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B2B Marketing

Intelligence • Connection • Development

ABX: What is account-based experience, and what do you need to know?



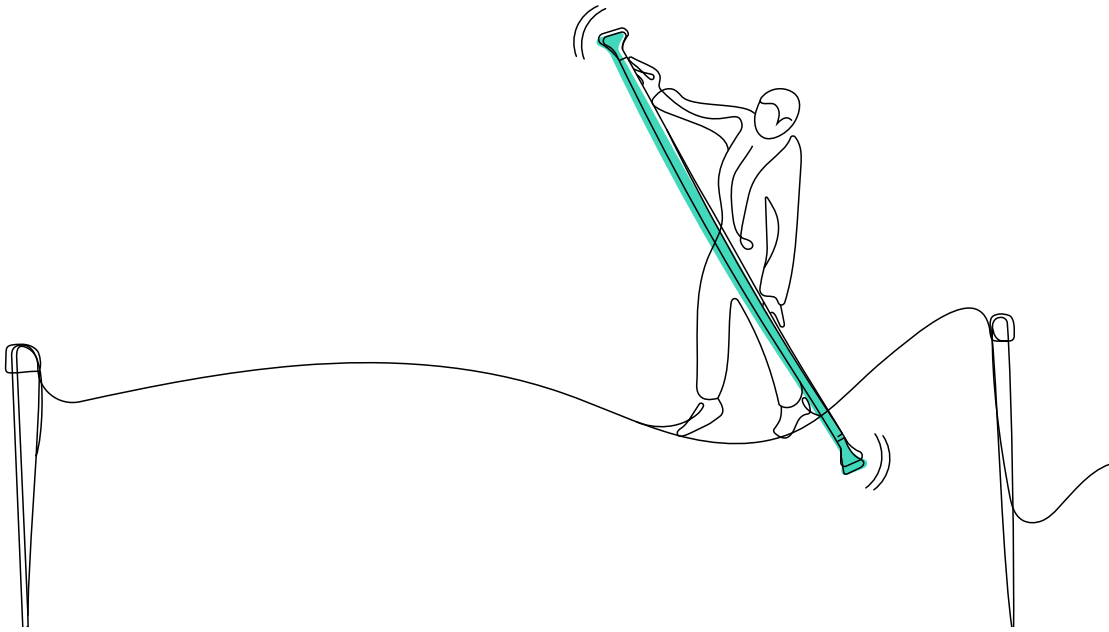
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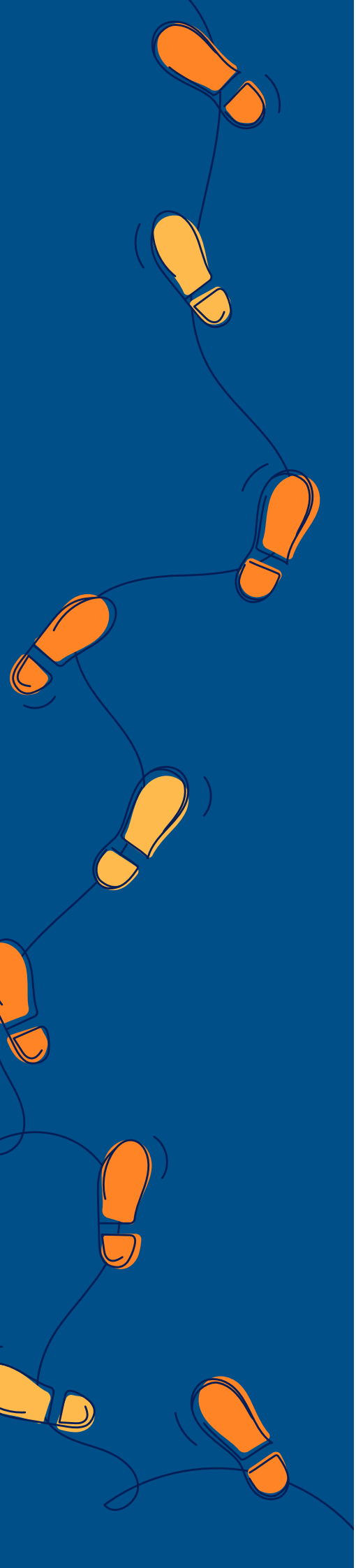
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An evolution, not a revolution



David Rowlands,
senior editor,
B2B Marketing

By now, we're all intimately familiar with ABM. However, as with all things in the world of marketing, nothing stands still. You've mastered that print advert? Say hello to the internet. You've finally got to grips with personalising your emails? Meet website personalisation.

You've finally cracked your ABM? Enter account-based experiences (ABX). But fear not! This is not a wild re-imagining of the world of ABM. Rather, it is the next step towards your business being completely aligned and account-based in its approach.

With that in mind, I recently spoke with Paul Gibson, VP international, Demandbase, to learn more.

This interview with Paul, which you can find on the next page, serves as a great intro to the topic, but for more granular-level information about ABX, head to page 7, where you can find the introduction and first chapter of Demandbase's new ebook, *The Clear & Complete Guide to Account-Based Experience (ABX)*. Here, Jon Miller, CMO of Demandbase (and former CEO and founder of Engagio, and former co-founder at Marketo), lays out the details.

