Most organizations, whether for profit or nonprofit purposes, exist to develop and promote some things or ideas related to their organization. One of the major activities of these organizations is to appeal to people outside their organizations to join them, support them, or purchase their goods or services. Traditional means of doing this included offering goods and services in storefronts, by advertisements in appropriate venues, and by contacting a broad spectrum of people by phone or mail. These methods are rather passive. The philosophy was to build it, show it, advertise or promote it, and customers would come.

Since the early 1990s, many businesses have taken a more active approach by using various technological approaches to identify specific prospective customers and going after their business, rather than waiting for them to respond to the passive appeals. The key issue in this process is identifying which prospects are most likely to respond to the appeals. The activity of identifying prospects and quantifying their likelihood to respond is one of earliest applications of data mining technology to business.