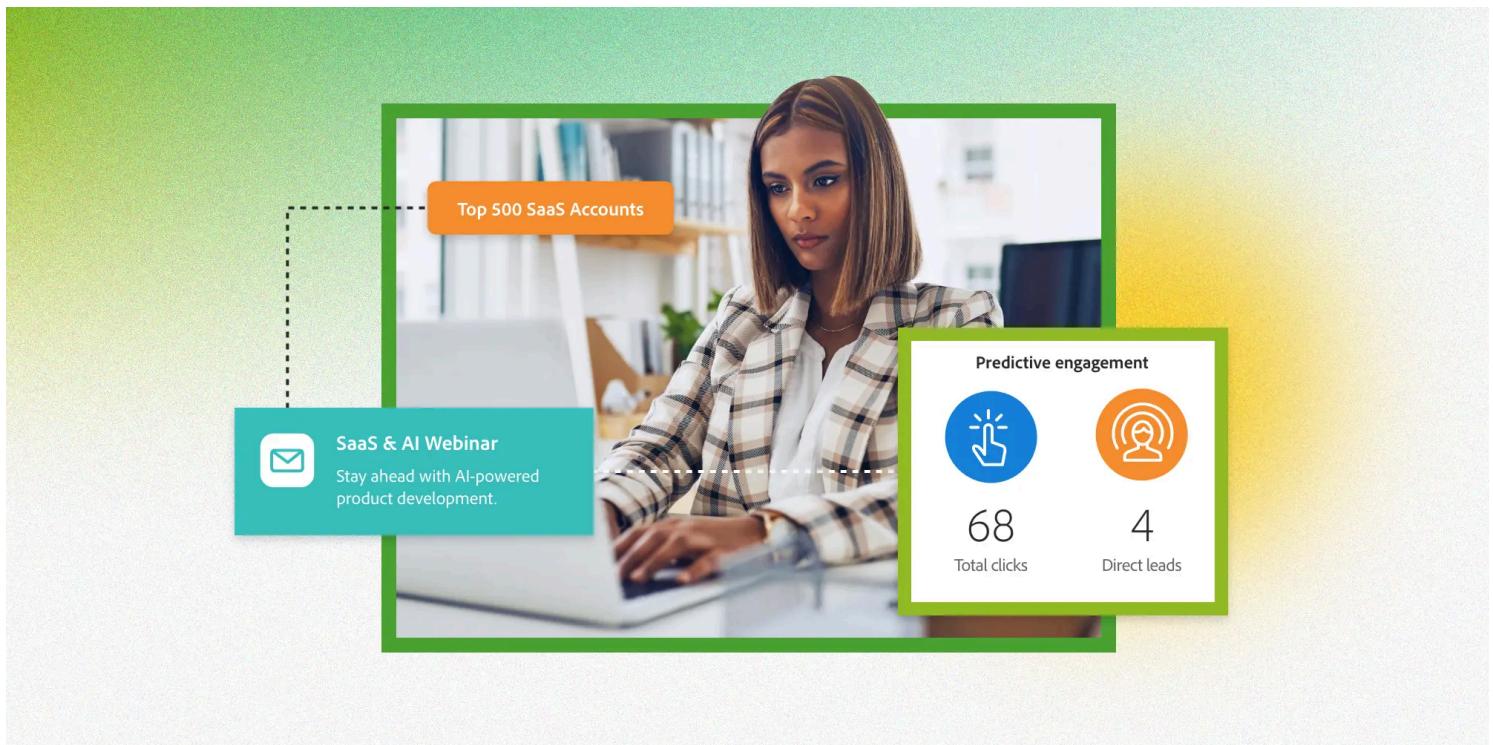


Your guide to account-based marketing (ABM)



Adobe Experience Cloud Team
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For business-to-business (B2B) brands, it can be tough to convert high-value leads into customers. The key is to create personalized customer experiences that not only convert more B2B decision-makers, but also generate a higher return on investment (ROI).