The importance of account-based experiences (ABX)



Paul Gibson,
VP international,
Demandbase

In a recent episode of the B2B Marketing Podcast, David Rowlands, senior editor at B2B Marketing, spoke with Paul Gibson, VP international at Demandbase. The self-proclaimed martech 'veteran' explains what exactly ABX is, from the importance of technology, to how sales and marketing can work in harmony in the name of customer success.

Back to the basics: The ABCs of ABM, CX and ABX

"You can talk to a hundred different people and they'll all give you a different view of what ABM is," Paul begins. Of course, you might consider yourself an ABM purist, focusing solely on one-to-one. Alternatively, you might be a champion of programmatic ABM, with a focus on scale.

Regardless of your *exact* approach, one thing that is certain is that ABM works.

"It's the right thing to do. We can all agree on that," Paul asserts, adding that customer experience (CX) plays a crucial role in ABM. "We know we need to treat people differently based on what industry they're in, the size of their business, their region and where they are in their buyer journey." It goes without saying, but if we don't do this, our customers are not likely to have a great experience of our brand. In turn, we're less likely to win (or retain) their business.

So, where does ABX come into this? "In its simplest form, ABX harnesses all the best things about account-based approaches and CX. So, ABM plus CX equals ABX," Paul explains.

For Paul, ABX isn't confined to the domain of marketing. Rather, it is an approach to business that should be adopted by all revenue enablement teams, from pre-sales to post-sales. After all, every department in your business will affect how your account perceives or engages with your brand, so this account-based focus cannot lie solely in marketing.

Importantly, technology plays a crucial role in ABX, allowing more and more companies to take account-based approaches to a larger data section of their audience by having streamlined data. "If you get to a point where all of those teams are looking at the same data with the same strategy, then you'll have the same success," Paul states. "This gives you the ability to report back to the business that this is the impact you're having on accounts as a combined revenue team. That's what we mean by ABX."

The importance of technology in ABX

So, what role can technology play in ABX? "If you're building out strategies for the future, you want to make sure that you're focusing on the right companies," Paul explains. Technology can help surface the organisations which are in market, showing the right buying signals and, to zoom further in, their levels of engagement: website visits; if they've talked to sales; attended webinars or events, etc. "The term 'turning the lights on' is something we've used," Paul continues.

As Paul maintains, account-based approaches have long been desired, but have not always been accessible due to time and resource constraints. Fortunately, this is beginning to change. "Technology is something that we see speeding up the process and making sure that the data is relevant and available to everyone." In short, giving you the ability to put your account-based strategy into action based on data that actually means something. And with that added, all-important bonus of sales and marketing alignment.

"We all know that delivering a personalised experience to an account is effective," Paul states. "But the ability to do that in line with where they are in the buyer journey, what industry they're in and across a wider section of your target audience is much more effective." ABX technology allows you to see those specifics and adapt your messaging accordingly. In this way, ABX isn't synonymous with an abandonment of ABM, rather "it's about taking that account-based approach and bringing in all those different elements we've spoken about." In other words, taking that proven account-based approach and scaling it out to enable more organisations to do it, and do it well.

"If you haven't got the data, your strategy is guesswork"

When it comes to strategy and technology, most tend to start with the former and move into the latter. At The Global ABM Conference, Paul took a slightly different view, arguing that the two should work in tandem. "It was seen as a bit controversial at the time," Paul states. "But simply put, you can't do one without the other."

For Paul, strategy without data is nothing more than "guess work, crossed fingers and maybe a bit of intuition." As he outlines, data helps companies to identify not only which clients are in market, but *when* you should act, and when it will be too late. "If you don't have that data, there's a real risk of missing the mark. No one wants to be sitting there in 12 months saying 'That approach didn't work. We just wasted 12 months. Let's try something different,'" Paul continues.

