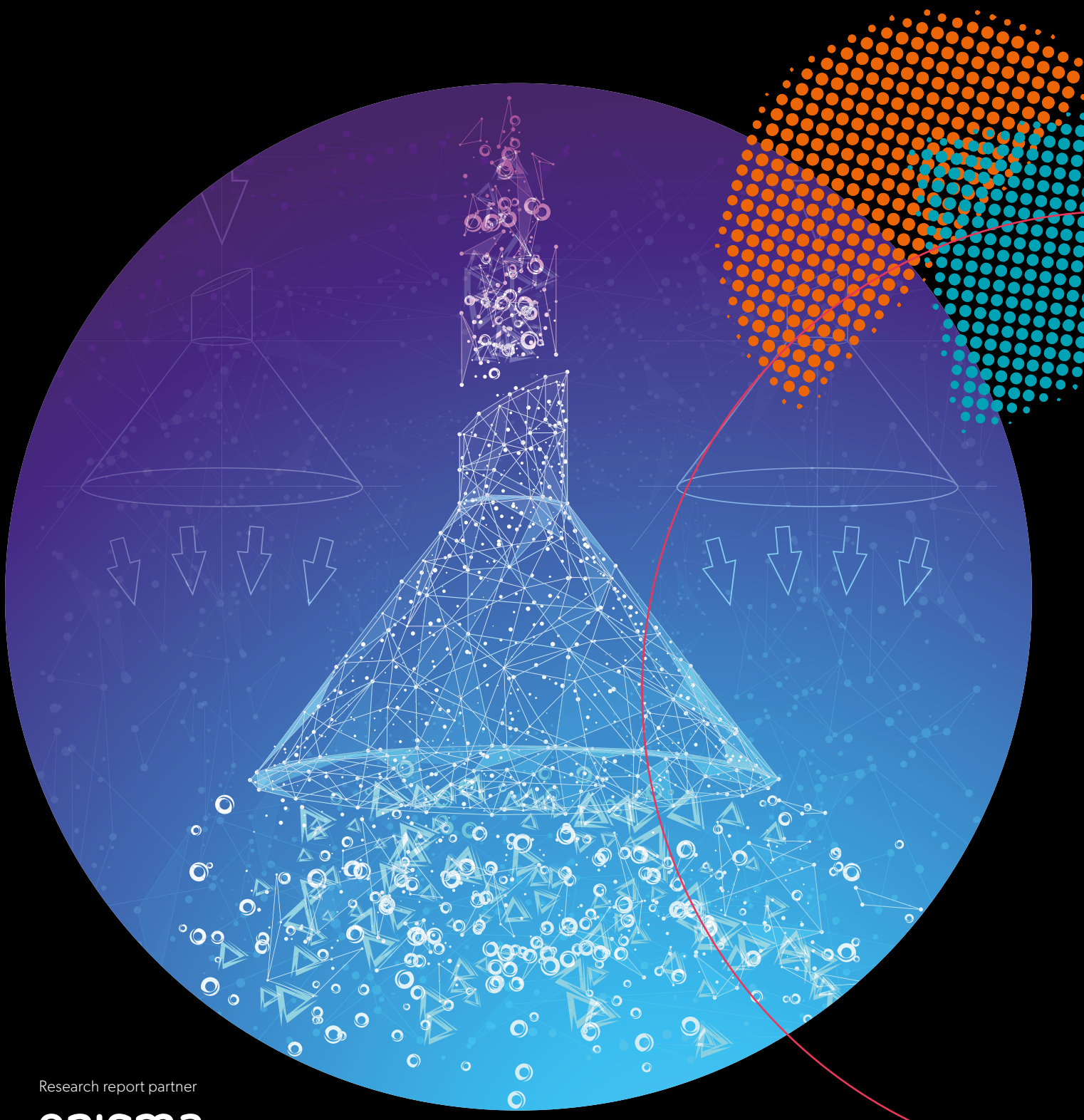
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The 2018 account-based marketing census



Research report partner

enigma

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The report is part of a larger whitepaper available here: b2bmarketing.net/earlystageabm



Marcus Hiles
Client services director, Enigma

Introduction

Spinning the wheels

For all who are involved in ABM, this annual B2B survey is both cause for celebration and concern.

It's good to see that the growing adoption of ABM is resulting in greater alignment between sales and marketing, and that many businesses now hold marketing in greater esteem as a result of marketers' efforts.

However, some alarm bells are ringing. The majority of respondents have yet to deploy ABM properly, but, as many as 76% are planning to increase their ABM efforts, using 26% of total marketing budget. It seems that many ABM programmes are spinning their wheels and marketers are responding by stepping on the gas. Yet this will not create momentum, but simply burn more fuel while standing still.

Marketers who want to get traction for their ABM programme need to reappraise their approach – and this is more about mindset and bravery than bigger budgets.

The right opportunities

The intelligence that fuels account definition is most readily found within existing customer data, underlining the need for increased sales and marketing alignment; yet the budget to support ABM activity is often only found for net new accounts. This may explain why 51% of respondents focus ABM activity on winning new customers while only 34% aim to protect and grow existing accounts.

Successful ABM programmes start with an informed, unbiased view of accounts able to generate sufficient value to deliver a return on that investment – and too many fall at this first hurdle.

The right resources

The survey highlights challenges around resources and capabilities: only 1% of respondents say their ABM teams have all the requisite skills; and a massive 84% see data and insight as a concern, with programme and content execution (65%) and technology (60%) also cited as major challenges.

Organisations practicing ABM must take a hard look at the resources and skillsets available to them – and be prepared to invest, upskill or outsource to develop an ABM ecosystem that delivers results.

The right mindset

Expectations surrounding ABM, plus its need to align with the wider business and sales, have given marketing an unprecedented profile. With this greater exposure comes greater responsibility, and marketers must be ready for the change that ABM inevitably brings.

Marketers must be actively involved in account strategy and selection from day one. They must understand and manage stakeholder expectations and ensure that the requisite processes, resources and skills are in place to execute and measure ABM effectively.

Beware the backlash?

It will be interesting to see the results of next year's ABM survey. Will the combination of heavy investment and limited results continue, and so contribute to a potential backlash? Or will marketing lead by example, driving internal alignment to focus finite resources on the most appropriate opportunities?

Let's make sure it's the latter. ABM is not marketing's latest shiny new toy but a strategic approach that will – with the right application and mindset – deliver long-term and sustainable value.

Introduction

A word from B2B Marketing



Mary-Anne Baldwin
Head of content,
B2B Marketing

It's incredible how quickly ABM has developed from something tucked away in the dark corners of the industry to what it is now – a celebrated part of the mainstream.

It's now one year since we launched B2B Marketing's ABM conference and with it, our ABM development programme, Head-Start. In that year we've had the privilege of speaking to hundreds of B2B marketers who are practicing these methodologies, and we have learned from them as they have learned from us.

We've watched as interest in ABM has mounted and activity has flourished, and I have to say we're excited for what's to come. There is still so much ABM can achieve. And it's not just about winning or growing accounts, but about changing the nature of marketing teams. We know that it can improve relationships with sales, instil a focus on data-led insight and be a real game-changer in customer experience. We see that as something to be really passionate about.

We also believe that ABM can be as revolutionary for the individual as it can for the company. Given the dearth of skilled ABMers on the market (only 1% of ABM teams have all the skills they need), we've no doubt that it will be a career springboard for those who demonstrate success over the next year or two.

