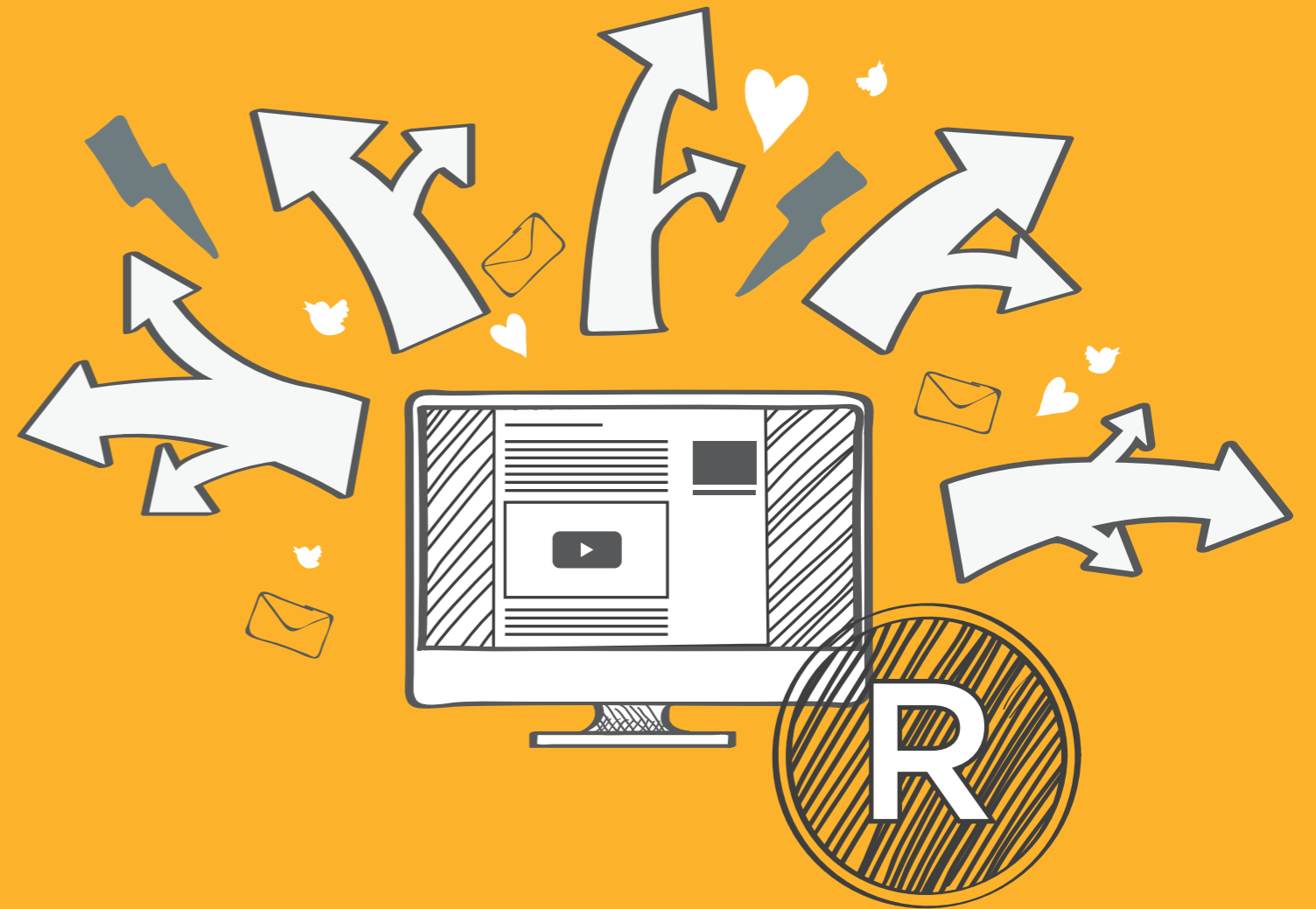


One Chance to Impress: How to Get Your ABM Content Right First Time



A Radix copywriting guide for B2B account-based marketing specialists

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The undeniable appeal of account-based marketing



Introduction

Account-based marketing is hotter than a very hot thing right now.