The advancement of technology

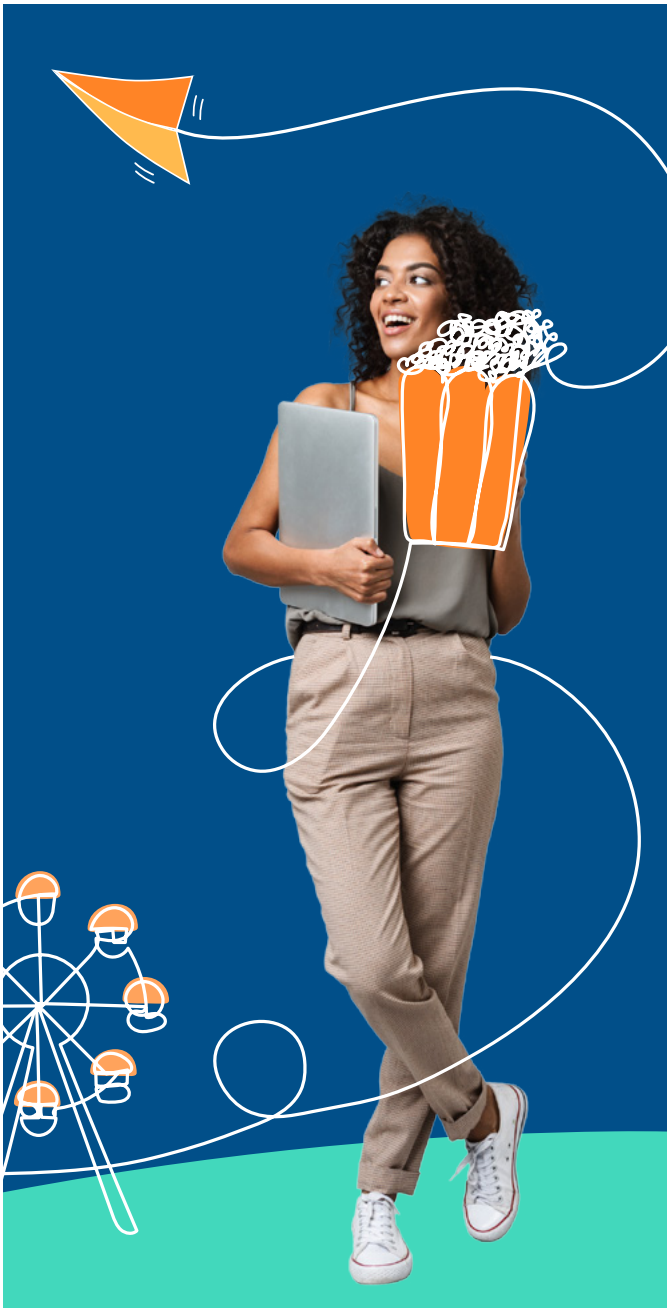
Paul argues that the advancement of technology signifies an ability to tie together both known and unknown buying committees, giving integral insight into buying decisions. It doesn't stop there. As Paul states, there has not only been an increasing reliance on CRM data, but also a push towards making sure that that data is accurate.

In a similar vein, Paul outlines an increasing use of automation technology which remove the need for "manually intensive processes that sales and marketing have to get involved with (…) so that we can do what we like to do: come up with creative strategies and ideas that push us forwards."

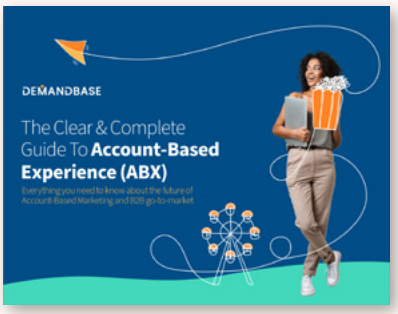
Where to start with ABX?

It comes as no surprise that, for Paul, the foundation of any strategy starts with data: orchestrating it into a format that sales and marketing can understand where to focus their efforts. Paul stresses the importance of making sure that your data is accurate. In his own words, "if you're not able to identify if that's a good company to go after or a good fit, it's all guess work."

From an in-house perspective, Paul states that ABX needs not only buy-in from the top, but requires wider organisational harmony. Although taking its first steps in marketing, Paul maintains that ABX has expanded to involve all those working in revenue, whether that be sales or post-sales. This plays a crucial role in customer success levels, such as looking into an account's buying signals to stop any potential problems in its tracks.



The next two sections are taken directly from Demandbase's ebook, *The Clear & Complete Guide to Account-Based Experience (ABX)*



Introduction



Jon Miller,
CMO,
Demandbase

In the mid-2000s, inbound marketing and demand generation revolutionised the way B2B brands go to market. The promise was exciting: no more interruption-based, one-way marketing. No more disconnected marketing and sales teams. No more spray-and-pray. It was a hugely exciting time and a completely new model.

But it was also flawed.

We all discovered that we had very little control over which companies raised their hands — and that far too many of them weren't a good fit. So marketing and sales teams ended up wasting a lot of time and energy on unqualified leads, and alignment never really got better.

Then, around 2015 we saw the explosive rise of account-based marketing (ABM). Now, for the first time, we could focus on specific, named lists of qualified accounts. No more wasting budget by marketing to companies that weren't a good fit. No more spending money to attract companies that sales didn't want to talk to. And it was pretty exciting, too.

But for all its benefits, early ABM was also flawed. As the name account-based marketing implies, these early attempts didn't sufficiently involve sales.

Worse, to engage these target accounts, we needed to reach out whether they wanted to hear from us or not (never a good idea). As a result, first-generation ABM efforts didn't deliver what sales teams needed: hot accounts they could contact to drive revenue right now.

Fortunately, there's another way. We call it account-based experience (ABX). It is a fundamental, customer-centric rethinking of an account-based go-to-market – one that combines the engageability of inbound marketing with the precision and targeting of account-based marketing. ABX enhances every aspect of the buyer experience throughout the B2B lifecycle, and dramatically out performs simplistic ABM and traditional demand gen.

It's time for the next evolution in B2B go-to-market strategies. We can't keep doing the same things and expect different results. Fortunately, a new model, new processes, and new technology – driven by AI and big data – have emerged to show a better way forward for every B2B company.

