

ABM Census:

Where B2B marketers are at,
and where they're heading



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SECTION 1

Foreword



David Rowlands,
senior editor,
B2B Marketing

If you haven't heard us beating the drum of ABM for the past few years now, where have you been? Case study after case study; expert after expert; results after results. They all demonstrate one thing: ABM works. Through ABM, marketers can see greater success in targeting super high-value accounts; they can ensure better retention of their best customers; and they continue to grow their highest-value accounts.

Of course, ABM nirvana and the actual reality of the B2B marketing landscape are unlikely to perfectly align. In fact, we at B2B Marketing may even be guilty of assuming everyone loves and adores ABM,

when there's some marketers out there who've never even heard of it (for shame!).

Well, with that in mind, we've surveyed over 100 client-side B2B marketers to establish:

- › Where they're at when it comes to ABM. Are they mature, or just learning the ropes?
- › The primary driver behind their decision to run with an ABM programme.
- › The peripheral benefits of their ABM programmes.
- › The challenges they face, and how they're overcoming them.

Although this report shows something of a gap when it comes to the expectations and reality of ABM, when compared with the results of last year's survey, it also demonstrates that there has been steady progress on the road to ABM mastery. While the road might be bumpy and full of pot-holes and barriers, it's good to see that marketers are making progress on their journey.

SECTION 2

Building successful marketing relationships with sales



Gareth Clark,
EMEA managing director,
Just Global

Sales and marketing alignment is the foundation of any successful ABM programme. This has been said so often that one would think it hardly needs re-stating, but the results of this year's *ABM Census* suggest that aligning the two is easier said than done.

A third of respondents (33%) said their biggest challenge in implementing ABM was a lack of sales and marketing alignment, but many of the other hurdles they identified have the same origin. The absence of deep account insight, which a good sales team will have in abundance, was cited as a problem by almost half (49%). Just over a third (37%) bemoaned the absence of planning and due diligence, and 33% said they lacked a shared strategy – both of which result from a lack

of alignment between these stakeholder groups.

This may be due to the relative immaturity of much ABM activity. 50% say they have been practising ABM for less than a year, and only 6% say their programmes have achieved full maturity. As a result, what many would consider to be true ABM – delivering content with bespoke propositions based on detailed customer insight – remains a minority pursuit carried out by less than a quarter of respondents (24%).

Despite all of this, a staggering 82% say that they are planning to increase their ABM activities. However, the concern must be that, without the full engagement of the sales function, many ABM programmes will fail to deliver on the promises marketers make on their behalf.

Speak the language of sales like you know what it means

This problem exists even though ABM is proven to deliver against key sales objectives: almost a third (33%) of marketers said ABM served to accelerate sales cycles and 27% said this activity increased retention. The real surprise is that these are unintended consequences – only

6% and 4% set out to achieve these outcomes. In fact, the only result that fell short of its intended mark was the one they most wanted – new business.

Clearly, there is a disconnect between the value that marketing claims for ABM and the value it creates for sales – which may go some way to explaining the lack of alignment between the two functions.

Perhaps the answer lies in playing to ABM's strengths, rather than its weaknesses. For both pipeline acceleration and retention, sales teams are more likely to have the relationships in place to generate the necessary account insights, and it should be much easier to arrive at a shared set of objectives. Once the programme has been set up, is working effectively and proving its value to sales, ABM activity can then set its sights on net new business – always a higher bar to clear.

So, looking towards 2022, let's hope that more marketers can frame their ABM activity in a manner that can be readily understood by sales – building the relationships with this critical stakeholder group that will benefit both parties enormously.

SECTION 3

ABM objectives: Starting with 'why?'

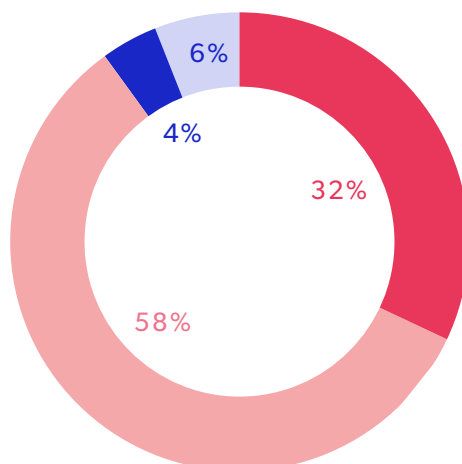
Let's start, as is the fashion, with 'why.' Our first set of questions established high level goals, approaches and the outlook for the future of ABM.

Why are marketers eschewing the wide-net approach and going elephant hunting instead? For most, it's for one of two reasons. Over half (58%) of our respondents said the main aim of their ABM activities was to win new accounts, while just over a third (32%) aim to grow existing accounts. Far fewer do it to improve client retention (4%), while a handful practise ABM to accelerate the sales cycle (6%). Interestingly, when we conducted this survey last year, significantly more marketers were using ABM to move leads more quickly through the sales cycle. So, why the change of tack?

