



Selecting and Engaging Relevant Accounts for ABM ROI

Build your account-based marketing foundation with
data-driven account selection

An Account-Based Marketing strategy is only as effective as the foundation it's built upon. Without a good list strategy, the whole program will fail. **The most important part of that foundation is choosing the right accounts to target.** Not all companies within your Total Addressable Market (TAM) are going to be the right fit for your ABM strategy, so in order to be successful, you must be able to intelligently narrow your market. To trigger ABM-specific action, you need to pinpoint the accounts that are most likely to buy from you now and engage them aggressively.

How do you choose the most relevant accounts for your ABM strategy? While important, it's not just about who sales wants to sell into. Nor is it just about accounts with whom you have had historical success. Choosing accounts is first about leveraging the right data to make better decisions about who should or shouldn't make your ABM list. Then you must enable your sales and marketing teams with the right tools to prioritize accounts and utilize the insights they most need to engage them effectively.

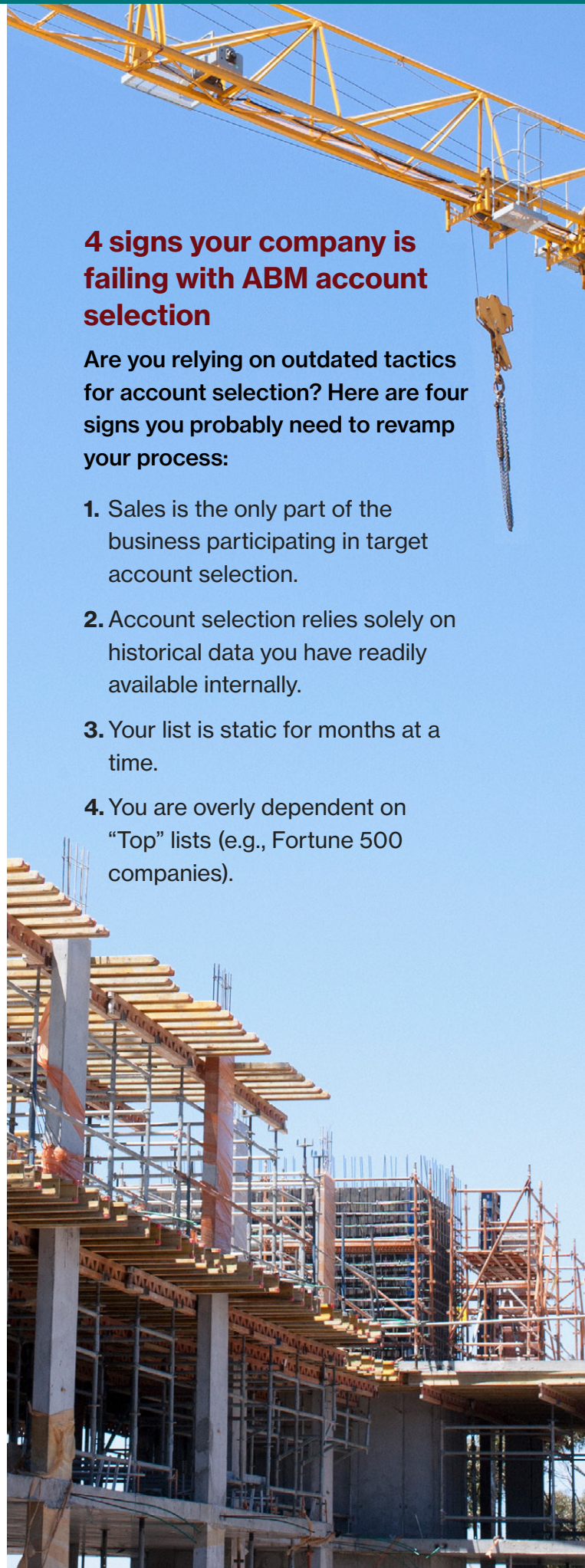
Building an ABM foundation: data-driven account selection and modeling

