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The Buyer's Guide

Five questions worth asking ABM platform vendors



FOREWORD

Who is this guide for?

This guide is designed for senior marketing professionals who are assessing the suitability of ABM platforms for their organisation.

What you'll learn in this guide

In this guide you'll discover some of the key elements to look out for when choosing an ABM platform. We'll highlight five questions that all prospective buyers should ask ABM platform vendors. This buyer's guide discusses why these questions are important, and the kind of answers you might hope to hear in return.

1. Where will my intent data come from?
2. How good is your AI-based account prioritisation?
3. How does your platform deal with orchestration?
4. Does your platform offer full-funnel automation?
5. How personal is your personalisation?

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INTRODUCTION

Marketers are rapidly adopting account-based marketing (ABM).

According to one recent survey, 61% of B2B marketers across all industries have moved beyond experimentation to run ABM programmes as an established part of their marketing mix.[1] Marketers running ABM campaigns typically report measurable improvements in the strength of customer relationships, pipeline growth and revenue per account.[2]

As a mainstream strategy, ABM traces its origins back to the mid-2010s. At a basic level, ABM grew out of a desire to align marketing and sales more closely, and to create more personalised marketing programmes that really resonate with prospects.

76% of companies
say that ABM delivers higher ROI than other types of marketing

55% report
improved revenue using ABM

[1] Demand Gen Report, 2021 ABM Benchmark Study (October 2021)

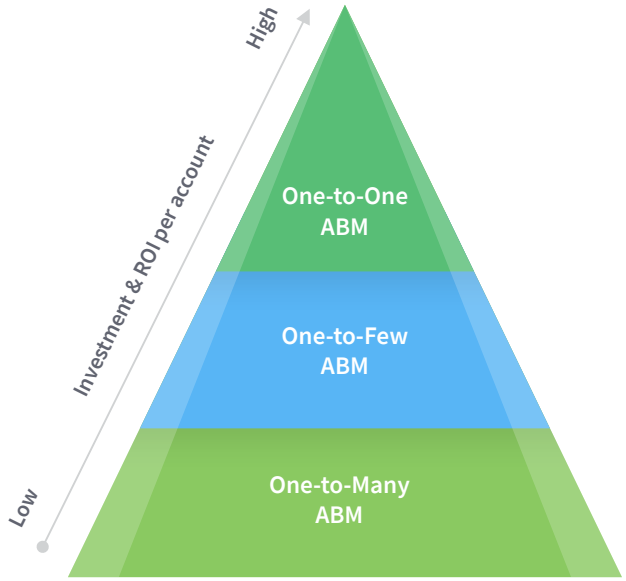
[2] ITSMA and ABM Leadership Alliance, Rethinking ABM for the Next Opportunity: 2020 ABM Benchmark Study (November 2020)

Broadly speaking, marketers deploy ABM in three ways

One-to-one campaigns that focus on the buying committee within a very high value account in a highly customised fashion.

One-to-few campaigns, in which marketers focus their efforts on a cluster of accounts that share common pain points that can be addressed by similar solutions (e.g. the need for infrastructure modernisation in the public sector).

One-to-many ABM campaigns: higher volumes and lower levels of customisation, but still targeted (for example, a campaign describing the benefits of business process automation in service industries).

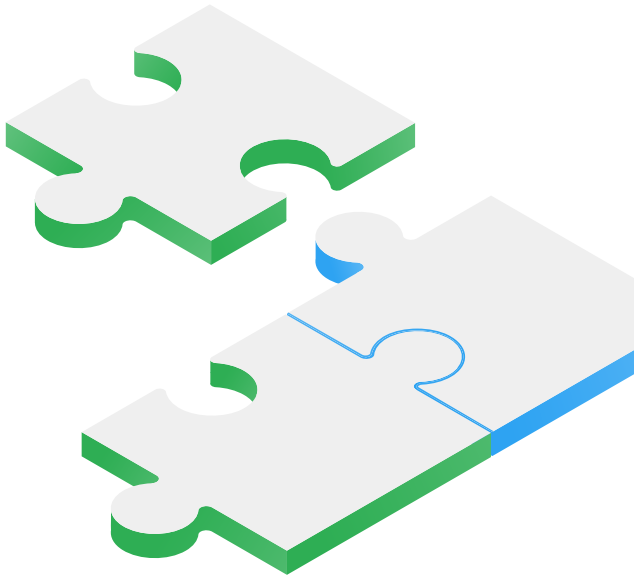


The approaches to ABM your team adopts will depend partly on the nature of your business.

