

The Flaws in Traditional Attribution Models for B2B SaaS Marketing

We have some bad news... the Top of Funnel (ToF) marketing strategies most B2B SaaS companies use are **flawed**. We've been looking at attribution all wrong, and it's time to make some changes.

Why Tracking Top of Funnel Conversions Is Missing the Point

We B2B marketers have been so caught up in fancy acronyms and percentages that we've lost sight of what really matters... *qualified leads that turn into sales*.

Data is great. We love data. But not at the expense of getting the *right* message in front of the *right* people at the *right* time.

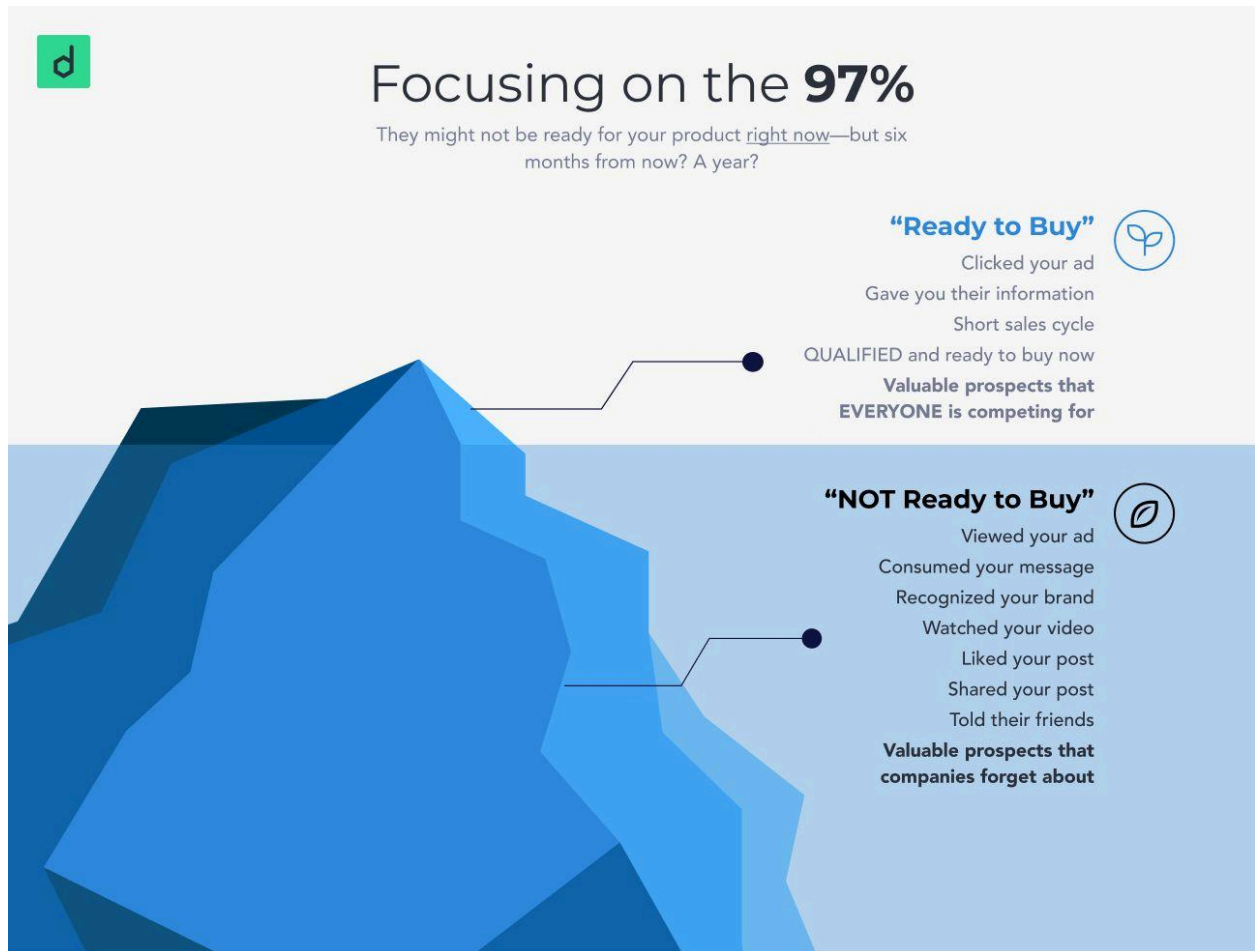
We've become overly fixated on the numbers to the detriment of sales.