ABX is the proper evolution of account-based marketing. When done right, it will outperform every other growth strategy for your company. And this book is your clear and complete guide to this new world

About the author

“

I’m Jon Miller. I’ve been in martech my entire career, first as a VP at Epiphany, then as co-founder and VP of marketing at Marketo, then founder and CEO at Engagio, and now CMO at Demandbase. In that time, I’ve written four Definitive Guides at Marketo and four Clear and Complete Guides at Engagio. This is my first one for Demandbase, and it’s the best one yet since it builds on everything I’ve learned over the last 20+ years.

You might say I enjoy teaching. I’d agree with you. The son of a professional educator, I hate wasting time and talent. I like finding better ways to do things and then showing people how to do them. I write the guides to share everything I know about a topic in an easy-to-understand way – that’s why I call them Clear and Complete. Thanks for your time.

”

Chapter 1:
Why account-based experience?

Traditional go-to-market (GTM) processes – and technologies – are built around the lead, the individual buyer who progresses along your funnel until becoming a marketing qualified lead (MQL) and is then passed like a baton from marketing to sales.

But in every complex B2B deal, there are many buyers involved: the decision-maker, the end user, the influencer, the CFO, the procurement department, and so on. LinkedIn research found an average of 6.8 people in the B2B buying committee and a Clari study found that deals over $100,000 require 19 meetings with 14 different stakeholders.

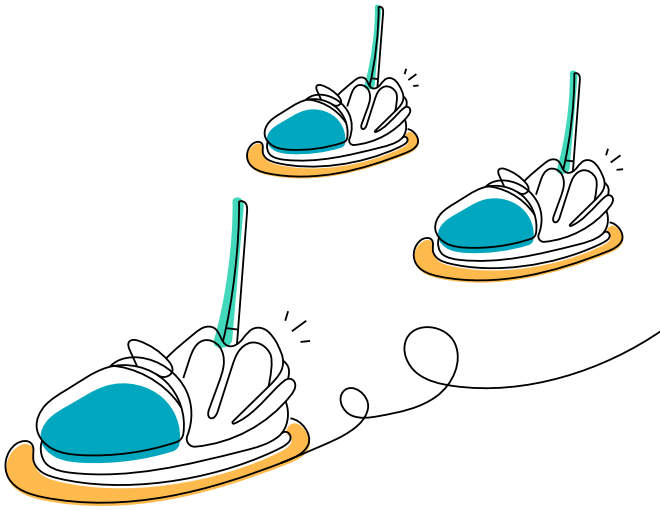
That's why so many B2B companies have hit a wall with traditional MQL-based demand generation efforts.

It's time to recognise that we're not marketing and selling to a lead. We're marketing and selling to an account. Lead-centric marketing isn't designed to handle accounts:

- It wastes time, budget, and effort filling the funnel with prospects that aren't associated with any target account.
- It can't map the relationships between the decision-makers and influencers within the account.
- It can't track the level of engagement of the entire account at any given time – so it misses important buying signals.
- It can't orchestrate interactions to deliver consistent messages to the entire account buying team.

It's called business-to-business, not business-to-lead. And that's why so many companies adopted an ABM approach.

Salespeople never talk about how many leads they've closed. They talk about how many accounts they've closed



An account-based experience

Sales has always used an account-based approach. And with the rise of ABM, the marketing team started to get onboard. But, by its very nature, traditional ABM focused on identifying valuable accounts and attempting to engage them, regardless of whether the time was right or if they were interested in hearing from you at all. And that's precisely the kind of customer experience buyers hate.

This is where account-based experience (ABX) comes in. It's all about engaging with business buyers with relevant messages, delivered in a trusted way and on their own terms.

ABX is a fundamental, customer-centric rethinking of how companies go-to-market. It's rooted in an intense focus on the customer at every stage of the buying cycle, using intelligent insights to know when and how to engage and what to say to each account. In a way, ABX is a specific discipline within customer experience (CX). CX has been all the rage, and for good reason: the impression your customers have of your brand as they move through the buyer's journey is the key driver of revenue, retention, and satisfaction. Businesses that invest in creating great experiences grow revenue 40% faster, improve retention by 70%, and increase customer lifetime value 1.6 times more than other companies (Forrester). ABX takes the principles from the best CX – trust, empathy, and relevance at every stage of the journey – and applies them to the account-based world. In fact, one of the fundamental principles of ABX is recognising that our buyers live in a world of information abundance and attention scarcity, making any form of interruption marketing ineffective. Instead, companies need to build trust with potential buyers, identify the magic moments when customers are open to engaging, and then orchestrate the perfect interactions across sales, marketing, and customer success teams.

The end of ABM?

ABX doesn't invalidate ABM. In many ways, ABX simply takes the best practices that have emerged around ABM and adds the critical concept of customer experience. Regardless of what you call it, an account-based go-to-market is simply the right way to approach B2B.

