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# Removing the 'marketing fluff' from ABM



[www.incisive-edge.com](http://www.incisive-edge.com)

0800 8600 512



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# Intro

Welcome to the Incisive Edge guide to Account Based Marketing, or ABM.

Let's get to the heart of it quickly.

ABM can offer an organisation the opportunity to build sustainable revenue generation, and long-term pipeline in a far superior way to other traditional means of marketing. It has come to sit alongside inbound marketing as the modern approach to new business generation, and together they replace the somewhat worn-out tactics associated with outbound marketing, which organisations have traditionally used to generate leads.

ABM has been a more common practice in savvy B2B marketing teams over the last decade or so, but it has really gained momentum since arriving *at 100mph*, into boardroom level discussions, following Covid-19.

Many organisations have long followed an ABM-mindset when it comes to their sales, although they may not have realised it, particularly those selling into industries with a limited pool of targets and long sales cycles, such as hospitals, or banks.

However, it was not always referred to as ABM in days gone by. In the past, a salesperson's "little black book" could contain all the relevant contact information of the people in one of their target accounts, and their career would provide them with anecdotal pain points that they were able to carry along with them over the years.



Now, in a world where databases have come to the fore, and knowledge-sharing is an accepted best practice required for success, there is an opportunity for an organisation, or marketing team, to map out the most lucrative accounts in their target market for themselves, rather than placing reliance on any single rainmaker.

There's a reason that this approach has become so popular in recent years – it has the potential to drive sales conversations which would otherwise not occur until months of lead generation, nurture and let's face it – in some instances, luck. The nature of this focus on a particular set of organisations, buying committees and pain points means that by the time a lead converts, they are truly sales ready.

Since its popularisation, ABM has become a request from aspirational CEOs and founders alike, which many an honest marketing team has come to fear.

But that need not be the case.



## Define: "Buying Committee"

The buying committee is the group of stakeholders, influencers and decision-makers, often from different departments, who have their own backgrounds, biases, needs and goals that must be addressed in order to push a decision forward. The respective members will be the target of your campaigns.



## What is ABM?

Account Based Marketing is simple in principle, but complex in practice.

ABM is a strategic approach to your marketing, sales and servicing of key accounts; identified by a set of business-criteria, in order to grow your business in the long term.

It's an end-to-end revenue strategy where marketing, sales and customer success spend the majority of their attention and activity, both pre and post sales, on accounts that are their best fit customers.

ABM is a more targeted, more efficient way for teams to generate more revenue, moving away from a broadcast approach to a more **specific** approach and creating awareness and engagement with a segment of prospects that have commonalities.

This means looking across your total addressable market, and selecting the businesses within it, who have the highest potential for your organisation specifically, and then bringing your marketing, sales and customer support teams together to achieve a common goal of gaining revenue from that business.

Delighting the people who matter to your business, within those key accounts.

Your business must use criteria which are intrinsically linked with your financial and sales goals. And this is key. **You cannot act in isolation as a single marketing or sales function, when following an ABM approach.**

Once you have collected your target group of organisations, your marketing activities will lean on commonalities within the target groups in order to increase conversion, and ultimately leads.

*In traditional marketing, you might be looking to convert 1% of a 10,000 person audience. In ABM, you are aiming to drive up the conversion percentage, as the audience number shrinks. You will achieve this via an in-depth understanding of the individuals on your list, their challenges, needs and pain points.*

The most effective Account Based Marketing we have seen, comes with the most tightly defined target audience. Hyper-personalised content and a deep understanding of the target's pain points, will yield success.

In order to follow an ABM philosophy or approach, an organisation must build a crystal-clear picture of who their ideal customer is (your ICP or Ideal Customer Profile) and what the target persona within that company looks like, for all those involved in the purchasing process. That means conducting research at both the company and individual levels.

Once your teams have a clear map drawn out, they may begin to execute hyper-targeted and hyper-personalised campaigns which speak to the pain points of those individuals.

This level of planning, and personalisation takes time, and therefore the process of effective ABM requires buy-in from the top of the organisation, as well as patience when it comes to achieving results.

# Using TEAM to structure your ABM

Yes, it's *another* acronym in the world of ABM, and marketing more generally.

But, in our mission to eliminate marketing fluff from conversations, we don't take the inclusion of TEAM lightly.

TEAM is a framework which is synonymous with ABM, and one which is used by organisations and agencies alike to build their ABM machine. You can use TEAM to validate your existing ABM campaigns, and even your broader marketing activities.

In the age of digital marketing, this is a great framework to keep you accountable, and stop those frequent internal requests for yet another random campaign.



## Target

Use a CRM or database tool to collect all the audience data you need. This will include profile information at both the account and buyer persona level. As you build your audience or 'buying committee', define the fields which you will need to use to know and understand your targets.