Who cares about cost per lead (CPL) when customer acquisition costs (CAC) are through the roof? Heck, your click through rate could be 100% and produce 5000 leads... but if nobody's buying... *so what?*

We've lost sight of the long-term goal of ToF marketing: educating prospects and being top of mind when they're ready to make a purchase.

Better yet, making your product synonymous with the solution it provides.

We've been focusing 100% of our attention on the 3% of people that click on an ad. But what about the 97% of people that didn't click, but still consumed the message.



Source: [duo Strategy](#)

Current convention would ignore them completely.

If they didn't click through, it's a waste of time marketing to them, right? Maybe. *Maybe not.*

Of course we love the 3%. The 3% are ready to buy right now. **But we shouldn't be so quick to write off the 97%.** They might not be ready for your product *right now*—but six months from now? A year?

The trouble is, are they going to remember you from a single ad? *Not likely.*

So what if instead of putting all your marketing effort into the 3% of right-now customers, you expanded your marketing efforts to include the 97% of soon-to-be customers?

What if you met them where they're at? Nurtured and engaged them?

Then you'd really be putting your marketing dollars to work.

Putting Up a Modern Billboard for Your B2B SaaS Product

Think back 40 years... *before* CPC, CTR, and CPL, what data did marketers have to rely on?

They ran print ads, sent direct mail campaigns, and put up billboards. Believe it or not, software-based attribution and pixels didn't exist then. So what did they rely on? The answer is sales—money, cashflow, dinero!



Source: [Hubspot](#)

If sales went up afterward, they counted the campaign as a success. If not, they scrapped it and tried something else.

It might be time to get back to the basics as far as ToF marketing is concerned. To start focusing *less* on which channels are giving us clicks, and *more* on which channels are bringing us sales.

So, let's take the billboard, for example—what's the modern billboard and where can you find them?

If you said 'ads and posts on social media,' congratulations! 🎉

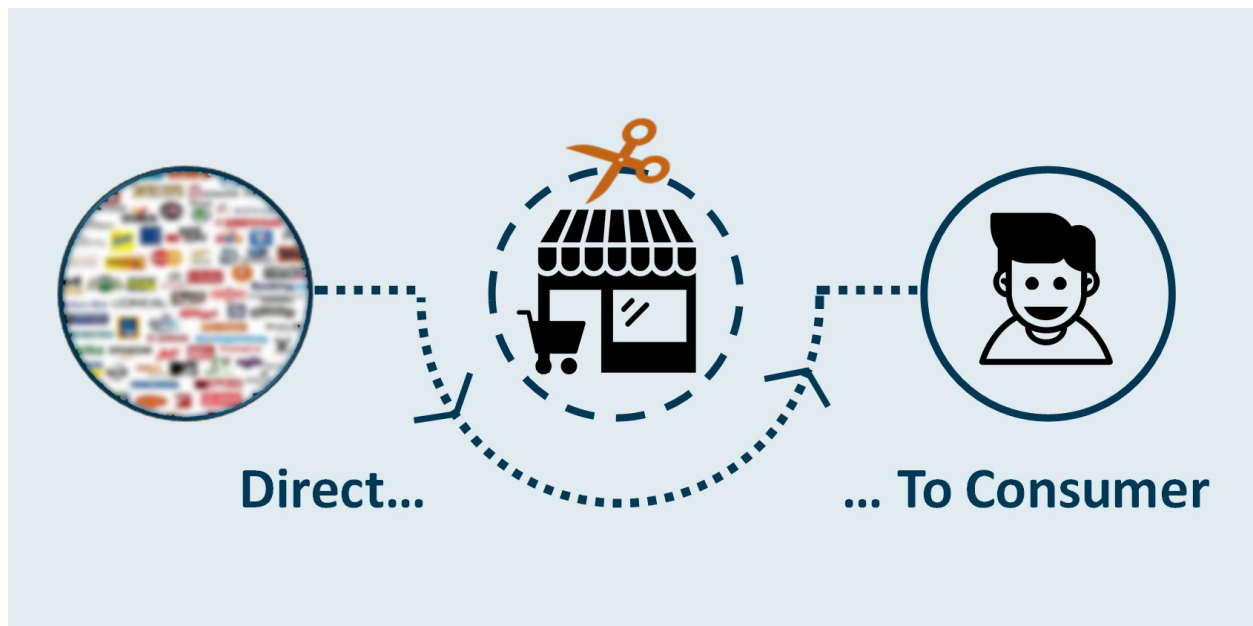
For B2B brands, this means LinkedIn.