But for me, the real beauty of ABM is that there is so much room for creativity and human connection. ABM speaks up for the customer, it champions their goals and challenges, and pushes lazy, ego-led marketing aside. It supports a new era of customer-led marketing and while doing so, calls for the utmost innovative and imaginative ways to show customers that you've listened.

Executive summary

ABM has certainly hooked this industry's attention, but as that interest mounts so does the volume of things you're supposed to learn, read and understand about it. Admittedly, it can seem a little overwhelming. We want to make it easier for you by charting the journey ahead in clear, easy steps. We also focus on the areas where others have stumbled and show how you can circumnavigate those issues.

This year's ABM Census, a survey of over 300 B2B Marketers, shows that the biggest problem those in ABM currently face is access to information on their accounts. This issue is tangled in many other aspects of ABM's delivery, which we will pick apart in this report and outline below.

› 86% of marketers are struggling to secure data

The biggest challenge facing those in ABM right now is access to customer data and insight. Practitioners must secure a huge quantity and high quality of account information to deliver personalised marketing. Any delays to this will impact their progress.

Those struggling to secure the information may need to revisit their account selection process. Have they chosen too many accounts? Are they too hard to reach? Ultimately, have they made the process too hard for themselves at this early stage?

› Most B2B marketers use ABM to win new business

The main aim behind ABM programmes is to win new accounts (51%) versus to grow existing ones (34%). This may be having a significant effect on the top challenge of securing information. Clearly, new accounts aren't known accounts, so you will have to start from the very beginning when sourcing information on them.

Of course, ABM must support your business objectives – indeed the beauty of it is that it has something to offer all models. But, if you have limited budget, resource and time growing your existing accounts is a much easier way to prove early success.

› The number of marketers doing one-to-many ABM has significantly dropped

It's in their favour that, for now at least, marketers are limiting the number of accounts they're targeting. Only 7% now conduct one-to-many ABM, versus 21% last year. This considerable drop shows a strong preference for the purest forms of ABM and a move away from demand generation, to which one-to-many is most closely aligned.

While the top challenge is perceived to be a lack of data and insight – this and a number of other problems, can invariably be traced back to the initial account selection phase. But don't worry. This report we walk you though all of that, with clear advice.

Section 1

An outline of the report

Through our extensive industry surveys and countless interviews and conversations with B2B marketers, we've come to learn a lot about what it takes to deliver ABM. We know the hurdles you're likely to face in advance of you reaching them and we're here to walk you through them all. We also draw on the guidance of Andy Bacon, lead advisor for B2B Marketing's ABM Head-Start Programme, who works with B2B marketing leaders on the successful delivery of their ABM campaigns.

Aside from the three distinct types of ABM (one-to-one, one-to-few and one-to-many), there are numerous methods of application. Some use it on old accounts, others to win new ones. You can cut ABM so many ways, with each one taking you in a different trajectory. But that can seem overwhelming, which is why, in this report, we have broken ABM down into five simple stages of maturity and five core elements of delivery, which can be applied to any style of ABM.

In this report we will lead you through each of those five elements of delivery, but to keep things simple we will focus on only the first two stages of implementation. Why? Because having surveyed the industry we've found that the majority of you are yet to deploy ABM but are busy laying the foundations to do so.

Next, we provide a short summary of ABM's principles and the three main methods of delivery, but for those seeking more detail on the basics of ABM, we suggest you start with our first *Account-based Marketing Benchmarking Report*, released in 2017, and gives you an overview of ABM's methodology, benefits and challenges.



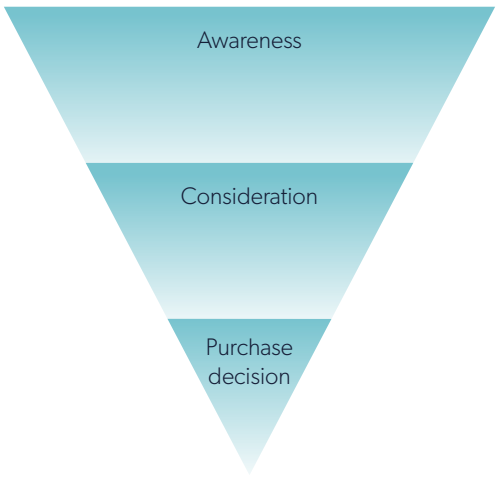
Flip the funnel

ABM doesn't just 'flip the funnel', it flips the agenda. It's no longer about generating leads, but about nurturing accounts.

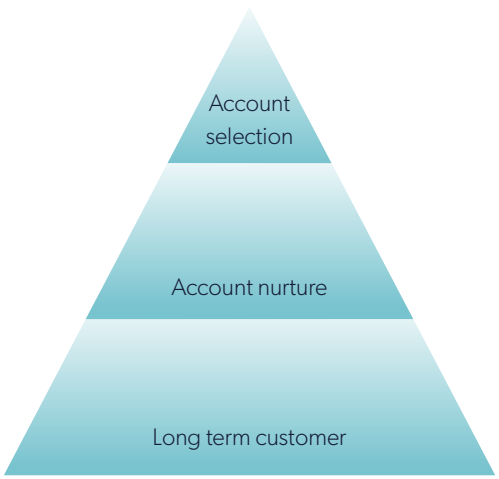
With ABM, marketers are moving away from the 'spray and pray' approach to marketing seen under demand generation and are instead taking a targeted, systematic view of marketing, one account at a time. It's no longer about how great your products or services are, but about responding to your customer's challenges.

> *"People go to ABM mostly because their existing demand generation process isn't working very well. They're spending a shed load on it and not getting results."*
>
> **Andy Bacon, lead advisor for B2B Marketing's ABM Head-Start Programme**

The traditional marketing funnel based on demand generation



The account-based marketing method



Source: ITSMA

Account-based marketing comes in three main forms

One-to-one

Selects a small pool of top tier accounts, typically five to 10. This very targeted approach is a great place to start as it is the most manageable of the three (particularly on limited resource), and is highly scalable. However, the fewer accounts you have, the higher the risk that none will convert.

One-to-few

One to few applies ABM to a larger selection of accounts, often selected in 'clusters' according to their commonalities – this may be their vertical, their challenges or their relationship to you.

One-to-many

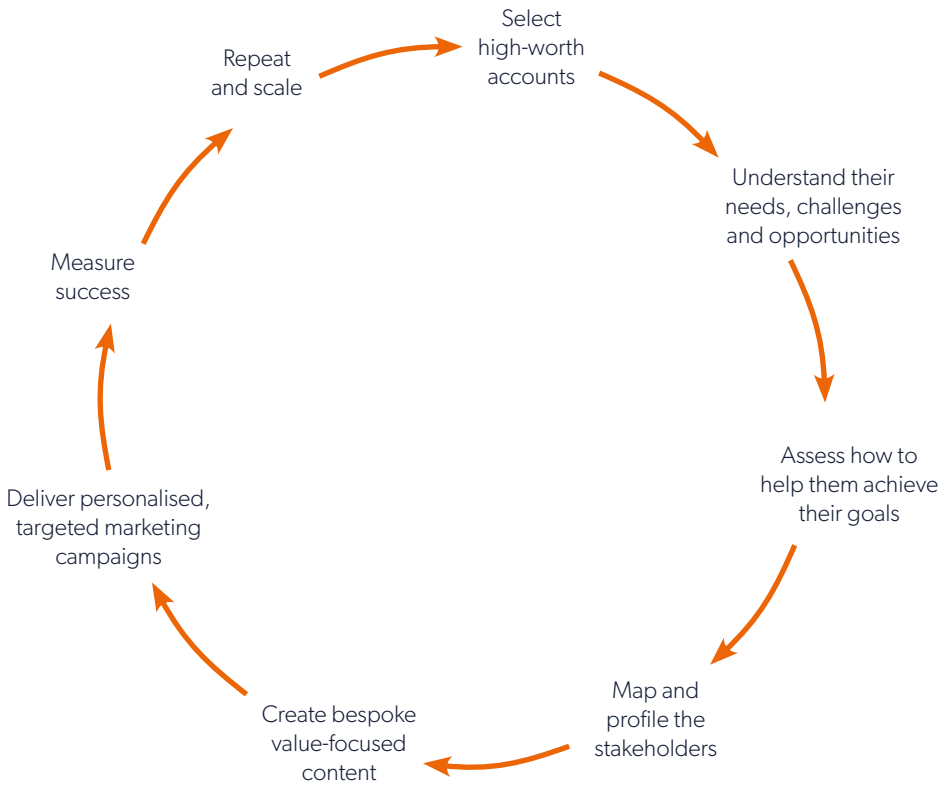
This is currently the least popular form of ABM and the type that has most in common with demand generation. It applies personalisation *en masse* to a wide pool of accounts and prospects.