3.1. Reality versus expectations

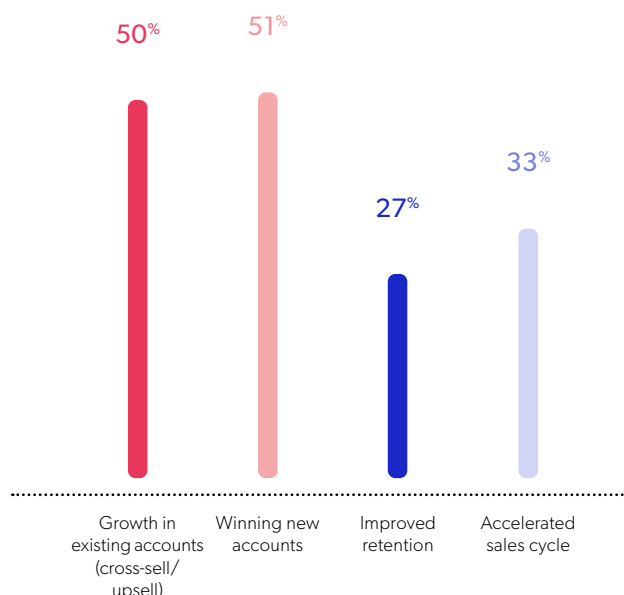
Reality rarely matches up with expectation; not in the age of Instagram. So, to strip back the filter, we asked our respondents about the benefits they've actually seen from their programmes, as opposed to what they set out to achieve. Just as a light bulb emits heat as well as light, it seems a percentage of every marketer's ABM strategy will add benefits beyond its intended purpose. While only 6% of marketers intended to accelerate sales cycles with ABM, in reality, almost a third (33%) say this was a consequence of their efforts. Similarly, only 4% set out to increase retention through ABM, and yet, a huge 27% experienced this result. In fact, the only result that fell short of its intended mark was the one they most wanted: new business.

WHICH OF THE
FOLLOWING IS THE
MAIN AIM OF YOUR
ABM PROGRAMME?



- To grow existing accounts (cross-sell/upsell)
- To win new accounts
- To improve retention
- To accelerate the sales cycle

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING BENEFITS HAVE YOU SEEN FROM YOUR ABM PROGRAMME?



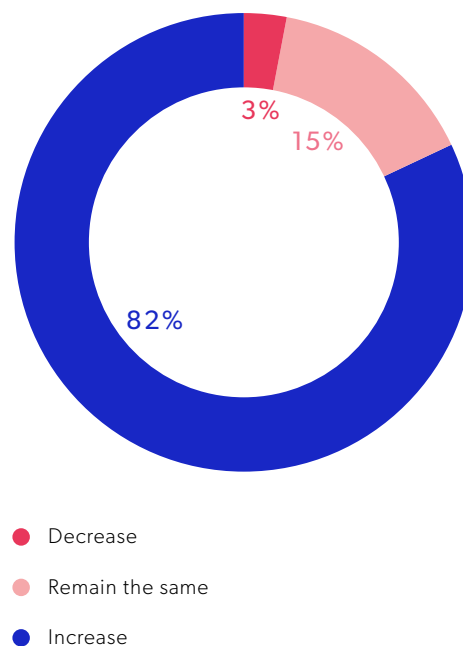
This disconnect between expectations and reality could speak to a lack of maturity in the average ABM model. After all, the more refined the process, the more predictable the results – generally speaking. So, we asked our respondents how long they’ve deployed ABM operationally within their businesses. 50% said they’ve been practising ABM for less than a year. Given the fact the average B2B sales cycle is around 100 days, perhaps it’s not such a surprise that many marketers’ ABM strategies are still a work in progress.

3.2. The growing momentum

On the flip side, many marketers are getting into their stride with ABM. Some 18% of our respondents have been practising ABM for one to three years, 9% have been operating for three to five years, and 6% can boast an ABM strategy of over five years old. Taking a quick look in the rear-view mirror shows how quickly this practice is still growing in popularity.

Just last year, only 39% of marketers were in their first 12 months of operating ABM, compared to this year’s 50%. Back then, just 8% had been doing it longer than three years. Now? That’s almost doubled to 15%. Indeed, when we asked marketers about their plans for the coming 12 months, a staggering 82% said they plan to increase their ABM activities, 15% said it will remain the same, and just 3% plan to decrease.

IN THE NEXT 12 MONTHS, WHAT DO YOU EXPECT WILL HAPPEN WITH YOUR ABM ACTIVITY?



