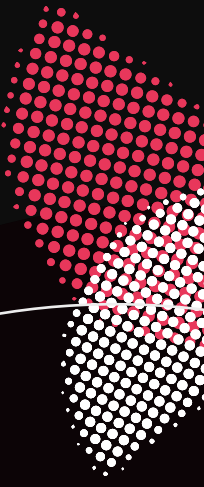
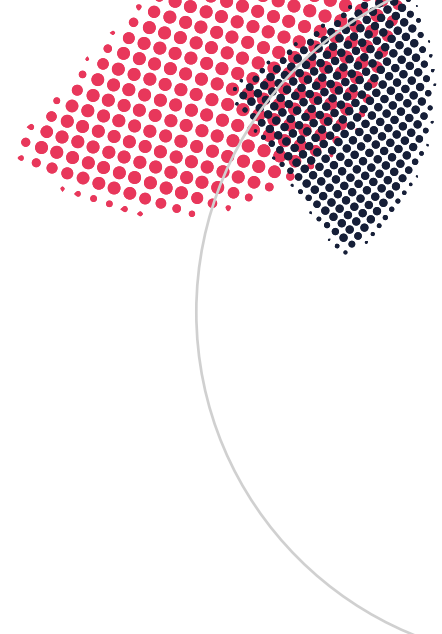


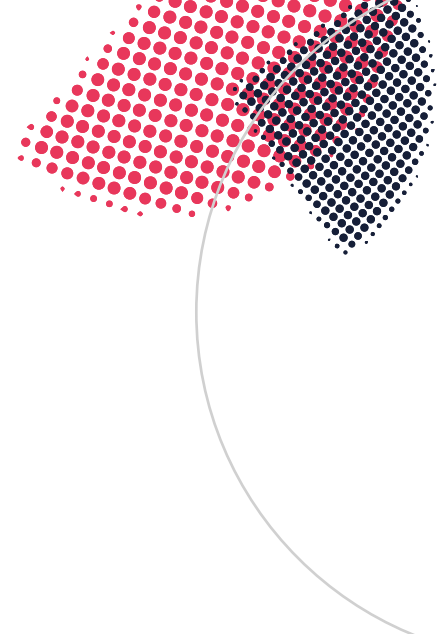
Preparing your ABM pilot for take-off





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Introduction

How do you get account-based marketing off the ground?

According to our most recent ABM benchmarking research, almost two-thirds of B2B marketers are currently looking into, or planning, how ABM could apply within their organizations.

The answer for most is to run a pilot program – a proving ground to demonstrate that ABM is suitable for your organization, team and prospects.

We've put together this guide to explain how to do just that, with advice and examples from brands and agencies who've been there and done it.

This guide will tell you:

- › The biggest mistakes to avoid when setting up your pilot
- › Which metrics and goals to look at before getting started
- › The resources you should allocate to the project, and how much to spend
- › How to convince your most important allies – sales – to get onboard
- › Which accounts to choose first
- › What to do once the pilot is over
- › Case studies from major brands including, Accenture, Medtronic, VMware and O2.

“‘Pilot’ means doing it at a smaller scale with a tighter focus area, a smaller budget, and a smaller team – not skipping over important principles of ABM.”

Meredith Fuller, MD buyer engagement, Quarry

The 5 most frequent ABM pilot errors



1

Not committing fully to the program

You don't have to commit all your resources to an ABM pilot, but those you do must be fully invested in the project. It can't be a half-hearted approach, where you 'just give it a try'. Resources, commitment and alignment need to be in place to make it work from the get-go. All account-based marketing is a (calculated) risk. But by hedging your bets, you'll fail.



2

Failing to get commitment from sales

If you're trying to launch a pilot by marketing without the support of sales, it simply won't get off the ground. Their support in terms of enthusiasm and insight is crucial, as is collaboration between the two functions.



3

Trying to secure full alignment from the start

While you need internal buy-in to make your pilot fly, you don't need the whole organization to be in formation from the start. You can start your pilot with the support of a few key individuals, including senior stakeholders and advocates.



