ABM: a strategy, not a tool



Account-based marketing (ABM) is often compared to fishing with a spear rather than casting a net. This approach to winning new business and increasing the lifetime value of existing clients focuses budget and attention on key accounts that offer the highest potential for driving revenue growth.

With ABM, each key account is typically treated as a market of one. This means that the success of any ABM programme relies heavily on the ability of marketing, sales and other business units to manage effective **relationship building** and maintain high levels of **account awareness**.

Of course, taking an account-centric approach is not a new concept in marketing. It could even be argued that ABM is just another term for B2B marketing executed effectively (and we will touch on this in more detail later). However, there's no denying the fact that ABM has now become a hot topic in the marketing space. Forbes reports that 70% of B2B organisations are currently either adopting or planning to adopt an account-centric approach[1]; while Forrester research reveals that ABM has worked so well for companies during 2019, that 56% say they actively target 99 or fewer ABM accounts, compared to 47% in 2018[2].

As more businesses prioritise ABM initiatives, this is creating an excellent opportunity for organisations to modernise the way they go to market and manage client relationships. Other opportunities are emerging in the form of sophisticated new tools designed to support enterprises' ABM efforts – and while technology does have a role to play in supporting an efficient ABM programme, it's important for marketers to remember that ABM is more than just a tool. Rather, it's a holistic **business strategy** that uses well-chosen tools, channels and

processes to achieve a new level of client-focused collaboration between marketing, sales and other functions across the enterprise.

In this article, we look at how the increased focus on ABM impacts the business as a whole; and provide recommendations on how you can maximise the success of your ABM programme.

New approaches to demand generation

ABM targets resources towards business opportunities that are most likely to become long-term profitable customers, as well as existing accounts that offer revenue expansion potential. Therefore, in this environment, demand generation strategies are focused around identifying and nurturing key accounts with the highest potential value to the business; rather than meeting lead volume targets.

This requires a completely new approach to demand generation, which focuses on nurturing longer-term, sustainable business opportunities rather than casting the net wide to generate as many leads as possible to meet short-term lead volume targets.

Additionally, for ABM to be successful, marketers need to tailor their demand generation strategies to suit the requirements and solve the specific friction points of each key account. The more relevant and personalised these marketing efforts are, the more likely they are to lead to conversions.

Of course, as mentioned, these are approaches that many successful B2B marketers have believed in and relied on for years! Now, however, as the C-Suite and Board buy into the value of account-centric strategies, it is critical to get this right. It's important to understand that this is an approach that needs to be strategically targeted based on a solid understanding of the customer. And this requires much more work than investing in the latest ABM-related technology. A focus on support tools rather than strategy could lead to investment being misdirected and outcomes that don't meet leadership's expectations.

There's also an opportunity to garner enterprise-wide support

For ABM to work effectively, the strategy needs to cut across every part of the organisation; and all functions need to collaborate and support each other to ensure a shared vision and effort.

This is an opportunity for C-level executives from multiple business units to collaborate more closely with their counterparts to drive account-centric practices across every function. The goal is to create a cohesive, high-quality client experience – regardless of whether the individuals on each account speak to technical support, customer services, accounts payable, sales or marketing.

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Of course, sales and marketing are two critical teams that need to work very closely together on ABM strategies and processes. In fact, a complete rewiring of these two functions and their relationship may be necessary. Traditionally, approaches and incentive schemes have been different. But if the purpose of the ABM marketer is to grow sales, should sales and marketing not share strategies and KPIs? In the era of ABM, is it time for sales and marketing to merge into one function, as we discuss in this article? Research shows that marketing and sales teams that take a strategic and unified ABM approach are more likely to exceed their revenue goals than teams that are less focused on ABM – with an impressive 62% saying they can measure a positive impact since adopting this approach[3].

How should channel strategies change?

When choosing channels and tools to support the ABM strategy, it's essential to remember that, while advanced technologies can certainly help you to streamline processes and analyse data more efficiently, it's important not to focus on ABM technology at the expense of your broader ABM strategy. As Forrester puts it, "There's a dissonance between what marketers think customers want and what customers actually want. It isn't the result of poor intentions. Rather, the proliferation of new tools and the race to amass data has at time outpaced true customer understanding."[4]

To achieve "true customer understanding" – which lies right at the heart of any successful ABM strategy – it's important to focus on the following practices.

- **Gather actionable insights:**

You need channels that enable you to conduct robust pre-sales research, so you can uncover insights that allow you to identify and prioritise the most valuable accounts and customers. You also need to continue gathering insights throughout the account lifecycle and feed these back into the demand generation loop. The richer your information, the greater chance you have of personalising your ABM strategy for each account successfully.

- **Establish human connections:**

You need platforms that support human-to-human relationship building with the decision-makers and influencers on each account. This may involve an increased focus on voice contact, face-to-face meetings and bespoke events where agendas are tailored to each specific account.

- **Engage in deeper account management:**

Account managers need to build relationships across the whole account and have a deep

understanding of each area within the business – including knowledge of these functions' unique needs and interests. This usually calls for regular on-site visits and one-on-one contact so that account managers can live and breathe each influencer and decision-maker's challenges and issues.

- **Be agile in the way you operate**

Pre-scripted messaging does not work in the ABM environment. Make sure you invest in communication channels that allow you to tailor your messaging in real-time as you engage with each client or individual on the account. You may also need to upskill your marketing team or outsource to an experienced ABM partner.

New ways of measuring marketing ROI

Because the ABM buying cycle is non-linear and there are often multiple individuals involved on one account, your organisation may need to rethink the way marketing value is measured. This involves looking not just at the number of inbound leads generated, but at the extent to which your marketing team has created business opportunities and helped to generate revenue by optimising conversions.

It's time to measure marketing performance on your team's ability to lead higher value customers and accounts through the funnel. In this context, vanity metrics – such as social media followers, webinar attendance and unique page views – won't hold much value. Why? Because while these metrics certainly indicate interest, in the B2B sales cycle they do not necessarily translate into revenue.

The road ahead

When you think about it and strip ABM down to its essential goals, the account-centric approach is really just B2B marketing done exceptionally well. In fact, many forward-thinking marketers believe that the terms B2B and ABM will merge or even fall by the wayside. According to Sangram Vajre, chief evangelist for Terminus, "Two years from now, there won't be ABM, there will just be better marketing and sales."

That said, right now, with ABM in the spotlight, there's an exceptional opportunity for marketers to align more closely with sales and convince senior leadership that account-centric marketing is the way forward – and a strategy that requires an entirely new level of support across the organisation. Ideally, it's an opportunity for everyone, from the top down, to unite and focus on the customers that matter most.

As we said earlier, true customer understanding is essential to any successful ABM strategy. As a highly personal channel, telemarketing enables you to gather that deep level of account insight to inform an effective strategy. Through pre-sales research and ongoing dialogue,

you can build an understanding of your priority accounts and gain the trust of senior decision-makers and influencers within those organisations.

If you need to strengthen your account-based marketing resources, get in touch to find out how we can help.

[1] https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesagencycouncil/2019/06/19/abm-how-to-compete-when-everyone-has-the-same-strategy/

[2] https://go.forrester.com/blogs/abm-helps-b2b-marketers-produce-better-revenue-results/

[3] https://go.forrester.com/blogs/abm-helps-b2b-marketers-produce-better-revenue-results/

[4] https://go.forrester.com/marketing-strategies/

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Hopefully this article will have inspired you to think a bit more about telemarketing and the value it can bring to your business. For more information on our services visit our website, or give us a call to discuss your requirements and how The Telemarketing Company can help support your sales and marketing strategy.

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