3.3. Highlights from this section:

- › ABM is still gathering momentum. Compared to last year, more marketers are entering every stage of ABM maturity – more are starting out, and more are fine-tuning.
- › What ABMers set out to achieve doesn't always match up with what they actually achieve. Improved client retention and accelerated sales cycles are the most common unintended results of ABM, which points to an immaturity in processes and strategy.
- › Marketers are going all-in on ABM: a phenomenal 82% plan to increase their ABM activity over the next 12 months.

What ABMers set out to achieve doesn't always match up with what they actually achieve



SECTION 4

Investment, scale and tech

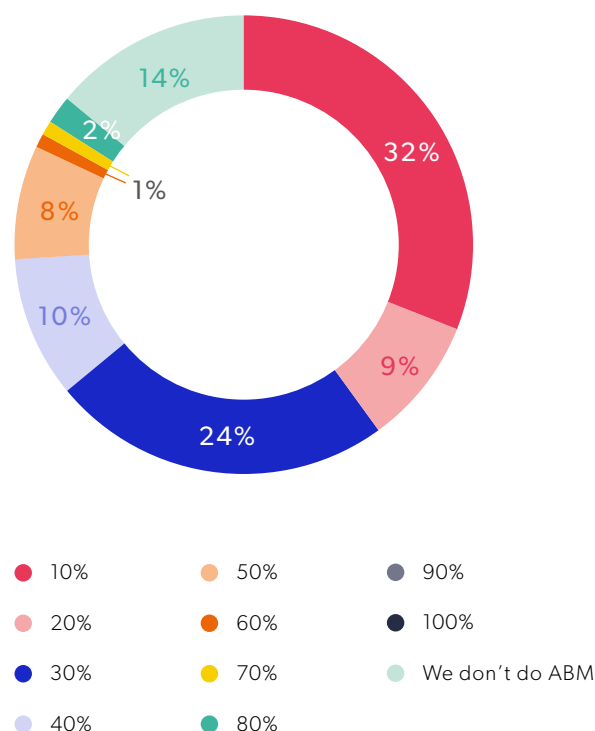
In section four, we sharpen our pencil and get down to the details – where's marketing's investment in ABM going, and what returns are marketers seeing?

Clearly, B2B has a capacious appetite for ABM, but, with a backdrop of economic uncertainty throughout Covid-19 and Brexit, are marketers tightening their belts? In short, no; not at all. A whopping 68% are increasing their ABM budget next year, with a further 25% planning to keep it the same.

Taking a step back to look at the bigger picture, what stake does all of this have on the wider marketing budget? It'll come as an interesting insight to those considering launching an ABM programme to know that between 10 and 30% budget allocation to ABM is the most common to marketers. Though a considerable 18% devote between 40 and 50% of their budget to the practice.

Very few marketers allocate beyond 60% of their budgets towards ABM. Our advice? Start small and work your way up as your programme matures and proves itself viable. Overall, this level of investment matches up with our findings around planned increases in activity over the coming 12 months, but ABM comes in many shapes and sizes, so where's the focus?

APPROXIMATELY SPEAKING, WHAT PERCENTAGE OF YOUR MARKETING BUDGET ARE YOU SPENDING ON ABM?



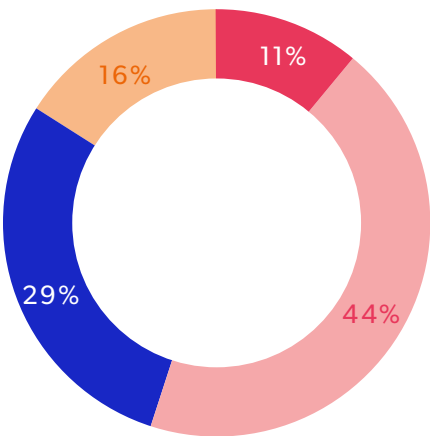
4.1. ABM for the few, not the many

When we asked our respondents about which flavour of ABM they’re investing in (one-to-one, one-to-few, or one-to-many), one thing became instantly clear: marketers are increasing their budget across the board, but some areas are more popular than others. 55% are increasing their investment in one-to-one; 59% are increasing their investment in one-to-few; and 48% are increasing their investment in one-to-many.

Although just 3% of decreasing their investment in one-to-few, and just 8% are decreasing their investment in one-to-many, a significant 16% are significantly decreasing their investment in one-to-one ABM.