For example, a manufacturer of anti-virus software probably won't be undertaking many one-to-one campaigns. By the same measure, a vendor of quantum computing hardware probably won't be targeting their audience via a one-to-many campaign.

One way of thinking about ABM platforms involves focusing on the key characteristic of ABM: a close working relationship between sales and marketing. ABM platforms reflect this: they are typically built to integrate closely with martech platforms like Marketo and sales/CRM platforms like Salesforce. Their single most important function is sales activation: handing off appropriately-nurtured leads to the right sales people, at the right time.

The ABM platforms we discuss in this buyer's guide typically come into their own as a way of efficiently managing and orchestrating one-to-few and one-to-many campaigns, where the accounts are numerous, the channels are multiple and ROI depends to a great extent on efficient execution.



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The Growing Need for ABM Platforms

Many organisations start off using their existing marketing automation software to manage early-stage ABM campaigns. As ambitions expand, the functionality offered by dedicated ABM platforms starts to look attractive.

The ability to orchestrate campaigns across multiple channels often becomes the most pressing need. Without this capability, marketers are limited to the reach of their email lists or advertising channels. On their own, neither of these channels is sufficient to engage today's large and complex buying groups.

Typically, another emerging requirement is the need to comb through very large prospect lists, rapidly selecting specific accounts for inclusion in specific campaigns. Successful ABM campaigns rely heavily upon the ability to identify and include accounts that are likely to purchase solutions. There are two ways of selecting accounts for ABM campaigns: manually, or AI and machine learning. AI is much faster and less error-prone, and it produces better results.

When your marketing organisation commits to an ABM platform, it's important that you and your team understand the implications fully. To maximise the value you generate from your investment, it is particularly important to understand the differences between the available platforms in a number of key areas.



QUESTION 1

Where will my intent data come from?

ABM platforms offer more than execution. Most come with a licence to use intent data to detect buying signals from specific accounts.

Intent data reveals your organisation's hidden sales funnel. These are users and organisations that haven't yet spoken to a sales rep, but who are showing signs of self-directed buying. The efficiency of ABM campaigns depends on your ability to find and make sense of these signals.

Some of these behaviours will be familiar: they're the things that you know customers have done in the past prior to a purchase (visited your website, attended an event and so on). Increasingly, however, ABM practitioners are finding ways to add new intent signals to the criteria they use to select accounts for campaigns. Better intent data makes for better campaign results.

