



Best Practices for Implementing ABM to Drive Revenue Growth and ROI

A Chief Outsiders Growth eBook
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Blind Men, Elephants and ABM

Account-based marketing (ABM) is like an elephant. Like the fable where each blind man describes the mighty elephant differently based on the part of the animal they touch, Martech vendors and marketing agencies frame ABM differently based on what they sell.

For example, solution providers that specialize in advertising center ABM on creating targeted personalized ads. For providers that started as traditional digital marketing agencies, email outreach and nurturing form their ABM center of gravity.

To be fair, most solution providers agree on the basics of ABM. These include the need to identify and pursue target accounts that match your ideal customer profile (ICP), the importance of aligning sales and marketing teams, and a recognition of the common ABM go-to-market approaches including one-to-one, one-to-few, and one-to-many. But often the similarity ends there.

Here's where it gets tricky. The different approaches and areas of emphasis that solution providers champion all too often create confusion and speed bumps for companies seeking to embark on an ABM journey. In many cases, this confusion affects adoption and the success rates of ABM initiatives.

According to ITSMA, 83% of marketers are still struggling to find the perfect way to deploy ABM.

3 Key Questions

The fractional CMOs at Chief Outsiders, have collaborated with over 1,500 companies to create go-to-market strategies and build growth engines. We have helped many organizations successfully design and implement ABM programs.

Our purpose here is to leverage this experience to help teams accelerate ABM success by providing insights and guidance on three key questions:

- What are the core pillars of ABM?
- When should ABM be used and with which approach?
- How do we get started and structure a pilot ABM program?

Core Pillars of an ABM Program

Six key components define a full-bodied ABM program. These become the core pillars of ABM success. We'll look at each in detail below.

1. Goals and Strategy
2. Ideal Customer Profile (ICP) and Target Account Selection
3. Orchestration of Channels and Touches
4. Content, Campaigns, and Personalization
5. Technology Infrastructure
6. Reporting

1. Goals and Strategy

The first step in building an ABM initiative is defining the strategy—which should be driven by the goals of the initiative. Marketers (or sales folks) often go down the ABM path guided by a vendor's capabilities or possibly an executive's personal interpretation of ABM.

At Chief Outsiders, we start with the goals and ensure clear alignment around them before we build a strategy. Clients typically pursue one or more of the following sales and marketing goals:

- Grow revenues from new prospects
 - » Identify new prospects
 - » Segment the market based on revenue opportunity
- Grow revenues from existing accounts
 - » Reach new decision makers/business units within an account and build engagement
 - » Sell incremental functionality to current client decision makers/users
- Increase efficiency per selling resource to secure more revenue per headcount
 - » Improve deal velocity
 - » Increase average revenue per customer
 - » Improve win rates
- Increase marketing effectiveness
 - » Accelerate deal cycles
 - » Create higher value "in-market" leads aligned to ICP
 - » Improve ROI

2. Ideal Customer Profile and Target Account Selection

It's no surprise that the process of selecting target accounts sits at the center of ABM. And you typically select target accounts based on their fit with your ideal customer profile (ICP) and their level of purchase intent.

Think of your ICP as the bullseye—the prospects with needs that best fit your solution and have the least friction in the buying process.

Typical ICP Criteria

- Compelling reason to buy
- Size of company
- Vertical markets
- Location
- Technographics
- Unique business characteristic aligned with your solution (e.g., frequency of product releases, size of customer success team, key business initiatives)

Pro Tip: Evaluate your best customers and identify what characteristics make them a good fit for your solution. Use capabilities in tools like ZoomInfo and LinkedIn to identify “lookalikes” based on an imported list of best customers.

Once you have identified companies that fit your ICP, prioritize them by how likely they are to buy. For instance, a company may be a perfect fit, but if they just purchased a competitor's solution they probably are not in market.

To understand purchase intent, take advantage of buying signals both inside and outside of your organization. The easiest signals to exploit are the internal ones happening within your ecosystem—visitors to your website, users that fill out forms or engage with your chatbot, or people that click on your ads.

Recent advancements in technology have made it possible to capture intent signals external to your ecosystem to identify companies that are “in-market”. Solutions like Bambora, ZoomInfo, TechTarget, G2, and Rollworks all help to identify prospects that show high purchase intent, a key characteristic used for prioritizing accounts.

3. Orchestration of Channels and Touches

Orchestration is a core concept within ABM. A distinguishing feature of ABM, the orchestration of activities and outreach extends across sales, marketing, and customer success teams.

