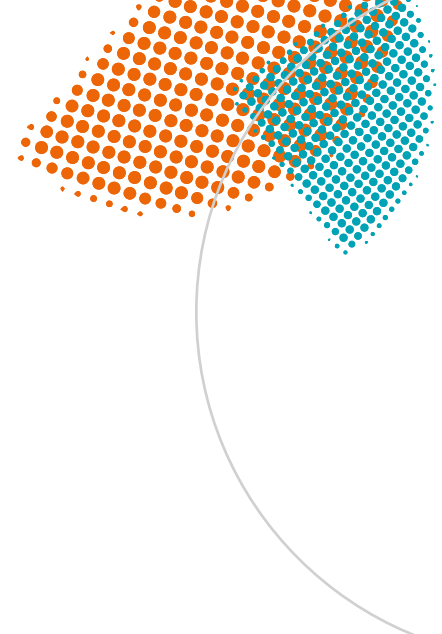


# 8 essential account-based marketing skills





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# Introduction

It takes a certain mindset to be an account-based marketer. It needs long-term strategic thinking that looks beyond the confines of the marketing function.

New skills are needed to accompany this change in attitude. But according to B2B Marketing's survey of 300 B2B ABMers, just 1% of marketers believe their team has all the skills required to carry out ABM successfully.

Through our conversations with marketing leaders we've identified the eight essential characteristics possessed by the most successful account-based marketers. Of course, this assumes you already have the essential skills of a modern marketer – communication, creativity, storytelling and tech-savviness to name but a few.

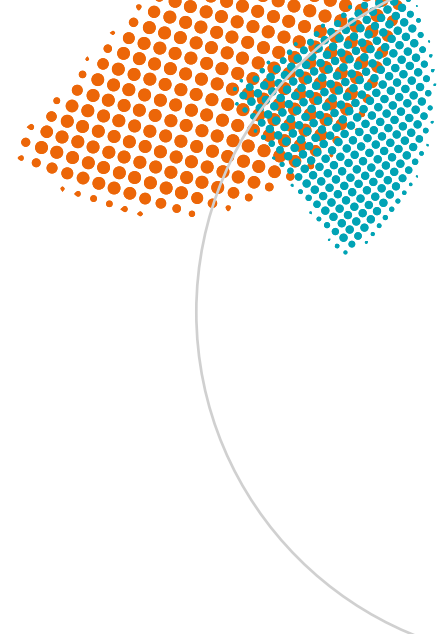
In this guide you'll discover:

- › Eight key skills to make your ABM career a success.
- › Key personality attributes for each skill.
- › Development tips on how to fill skills gaps.

*“Finding people with the right skills can be really tricky. As individuals you need to make sure you have the right skills, either individually or in the team working with you”*

Bev Burgess, author, *The Practitioner's Guide to ABM*





## Section 1

# Leadership

### Key attributes

- › Credibility
- › Confidence
- › Enthusiasm.

### Why this skill is important

Andrea Clatworthy, head of ABM at Fujitsu, describes account-based marketers as mini-CMOs, such is the scope of tasks the role requires you to cover. Thanks to the experience he gained, Charles Doyle – cited as one of the ‘magnificent seven’ pioneers of ABM by Bev Burgess – went from running ABM programmes at Accenture to becoming CMO of both global law firm Clifford Chance and global CMO of property management business JLL.

This is why leadership skills – the ability to rally a group of individuals with sometimes competing personal objectives around a central goal – are so important. To do this, you’ll need to create a shared vision for your strategy. You’ll need to outline the destination, which might be landing a new account, an invitation to tender or retaining a contract. You then need to set out how – and why – you’ll achieve this. The final stage is to determine the goals and milestones that will help you reach your objective.

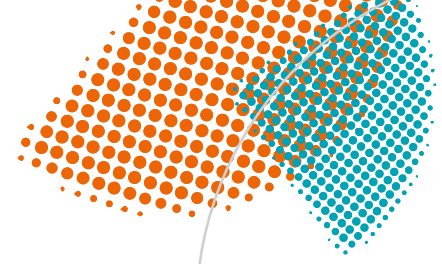
An important part of leadership in ABM is enthusiasm. Andrea Clatworthy believes this separates ‘good’ account-based marketers from ‘great’ ones. A motivated leader will inspire others and maintain momentum when customers or prospects seem indifferent to activity.

ABM leadership is often about changing a mindset and culture. Or perhaps more accurately, about helping others deal with new ways of working and managing the cultural change ABM often introduces. You’ll need to encourage others to move out of their comfort zone, and to develop their own skills.

### Development tips

However, ABM leadership doesn’t mean you’ll be sitting back, delegating to others who’ll handle the donkey work. Being an account-based marketer is a hands-on role – both setting strategy and executing it with the help of others.

