

ACCOUNT-BASED MARKETING **RESEARCH REPORT**



InboxInsight 

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Interest in account-based marketing continues to grow as marketers seek better results in B2B sales and businesses look for more reliable strategies. The appeal of ABM is its targeting, and how marketers can build entire campaigns focused on highly specific accounts to attract and convert high-quality marketing leads, resulting in a greater percentage of wins and better value from the resulting deals.

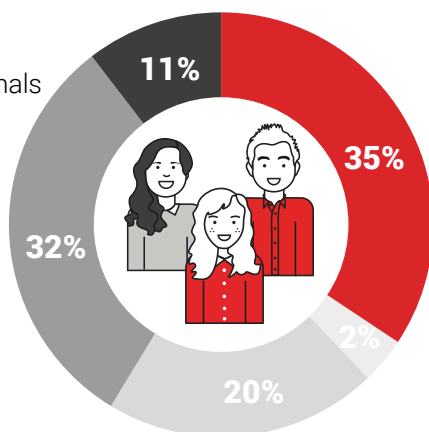
ABM is a strategic approach that has become a fundamental asset in almost every marketer's toolkit and we wanted to gain a better understanding of how ABM is being used to drive higher ROI and better results.

To do this, we surveyed senior marketers within the Insights for Professionals community to establish how different seniorities within different industries are using ABM to meet goals and exceed expectations.

Sample

Sample size: 174 US marketing professionals

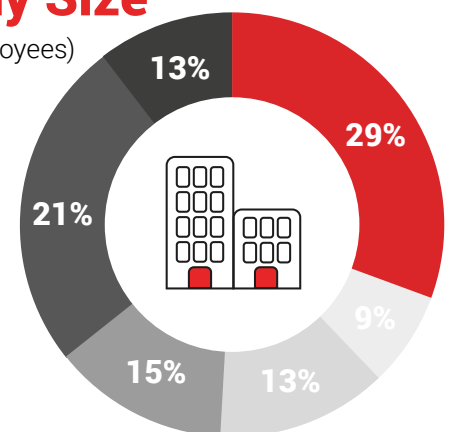
- Director
- Executive
- Manager
- C-level
- Vice President



Company Size

(number of employees)

- 100-249
- 250-499
- 500-999
- 1000-2499
- 2500-4999
- >5000



Industry Split

Telecommunications (7%), Software (11%), Service Industry (3%), Information Technology (55%), Finance & Banking (18%), Advertising/PR/Marketing (6%)



This research report aims to delve deeper into the use of ABM and investigate how it's being used in business, the benefits, the state of ABM ROI, the maturity of such programs and the pain points.

WHY IS ABM SO IMPORTANT?

After decades of marketers trying a near-endless stream of broad-based, high-volume, low-return efforts via online methods, ABM returns some sanity to the marketing effort, by focusing on quality, not quantity.

Marketers are finding greater success with ABM than with traditional methods, but that doesn't mean ABM is a golden bullet; it still requires skill and dedication to be successful. Ideally, an ABM team should consist of a marketing operations lead, database manager, digital specialist, developer, copywriter and designer, but some roles may merge depending on the business size.

To be successful, every ABM campaign needs:

- Detailed, account-specific, marketing and capture plans that match the business objectives of each target account.
- Templates to provide a foundation for creating personalized messaging, that are then rounded-out by knowledgeable account managers and domain experts.
- Carefully planned, relevant messaging and specifically defined assets that can be personalized to build engagement across the target business, not just the buyers or relations team.



CHAPTER 1: CONTEXT

With ABM, your marketing team identifies the best-suited companies for you to do business with, ranking them in order of importance and trying to win accounts with a company/partner that represents the highest-value, longest-term benefit or is of strategic use to your efforts.

Engaging those businesses with personalized marketing campaigns enables your sales team to focus on the requirements or pain points of both organizations and maintain a functional business dialogue, rather than trading marketing epithets.