The first step in preparing for ABM starts with the account data structure in your CRM system. Without solid and comprehensive account data, especially if your targets are enterprise companies, it will be challenging to identify accounts that match your ideal customer profile (ICP), let alone understand sales

4 signs your company is failing with ABM account selection

Are you relying on outdated tactics for account selection? Here are four signs you probably need to revamp your process:

1. Sales is the only part of the business participating in target account selection.
2. Account selection relies solely on historical data you have readily available internally.
3. Your list is static for months at a time.
4. You are overly dependent on "Top" lists (e.g., Fortune 500 companies).



assignment! The data work entails not just having the corporate headquarters detail, but field offices and links to subsidiary companies. For example: What if your marketing activities include direct mail? What address should you use?

Furthermore, many companies have abbreviated names or acronyms, so storing the legal business name, along with the shortened versions, will help the Sales team. Filling in fields such as stock ticker symbols can be valuable in understanding if the account is public or privately held. And going beyond standard fields such as industry, annual revenue and number of employees can help a great deal, too. Understanding things like what systems and software products are installed, when their fiscal year turns, as well as all website URLs and links to the companies' social profiles can be useful depending on your particular business and Sales team use-cases.

The next critical element of an ABM strategy is selecting the right accounts to put in the program. It's also the place most teams go wrong.

Getting account selection wrong has a cascading negative impact. The best campaigns work only when they are directed toward accounts that have a propensity to purchase—so it's important you build a selection methodology that will set you up for success. Don't worry—if you aren't sure where to start, we've outlined a selection methodology that's proven to work.

1. Get real about fit. It's important for a business to have aspirational goals.

Realistically, however, building a target account list without a significant grounding in historical performance is usually a critical mistake. Lists based primarily on the types

of companies you hope you'll serve someday simply represent too big a challenge when you're just beginning your ABM program. There are too many improvement variables for you to have a strong chance of delivering defensible benefit in the near term. While Account-Based Marketing is a wonderful approach for going after new market segments, you must begin with a very clear picture of how well-suited your organization is to serve them. As with any significant new initiative, you want to design your ABM for success from the start.

2. Embrace intelligent account selection. ABM gives you permission to do everything you can to radically improve business with a subset of your total audience. To outperform, you'll need to go beyond simple segmentation based on company size and industry.

[Read "Using Data to Develop Your Target Account Profile" to learn more. >](#)

You need to use more intelligence than you do with standard demand generation by including sources that can provide more actionable

insight into what's occurring deep within an organization. You will want to understand clearly what competitors they may already be using, more about the context of their business overall, even about outcomes from previous interactions they experienced with your team.

The goal of all this effort is to create a clearer picture of an account's real propensity to buy from you, and to do it in a way that's

truly actionable. To deliver value quickly and sustainably through ABM, you definitely need to have enough intelligence to avoid spending resources chasing accounts that will never need your product or service. To avoid waste and delays in realizing value, you need to identify specifically those accounts that are likely to buy.

3. Don't be afraid to build a hybrid model.

It's quite possible that while portions of your business are well-suited for Account-Based

Marketing, others may be best served by traditional inbound and outbound efforts.

Maintaining a mix is not only OK, it's highly effective. As you advance, you'll naturally create a mix of approaches to cover different market segments or even different buyer types within the same segment.

At maturity, many programs deploy Account-Based

Marketing tactics on parts of a segment or even key buying centers within an account while covering other elements with standard programs alone.