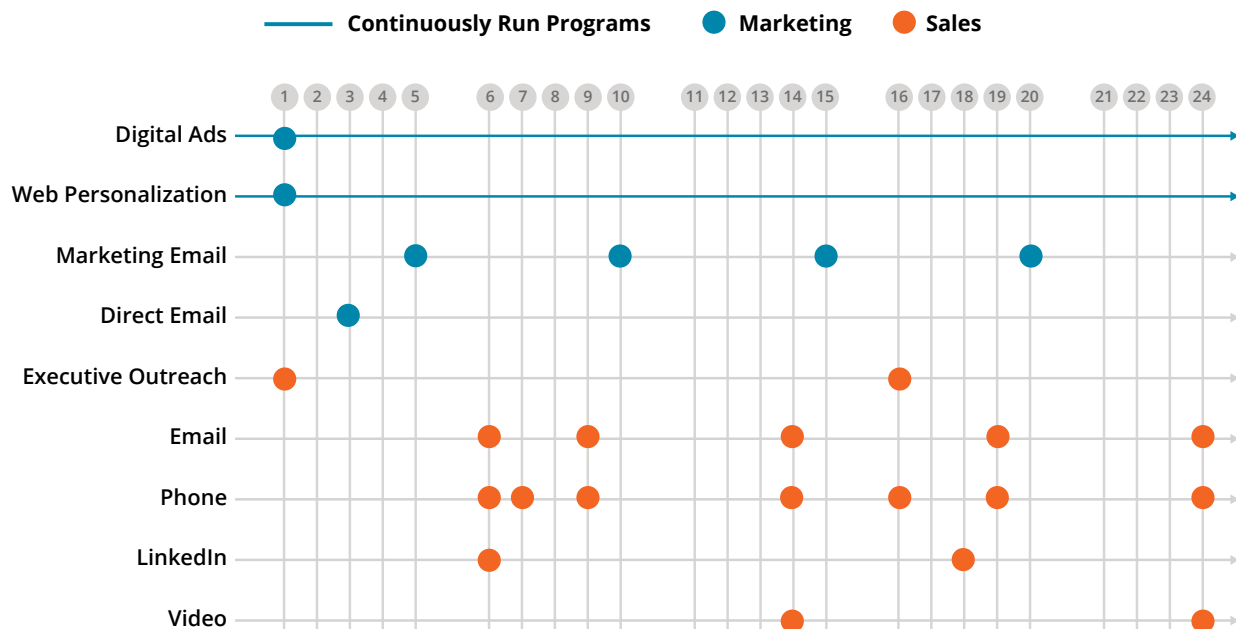
Here is a definition:

“Orchestration is the coordination of activities across GTM teams aimed at accelerating target account engagement across the entire buying team. Orchestration aligns and sequences outreach activity across communication channels including ads, email, website content, phone, direct mail, events and more.”

The tight integration of sales and marketing activities is one of the key ways ABM differs from traditional strategic account selling. In an ABM program, a carefully designed series of touches (often personalized) is defined, aimed at engaging multiple members of the buying committee.

For instance, an ABM campaign may begin with a period of digital advertising aimed at a target account to provide air cover and begin building awareness, and then proceed with an orchestrated set of activities across sales and marketing teams to drive engagement.

The diagram below shows an example of a series of orchestrated touches conducted by sales and marketing across multiple channels.



Source: © 2021 Gartner, Inc. and/or its affiliates. All rights reserved. Gartner is a registered trademark of Gartner, Inc. and its affiliates.

4. Content, Campaigns, and Personalization

Like with traditional Inbound marketing programs, content is king with ABM. Only in ABM, content tends to be more personalized. Relevant and personalized content is a key way that ABM campaigns cut through the clutter and noise challenging all modern B2B marketers.

Personalization has become commonplace in the B2C world (think ecommerce recommendation engines, targeted advertising on Facebook, and personalized outreach), and the bar has been raised for B2B marketers.

The level of personalization increases as you move up the ABM food chain from one-to-many to one-to-few to one-to-one strategies. One-to-one programs have the highest level of personalization. In one-to-one programs, customized website landing pages with highly tailored messaging and graphics may be built for each target account.