Not only has B2B Marketing just devoted its entire autumn 2017 conference to “Account-Based Everything”, but 96% of marketers who are doing it say it’s a key driver of marketing success, according to research by Demandbase¹.

Why is ABM so popular? For most, it’s because the ROI is exponentially higher than with traditional marketing campaigns. With companies like Localytics saying their first ABM pilot led to a 36% account-to-meeting conversion rate, and KPMG reporting “a larger pipeline and increased revenue” from its ABM initiatives², the appeal is undeniable.

The importance of *really* good content

ABM is a powerful strategy, but it’s also a high-stakes one, and easy to get wrong. When you’re creating personalised content for an individual account or person, the first impression is critical - so the success of your campaign depends on getting that content right first time.

It takes a lot of skill to create content that resonates with an audience of one - and spurs them to take the appropriate action. For marketers and writers used to working on traditional campaigns, it can mean learning a new set of skills, or at least learning to apply your existing skills differently.

¹ Demandbase, More Than 95% of B2B Marketers Report that Account-Based Marketing (ABM) Drives Marketing Success, September 2015

² ITSMA eBook, Driving Growth with Three Types of ABM, July 2017

How to get your ABM copy bang-on

That's why we've created this ebook. From our own experience of writing targeted ABM content for the likes of Tata Consultancy Services, BlackBerry and Dell - and from conversations we've had with clients and ABM experts (some of which you'll find in these pages) - we've established an approach to writing ABM content that maximises your campaign's chances of success.

Read on to get a solid understanding of how to approach your ABM content from a copywriting point of view, including practical advice on:



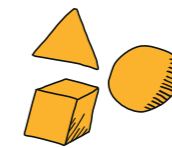
What is ABM - and how does it work?



The role of writing in ABM



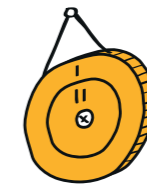
When to get a copywriter involved



The skills your copywriter will need



How to research your target prospect



How to write for your target prospect

About Radix

Radix is a copywriting agency for the content marketing era. We specialise in producing top-quality copy and content for B2B technology firms who want their writing to stand out and get results.

With 10 writers under the roof of a converted creekside warehouse in Cornwall, working on high-profile (and sometimes award-winning) campaigns for over 50 tech brands each year, we think we have an edge when it comes to applying copy to marketing objectives to get the best results.

If you'd like to explore getting a professional writing team involved with your ABM campaigns, look us up. You can reach us on +44 (0)1326 373592 or at info@radix-communications.com.



Hang on a minute - what is ABM, exactly?



Section 1

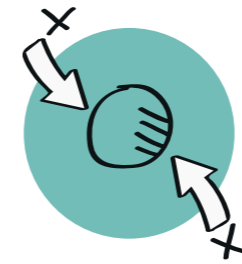
Account-Based Marketing steps away from marketing to a broad target market, and instead focuses on marketing to very specific companies, and even to individual people (or buying committees) within those companies.

This very targeted approach often requires copy and content to be tailored to an individual company or buyer. In some cases, it can mean entire campaigns designed for an audience of one.

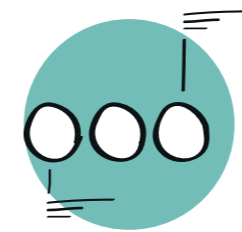
While it's by no means a new concept, recent advances in marketing technology have made **ABM** more achievable for marketers in organisations of all sizes.

Three types of ABM

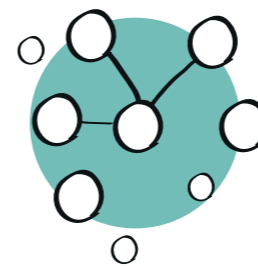
ABM as a discipline is still evolving, but leading practitioners - like [ITSMA](#) - have already established that there are three distinct approaches when it comes to targeting specific accounts:



1-to-1 ABM focuses on individual accounts, aligning closely with sales to produce an entirely bespoke approach to each one - including unique content targeted to that account.



