Rhetorik
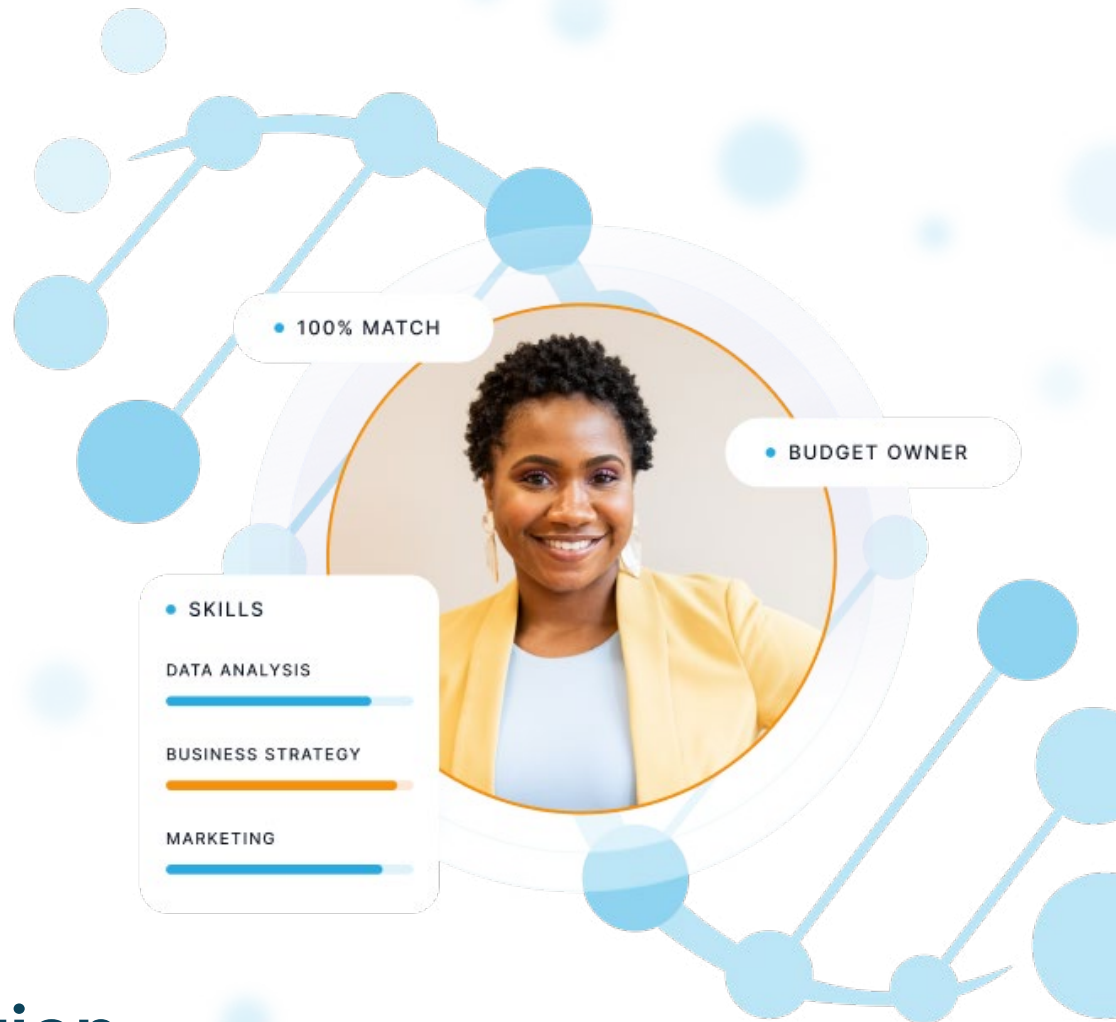
Harnessing Skills Data for Precision Prospecting

Introduction

As digital platforms continue to grow, new opportunities for B2B sales teams to identify potential customers have multiplied. However, finding the right prospecting targets among countless possibilities can be time-consuming and complex. To succeed in today's competitive landscape, revenue teams must focus their efforts on finding decision makers with the ability to understand their message and influence their organization.

The solution? Professional skills data. This type of market intelligence helps teams understand a professional's entire skillset, including their technical expertise, platform certifications, and managerial abilities. By using a skills-based approach to prospecting, your team can find more high-propensity leads in less time–all while refining your ideal customer profile.