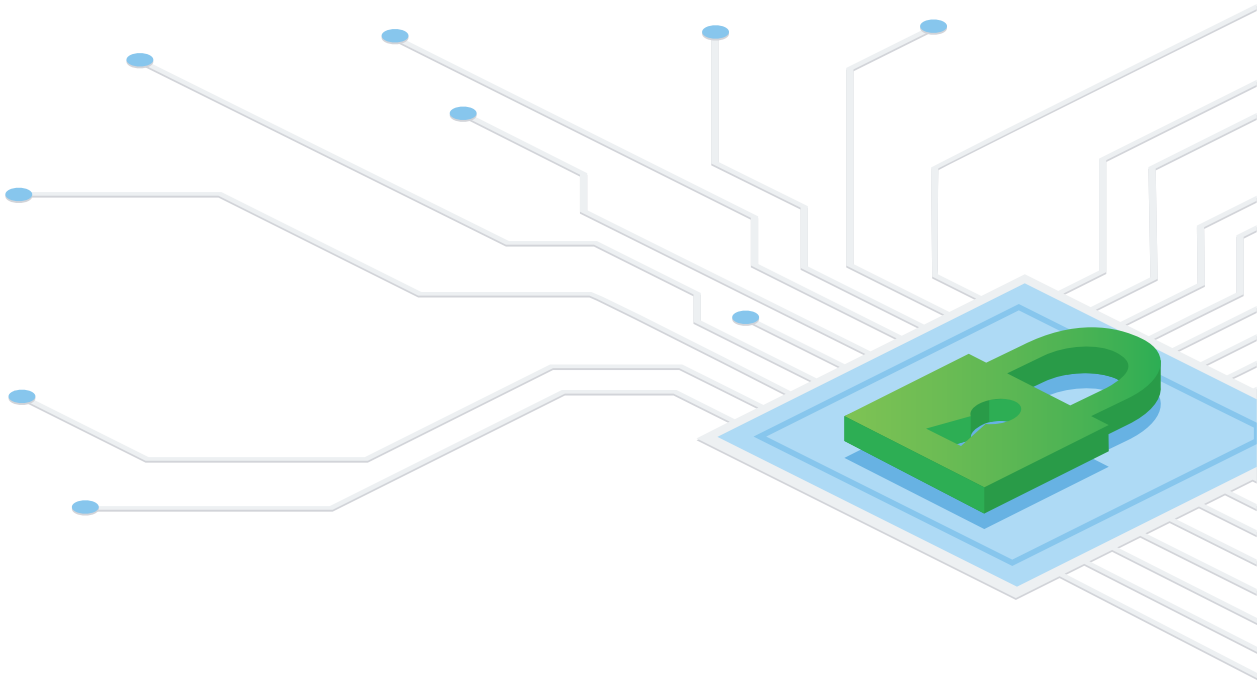


When we talk about intent data, it's important to recall the context.

On a global basis, the marketing industry is headed down a one-way street toward enhanced data privacy. The principles behind GDPR and CCPA are inspiring a proliferation of similarly-configured national data protection regimes.

This shift to prioritise privacy is reducing the demand for intent data derived from non-consented tracking (for example, bidstream data acquired by scraping IPs and URLs from display advertising bidding logs). Under next-generation data privacy laws, these sources won't stand up to scrutiny.

Gradually, sources like these are drying up, or are increasingly unavailable for use outside North America. Taking their place are privacy-first data sources, which now provide the bulk of intent data globally.



Today, the largest sources of privacy-first intent data are media organisations that require readers to register for access to high-value content.

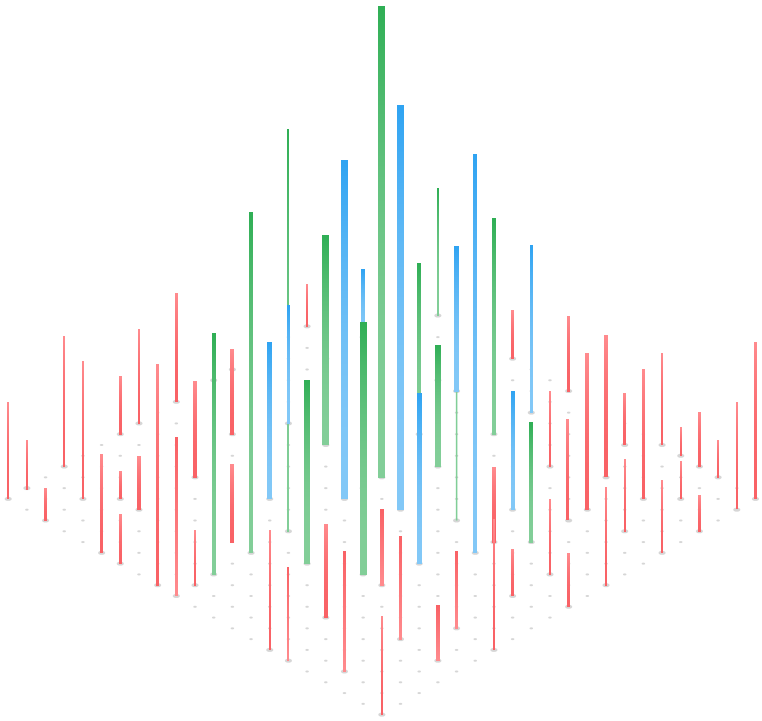
This is human-verified data. Rather than being scraped or captured, often without the knowledge of the user, it is created when decision-makers proactively subscribe for access to content and attend events. In general, this means that the signals of intent contained in the data are more reliable. For obvious reasons, reliable signals of intent tend to result in better outcomes.

