

Account-Based Marketing Handbook

A practical approach that aligns sales and marketing



After years of chasing prospects and customers using the same tactics, fewer marketers see the value of investing time and money in traditional marketing.

Email outreach worked until spam clogged up inboxes. Content marketing worked until everybody started to publish sub-standard material. And search engine marketing worked until it became inundated with new players clamoring for attention. Even inbound tactics aren't delivering the results they once did.

Marketers are taking a highly targeted approach. As the need for performance continues to climb, so does the adoption of account-based marketing (ABM).

What is ABM?

ABM is a focused strategic approach to B2B marketing that brings sales and marketing together. It's about focusing on the right leads instead of more leads. With ABM, marketing resources are dedicated to a specific set of target accounts and their contacts. This highly targeted strategy requires marketing and sales teams to align to deliver the right message and content to the right person in an account.

Why ABM?

ABM leverages the power of hyper relevancy to speak more directly to a customer's needs, a persuasive technique that has a better chance of winning them over. This allows you to use your marketing team's time, budget, and resources to cultivate relationships.

Marketers who adopt account-based strategies are more successful and competitive than their peers who market to mass audiences. And there's data to prove it.

The foundations of ABM

ABM treats every account as a market of one

ABM focuses on customer value. Instead of employing automated campaigns sent to a large group of people with similar titles, ABM personalizes to the individual, identified decision-maker. Aiming at a market of one allows you to think about the needs of all the influencers in one company, rather than one general persona. For example, what does the IT director care about? What's on the mind of the CFO? Does the VP of marketing have a say on the IT budget? It's vital to understand the specific obstacles and opportunities within an account.

Build experiences based on channel

ABM packs so much punch because it is hyper-personalized to the needs of specific individuals and accounts. After completing research on your target accounts, you'll have a better understanding of their business. When you demonstrate that knowledge in your campaign messaging and assets, you gain your audience's attention.

It forces marketing alignment

Different content assets often get developed in silos within organizations, with one group creating blog posts and ebooks, and another writing product sheets and solutions documents, for example. Since ABM starts with insights gleaned from research, campaigns and content are aligned to stay consistent and cohesive—making persuading audiences easier.

It unites sales and marketing

One key to ABM is aligning marketing with sales early on. Making this partnership work calls for both teams to collaborate and agree on an engagement strategy and sync on what success looks like. As traditional lead-based metrics (like lead volume, impressions, and traffic) don't correlate to revenue, they can be problematic in ABM. Therefore, measuring success means looking at:

- The number of accounts identified
- The number of key contact relationships
- Acceleration of pipeline
- Reduction in sales cycle and revenue

“76% of marketers saw higher ROI with ABM than any other marketing strategy in 2020.”

[Rethinking ABM for the Next Opportunity: ABM Benchmark Study](#)

Last accessed August 18, 2021
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Account selection

ABM is all about focusing on the right leads, not just more leads.

To determine the most suitable or “convertible” prospects, sales, and marketing should jointly define a list of named accounts based on multiple variables.

Named accounts refer to a single company assigned to an internal marketing or sales rep. These accounts (which could encompass several leads) are generally more engaged and closer to making a buying decision. They are the building blocks of a focused marketing effort.

Taking a rigorous approach

A named account list for ABM needs to include more than just contact information. You must understand the specific challenges each account is facing to frame your solution as the right choice in the eyes of decision-makers.

Focusing on named accounts improves efficiency in two ways: First, it avoids duplication of efforts. Second, most companies have multiple decision-makers in today’s modern B2B environment, making it vital to identify those involved and build your sales-marketing strategy accordingly.

Moving to ABM

So how do you move from managing leads to advancing named accounts? Start by arranging contacts more strategically in your customer relationship management system (CRM).

For example, when a sales or marketing rep identifies a lead within a relevant company, that lead should be flagged, and that rep should then be instructed to bring in more leads from that account—and build a pitch around them.