1-to-few ABM focuses on small groups of accounts with clear common characteristics, produces campaigns that are likely to appeal to them, and then tailors that content as appropriate.



1-to-many ABM is technology and data driven, and it's new. You still need appealing central stuff, but the audience is greater, and the personalisation is more automated.

The role of writing in ABM



Section 2

A lot goes into making an ABM campaign successful - particularly if you're using a 1-to-1 or 1-to-few approach to create a highly-targeted (or even fully personalised) campaign.

There are reams of blogs and ebooks on everything from identifying the best target accounts, to getting your ABM team structure right and choosing the right technology platform to deliver your personalised content.

You'll also find a huge amount of advice about the research and insight-gathering needed for effective personalisation, and the most effective channels and content formats to get your prospects' attention (and win their business).

But what's often skipped over in these guides is this: Once you've restructured your team, identified your target accounts, researched your individual prospects, determined the channels and content formats you're going to use to reach them, and implemented your technology platform, *you then have to create the content* that's going to get you that all-important sales meeting or demo booking.

That content could be anything: a personalised ROI illustration; a tailored version of an industry research report; a two-page solution brief

based on the prospect's known pain points and challenges; an insightful interview with the prospect's CEO. (Once, our creative director David was even asked to write an entire book for one prospect.)

Whichever content format(s) you choose, one thing is certain - it has to *deliver*. It has to get past gatekeepers and into the hands of your prospect. It has to get opened, and read. It has to get their attention and keep it. It has to strike a chord, by accurately hitting on a challenge, pain point or aspiration that your prospect has, and it has to convince them that your brand can help them with that. It has to sound credible, compelling, unique and relevant.

And it has to do all that without seeming *creepy*.

Why great writing is critical to your campaign's success

Once you've hit on your campaign concept, almost all of that incredibly heavy lifting has to be done through the writing. And if you're doing ABM well - i.e. deeply personalising the content to each individual prospect - every piece has to be written with the individual prospect in mind; using the appropriate angle, tone, terminology and language.

That's where writing comes into ABM picture. As Robert Norum, Associate Director at McDonald Butler Associates, told us:

“Content is critical to the ABM process... so on that basis, good writing that is tailored to a company or even an individual is definitely a key element in the communications mix.”

But doing that writing yourself can be tough. In a survey of 159 marketers who are doing ABM, ITSMA found that the top two challenges were “developing campaign assets that are mass customizable to allow scale” (cited by 42% of respondents) and “personalizing and tailoring our marketing to the key contacts at each account” (40%)³.

If you're a marketer with a plan to develop more ABM campaigns, but you don't have the bandwidth or the desire to create all the content

yourself, that's where a copywriter can help you.

In fact, in our experience, larger ABM campaigns can be too much for a single copywriter, especially if you need to produce lots of tailored content pieces in a relatively short timeframe. For a large-scale 1-to-few ABM campaign - like the one in our case study on page 18 - you'd probably want to gather a team of writers.

When should you involve a copywriter?



Section 3

The process of pulling together content for 1-to-1, or 1-to-few ABM, can be a long one – involving a great deal of research to determine the most important issues, solutions, value propositions and language. What is the right time for the account-based marketer to bring a copywriter into the mix?

Andrea Clatworthy, Head of Account Based Marketing at Fujitsu, believes it should come once you've decided what you want to say, to help you shape the how:

“One of the key things when communicating with a customer is to use their language, their terminology, so insight and research are important to get that right – this should be a joint effort between the ABMer, the account team, and the extended team including, for instance, a copywriter.”

“I think the right time for a copywriter to get involved is when the ABMer has determined what to communicate, and brings in folk to shape how and when.”

Robert Norum, meanwhile, believes that copywriters should be involved earlier in ABM than for regular marketing campaigns:

“Typically, we would expect to start with industry, company and stakeholder insight before moving to value proposition and messaging development, which would then lead to a creative brief for content and creative execution.”