- › **Find a mentor:** There’s no better way to improve leadership skills than through experience. A mentor can pass on the benefit of their own, plus act as a useful sounding-board for questions and ideas.
- › **Identify a passion:** The obstacles that get in the way of an ABM programme can often dampen enthusiasm. Identifying goals you can get excited about will help you power through these barriers.
- › **Lead by example:** Nothing undermines a leader’s credibility more than talking a good game but failing to deliver. Ensure you meet the commitments you make and live up to the expectations of others.



## Section 2

# Relationship building and influencing

### Key attributes

- › Persuasion
- › Patience
- › Diplomacy.

### Why this skill is important

While all these skills are vital, for the purposes of ABM, the ability to influence peers and build relationships is perhaps the most important. The ability to develop and nurture internal relationships is just as crucial as building external ones with clients and prospects.

You need buy-in from all areas of the business, in particular the sales function, for an ABM programme to be successful. But it's not just sales you need to convince. You'll also need the support of finance, IT and others to make it work. This means being able to speak the language of others in the business. What does ABM mean to them? How will it help them achieve their goals? What will it mean to their workload? Make the effort to understand their behaviour and motivations, just as you would with your target accounts. Doing so will allow you to tailor your approach more effectively. ABM will only be successful with significant co-operation between the functions. You must outline what's in it for them. As one CMO

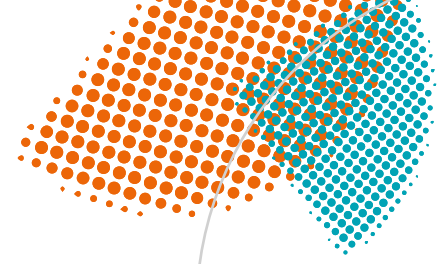
puts it, you might need an internal ABM campaign before you run one externally.

If you're asking other functions to help you execute your ABM strategy, there'll be skepticism about your own level of commitment. As B2B Marketing's ABM consultant, Andy Bacon, said: "What's the difference between ham and eggs? The chicken's just involved, but the pig's fully committed". Marketers are often seen as the chickens, with sales perceived to be the pigs. You'll need to demonstrate you are just as accountable as them for revenue, and that everyone's in the same boat. That will improve your credibility.

### Development tips

You'll need to find a compromise at some point; it pays to be both patient and diplomatic. A bullheaded approach might bring short-term gains but won't deliver long-term success.

- › **Identify your supporters:**  
Find individuals in key functions who are already on your side and get them to help you persuade others.
- › **Be prepared:**  
Approaching people at the right time will be crucial in getting them on board. As will anticipating their objections, and preparing your own counterarguments in advance.
- › **Be transparent:**  
Being open about your own motivations and how you are held accountable will build trust with your partners, and boost the sense this is not just a marketing programme.



## Section 3

# Resilience

### Key attributes

- › Strength of character
- › Persistence
- › ‘Bounce-back-ability’.

### Why this skill is important

It can be difficult to get internal support for ABM. There’ll be hurdles and obstacles, often from those you need to help deliver the strategy. It can be a long time before you actually start delivering results. And when it’s successful, the demands on you will only increase.

That’s why resilience is so important. You need to be able to shrug off setbacks and bounce back from them. This will be far easier when you are enthusiastic and optimistic about the strategy.

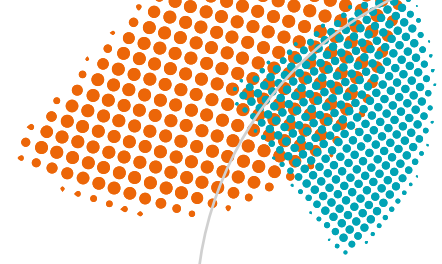
Because deals can take a long time to close, patience without panic is also necessary. The skill comes in knowing exactly when to bin something that’s not working and when to stay the course. ABM is a process of testing and learning what works with customers and prospects, and what doesn’t. The account-based marketer needs to accept that not every idea will work, and not to be disillusioned when they don’t.

This strength of character also needs to extend to the ability to say no. Dealing with demands from the business can be intense, especially when an ABM programme starts to demonstrate results. These need to be managed effectively or you’ll never make progress with your strategy, but rather be stuck dealing with individual requests.

You’ll need to find a compromise at some point; it pays to be both patient and diplomatic. A bullheaded approach might bring short-term gains but won’t deliver long-term success.

### Development tips

- › **Stay the course:**  
If you believe in what you’re doing, and are enthusiastic about it, small objections should not be sufficient to throw you off course.
- › **Ditch the ego:**  
Some ideas will work out, and some won’t – but not necessarily the ones you expect. Don’t become too emotionally invested in particular plans.
- › **Don’t take it personally:**  
Objections will most likely be motivated by uncertainty or fear. Addressing these concerns upfront will provide a smoother run in the long-term.