## Engage

Generate clicks, visits and downloads from the individuals within your target accounts. Produce content which delights your target audience and builds a long-term relationship with them. Make their lives easier in some way so that they come to learn what your business does well.



## Activate

Monitor activity on a constant basis. Take cues from your CRM and prompt the sales team when an account is repeatedly hitting your website or engaging with your content. Don't rely on you checking in on the data, rather, configure dynamic prompts to deploy sales resource appropriately.



## Measure

Define your KPIs and track them over time. Group KPIs together to create an account health score, and ensure that you and your ABM team have a clear vision of what's happening within each account.





# 5 Things your organisation must do to achieve Account Based Marketing

## 1. Build a team fit for ABM

Account Based Marketing doesn't live and die with the marketing department. If you truly want to apply an ABM approach to driving pipeline for your organisation, and create sustainable sources of revenue from accounts with deep pockets, then you will need cross-department collaboration.

The cornerstone of ABM is **sales and marketing collaboration**. This is often heard, but not actioned when organisations are planning their ABM strategies. True sales and marketing collaboration doesn't happen with a one-off, kick-off call, followed by regular meetings to drag the marketing department over the coals. Joint accountability, strategic planning and cultural investment is key.

In addition to sales and marketing, you will need to bring **CRM operations** into the room. ABM is challenging at the best of times and without a proper database and marketing automation system it can become near impossible. Bringing your Ops team to the table will ensure that they understand what you need from the system, as well as bringing them along on your ABM journey.

Finally, you will need to bring in your **services, delivery, support or CX functions**. Whatever the name of the department, you need to have boots-on-the-ground expertise in your ABM team. Once you capture a high value account, it is your mission to delight them. Measuring the satisfaction in your key accounts will allow you to shape your campaigns, understand the right and wrong times to sell to them, and identify pain points for other accounts that fit your target profile.



Try surveying your customers to generate an NPS score, in order to have a consistent measure of the satisfaction within each account. If you can profile the responses by job title, seniority and region, even better.



## 2. Select the right tools

Account Based Marketing is made possible by the developments in databases, particularly your CRM, to power sales, marketing and CX functions across the B2B landscape. The ABM philosophy can utilise tactics from either an inbound, or outbound methodology, but no matter which way you choose to pursue your target accounts, you will have to be confident in your ability to:

1. Maintain a clean and tidy CRM/Marketing Automation System
2. Measure the impact you are having on an account-by-account basis
3. Accurately reach out and engage with individuals in your buying committees
4. Create a point of conversion which is compelling to the individuals

In order to achieve these things, you will need to ensure that you have systems in place which you believe work for your business' technology ecosystem.

Below are some examples of the types of technologies you'll need – your tech stack and the systems available to you.



### Conversion

Encouraging conversion is critical, when applying the ABM mindset. Each lead, or sales conversion, becomes more valuable than in traditional marketing, so you need to be confident in your prospects' ability to convert.

- ChilliPiper
- Calendly
- HubSpot (CTAs & Forms)
- Turtl
- Contentful



### CRM/ Marketing Automation

A clean database is critical. You need to collect profile information on your prospects, group them into accounts and personas, and have the ability to score/grade them from that data.

- HubSpot CRM & Marketing Automation
- Salesforce & Pardot
- Zoho



## Attribution

You need to know where you're driving traffic from, and where it is converting. Having attribution tools which are properly configured and firing, is absolutely critical.

- Google Analytics
- RollWorks
- HubSpot Marketing Automation
- Pardot



## Prospecting and Intent Data

To reach an audience which is ready to engage, you will have to populate your database. There are multiple approaches which you can take, but no matter what, you need to get to know your buying committee on an individual level.

- HubSpot CRM & Marketing Automation
- Salesforce & Pardot
- RollWorks
- Cognism
- LinkedIn
- Google Ads



Ensure that the CRM fields you choose to power your ABM strategy are tightly defined, realistically capable of being collected, and relevant to your scoring of both a target account and an individual within their buying committee.