There has never been a better time to run ads on LinkedIn. Why? **Distribution.**

LinkedIn is the B2B marketer's best friend. Never before could you target audiences as specifically as you can with LinkedIn. We're talking title, function, industry, company, education, interests... the works.

You've probably heard of D2C, or Direct to Consumer. It's one of the more popular business models in the past decade thanks to the internet and Shopify.

Using a D2C strategy, ecommerce companies were able to target and sell their goods *directly to the customer*, cutting out the retail middlemen and increasing margins.



Source: [Retail4Growth](#)



Source: [SlideModel](https://www.slidemodel.com)

That same model exists for B2B.

B2B companies are no longer reliant on trade shows, conferences, and outbound sales to promote their products.

Today, distribution to a hyper-targeted audience is a few clicks away on LinkedIn... *but few B2B companies are taking advantage.*

Think of the LinkedIn Feed as the road your dream prospects, or ICP (Ideal Customer Profile), take to work every day. If you had the opportunity to buy a billboard on that road, would you buy it?

The answer is probably a resounding 'yes!'

Well, we have good news for you. *You can buy billboards on that road*, and you can even tailor the key message you show each prospect.

So Why Aren't More B2B Companies Considering LinkedIn as a Critical Piece of Their Marketing Strategy?

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In today's attribution-focused environment, marketers put more emphasis on marketing efforts that are directly measured against traditional ad-channel-centric metrics—like CPC, CTR, CVR, "Conversions", and CPL.

In other words, measurements that can be captured by software-based attribution sources.

However, what these traditional metrics fail to capture is *what actually **created** the demand*.

Software-based attribution is a last-touch measurement that indicates what *captures* demand. As marketers, shouldn't we be more interested in the *asset or advertisement* that **created** the demand?

Sure, sometimes these two things are the same. The ad that captured the demand, also created the demand.

But more often than not, B2B buyers embark on a buying journey that's just not traceable by software-based attribution models.

B2B products aren't impulse buys. An individual can see an ad for a pair of jeans and make an immediate purchase based on their own preferences—but someone buying software for an entire company has a lot more to consider.

The B2B buyer is conducting a significant amount of research *after* seeing an ad.

They're watching YouTube reviews, asking colleagues in Slack communities, scrolling Reddit, Twitter, and LinkedIn posts—all dark social activities that can't be tracked by attribution software.

Then, *after all that*, they're coming back to your product through a Google search. Clicking on your ad at the top of the results page. And getting attributed to a Google brand campaign—when the demand was actually created by a separate advertisement or organic effort.

So why aren't more B2B companies considering LinkedIn as a key piece to their marketing strategy?

Simple. LinkedIn ads don't produce a high CVR, low CPL, and a low CPC. They're expensive, and typically don't generate a lot of conversions.

You're probably thinking... *So why on god's green earth should I run LinkedIn ads again?*

Because they get your message in front of your ideal prospects, and play a critical role in today's modern B2B buying journey—by providing the educational content and touch points needed to create demand with your target market.