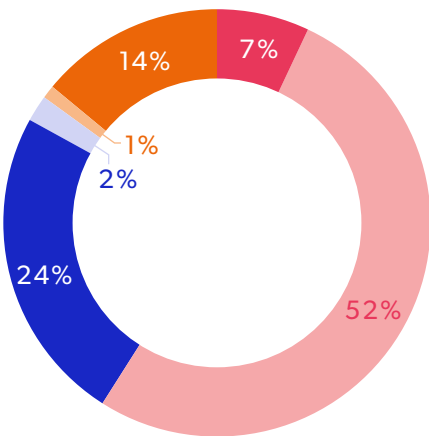
Although one-to-many was recently heralded as the next big thing, it seems to have cooled off slightly – at least for now. Perhaps the novelty’s run off, or maybe we’ve realised its limitations? Unlikely. It’s probably just about reaching the peak of the ‘inflated expectations’ phase of Gartner’s hype cycle. (Prediction: next year’s results will expose a trough in interest, then it’ll reach its ‘enlightenment’ phase in the second half of the decade).

WHAT’S HAPPENING TO YOUR ONE-TO-ONE ABM INVESTMENT?



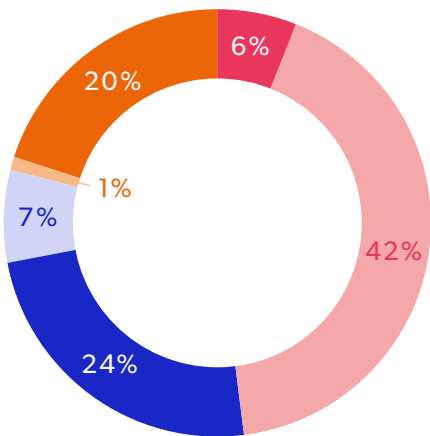
- Increasing significantly
- Increasing
- No change
- Decreasing
- Decreasing significantly
- We don't do one-to-one ABM

WHAT’S HAPPENING TO YOUR ONE-TO-FEW ABM INVESTMENT?



- Increasing significantly
- Increasing
- No change
- Decreasing
- Decreasing significantly
- We don't do one-to-one ABM

WHAT’S HAPPENING TO YOUR ONE-TO-MANY ABM INVESTMENT?



- Increasing significantly
- Increasing
- No change
- Decreasing
- Decreasing significantly
- We don't do one-to-one ABM

4.2. Tech deployment

The rise of ABM was catalysed by the digitisation of marketing; and the two have worked in tandem over the years. As the scale and ambition of our ABM programmes grew, so did the proliferation of technologies and tools that enabled it. Our next question examined the technology used in ABM today.

We put forward 11 categories of ABM technologies – ranging from sales insights tools like Dun & Bradstreet, to orchestration tech, such as Engagio and Terminus – and asked our respondents to indicate which they currently use for their activities.

Of course, the old faithful CRM and MA platforms are still the most commonly used for ABM, with 80% and 45% using them, respectively. A considerable 20% use sales insights tech and 7% are using predictive analytics tools like Leadspace and DiscoverOrg.

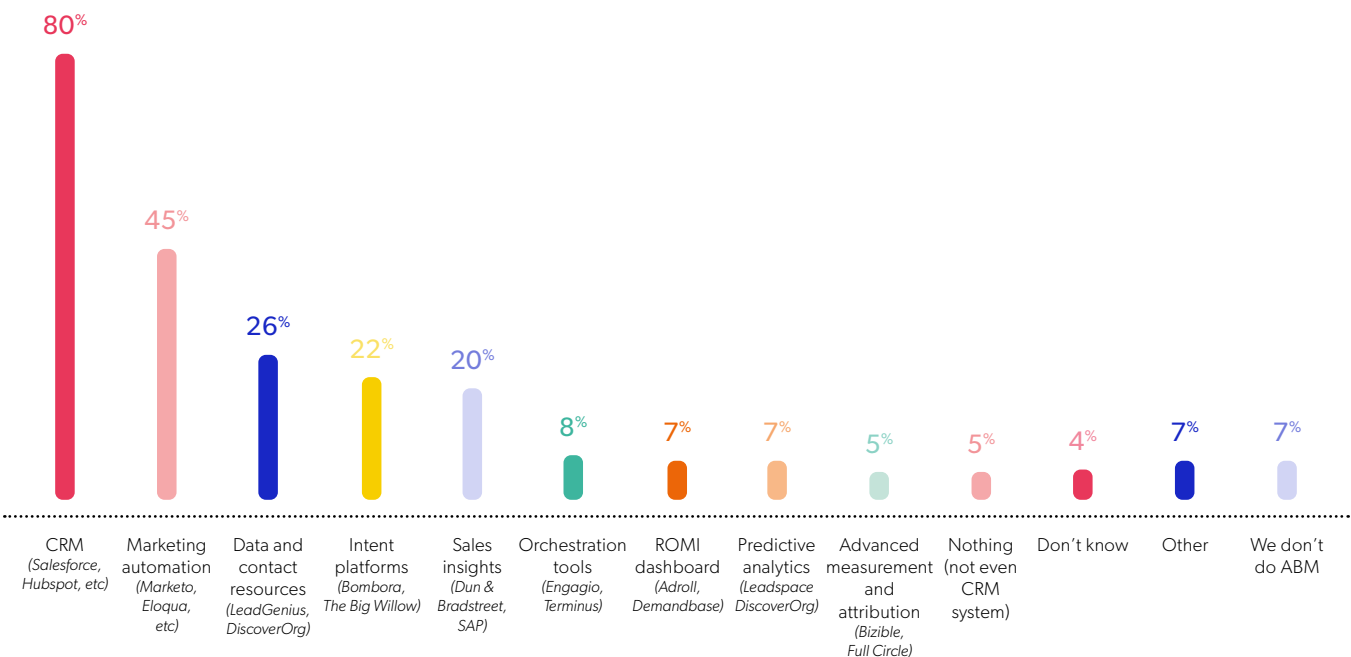
But the two insurgent technologies for ABM are data and contact resources (such as LeadGenius and DiscoverOrg) and intent platforms (such as Bombora