“But [with ABM] I think the copywriter should be immersed in the insight findings and heavily involved in workshops or conversations around value proposition and messaging.”

If you get a writer involved early on, we can help to make sure the research is meaningful, and will find out things that help us write with real authority and insight.

So what skills should you look for in your ABM copywriter(s)? We put that question to Bev Burgess, Senior Vice President and ABM Practice Lead at ITSMA, and she was kind enough to give us a very detailed answer.

“ABM is all about treating an account as a market in its own right. As a result of the research you conduct and insight you build into that account and the key people within it, you are able to develop messaging that is more relevant, personalised, and presented in the language and format that the buyers and influencers in the account prefer.”

But more importantly still, Bev believes the copywriter’s core skills are different, depending on the kind of ABM you’re doing: 1-to-1, 1-to-few or 1-to-many.

The skills an ABM writer needs



Section 4

1-to-1 ABM

For 1-to-1 work, Bev says the most important thing for account-based marketers is to find a writer who's strong enough to push the brief back if it's wrong:

“Writers working on 1-to-1 ABM campaigns usually make the account’s issues and the language it uses the starting point for any bespoke or customised brand propositions, thought leadership content, and value propositions.

“This outside-in perspective is not different from good marketing – just more focused on one account – but it is different from the inside-out messaging that many technology companies put out in the market.

“This means writers in ABM need to not only get into the mind of the audience, as experienced journalists would typically do anyway, and create an impactful headline or proposition in the right language, but they also need the soft skills to push back on those who want to revert to their own technical language or messaging, or add back in technical details that will not resonate.

“In essence, ABM copywriters need the assertiveness to help suppliers create something powerful and ‘get over themselves’ to be effective in an ABM context.”

(You heard it, marketers: get over yourselves.)

1-to-few ABM

With 1-to-few ABM, Bev believes writers can help the marketing team to strike a balance between enough personalisation, and overkill:

“With 1-to-few ABM, the challenge is to understand the common issues and language used by a cluster of similar accounts within a context, and be able to craft language that resonates with as many of the stakeholders in those accounts as possible, without creating the need to feed an unmanageable content beast!

“The balancing act is a tough one. But essentially it’s about the 80/20 rule: making sure enough content is customised to stakeholders and accounts within the cluster while keeping as much of the content created for all the accounts in common as possible.”

1-to-many ABM

Finally, Bev says that writing for 1-to-many ABM campaigns are a lot like the B2B marketing copywriters already know and love.

“As you hit 1-to-many ABM, it becomes much more like ‘just good marketing’, as one of my clients calls it. It’s about creating the right content to reach the right people at the right time in the accounts that matter to you. Writing for buyer personas is really the best way to work here.”

How to write for your target prospect



Section 5

As different as ABM is from traditional marketing, the first rule of B2B copywriting still applies in spades: know your audience. If you don't know who you're writing for, you can't craft an argument that's relevant, urgent and compelling for that reader.

In the traditional world of marketing to broad market segments, having a buyer persona was often enough. But with ABM, your reader isn't a theoretical *persona*, but a real *person* in a real organisation.

That makes “knowing your audience” a super-high-stakes game. You're no longer writing copy that needs to resonate with HR heads in midsize-to-large financial services companies. You're writing copy that specifically has to resonate with Debra Minkus, CHRO at MidBank in Manhattan.

Debra may have some of the characteristics of your “HR Head” buyer persona, but equally, she may be a maverick, with a completely different outlook on life and her role than her peers in other companies. The approach you'd use with your HR head persona may work, or it may turn her off entirely.

So, how do you know what makes Debra tick?

Interviewing a salesperson or account manager

Well, if you're doing ABM properly, with the right level of insight into your target accounts, you'll be able to find someone who can tell you.

If your organisation already has a presence in the account, for example, there may be a salesperson or account manager who can give you a decent view of what Debra is like. Or someone in your organisation may have worked at MidBank in the recent past, and can give you the inside track.