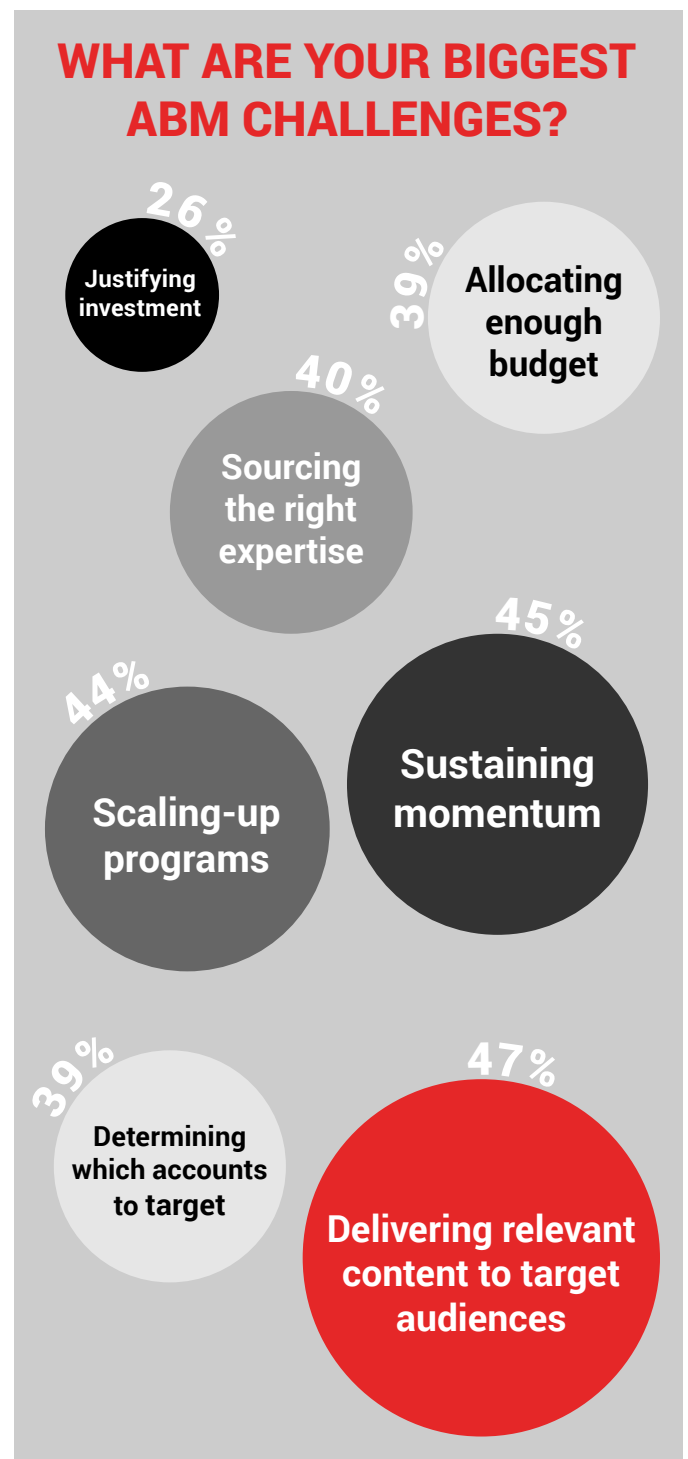
This approach creates lasting opportunities and benefits for both sides, and reduces the scattershot efforts of marketing's traditional approach to a more meaningful, laser-focused approach that delivers higher value results.

The biggest challenges of ABM

According to 47% of marketers surveyed, the leading challenge to enabling an ABM strategy is delivering relevant content to the target audience, something that comes with experience. Sustaining momentum (45%) and scaling-up programs (44%) are also likely issues, as with any technical-led marketing project, where both business leaders and the marketing department expect their new toy to deliver success rapidly, and can lose interest as the results take time to accrue.

As a relatively new endeavor, finding the right experience and expertise among marketers can also be a problem for departments, according to 40% of those surveyed, especially for those focused on different tactics over a long period of time. Budget (39%) and justifying the investment at various levels (27%) can be a challenge, especially if previous marketing efforts have not met expectations.

As with any marketing effort, there are a range of ABM tools and services available to help marketers drive their efforts, suited to all budgets, but the tools will only be as good as the data it runs on and the operators who use it.