Curious to learn more? In this guide, we'll cover what professional skills data is, how skills-based targeting drives results, and how to use it for more effective outreach, regardless of your budget.

What is skills data?

Professional skills are a set of abilities developed within the course of a career. Human resources and workforce teams often divide professional skills into two subgroups: hard skills and soft skills. While hard skills describe what someone works on, soft skills describe how they approach their work. Understanding both hard and soft skills is essential for sales teams because it provides a comprehensive view of a prospect's capabilities and influence.

Let's take a closer look at these groups:
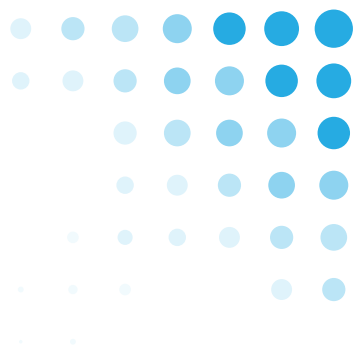
Hard skills

are technical abilities specific to particular job functions or industries.

Examples: *Ruby on Rails*, *Computer-Aided Design (CAD)*, *Financial modeling*

Soft skills

are personal attributes that are not specific to a particular job or industry.

Examples: *Communication*, *Leadership*, *Flexibility*

Why is skills data important?

Professional skills data can reveal a wealth of information about potential customers that might otherwise go undetected. By targeting professionals based on their unique skill sets (rather than their job titles), sales team can source leads from:

Niche industries

Professionals working in highly specialized, technical industries like astrobiology or geospatial intelligence don't often show up within standard prospecting tools, but can be found using a skills-based targeting approach.

Emerging markets

As the pace of technological development quickens, professionals must develop new skills to meet market demands. Emerging skills like prompt engineering can be identified through an analysis of skills data.

Rare skill/ industry combinations

Skills data allows salespeople to reach out to professionals who occupy particular roles within niche industries, like blockchain experts with experience in supply chain.

In addition to being able to find prospects in these hard-to-find areas, skills data can help teams search for individuals based on specific abilities and attributes, including:

Technological expertise

Finding experts in specific tech platforms, specific versions of those tech platforms, and complex integrations is possible with skills data.

Leadership abilities

Skills data can identify prospects with specialized leadership abilities, such as managing remote or multilingual teams.

Skills-based Targeting vs. Demographic Targeting

Unlike typical demographic data (ex. job titles), skills data can convey the depth and breadth of a professional's unique expertise. Skills data is a form of behavioral data because it represents the actions related to a person's professional development–the courses they've taken, certifications they've earned, and roles that they've held.

According to [McKinsey](#), sales teams that leverage behavioral data for targeting purposes outperform their competitors by 85%. Our customers have generated up to 10x more leads than standard approaches by targeting prospects based on their skills.*

By targeting prospective buyers based on their demonstrated skills, sales teams can identify, qualify, and engage them effectively. However, many teams still rely on demographic-based targeting strategies–which rely on data like age, location, and job title–to identify potential buyers. While this approach can help teams narrow down long lists of potential customers, relying solely on demographics to identify new targets is far less effective than using a skills-based approach.

To compare skills-based targeting with standard demographic targeting practices, let's use the example of a fictional cybersecurity company, Cumulus Intelligence. This company wants to connect with professionals who have deep expertise in cloud storage and GDPR compliance in the US and EMEA to support a new product launch.

To begin, the team has created a list of job titles (Cybersecurity Manager, Engineering Manager) and keywords (cloud security, GDPR) that reflect the type of contacts they're looking for.

Let's see how each approach stacks up when it comes to finding leads that fit their criteria:
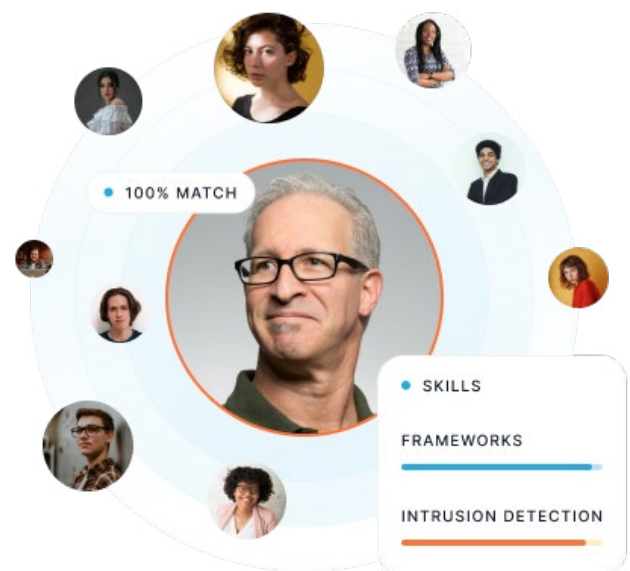
*Cybersecurity Customer Case Study, June 2021: [link]

