



ITSMA

7 BEST PRACTICES TO OPTIMIZE ACCOUNT-BASED MARKETING

ABM LEADERS SHARE REAL-LIFE STRATEGIES AND SUCCESSES

THE EXPANDING FRONTIER OF ABM

At our conference, “Optimizing ABM Impact,” we heard from a star-studded lineup of seasoned experts using a blended approach to account-based marketing (ABM) to personalize every touchpoint from executive engagement to direct mailers.

They’re also using account insights and market intelligence to help companies realize their most strategic goals, building relationships that stand strong in a business environment with both rising expectations and declining trust in marketing, messaging and products.

We’ve taken their experiences and best practices and compiled them in this year’s guide, which is packed with the innovations our experts are using to expand their programs and get results. You’ll find their suggestions for building alignment within your organization, building the right tech stack and building trust with your clients. Dig right in for the tactics and strategies to optimize your own ABM program.



Our customers demand relevant content when they want it, in the form they want it, personalized to their business, industry, and role. Otherwise, they’re tuning it out.

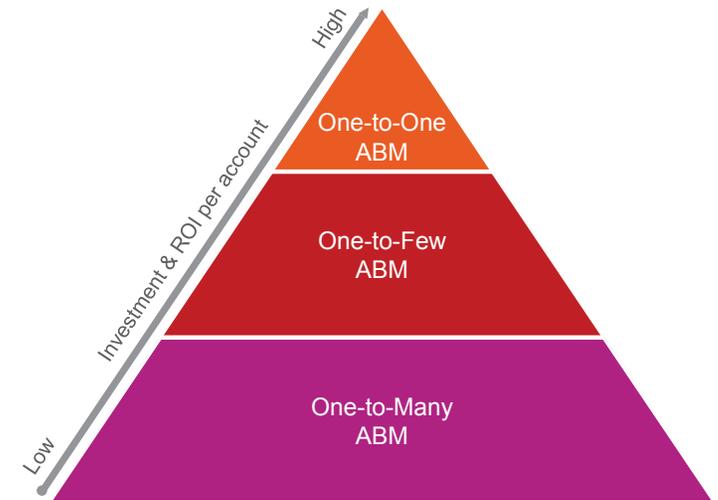
-Rob Leavitt, Senior Vice President, ITSMA

1. BEST PRACTICE: STRATEGICALLY BLEND YOUR APPROACH

TODAY COMPANIES WORK WITH THREE TYPES OF ABM:

- The 1-to-1 approach is how ABM began: put skilled marketing people on account teams for your largest, most strategic accounts. This approach is powerful, but also expensive and hard to scale.
- The 1-to-many approach uses analytics and automation to customize content for hundreds or even thousands of accounts.
- The 1-to-few approach is newest, combining aspects of the other two to focus on a group of related accounts in a cluster.

Your company's top business priorities should help determine which types of ABM you bring to the table. Some objectives call for a single type – for instance, using a 1-to-1 campaign to land a marquis client or leveraging 1-to-many tactics to secure a beachhead in a new vertical. Now top ABM companies are blending their approach, using two or even three types to realize their goals.



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TEGILE: FINDING THE SWEET SPOT

Tegile, a rapidly growing flash storage company, sorted 13,000 mid-market accounts into three priority levels to apply a blended ABM approach. Marketing built a predictive engagement score (based on marketing and sales scores, intent signals, active opportunities and number of contacts), which sales used to select and segment accounts:

- 20 Priority 1 accounts (five for each of four regions)
- 750 Priority 2 accounts (25 accounts per AE)
- 12,230 Priority 3 accounts (all others)

Now all accounts are recipients of the 1-to-many strategy and tactics, but P2 accounts get semi-customized content and moderate spend (1-to-few), and P1 accounts receive highly customized 1-to-1 programs and high program spend.