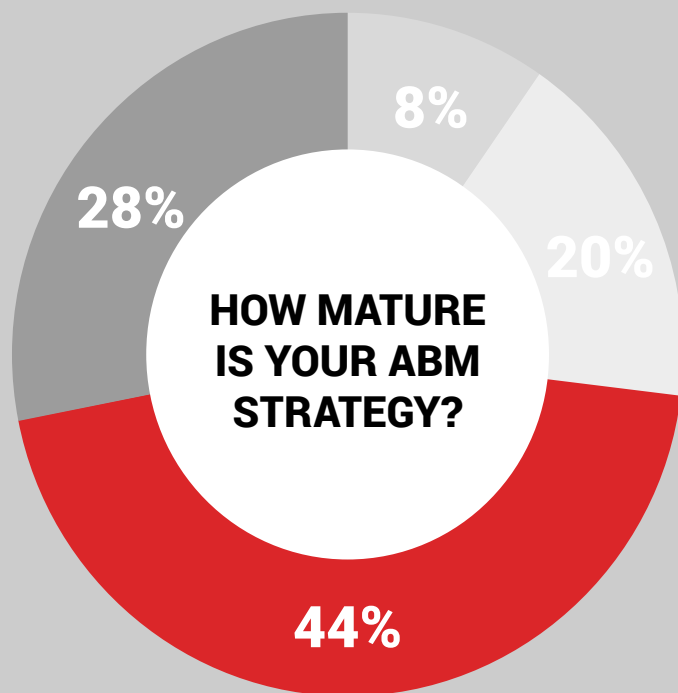
Many marketing teams want to succeed with ABM, but many approaches will deviate from best practices or haven't been allowed to reach maturity. As with any project, marketing practitioners need to understand the approach through practical experience, rather than the promises of ABM tool vendors or white papers touting the achievements of others.

ABM Maturity

The rise of ABM as a strategy is highlighted in the variety of survey responses on how long respondents have been operating an ABM approach, and how mature they consider it. Over 50% of businesses have been operating ABM for over 2 years, but only 44% consider their efforts well-established.



- 1-6 months
- 6-12 months
- 1 year
- 2+ years



- Early stages
- Scaling up
- Well established
- Fully synchronized

ABM is a strategic approach to winning clients, not a tactical one. It is about taking a long-term view, and avoiding putting pressure on the marketing to deliver quick wins. As such, it is common for an ABM strategy to be abandoned before the team have mastered the approach and been able to prove a strong ROI.

ABM programs are proven to achieve strong returns for marketing and sales, but require strong execution, especially in the planning and launch phases.

CHAPTER 2: STRATEGY

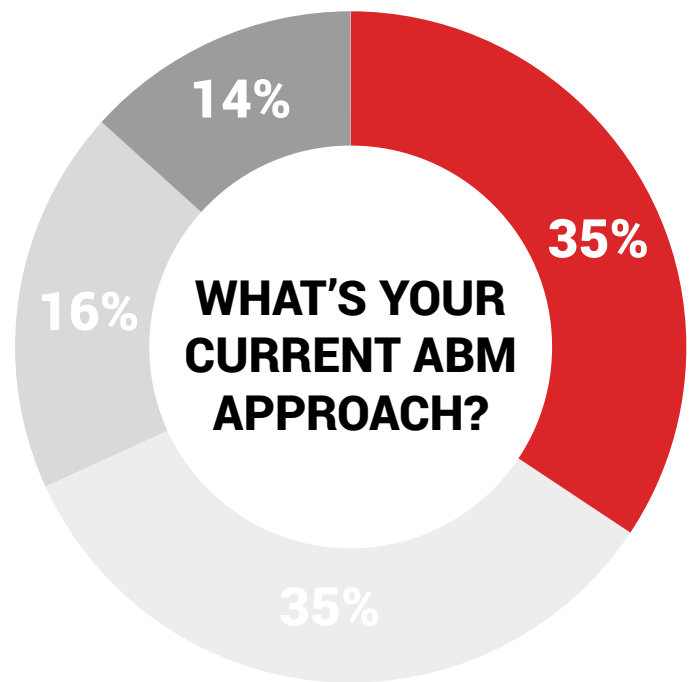
The three branches of ABM strategy

Businesses can use one-to-one, one-to-few and one-to-many approaches to vary their strategy and improve the opportunities for success. That success can be achieved by focusing efforts on a small number of targeted named accounts, or approaching a market or industry segment that can vary from dozens to thousands of targets.