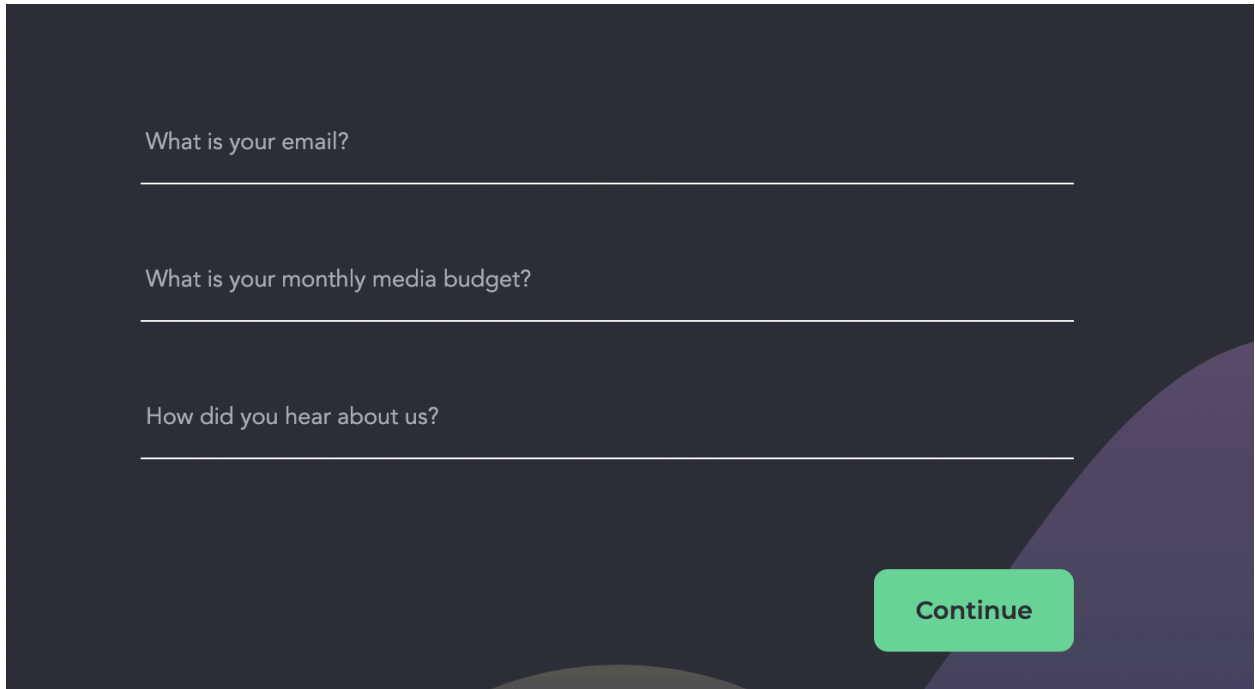
But, if you can't rely on modern attribution methods, how should you measure success?

By focusing on the engagement of the ad. The demographic profile of your impressions. The CTR and user behavior on the landing page. Are they bouncing right away? Or are they taking their time on the page, absorbing information, and learning more about your product?

Look for increases in your direct and organic traffic, from buyers looking you up again after completing their research.

Most importantly, add "How did you hear about us?" to your lead submission form or sign-up process. And instead of a drop down, just have them type their answer in a blank text box. Oh, and **make it required**. I know, I know — what about the form conversion rate?! *Making an OPEN TEXT field in my demo form required will turn away every prospect!*

If filling out one open text field turns them away, I promise you they weren't going to be a good lead.



What is your email?

What is your monthly media budget?

How did you hear about us?

Continue

Source: [duo Strategy](#)

Over time, check whether or not your blended CPSQL from paid, organic, and direct traffic has improved since running LinkedIn Ads.

Analyzing these key metrics will indicate whether or not your LinkedIn ads—or any dark social ads for that matter—are positively impacting your marketing efforts.

The Big Takeaway?

