An Introduction to ABM Scoring

Creating a model that works for you

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Supported by most marketing automation and CRM systems, lead scoring had been part of good marketing methodology for years. It's a valuable tool for helping your marketing and sales team determine who is a quality lead—most likely to become a buyer—and thus most important to follow up with.

When it comes to Account-Based Marketing (ABM), many companies are using Account Scoring to evaluate success and trigger their ABM-specific activities. But what is Account Scoring and how does it differ from traditional lead scoring? And how do you score the individual contacts and buying teams within your target accounts?

It's important to remember that Account-Based Marketing is still about marketing to people, so you will ultimately need a way to combine account-based or buying-unit scoring with individual lead scoring at those accounts. In some approaches, an account score is merely an aggregate of individual lead scores at the account. Other models look beyond aggregate activity and try to measure the significance of different activity types. They may take into account journey stage, multiple buying teams and other factors. In this paper, we will examine common models and provide insight on what qualification criteria to focus on in determining your own ideal approach to ABM scoring.

Creating scoring that actually helps your teams

Your qualification criteria—how you score behaviors and profiling data such as demographics—are only as useful as you make them. Remember that the purpose of scoring is to help increase productivity, particularly for your Sales team. In the end, what

"We know that 7 to 8 people are involved in purchasing one of our solutions, so it is not about just tracking or influencing one individual, **it is about having a global view of the buying team in their journey.**"

— Mathilde le Taillandier, Regional Marketing Director, EMEA, Informatica

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you're trying to do is make sure you're sending in your Sales team only at the right time—when there's a real opportunity developing in an account. To develop the right scores, you want to be super clear about what the Sales team is willing to act on. Because of past experiences, you may need to work with them a bit to adjust their own thinking for ABM. For example, based on the clarity that new data sources can provide, you may want them to act on information they've never had before.

As illustrated in the table below, when building out your ABM scoring model, you need to be aware that account or buying-unit scoring is significantly different from traditional lead scoring—it takes into consideration collective actions that require deeper analysis. Adjusting your existing model for ABM will be essential for success because it's your model that triggers the actions you and your Sales organization colleagues are each going to take on.

In order to develop an account score, you must understand the level of engagement that members of a specific buying team are exhibiting with you or with third parties. In essence, you must come up with an aggregate contact engagement score, which can then be incorporated into a score for the account to kick off a special set of marketing and sales activities (often referred to as "orchestrating a play").

Differences in account-based scoring and traditional lead scoring

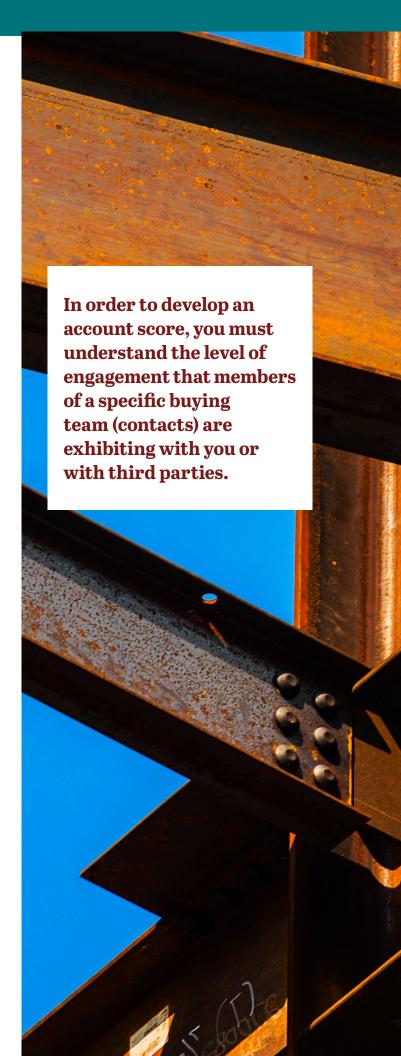| Account/Demand Unit Signal Scoring	Traditional Lead Scoring
Account driven—incorporates known account-level insights to determine proper score	Contact driven—progresses single leads based only on the action of an individual person
Exposes tasks related to the full buying committee for proactive Sales organization follow-ups	Assigns Sales follow-up to a specific person rather than a group of people related to a deal
Triggers nurturing communications to groups of relevant contacts at an account	Triggers nurturing communications to a single individual
Recognizes an "Account Potential" score based on buyer stage activity	Points-based score based on volume of activity by an individual only

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Evaluating and scoring contact-level engagement

While approaches vary slightly between marketing automation platforms, most scoring models operate using an x/y axis (profiling and observed behavior) construct. Beginning from your ideal customer profile (ICP), you can determine the right elements for your business to use in scoring contacts against its ideal demographics and firmographics. For example, you can use company name (more points if that name is one of your target title, industry, company size, geography and so on.

Target Profile Criteria	Points
Target Title	10
Size	10
Country	5

Next, you need to create a behavior-based engagement score for each contact. Different from lead scoring based on "qualification" criteria, in ABM the purpose is to establish how well we are doing at building an effective set of interaction points and contact cadences for use in relationship nurturing over time. Engagement points are earned based on the recency and frequency of positive marketing interaction.

