b2bmarketing.net

ABM talent spotting

5 things we learned at this month's Leaders roundtable June 2018



B2B Marketing

Insight · Development · Training · Events

5 things we learned at this month's Leaders roundtable

As we see more brands embark on their ABM journey, a common theme has turned up again and again; It takes a certain sort of person, with a certain set of attributes, to be an account-based marketer.

In particular, ABM veterans like Andrea Clatworthy suggest that the role of an ABMer is a form of 'mini-CMO' – and we don't need to tell you how tough a job that is. ABMers need to collaborate across departments, understand campaigns and multiple marketing disciplines, and right now there aren't many tried and tested ABMers out there in the market, which means it's up to CMOs to develop them.

So how can you find the right people with the potential to work in an ABM environment? And how do you mould those traits into a commercial asset? How can you blend outside expertise with your in-house teams as they get up to speed? And furthermore, how do you ensure that your hard work in cultivating ABM experts isn't harvested by a rival firm?

Here are the key findings from June's roundtable.

1 Hire from within

To execute a successful ABM strategy, you'll need seasoned marketing execs who can combine strategic thinking with the ability to get their hands dirty on the front line.

And the most important facet of this, according to our discussion, is their understanding of the organisation itself.

"They have to know the business," said one participant. "It's really important they understand the culture within the business, the markets, the products, and as much as they can about the customer journey, etc.

"The biggest challenge when employing someone externally in an ABM role is they won't understand your business. My advice is try and recruit from within your organisation. Take someone out of their existing role, show them some career advancement, and replace their role with someone external.

"Someone coming in from the outside is going to take six months to understand the culture, product and market and how it all comes together – unless they happen to come from a partner or someone very close to your existing organisation."

2 If not from within, then from where?

If you don't have the employees within, which other backgrounds set you up for a career in ABM?

One attendee suggested looking at those with a background in sector marketing. It shares many of the same characteristics of ABM – taking a cluster of accounts with a similar problem – and ABM takes it to the next level by applying those skills to a single account.

© **B2B Marketing 2018**

Hiring from agencies was suggested, as having staff seconded from partners had previously proved successful becuase these marketers understand the business and sales team. But agencies are also competing in the ABM talent market, and can often outspend client brands when it comes to salaries.

Those leading marketing functions in smaller organisations were also recommended as potential new hires. These individuals tend to be more open to trying different approaches, have a more entrepreneurial attitude, and more used to dealing with customers. They're used to getting their hands dirty, and tend to be task-focused. But there are question marks over whether they are suited to working in an enterprise culture, or dealing with multi-million pound accounts.

3 Look for a true partner for sales

Building a stronger relationship between the marketing and sales functions is a key tenet of an ABM strategy, so it follows that you'll need to hire marketers who understand and empathise with their sales colleagues.

The perfect hire would be someone with both marketing and sales experience. But at the very least you'll need someone who can develop the partnership with them, understand their needs and motivation, while at the same time has proven experience in delivering marketing campaigns and activity.

It's another cross against trying to populate your ABM team with junior (or less expensive) employees, as they won't have either the necessary experience or gravitas to hold their own in the relationship.

And there's no substitute for making these account-based marketers get out there with their sales colleagues to enhance their understanding of the business. "I would always recommend if you can put your marketing guys on the coalface, the stuff they can learn is invaluable – and I still use some of those lessons I learnt back then today," said one marketing veteran.

4 Are you a chicken or a pig?

"What's the difference between ham and eggs?" asks one roundtable attendee. "The chicken's just involved, but the pig's fully committed. The sales guys are the pigs, while marketers are quite often seen as the chickens."

It's a neat analogy that sums up the common perception that marketing's not ultimately accountable for driving the revenue target in the same way salespeople are.

"If we as marketers can start to be more accountable and be measured, and as an ABM team have the number on their head in terms of what needs to be delivered, then everyone's in the same boat. That breaks the disparity, and sales will start to take you more seriously," he continues.

5 These are the traits you need to identify

The group around the table came to a general consensus over the requisite skills and characteristics to be successful at ABM. This is not an exhaustive list, but when hiring for an ABM programme, you should look out for:

- **Commercial acumen:** This is often the most difficult thing to assess in candidates. In addition to business skills, they need to understand the larger picture, to have an intelligent conversation with the account sponsor at the very least. It was suggested you ask candidates to do account research on the employer brand, and then present this back as part of the recruitment process.
- **Strong character and leadership skills:** You need to be able to get people on board, form alliances across the organisation, so everyone's moving in the right direction. You also need to be able to say no – and why no, because the demands from sales are intense.
- **An open mind:** Both marketers and sales professionals are often happy to operate in their comfort zone. ABM practitioners need to be willing to take new approaches.
- **Persistance:** Those working in ABM will suffer a lot of knock-backs and resistance along the way. A good ABMer needs the ability to break through the barriers people will set up in their way, and a good deal of 'bouncebackability' to recover when things don't go to plan.
- **Risk taker (within reason…):** ABM programmes are often a gamble – you're concentrating all your resources on a few accounts with no guarantee of success. An account-based marketer needs to be comfortable with that level of risk – and be confident enough to pull it off!

© B2B Marketing 2018

About

B2B Marketing

The B2B Leaders programme is a network of the most senior marketing figures at prestigious B2B brands.

Members benefit from a unique and invaluable opportunity to regularly network and collaborate with senior-level peers, sharing insights and discussing strategic challenges at events every month.

Membership is by invitation only, and includes:

- Your B2B Leaders Forum ticket, the only B2B marketing leaders event of its kind.
- Regular roundtables focusing on key marketing leadership topics.
- Monthly roundtable findings reports.
- Annual *B2B Leaders Report*, with key research data and insights.
- Monthly Premium content reports.
- A subscription to *B2B Marketing* magazine.

The B2B Leaders programme counts senior marketing names from Deloitte, Oracle, Atos, Dell, HSBC, KPMG and Adobe among its members, all sharing ideas on topics ranging from team development to board interaction.

To register your interest in the programme call +44 (0)20 7014 4920 or email adam.harper@b2bmarketing.net.



B2B Marketing

Insight · Development · Training · Events

© **B2B Marketing 2018**

B2B Marketing

Insight · Development · Training · Events

Contact us

B2B Marketing
Clover House
147–149 Farringdon Road
London
EC1R 3HN

Tel: +44 (0)20 7014 4920
info@b2bmarketing.net
b2bmarketing.net