Attribution isn't perfect. It's impossible to capture everything a buyer does in this increasingly less trackable world (shoutout consumer privacy).

Instead, we have to take a more holistic look at our marketing strategy and think logically about it.

Ask yourself... is it valuable to get your brand and key message in front of your ICP **everyday** even if you can't 100% track the effort back to conversions?

You're goddamn right it is.

Not sure who your ICP is? We've put together [5 great strategies for finding out exactly who your ICP is](#)—what they like, what they hate, and the best way to get them acquainted with your brand.

And if you find yourself in need of a marketing partner to help you rethink your attribution model, shoot us a message. We'd love to help.

Email

Subject:

- We've been looking at attribution ALL WRONG
- We have some bad news... traditional attribution models are flawed

Body:

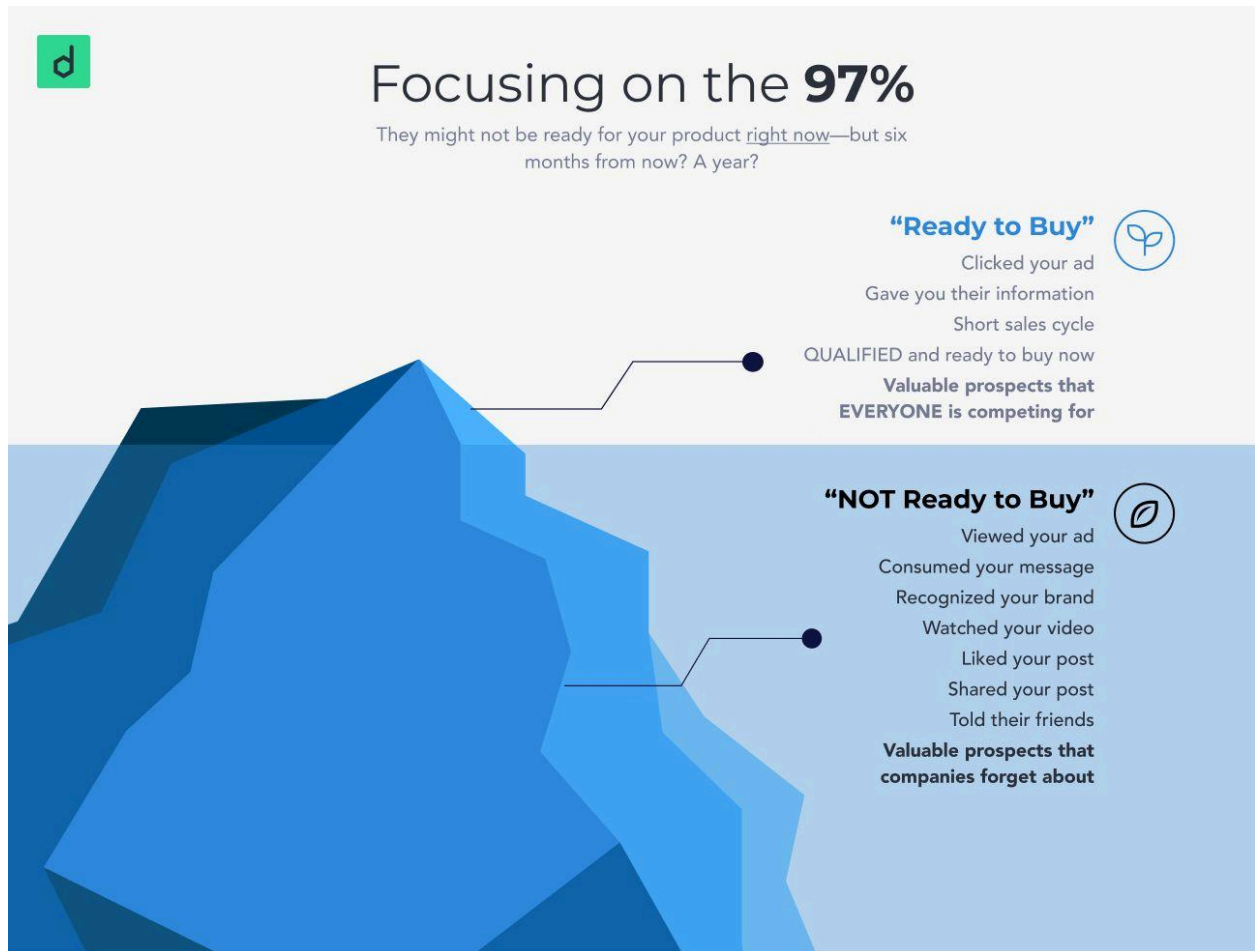
Hi {first_name},

Turns out our go-to metrics for measuring top of funnel ad performance are...

not great.

As B2B marketers, we often focus too much on data, numbers, and percentages, and forget that **the ultimate goal of ToF marketing is to educate prospects.**

We recommend taking a new approach.



Improve your ToF B2B marketing strategy with these 5 tips:

1. Stop focusing just on the 3% who click... Start focusing on the 97% who DON'T click

The 3% who clickthrough aren't truly ToF—they're ready to buy. The 97% need to be educated and nurtured with your ToF ads *before* they're ready to buy.

2. Realize conversions don't matter in ToF marketing

Instead of tracking conversions, you should be focusing on whether or not people are engaging with your ad.

3. Understand software-based attribution doesn't accurately measure ToF ad success

This is a last-touch measurement that indicates what captured demand, but can't tell you what *created* that demand in the first place.

4. Start using different metrics to measure success

Measure engagement rate, impressions, increases in your direct & organic traffic, and whether or not your blended CPSQL has increased.

5. Capitalize on the massive value of LinkedIn for B2B marketing

Think of the LinkedIn feed as the road your dream prospects take to work every day, and LinkedIn ads as billboards on that road.

It's time to rethink how we approach marketing to top of the funnel prospects and take a more logical approach in how we measure success...