When your organisation is examining the potential of an ABM platform, it is worthwhile seeking out vendors who offer intent data that is:

- Collected from multiple sources where people have opted in or subscribed
- Multi-language
- Privacy-first

Our Recommendation

Buyers should ask all vendors of ABM platforms where they can acquire high quality intent data to use on their platform.



QUESTION 2

How good is your AI-based account prioritisation?

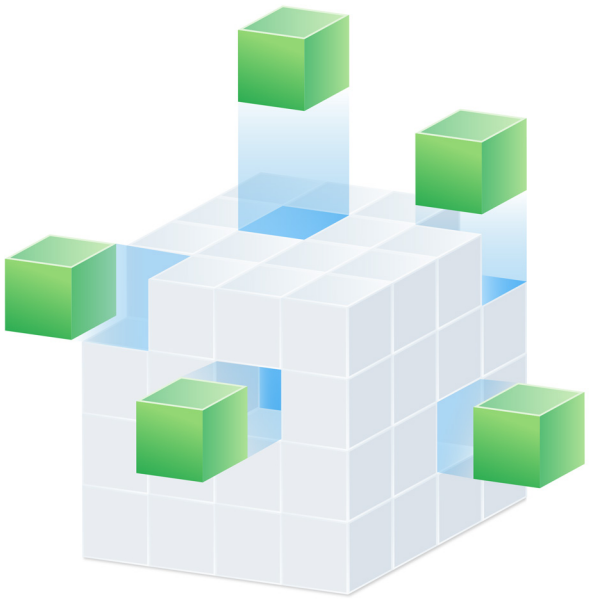
Having intent data is one thing. Making it actionable is something else. Accounts – plus their associated long tail of behavioural data – need to be scored so that your team can understand where each account sits within the funnel. Which accounts are warmest and require approaching first? Which should receive targeted advertising?

Prioritising intent data in this way is one of the more challenging tasks facing account based marketers.

Several ABM platforms require ABM teams to rely upon manual account scoring. Human beings rely on heuristics bounded by experience and memory. (Neither of which is 100% reliable.) Our judgements incite doubt: are your marketers prioritising the right accounts on the right criteria? How do they know they have made relevant choices? In the presence of a large list, manual account prioritisation can also be a slow process.

Our Advice

Manual account prioritisation is worth avoiding at all costs.



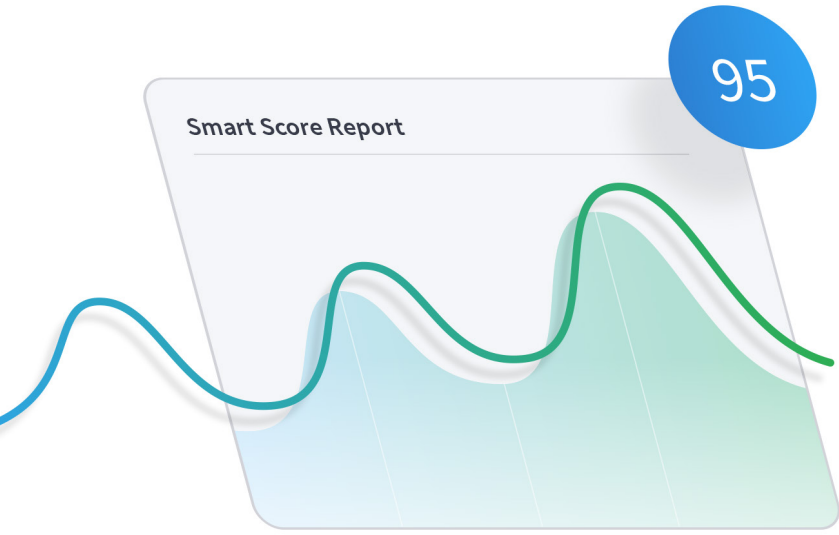
The alternative to manual prioritisation is AI (in ABM circles, the expression is typically used interchangeably with predictive analytics).