Source: ITSMA

All ABM boils down to the same process

While there are many approaches to ABM, all types use the same process – it really is simpler than it first seems.



Section 2

Results of the 2018 ABM census

Interest is high but it's still early days for ABM

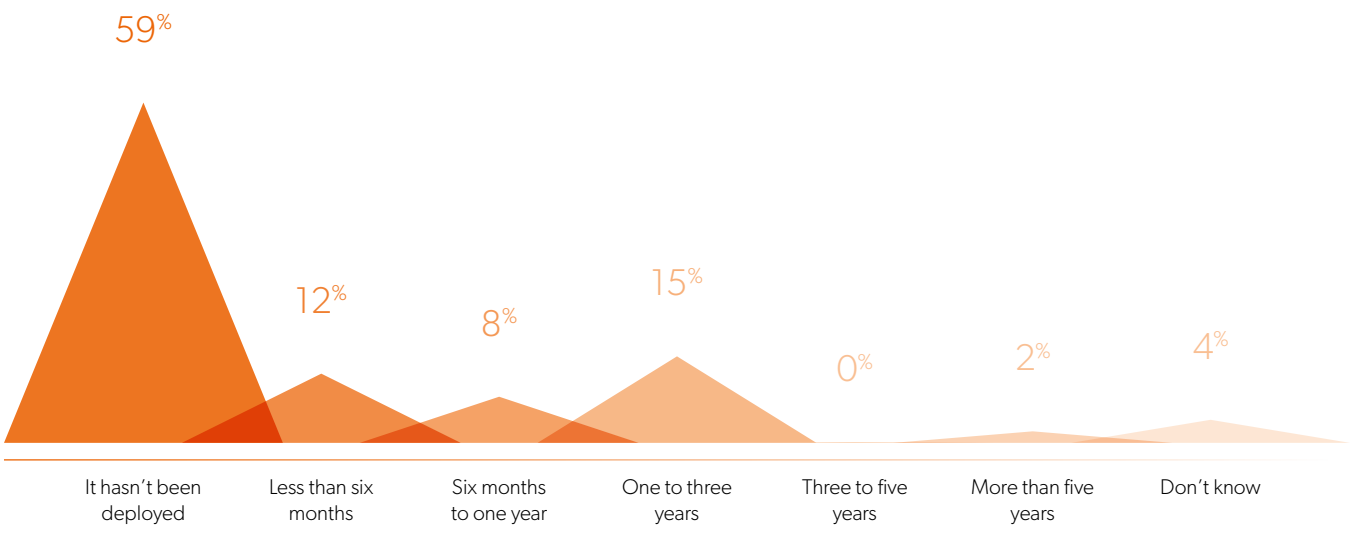
Anything that proves to have mass appeal will have some naysayers calling it a flash in the pan. That's certainly been said of ABM – yet interest and investment is growing, and it looks like it's here to stay.

While a handful of marketers have enjoyed its benefits for some years (the method first formed in 2000), those are few and far between. It is still early days for most, and ABM has yet to show us all it has to offer.

In our extensive survey of more than 300 B2B marketers, the largest group of people (33%) are still scoping ABM's fit with their business, while another 27% are busy planning their ABM programmes.

Given the mounting interest over the past year or two, it's clear we're on the edge of considerable change. It won't be long before we'll see a surge of account-based marketing hit the industry. This explosion of activity will provide the opportunity for collective learning, from which individual marketers can hone and develop their efforts in this methodology.

How long has ABM been operationally deloyed in your business?



Interest is high, yet ABMers are slow to progress

2018: 59% are yet to deploy ABM programmes

2017: 47% were yet to deploy ABM programmes

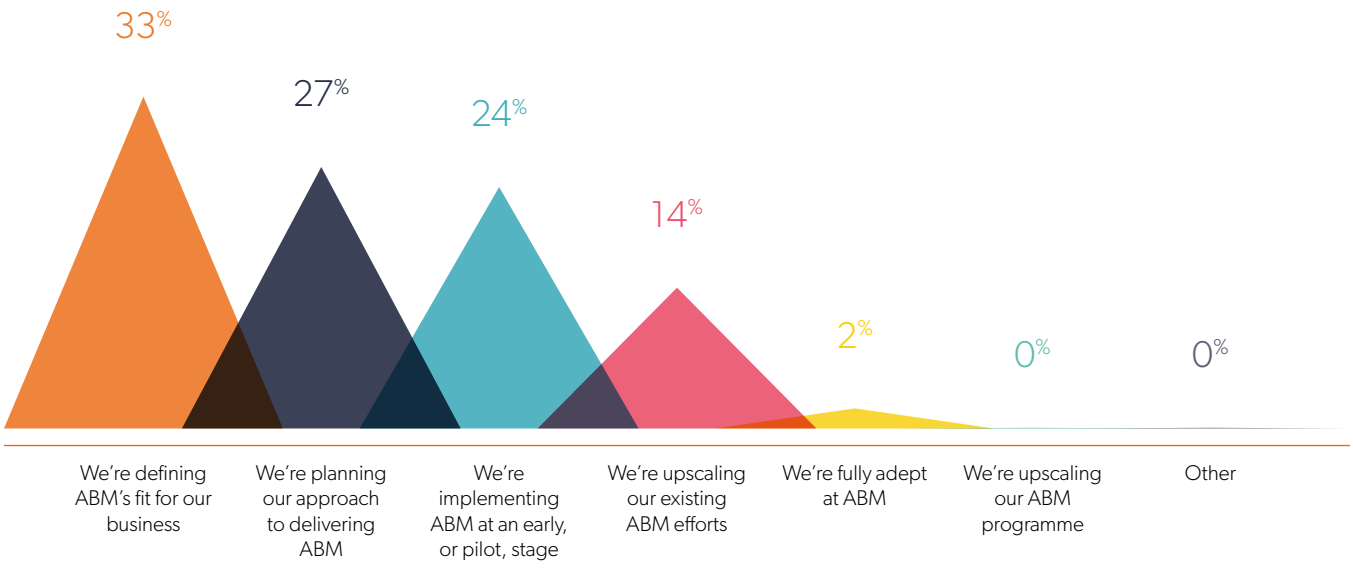
There is a 12% year-on-year increase in the total number of people who have adopted ABM but are yet to deploy it. It's unclear whether this predominantly marks an increase in the number of people interested in ABM or the amount of time it takes to move from the planning stage into action, although it is most likely a bit of both.