and The Big Willow). When we put this question to marketers last year, only 17% were using data and contact resources, now over a quarter (26%) are using it to fuel their strategies. Last year, just 10% were using intent platforms. Now, that’s more than doubled to 22%.

4.3. Highlights from this section:

- ▶ Marketers are putting their budget where their mouths are: over two-thirds (68%) are increasing their ABM budget next year, with a further 25% planning to keep it the same.
- ▶ One-to-few is the flavour of the year. Meanwhile some marketers are withdrawing investment in one-to-many, but not at an alarming rate. Net investment has increased across all three forms.
- ▶ ‘Data and contact resources’ and ‘intent platforms’ are the two insurgent technologies for ABM, experiencing significant year-on-year growth in usage.

WHAT TECH DO YOU CURRENTLY USE FOR ABM?



SECTION 5

ABM maturity

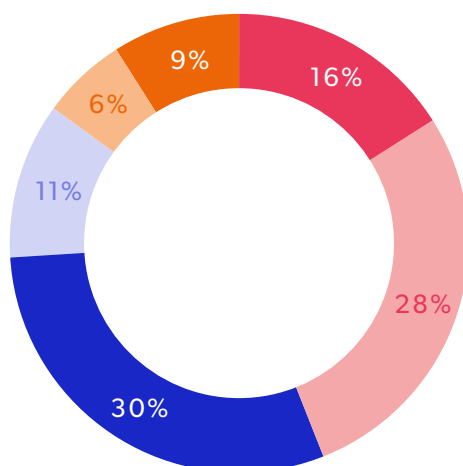
In 2016, account-based marketing became the topic of the day in B2B. Everyone was talking about it, some were doing it, but very few were doing it well. Fast-forward five years, and where are we now? In this section, we explore the maturity of ABM in businesses today.

To lay the foundations for our next set of questions, we identified five key stages of ABM maturity: considering; preparing; delivering; upscaling; and perfecting. Before diving into specific elements of their ABM strategy across these stages, we asked respondents where they ranked their overall company status on ABM.

Overall, 16% of organisations are at the earliest stage: considering, having not yet selected accounts. Some 28% are preparing to embark on their ABM journey: their sales and marketing teams have agreed the objectives of the ABM programme. It's exciting to see that 30% are actively delivering on their ABM strategy towards agreed objectives. Some 11% are making serious inroads, upscaling their ABM and growing cultural acceptance. Meanwhile 6% have reached ABM nirvana – perfecting their approach that's in full swing with company-wide backing and full collaboration between all stakeholders.

Comparing their answers to those of last year's survey paints a picture of serious progress. Far fewer marketers are merely 'considering' (16% in 2021 versus 35% in 2020) or 'preparing' (28% in 2021 versus 33% in 2020), and far more are actively delivering (30% in 2021 versus 24% in 2020), upscaling (11% versus 5%) and perfecting (6% versus 3%).

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING BEST DESCRIBES YOUR COMPANY'S OVERALL STATUS ON ABM?



- Considering: No accounts have been selected, yet key stakeholders see the value of doing so
- Preparing: Sales and marketing have agreed the objectives of the ABM programme, with each allocating resource to the effort
- Delivering: The ABM team is collaboratively delivering the agreed objectives, but there's need for greater alignment
- Upscaling: ABM is in full swing and cultural acceptance of it is growing. There are internal champions at many levels
- Perfecting: ABM is in full swing and there is a company-wide backing for ABM, with full collaboration between all stakeholders
- NA: We're not doing ABM

5.1. The state of ABM maturity

So, which aspects of ABM are flourishing, and which are faltering? To find out, we broke the process up into four sections:

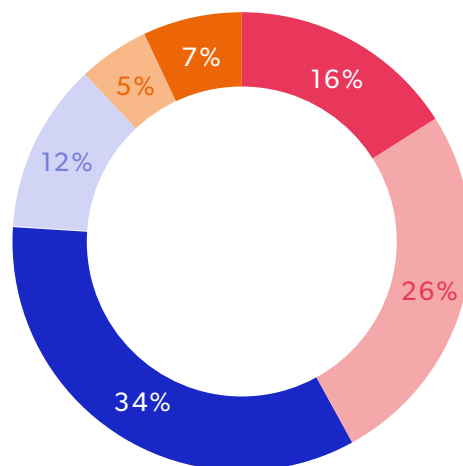
- › Defining target accounts.
- › Securing the right data and insights.
- › Use of tech for ABM.
- › Delivery of ABM programme.