AI-powered account prioritisation tools come built into some ABM platforms. These tools analyse large prospect lists, tracking historical behaviour at contact and account level and looking for variances in behavioural signals. (Are search patterns generated by the account on Google different now, compared to 12 weeks ago?) Prospective buyers of ABM platforms should look for functionality that can allocate accounts automatically to a nurture cycle or even directly to sales if buying signals are sufficiently intense. AI account prioritisation tools should also allow users to calibrate the system by telling it to uprate the value of specific content or interaction types as required.

Instead of applying human heuristics, the ability to ingest all of the data at scale and then run simulations to discover the major points of difference between account groups will transform your ABM strategy.

Our Recommendation

Ask ABM platform vendors what's unique about their implementation of AI for account prioritisation. Although there are some differences between rival implementations of AI for account prioritisation, in reality, the differences are not substantial.



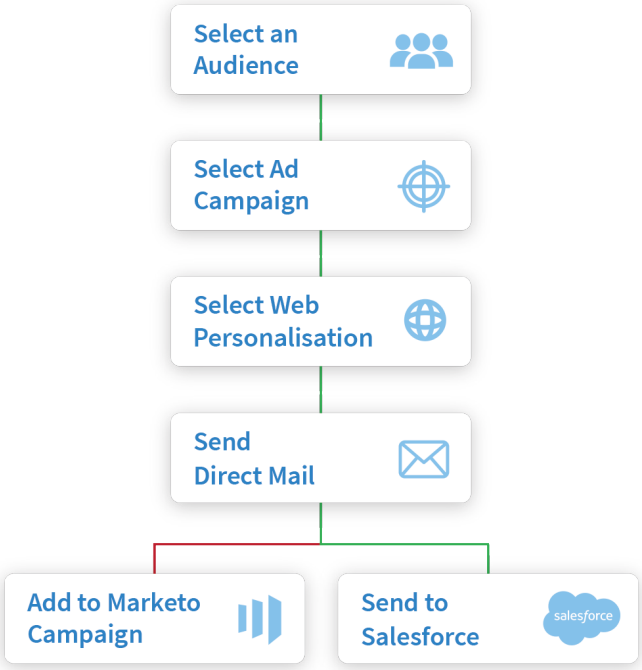
QUESTION 3

How does your platform deal with orchestration?

Orchestration is the ability to manage a cadence of outbound communication in an integrated way across different channels (for example, email, LinkedIn and digital advertising) as part of one or more ABM campaigns.

You will want to avoid ABM platforms with poor or limited orchestration functionality for at least three reasons.

1. Shifting data between fragmented applications is time-consuming and error-prone.
2. The inability to aggregate everything on a single pane of glass means it takes longer to see the big picture.
3. Cross-channel orchestration allows you to run management reports at the drop of a hat.



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Good orchestration is challenging to implement within an ABM platform. But it vastly improves the efficiency of ABM operations.

Do look for...

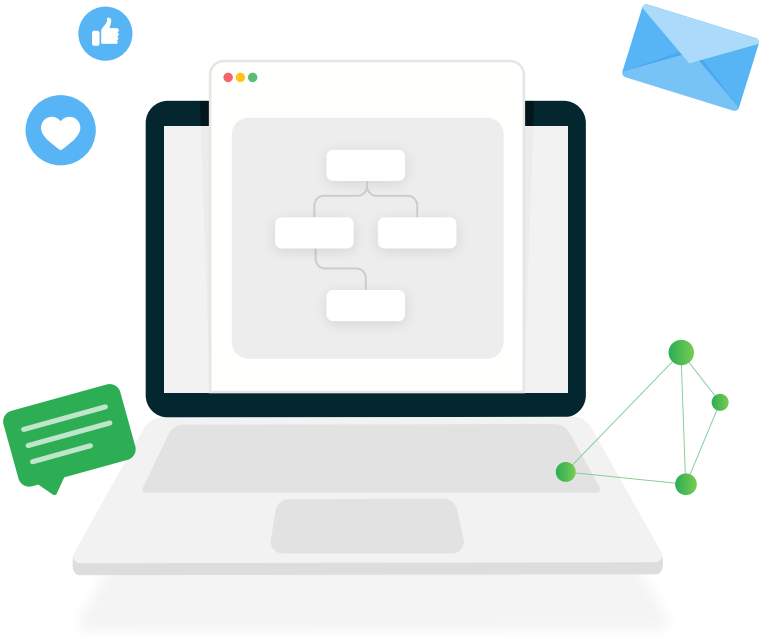
- A single pane of glass, a single UI, from which you can control everything: LinkedIn, email, web, chat and sales coordination.
- The ability to compile reports detailing cross-channel engagement with only a few keystrokes.