B2B marketers are already thinking big; 76% of them are looking to increase their efforts in ABM, 56% of which aim to do that at on a significant scale. Yet no one can afford to be complacent. Growth can only follow from success, and as we'll uncover in this report, many issues lurk on your path to ROI.

"Where the market is increasingly competitive we really needed to respond by growing our existing accounts. ABM is the way forward for us and we're just at the beginning of what it has to offer."

Conrad Wilson, head of marketing and communications, Cranfield executive development, Cranfield University

Which of the following best describes your organistation's current approach to ABM?



The vote is in on ‘one-to-many’ marketing

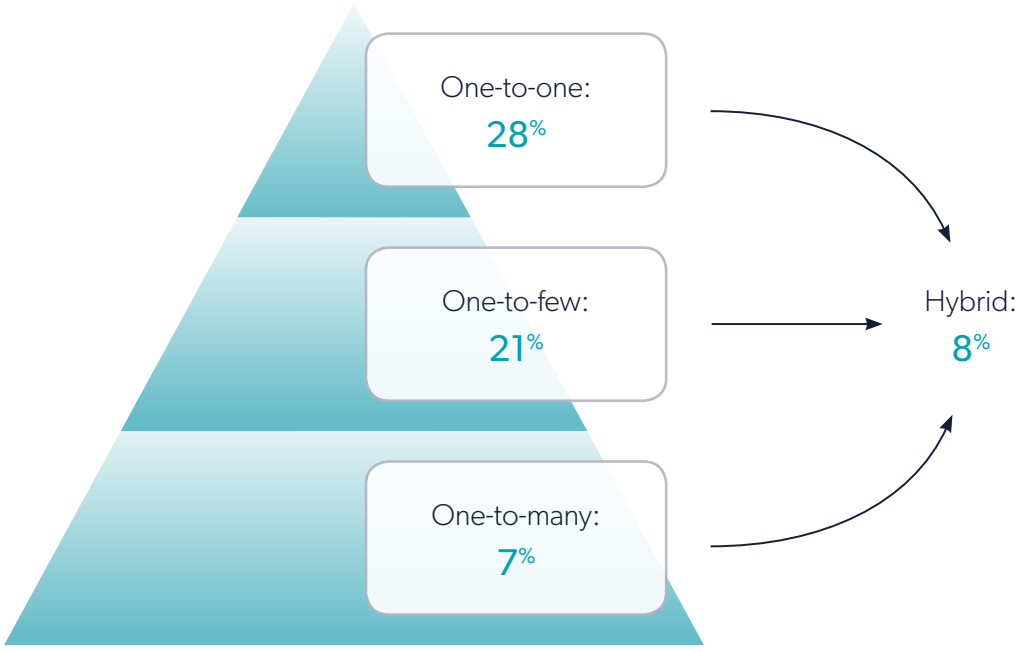
The consensus is clear. One-to-many ABM is just marketing done well. Over the past year, the number of marketers practising it has dropped significantly from 27% to 7%, demonstrating a lack of conviction.

One-to-many has always sat at odds with the very bespoke delivery of its down-scaled counterparts, and its place under the ABM moniker has been called into question many times. It is, afterall, far closer to demand generation than ABM’s other effort, the very thing ABM moves away from.

But that’s not to say it doesn’t have value, nor that interest in it won’t rise again.

One-to-many (or programmatic ABM as some prefer to call it) can be a very effective method when it really absorbs ABM’s principle of targeted personalisation. It could be that marketers are building up to one-to-many by first perfecting their use of ABM on a smaller pool of targets. But for now at least, and rightly so, most people are focused on the thoroughbred versions of ABM, which are one-to-one and few.

Which method of ABM do you use?



*36% are not yet conducting ABM/have not yet selected a method

ABM's primary driver is new business

The majority of people using, or seeking to use, ABM are doing so in the hope of winning business from new accounts. Of those surveyed 51% said their main aim was to win new accounts versus 34% who want to grow existing ones.

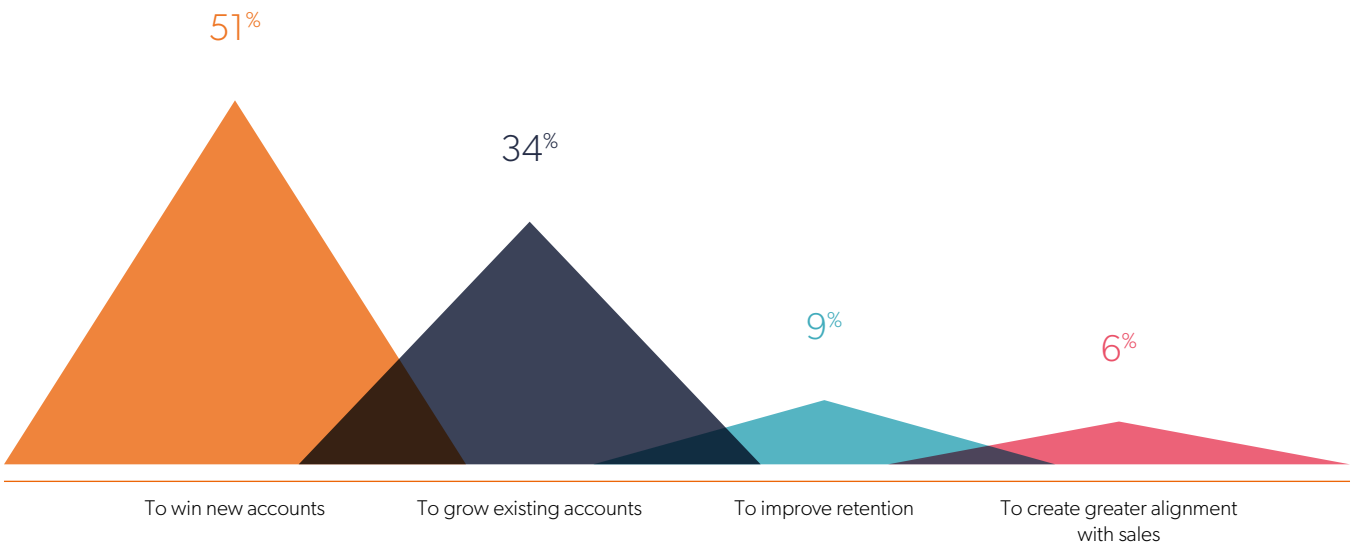
This finding is consistent with other industry surveys and with the many conversations we've had with practitioners over the last year. Our qualitative research shows us that most marketers use ABM as a means to steal big brand accounts from their competitors.

While this isn't a surprise it does carry some concern. As we'll explore in the full report, there are challenges in applying ABM to new accounts, namely a lack of data and insight, which may limit or delay your success.

"ABM is not about stuffing the sales funnel with MQLs and hoping for the best – it's about working in collaboration with sales to engage the customer and enable quality interactions. It's about conversations that address the customer needs and deliver value at every step"

Marcus Hiles, client services director, Enigma Marketing Services

What is the main aim of your ABM programme?



