What Do Software Marketers Need to Know About ABM?

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For B2B software and SaaS marketers, it is important to keep pace with developments in demand generation methods, and they should consider launching or enhancing their ABM strategy.

Account-based marketing (ABM) has been gaining traction among B2B marketers of technology and software products because of the stronger response it generates compared to traditional demand generation and prospecting methods. ABM (/en/digital-markets/insights/account-based-marketing-trends) can provide a lift across several key metrics, including a 28% increase in overall account engagement and a 25% rise in the marketing-qualified lead (MQL) to sales-accepted lead (SAL) conversion rates.

However, for an ABM program to be effective, it is critical to have buy-in from both the marketing and sales teams. This article helps digital marketing leaders for software and SaaS providers get the buy-in they need to take the initial steps to plan and execute a B2B account-based marketing program.

What is ABM?

ABM is a go-to-market strategy that targets certain accounts with a synchronized, continuous set of marketing and sales activities. With ABM, instead of casting a wide net, a B2B marketer gets intentionally selective about focusing on leads or accounts that have a high chance of conversion.

Marketers provide a targeted account with a steady stream of personalized content (/en/digital-markets/insights/account-based-marketing-best-practices) tailored to individual businesses and buying contexts. It is almost like creating a *universe* of one for the targeted account, such that all interaction over advertisement, email, phone calls, and social media the contact has with the software provider is relevant to business needs and immediately resonates.
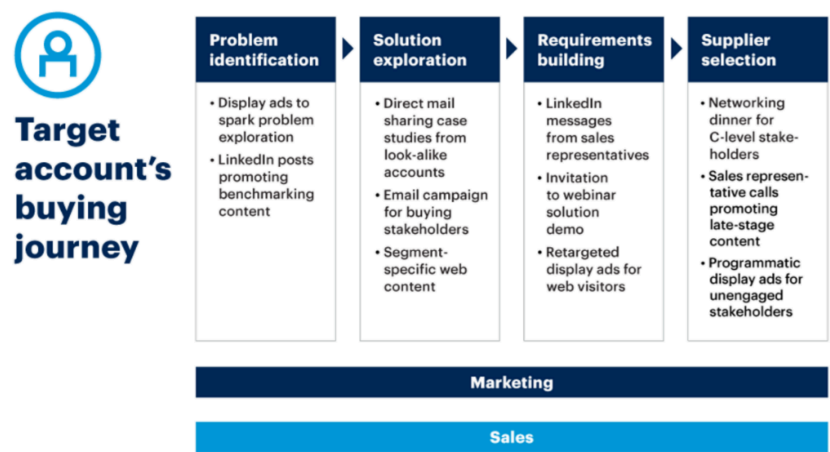
Execute an effective ABM strategy by utilizing intent data. B2B Intent data (/en/digital-markets/b2b-intent-data) interprets software buyer behavior to predict which companies have the highest intent to purchase your software.

How to get started with ABM

There is no standard approach to getting an ABM program off the ground. The optimal ABM campaign depends on the unique needs of the business. It also relies heavily on a thorough understanding of the target account's business and buying context, including key business objectives, value drivers and information needs along the purchase journey.

Sample ABM strategy

Target account's buying journey

Problem identification	Solution exploration	Requirements building	Supplier selection
• Display ads to spark problem exploration • LinkedIn posts promoting benchmarking content	• Direct mail sharing case studies from look-alike accounts • Email campaign for buying stakeholders • Segment-specific web content	• LinkedIn messages from sales representatives • Invitation to webinar solution demo • Retargeted display ads for web visitors	• Networking dinner for C-level stake-holders • Sales represen-tative calls promoting late-stage content • Programmatic display ads for unengaged stakeholders

Marketing

Sales

Source: Gartner

Gartner
Digital Markets

The first step to setting up an ABM program is securing alignment between the marketing and sales teams around mutually established goals. There has to be agreement on points of discussion such as how the target account is selected, who is responsible for driving the engagement and how, and what ongoing coordination looks like. A lack of agreement on contacts to target, misunderstandings on when engagement has to occur or lack of visibility into the engagement can derail the ABM program or result in it never getting off the ground.

Marketing and sales relationship

Source: Gartner

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The next step is deciding how to prioritize or select accounts or contacts to target with the ABM program. This can be achieved by developing a robust lead scoring system (/en/digital-markets/insights/increase-close-rate) that considers a buyer's position in the sales funnel and their engagement level with your product to identify when they're ready to be handed to sales. Lead scoring goes beyond static indicators such as the industry or company size and instead focuses on behavioral attributes like digital engagement.

However, an easy and far less technical way is to ask three qualifying questions:

⬇ (/ngw/globalassets/en/digital-markets/images/graphs/three-qualifying-questions-to-include-a-customer-in-an-abm-program.jpg)

3 qualifying questions to include a customer in an ABM program

Has the contact demonstrated a sustained interest in the product over a period if weeks?

Has the contact explored the product's features and capabilities via content consumption or request for information?

Does the customer have the budget as well as the business need to make the purhcase?

Source: Gartner

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Once these two things are done, defining an engagement strategy is an iterative endeavor. It is a good idea to use a mix of online and offline channels for outreach, as well as play with proven and experimental techniques to optimize the engagement approach. Building a documented list of planned and executed engagement tactics over time can also help understand what works and what doesn't.

For those looking to run a pilot or a small-scale ABM program, here are some tips to keep in mind:

- Target accounts that look similar to each other by evaluating intent data. (/en/digital-markets/insights/types-of-intent-data) The criteria for identifying such accounts could be the industry, business function, current software in use or key problem.
- Get the marketing team to work with a handful of experienced and responsive sales reps as opposed to having them onboard new members from the sales team frequently.
- Limit channels of demand gen (/en/digital-markets/insights/lead-generation-vs-demand-generation) to a select few that can be measured and closely monitored as opposed to trying to include every outreach channel the business uses.
- Ascertain the effectiveness of ABM by benchmarking the target accounts against similar accounts receiving only broad-based or traditional outreach campaigns.
- Revisit the capabilities of the martech stack or other marketing and sales software being used by the business, and consider adding ABM software if required.

Execute ABM one step at a time

An ABM program is only effective when its objectives are clearly defined and aligned with the business goals. While it does offer a significant promise for marketers of software and SaaS solutions, executing an ABM program can be an overwhelming experience.

A good way to execute an ABM program is to start with small steps and focus on one at a time. In the planning phase, get alignment between marketing and sales teams. Then, ascertain the metrics to be used to select target accounts to prioritize. In the execution phase, use a mix of proven and experimental engagement strategies and closely monitor them to optimize the approach.

Done one step at a time, an ABM program should be easy to incorporate into any software provider's broader marketing strategy without causing a significant strain on monetary or human resources.

Accelerate Efficient Growth With ABM

The ultimate guide to kickstart an ABM program with intent data.

**Get the Guide
(/en/digital-
markets/insights/accelerate-
efficient-growth-with-
abm)**

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