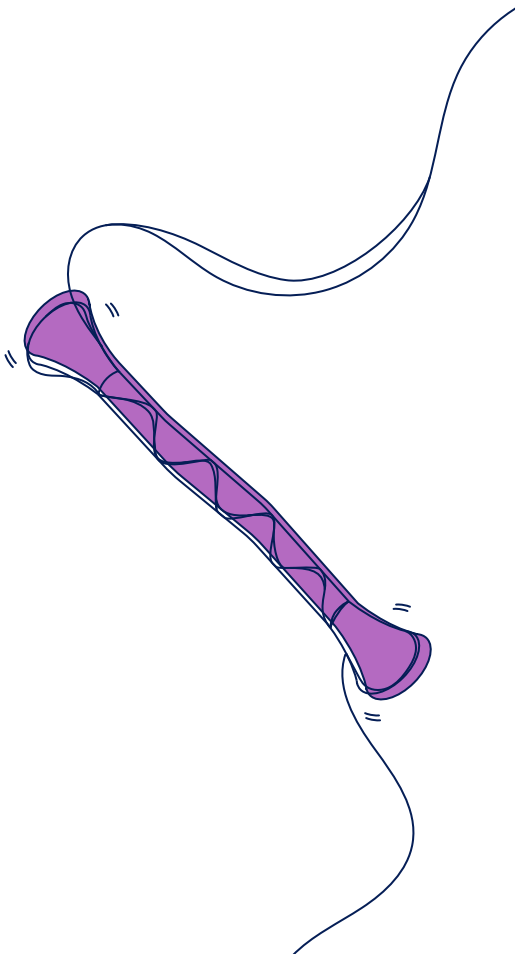
Attention scarcity

To say that modern buyers are overwhelmed with information is a cliché. And yet, it remains more true today than ever before. Waving the 'Content is King' banner, B2B companies have deluged our poor buyers with even more information: blogs, ebooks, webinars, product reviews, videos, emails, phone calls… The sheer quantity of information has become overwhelming, and information from suppliers, while appearing trustworthy, is often contradictory – which can actually hurt rather than help the chances of closing a sale.

Interruption marketing

Interruption marketing describes tactics that work only if they interrupt you to get your attention. Classic B2B examples include the cold call that interrupts you working on a proposal, the unwanted email in your inbox, or the flashy booth at a tradeshow. In each example, the marketer thinks his job is to create a call script, email copy, or booth gimmick that will make people pay attention. Of course, all the other marketers are also fighting to get the buyer's attention, and so the battle escalates. The result is a tragedy of the commons – when everyone tries to get the customer's attention, the customer gets a terrible experience, and nobody wins.

Challenges in capturing the modern buyer's attention



1. Buyers are harder to reach than ever

They don't want to be marketed to. They don't want to feel sold to. And they will let you know by opting out, tuning out, and tossing out any unwanted interruptions. They'll avoid forms and do everything they can to stay anonymous. Personally, I avoid putting accurate information onto a form since I know it'll just lead to unwanted emails and phone calls. And (admittedly) I take a perverse joy in hitting the spam button on unwanted sales outreach.

2. Buyers do their research before they talk to sales

While it's no longer news that buyers want to do their research online and anonymously before talking to sales – marketers have been talking about this trend for 15 years – it, nonetheless, remains as true as ever. The biggest change is that 10 years ago the vast majority of the research happened on our own websites so we could observe the behaviour. But today, buyers do more of their research on third-party websites – which is hidden to traditional marketing automation scoring.

3. Buyers spend less time with suppliers and more with each other

Gartner writes that "The ready availability of quality information through digital channels has made it far easier for buyers to gather information independently, meaning sellers have less access and fewer opportunities to influence customer decisions. In fact, Gartner research finds that when B2B buyers are considering a purchase, they spend only 17% of that time meeting with potential suppliers. When buyers are comparing multiple suppliers, the amount of time spent with any one sales rep may be only 5% or 6%."*

B2B buyers are typically 57% of the way to a buying decision before actively engaging with sales. 70% of buyers fully define their needs on their own before engaging with a sales representative, and 44% identify specific solutions before reaching out to a seller. 67% of the buyer's journey is now done digitally

*Gartner, 'New B2B Buying Journey & Its Implication for Sales', (2019), gartner.com/en/sales/insights/b2b-buying-journey

The form fill = too late

All this puts B2B companies in a remarkable quandary.

On the one hand, we want to respect our buyers and not interrupt them with unwanted outreach.

On the other, prospects are conducting much of their buying journey on their own, online and anonymously. If we wait for the prospect to fill out a Contact Me form, we've waited too long. The prospect has learned a lot, formed opinions, and may have a preferred vendor (likely not you) in mind. Or worse, a competitor closes the deal before you even have a chance to engage. Ouch.