### 3. Customer & market analysis

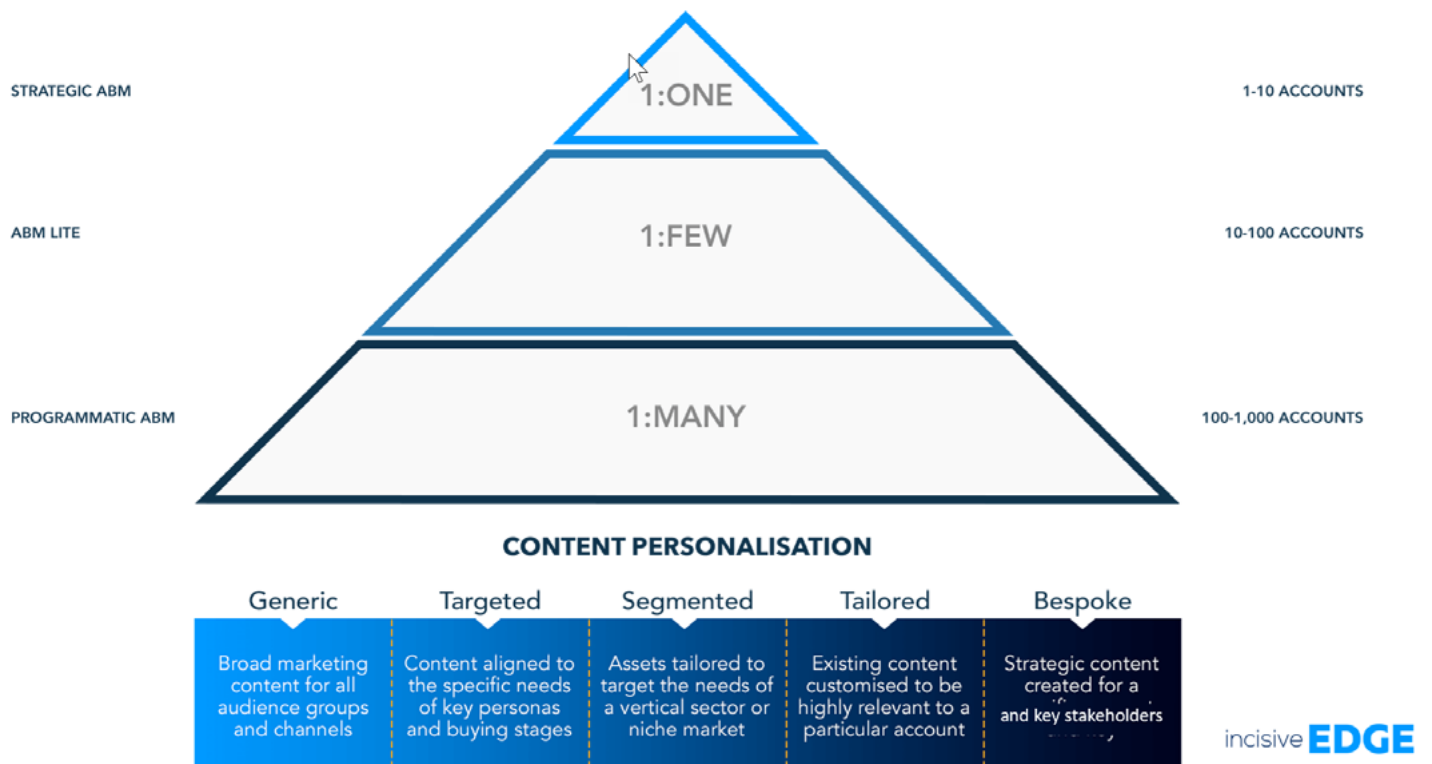
Once you have buy-in from the key departments within your organisation, and a marketing tech stack that can support your ambitions, it is time to look across the available accounts and carve out your audience.

You may wish to apply an ABM mindset to a 1:1, 1:few or 1:many approach. As a rule of thumb, you will enjoy better results the tighter you keep your target audience.

**1:1** is a strategy that delivers bespoke content and messaging directly to individual target accounts, treating each account as a market of one. These strategies lead to better engagement, improved relationships, and company loyalty with prospective customers.

**1:Few** is similar in that it focuses on personalising engagement for a small group of relevant target accounts. The same content personalization strategies as one-to-one marketing are used, but they're scaled up to target a larger number of accounts that share similarities in profile and industries.

**1:Many** this approach leverages technology to tailor marketing campaigns to specific named accounts at scale by refining targeting, analytics, and personalisation across multiple accounts, but requires alignment with the company's sales design, and typically focuses on a certain vertical or horizontal market.



The best targeted campaigns that we have seen, come from a collaboration between sales, marketing and CX. If sales can help marketing identify the types of leads that get them excited, then when marketing deliver individuals from those organisations, they will not have to chase or pester the sales team rather, they will be excited to pick up the phone.

Understanding the needs of your dedicated salesperson in the ABM team, will allow you to find commonalities amongst their most lucrative accounts. It is fine to be aspirational, and include accounts in these conversations which have not yet converted to customers, but this must be balanced with realistic expectations. If your average customer is a 20 person financial organisation, going after a huge retail bank immediately, might not be an achievable target in the short-term.



### Top Tip

Tools like Calendly or ChilliPiper give prospects the chance to book meetings directly into your sales team's calendars. This removes an opportunity for leads to fall away, and accelerates the deal cycle

Within your organisation, you need to understand who is involved in the purchase process. This group of individuals, is no longer as linear as it used to be. Gone are the days of passing the gate keeper, moving through the internal sponsor and into the decision maker. Now the average B2B deal can rely on as many as 15 individuals within a buying committee; and sometimes even more. The larger the organisation, the bigger the buying committee.