Demographic Targeting

Strategy

Standard demographic approaches typically involve searching for professionals by job title (Engineering Manager, Cybersecurity Manager). A more sophisticated account-based approach might entail searching for professionals at specific organizations that hold these job titles, or searching for relevant keywords like "GDPR" within professionals' titles or social media profiles.

Result

Searches that rely on job titles alone typically yield high volumes of low-propensity results. It's unlikely that most Engineering Managers have the deep experience in cloud security and GDPR that our company needs. As a result, teams must often search through many low-conviction leads. While adding keyword searches or account-based filters can be helpful, these approaches don't account for organization-specific language and are overly reliant on self-reported information.

Skill-Based Targeting

Strategy:

A skills-based approach involves analyzing the underlying skills–technical, managerial, and more–of a company's target buyers in order to find professionals with similar skill sets. A skills-based search strategy requires a careful assessment of the abilities a professional has acquired over their career. Experienced providers like Rhetorik use AI to analyze tens of thousands of factors to determine a professional's skills and find similar profiles based on these findings.

Result:

Searches that rely on skills data typically yield high volumes of high-propensity results. By using skills to conduct searches instead of job titles, this approach can uncover hard-to-find professionals with specialized expertise, even if they don't list their skills directly within their title or social media profile. This style of search could identify relevant, influential professionals for Cumulus Intelligence with titles like "Application Security Manager" or "Digital Forensics Lead" that a demographic search may have missed.

How to Use Skills Data

With on-demand access to skill-enhanced professional contact data, sales teams can make more informed decisions in order to generate more revenue for their organizations. A skills-based approach can improve teams' productivity and effectiveness across these areas and more:

Buyer persona creation:

By understanding the professional competencies and characteristics shared by your target customers, your team can build highly specialized buyer personas to increase marketing effectiveness.

Lead segmentation + scoring:

To spend less time manually qualifying leads, skills data can help your team automate the lead scoring process to prioritize high-intent buyers based on their unique skills.

Market sizing:

With an understanding of who has the right skills to use your product or service, your team can increase the accuracy and reliability of market sizing metrics like TAM (Total Addressable Market), SAM (Serviceable Available Market), and SOM (Serviceable Obtainable Market).

Account-based Marketing (ABM):

If your team is already practicing account-based marketing, skills data can help you build complementary and competitive targeting programs to identify the right people at companies you may not have considered.

Recruitment:

Looking for Business Development Representatives in a particular region with experience in prompt engineering, or cold calling? Searching for prospective hires based on their skill set can help you uplevel your team's expertise.

How to Source Skills Data

Sales teams with low budgets and fewer time constraints can manually estimate the skills of prospects to enhance their operations. Conducting thorough research about leads by examining their professional certifications, previous roles, patents filed, and industry affiliations can be done by searching popular social media networks, governmental databases, and other publicly available sources.

At baseline, this approach requires that analysts uncover the companies that a particular prospect has worked for and the publicly available job listings that might match their role at an organization in order to determine their skills.

Finding an automated solution that can identify skills and conduct profile searches by skill can increase your results and present less risk.

	Manual Skills Analysis	Automated Skills Analysis
Accuracy	Variable	High
Scalability	Limited	High
Customization	Highly customizable	Provider dependent
Time Efficiency	Low	High

For teams looking to supercharge their outreach efforts in less time, consider partnering with a trusted market intelligence provider like Rhetorik. Our data science team has built a proprietary skills taxonomy and AI classification model that uses machine learning to analyze professional profiles based on 30,000+ unique data attributes, including patents, certifications, industry affiliations, media mentions, and more.

In addition to our skills suite, our best-in-class products combine the power of cutting-edge AI models with trained data analysts to ensure all of our B2B contact data is up-to-date, legally compliant, and available across the globe.

Interested in learning more?

Talk to a *data specialist* to learn more about how customers use skills data to drive more leads in less time.

Contact Us

Rhetorik