The common challenges of ABM

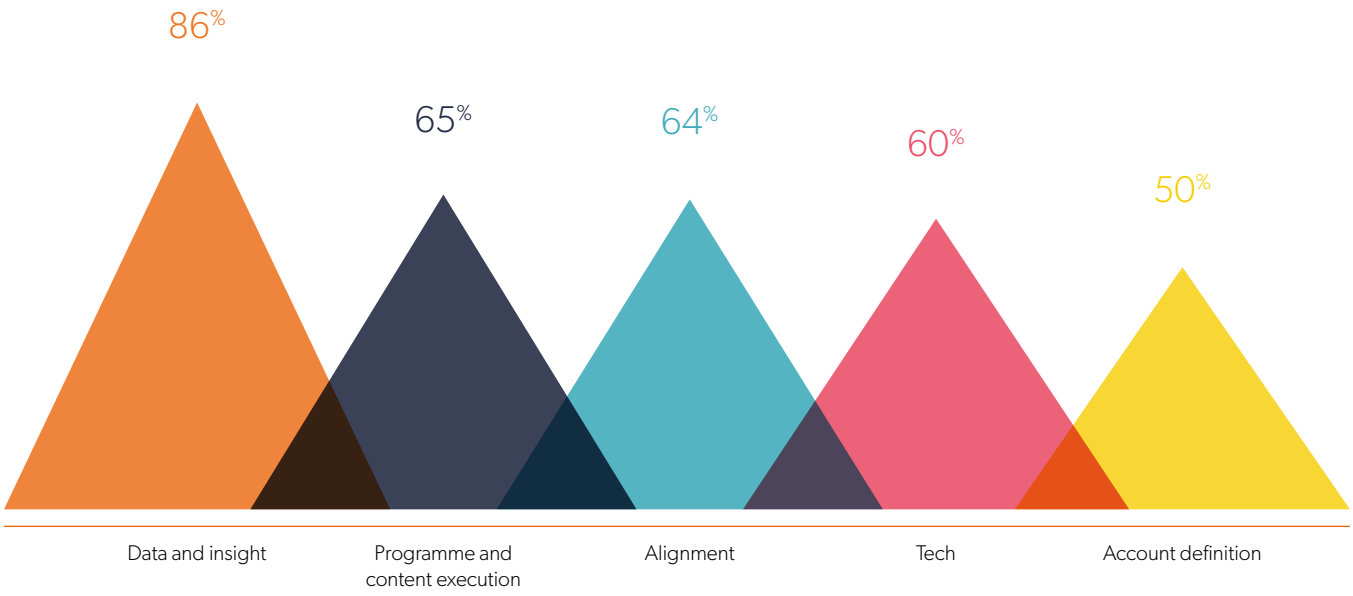
The biggest concern among ABMers is securing the data and insight they need for their accounts. As we will explore later, the struggle to access more data can be tied up in many things, such as fragmented use of the company's CRM system, or a lack of effort from sales or a focus on new accounts with little existing information.

We also see that the least challenging area is seen as defining and selecting accounts. However, as we explore in the full report, almost half of those surveyed have yet to choose their accounts and may find there is more to it than first thought.

In the full version of this report we delve into each of these five challenges. We dig deeper into the findings, demonstrate where your peers are in relation to these issues, and provide specific advice on how to overcome them.

> *"The biggest areas of conflict between sales and marketing are building trust versus managing expectations. Marketing is so keen to create buy-in that it's prone to oversell ABM. It also don't know what it's up against so may mismanage expectations."*
>
> **Andy Bacon, senior ABM advisor, B2B Marketing**

How significant are the following challenges when deploying ABM within your organisation?



** % of people who see this as a challenge or big challenge*

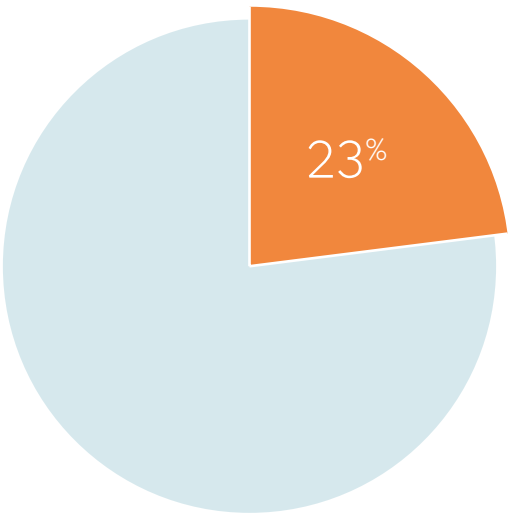
ABM on a budget. Is there any other way?

Very few marketers have been granted additional dedicated budget for ABM and are instead reallocating funds from the overall marketing pot, which can put a strain on both the existing and new operations. The same applies for staffing – very few have a dedicated team of ABM staff, but instead divvy-up a handful of accounts to select employees (typically five per staff member). In some cases these accounts are spread across the whole team, but very rarely will there be more resource or less pressure to deliver on existing targets.

This poses a considerable, though not unfamiliar problem. Without additional budget and resource, progress (and ultimately, success) in ABM will be limited. And without success, you shouldn't expect further investment.

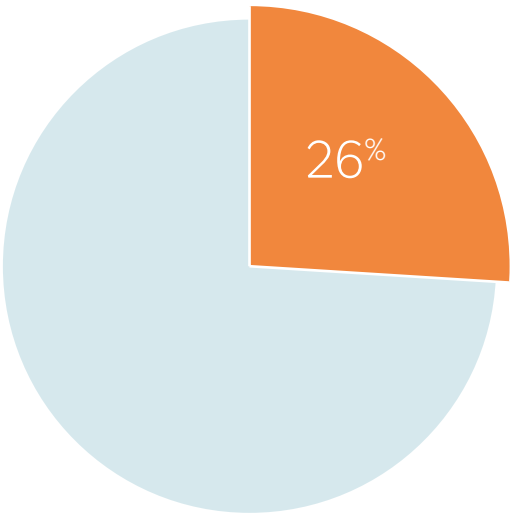
At this early stage of ABM's evolution, most marketers must make do with small but scalable programmes and be mindful not to bite off too much. Later we will discuss how to ensure some easy and quick wins to support your case for later investment.

What percentage of your marketing budget do you allocate to ABM?



+3% YoY

What percentage of your resource do you allocate to ABM?