*85% of business buyers say that the experience a company provides is as important as its products or services, and 57% have stopped buying from a company because a competitor provided a better experience**

Aligning GTM to the account journey = just right

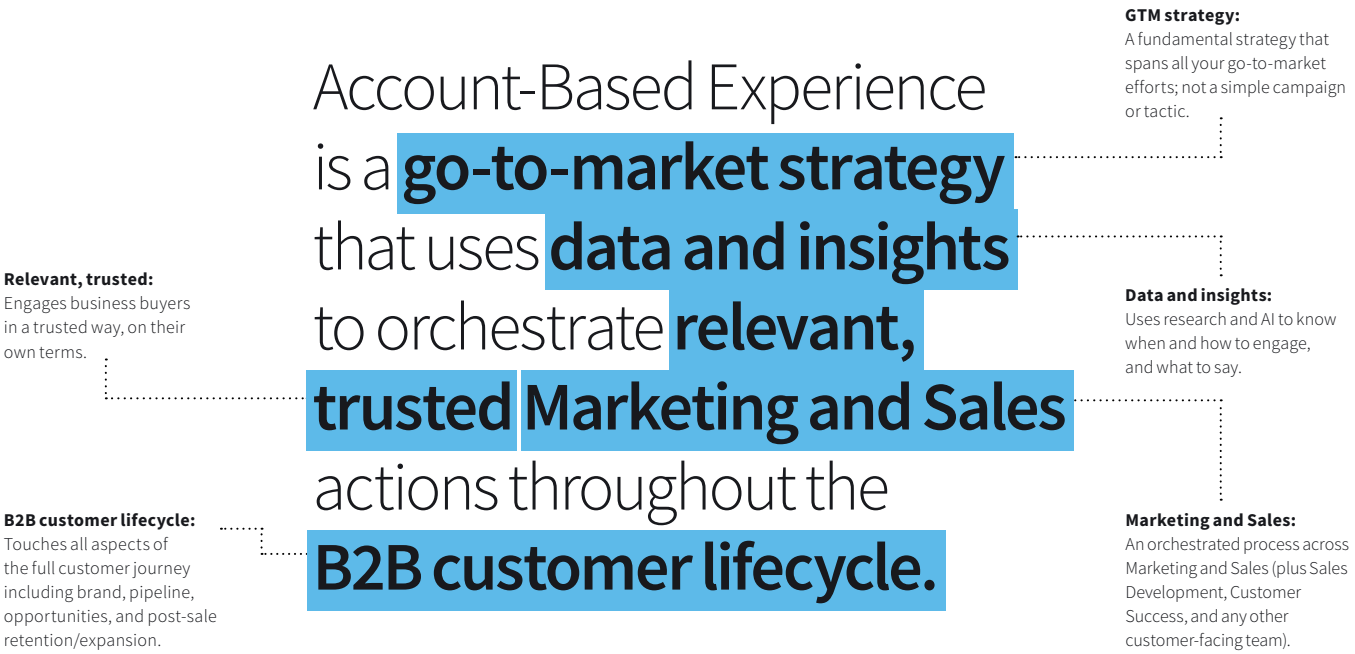
ABX resolves this dilemma by aligning your GTM efforts to the account journey. With ABX, you know where each account is in its buying process and so you can create the right experience for them each step of the way.

ABX lets us work with buying teams on their own terms: anonymously when they want to be, helpful and relevant when they're ready – and always based on trust. It's a much better customer experience and it delivers much better long-term results.



*Salesforce State of the Connected Customer (2020)

Account-based experience (ABX) defined



ABX is a GTM strategy that uses data and insights to orchestrate relevant, trusted marketing and sales actions throughout the B2B customer lifecycle

The benefit of ABX

The benefits of an account-based GTM approach are clear and well documented.

Zero waste

Focus your time and resources on accounts most likely to drive revenue. ABX is a super-efficient strategy that targets 100% of your time, budget, and effort on the named accounts your company decides have the greatest potential.

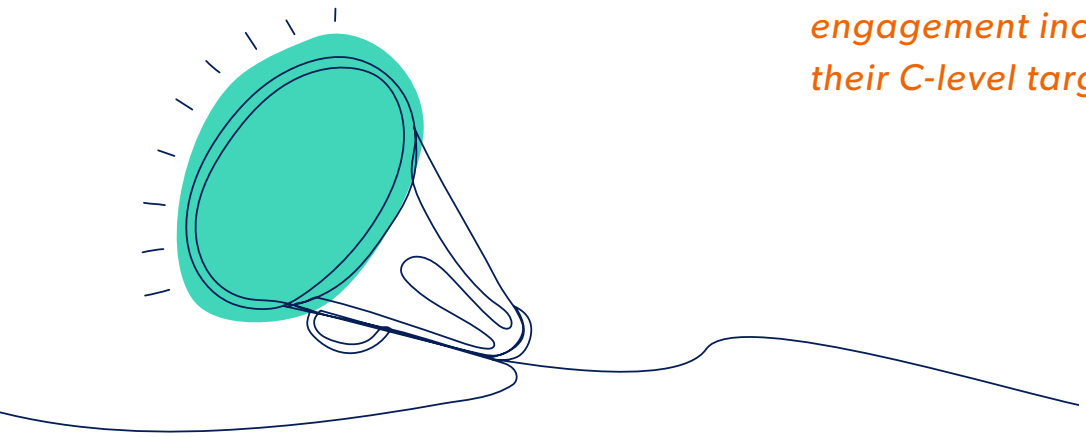
"ABM aspires to be 'zero-waste' marketing. It's a model that targets only the companies and contacts that are likely to buy your product and that sales has pre-committed to try to close"

Joe Chernov, CMO, Pendo

Much bigger wins

Big deals build big businesses. ABX consistently drives larger and better deals – those that tend to stick around longer and become even more valuable over time. And with an account-based strategy, you're more likely to have buy-in from a wider team, to lock out or constrain competitors, and to reach higher into the account. When ABX wins, it wins big. In a study released by the ABM Leadership Alliance, companies that implemented account-based strategies saw an increase of 171% in their average contract value (ACV).