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Your engagement scoring model might look something like this:

Action	Points	Timeframe
Opened an email	3	Within last 30 days
Attended an online event	20	Within last 60 days
Submitted a form	20	Within last 30 days
Attended a physical event	25	Within last 90 days
Clicked and watched a video	30	Within last 90 days
Requested a demo	70	Within last 14 days

Your contact behavior/engagement baseline report will look something like this:

Target Account List	User Champion(s)	Economic Buyer	Influencer(s)
Account A	200	10	0
Account B	90	20	50
Account C	25	50	0

Knowing when to act

Knowing when there is real opportunity at an account (versus relying on potentially misleading individual "leads" alone) requires holistic understanding of the full breadth of activity and engagement at that account. Real B2B decisions are not the result of the activity of only one champion in the process! Your own first-party data helps with this, but there are third-party sources available that can greatly enhance your ability to identify accounts that have confirmed projects underway. It's how well we read the collective signals from an account plus how well we engage each critical persona active within a specific account's buyer's journey that will ultimately determine our participation in the opportunity and, ultimately, the deal. Defining your understanding

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of "Prioritized Demand" will enable you to identify when an account is ready to take the next step. By obtaining the answers to critical sales questions (Is there a project? Is a decision imminent? Has the collective activity of the buying team reached a crescendo?) will help guide Sales towards where their attention will pay off.

The SiriusDecisions Demand Unit Waterfall™

> **Prioritized Demand**—A buying group has reached a threshold of engagement indicating an explicit need and a decision timeframe.
>
> **Qualified Demand**—Through interactions with the buying group, you can confirm that there are resources, relationships, fit and urgency.

Match the tactics to the account status.

If you are going to prioritize an account for action, you need to be acutely aware of your choice of tactics and the content needed to fuel them. If you use tele-outreach, make sure ABM scripting is custom-designed to be especially useful and helpful. If you're making an integrated play, customize your banners, your email and your tele-outreach. Don't base outreach solely on showing that you know they're in play. Instead, focus on what would help an account like them solve a business issue that you've identified based on their activity profile.

From there, further qualify accounts based on the scoring thresholds and established SLAs with Sales—"Qualified Demand." You may very well need to agree that the definition of "Qualified Demand" should remain flexible for a number of months until the whole team gets comfortable with precisely what is critical to follow up on (true positives) and how many false alarms (false positives) the team is willing to accept. That said, once you have agreement on the definition of Qualified Demand, you must be absolutely sure that all players commit to pursuing it with laser focus. It does you no good to have an agreed-upon case passed to Sales, only for it to be disqualified because an SDR couldn't get through.

Learn how better alignment and account intelligence can help your SDRs improve Sales appointment rates 19x. >

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Combining the profile score with the behavior/engagement score produces an engagement score for the contact. An engagement score is important for measuring how you are doing in covering an ABM account. It's an excellent way to help prioritize communications and measure the overall health of your outreach without changing your standard lead qualification approach. And while this can look similar to the MQL concept used in standard demand gen, it doesn't carry with it the idea of BANT qualification, so Sales tasks should not be triggered off the engagement score alone. Although engagement scoring does provide a measure of "heat," it does not yet contain the specific lead qualification criteria your Sales colleagues probably require. From measuring engagement, you will probably choose to layer in some of your classic qualification criteria, setting a total score threshold that indicates which accounts and which contacts within them are truly ready for a Sales call.

Put Your Model into Action: Using ABM scoring to drive Marketing and Sales activities

An ABM scoring model is effective only if you and your team can agree upon the triggers that will kick off both Sales and Marketing activity. You may want to consider implementing some of the common triggers shown here, but be sure to modify this list as necessary based on your own knowledge of your buyers' unique purchase inflection points. This is something you will want to monitor and improve on over time, as you are able to integrate more of your own and third-party insights into your workflows. Always remember that the purpose of scoring is to help you focus the right resource on a prospect account at the right time. Bottom line: Your scoring should help you make it easier to know what to do next. It should be as intelligent as you can possibly make it.

Common triggers

Trigger	Action
Proof of Concept (POC) kickoff call completed	POC Success Kit mailed to champion
Demo completed	Send survey to all meeting participants
Proposal sent	"Thank you for considering us" letter from executive
New contact added to an account by Sales	Send email with most popular content viewed by other contacts at the account
Account is up for renewal with a competitive contract	Assign call task to Sales to contact economic buyer and champion
Account sends RFP to competitor(s)	Trigger task to Sales for a call and email buyer's guide and case study
3+ people from the same account download the same piece of content within 14 days	Trigger email prompting them to request a demo
Influencer on the buying committee registers for an event	Assign task to Sales to invite other contacts at the account, referencing that their co-worker signed up

Fuel Your ABM Scoring Model with Better Data

The triggers on the previous page represent a sample starting point. However you begin, be sure to monitor your model's usefulness, adapting triggers and actions as you incorporate new data sources and learn more about your buying committee preferences. Whether for existing accounts or net-new, **avoid the temptation to treat your large accounts as single buying units**. In reality, there are likely to be multiple buying units within each of your target accounts. Keep in mind that one buying unit may behave differently than another, so be sure to do analysis at the opportunity level, not just at the account level.

Newly available sources of behavioral data can provide the essential inputs you need to fuel a more effective ABM scoring model. To learn more about how real purchase intent insight from TechTarget can help you better identify and act on real opportunities at key accounts, reach out to us today.

About TechTarget

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