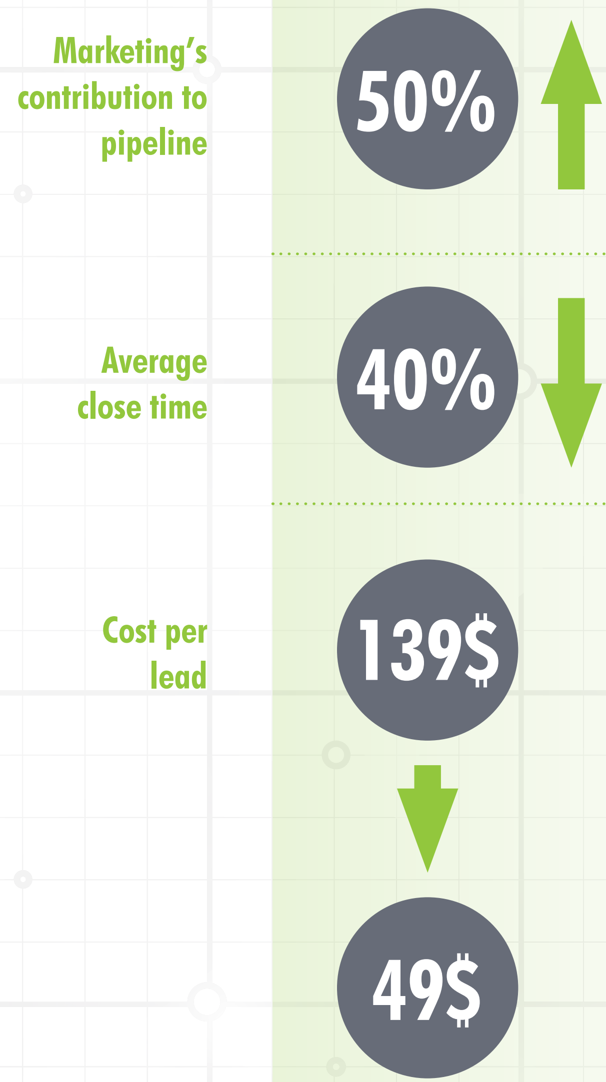
It means you can no longer hope to engage buyers through mass advertising and batch and blast email campaigns. Instead, you must focus on being found through the channels that buyers prefer. But before you can do that – and this is a big but – you need to know who your buyers are, where they like to hang out and what types of content will engage them.

So there's some work involved. And if it sounds like heavy lifting, you're not wrong.

But don't worry, like Arnold Schwarzenegger's portrayal of an 800-series Terminator, you'll be in great shape in no time – especially when you recognize that the rewards of taking a customer-centric, persona-based approach to marketing can be significant.

Take for example the Demand Spring client who recently invested in persona research and the development of persona-based inbound digital marketing campaigns.

The client increased Marketing's contribution to pipeline by 50 percent, while reducing their average close time by 40 percent. Cost per lead went from $130 to just $49. Those are some amazing gains.



The Buyer Journey Blueprint

A Buyer Journey Blueprint is the foundation for a strategic demand generation plan grounded in the reality of how buying teams buy. The blueprint gives you the insights you need to engage prospects through effective inbound campaigns, nurture prospects with content that is highly relevant to their needs, industry and roles, and then convert buyers into satisfied customers.

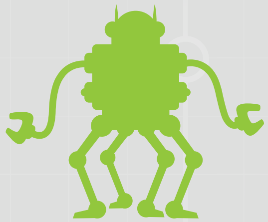
Here are some of the must-have components of a Buyer Journey Blueprints:

- **Demographic and psychographic** insights uncover who your primary buyers are and how they think. Knowing this helps you connect with them both rationally and emotionally. Specific attributes include: gender, age, geography, education, skills, qualities, personality, values, opinions, attitudes and interests.
- **Firmographics** are the descriptive attributes that can be used to aggregate individual organizations into meaningful segments. For example: industries, non-profits, government entities, etc. This type of segmentation is key for defining messaging, vertical market strategies and execution. Attributes include industry, company, annual revenue, location, ownership (public/private), B2B/B2C, market share and market position.
- **Job responsibilities** are key to driving relevance. The more you know about a person's role, along with their challenges and motivators, the more targeted your messaging will be.
- **Thinking, feeling, and doing** are actions that relate to the buying process. They help you understand not only where individuals seek out information, but also whom they interact with both internally and externally. **Thinking** includes industry and operational pressures, and the questions they might ask. **Doing** includes the digital and physical touchpoints they rely on to gather knowledge, which is critical for planning your engagement tactics. **Feeling** uncovers how individuals view their role within the buying process.