Influencing several members of your buying committee at once, is one of the most effective strategies you can employ within ABM, as it is often the case that more junior members of the committee will want to use your solution or services to build on their own professional standing within their organisation.

Find the need for each individual within the buying committee and you will find that deals move forward far more smoothly (and quickly), as conversations unfold behind closed doors without your input.





## 4. Marry your outreach to your audience

Once you have worked together to create a combination of target accounts and personas within the buying committee, it's time for the marketing team to really drive value. Wielding your newfound understanding of when to target a particular persona, you can begin to plan outreach campaigns that influence the appropriate individual at the right time.

Using tools like LinkedIn or Microsoft Display Network can be a huge weapon in your arsenal at this point, due to their database of self-cleaning employment information. You will need to push out your content and ads to your target audience along with genuine value-add content, in order to bring them into your funnel and identify which companies are showing a willingness to engage with your product or services.

## 5. Refine, enhance & drive

ABM is not a "set it and forget" methodology.

One of the most important things you can do for the success of your ABM campaigns is continue to check in on them regularly. You may wish to do this alongside other members of the team, but you will certainly want an understanding of progress, and plan changes or refinements as necessary. Not only that, but due to the patience required to see results from ABM, you will need to demonstrate the impact you're having on an account, before deals actually close.

### Top Tip

Schedule regular check ins with your stakeholders, to report out on what is working well and driving engagement. Give the other departments freedom to contribute when it comes to which parts of the campaigns to push and double down on. You maintain control, but bring them on the journey with you.

Document your findings where relevant. A CTO buyer persona at Barclays, is likely influenced in many similar ways to a CTO at Lloyds or RBS. Make a note of what you learn as you go, and use those learnings as you roll out to new target accounts in the future.

When you define your metrics (see our next section) it will be important to consider what each metric indicates to you, fuelling the enhancements you make to the campaign, and informing you of which lever to pull and when.



## Selecting the right metrics to monitor

For each of your tactics, under the umbrella of your ABM strategy, you need to have contributing metrics which form KPIs. We recommend collecting those metrics together, to generate an “account health” score overall, informing you of the right time to push sales, and the right time to reach out.

If you’re following an intent and inbound mindset, then you will need to ensure that you are able to track which companies are hitting your website. This can be done using a tool like Rollworks, Folloze or Pardot for example. As you roll out content in the locations where your buying committee spend their time, you will need to monitor the increase in visits from those target accounts.

For those taking a more direct approach, leaning on activities such as email marketing via HubSpot or other automation platforms, you can measure metrics such as email opens, clicks, interactions and conversions on each element of your content.

Of course, the ultimate metrics which matter are sales – closed sales. However, within ABM, the measurement should not stop at the opportunity stage. As you meet more members of the buying committee and the deal progresses, continuing to market to those customers, whether through 1:1 email, events or direct mail (to name a few), you will be able to track each positive interaction and accumulate a score at the account level.

Of course, accounts with multiple engagements will garner a higher score than those without.

Negative actions like unsubscribes, low NPS scores or flurries of support tickets move the account health score downwards.

Try using the OKR, or “Objective Key Result” format, where you tie an overarching objective to 2–3 KPIs.

See the example on the right:

### Objective:

Grow engagement within the Barclays’ account in the build up to contract renewal in 18 months

**KR 1:** 5 email exchanges with key account contact in the next 12 months

**KR 2:** 5 attendees at customer events in the next 12 months

**KR 3:** An NPS score of 40% or greater over the next 18 months

## There you have it

So there you have it. Our introduction to the key concepts in Account Based Marketing, and removal of some of the 'marketing fluff' that can slow conversations down in the B2B workplace.

ABM is a complex methodology, which leans on many elements of the marketing mix. It is often a great approach for organisations who are scaling beyond the 30 employee mark, and have an internal team of marketers, or a single marketer with agency support.

Whilst there are elements of ABM which you can utilise at an earlier stage of growth, the full package requires a considerable time and resource investment from the organisation. It's not something to be taken lightly. However, when done correctly, ABM can yield amazing results.

Once your organisation has looked at your current client base, and made the commitment to ABM, we are here to help you, starting with creating your ABM strategy – the foundation stone to any successful ABM programme.

If you'd like to know more about our ABM strategy services, you can reach out via the link below.

[BOOK A 30 MINUTE ABM CONSULTATION.](#)



## About Incisive Edge

Incisive Edge is a strategy-first B2B marketing agency, expert in customer acquisition and specialists in tech.

Established in 2009, our team have years of experience delivering high quality strategies and strategic campaigns for our clients across the B2B landscape.

**We're the digital marketing agency for growth-obsessed tech companies.**