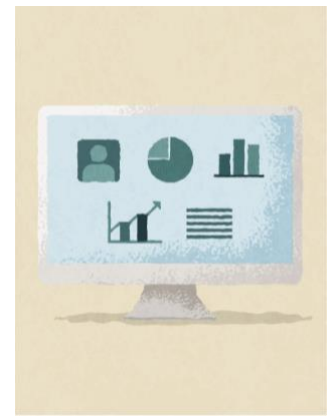
Since some CRM and marketing automation systems don’t account for the connection between leads and the companies they work for, shifting to ABM can be a challenge without the right technology. But marketing automation can solve this.

Shaping content for ABM

When done with creativity and passion, content marketing can carry a weight of herculean proportions—especially when it comes to ABM. And it’s no surprise. Useful and inspiring content that helps prospects solve their business problems is one of the most effective ways to fill the top of your funnel and move prospects towards a close. Tailor ABM content for the specific companies you’re reaching while capturing the mindshare of the key influencers within those accounts. For content that hits the ground running, the most important question you need to ask is:

“What keeps this prospect awake at night?”

Even though you're marketing to accounts, you're still talking to human beings. “Increasing company ROI” or “improving lead to conversion rates” could, on a human level, boil down to making their jobs and lives easier.



“43% of marketers who reported the most success from their digital strategy have a working ABM program in place.”

[2021 State of B2B Digital Marketing: Capitalize on Increased Budgets & Post-Pandemic Opportunities](#),

Last accessed August 18, 2021
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And by slicing and dicing existing material, like webinars, ebooks, and customer interviews into blogs, social media posts, and infographics, you can make what you currently have work harder.

Implementing a content marketing strategy for ABM doesn't require any radical shifts outside of creating tailored content for certain accounts and setting more granular media targeting parameters. The main difference with ABM content marketing begins with the "who."

Creativity calls attention

Steer clear of jargon and keep it conversational when it comes to ABM content. Have fun, tell a story with tension and resolution, and offer actionable tips readers can use. It's also key to ensure your content is as visual as possible. The uniqueness of both your copy and visuals is undeniably important— because it's what makes your brand memorable.

Content goals for ABM

To create content that makes an impact, define precise goals. While soft metrics like shares, more followers, or increased traffic are all legitimate measures for most marketing content, the targeted nature of ABM requires more concrete metrics, like increased pipeline velocity, lead generation, and revenue.

Lead management

Outbound engagement

Typical B2B lead generation efforts for sales development reps (SDRs), or business development reps (BDRs) can involve:

- Searching LinkedIn and Google
- Navigating thick phone directories
- Playing email roulette to connect with the right people

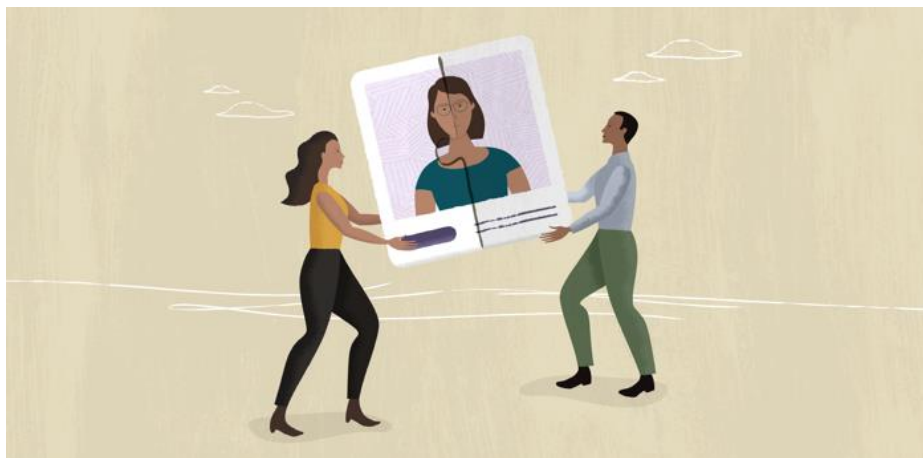
With ABM becoming popular, more SDRs focus their outbound efforts on specific accounts rather than canvassing industries or company types to find key influencers and decision-makers.

Inbound lead routing

Here's a nightmare scenario for many B2B marketers: You carefully craft a campaign, deliver it successfully to your target prospect through your marketing automation platform, your prospect opens your message, likes it, and clicks through to your desired call-to-action. Then, the sales team never reaches out, and the lead sits there.