Account-based marketing (ABM) is a B2B sales and marketing strategy that requires both teams to collectively engage specific target accounts that are considered a good fit for the brand. It's a powerful, focused approach that targets specific, high-value prospects to convert them into sales.

Account-based marketing is quickly becoming a top marketing practice because it helps businesses hone in on best-fit accounts. However, ABM has a learning curve, so it's important to understand the ins and outs of ABM. In this guide, we'll explain what ABM is, why it's so beneficial, and give you actionable steps for creating your own ABM strategy.

This post will discuss:

- [What account-based marketing is](#)
- [Account-based marketing benefits](#)
- [How account-based marketing works](#)
- [Creating an ABM strategy](#)
- [Account-based marketing and inbound marketing](#)
- [Account-based marketing examples](#)

What is account-based marketing?

Account-based marketing is a B2B strategy that sales and marketing departments use to focus their efforts on specific organizations, or accounts. With ABM, marketers and salespeople collaborate on a shared strategy and then coordinate account-based experiences together as one revenue team with the same goals. The combined team selects a number of key accounts, works together, and wins more business as a result.

Traditionally, marketing focuses on inbound strategies, such as [content marketing](#), or lead-based marketing, where you cast a wide net and hope that people respond. With account-based marketing, you try to target specific individuals within an account and coordinate your marketing efforts with the sales team.

Instead of targeting large groups, ABM focuses on creating content geared toward specific prospects at particular organizations that your business wants to work with. This is especially effective if your business serves enterprise customers because ABM allows you to target multiple decision-makers.

Account-based marketing benefits

Account-based marketing isn't a fit for every business, but it can be incredibly effective for B2B companies targeting enterprise accounts. Let's take a look at some

of the great benefits ABM offers businesses.

Align marketing and sales

Traditionally, sales and marketing are siloed into separate departments. But their roles are so intertwined that it doesn't make sense to separate sales and marketing. This leads to miscommunications, conflict, and lower campaign performance.

Account-based marketing is so effective because it provides much-needed structure for [`unifying sales and marketing](#) under the same umbrella. If you've struggled to get sales and marketing on the same page, embracing ABM will naturally remove silos and simplify sales and marketing workflows.

Create more consistent customer experiences

According to PwC, [48% of consumers](#) say consistent, reliable experiences are key to loyalty. In an age where all buyers — including B2B prospects — crave consistency, it's critical for businesses to embrace different marketing models.

Account-based marketing strategies align your sales and marketing initiatives to give your leads a consistent experience, no matter where they interact with you. An [ABM-specific marketing platform](#) also makes it easier to deliver consistent, quality experiences across all of your brand channels. The result is improved customer trust, higher conversions, and fewer lost accounts.

Increase ROI

Successful marketing campaigns require time and resources, but you should still expect to see a return on what you put into your marketing strategies. The [return on investment, or ROI](#), is a great factor in understanding whether a marketing strategy is effective or not.

The majority of B2B marketers say ABM campaigns are great value for the money. In fact, [76% of marketers](#) say ABM generates a greater ROI than any other marketing strategy. And more businesses see value in this marketing approach, with [70% of B2B marketers](#) at large or midsize companies planning to launch ABM strategies.

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Streamline sales cycles

While B2C sales cycles can happen in a matter of hours or days, B2B purchases take weeks, months, and sometimes even years. In the interim, your team is spending more time and resources nurturing relationships with leads.

With ABM, you can focus your efforts on accounts that are most likely to convert into high-value sales. Instead of splitting your focus, you pursue accounts that are ready to take action. The B2B sales cycle might still take a few weeks or months, but ABM workflows will definitely [shorten the time from first contact to closing the deal](#).

Increase content relevance and customer trust

In an ideal scenario, leads would receive content tailored to their unique needs and where they are in the sales funnel. Traditional marketing approaches struggle to do this, but account-based marketing makes it much easier to connect leads with relevant content.