Top tactics for each type of ABM program According to ITSMA

Top Five Most Effective Tactics

ABM Leaders

One-to-One ABM	1. Account-specific content
	2. Executive-to-executive programs
	3. Webinars and virtual events
	4. Microsites
	5. Paid social media
One-to-Few ABM	1. Account-specific content
	2. Executive-to-executive programs
	3. Webinars and virtual events
	4. Email Marketing
	5. Paid social media
One-to-Many ABM	1. Email Marketing
	2. Webinars and virtual events
	3. Reverse IP/targeted digital ads/retargeting
	4. Paid social media
	5. Account-specific content

Source: ITSMA - A Momentum Group Company

An important concept to touch upon is the idea of a “high-value offer”. In traditional demand generation programs, a top of the funnel offer may include an eBook or a webinar. These are great calls to action to attract hand raisers in large numbers.

Since ABM target accounts are hand-picked to ensure they fit one’s ICP, and often have shown signals that they are in-market, it is cost-effective to invest more in these accounts through a high-value offer.

High value offers by definition are more expensive, more personalized, and require more resources to deliver than traditional calls-to-action.

Four categories of high-value offers according to Gartner

Four High-Value Offer Categories	
<p>Market Trends, Data and Vision</p> <p>Inform buyers in a live session covering the latest market vision, proprietary or third-party data and analysis.</p>	<p>Collaborative Planning</p> <p>Deliver a session that solves buyer challenges using a clear point of view and a collaborative plan of action.</p>
<p>Customized Experiences</p> <p>Customize existing content, such as e-books, or white papers, to address known buyer challenges for in-person discussion.</p>	<p>Peer Experiences</p> <p>Meet to share similar situation use cases from industry peers with similar challenges, processes, tactics and tools.</p>

Source: Source: Gartner/TechTarget, TTGT_Growing_Sales_Revenue_Using_HVOs_for_ABM_Engagement.pdf

Building the high-value offer (HVO) best for your business is a strategic decision. Done well, it accelerates and increases the number of quality discovery meetings you hold with target account buying teams.

Key considerations when designing a high-value offer include:

- What is valuable to your prospects
- Available thought leadership content
- Resources available to deliver the offer (HVOs often require support of subject matter experts and executives)

5. ABM Technology Infrastructure

Martech vendors delight in aligning with marketing trends and developing solutions to support them. ABM is no exception. Hundreds of martech solutions fall in the ABM category.

The ABM technology landscape can be very confusing, with martech vendors offering overlapping solutions with sometimes difficult to decipher claims.

As mentioned above, the “ABM elephant” looks different depending on whether you touch the trunk, leg, or body. Thankfully, as the industry matures, the elements of an ABM tech stack begin to coalesce.

Five categories of ABM solutions according to Forrester

- ABM platforms
- Data providers
- Customer data platforms
- Personalization solutions
- Sales engagement platforms

Terminus, 6Sense, and Demandbase remain the three most widely recognized ABM platforms as of this writing. While these solutions include broad ABM capabilities, they usually work in conjunction with other core tools such as marketing automation and CRM and not as standalone products.

According to the 2021 ABM Benchmark Survey by DemandGen, CRM and Marketing Automation Platforms form the two basic ABM tech stack building blocks. The most deployed additional ABM martech solutions include:

- Intent monitoring tools (42%)
- Measurement and reporting tools (38%)
- Campaign execution and orchestration tools (36%)
- Web and content personalization tools (36%)
- Account-based advertising tools (34%)

Pro Tip: Don't let the complex ABM martech landscape slow you down. Start simply with a crawl, walk, run approach. In most cases, having a CRM and marketing automation system in place is enough to get started.

When evaluating ABM martech solutions, start by checking review sites like TrustRadius, G2 and Capterra.

Some useful review site links:

<https://www.trustradius.com/account-based-marketing-abm>

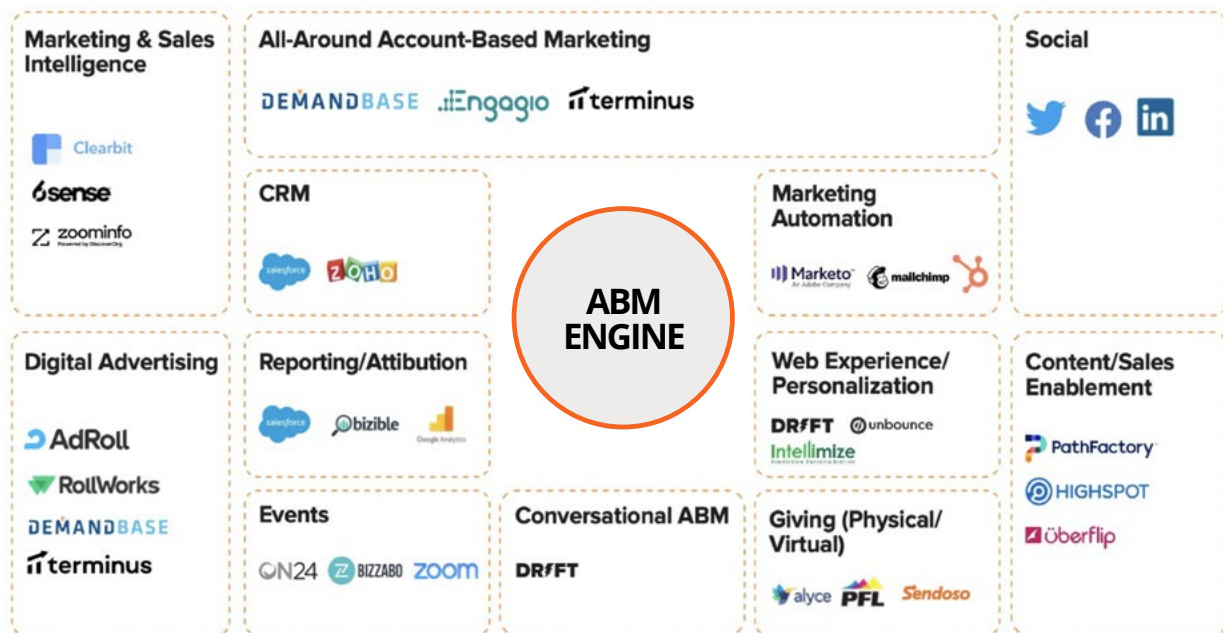
<https://www.g2.com/categories/account-based-marketing>

<https://www.capterra.com/account-based-marketing-software/>

As your program matures, expand your ABM tech stack.

A mature ABM tech stack could look like this

Account-Based Marketing Tech Stack Example



Source: Drift, *The Art of ABM: A Strategic Guide to Account-Based Marketing*

6. ABM Reporting

Companies seeking ABM success need to understand how to measure ABM effectiveness and identify the reporting tools needed to operationalize an ABM initiative.

Important considerations include:

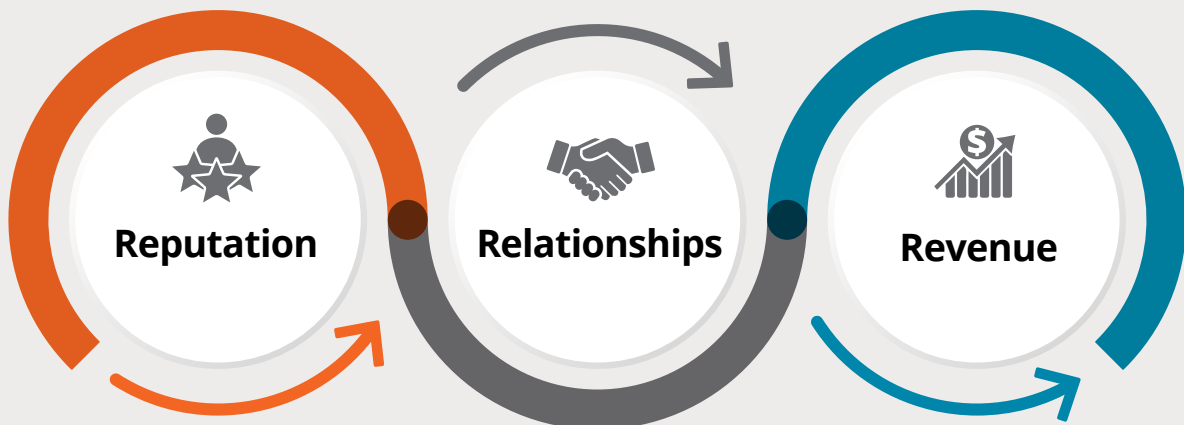
- What are the key categories of ABM measurement?
- How do ABM metrics differ from traditional marketing metrics?
- What metrics matter?

What are the key categories of ABM measurement?