The Buyer Journey Blueprint (cont.)

- **Content and channels** span each stage of the buyer journey. It's important to understand the types of content each persona prefers, and what sources they turn to for trusted information. Content and channels the foundation for operationalizing the Buyer Journey Blueprint across your marketing organization.
- **Unmet needs** are those that are not currently being addressed, either by an existing vendor or due to an operational gap. They represent an opportunity for crafting effective messaging and winning a buyer's business.
- **Buying characteristics** are also important to messaging, as they include buying team identification, key buying criteria, reasons for change, length of buying cycle, vendor awareness, solutions considered, use cases and triggers to move to next stage.

Rule of thumb: If you have three key personas involved in purchasing your products, you should have three independent, but inter-related Buyer Journey Blueprints.



Primary Research

Primary research. Not only is it how you get to know your target audience, but it's a must-have component when building your buyer journey blueprint.

Through existing third-party research and discussions with internal stakeholders, valuable anecdotal support is gained. However, invaluable insight into the buying process of your solution is revealed through one method, and one method only – by speaking directly with those customers or prospects who have been through your buying process.

Before you travel through time to the research phase, you have to know whom you need to speak to. Like the Terminator, you need to find your John Connor(s). To do so, consider the following directives:

- **Relationship with your company** – zero in on customers, prospects or both.
- **Title and role in the organization** – Precision here is key. Are they technical, responsible for a line of business, or both? If you can define their line of business precisely, such as the Marketing Director or Business Analyst, that's even better. The more precise you are with these definitions, the more relevant your results will be.
- **Role in the buying process** – Individuals who played a decision-making role should be your top priority. Key influencers and evaluators come next. Avoid interviews with people who played minimal or no role in the process. They won't add value to your efforts. Like a minor character that gets in the protagonists way, they're immediately expendable.
- **Industries and Solutions** – Where do you expect revenue to come from? If it's a certain set of industries or product solutions, focus only on those customers.
- **Timeframe of purchase** – Interview people who have been involved in a purchase process in the last 12 months. If your sales cycle is longer, it's ok to stretch that a bit. Keep in mind the goal is to get people who have gone through the process recently so that the steps will be fresh in their mind.

Primary Research (cont.)

There are two types of primary research you will want to consider – qualitative research and quantitative research.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research helps you uncover your target audience's behaviors and perceptions through in-depth probing. It may sound painful, but it doesn't hurt, we promise.

The most common approaches to qualitative research are focus groups and in-depth one-on-one interviews (called 'IDIs' in the industry.) Typically, focus groups are moderator-led, in-person discussions with three to five participants.

Though in-person IDIs can be conducted via telephone to keep travel budgets in check, they're best done face to face to allow the interviewer to read one of the most critical elements of communication – body language. Without seeing how a person reacts to a question, it becomes more difficult for the interviewer to fully guide the conversation and capture the mind-set of the buyer accurately.

In focus groups and individual interviews, the interviewer seeks to capture the mind-set of the buyer and reveal what they thought, felt and did; and, whom they engaged with throughout the process.

Typically, discussion guides – a blueprint before the blueprint – are developed to define the scope of the research and the questions to be asked. But don't be a robot. A good interviewer will listen as buyers describe their journey and probe based on what the buyer says, even if it strays from the "script." Questions should be open-ended to allow for descriptive rather than tabulated results.

Despite the dystopian view of the future fictional mechanical mercenaries present, there's little risk of activating SkyNet through the use of online bulletin boards to conduct qualitative research.

Moderator-led, bulletin boards overcome time zone limitations and can help you expand the geographic reach of your research. Participants log in at their convenience and share their insights by responding to specific questions presented by the moderator. Like the live discussions, the moderator can ask follow-up questions and probe deeper with individual participants as opportunities arise.

Primary Research (cont.)

Quantitative Research

These are the surveys we all know and love. Conducted by telephone or online these surveys collect tabulated data, lending themselves well to the output of pretty charts and graphs. Like our robot overlords, these surveys come pre-programmed, and yield best results when they follow qualitative research and provide an opportunity to fill in gaps and test for trends while reaching a larger, broader set of prospects.

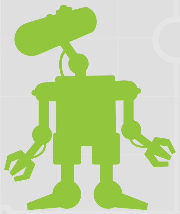
Plan your online survey using these best practices:

- **Keep language short, simple and direct.** Ask no more than 10 to 15 questions to allow respondents to complete the survey in 5 to 7 minutes.
- **Present multiple-choice questions.** This makes it easier for people to respond while it optimizes completion rates (especially on mobile devices).
- **Focus on questions easily tabulated and quantified.** For example, demographics and firmographics, along with preferred content types and favorite information sources.
- **Cast a wide net.** Average response rates for online surveys are less than 2 percent, so it's important to send to as many prospects as possible.

