

[6 Insights from the 2019 ABM Benchmark Study](#)

Thursday, April 30, 2020 - Written by: [Giuseppe D'Angelo](#)



For the past few years, we've regularly addressed issues related to account-based marketing (ABM). We've looked at the tools and technology, highlighted the successes and dissected some of the challenges. Today, we want to share some of the insights to come out of what may be one of the most important studies to date.

In December, ITSMA and the ABM Leadership Alliance released their latest benchmark study on the state of ABM. The report's title, "Moving to ABM Maturity," says it all. ABM is not another passing trend or flavor-of-the-month marketing gimmick. Instead, as ITSMA Senior VP Bev Burgess explains, "We've seen an incredible rise in interest in ABM since 2013, and I don't see any signs of that abating. For those already doing ABM, I see it becoming embedded in their marketing strategies..."

Whether you're already implementing ABM or just starting to explore the possibilities, you need to understand the trajectory of B2B ABM strategies and how the most experienced companies are putting ABM to work.

To that end, we've pulled five critical insights from the study to provide direction for your ABM journey.

1. Understanding the Evolution of ABM

The objective of ABM is to help sales teams, often including people across several departments, bolster their strategies by using data-driven insight. As the resulting marketing messages and content become more tailored to individual needs and buyer-seller relationships grow stronger, the customer experience becomes more satisfying. Result? Company revenue grows.

As companies have tested the principles of ABM, the techniques employed have evolved into three distinct types of ABM that are helping companies scale their efforts:

- **One-to-One ABM:** Marketing and dedicated account teams focus on a few key companies. They develop highly targeted programs based on a solid understanding of their account's pain-points and needs.
- **One-to-Few ABM:** Marketing and sales teams work together to expand their use of ABM by developing strategies designed to focus on the needs and pain points of small groups of accounts.
- **One-to-Many ABM:** Representatives from marketing and sales work closely to scale ABM by defining their ideal customer profile based on past sales history, company firmographics and technographics. Then they personalize content to individual decision-makers within accounts.

2. Where Are Most Companies Today?

In terms of adopting ABM, most companies fall within one of four categories — Exploring, Experimenting, Expanding or Embedded —with most reporting they are in the Experimenting (43%) or Expanding (30%) phase. Although only 17% of respondents are in the Embedded stage, the study highlights their experiences to indicate how ABM can drive strategic growth.

At the same time, the study finds no slowdown in commitment. Budgets for ABM are growing. In 2019, ABM initiatives received 29% of the marketing budget, and in 2020 the dollars allocated to ABM are expected to increase 21.3%, on average.

3. Key Objectives

When asked about their primary objective with ABM, most companies are focused on growing their business within existing customers and selling into new accounts. Additional objectives include:

- Supporting specific major deals
- Strengthening the company's reputation or changing how targeted accounts perceive it
- Entering new markets or selling to new buyer types

4. Common Challenges

Of course, ABM is not without its challenges. The top two problems reported are:

- Personalizing and tailoring marketing to the key contacts at each account
- Tracking and measuring ABM results

The first takeaway here is to expect to put a lot of time and effort into tailoring your content and marketing messages. Doing so requires research, data analysis and a strong alignment of goals and communication between sales and marketing.

Second, metrics are critical. You want to track results that help you grow and strengthen your ABM effectiveness as well as identify weaknesses. Give adequate time to see the results based on the metrics you select.

The number one metric for all types of ABM programs is tracking pipeline growth. Closely behind sales funnel metrics is tracking overall revenue growth and the portion of it that is directly related to ABM initiatives.

Additional challenges include:

- Getting a realistic budget to support programs
- Developing campaign elements that you can customize at scale
- Educating salespeople on the process and value of ABM
- Hiring experienced, skilled and talented ABM marketers
- Standardizing the approach to ABM across the company's divisions, locations and business groups
- Agreeing on the accounts to include in the program

In other words, companies want larger budgets, which will help grow their ABM programs and attract marketers with ABM experience. They need to define their marketing programs to allow for scaling because that's where the real growth lies. And companies need to get all their people on the same page both through training and better inter-departmental alignment.

5. The Future Is at Scale

The big news is that the vast majority (92%) of companies are growing, expanding

and scaling their ABM programs. Here are a few examples of what they are doing:

- Expanding what they are doing for accounts currently in their ABM programs
- Using ABM to cover more accounts
- Adopting technology to automate and create more leverage for existing programs
- Developing new tools and templates to expand, reuse and share best practices
- Applying ABM to significant opportunities or deal pursuits
- Adopting an approach that uses more than one type of ABM to cover more accounts, clusters and segments

6. Five Keys to Success

As companies move toward maturity and beyond, there are five critical areas of focus:

- **Practice Patience**

Stay the course because your commitment will result in a higher ROI. Of those responding to this study, 71% reported somewhat or significantly higher ROI. But it takes time. While 59% of the most experienced ABM companies report significant improvements in reputation and brand perception, only 11% of others say the same. Similarly, 45% of the companies most experienced with ABM report significant pipeline growth versus 19% of others.

- **Strengthen Sales Alignment**

While marketing and sales have, at times, operated independently, the most successful ABM programs report close alignment in objectives and program development. Alignment helps you to know what is driving the account, increases your ability to play to the client's needs and enables you to develop stronger targeted value propositions. Make this a goal, but recognize that it takes time and commitment. Even companies with the most effective ABM programs are not completely satisfied with their alignment.

- **Invest in Insight**

Start with simpler, easy-to-integrate technology, such as email, social media, CRM and website tools. Then gain greater insight with marketing automation, analytics,

intent analysis and the integration of third-party data. The gold standard, where the most effective companies are investing, includes business intelligence, predictive analytics, AI-enhanced chatbots and automated content activation.

- **Master Multichannel**

With digital marketing have come many more platforms for reaching buyers, including paid social media advertising, direct mail, newsletters, executive outreach webinars and email marketing. Also, once the current health crisis dissipates, include in-person events and tradeshow. They have their place.

- **Build a Blended Strategy**

As your ABM program grows and evolves, you don't necessarily move away from one-to-one programs and adopt one-to-few or one-to-many. The mature program blends and adapts the various types of programs to your goals and the audience you are trying to reach.

Whether you're just starting to explore ABM or you've already invested significant dollars and resources, think beyond the immediate program. Think of ABM as a strategy. It's a long-term play that drives results by enhancing the customer experience while growing revenue and increasing ROI.

For help meeting your sales goals, call us at +1 813-320-0500 (US) or +39 06 978446 60 (EMEA), or contact us online.

Published in
[Tele-Services](#)