According to ITSMA, the following describe three important categories of ABM program measurement:

- Reputation
 - » Drive preference with named accounts
 - » Build reputation in new markets
 - » Improve internal credibility
- Relationships
 - » Identify and engage with key stakeholders
 - » Deepen relationships for insight and innovation
 - » Develop references, referrals, and advocates
- Revenue
 - » Grow and accelerate pipeline
 - » Sell new offerings and enter new markets
 - » Increase win rate and deal size

ABM programs must measure and report results, both quantitative and qualitative, using the three Rs



Most marketing campaigns have a short time horizon and concrete objectives:

- Drive demand for specific products and/or services
- Generate qualified leads
- Show results in 30-90 days

ABM programs have a longer time horizon, and the revenue opportunities aren't always known in advance. ABM aims to:

- Change perception or positioning within accounts
- Build stronger relationships for ongoing collaboration and value creation
- Grow business with existing and new accounts through more targeted marketing

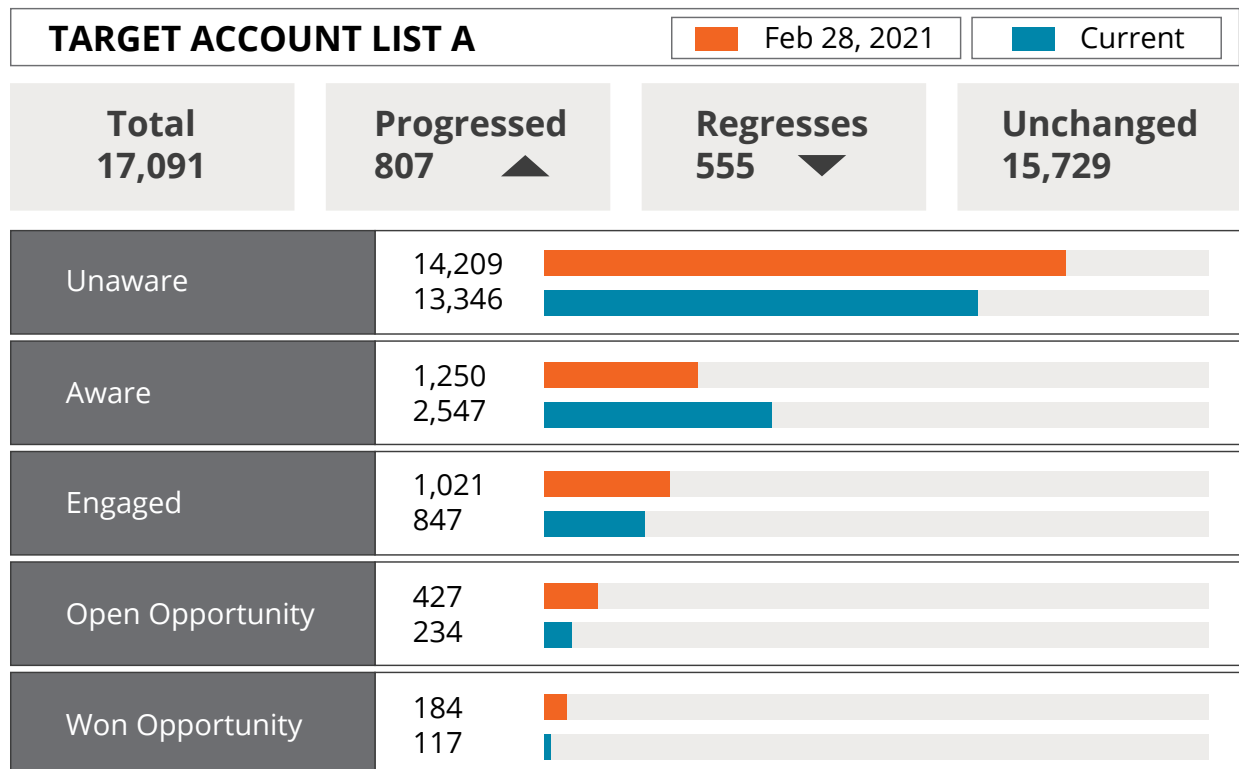
Source: ITSMA

How do ABM metrics differ from traditional marketing metrics?

A key difference in ABM measurement lies in the focus on account-level versus contact-level activity and metrics. A fundamental tenet of ABM dictates that marketers target multiple contacts within the buying teams of target companies that fit the ideal customer profile.

So, where a classic lead measurement focuses on generating MQLs (marketing qualified leads), ABM focuses on MQAs (marketing qualified accounts). The key distinction being MQLs focus at the individual contact level, where MQAs focus at the account level.