Try to avoid...

- Any need for manually-integrated reporting
- ABM platforms that require you to purchase third party add-on tools

Our Recommendation

If you want your ABM campaign managers to become as efficient and productive as possible, spend time looking at the options for orchestration offered by platforms. Great orchestration makes a big difference to outcomes.



QUESTION 4

Does your platform offer full-funnel automation?

Conversions are typically the result of multiple touches, perhaps as many as eight or nine as your leads make their way down the sales funnel.

Your ABM campaign managers need the ability to set up in advance fully-automated customer journeys using drag-and-drop functionality. For each step, from the start to the end of the customer journey, they should be able to specify a required action (send a specific piece of content, an email, schedule a sales call etc.)

In addition, your ABM team should be allowed to pre-configure journeys for a wide range of scenarios, including, for example, accounts that need to start their journey at the top or the of the funnel, for leads that are net new or will be cross-sold, or that are destined to become part of a vertical industry campaign. ABM managers also need the ability to reconfigure these templated journeys rapidly so that optimisation becomes continuous.



The ability to oversee all this activity from a single pane of glass makes for outsized productivity improvements.

The general rule is that vendors need to put in the hard yards if their software is going to provide a great user experience that maximises efficiency. However, unified UIs remain a rarity in the ABM market. Too often, campaign managers find themselves having to switch screens incessantly, pushing data into different systems and pulling reports back out again.

This lack of integration means campaigns take longer to set up, and your ABM team has to become expert at getting different systems to play nicely together.

You want to be able to maximise the time your team spends thinking like marketers, and minimise the time they need to spend thinking like technologists.

Our Recommendation

Look for solutions that allow your team to do what you hired them for – on a single pane of glass. Look for full-funnel automation, as well as the ability to course correct rapidly mid-campaign.



QUESTION 5

How personal is your personalisation?

Everyone knows that ABM is about personalisation. But when you run a one-to-many campaign involving thousands of accounts, how personal can you get?

By using intelligent automation, you can go further than most. One place it's worth examining for the use of automation is the moment of sales handover.

Our Recommendation

Ask ABM vendors about how they are using intelligent automation to enhance personalisation in one-to-many ABM campaigns.

Platforms offering account-specific landing pages with a private URL simplify the job of sales teams following up successful campaigns. Account-specific landing pages can be triggered into existence by an automated routine at the point of handover. Ideally, each one contains everything that the buyer and the seller require to close the deal, including next-step content, previously-viewed assets, sales contact details and a book-a-meeting facility.

This kind of intelligent automation holds the key to personalisation at scale.



CONCLUSION

The vast majority of marketers worldwide are now trialling or fully exploiting the power of ABM. For the reasons we've highlighted, many are migrating to a platform specifically engineered to manage ABM operations.

Any ABM platform is better than no ABM platform. But selecting a platform that maximises efficiency and delivers superior results can be a challenge. Differences in functionality and data availability that might seem minor at first can translate into substantial differences in outcomes.

We have assembled this buyer's guide to shed some light on these differences. We hope the answers you receive to the questions we've posed will help you to make the right choice for your organisation.

If you're interested to learn how Triblio can enhance your ABM strategy, get in touch with one of our ABM experts.

Request a Demo

Triblio Product Overview

IDG Triblio's Account-Based Marketing (ABM) platform orchestrates marketing and sales campaigns at every stage of the purchase journey. In a single platform, IDG Triblio combines account-based advertising, web personalisation, and sales activation features to orchestrate campaigns across multiple channels.

These campaign tools and analytics run on a proprietary AI-powered purchase intent engine that scores the level of interest each account has in making a purchase.