4

Trying to tackle too many accounts

Your pilot needs to be focused. Many marketers try to increase their chances of success by spreading themselves too thinly across too many accounts. Proper account selection is a crucial factor in ABM success, whether a pilot or full program.

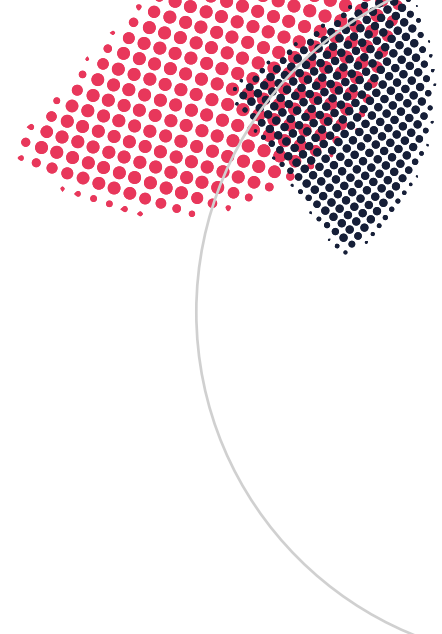


5

Making scale your objective, rather than the project goals

Your end-goal may be to use your pilot as a gateway to a full ABM program, but don't let your focus on that allow you to lose sight of the task at hand.





Section 1

What's the purpose of a pilot?

Define your goals

Pilot schemes tend to have two separate sets of objectives – the project goals, and the broader internal targets.

1. Project goals

Often metrics used to measure ABM success (such as ROI) are based on long-term return. Yet, with sales cycles of 12-18 months, it's unlikely those timeframes will align with a pilot. This means you may not be able to report closed business revenue metrics on new accounts; however, you should be able to provide evidence of increased engagement. Furthermore, selecting known accounts that are at the mid to end of their sales cycle is an effective way to demonstrate both engagement and financial results.

“Are you deploying ABM for your customers or for your organization? Where should you focus to prove the approach? Decide and define what success looks like for your company, then keep the tech to a minimum to start with and investigate using an agency with ABM expertise.”

Shane Redding, MD, Think Direct

Metrics you could use to track the success of your pilot include:

- › Engagement with named individuals in the decision-making unit
- › Number of face-to-face new business meetings
- › Number of pitches or invitations-to-tender
- › Number of product demos
- › Number of proposals
- › Conversion rate
- › Value of new pipeline
- › Reduction in sales cycle time.

If your pilot targets existing accounts, which experts recommend, further metrics could include:

- › Increase in average order value
- › Increase in average revenue per customer
- › Reduction in attrition rate.

You will not have the scope in a short pilot to achieve all of these metrics. Nor is it sensible to retrofit which of these measures have been successful once your pilot is complete. Instead, choose two or three of these to go after, so you can really focus your attention and activity on achieving them.

2. Internal targets

Beyond the project goals, you'll probably have internal objectives you want the pilot to achieve. These could be to:

- › Improve alignment between sales and marketing
- › Improve the perception of marketing across the business
- › Prove ABM can work within your organization and with target accounts
- › Prove the ABM pilot could be scaled into a full program.

While it's important to hold these in mind, they shouldn't be the focus of your pilot. If you cannot achieve the project goals, you won't be able to meet the targets above.

Don't be afraid to fail

An additional objective of your pilot should be to refine your future approach to ABM. Few seasoned account-based marketers would claim to have nailed their approach first time. The pilot should find out what works for your team and accounts, and what doesn't.

For ABM to be a success, there needs to be a culture within your organization that allows for testing and learning. If you work in an 'all or nothing' culture, where the potential for ABM lives and dies on the success of your pilot, it may not be the right environment for ABM to thrive in the future.