Driving engagement across multiple contacts within a target account becomes the goal. As illustrated below, we want to track account level activity and progress throughout the customer journey.



Source: Rollworks, <https://www.rollworks.com/product/measure/>

Which metrics matter?

Examples of key ABM metrics include:

- Number of target accounts
- Number of contacts per target account
- Accounts reached
- Account level engagement
- Meetings scheduled
- Marketing Qualified Accounts (MQAs)

When to Use ABM and Which Approach to Deploy

ABM is an incredibly powerful strategy. It works most effectively when built with clarity around target accounts and allocated adequate resources (technology-based or human) for success. That said, scenarios arise in which ABM is NOT the best approach to take to achieve your goals. In those situations, traditional demand gen programs and channels may work best.

The framework below helps to determine whether ABM is right for you, and, if so, the flavor of ABM to deploy.

When Should ABM Be Used?

GTM Maturity	High	1:Many	High-touch and high-tech Account-Centric	1:1 and 1:Few
	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High prospect volume • Small average deal size • Short/no contracts • 1-3 decision makers • No/limited departmental reviews • Demand gen vs assigned accounts • Reactive/reliant on marketing leads • Sophisticated targeting (intent, automated triggers) • Processes and tech to execute mass personalization at scale • Tech in place for targeted ad serving, retargeting, targeted content syndication 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited number of prospects • Large average deal size • Long contract lengths • Large buying committee • IT, Security, legal other reviews required • Known/assigned accounts • Proactive sales process • Sophisticated targeting (intent, automated triggers) • Processes and tech to execute custom personalization efficiently • Tech in place for targeted ad serving, retargeting, targeted content syndication • Research and insights-driven
Low	No ABM - Focus on Inbound demand gen or targeted outbound		High-touch Account-Centric 1:1 and 1:Few	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High prospect volume • Small average deal size • Short/no contracts • 1-3 decision makers • No/limited departmental reviews • Demand gen vs assigned accounts • Reactive/reliant on marketing leads • Limited MarTech • New, developing team 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited number of prospects • Large average deal size • Long contract lengths • Large buying committee • IT, Security, legal other reviews required • Known/assigned accounts • Proactive sales process • Manual workflows to surround decision-makers • Limited MarTech • Research and insights-driven 	
		Low	Solution Value/Sales Complexity Continuum	High

When to Use ABM Framework Axes Definition and Considerations

- GTM Maturity - Team preparedness for the increased complexity of an ABM program, experience level of the team, marketing technology in place to support automated ABM initiatives, team resources comfortable with marketing technology
- Solution Value - Number of prospects; average deal size across the market; average contract length accepted in the market
- Sales Complexity and Strategy - Known/assigned accounts vs reliance on lead gen; proactive/strategic accounts worthy of investment, single buyer versus large buying committee, the need for departmental reviews (i.e., IT review, security review, legal review, etc.), typical deal velocity

Description of Each of the Four “When to Use ABM” Quadrants

High-touch and High-tech Account Centric - ABM Marketing strategies in this quadrant are either one-to-one or one-to-few. There tend to be a limited number of prospects with large average deal sizes and long contract durations. The sales process is typically complicated, and the buyer journey is elongated with numerous team members on the buying committee.

Solutions typically require departmental reviews. Marketing and sales teams in this quadrant are sophisticated and possess a combination of budgets and technologies necessary to help nurture assigned accounts (both new prospects and expansion) through the buying cycle. There exists an intricate orchestration of sales and marketing resources to support the information needs of extended buying committee members while working to improve sales velocity.

Technologies leveraged often include intent data, automated triggers, retargeting, ABM-based content syndication, and other digital channels. Marketers leverage traditional channels (events, webinars, custom research, executive outreach, etc.) in conjunction with digital channels.

High-touch Account Centric - Also one-to-one and one-to-few. This quadrant is similar to the above in terms of the profile of target accounts and the nature of the buying process within the accounts. And typically, accounts are assigned to individuals or teams. The key difference lies in the fact that marketing and sales teams in this quadrant are less sophisticated.

They do not possess a high level of technology, nor the resources necessary to optimize technology. Sales and marketing do partner together though, and leverage more traditional channels (events, webinars, custom research, executive outreach, etc.) to support and nurture accounts through the buying cycle.