4. Design in dynamic ways to support static assignments.

You might be agreeing that all this account intelligence is helpful and great,

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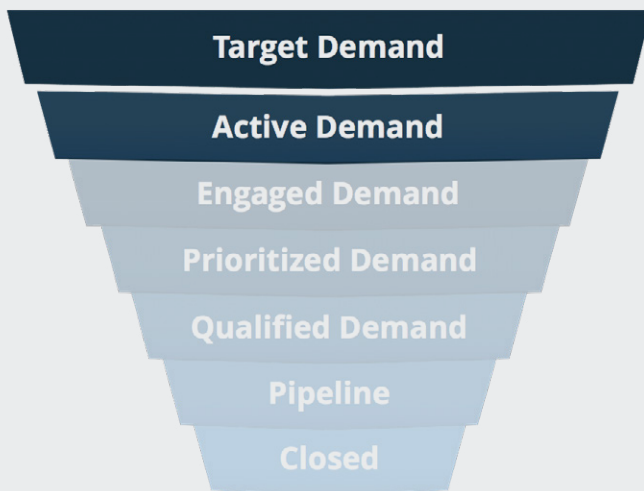
Third-party data sources will become your new best friends.

No matter how thorough a database you maintain, internally sourced data has substantial limitations. It provides a fundamentally incomplete picture – one that's inherently biased because it reflects only the interactions of existing customers or of those prospects that are already interacting with your company. The most effective ABM programs leverage third-party insights to provide important intelligence beyond what you already know. This intelligence also offers deep insight on titles and/or contacts you should additionally pursue. Consider using external sources to collect:

- Complementary technology usage
- Competitive insights (e.g., reading competitive content, using a competitive offering, finding relative vendor consideration rates within verified deals)
- Company insights (e.g., number of customers your prospect has, their revenue growth in the past 12 months, office locations)
- Buying signals/signal strength (e.g., number of prospects actively researching at accounts, recency and frequency of downloading relevant content, content aligned to the buyer's journey such as vendor comparisons, reading product reviews in your category)
- Other triggering actions (e.g., mergers, spikes in hiring, new cash influx)

How to match account selection with active demand in your market

The SiriusDecisions Demand Unit Waterfall™



Target Demand – Both the accounts and the buying teams within them for the true Total Addressable Market (TAM) for your product or solution defined by firmographics, e.g., size, industry, location, etc.

Active Demand – Within your true TAM, the buying groups by account that you have good reason to believe are in market for your product.

Selecting the best accounts to focus on now is key to maximizing your success with the active buying teams in your market. SiriusDecisions' new Demand Unit Waterfall helps organizations better prioritize how to target, select and tier accounts for the key stages in more productive Account-Based Marketing.

Focus your ABM energy on where the action is right now.

To launch an effective ABM program out of the gate, SiriusDecisions calls out the importance of "Active Demand" that exists right now inside your Target Demand TAM. The Active Demand concept clearly differentiates ABM from mass demand-gen methods because it replaces lead volume and top-of-funnel conversion ideas with an ABM focus on quality and hyper-relevance. Because it gets the accounts right first, implementing in this way drives account-based ROI from where it starts.

By differentiating between what you do to all accounts on your ABM list versus what actions you reserve for those showing Active Demand, you can focus your energies more productively – specifically on where they are most needed. Clearly, the accounts showing Active Demand – the accounts that are "in market" now – are where your efforts will pay off fastest. Focusing on them will inject the life-sustaining momentum your program needs early on.

Go beyond your comfort zone to achieve ABM ROI breakthroughs.

You'll find much of what you need in your own inbound and outbound systems, but to maximize your potential return, you need to go beyond that. If you concentrate only on what you already see and know, you're limiting your ABM opportunity to just replicating past success. That may give you incremental gains, but it's not a source of major new ROI breakthroughs.

By finding the right combination of external data sources, you'll get a much clearer picture of how

much total Active Demand there really is out there in the market as a whole. This will help you beyond where you've naturally focused—your historic comfort zone—to make sure your ABM program has the best possible chance of becoming a significant driver of net-new growth.

To learn more about sourcing Active Demand in your markets, read the e-book “Capturing More Active Demand: A 4-Step Guide.” >

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but at the same time find yourself still thinking in old-school, non-ABM ways like: “How many accounts do I assign per Sales rep?”

We'd submit that's contrary to what you need to do. What you should be asking is how best to cover the ABM opportunity, or more simply, “How much of what types of resources do we really need to support our account-focused program?”