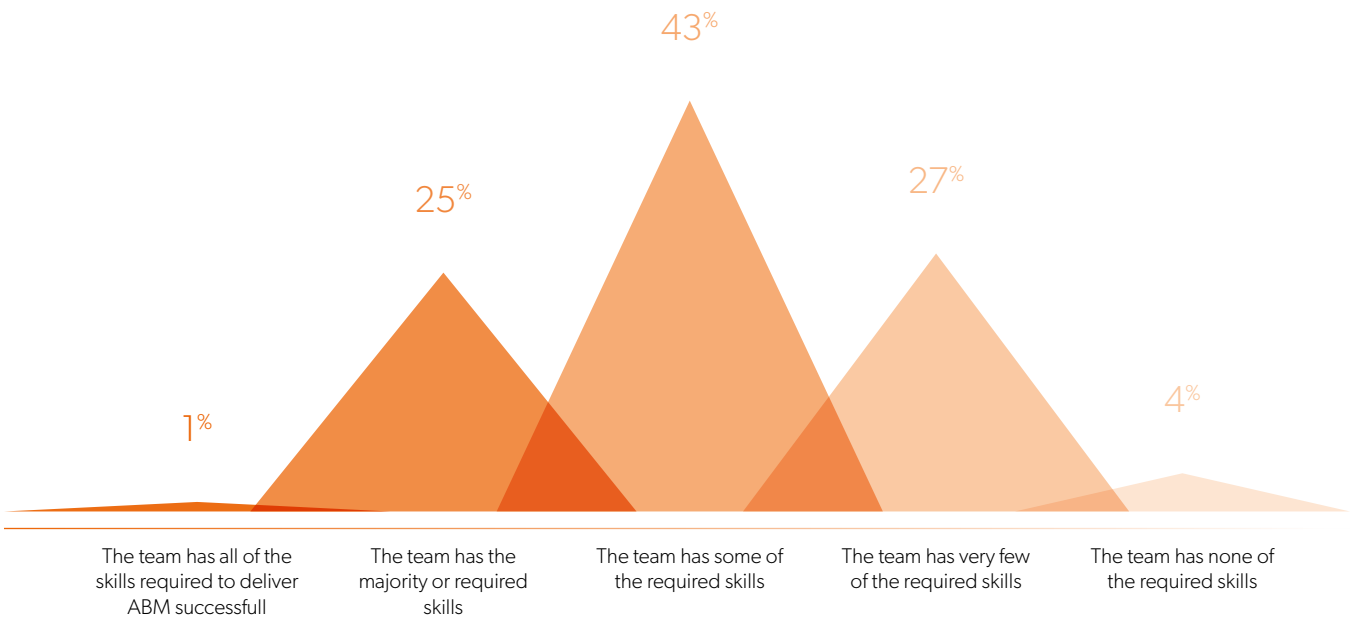
+6% YoY

Only 1% of teams have all the skills for ABM

Yes, you read that right. Only 1% of teams practising ABM have all the skills required for it. You may take comfort in knowing you're not the only one struggling to find these elusive ABM gurus, but that comfort will be short-lived.

Just as you secure the budget for skilled staff so too will your competitors – and the talent pool you'll be fighting over is incredibly small. That makes training for your existing staff essential – most likely a mix of experiential and formal. But the real trick will then be to hold onto those staff who, once trained, will be a highly sought after commodity.

How would you describe the ABM skills of your internal marketing team?



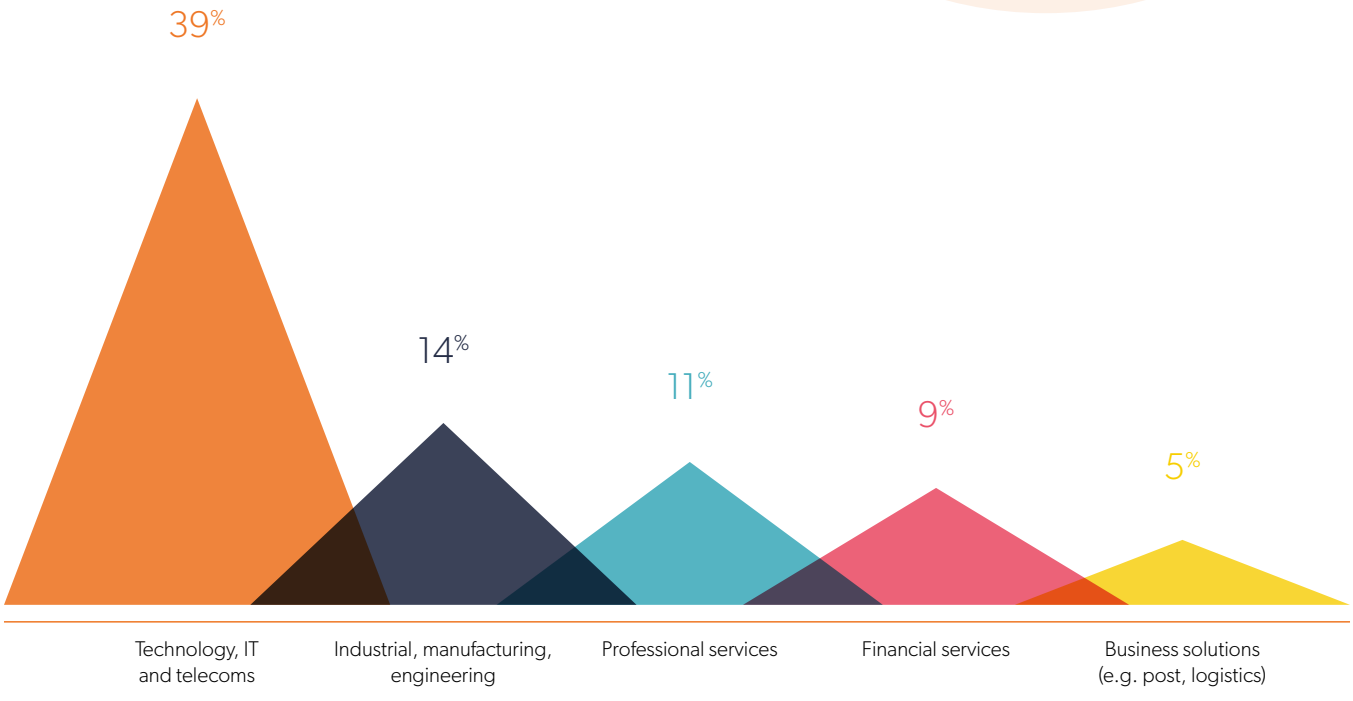
Look to the tech sector for inspiration

ABM first kicked off at the turn of the century with its technology-based forerunners – including CSC, Unisys and IBM – leading the way. Yet even there, ABM is an evolving discipline with numerous hurdles still to clear, such as how to scale up, and how to create greater alignment with sales.

Want to know more?

For more insight into ABM in the tech sector, including its popularity, specific challenges and opportunities, plus case studies from Atos, Fujitsu and Criteo, read our free report, *ABM lessons from the tech sector*.
bit.ly/abmlessons

Top five sectors in which ABM practitioners operate



A word on agencies

At present 19% of clients practicing ABM are doing so with the support of agencies. This figure is flat year-on-year, which mirrors the fact that most clients are still taking the time they need to educate themselves on ABM, and to prepare themselves before putting it into practice.

Most will not have the budget for agencies during this early stage of implementation and must prove success on a smaller scale before they can earn the budget to work with external partners.