How much research is enough research?

At Demand Spring, we completed a project with a client covering five personas. The mix included two days of live focus group and IDIs. The first day covered four groups, each with four participants, with each session lasting 90 minutes. The second day included eight IDIs, each lasting 45 minutes. This provided us with 24 live interviews per persona. Then, through online bulletin boards, we reached 15 to 20 additional individuals.

Whether you are doing focus groups or telephone interviews, a good rule of thumb is to interview a minimum of 20-30 individuals per persona. Unless you have an in-house research team, you shouldn't try to facilitate qualitative research on your own. It's harder than you think to recruit the right participants and shape the conversation in way that will produce valuable insights. An expert facilitator can also help you avoid research creep – where everyone wants to ask questions that go beyond the scope of the buyer journey.



Operationalizing the Analysis

How many times did we count Robert Patrick's T-1000 out? Surely when he was frozen in liquid nitrogen and shattered that would be it, right?

Unfortunately, many organizations count their persona development efforts out too soon – just when the data has been collected and the facts presented in pretty charts. Rather than allow the story to develop, research data typically ends up collecting dust in a virtual file cabinet. Talk about a plot letdown! The real objective of buyer journey research is, and should always be to develop a blueprint that presents the learnings for each persona as well as the best engagement strategies. There's limited value in knowing what someone likes or dislikes. The ultimate goal is to identify what they like and dislike, and how to engage them as they progress from awareness to consideration to decision. Sounds like the plot to a pretty interesting movie plot, doesn't it?

Operationalize your buyer journey research using these best practices:

- **Deliver analysis in pragmatic, easy-to-consume documentation** so that everyone on your marketing team can see how it applies to his or her role and objectives.
- **Organize your planning teams around personas.** Ensure the team has representatives from marketing communications, online marketing, content development and product management.
- **Align strategies and tactics to the stages of the buyer journey.** The place where information is sought during the awareness stage may differ from the channels relied on in the decision stage. Similarly, the content consumed may begin with educational white papers and videos, and then progress to product demos and comparisons, and end with justification and ROI tools.
- **B2B buying is a team sport.** Your execution must reflect the interdependent nature of the primary personas. Though they may be understood individually, you must understand that these personas may be collaborating. The interests and needs of your personas will often intersect. Therefore, you must know how to engage them individually, and collectively.
- **Align your sales and marketing processes** around customer behaviors, not your sales activities.

Keep it Fresh

Like the sustainable movie franchise the Terminator series is, persona research should never be a one-and-done effort.

From shifts in industry to shifts in the weather patterns of a specific geographic, your persona's priorities will change over time. That's why it's important to update your persona documentation regularly using third-party research, industry periodicals and annual surveys.

Leverage customer advocacy marketing software (such as Influitive) to give your customers a new way to share buyer journey feedback. Be sure to revisit your primary research in the form of focus groups or one-on-one interviews at least every two years.

Before You Begin

But how do we avoid losing the plot and disengaging your customers, like Terminator Genesis – the most recent installment the series – did for most fans of the franchise?

Get aligned.

Your buyer journey research and blueprint development relies on alignment within your organization, from the top, down.

Without alignment, you'll be confused at every turn, and in the end you won't know who you're trying to sell to, or how you should go about doing it.

With the assistance of other teams within your organization, like sales, customer reference, and support, you can successfully begin to identify and engage customers.

When is the research finally is done, it's imperative to align your sales and marketing activities around the customer buying cycle stages to create a winning engagement strategy for each.

And, of course, resist the urge to impress your customers with either complex timelines or fancy charts and graphs.

Contact Us

For more information, visit www.demandspring.com
Call us at 613.831.0295
Or email us at info@demandspring.com

For help in growing your hair and strengthening your marketing muscles, check out our Demand System Workshop.

www.demandspring.com

About Demand Spring

Demand Spring is a demand generation consultancy that helps marketing organizations improve their ability to build and progress sales pipeline.

Our extensive client-side experience with organizations like IBM, Yahoo!, Computer Associates, and Cognos provides unique insight into the challenges marketing executives face when building repeatable, scalable demand generation models.

At Demand Spring, we take a pragmatic approach – we won't try to boil the ocean in a day, nor will we take six months to deliver a cursory consulting document. Refreshingly, we strive to deliver meaningful results within 45 days of our initial engagement.

Our three integrated service lines – Strategy, Technology, and Content – help clients optimize all elements of demand generation.

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