For example, a search engine optimization agency might use automation to send a personalized SEO report to contacts at their target organizations. B2B leads want content tailored to their exact needs, and when you fulfill that expectation, you're much more likely to foster trust — and eventually a sale.

How account-based marketing works

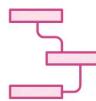
Now that we understand just how beneficial ABM can be, we'll explore the inner workings of an account-based marketing strategy. While every B2B strategy is unique, all account-based marketing strategies share these qualities:

- **Collaboration.** ABM isn't solely a marketing task. It requires collaboration between both sales and marketing departments.

- **Customer journey mapping.** As a B2B company, you're targeting a very specific type of customer. To better understand the needs of these customers, you'll need to create a [visual representation of the customer journey](#), or the steps an account takes before becoming a paying customer. During this process, you put yourself in the customer's shoes to identify their pain points and remove any areas of friction.
- **Lead qualification.** Strong [lead qualification practices](#) are the key to highly focused ABM campaigns. Teams following an account-based marketing strategy are very particular about their target accounts. With the right ABM software, you can qualify accounts as a way to specify who is (and isn't) ready for nurturing.
- **Using the right ABM platform.** Account-based marketing just isn't possible without [the right technology](#). ABM platforms equip your team with smart automations, AI-driven segmentation tools, and a connected customer relationship management (CRM) platform to execute your ambitious plans.



Collaboration



Customer journey mapping



Lead qualification



Using the right ABM platform

For example, let's say you own an executive coaching business that serves C-suite leaders. Sales and marketing would work together to create goals, metrics, and a strategy for attracting executives at Acme, Inc. to your business. The two teams work together to map the journey the Acme executives might take to become customers, which includes word-of-mouth referrals, website visits, and webinar attendance.

You add these contacts to your CRM and begin nurturing the relationship, logging each touchpoint in your ABM software. The system automatically alerts the right member of your team for sales calls, marketing collateral, and other touchpoints to further qualify leads until Acme chooses your executive coaching services.

Creating an ABM strategy

Now that we know the basics of account-based marketing, we'll outline the five steps you can follow to create an ABM campaign.

1. Identify target accounts

Traditional marketing requires responding to interested leads, but account-based marketing takes the opposite approach. First, you [identify the companies you want to work with](#) and then attract the target account's interest with tailored marketing campaigns.

Since you'll expend a lot of time and energy pursuing these accounts, select targets with high-value potential. For some companies, that could be a few hundred dollars, while it could be multi-million-dollar deals for other businesses.

You can also identify target accounts by:

- Pursuing accounts that are similar to your past or current accounts
- Choosing targets based on their size, annual revenue, or location
- Learning more about your followers on social media, blog readers, and other contacts who are already engaging with you
- Researching who your competitors are working with and looking for similar companies
- Reading news articles or press releases in your industry that mention growth, mergers, or other indications that a business would benefit from your services
- Networking at industry events or conferences

Most account-based marketing strategies assign a set number of accounts to each member of the team. However, you can also select ten target accounts that the entire team works on together — it's completely up to you.

2. Rank prospects within your target accounts

A list of target accounts is a good start, but your team can't contact a business. You need to find contact information for employees and decision-makers at these businesses to start nurturing relationships with them.

For successful ABM, you need highly sophisticated and advanced lead-based targeting. At the end of the day, you're still targeting an individual with account-based marketing, but you're targeting an individual within the context of the larger account.

If you have existing data on contacts at prospective accounts, consult your CRM to see if these contacts have decision-making power. If they're no longer at the organization or if they're too low-level, look for more relevant contacts on LinkedIn.

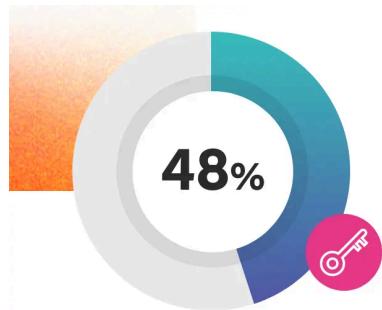
From there, add these contacts to your CRM. If you import dozens of contacts to the same account, work with your team to rank prospects within these accounts. This will help you narrow your focus to relevant decision-makers in the business.