5–50 Accounts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on existing key accounts • Customized for each account • Engagement and relationship-focused
Clusters of 5–15 accounts each	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on new and existing key accounts with similar issues • Customized with some personalization • Engagement and lead-focused
100s of accounts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on relevant new accounts • Targeted with light personalization • Lead-focused

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2. BEST PRACTICE: KNOW THE SCORE ON 1-TO-1 ACCOUNTS

Top-tier accounts are essential for growth, innovation and references. It's critical for marketing and sales to collaboratively select 1-to-1 accounts, using both marketing analytics and sales experience.

ITSMA recommends scoring accounts based on both attractiveness (data) and business strength (sales insight). Accounts with high scores on both axes are the best candidates for 1-to-1 investment.

ACCOUNT ATTRACTIVENESS

This score is based on size, growth rate, industry, or whatever account characteristics are important to your organization.

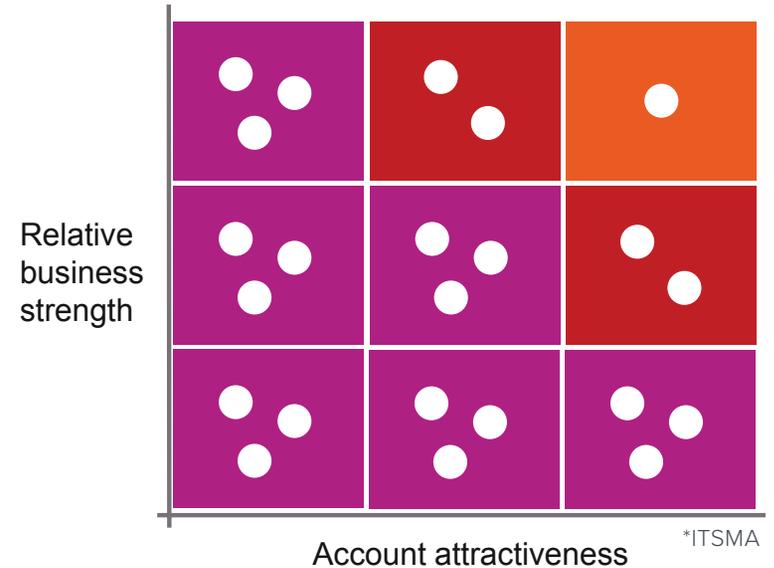
RELATIVE BUSINESS STRENGTH

This score measures how well you're prepared to take on an account, including both strong marketing capabilities and a firm commitment from sales.

You can take this idea further by subdividing 1-to-1 accounts into two tiers -- for instance, enterprise clients that provide high revenue, and smaller accounts that provide less revenue but are brand champions on social.

HCL: CREATING A RELATIONSHIP BEYOND THE CONTRACT

HCL Technologies uses a 1-to-1 approach to build strategic partnerships with their most important clients. To help target accounts, marketing created the ABM 20x20 Framework, a custom tool that identifies their top 20 accounts, with 20 marketing tactics to help each achieve their most important goals. Sales uses the framework to identify "micro-moments" to engage.



3. BEST PRACTICE: RESEARCH, RESEARCH, RESEARCH

ABM is about being relevant to the accounts that you're targeting. Research helps you understand what drives your accounts, how to play to those needs and priorities, how to identify and understand key stakeholders and how to use those insights to develop highly targeted value propositions – before you start to create campaigns.

Your research efforts at each tier are the same, but each is done at a different depth. For example, to go after Nissan, you'd need a 1-to-1, heavy-duty research strategy to profile key decision makers and research specific initiatives. To go after Nissan's top ten competitors, you do the same research at the segment level using personas: what types of people drive decisions? What are the technology trends? To research the entire auto sector, use a 1-to-many strategy to learn broadly about manufacturers, suppliers and regulators.



“We found people in sales who wanted rich account intelligence their competitors didn't have. It's really hard for a seller responsible for hundreds of accounts to know enough about each one. It was never us pushing accounts on sales; it was us helping sales be more competitive.”