SiriusDecisions Command Center™ data shows that 91% of respondents say deal size is larger for ABM accounts, and one in four say it is over 50% larger. It also found 30% of marketers that worked in an account-based manner reported greater than 100% engagement increase with their C-level targets

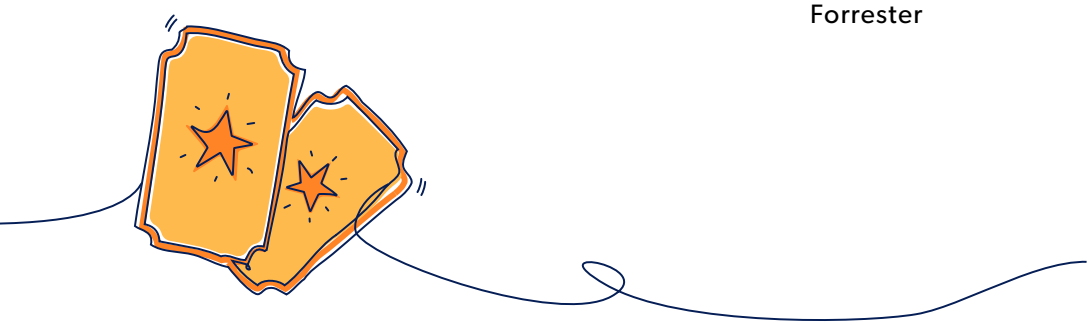


Better close rates

Increase your win percentage. Because it actively targets all of the buying influencers and decision-makers in an orchestrated way, the systematic discipline of an account-based GTM significantly outperforms the unaligned approaches of the past. The *SiriusDecisions 2017 State of Account-Based Marketing Study* found that 91% of responders said ABM accounts had a higher close rate, with 66% of responders reporting more than 20% better close rates.

Organisations report, on average, a 48% higher win rate from their account-based efforts, and create opportunities in 21% of target accounts.

TOPO



Drive post-sale expansion

Increase the lifetime value of your best accounts. Many companies get more revenue (and revenue growth) from current customers than from new ones. With large deals, it's all about land and expand. An account-based strategy applied to existing customers delivers smart, personalised account orchestration for a greater share of wallet and higher margin.

84% of marketers said ABM offers significant benefits to keeping and expanding existing client relationships.

Alterra GroupSiriusDecisions

Align marketing and sales

Tightly integrate your revenue teams. By definition, ABX requires marketing and sales to focus on the same accounts with clear and agreed-upon criteria, sharing information and orchestrating their interactions. Less friction. Better ROI.

Tighter alignment between marketing and sales is the primary value demonstrated from ABM today

Forrester

A better customer experience

Create the trusted, relevant experience customers demand. ABX focuses on engaging with buyers with the right approach for each account at each point in their journey. And it's coordinated, with all interactions synchronised across channels so you look like one company with a single, compelling story. Buyers appreciate that. 58% of marketers in the ITSMA and ABM Leadership Alliance's *2017 ABM Benchmark Study* said that ABM plays a major role in making their entire company more customer-centric.

"Rising customer expectations are the most disruptive trend in business today. Companies that differentiate their customer relationships on the basis of account-specific insights and responsiveness raise customer expectations and create competitive advantage"

IDC

"ABM delivers the highest return on investment of any B2B marketing strategy or tactic. Period"

ITSMA

Maturity matters! The most experienced ABM programmes are much more likely to drive significant improvement in key measures of ABM success. When asked what changes they have seen in these metrics that can be attributed to ABM, respondents reported significant improvements in these: branding, pipeline, relationship coverage, and revenue.

Qualitative benefits

Here's what the ITSMA says about the qualitative benefits of an account-based approach.

Customers

- Feel better understood from in-depth analysis.
- Understand vendor offerings, strategy, and solutions more broadly.
- Enjoy increased customer satisfaction.
- Experience a more tailored approach.
- Develop deeper partnership with vendor.
- Tend to position and sell vendor across the organisation.

Sales

- Earns status of trusted vendor and partner.
- Has richer conversations.
- Aligns better with customer needs.
- Uncovers new opportunities.
- Increases revenue, margin, and wallet-share.
- Stays on the same page with the rest of the team.

Marketing

- Aligns marketing and sales in a unified account strategy.
- Orchestrates coherent, relevant messages.
- Increases marketing ROI.
- Consistently tailors campaigns.
- Strengthens brand reputation.
- Secures more customer references.

