



The State of B-to-B Prospecting Data Accuracy

By Bernice Grossman, Ruth P. Stevens, Karla Blalock and David Knutson

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Executive Summary

As part of ongoing research on B-to-B data sources available to marketers, this white paper evaluates the accuracy of B-to-B prospecting data at the account level. Five database suppliers participated in this study. Unlike past studies, this time we had the opportunity to actually verify the data samples, thanks to outbound phone services provided by PointClear. The results showed that data accuracy at the account-based level is stronger than many marketers may think. As we have concluded in past studies, we advise marketers to take great care when specifying their data needs when ordering prospecting data, and test a sample in advance.

Over the past ten years, our series of research studies on the state of B-to-B prospecting data has been well received. In five of the studies, our focus has been on data quantity and quality, with the goal of giving marketers a sense of how likely it is that they will be able to reach all the prospects they want, with minimal waste, using the prospecting data provided by U.S. vendors today.

We have been generally satisfied with the method we used to get at data quantity, which involved asking vendors to provide company counts in specified sample industries and contact counts at specified sample companies.

But when it comes to data quality, we have long wished for a method of verifying the accuracy of the company records provided by data vendors. Fortunately, an opportunity came along in 2014, with a generous offer from Dan McDade to televerify the data. Dan's firm, PointClear, provides lead generation and management services, and houses a sophisticated and efficient call center run by Karla Blalock.

So we set about inviting vendors of B-to-B prospecting data to participate, and we structured a research study to get at the accuracy of a statistically projectable sample of company records from the vendors.

Invited to participate, in June 2014, were:

- Accutrend
- ALC
- Avention
- BrightSpeed
- Broadlook
- Cortera
- D&B
- Datamatics
- Equifax
- GoLeads
- Harte Hanks
- HG Data
- Infogroup
- InsideView
- Lake B2B
- Lead411
- ListsOnline
- MeritDirect
- NetProspex
- Netwise Data
- Oceanos
- Profound
- Salesforce
- Statlistics
- Stirista
- WebDecisions
- Worldata
- ZoomInfo

The five participants who agreed, and contributed a data sample, are:

- Equifax
- Harte Hanks
- Infogroup
- Lake B2B
- Salesforce

Our sincere thanks to them, and to everyone else who considered participating.

The televerification process was conducted immediately on receipt of the names, but the analysis took us more time than we expected. After several false starts, the skilled analyst David Knutson generously volunteered to work on the data for us. We are now ready to share the findings with marketers everywhere.

The Study Methodology and Execution Process

Thanks to the generosity of PointClear in providing us with the ability to verify the data's accuracy by phone, we structured our study to find out if the data available for rent or purchase from data suppliers today—the company names, addresses and URLs—were correct.

We asked the vendors to supply all of their records as follows:

1. All firms located in PA, GA, WI, OH, CO, with \$25+ million revenue, HQ locations only. While we recognize that most B-to-B targeting involves industry as a key variable, we decided that geography—along with company size—provides variables that are broad enough to be relevant to all marketers.

2. Company name, address, URL.

We planned to televerify firms that were common to all five participants. PointClear conducted a merge, and called the common companies in random order, stopping once 103 companies had been contacted successfully. The televerification took place during the period of August 28 to September 15, 2014.

The Research Results

Having asked for all headquarters sites of \$25+ million revenue companies in five states, we found the company-level data to be generally accurate, above 90%, as shown in the chart below.

Overall accuracy by vendor ranged from 92.9% to 97.8%. When looking at the accuracy by data element, company name was the most likely to be inaccurate, at 91.2% overall. There were some minor (less than 5%) accuracy problems with the street address, zip codes and URLs. The state data reports at a perfect 100% because the companies were selected on a state level.

Marketers can feel fairly comfortable that the prospecting data they get from vendors is likely to be reasonably accurate when it comes to company names, postal addresses and URLs.

COMPANY RECORD ACCURACY

	Equifax	Harte Hanks	Infogroup	Lake B2B	Salesforce	Mean
Company Name	94.9%	91.6%	89.0%	86.8%	93.8%	91.2%
Address1	98.0%	94.7%	91.5%*	96.7%	94.8%	95.1%
City	99.0%	95.8%	95.1%	91.2%	96.9%	95.6%
State	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
ZIP	99.0%	98.9%	98.8%	86.8%	99.0%	96.5%
URL	96.0%	94.7%	93.9%	95.6%	94.8%	95.0%
Mean	97.8%	96.0%	94.7%	92.9%	96.5%	

* A false low reading, since PointClear validated street addresses, and Infogroup used P.O. boxes at a higher rate than other participants.

Advice to Business Marketers Ordering Prospecting Names

B-to-B marketers should be prepared for a certain number of errors, due to the inherent limitations of merge/purge software, and software variations among vendors. Business addresses are complicated, with variations like P.O. box versus street address; headquarters versus divisions and subsidiaries; and legal name versus trade name. Marketers need to examine how their vendors maintain data at the company level, and then specifically ask for data to be pulled the way they want it.

Other suggestions for marketers to consider:

- Take a sample of records for testing, and do your own televerification, before placing a large order.
- Examine the incoming records for problems.
- Use a trusted list broker who has a thorough knowledge of the particular vendor's file.

We hope our research is useful to business marketers who are renting or buying data for finding new prospective customers. This information will serve as a guide as you conduct your due diligence. ❖

The Authors

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Harte Hanks sold their data business in April 2015.

This publication is part of a series entitled *Business-to-Business Database Marketing*, by Bernice Grossman and Ruth P. Stevens. Papers published to date include:

- "13 Thorny Data Problems that Vex B-to-B Marketers, and How to Solve Them (2014 Edition)" (2014)
- "A Deep Dive into B-to-B Prospecting Databases: How Seven Data Suppliers Compare" (October 2013)
- "B-to-B Technology Industry Prospecting Databases: A Comparative Analysis of Nine Data Suppliers" (July 2012)
- "B-to-B Response Databases: A Comparative Analysis" (April 2011)
- "Online Sources of B-to-B Data: A Comparative Analysis, 2010 Edition" (March 2010)
- "Online Sources of B-to-B Data: A Comparative Analysis" (January 2009)
- "What B-to-B Marketers are REALLY Doing with Their Databases" (September 2007)
- "Enhancing Your B-to-B Database with Data Append" (November 2006)
- "15 Thorny Data Problem That Vex B-to-B Marketers, and How to Solve Them" (November 2006)
- "Keep it Clean: Address Standardization Data Maintenance for Business Marketers" (February 2006)
- "Outsourcing Your Marketing Database: A 'Request for Information' is the First Step" (March 2006)
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