-Daniel Day, Director of ABM, Snowflake Computing

4. BEST PRACTICE: MAXIMIZE MULTICHANNEL

We're all trying to prioritize digital, but offline activities like roadshows, events and direct mail are just as important and can be highly creative and focused. Use your research efforts to learn which segments respond to different channels – then use that data to create integrated, multichannel campaigns.



*ITSMA and ABMLA

VYOND: DELIGHTING WITH THE UNEXPECTED

The marketing team at Vyond sent clients old-school flipbooks in a direct mail campaign to promote their digital animation platform, riffing on the way cartoonists used to flip through drawings to test animation. The campaign was a huge hit with its highly targeted audience. “Because of the success of these mailers, I make sure that any campaign, no matter how small, always has multiple channels. That was what made the flipbooks so successful. It wasn’t just emails and phone calls: it was multiple touch, it was direct mail to the right people. It was very selective, and we put a lot of time and heart into it.”

5. BEST PRACTICE: PUT TECHNOLOGY IN ITS PLACE

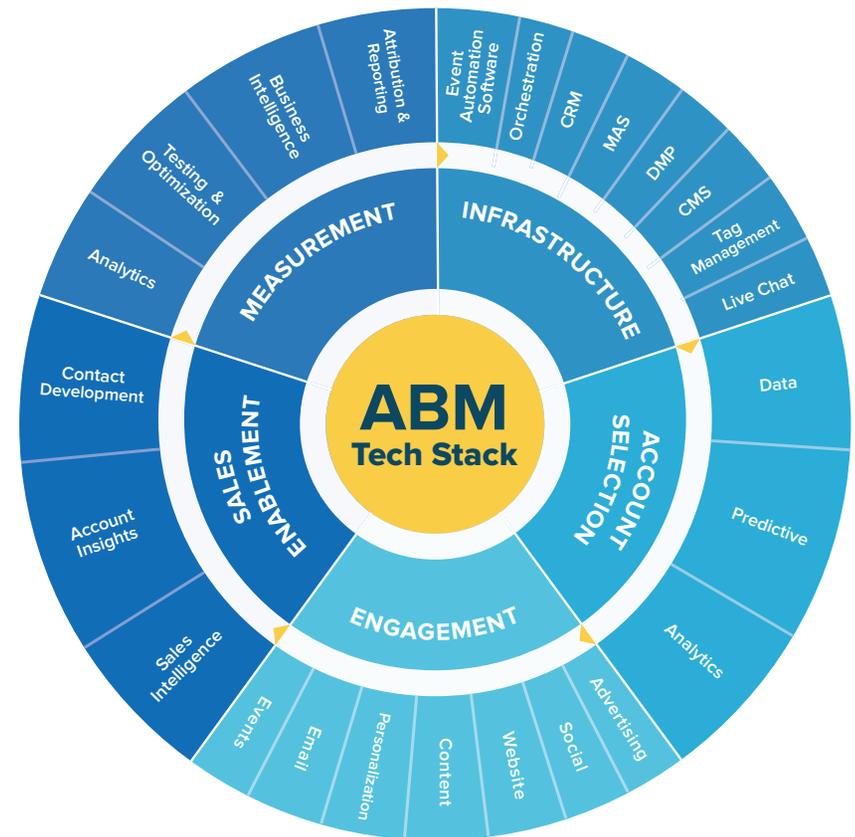
It's important to remember that you can't buy your way into an ABM strategy. Instead, you'll want to put a foundational strategy in place first and then start thinking about technology. Start by leveraging and modifying existing technology like your CRM and Marketing Automation solutions so that they can report and action on accounts, versus only contacts, and then buy additional technology as you need it.

In other words, be sure you've got the basics humming. For instance, if you're scaling from 1-to-1 to 1-to-many, can your data take you from individuals to segments? Use your strategic goals as a roadmap for deciding what to purchase and when.