Think big, but start small

Don't get intimidated. If you've been living in a lead-based world, adopting an account-based strategy may seem daunting. But just like when starting any new strategy, pursue an incremental approach – think big, but start slow and gradually increase your speed as you gain confidence and experience.

Establish: The onramp

When you start from zero, you'll probably start with a pilot to prove early success. In this initial phase, you're getting started with account-based efforts and putting the building blocks in place to set you up for longer-term success. Key activities might include identifying a specific list of accounts (usually for just a subset of reps) and tackling one or two initial use cases. (As we'll see, this might include top-of-funnel advertising to high-intent accounts, delivering engagement insights to sales, or running a marketing campaign with SDR follow-up.)

Operationalise: The merging lane

You've proven ABX success and are ready to take on more. The program is becoming established and understood and the revenue team is excited about progress and potential. Here, you add more accounts and create repeatable processes and best practices. Common use cases include identifying accounts, researching competitors, empowering Sales with account and individual engagement insights across multiple channels, and personalising the journey experience.

Grow: The through lane

Now you are fully in gear. Marketing and sales are fully aligned not only philosophically, but also in practice, and they're working to meet the same goals and objectives. You're now reaching out to your target accounts (which you've identified through predictive modeling, big data, and AI). And you are executing multi-channel plays according to journey stages. Success is measured by engagement and journey performance.

Optimise: The fast lane

At this point you're a pro with your ABX engine running on all cylinders. By now, you've pulled in your customer success team along with marketing and sales, so that your entire revenue team is running orchestrated campaigns. You're using attribution insights, personalising the website experience, and orchestrating plays for every stage of the account journey. When you've mastered a mature ABX practice – maybe within a year, maybe two – executing orchestrated account-based plays and campaigns will become second nature, and your revenue teams will wonder how you've ever lived without it.

Account-based or lead-based?

There's no rule that says you need to practice only an account-based approach or only traditional demand generation. Instead, think of it as a spectrum. On one end are companies selling only to the Fortune 100. The vast majority of their efforts are going to be account based. On the other end are companies selling into the small and mid-size business (SMB) market. The majority of their efforts are going to be focused on demand generation. Most likely, you're somewhere in the middle, so you'll want to balance the two strategies.

In fact, 64.9% of companies are currently using a mix of account-based and traditional demand generation programs (Demandbase ABM Outlook Survey 2018).

ABXpert advice: Megan Heuer, managing director, Winning By Design

Buyers don't want to be sold to

They want to solve their problem, and they're going to do whatever is necessary to get there. And while we marketers would often prefer they follow set stages, buyers never stick to their part of the script. They may step forward. They may step back. They do what they like. The question is, how can we architect a system that supports them given that?

First step, think in terms of accounts

When you start to think in terms of account-based, there's an evolution most organisations go through. It starts with marketing to accounts and then evolves into account-based marketing. Those two are not the same, of course. The first is when you simply have a list of accounts but you're still thinking in terms of lead volume. The latter is when you begin to adapt your organisation's behaviour to understand that account's intent and interests and then act to help them through that lens.

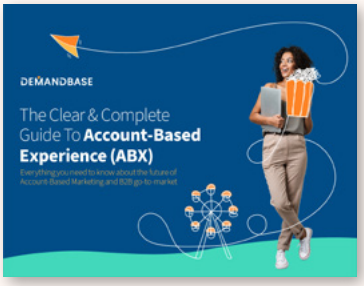
The future is account-based experiences

Account-based experiences take account-based marketing to its logical conclusion. ABX encapsulates everything pre- and post-sale. Because, when we separate those functions, they move in different directions and cause buying friction. When they're combined, everyone has a shared goal and it's easier to understand your customer or group of customers and support them. No matter how many loops they go in, it's always a good experience.

Questions to ask yourself

- Is our funnel built to accommodate non-linear buyers?
- Is our outreach designed to help or herd?
- Are we offering emails or experiences?

Want to keep reading?
You can check out the full ebook here.



About

B2B Marketing and Propolis

Powered by the community, for the community.

Established in 2004, B2B Marketing is now the number one go-to resource for B2B marketers across the globe.

Right from the start, we had a clear mission that remains as strong and clear today: to provide marketers at business brands with the tools, insight and inspiration they need to grow and succeed – as both individuals and businesses.

To do this, we need to continually evolve to make sure we are delivering what you need.

This is why Propolis was born – our exclusive community for B2B marketers.

We're proud to serve as the focal point for the B2B marketing sector, and to be a force for greater connectivity, enabling marketers and leaders to share experiences and learn from one another.

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B2B Marketing
Intelligence • Connection • Development

Demandbase

The biggest and fastest-growing companies in the world rely on Demandbase to drive their B2B go-to-market performance. We pioneered the ABM category nearly a decade ago, and today we lead the industry in B2B go-to-market.We realised that traditional ABM had limits. By its very nature, it didn't include Sales, and it focused on accounts regardless of whether the time was right. So, we led the way by introducing Account-Based Experience (ABX), a customer-centric rethinking of the account-based go-to-market that combines the engageability of inbound marketing with the precision of ABM.

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