Case study: Medtronic's surgical approach to ABM

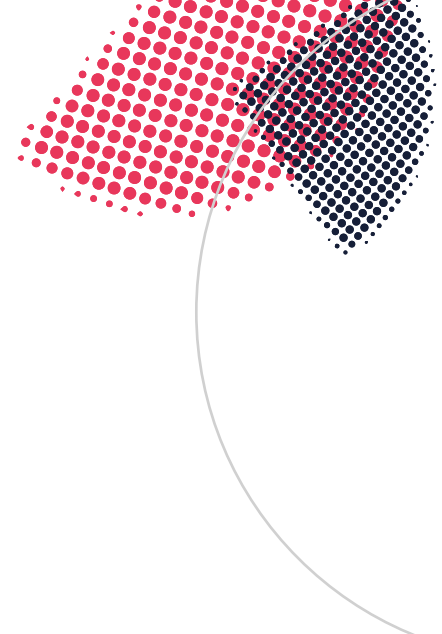
Lynsay Russell, now senior digital marketing manager at Invoca, established an ABM pilot as senior manager of global marketing operations at the medical tech business Medtronic.

The pilot consisted of 600 accounts taken from a list of 5,000 US hospitals. She ran a six-month program, which featured account-based ads and email campaigns, targeting customers who had previously purchased medical devices from the company.

Her team used existing customer data from Salesforce as well as public procedural data from hospitals to determine how many surgeries were performed at different hospitals and who would benefit from Medtronic's new product. Marketing also relied heavily on sales insight. Starting with sales leadership, they collated competitive information on particular accounts to understand how to target them, helped also by a dedicated analytics team.

The biggest hurdle was the transition from traditional leads to account-based metrics. Changing from using an exact number to a full account picture, tracking revenue, was very important. People were confused by the change in narrative and others were sceptical of something new. This was a sticking point for almost two years, but eventually, a new campaign created a tipping point in how metrics were viewed. With great results, the whole team was able to see the value of how reporting was done.

At the end of the campaign, 32% of the targeted accounts created a new opportunity. The team followed the 600 accounts through the sales cycle and closed \$30 million of incremental revenue in 12 to 18 months.



Section 2

What's needed to start a pilot?

What resources should you dedicate to your pilot?

It's rare you'll have extra budget or personnel to dedicate to an ABM trial. Running a pilot will have to take place alongside your existing marketing activity. A simple rule of thumb is to allocate 25% of your budget and 25% of your time to work on the pilot project.

As B2B Marketing ABM advisor Andy Bacon frequently points out, you cannot do ABM on the cheap. But that doesn't mean heavy investment in technology or expensive agency support. Many marketers free up budget by diverting money away from tactics that are having no impact, such as campaigns that only deliver low quality leads.

Who should be on the team?

You don't need everyone in marketing and sales involved in your pilot, you can get going with as few as three key individuals.

The ABM pilot cockpit

› Pilot captain

This role will be taken by a senior marketer who is behind the concept of ABM. Their role is to secure senior leadership support for the pilot, engage the wider business stakeholders in the project, and to decide on and oversee the KPIs.

› Marketing navigator

This is the marketer responsible for executing the strategy, either determined by the captain or themselves (depending on responsibility or seniority). They may also need the support of other parts of the team, such as design or account managers, to assist the activity (think of them as your cabin crew).

› Sales enthusiast

ABM cannot work without the support of a well bought-in sales person. You should identify an enthusiastic salesperson who can see the value ABM can bring, who has responsibility for, or a relationship with, the target account so they can provide insight.





What technology do I need to start?

For a pilot scheme, you rarely need to invest in any additional martech or platforms. Even a CRM isn't vital – although not having one will make the process of account selection and research more complex and time-consuming.

Investing in tech too soon is a costly mistake; it means the tech ends up dictating the strategy in order to justify the investment. Technology is most valuable when it comes to scaling your ABM efforts, which is unlikely to be an objective of your initial pilot.

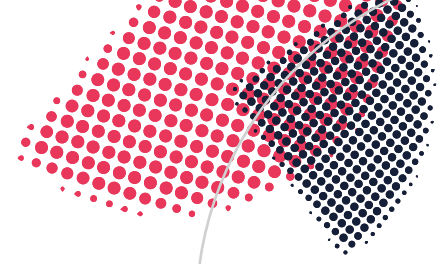
Tenessa Lochner, senior ABM education and training manager at martech provider Demandbase, says the right time to introduce technology is once your pilot has been successful. That way you can tweak your stack once you know exactly which platforms you need to support the strategy that works for your business.