3. Align marketing and sales

Marketing and sales should work together to create workflows for nurturing your highest-ranking contacts. The two teams should align on:

- Your target accounts and [ideal customer profile \(ICP\)](#)
- Shared messaging across every stage of the customer journey
- Which [key performance indicators \(KPIs\)](#) you'll track
- How they will use technology to support the ABM strategy
- Which actions matter most for qualifying a lead (some teams will use [scoring systems](#) to quantify when leads are ready for outreach)
- Who is responsible for which nurturing actions? This should go beyond assigning tasks to "marketing" or "sales" but to individuals on each team. Accountability ensures that no prospect goes unturned.

Account-based marketing requires regular meetings between sales and marketing. Schedule weekly standup meetings between the two teams to keep everyone on the same page.



48% of consumers say consistent, reliable experiences are key to loyalty.

4. Create personalized content

Account-based marketing is all about targeting specific prospects at your target organizations. The good news is that this approach makes it much easier to create

hyper-personalized content tailored to the unique needs of each prospect at your target organizations.

For example, if you're targeting the C-suite leader of an office supply business, you can create a guide explaining how your business got results for a very similar business and email it directly to the C-suite leader.

B2B prospects receive a lot of marketing content, so personalization is a must to convince them to engage with your brand. You can personalize ABM by:

- Creating ads targeting specific roles or companies
- Reaching out to contacts on LinkedIn when they receive a promotion
- Using [dynamic content](#) on your website and in your email campaigns
- Mentioning companies or people by name (if you're feeling brave)
- Crafting one-on-one emails to contacts at your target companies
- Meeting prospects in person at industry events

5. Measure your results

It can take some time to know whether your account-based marketing strategies are working because the B2B sales cycle is so long. However, with [the right data analytics tool](#), you can course-correct before your team spends too much time on an irrelevant lead.

ABM thrives on data, so [consult your ABM platform](#) to track important metrics like:

- Influenced pipeline
- Engagement rates
- Open rates
- Click-through rates
- Conversions
- Cross-sells and upsells
- Annual contract values
- Customer lifetime value
- Win rates

With ABM, the focus is less on the number of leads and more on the quality of lead engagement. The sales cycles tend to be longer, but the deals are bigger. Ideally, you

want to see an increase in your average deal size to know whether your ABM strategies are paying off.

Account-based marketing and inbound marketing

While account-based marketing is a standalone marketing strategy, it borrows components of other marketing strategies. For example, ABM is related to inbound marketing, and the two strategies work well together.

With inbound marketing, you create valuable, informative, or educational content that leads usually find via organic search, social media, or paid search. This is great for attracting new leads into your business, but inbound marketing can also pique the interest of contacts at your target accounts for ABM.

This is why inbound marketing is the foundation of a successful account-based marketing strategy. Inbound allows you to meet your prospects where they are and show them the content they want to see and when they want to see it.

Your team will likely use a blend of both inbound and ABM strategies to reach more people in your target audience. As long as it makes sense for your company, these two strategies should run parallel to each other. Some brands are 80% ABM and 20% lead-based marketing. Some brands have those percentages flipped, while some brands are 50/50. It completely depends on the company, its resources, its level of maturity, its goals, and the product or services it sells.

With ABM, marketers and salespeople collaborate on a shared strategy and then coordinate account-based experiences together as one revenue team with the same goals.

Account-based marketing examples

Every business implements account-based marketing differently. To create a strong ABM strategy for your own business, it's a good idea to see how other companies embrace account-based marketing too.

target contacts to these websites via display ads. Since DocuSign knew exactly who would visit these specialized websites, it populated the sites with highly personalized content that substantially increased conversions.

GumGum, a contextual intelligence company, was targeting an account with T-Mobile. Its team created a custom superhero comic book featuring the T-Mobile CEO as the hero of the story. GumGum's comic book went viral, and it successfully landed the T-Mobile account.