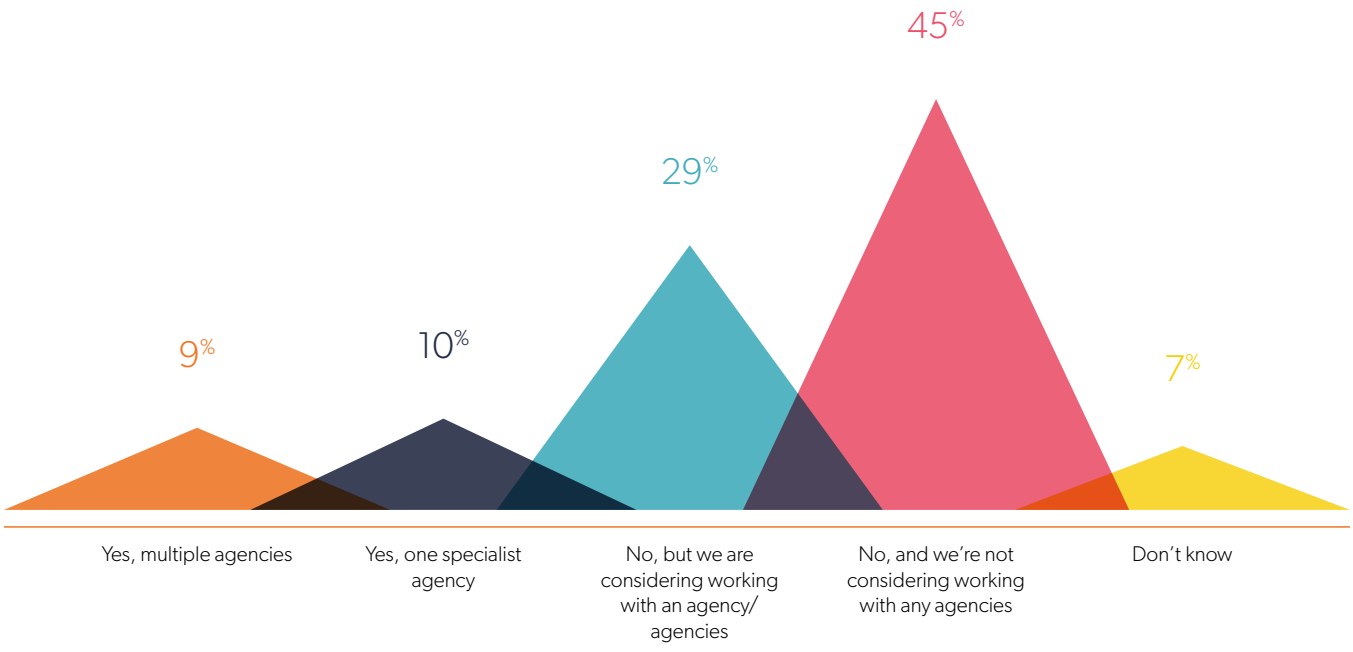
ABM clearly offers a growing opportunity for agencies, yet it may take time for them to win this business, and they will have to fight against tough competition. The number of clients looking to use agencies in the future has dropped 9% year-on-year to a current figure of 29%. (Yet that does still mark sizeable growth from today.)

Agencies are eager to snap up any of that market growth and are upskilling and preparing themselves for it. In another of our annual surveys (this time on agencies) we've found that the number of participants listing ABM as a skill and offering has increased considerably over the past two years.

Of course, agencies do have a lot to offer on this. For ABM to work, its campaigns must be original, powerful and persuasive – and there will be a lot riding on it.

Where they can really add value, and successfully compete against their counterparts, is in supporting their clients right through the process. That means not just providing great creative, but understanding all the elements of ABM – from data consumption and account selection, right through to delivery – and supporting their clients with that.

Do you work with agencies to help you with your deployment of ABM?



Section 3

The ABM Competency Model Version 2.0

In the following pages we present The ABM Competency Model. It's an update on the maturity matrix we released last year, and a means by which you can understand all of the components involved in moving from your very first understanding of ABM to being proficient in it.

Crucially, this model also allows you to:

- Assess your current skills against what you'll needed for the road ahead
- Compare your aptitude with the majority of other B2B marketers
- Determine the steps that'll take you to the next stage

This model demonstrates everything you will master as you become proficient in ABM. It maps that across five stages of evolution, taking into consideration the five core elements of delivery:

1. Internal alignment
2. Account definition
3. Data & insight
4. Technology
5. Programme & content execution

It's important to note that while stages one to five mark a linear path through time, the five elements do not. There is no doubt that you will be tackling many, if not all of these elements concurrently. However, alignment should always be the first of those.

To follow we'll explore what each of those five developmental stages look like in practice, and what each of the five elements of delivery comprises.



The ABM Competency Model Version 2.0

B2B Marketing

Elements of delivery	Stage 1 Understanding	Stage 2 Preparing	Stage 3 Delivering	Stage 4 Upscaling	Stage 5 Perfecting
Alignment	Cultural & customer fit assessed Execs/board support ABM Initial budget allocated	Initial ABM team has been created Key stakehlders are on board Sales & marketing agree objectives	Sales & marketing are working collaboratively ABM team delivering on agreed objectives	Greater budget & resource allocated There are internal champions at many levels	ABM supported company-wide Full collaboration with sales & other stakeholders Marketing's status has improved
Account definition	Key stakeholders see the value of personalisation, yet no accounts are selected	Accounts are scored, selected, segmented & agreed Sales & marketing have mapped the DMU & buying process Standardised sales account plans have been created	Small-scale targeted marketing is delivered Customer engagement has improved	Large-scale targeted marketing is delivered throughout the buyer journey The deal size/win rate has increased	Targeted marketing is used to prospect & retain/upsell
Data & insight	Existing customer insight is audited Data requirements are mapped	Research & third-party data is sourced All data is clean & inputted	Data is regularly shared & updated Data is used to deliver targeted marketing on a small scale	Centralised data is used to deliver targeted marketing on all touch points	Data insights are consistently delivering increased sales Data is used for strategic company decisions
Technology	CRM & MA systems are in place & used frequently	CRM & MA systems are regularly updated & properly used Additional tech for data/ contact resources & sales insights installed	Content, personalisation & event management tech is installed Website starting to deliver dynamic content	ABM ROMI dashboard in place Retargeting & intent platforms installed	Orchestration, advanced measurement & attribution tools installed All tech fully deployed & staff regularly trained
Programme & content execution	Marketing efforts are delivered in sympathy with (not in adherence to) ABM philosophies	Customer needs/challenges are defined Content is audited Programmes are planned	Content serves bespoke propositions, based on detailed customer insight Content hits the right person at the right time	Targeted campaigns are being delivered at every point of the buyer journey Marketing adds strategic value to RFPs	Sales are successfully & consistently leveraging targeted campaigns

The five stages of development

Stage 1: Understanding

Recognising the value of targeted, personalised marketing, your current practices are likely to involve loose experimentation with ABM philosophies but not its precise disciplines.

You will now be scoping the opportunities from developing these efforts. This will include auditing your current capabilities, securing top level buy-in and budget, setting your overarching objectives and assessing fit, both internally and with prospects.

Stage 2: Preparing

At the planning stage you will be mapping a targeted approach to your selected accounts, having found the decision-makers, segmented them but also understood them on an individual level. This stage is about preparing all elements and tools – including data, staffing, early stage technology and content execution – ready for implementation.

Stage 3: Delivering

During stage three you will busy implementing your first steps as ABM practitioners, applying its principles to a select number of accounts. For some this will mean running precise ABM techniques on a small pilot scheme, while others may take a more general but wide spread approach. During stage three there will be a strong focus on learning, development and alignment.

Stage 4: Upscaling

Having experienced early small-scale success in ABM, you will be ready to roll out this approach to a larger number of accounts and cover all stages of the buying cycle. Your early efforts will have earned you wider and firmer stakeholder support, with which you will have secured additional budget and resource to grow your efforts. This is likely to involve greater investment in technology.

Stage 5: Perfecting

At stage five you will be full proficient in ABM with marketing and sales having mastered it and the rest of the business culturally embracing it. ABM techniques are being used to win, retain and grow accounts at many levels. Furthermore the insight you have on these customers is being used to make strategic decisions at a company level.

"People struggle to describe ABM in a coherent and unified way. That's because ABM exists differently in every organisation, it's a programme that needs to be tailored to how you business goes to market, its organisational structure and offerings"

Andy Bacon, lead advisor, B2B Marketing's ABM Head-Start programme

The five elements of delivery

Element 1: Internal alignment

Internal alignment starts with key stakeholder buy-in from your marketing team, sales, executives and the board. Once you have secured this (and that is no easy feat in itself), the majority of your efforts will be to maintain your understanding and alliance with sales. Friction between you will have an affect on your performance.

Element 2: Account definition

This is the process by which marketing and sales have worked together to define what the ideal account will look like, and then selecting them. This includes finding agreement on the number, size and type accounts that you will target. That decision must be data-driven and made collaboratively by sales and marketing.