How long should your pilot last?

Your pilot needs to be long enough to deliver results, but short enough to ensure you can act on the results and pivot accordingly. Around six months should give you enough time to bed-in a short project with focused goals and deliver on two or three engagement-based metrics.

“The mistake some companies make is running a superficial pilot. You can't excuse cutting out half the steps because it's 'just a pilot'. You need to plan, execute, and measure at every stage of the process, adhering to ABM best practices at each point”

Meredith Fuller, MD buyer engagement, Quarry



Section 3

Welcoming sales on-board your pilot

A common complaint about ABM is that the name itself puts too much emphasis on ‘marketing’ given the importance of the role of sales.

“Resist the temptation to start a project without sales being onboard,” advises Mike Boogaard, co-founder and CEO at ABM agency Alias Partners. “You might think that they’ll come around once they start receiving high-quality opportunities – but this approach has a significant problem, as without the support of sales, those high-quality opportunities are much less likely to arrive. Your sales team’s unique insight into the fears and needs of your target clients is an essential ingredient in your success.”

Running a pilot program is one of best ways to tackle the complaint that sales doesn’t have the time or resources to do ABM.

Fortunately, ABM is also one of the best ways to drive sales and marketing alignment, if you get it right.

4 steps to finding your ABM sales champion (and bringing them on board)

- 1. Give them a stake in the pilot.** People are more likely to support something they have a hand in creating. Find out if your sales team is satisfied with what marketing is providing. When they inevitably say ‘not quite’, it’s an opportunity to sell the value ABM can bring in terms of improved results.
- 2. Align your goals and objectives.** Make sure when you’re establishing your pilot’s goals to align them with sales KPIs. Doing this will unite the teams to begin with.
- 3. Involve them in account selection.** Clive Armitage, CEO at Agent3, recommends choosing a target account that has a large opportunity pipeline, then showing how ABM will give them a premium marketing service with greater personalization and more effective decision-maker targeting.
- 4. Communicate and validate regularly.** Sales need to be constantly reminded the program is working. Make sure they are kept up-to-date with the pilot – its activity, success and refinement. Give them the opportunity to give regular feedback on tactics and engagement. You could even go as far as to set up Net Promoter Score models to measure satisfaction with the program.

How to tackle 3 common objections sales have to ABM

Before you start your pilot, you should be ready to address any objections the sales team has. Take their worries seriously, and show that you're working toward the same goals. Here are three common ones:

› “We’ll get fewer opportunities”

Rebuttal: It's true that ABM usually focuses on fewer opportunities, but every one you'll hand over to sales will be highly-qualified; that means they won't be wasting time on poor, unqualified leads.

› “It’s too complex and won’t work”

Rebuttal: ABM is a proven strategy with high ROI. Share case studies and statistics of successful ABM initiatives in industries that are relevant to your project. This will help you demonstrate how and why it works.

› “We don’t have enough time/resources”

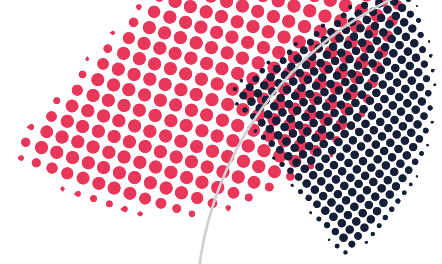
Rebuttal: Make your pilot just big enough for your team to handle; it's usually better to deliver a smaller project in collaboration with sales than to push something bigger without them fully invested.

Case study: How marketing at Accenture has sales beating a path to its door

When Accenture decided to implement an ABM program, it realized it would need to sit at the heart of the company, collaborating with a long list of teams such as digital marketing, sales, and competitor intelligence. This meant getting buy-in was imperative for the success of the strategy. While some stakeholders were easy to convince just by explaining it to them, others needed to be shown the benefits.

