

VOLUME 2 · EARLY-STAGE CONTENT AND ACCOUNT COVERAGE

# The Demand Gen Guide:

## Quick plays to drive better demand

Most B2B demand gen programs are built to win opportunities that already exist. The problem is, by the time an opportunity shows up in your CRM, the shortlist is already forming.

In this edition, we're focused on what happens before that moment. These are the plays we use to stay visible long enough to be chosen:

- Creating content that shapes early buyer perception
- Getting discovered before shortlists form

# Creating content that shapes early buyer perception

## What's changed

Most marketing still assumes buyers start from zero. They don't.

94% of buying groups rank their shortlist before they ever contact a seller, and they purchase from that top choice nearly 80% of the time (6sense). Your brand either made that list during the research phase, or it didn't make it at all.

The harder truth is that you have less control over that research phase than you think. Twice as many buyers now name generative AI or conversational search as their most meaningful source of information, ahead of vendor websites, product experts and sales (Forrester). Buyers are forming opinions further from your owned channels every year.

Vendor websites tend to confirm decisions. They rarely shape them. Buyers form their views through articles, communities and industry platforms where information feels more neutral and easier to trust. Now AI is doing that synthesis for them, before you ever get a chance to show up.

And that changes the role of content.

**It's no longer just about answering questions. It's about shaping how buyers define the problem in the first place.**

## CREATING CONTENT THAT SHAPES EARLY BUYER PERCEPTION

# Align content to buyer research

## WHY

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By the time buyers are evaluating options, their questions have shifted from "What is this?" to "Why this over that?" If your content doesn't answer what buyers are actually asking when they're deciding, it won't influence what they choose.

## HOW

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- 1 Pull 10 to 15 recent sales calls, demo notes or inbound leads from the last 30 to 60 days. Write down the exact questions buyers asked, especially the ones mentioning comparisons, tradeoffs and "how does it work" queries.
- 2 Identify which questions come up most often during evaluation or right before a decision. Those are your content gaps.
- 3 Search those exact questions. See who's answering them. If it's a competitor or a third-party review site and not you, that's the problem. Tools like SEMrush ONE or Profound can show you where your brand is and isn't appearing in AI-generated answers for those same questions.
- 4 Create or update three to five assets that answer those questions directly: comparison pages, clear product walkthroughs and detailed use cases.
- 5 Distribute them where buyers are already looking, including industry publications, review platforms and paid channels.

## MEASURE

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Track how many opportunities include content engagement before the opportunity was created, how many involve two or more contacts from the same account, and whether win rates or deal velocity improve when buyers touched your content first.

## CREATING CONTENT THAT SHAPES EARLY BUYER PERCEPTION

# Extend your point of view everywhere

## WHY

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Buyers form opinions before they talk to you. If your perspective isn't in the mix while they're researching, someone else's will define how they think about the problem and how they compare solutions.

## HOW

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- 1 Start every campaign with one core asset that clearly lays out your point of view: a webinar, a report or a guide. That's your anchor.
- 2 Break it into at least five smaller pieces: a long-form article, two to three short posts, a standalone checklist or summary.
- 3 Adjust the framing for each audience. Practitioners want execution. Executives want outcomes. Same idea, different angle.
- 4 Distribute across owned channels and two to three third-party platforms where your buyers already spend time. Don't wait for them to come to you.
- 5 Repeat this for every campaign. The goal isn't one great piece. It's a library of connected content that keeps showing up.

## MEASURE

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Track how many assets you produce from each core piece, how many target accounts are exposed to your content across at least two channels, and how many engage with more than one asset in a 30- to 60-day window before an opportunity is created.

## CREATING CONTENT THAT SHAPES EARLY BUYER PERCEPTION

# Maintain presence with AI

## WHY

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Buyers don't decide in a single moment. They form opinions across weeks of research. The brands that show up consistently are the ones that get remembered. If you're only publishing when you have capacity, you're disappearing between campaigns.