Element 3: Data & insight

Again sales & marketing must work collaboratively together to pool the information they need to select the right accounts. Once they've chosen them, they have to dig deeper into those insights, mapping what they don't know and plugging that gap. That information must be clean, up-to-date and readily shared.

Element 4: Technology

Largely speaking, additional technology is not essential to ABM's delivery – unless you are using One-to-many marketing. As you progress in your journey you will find more use for tech, but at the start your focal point must be getting sales and marketing efficiently and effectively using the CRM system. It's surprising how many aren't there yet.

Element 5: Programme & content execution

This covers the bespoke marketing assets – be they whitepapers, microsites, direct mail content or company awareness days – that you will use in order to engage and entice your chosen accounts. It describes both those assets the full scope of the campaign under which you deliver them.

What a difference a year makes

The 2019 ABM Competency Model, is a revision of our 2018 Maturity Matrix (show in last year's report). Having listened to many practitioners in the field we tweaked and honed this model to better reflect what the majority of B2B marketers feel are the main aspects of delivery.

While the 2019 model does not match the 2018 matrix, there are many similarities, so it is worth noting how last year's survey participants ranked themselves on the 2018 Maturity Matrix. In terms of their progression through the journey to proficiency, marketers put themselves at an average of 2.2 out of 5, so almost half way through the five stages toward being fully adept. This year the average is 1.5.

The greatest change was seen in account definition, for which people ranked themselves at stage 3 last year, versus stage 1 this year. So why have people downgraded themselves despite having more time to mature?

It's our belief that in the course of the last year marketers have educated themselves on what ABM really involves, and in doing so they have recognised that they are not as far along the journey as they first thought. This is not a bad thing. In fact, it marks greater ABM maturity, which stands them in much better stead for success.

The following five chapters will focus on each one of the five elements of delivery, honing in on the efforts involved in moving from the stage most are currently, to the next. In doing so, we will provide insight and advice on the apparent and unseen considerations ahead of you so that you will progress more smoothly.

"In the course of the last year marketers have educated themselves on what ABM really involves"

Key takeaways and advice

To help you take your next steps in ABM, we've put together specific advice on overcoming the most common early stage challenges in each of the five main areas of ABM delivery.

Alignment

The relationship between sales and marketing creates the framework from which all of your ABM efforts will hang. A shaky relationship means it can all come crashing down.

A common mistake is to oversell your pitch and under-deliver on your promises. It's a tough one to get right. Of course you will want to create support and enthusiasm for your endeavour, highlighting what ABM can do for sales in particular. Yet many create over-ambitious targets in terms of the timeframes they given to deliver them.

The key message in your pitch, should be that ABM must be an 'in it together' approach between sales and marketing. This is not you doing something for sales and they must be willing to shoulder the burden of delivery with you.

Thankfully, ABM doesn't just require collaboration between sales and marketing, it creates it. It is a self-perpetuating machine.

Account definition

Most marketers are using ABM to win new accounts (51%) versus growing existing ones. It can be tempting to go after big untapped brands, particularly when sales are eager to open doors to them, but don't underestimate the amount of effort both sides will have to put in. This is the difference between beginning the marathon with a head start versus a weight on your back.

Opting to grow or retain existing accounts also gives marketing the opportunity to go where most don't tread – that is back over common ground. Marketers have historically been focused on new business and it's not often that they support the process of up-sell and cross-sell.

Regardless of which objective you pick, it's important to factor in some quick wins by choosing accounts that are likely to give you measurable results early on. These may not be your big ticket accounts but early success doesn't have to mean ROI – it could be something far faster and easier to achieve, such as an improved NPS, open rates or stronger client/prospect relationships.

Data & insight

Data and insight is by far the biggest challenge facing marketers in ABM. A whopping 86% of those surveyed see it as a significant problem. The alarmingly clear message is not to underestimate the effort it involves.

ABM is a data-driven approach and marketers will be reliant on account information to make informed moves, particularly at two crucial junctions – account selection and campaign planning. The wrong information, or not enough, will severely impede progress.

The largest group of B2B marketers we spoke to (45%) have successfully audited their existing customer information and have mapped the gaps that are left. Filling those gaps can be hugely time-consuming and put considerable burden on both sales and marketing – this in turn can create conflict and programme delays. Remember you don't have to do this alone – there are many third-party data providers that can help.

If you're still struggling you may want to adjust the number of accounts you're targeting, or choose ones you already know more about.

Content & programme delivery

Your challenge is in putting together bespoke content and marketing that makes the customer sit back and think 'these people really understand my business'. This is the part where your team can come alive. ABM delivers an opportunity to apply creative thinking and innovative approaches. It's a marketer's playground.

Yet the temptation when most start out is to dip into and repurpose existing content. It's okay to do that if you're sure it satisfies a specific customer goal, however, think about how to repackage and personalise it so that it feels like it's been created just for them. And while this is a good start, ABM grants opportunities for much more.

Experiment with how you can connect to the customer and don't be afraid to move on from success. It is tempting to repeat a great campaign with a similar account, but that's a process of diminishing returns. Ultimately, the more you borrow the less impact it has.

Technology

Only 22% of B2B marketers feel they have a good grip of the technology available to support them in ABM. There is in fact a great deal on offer, but in these early stages there is only one piece of tech you need to use and master, and that is your CRM system. Not everyone has invested even in this most basic of equipment – 17% have yet to do so.

It's through your CRM system that you understand your customer, pooling your information and managing your interactions with them. Your staff won't become CRM superstars overnight; it will take education for these new tasks to become effortless. It may also require you to tailor your teaching approach. Allocate a period of time for your staff to learn – but make clear that once the honeymoon is over, using CRM will be non-negotiable.

Pre-conceived ideas and negative past experiences can have a detrimental impact on uptake. It needs to be tackled if you want to coax employees toward better use of the system. There is no silver bullet to sales' adoption, but you can create cultural change by demonstrating the value in business and personal terms.

About

B2B Marketing

With hundreds of thousands of users across the globe, we are the leading trusted voice at the centre of the B2B marketing community.

B2B Marketing members are kept up to date with the latest strategies, insight and inspiration from the B2B marketing space, through our dedicated:

- Research and analysis
- News
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Why become a B2B Marketing Premium member?

Our Premium membership package delivers outstanding value, and is the go-to choice for thousands of senior-level B2B marketers, decision-makers and leaders.

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- Premium research, analysis, benchmarking reports and guides published every month.
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Things change fast in B2B. Just staying on top of the changes can be a full-time job. So we do that job for you.

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- Call us on +44 (0)207 014 4920 if you'd like to discuss your specific business needs.

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About

Enigma Marketing

Enigma is a global, full-service B2B technology marketing agency with planning at its heart and creative excellence in its soul.

We believe that great relationships deliver great results: our understanding of our clients' needs allows us to deliver better business outcomes for them. That could be achieved through award-winning ABM programmes and lead/demand generation activities; or by applying our understanding of the dynamics of channel relationships around the world to drive partner revenues.

Enigma's core strength lies in making insight come alive for clients through four disciplines – Insight generation, creative execution, programme activation and evaluation/optimisation. We leverage planning capabilities to ensure clients take the right message to the right target audience using the right channels; then the studio goes to work creating arresting branding and communications capable of generating cut through in today's attention-deficient world. We are also proud of our reputation for innovation: we constantly monitor the latest developments – whether that is intent data or virtual reality – to understand how they can inform and animate our clients' campaigns and enhance engagement.

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