Accenture decided to run a pilot program to demonstrate what ABM could do, so it looked for a promising account that could provide a success story. “We chose an account that had really clear business objectives and had stakeholders we knew would give us the time and investment we needed from them,” explains Rhiannon Blackwell, the professional services firm's head of account-based marketing.

Once the account had seen success, the ABM team packaged it up as a case study and promoted the story and the data internally. The program then began to sell itself. Now time has gone by, Rhiannon says she pitches ABM internally much less frequently. “It's often by word-of-mouth. Our client account leads are actually selling it to each other and are approaching us,” Rhiannon says. For her, the challenge is keeping the initial enthusiasm from account leads waning. “It's keeping the momentum going after you've sold it into an account.”



Section 4

Selecting the target accounts for your pilot

How many accounts should you target?

A large proportion of organizations that run a pilot focus on one-to-one ABM. This is because it's much easier to track the success of your efforts when targeting a limited number of accounts. This is a key determinant in proving the overall success of the pilot scheme.

Selecting too many accounts can leave you too stretched to do justice to the personal approach ABM requires. If your pilot is successful and the program has been established, that's when you can start to scale up the program.

What makes a promising pilot account?

There may be a temptation (or internal pressure) to use your pilot scheme to access new or dormant accounts where sales have struggled to achieve traction.

Your pilot is likely to be more successful if you choose to target existing accounts where you already have the crucial insights into decision-makers, motivation and challenges, plus they are already aware of your brand. By targeting these accounts for additional up-sell and cross-sell opportunities, you will be able to act faster and hopefully deliver a result more quickly. Starting with this low-hanging fruit will also help to manage expectations around account selection.



Account selection criteria

The criteria for selecting your target account is much the same as for a full ABM program. One way to do this is to create an ideal customer profile (ICP). This is based on:

- › **Firmographics:** Ideal account size, location, number of employees and sector/industry.
- › **Technographics:** The account's relationship to technology, their state of digital maturity, install base.
- › **Sociographics:** The account's issues and challenges, their priorities and the opportunities related to the ideal account and account intent (behavioural data related to accounts).

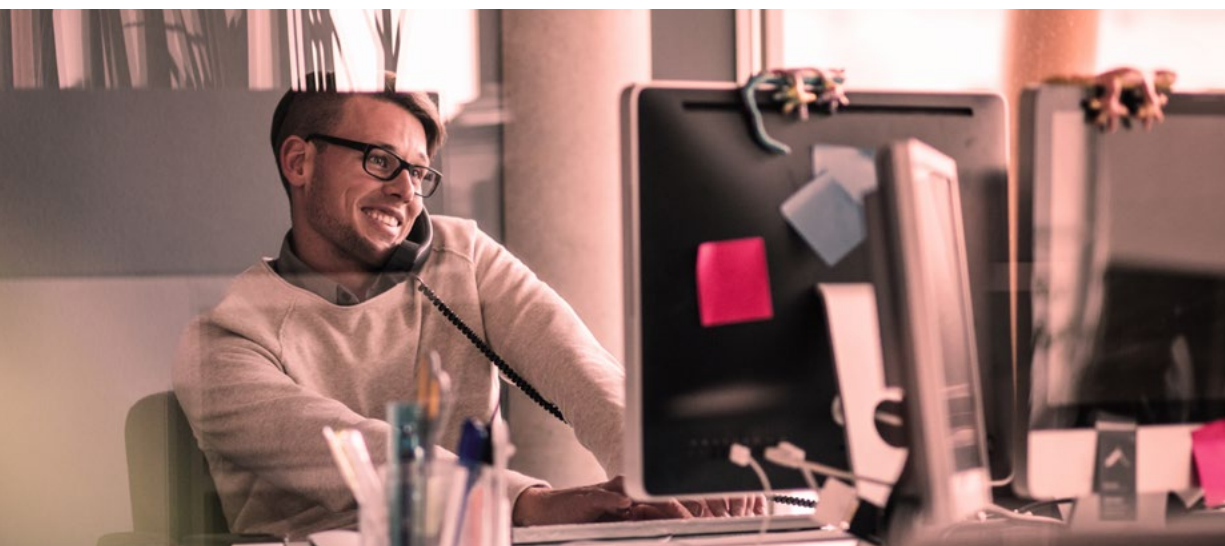
Cross-reference your ICP against your list of potential target existing accounts incorporating factors such as:

- › Nature of existing sales relationships
- › Inside knowledge of accounts
- › Up-sell/cross-sell potential.