The difference is not subtle. The first question reflects typical pressure to optimize your staffing based on historical cost. But this is a pitfall you'll want to try to avoid, because it treats ABM like it's a mature program, when in fact, it represents an innovative new approach for which you most likely don't yet have any precedent. Before you begin, **ABM should be a clean-slate effort where your planning should focus on what you need to do in order to optimize effectiveness.**

Successful ABM programs must have alignment and flexibility built-in

For account-based programs to realize their promise, you definitely need to have enough Sales resources to do your best possible work. And while few Field Sales organizations are built to adjust account assignments in response to shifts in demand activity, there is often room within the Sales organization as a whole to support real flexibility.

Your first step should always be to achieve conceptual alignment between Marketing and Sales leadership because for ABM to work well, the combined Marketing and Sales organization must be able to more flexibly respond to the ebbs and flows of active demand within the ABM list. As marketers, you'll want to build in flexibility by

having tactics or complete plays on the shelf that you use only when you see certain demand behaviors. The same concept can be extended to the greater Sales organization: Together with

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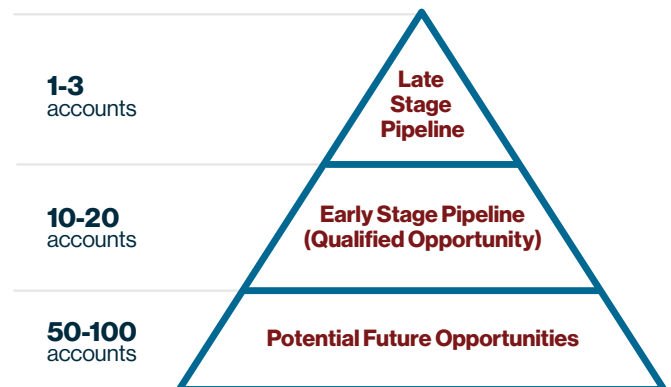
Sales leadership, you'll want to find ways to create real responsiveness. Some examples that we see working involve changes to how tele-resource, sales engineers and other enabling functions gain agility when the KPIs and SLAs they work with can be redesigned specifically to better support ABM.

One way to begin designing flexibility into your program is to **create a tiered account model** that prescribes a specific coverage vision, and therefore a flexibility vision, that differs by tier.

A tiered account model should be structured with reference to a combination of the skills- and task-based assignments within your Sales organization as a whole. It should take into account the duration and complexity of the buying process and other inputs you deem relevant. On the right

you'll see a general guideline that has worked for other organizations with complex sales cycles. This is a challenging area for most companies, so you should anticipate having to experiment to determine an effective mix for you.

Remember, this type of coverage structure or concept is designed to be dynamic—responsive to changes in actual demand within your ABM list. While your overall ideal customer profile won't change frequently, individual accounts will constantly change in terms of their propensity to purchase at any given time. You're looking to design your organizational capabilities such that your combined Marketing and Sales team can flex with reference to where attention is needed most, based on where real, active demand is showing up.



Take a more intelligent approach to account selection and engagement

Choosing the accounts for ABM should not be based merely on segmentation, historical success, or sales' preference, but should be informed by reliable 3rd-party data sources that provide clear and actionable insight into what's really going on within accounts. And regardless of which ABM approach is the right fit for your company, to achieve true success, teams need to be truly aligned with sufficient resources and flexibility to respond to target market demand activity. To learn more about how real purchase intent insight from TechTarget can help you find and engage the most active accounts in your specific technology segment, [reach out to us](#) today.

About TechTarget

TechTarget (Nasdaq: TTGT) is the global leader in purchase intent-driven marketing and sales services that deliver business impact for enterprise technology companies. By creating abundant, high-quality editorial content across more than 140 highly targeted technology-specific websites, TechTarget attracts and nurtures communities of technology buyers researching their companies' information technology needs. By understanding these buyers' content consumption behaviors, TechTarget creates the purchase intent insights that fuel efficient and effective marketing and sales activities for clients around the world.

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