## HOW

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- 1 Use AI tools like ChatGPT or Claude to turn long-form content, transcripts or recordings into usable first drafts for summaries, short posts and role-specific variations.
- 2 Build a small set of reusable prompts for your most common tasks: summarizing a report, rewriting for a different persona or adapting a post for LinkedIn versus an email. Consistent prompts produce consistent outputs.
- 3 Before publishing anything AI-generated, edit for three things: Does it sound like you? Does it say something specific? And does it reflect a real point of view? Generic AI output is easy to spot and easy to ignore.
- 4 Commit to a publishing cadence and use AI to protect it. Two to three pieces per week is enough to maintain presence. Instead of focusing on volume, aim for consistency across the accounts you're trying to reach.
- 5 As mentioned in play #2, use AI to generate five format variations for every core asset before you move on, such as versions for LinkedIn, email and third-party channels. Build the habit into your campaign workflow instead of treating this step as an afterthought.

## MEASURE

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Track three things—publishing consistency week over week, how many target accounts are reached more than once within a 30-day window, and whether engagement spreads across multiple touchpoints rather than spiking once and going quiet. Remember, clicks don't tell the whole story. Use tools like AirOps or SEMrush ONE to track whether your published content is surfacing in AI-generated answers for your core topics.

# 30/60/90 quick start

30  
DAYS

Pull recent sales calls, demo notes and inbound leads. Write down the exact questions buyers asked during evaluation. Then audit your existing content against those questions and find where you're not showing up, especially in third-party channels where buyers actually form opinions.

Build one core asset that directly answers those questions and clearly stakes out your point of view. Break it into five or more pieces for different roles and formats. Get it into your owned channels and at least two to three third-party platforms.

60  
DAYS

90  
DAYS

Lock in a publishing cadence and use AI to hold it. The goal isn't more content. It's showing up consistently across the accounts you want to win, across the full window of time they're deciding.

# Getting discovered before shortlists form

## What's changed

Most teams can list their target accounts. Fewer can say they are consistently reaching the people inside those accounts who actually shape decisions.

That gap is where deals are lost before they start.

The typical buying decision now involves 13 internal stakeholders and nine external influencers, with that number rising for more complex or strategic purchases (Forrester). They don't move through your funnel together. One person reads a report. Another sees an ad. Someone else joins a webinar three weeks later. None of them are seeing the same information, and most will never talk to your sales team before forming an opinion.

If your campaigns only reach one or two of them, your message doesn't carry. You may be hitting the right accounts. You're just not hitting enough of the right people often enough to matter. Engaging the full buying group leads to double or triple win rates, larger deal sizes and more predictable pipeline (Demandbase). Most teams are leaving that on the table.

By the time an opportunity surfaces, the shortlist has already formed. Getting on it requires showing up across the group, across channels and across time, so your brand is recognized and trusted before decisions start to solidify.

**The new reality: Most targeting is account-level. Winning requires buying group-level coverage.**

## GETTING DISCOVERED BEFORE SHORTLISTS FORM

# Reach the full buying group

## WHY

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Most campaigns are built around account lists, not the people inside them. If only one or two contacts from an account ever see your message, you're not running an account-based program. You're running a contact-based program and calling it ABM.

## HOW

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- 1 Identify three to five roles that consistently show up in your deals: the economic buyer, the technical evaluator, the end user and the champion. Don't guess. Pull from your CRM.
- 2 Review your last ten closed-won opportunities and confirm which titles and functions actually participated. You'll almost always find roles that weren't in your targeting.
- 3 For each role, define what problem they're trying to solve and what content would actually be useful to them. A CFO and a VP of Operations are both in the buying group. They need completely different things from you.
- 4 Build separate audience segments for each role and run role-specific content against each one. One campaign that speaks to everyone speaks to no one.
- 5 Use platforms like NetLine or Demandbase to reach those roles beyond your owned channels, at the accounts you care about, across the channels they're already using.

## MEASURE

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Track how many distinct roles from each target account engage with your content, whether engagement spreads beyond the first contact over time, and how many opportunities include activity from more than one person before the opportunity is created.