High-tech Scaled ABM - Strategies deployed in scaled ABM are typically one-to-many. Marketing and sales teams operating in this quadrant typically are targeting industries or market segments that have high prospect volumes, small average deal sizes, simple contractual arrangements, and a limited number of parties engaged in the decision process.

Very often sales teams are aligned around territories rather than named accounts. The business is typically much more reliant on marketing leads than is the case with the above two quadrants.

Scaled ABM teams operate with sophisticated technology that allows them to execute mass personalization efficiently. Team members are comfortable deploying the technology and understand the associated analytics. Sales and marketing are tightly aligned and typically organized as teams around segments.

No ABM Focus on Inbound demand gen or targeted outbound - The combination of resource constraints and broad customer targets makes ABM impractical for this segment. Emphasis here should be on traditional demand gen channels.

How to Get Started with an ABM Pilot Program

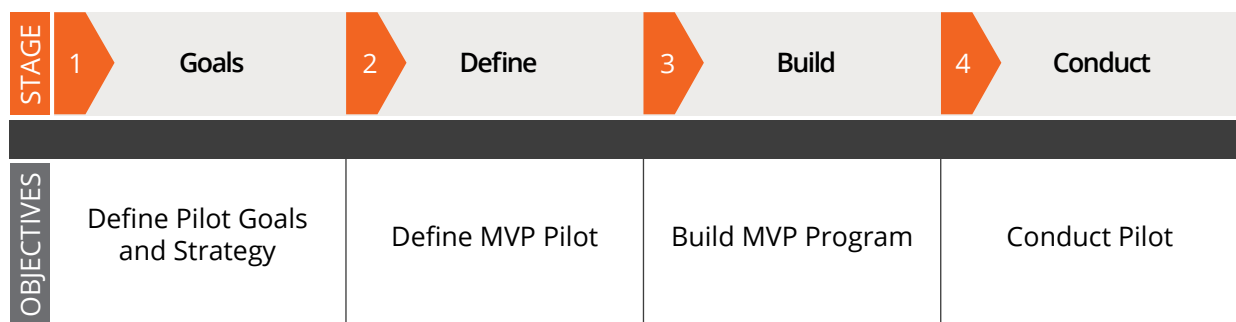
Getting started with an ABM initiative can be very daunting. In our experience at Chief Outsiders, taking a crawl-walk-run approach greatly increases the opportunity for success.

Our best practice approach begins with a Minimum Viable Pilot (MVP) during the crawl phase. The scope of the pilot should be carefully crafted so that initial success can be achieved within a few months.

ABM Minimum Viable Pilot (MVP) Guidelines

- Create pilot goals jointly agreed upon by sales and marketing leadership
- Select a manageable number of accounts for the initial pilot (between 10 and 50)
- Leverage existing technology and minimize the need to implement new tools during the pilot phase
- Limit the pilot in terms of use cases, stage of the customer journey, and success criteria. For instance, pilot goals could include:
 - » Schedule X meetings across net new accounts targeted in the pilot
 - » Drive expansion deals by scheduling Y roadmap workshops with installed base target accounts
 - » Leverage existing content and keep to a minimum the dependence on significant new content development necessary to achieve success

Consider this recommended approach for structuring and executing an ABM pilot that we know from experience accelerates results and minimizes risk.



Finally, it's important to recognize that for ABM to take root and succeed within an organization, it needs to be treated as a cross-functional GTM strategy, and not just a marketing tactic. This means that sales and marketing alignment is critical.

The minimum viable pilot becomes an opportunity to build trust between sales and marketing teams, experience initial success, gain learnings, and create the conditions for the ABM initiative to move from crawl to walk to run.

Use ABM to Drive Revenue Growth and ROI

ABM offers the promise of improved ROI, increased revenues from new and existing accounts, reduced deal cycles, increased conversion of target accounts, and increased efficiency and effectiveness of sales and marketing dollars.

The variety of approaches, technology, jargon, plays, and recommended practices in the market today can be overwhelming.

***Just remember:** ABM is not about the technology. It's about the accounts you are targeting and the buying committees, buying process, and buyer needs. The technology exists to support your strategy, not dictate the strategy.*

Simply take a step back and determine exactly what you need to accomplish, the nature of your specific challenge, implications for creating an ABM program, and resources you have available to take action. With this guidance, you can successfully define a program that works for the market you are targeting as well as for your organization.

We hope the above information provides you with the blueprint for assessing what ABM programs make sense for you, how to organize your ABM strategies and tactics, and what you need to do to get started.

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