These are ideal scenarios - because the person not only knows what Debra is like, but they also have a good view of what MidBank is like as an organisation, and knows at least some of the internal challenges it's facing.

If you find that person, press them for any information you can use to help you target your content accurately. The kinds of questions you could ask them include:

- What is [name]'s responsibilities at [company] - and how is their success measured?
- What is [name] like: ambitious, a risk-taker, conservative, cautious?
- What is [company]'s attitude towards [area related to our offering]?
- Is [area related to our offering] a strategic priority for [company]? Why / why not?

- How far advanced is [company] in rolling out [area related to our offering]?
- What barriers are they facing in rolling out [area related to our offering]?
- What is the single biggest pain they're experiencing today in [area related to our offering]?
- What's the one thing we can tell [company] that will make them sit up and listen?

Unfortunately, though, it isn't always this straightforward. Many ABM campaigns target accounts where the brand currently has no presence, so it's hard to find anyone with first-hand knowledge of the account or the person you're targeting.

Other useful sources of insight

In an ideal ABM world, as Andrea Clatworthy and Robert Norum have outlined, you'll have access to a dedicated insight team. They'll be able to research the industry, company and individual, and come up with an accurate profile to help you position your content accurately. However, it isn't always an ideal world, and sometimes you and/or your writers will find yourself under pressure to create the content without any formal research to go on. What do you do then?

In our experience, these sources can be particularly useful:

- If the target account is a public company, its annual report and any interim trading statements (you'll generally find these in the "Investors" section of its website)
- Any recent media interviews you can find with the person you're targeting or the company's senior management
- The Careers pages of the company's website, and any job listings it has elsewhere
- The LinkedIn profile of your target prospect

1. Annual reports and trading statements

These documents provide the company's own view of its current market, strategic objectives and trading conditions. As they're legally bound to be honest and accurate, they can be a very good source of information about the challenges the company is currently facing, and the risks it faces in trying to achieve its strategic goals.

You can learn a lot from these documents about how the company is structured, how well each business unit is doing, and where it intends to focus (and de-focus) over the coming months and years. You can often learn, for example, about the success or otherwise of recent digital transformation initiatives and strategic technology investments - and about any more that are planned.

You'll also find statements and quotes from senior executives that will give you a good idea of the company's current priorities and future aspirations. A lot of the wording will be expressed in optimistic business-speak, but your business knowledge should help you to decode it.

2. Media interviews

A decent media interview can also be a goldmine of information about your target company and your target executive's current priorities and preoccupations.

Look for interviews where the reporter has a good handle on the company and is asking astute questions about areas that are of interest to you: *"Your online sales were down as an overall proportion of revenue last year - why was that?"* The kind of questions you'd want to ask your target prospect yourself, if you had the chance to interview them.

While some executives will deflect challenging lines of questioning, many will be honest about why certain initiatives failed, or what needs to be done in order to regain market share (or maintain/extend a market lead). Those answers can give you some superb nuggets of insight as to how your product or service offering could help that company succeed.

3. LinkedIn profiles

How do you personalise your content to your target prospect without making your writing sound stalkery? This is a critical consideration for any highly-targeted ABM campaign - and one that's always bothered us as writers creating targeted content.

To learn more about your prospect, you may be tempted to follow their personal Twitter or Instagram, or look at what they're posting on Facebook. But that way you risk falling into an "uncanny valley" - where you start to write about things you know matter to them personally, but without the benefit of knowing the "whole" person in real life.

This approach carries a very high risk of coming across as creepy. For that reason, we'd recommend staying away from personal social media accounts, and focusing instead on the person's LinkedIn profile and professional postings on that platform.

If you're lucky, this is where you'll find useful information about how they see their role in the organisation; what they're responsible for; and information about what they consider to be their personal mission and milestone achievements - all of which is good to bear in mind if you're writing something for that person.

4. Careers pages and job listings

An organisation's careers pages and specific job listings can give you much more of an insight into what the organisation is all about than, say, its "About Us" pages.