Rather than relying on flawed attribution models.

More on these strategies in our blog post: [The Flaws in Traditional Attribution Models for B2B SaaS Marketing](#).

Stay well!

Taylor

LinkedIn Post 1

B2B marketers have been looking at ToF marketing for SaaS products ALL WRONG.

They've forgotten that the ultimate goal of ToF marketing is to EDUCATE prospects, *not* to sell to them.

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LinkedIn Post 2

Today, distribution to a hyper-targeted audience is just a few clicks away... but hardly any B2B companies are taking advantage.

So where's this magical audience for B2B brands hiding? Right here on LinkedIn!

Think of the LinkedIn Feed as the road your dream prospects, or ICP (Ideal Customer Profile), take to work every day. If you had the opportunity to buy a billboard on that road, would you buy it?

The answer is probably a resounding 'yes!'

Well, we have good news for you. *You can buy billboards on that road*, and you can even tailor the key message you show each prospect with LinkedIn ads.

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More on this in our blog: [The Flaws in Traditional Attribution Models for B2B SaaS Marketing](#).

LinkedIn Post 3

If you're a B2B marketer, you need to add 'how did you hear about us?' to your lead submission form RIGHT NOW.

And don't make it a drop down.

Make it an open text field, and make it MANDATORY to fill in.

Don't worry about your form conversion rate.

If filling out one open text field turns them away, I promise you they weren't going to be a good lead anyway.

Why is this important?

Because traditional attribution can't tell you where your leads originated... just where they ended up.

It's the difference between what CREATED the demand and what CAPTURED it.

Most B2B buying journeys are looooooooooonnnnggg... and B2B buyers are conducting a significant amount of research *after* seeing an ad.

They're watching YouTube reviews, asking colleagues in Slack communities, scrolling Reddit, Twitter, and LinkedIn posts—all dark social activities that can't be tracked by attribution software.

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If you want to know how they really found out about you—AKA where to spend more of your advertising efforts—you need to ask them how they heard about you!

More on this in our blog: [The Flaws in Traditional Attribution Models for B2B SaaS Marketing](#).