This should leave you with a small shortlist, which – in collaboration with sales – you can prioritize to select for your pilot.

“In almost every customer scenario I’ve come across when starting with ABM, the biggest struggle is to convince the business to reduce the number of target accounts and to set aside some decent opportunities in favor of the very best. But the key to ABM success lies in personal (not just personalized) communication with your future customers. To do this effectively, you need to make choices, which is why the account selection is so vital”

Mike Boogaard, CEO, Alias Partners



Choose your top targets

“One strategy is to pilot new tactics on narrow verticals within lower tier accounts before implementing with tier one accounts,” says James Harris, CEO at Seraph Science. “However, given the high costs often associated with ABM, testing on insignificant accounts can take a bite out of your budget. While it may feel intimidating, testing on tier one accounts can provide better ROI and reveal more accurate insights on ABM performance.”

If you choose to test on tier one accounts, there are a few ways to mitigate risk:

- › Define what success will look like from a sales and marketing perspective.
- › Monitor more than just your defined success metrics and be open to unexpected correlations between actions and revenue.
- › If you have a long sales cycle, be prepared for the results of your trials to take longer to become visible.
- › You don't need buy-in from the entire sales team, but you will need an ally who's aligned with your strategy and bought-in to c-suite ABM.
- › Send your top-performing salespeople in from the start.

Case study: How VMware targeted a single decision-maker with its pilot

VMware had an image problem. It was recognized neither as provider of a wide range of software and services, nor as an innovative partner. While it generally had good relationships with the IT function, it lacked strategic influence both within the IT department and with senior decision-makers in other lines of business.

The company wanted to deepen its relationship with bank giant UBS and identify new opportunities with what is a valuable key account. VMware worked with agency Momentum ABM to help kick-start dialogue with a key influencer in the bank – then CIO Oliver Bussmann – first on social media and ultimately face-to-face.

Momentum created a matrix of his top five priority issues and mapped VMware's response to each. Priorities included the rise of fintech, the role of blockchain for financial services and how to embrace and respond to digital disruption.

Given the limited budget and time frame for the campaign, Momentum reused an existing asset, an infographic of the VMware story, which had echoes of the issues that meant most to Bussmann: digital and business transformation among them.

The generic pain points were removed and replaced by those with UBS-specific pain points and VMware's response to those issues. The infographic was then pushed out via social media, as postcards at a Hong Kong banking summit and as banners for the VMware stand at the event.

When Bussmann retweeted the VMware infographic to his 16,000+ Twitter followers, the firm knew it had the openings of a dialogue. Bussmann accepted an invitation to meet VMware's account manager at the UBS Disruptive Technology CEO Summit.



Section 5

What to do when your pilot is over

So your pilot has run its course, and – hopefully – it's been a success. At the very least, it should have taught you something about the suitability for ABM within your organization.

Measure your goals

- › **Did you achieve the goals you set out at the inception of the pilot?** If so, how do you scale this success with additional accounts?
- › **How far does your success go to satisfy the internal targets you set out?** If success was limited, perhaps you haven't quite delivered on the promise needed to scale-up.
- › **Did you achieve results you didn't expect?** Perhaps your goals weren't aligned – or you can capitalise on this unexpected success.

If you achieved what you set out to, you've now got a case study you can sell back to the organization to build a business case for a full roll-out.

If you didn't, you need to analyse what went awry. Did it lack support from sales? Was the account selection faulty? Were the timelines too ambitious? A failure need not prove fatal to your ABM ambition, but reassessment may mean running another pilot with the mistakes ironed out to provide you with that winning business case.