## Section 4

# Open-mindedness

### Key attributes

- › Comfortable being uncomfortable
- › Embraces new ideas
- › Willing to change approaches.

### Why this skill is important

The purpose of account-based marketing is to change the way you approach customers and prospects. So by definition, you've got to be open and willing to try new tactics.

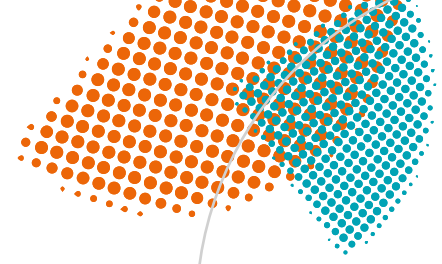
Some marketers struggle with this, especially if they're used to using particular tactics, or have driven success with them in the past (such as email, for instance). You'll need to instill the same open-mindedness in those you work with. Reassure them on their concerns and take a positive attitude.

As already stated, the ability to accept failure is key, but you must also be able to quickly change tack. As country singer Kenny Rogers once put it, know when to hold 'em, know when to fold 'em. All ABM strategies are somewhat of a gamble, putting the majority of your time and resources into a small number of accounts that may or may not work out. Great account-based marketers need to thrive on this sense of risk but also make sensible decisions at the right time.

### Development tips

- › **Listen and ask questions:**  
The best way to expand your own horizon is to actively take on board, and be curious about, others' suggestions.
- › **Seek examples from other sectors:**  
If you've spent your career in the same industry, there might be certain assumptions about how prospects want to be reached that might not be true in practice.
- › **Try new tactics:**  
ABM is all about different approaches. If you specialise in particular channels, try to diversify your approach.





## Section 5

# Commercial acumen

### Key attributes

- › Knows the numbers inside out
- › Credible with senior sales professionals
- › Understands the pressures and motivations of sales colleagues.

### Why this skill is important

Any account-based marketing strategy will require a close relationship with sales, and you can't build that relationship without credibility.

It's no surprise that many of the top ABM leaders have worked in sales at some point during their career. As well as the instant boost to credibility, they understand the pressures that come with the role and how sales professionals are motivated and incentivised. This is important when developing the close relationship needed for ABM.

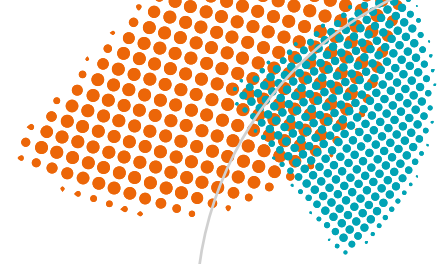
Many marketers may think they have a good understanding of how their business makes money and who from, but if you put them in front of a grizzled commercial director they might be shakier than first thought. You need to know the numbers inside out, both to inform your strategy and so you can talk credibly with sales colleagues.

### Development tips

- › **Don't bury your head in the sand:**  
Maths scares some marketers. If you're one of them, take a refresher class or find someone who's willing to spend the time teaching you.
- › **Learn how the finance function operates:**  
Shadowing or sitting down with someone from finance can be a great way to gain insights into the metrics they want marketers to deliver.
- › **Take a number:**  
What better way to demonstrate your credibility and commitment to the cause than to hold yourself accountable for delivering a proportion of sales or revenue? This will give you credibility and an appreciation of what sales have to deliver.







## Section 6

# Project management

### Key attributes

- › Organisation
- › Risk assessment and management
- › Experience with Agile marketing.

### Why this skill is important

ABM requires the management of multiple competing tasks and priorities at the same time. You'll need excellent project management skills to be able to manage this. These include:

- › Organisation
- › Scheduling
- › Delegation and people management
- › The ability to assess and manage risks
- › Budget management.

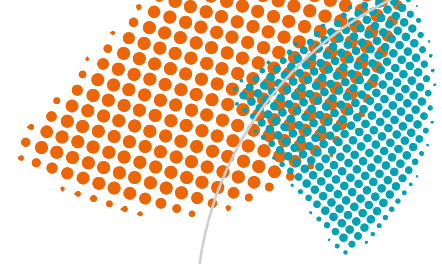
If you're working in ABM, you'll need to be able to switch tactics in response to data and feedback. This approach will be familiar to those with experience of Agile marketing. There is a neat intersection between what ABM needs and what Agile methodologies deliver, including:

- › Response to the changing requirements, both internal and external
- › Rapid iteration, based on testing and learning
- › The customer/prospect-centric decision-making
- › Close collaboration with functions across the business.