TRACKR: THE NEW STACK

Influencer marketing company Traackr uses AI and data to identify keywords in specific verticals, then maps people talking about those topics. They engage influencers via Traackr's platform, using those conversations to create targeted ABM plays that revolve around "State of Influence" reports.

The intelligence in these campaigns is so compelling and credible that it often attracts the interest of senior executives. Traackr's program has doubled average deal size, significantly improved churn rate, uncovered new expansion opportunities and improved visibility into pipeline and deals.



6. BEST PRACTICE: BUILD A CULTURE OF TRUST

ABM is not for the faint of heart. It calls on the entire marketing skill set – communication, creativity, ability to develop value propositions and creative campaigns – as well as on the ability to understand and interpret data and to partner at the 1-to-1 level with senior sales people and account leads.

It's also a full-funnel strategy that demands collaboration and teamwork. For instance, to coordinate ABM across global, national, regional, industry, and service groups, you need good marketing and sales alignment, with a mutually agreed-upon account list and a shared revenue target.

LEANPLUM: TRUST IS EVERYTHING

Chris Souza, Director of Demand Generation at LeanPlum, said it best: “At the base of all alignment is trust. As marketers, our job is to empathize with our prospects and understand what motivates them. It's the same with our sales team. If they're not set up for success, that's their livelihood. So when you say ‘we're going to try this out,’ or ‘we're going to A/B test this’ – you're kind of A/B testing with their lives.”

Chris advises transparency: showing where data comes from and how it's used in the tech stack to score accounts. “Sales needs confidence in the data that's feeding target accounts, so it needs to come from a reliable place. Bad data erodes trust.”

Chris's team incorporates ideas from sales and works to empower them with budget, tech and creativity, showing them returns in terms of pipeline and revenue. Through this alignment, LeanPlum has raised the percentage of ABM-sourced opportunities for the sales team from 33% to 66% over just one quarter.

7. BEST PRACTICE: BUILD AN ABM DASHBOARD

A dashboard approach helps ABM teams measure engagement and business impact across the three R's: revenue, reputation and relationships. A holistic view also shows which types of ABM will work best as you scale your program.

REVENUE

Pipeline acceleration, revenue growth, deal size and type, portfolio penetration, wallet share

REPUTATION

Sales and customer satisfaction, brand perception, references and advocates

RELATIONSHIPS

Account coverage, engagement, trust, innovation

TEGILE: CLOSING THE LOOPS

Tegile measures engagement across segments with one account-level dashboard that shows:

Marketing engagement

- Firmographic and census data to understand account size, vertical, revenue, etc.
- Contact data to find decision-makers and gaps within accounts
- Technographic data for IT insights such as complementary and competing tech in use and applications that would benefit from flash storage
- Intent data to identify buy signals and prioritize accounts based on relevant activities of buying teams on TechTarget
- Data from marketing tools to report engagement with online and offline campaigns

Sales engagement and impact

- inbound and outbound communications
- 1-to-1 emails
- phone/dialer campaigns
- social selling
- meetings held

With this comprehensive view, Tegile can track coverage, awareness, engagement and impact across all their efforts and continuously refine segmentation and campaigns.

THE BEST ABM PRACTICE: EXPERIMENT

As the examples here show, there's no one perfect way to implement ABM. Instead, the right program for your company will flow from understanding your priorities, your people and your clients.

These best practices will help you build collaboration between teams, invest in the right tech stack, and use it to create a blended approach that deepens and broadens your reach across tiers. In doing so, you'll create an optimized ABM program that delivers relevant content and strategic value to your customers, all while building relationships that help your company thrive.

ABM Leadership Alliance

The ABM Leadership Alliance brings together industry-leading technology partners who enable an ever-growing list of B2B marketers to deploy successful ABM strategies every day.

ITSMA

ITSMA pioneered ABM in 2003 and today provides the world's leading ABM practitioners with a broad portfolio of ABM research, advisory, training, and coaching services.