An ABM approach to inbound lead routing matches the contact info of the people who respond with the companies' key account data. So, if someone reaches out, and that person works for a current customer of yours, they get a response from the right account team.

But if the lead works for one of your top prospect accounts, your automated system should flag that lead as a priority. Lead-to-account matching, a feature of ABM solutions built on predictive analytics, can make sure that happens.



“A 2020 report by Experian Data Quality found that organizations believe 29% of their current customer and prospect data is inaccurate.”

[2020 Global Data Management Research: The Data-driven Organization, a Transformation in Progress](#)

Last accessed August 18, 2021

Prepping your data

Bad data produces bad results

As ABM’s personalized approach relies heavily on reaching prospects via accurate email and contact methods; there’s no room for weak data.

Some companies work around bad data manually by researching online to find the right people before calling and hoping to get through. This approach may work for companies with a specialized product and a small list of target accounts, but it’s labor-intensive. For the average B2B company, this approach doesn’t scale.

Personas and personalization

To build personas that deliver solid insight, try to go beyond the shallow info pulled from your in-house contact database. Rely upon a solution with a deep understanding of people individually, including specific responsibilities, technologies used, and day-to-day pain points. Very little of that is known by title alone.

For example, a Director of Marketing might be a marketing operations person or a demand gen person. Or they could be focused on product marketing, solutions marketing, or field marketing. And by the same token, the primary decision-maker for marketing in each company could have any of a dozen titles.

It’s easy to create quick personas based on title or a few other factors and never look back. But if you do the work of creating accurate personas based on role, company size, industry, job function, the technology they use, level, and department, keeping records up to date will be easier. It’s a smart investment of time and effort that will pay off with increased engagement.

Predictive analytics

Incomplete form-fills, attendee lists, and anonymous web visitors can make some marketing and sales teams buckle under the weight of bad contact and company data. But considering how far marketing technology has evolved, it's surprising that the database problem still plagues most marketers. In some cases, it's even getting worse as marketing expands into new channels and technologies. Traditionally, marketing and sales teams have looked to data and lead vendors to help cleanse and enrich their data. The problem with this method is that the data from many vendors can be out of date in six months—or less. Because people perpetually switch roles and companies, a six-month-old shelf life on data leaves it useless.

Often, you can find updated info on web and social channels. The open and social web is comprised of mostly unstructured data. Due to this type not being organized in a predefined manner, there's a manual element to finding the information you need and then fusing it with your records. This can make it hard to support at scale. Predictive analytics platforms for B2B lead generation address this challenge. They combine multiple data sources, eliminate redundancy, and bring in contextually relevant external information (like promotions, hiring, and technology changes). Platforms like these eliminate the need for data cleansing tools and provide an on-demand, virtual database of the most accurate person and company information.

Lead scoring

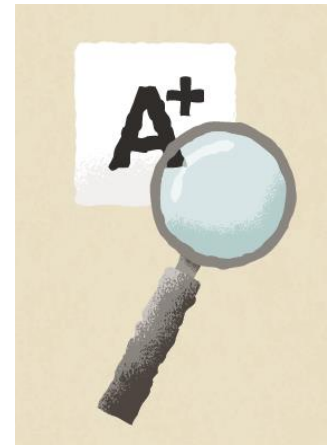
Lead scoring measures the likelihood of a lead to convert. Lead scoring is used to prioritize prospects, helping salespeople concentrate on the most promising prospects while others are managed through lower-cost efforts like email nurture campaigns.

Deciding which are worth it

To sort out which leads are worth the effort, start with a database of past leads and build a model that identifies those who eventually reached a goal (like making a purchase). Scores can be customized to your exact needs and built for individuals and companies based on behaviors and attributes. Behavior-based scoring measures “engagement” and changes over time. Attribute-based scoring measures fit against an ideal customer profile and is usually stable.

Models are built by correlating behaviors such as web searches or page views and social media comments with actions like requesting a proposal or making a purchase. The key is predicting which leads are close to initiating a project or making a purchase decision. Lead intelligence derived from scoring, modeling, and predictive analytics helps sales and marketing teams handle leads effectively.

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