The account-based marketer may find themselves in the role of 'scrum master' – the nominated person with oversight of the project. It's also the job of the scrum master to identify and remove roadblocks to the project's progress. Taking an Agile approach, or at least learning the techniques and skills required, will stand you in good stead when it comes to running an ABM project.

### Development tips

- › **Get up to speed on Agile:**  
A great place to start is to download our guide [\*How to apply Agile to your marketing\*](#), which includes a checklist of whether it's right for you, and how you can implement an Agile approach.
- › **Get professionally qualified:**  
Both project management and Agile methodology are recognised disciplines. B2B Marketing offers Agile marketing training, and there are professional courses that concentrate on the role of the scrum master.



## Section 7

# Knowledge and experience

### Key attributes

- › Well-versed in a variety of marketing tactics.
- › Understands the politics and personalities in the business.
- › Has experience from different organisations and sectors.

### Development tips

#### › Structure your career path:

If you're early in your career but keen to take an ABM role, map out a career path that'll incorporate the blend of skills, knowledge and experience necessary.

#### › Identify your knowledge gaps:

If you've had a career in marketing for some time, use a skills radar map to identify your strengths and weaknesses. This will show you where you need to develop experience that'll help secure an ABM role. You can find a skills radar and how to use it in our free download [How to build, nurture and retain the ultimate marketing team](#).

### Why this skill is important

Knowledge and experience are essential for account-based marketers. Experience brings confidence that's vital when dealing with senior stakeholders and influencing them to execute their element of the project.

According to one CMO, the biggest challenge when hiring account-based marketers is the amount of time it takes to bring new hires up to speed on the business, which is at least six months. This internal knowledge is crucial in getting off to a running start. Their advice was to hire from within, supporting career development, then replacing their role with someone external.



## Section 8

# Analytics

### Key attributes

- › Able to interpret data
- › Can spot trends and patterns
- › Comfortable with a variety of technologies.

### Why this skill is important

Given their general importance in marketing, you might think of data skills being necessary to anyone serious about a career in marketing today. But more than half of CMOs report difficulty in finding marketers with the data skills they need.

Data's crucial to ABM. A recent study found 88% of B2B marketers believe data quality is important to execute an ABM strategy. It's critical to your account definition, segmentation and personalisation strategies, so you'll need the ability to spot patterns and trends, and if something doesn't look right in the quality of your organisation's data.

ABM programmes are all about testing and learning – finding out what's working with your target accounts, dropping what isn't and doing more of what is successful. You'll need to be comfortable about drilling down when presented with data to find the hidden insights that can inform your future approach.

It's not just the technical qualities to analyse data you need as an account-based marketer. You also need the strategic view, to be able to quickly make decisions based on the outcomes of the data you look at.

Data skills are even more important when running ABM programmes at scale. Predictive analytics and intent data have a large role in the account selection process of one-to-many ABM programmes, so you'll need to be confident in your ability to look at these data sets and spot new targets and opportunities based on what the trends are telling you.

### Development tips

- › **Get comfortable with data:**  
The more data you look at, the quicker it will be to spot trends and patterns. If you don't do this regularly, make it a habit.
- › **Understand attribution modeling:**  
Most marketers' understanding of attribution modelling doesn't go beyond basic. ABM sales cycles can be long with a multitude of touch points, so your understanding of how to build these models must go deeper. Check out our download [\*The B2B Marketer's Guide to tracking and proving ROI\*](#) for more on how to do this.
- › **Keep on top of technology:**  
The technology used for ABM is expanding at an exponential rate. Keep on top of the latest developments, and understand how these might be applied in your own organisation. Not every piece of tech is going to be suitable, but you need to be aware of what's happening in the market. Forming relationships with major tech vendors can help you to do this.

# At-a-glance skills guide for account-based marketing

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- › Confidence
- › Enthusiasm.

## 4. Open-mindedness

- › Comfortable being uncomfortable
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- › Willing to change approach.

## 7. Knowledge and experience

- › Well-versed in a variety of marketing tactics
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- › Diplomacy.

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## 3. Resilience

- › Strength of character
- › Persistence
- › 'Bouncebackability'.

## 6. Project management

- › Organisation
- › Risk assessment and management
- › Experience with Agile marketing.

Eager to build these skills across your team? Check out our range of ABM training courses to upskill your team [here](#).

Unsure how to embark on ABM? Looking to upscale your ABM efforts and accelerate results? B2B Marketing's tailored team-enablement programme, **Head-Start, will help.**



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Established more than 12 years ago, we are the number one go-to resource for B2B marketers across the globe.

Through our content hub and professional development services – including events, training and networking – B2B Marketing users are empowered with the tools, insight and inspiration they need.

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Contact us

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

Tel: +44 (0)20 7014 4920  
[info@b2bmarketing.net](mailto:info@b2bmarketing.net)  
[b2bmarketing.net](http://b2bmarketing.net)