Account-based marketing doesn't just have to happen in the digital realm either. Product design company Intridea cleverly bought a billboard in front of the Ogilvy New York City headquarters to get the brand's attention — and it worked.

Creating effective ABM strategies

There are so many ways to embrace account-based marketing in your own business. This marketing strategy is a great way to use your resources more efficiently by aligning sales and marketing teams to convert your high-value prospects into customers.

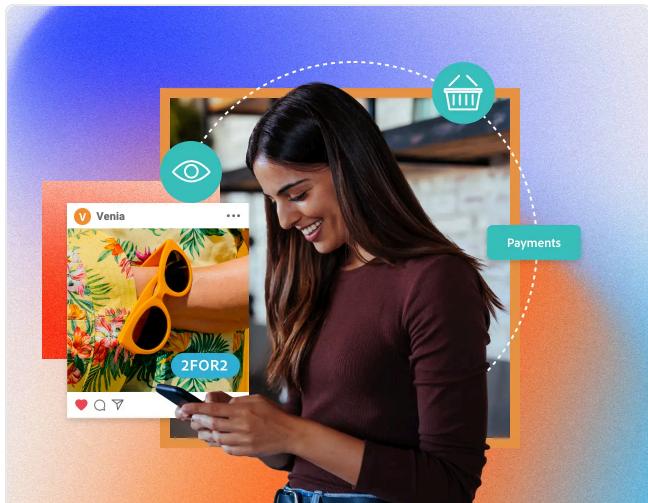
When you're ready to create your own ABM strategy, start by reviewing your prospects and leads to identify potential high-value customers that would benefit from a personalized experience. Rank these prospects within your ABM software, create a shared workflow between sales and marketing, create personalized content, and measure your results.

It's one thing to create an ABM strategy, but it's another thing entirely to execute that strategy, especially with a large sales and marketing team. That's why it's so important to back up your ABM campaigns with ABM-friendly software like [Adobe Marketo Engage](#).

Marketo Engage is a powerful marketing automation and CRM tool that helps you manage campaigns of any scale. Marketo Engage helps you personalize and automate experiences across channels, use artificial intelligence to segment your audience, and bring your sales and marketing teams together.

[Take a product tour](#) to find out more about how Marketo Engage can make your next account-based marketing campaign a successful one.

Recommended for you



BASICS

What is digital marketing? A complete guide

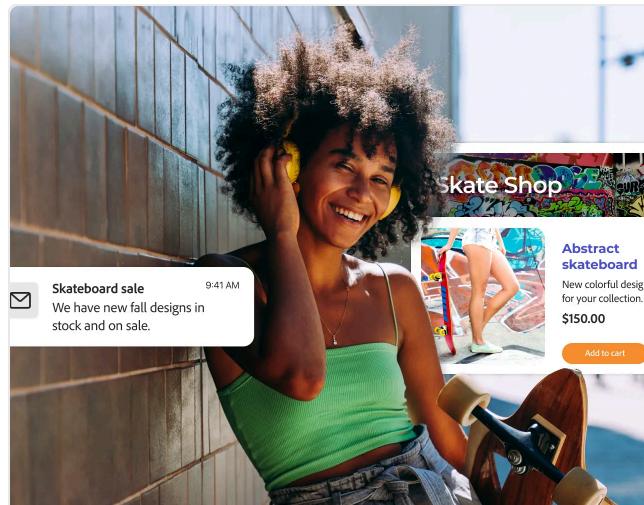
Digital marketing is the use of digital channels to market products. It promotes...

A woman with curly hair and glasses is smiling while holding a tablet. She is wearing a purple blazer over a teal top. In the background, there are two small boxes labeled "Email A" and "Email B", each showing a different image from a music series. To the right, there is a large orange box containing a line graph titled "Total impressions" with the value "17948". Above the graph, it says "Increase customer base".

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BASICS

What is inbound marketing?

Inbound marketing refers to marketing campaigns where engagement with the...

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