Capitalize on the momentum

If it has been a success, you may find the pilot has generated its own momentum. If you've engaged and collaborated with sales effectively, there should be appetite from others to latch onto your success. You'll want to capitalize on this enthusiasm by bringing them into the program.

Increased demand will strain pilot resources, so communicating the success to the wider business, and critically senior leadership, will support your case for investment to meet this additional interest.

What to do next

If your pilot project has been successful, congratulations – you can now consider rolling out ABM more comprehensively.

For a plan on how to do this, download our benchmarking guide *Early stage ABM: Plotting your route to success*. This is packed with templates, tools and advice on how to make your next steps, alongside what the leaders in the industry are up to.

If you're struggling to get your pilot off the ground, independent advice could be of use. B2B Marketing's ABM Head-Start program, with its tailored enablement program might be what you're looking for. Visit b2bmarketing.net/abmheadstart for more details.

Case study: From pilot to profit using ABM at O2

O2 launched its enterprise division in 2011 to compete in the crowded B2B space. O2 Business supplies IT services to enterprise organizations with more than 2000 UK-based employees, and the public sector. Sales feedback showed the company continued to face low brand consideration beyond mobile. This perception was preventing the company from having strategic conversations with c-level audiences.

To support the ambitious growth targets, O2 needed to demonstrate its credibility as a strategic partner.

Account-based marketing (ABM) was employed with a single strategic account in 2015 before being rolled out to 10 more in 2016. Armed with tailored content for each account, sales could have more strategic conversations and, ultimately, close more business.

O2 decided to lead with a bespoke report. The report clearly outlined the projected savings and revenue generation for each organization in a big, bold font on the front cover. The company took inspiration from the 'challenger sale' methodology where the supplier takes control of the buyer journey, teaching the customer something they didn't know about their business, tailoring the communication and establishing itself as an expert in the field.

Marketing and sales generated a highly targeted list of organizations from a variety of industries, working together at every stage of the process, from developing the early account insights and messaging, to reviewing how each meeting went and agreeing a plan to close the deal. Sales worked closely with marketing to nominate a list of highest-priority accounts. Accounts were only considered for enrollment onto the program if the potential opportunity was greater than £1 million and the account insight strong enough to build a bespoke business case.

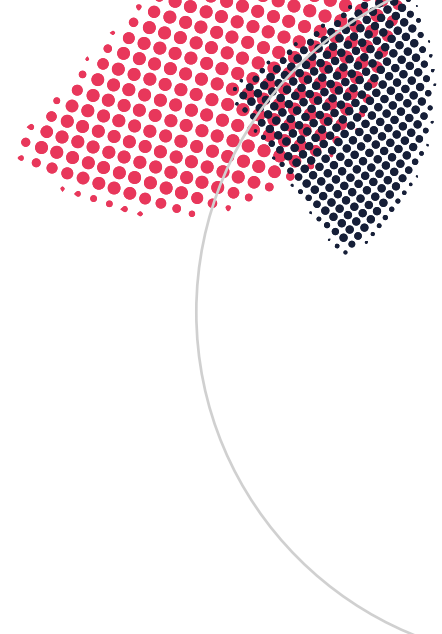
O2 developed a calculation model. The company used account and industry insight to create a bottom-line improvement projection for each target organization. This was displayed on the cover of a personalized report. The inner pages explained, in detail, how the recipient could achieve that figure, positioning O2 as a trusted advisor.

A bespoke data build was completed for each account, key individuals were identified, and the report was sent as direct mail for maximum impact. A digital version was developed as a follow-up touchpoint, providing target contacts with an asset they could easily share with other team members.

The initial pilot was extremely successful, delivering a ROMI of 1229:1. O2 salespeople quickly approached marketing to get their accounts included in the ABM program.

“The reason we were so successful was because we made sure everything about the approach was right: the stakeholder buy-in, the tailored value proposition, the research, even the timings of the communications (for us and the customer). If we wanted to replicate the same results at scale, we needed to stick to our guns”

Zoe Hominick, head of business marketing, O2



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