Reading between the lines, you'll find detailed descriptions of how the organisation operates; what people in different departments are expected to do; the challenges the organisation needs its people to help it overcome; and the kinds of thing it considers to be its USPs and differentiators.

If you're lucky, you may even find the job listing for the role your target prospect now has; which will give you some very good insight into what that person is expected to achieve in their job - and by extension, how your products or services could help them succeed.

Four tips for applying your research

Once you've done your research, you need to reflect what you've learned in the writing of the targeted content. The exact way you go about that will depend on what type of content you're creating, but here are four general tips that we try to follow when writing ABM content that's targeted to a specific person or organisation:

1 Use the terminology your target

prospect uses. As a basic example, if the target organisation refers to its employees as “colleagues”, use this word in your content rather than “employees”. It'll show you've researched the organisation and know the language it uses.

2 Use the right names for internal functions and departments.

As above, if your prospect organisation calls its central IT function “The Digital Hub”, use that language in your content. (Caveat: you have to be really sure you're using correct, up to date wording - otherwise that “uncanny valley” effect kicks in again, and you risk alienating the prospect.)

3 Choose your tone of voice carefully.

Mirroring the prospect's brand tone of voice can help to show you're aligned with their company - but at the same time, you still want the piece

to sound like it's come from your organisation, so it doesn't jar with what the prospect already knows about your brand. This is a fine line to tread, but if you've got a good amount of experience in writing conversational marketing content, you should be able to strike the right balance.

4 Be upfront about where you got your info.

This is another good way to avoid coming across as creepy. If you talk about the prospect's key challenges in the piece, be honest about where you learned about them. If you say something like “As CEO [name] stated in [company]'s 2017 annual report, [company] is looking to upgrade its ecommerce engine to cope with growing demand,” your prospect will feel like you've done appropriate research, and not like you've sent someone to spy on them.

Case study: Tata Consultancy Services

When [Quantum Marketing Group](#) approached Radix for help with an ABM campaign for their client Tata Consultancy Services, the way they planned to tackle the project got us really excited about the possibilities.

The aim was to raise TCS's profile with senior decision-makers in UK retail organisations – by creating a unique piece of content for each recipient.

Each bespoke report would explore the recipient's real challenges and aspirations, drawn from information revealed in annual reports and media interviews. It would then present TCS as a consultancy that could help the individual decision-maker – and the target account as a whole – to achieve their goals. The kicker: We only had four weeks to research and write 29 reports. The Radix team sprang into action, appointing two researchers, two writers, two reviewers and a project manager. We read annual reports, scoured through press articles, interviewed key stakeholders at TCS, assembled facts, figures and quotes, and drafted copy for 29 personalised content pieces.

Quantum's designers flowed our approved copy into a smart template, and we wrote a personalised a cover letter for each one. Then it

was down to Quantum to execute the campaign: sending out the reports, and following up with each recipient by phone.

More than three quarters (77%) of decision-makers who received the content actively engaged with it: a significantly higher response rate than traditional methods of outbound marketing, and a great demonstration of how a well-executed ABM campaign can be a highly effective way to engage a senior-level audience.



Time to protect the world from crap ABM content



Summary

As more and more B2B marketers start using ABM, there's a real danger that the quality will drop, and prospects will be deluged with piles of lazy, half-arsed, poorly thought-out rubbish.

To get ABM right, marketers and key account teams need to form close partnerships with writers who can take their insights and use it to craft relevant, compelling and actionable content that delivers the kind of results we know ABM is capable of.

As Bev Burgess concludes:

“For writers, ABM is a chance to focus on a more tightly-defined audience and create relevant, engaging content as they pass through a buying cycle. The amount of content needed could be enormous, so the judgement to know when you've hit diminishing returns is important, along with the assertiveness to help suppliers adopt an outside-in mindset and move away from their corporate messages and jargon.”

We say: **bring it on.**



Acknowledgements

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Andrea Clatworthy

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