Within each, we asked our respondents their status using the same five stages outlined on the previous page (considering, preparing, delivering, upscaling and perfecting).

Broadly speaking, the point at which ABM is at its most mature is the initial defining target accounts stage, with over half (51%) either delivering, upscaling or perfecting their approach. However, a total of 42% of marketers are still conservatively considering (16%) or diligently preparing (26%) for ABM account selection.

This has come on leaps and bounds since last year, when a massive 60% of marketers were still merely planning and considering, and just 40% were actively delivering small to large scale targeted marketing to selected accounts.

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING BEST DESCRIBES YOUR EFFORTS TO DEFINE YOUR TARGET ACCOUNTS WHEN IT COMES TO ABM?

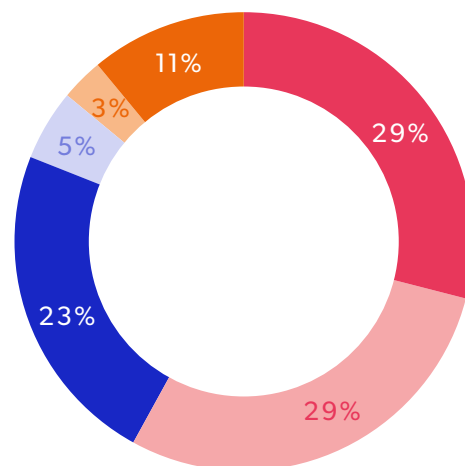


- Considering: No accounts have been selected, yet key stakeholders see the value of doing so
- Preparing: Accounts have been scored, selected, segmented and agreed
- Delivering: Small scale targeted marketing is being delivered to target accounts
- Upscaling: Large scale targeted marketing is being delivered to target accounts with the deal size/win rate increasing
- Perfecting: ABM is being used to prospect, retain and up-sell at all levels, with ROI consistently delivered
- NA: We're not doing ABM

Moving through the process, marketers are somewhat less bullish when it comes to securing the right data. At 58%, over half of all ABMers are still at the consideration and preparation stages; they're auditing data, mapping it out, or securing and cleaning third-party data. Some 23% are taking their first tentative steps using centralised data to deliver targeted, personalised marketing on a small scale, while just 5% are upscaling that process, and 3% are perfecting it.

But as before, it takes comparing these numbers to last year to see how far we've come. 12 months ago, a staggering 79% of marketers were only considering or preparing their data and insights for ABM, while a paltry 4% were either upscaling or perfecting. Clearly, ABMers have used this last year to make huge leaps in their use of data for ABM.

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING BEST DESCRIBES YOUR EFFORTS TO SECURE THE RIGHT DATA AND INSIGHT WHEN IT COMES TO ABM?



- Considering: Existing customer data has been audited, with additional requirements mapped
- Preparing: Research and third-party data has been sourced, cleaned and inputted
- Delivering: Centralised data is being used to deliver targeted, personalised marketing on a small scale
- Upscaling: Centralised data is being used to deliver targeted marketing on a large scale and across all touchpoints
- Perfecting: Data insights are being used to make strategic company decisions
- NA: We're not doing ABM

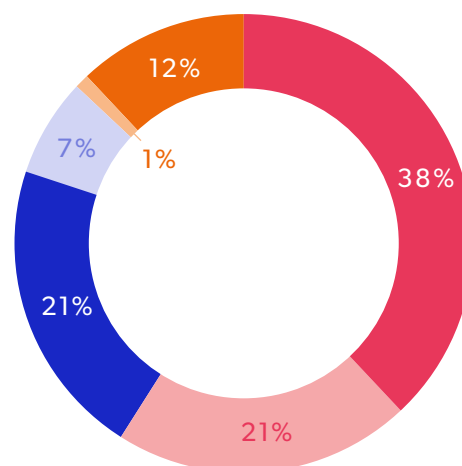
In 2020, 81% of marketers hadn't yet engaged ABM specific technology in their ABM programme. Fast-forward 12 months, and just 59% are yet to roll out ABM-specific tech.