## GETTING DISCOVERED BEFORE SHORTLISTS FORM

# Reinforce the same message everywhere

## WHY

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In a multi-stakeholder deal, different people from the same account encounter your brand in different places at different times. If those touchpoints don't reinforce each other, there's no shared context when the group gets together to decide.

## HOW

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- 1 Start with one clear campaign message: a single, specific claim about the problem you solve and why your approach is different. If you can't say it in two sentences, it's not ready.
- 2 Map that message to each role in the buying group. The core idea stays the same. The framing shifts. ROI for finance, risk reduction for legal and workflow impact for end users.
- 3 Audit every active channel where your target accounts might encounter your brand: ads, emails, webinars, third-party publications and review sites. Check whether the message holds across all of them or fractures into different positioning depending on who wrote it.
- 4 Close the gaps. If your LinkedIn ads say one thing and your nurture emails say another, fix it before you spend more on distribution.
- 5 Run the campaign long enough for repetition to build recognition. Most campaigns go dark right before the message starts to stick. Six to eight weeks of consistent exposure across channels is a floor, not a ceiling.

## MEASURE

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Track how many target accounts are exposed to your message across two or more channels and whether multi-channel accounts convert at higher rates than single-channel touches. Also watch for buying group members from the same account engaging independently within the same campaign window—that's a strong signal.

## GETTING DISCOVERED BEFORE SHORTLISTS FORM

# Show up consistently over time

## WHY

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Most campaigns run for three weeks and then go quiet. Meanwhile, buying cycles run for months. The accounts you stopped reaching didn't stop deciding. They just started deciding without you.

## HOW

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- 1 Commit to a minimum campaign window of six to eight weeks before evaluating performance. Buying decisions don't happen in a single month, and brands that disappear mid-cycle don't get remembered when it counts.
- 2 Use platforms like NetLine or Demandbase to maintain steady exposure across target accounts throughout that window, not just at launch.
- 3 Sequence your touchpoints deliberately. Early exposures should build awareness and establish your point of view. Mid-campaign touches should reinforce it with proof: case studies, data and peer validation. Late-cycle touches should make the decision easier with comparisons, ROI framing and implementation clarity.
- 4 Don't treat initial engagement as a signal to reduce spend. An account that engaged once is more likely to be in an active buying cycle, not less. Keep showing up.
- 5 After the campaign window closes, review which accounts engaged across multiple weeks versus those that spiked once and went quiet. The multi-week engagers are your warmest pipeline signals.

## MEASURE

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Track how many target accounts show engagement across at least three separate weeks and whether they're receiving more than one type of content touchpoint. Multi-week, multi-touch accounts should convert to opportunities at a meaningfully higher rate than single-touch accounts.

# 30/60/90 quick start

30  
DAYS

Pull your last ten closed-won opportunities and map every role that touched the deal. Then look at your current targeting and find the gaps. You'll almost always discover you've been reaching two or three people at each account when five to eight were actually involved in the decision.

Launch coordinated campaigns that reach each key role with content specific to what they care about. Run them across at least two to three channels simultaneously so different stakeholders encounter your message in different places. One consistent message. Multiple entry points.

60  
DAYS

90  
DAYS

Double down on what's driving multi-stakeholder engagement. Instead of just trying to reach more people, aim to reach the right people at the accounts that matter, consistently enough that your brand is already familiar when the shortlist conversation starts.

# The Demand Gen Guide

Quick plays to  
make you a  
better marketer

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# Key takeaways

- **Buyers form opinions before you enter the mix.** The content they see early shapes what they look for later.
- **Familiarity earns the shortlist.** Buyers don't discover vendors when they're ready to decide. They choose from the brands they've already seen, read and heard from. Show up before they start looking.
- **Reaching an account isn't enough.** You need to reach the people involved in the decision.
- **Getting chosen starts before the shortlist.** Brands that show up early, reach the right people and stay visible are the ones that win.

## Turn these plays into pipeline

Need the Strategy? Partner with Iron Horse to build audience-centric programs.  
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