Even still, this is the area in which marketers are at their least confident. Some 38% are still scoping out additional technology requirements or just starting to look at their existing tech stack through a new lens, while a further 21% are just investing in new technology or implementing processes to better use their existing tech. That means just 29% are actively using specific ABM technology in their programme. And, even then, 21% are just getting started using technology – only 7% are confidently upscaling their tech to better target prospects, and just 1% would consider themselves perfecting their approach to tech.

For the fourth and final stage covered in our research – delivering ABM – marketers are again weighted most heavily towards the early phases of ABM. Over half 55% are either still trying to sell the ABM philosophy to their wider organisation (35%), or are just beginning to audit content and map customer challenges (20%). The rubber is meeting the road with 22% of ABMers, as they're delivering content with bespoke propositions based on detailed customer insight, while 5% are launching sophisticated campaigns at each customer touchpoint, and a bullish 4% are perfecting their approach, with sales consistently getting the goods from marketing's ABM efforts.

But the story of progress continues. This time last year, a huge 58% of the respondents were still winning sympathy with ABM concepts, while a further 23% had only just audited and mapped against customer needs. Just 14% claimed that their content was serving bespoke propositions and based upon customer insights.

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING BEST DESCRIBES YOUR
USE OF TECH FOR YOUR ABM PROGRAMME?



- Considering: We are scoping our additional tech requirements for ABM and how to better use our existing technologies
- Preparing: We have bought and are implementing new technology AND/OR have developed new processes to better use existing tech
- Delivering: We have implemented and are improving our use of new and existing tech for ABM
- Upscaling: We are on a second phase of scoping tech requirements as we perfect our ABM stack
- Perfecting: We have the full ABM tech stack required for our operations and are perfecting our use of it
- NA: We're not doing ABM

5.2. Mind the sales and marketing gap

Clearly, we've come a long way, but there's still a long way to go. So, what's holding marketers back? We asked our respondents a bit about the challenges they face in ABM deployment. Far and away the biggest blocker is the absence of deep account insight, with almost half (49%) of marketers noting this as a challenge to getting started. The other greatest pitfalls include lack of sufficient planning and due diligence (37%), lack of sales and marketing alignment (37%), and absence of a shared strategy (33%).

This broadly reflects the blockers from this time last year, but with one alarming trend: sales and marketing are drifting farther apart (at least, according to our sample group). Perhaps, in a remote working world, this is unsurprising. Previously, even though day-to-day marketing and sales teams generally operated in their own spheres, at least in office environments water-cooler catch ups and spontaneous white board sessions provided that invisible glue. Take away that visibility and now sales and marketing could be facing a chasm. And of all types of marketing, ABM requires this connection to be at its tightest. So, for hybrid working plans and future work arrangements – we implore marketing to stay updated with sales, and vice versa.

5.3. Highlights from this section:

- ▶ Marketers have made huge progress in ABM over the last year. Far fewer marketers are merely 'considering' (16% in 2021 versus 35% in 2020) or 'preparing' (28% versus 33%), while many more are actively delivering (30% in 2021 versus 24% in 2020), upscaling (11% versus 5%) and perfecting (6% versus 3%).
- ▶ Marketers' greatest ABM strength at the moment is finding and defining their accounts, but they're being held back by the data they can glean from those prospects. Clearly, in order to put their investment to proper use, they need to find ways to unearth the right data on the customer before delivering their content and messaging.
- ▶ Sales and marketing are at risk of drifting apart. After another year's physical separation, sales and marketing alignment is now proving to be a significant challenge to ABM.

SECTION 6

Data and measurement

To conclude our study, we rolled up our sleeves and got dirty with the data. Was it all worthwhile?

While it's promising to see that marketers are having to spend less of their time and resources internally evangelising the mere concept of ABM within their companies, maturity is another thing altogether. In order to secure the buy-in of the wider organisation and reach that 'perfecting' nirvana we explored earlier, sooner or later, marketers will come up against the familiar question, from the familiar face. The CFO, CCO or CEO (insert appropriate c-suiter here) will sit down, pull out their pencil, and enquire into the finer points of your ABM programme. "What's the ROI?" they'll ask.

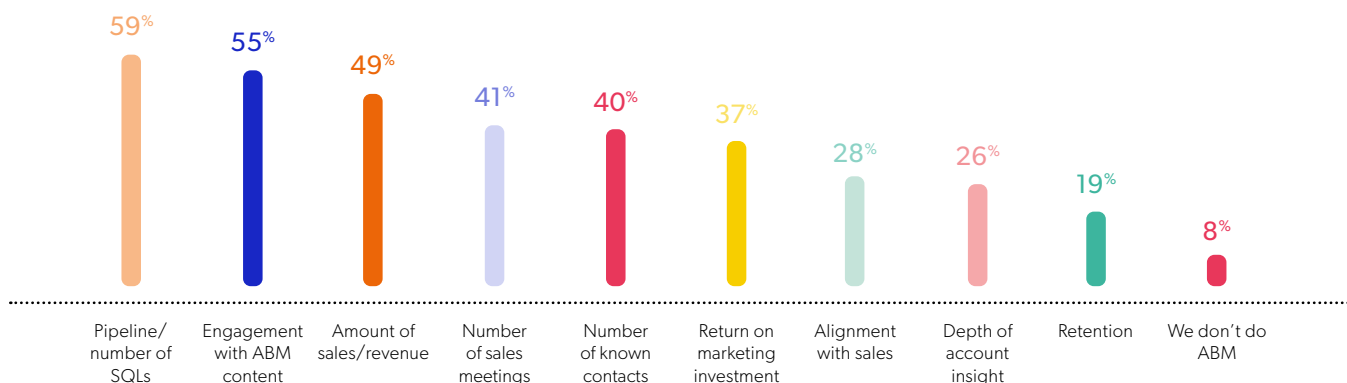
And they're right to do so. ABM is as close to an all-in strategy as marketers can go. To ease the mind of the sales director – who gets the whole personalisation

thing, but, deep-down, wonders why on earth you're choosing not to go after 90% of their TAM – you need to measure the metrics that matter, and have some robust numbers to show. So, how are marketers doing that today?

6.1. What's measured, and what matters?

The three most widely adopted ABM metrics for marketers in 2021 are pipeline/number of SQLs (59%), engagement with ABM content (55%), and amount of sales revenue (49%). Given the challenges of sales and marketing alignment outlined in part three, it's promising to see here that three of the top five most-used metrics are related to sales success. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the least common ABM metric was client retention, with just 19% of marketers gauging their success in that way.

WHICH OF THESE ABM METRICS DO YOU USE?



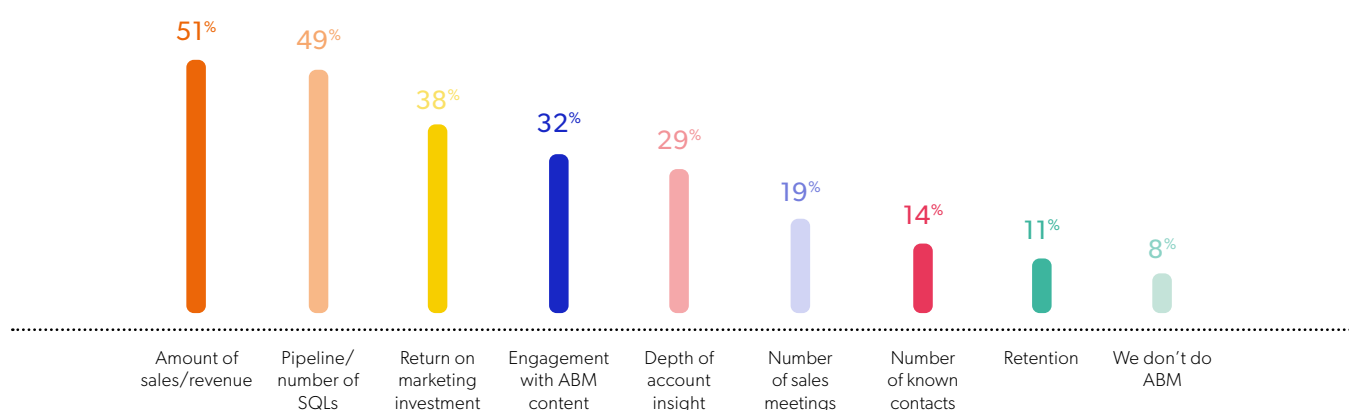
So that's what they're measuring, but which metrics do marketers find most important? This is where it gets interesting. See, everyone's tracking known number of contacts (40%), but very few find that important (14%). Likewise, engagement with ABM content is very commonly tracked (55%), though just 32% said that was very important.

Another big difference in what we register to what we actually want is sales meetings, from 41% to 19%. So, what are marketers looking for with their ABM metrics? You guessed it: marketing ROI (38%), number of SQLs (49%) and, most importantly, sales revenue (51%).

6.2. Highlights from this section:

- › Marketers are closely measuring themselves against sales metrics, with SQLs and revenue generated among the top three metrics measured.
- › ABM content engagement is tracked by a lot of marketers, but actually, when it comes to the crunch, it's not seen as nearly as important as those metrics relating to sales.
- › Sales revenue is king. Not only is it among the most commonly tracked metrics, it's the one marketers – and of course sales – care most about from their ABM strategy.

WHICH OF THESE ABM METRICS ARE MOST IMPORTANT TO YOU?



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.

b2bmarketing.net
propolis.b2bmarketing.net

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

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Contact us

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

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



justglobal.com