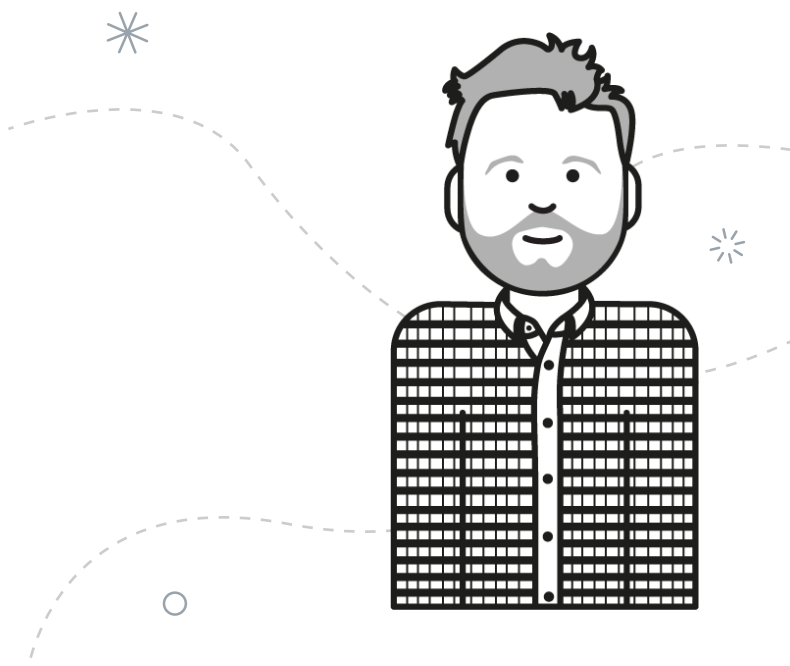
- **One-to-one** targets specific individual accounts and uses personalized messaging. This is ideal if you operate in a local market or appeal to a fixed range of businesses.
- **One-to-few** uses a specialized target account list that is based on predictive analytics or industry knowledge to define likely candidates.
- **One-to-many** identifies a total addressable market based on a wider scope or industry-type data broken down by likelihood of conversion.

Which method you use depends on the specific needs and knowledge of your sector landscape. Only 14% of those surveyed use a one-to-one strategy due to the granularity of this type of campaign and the effort needed to create truly personalized messages. However, 35% use a one-to-few strategy, showing that ABM is more common on a slightly larger scale, most likely because it's easier to execute. 16% use a one-to-many approach which indicates that whilst it's applicable to some markets, it may not be the most applicable strategy for everyone.

There is no one-size-fits all approach that will work for every business. In fact, 35% claim they use a combination of the above strategies to create an ABM strategy that works for them.



- One to one - specific individual accounts and personalized messaging
- One to few - specialized target account list based on predictive analytics
- One to many - identified a total addressable market based on firmographic data
- A combination of the above



Using the strategy that is best for your company should also be a key priority. Startups and fast-growing businesses will be focused on the makeup or identity of their ideal client and should already have a range of high-profile targets.

In the middle-ground, established businesses that are already entrenched in a number of key clients but are looking to expand should focus on upcoming players in key markets and expanding into new territories or beyond their traditional marketplace.

Finally, enterprises with widely-spaced offerings will have a huge range of targets and can benefit from the analytic approach of a one-to-many effort to narrow a potentially massive list down to a manageable prioritized target account lists (TAL) for the ABM approach.

Targeting techniques

What are the most important audience characteristics for profiling a Target Account List?



Segmentation is a long-established marketing method, and ABM takes this to the next level, with insight and research helping to build a high-quality TAL. This is where experience and expertise comes into play, as failing to identify the right companies at the start will waste any subsequent ABM effort for your product

or services. Instead, spend time determining which accounts you've seen the most success with. You can do this using short-term metrics such as revenue, and more long-term metrics such as customer lifetime value. From this, you can then build a TAL based on the types of company that's the best fit for your business model and be confident your service delivers what they need.

With much ABM based on data, your team will need to verify existing first or third-party data for quality and currency. Over half of marketers (54%) say they use a combination of first and third party data to create their TAL. However, working from out of date lists or files compiled from various out-of-house resources risks the ABM effort on day one. To combat this, ensure that targets fit into the right category and that the relevant people within that organization are still there in the right roles. You should also consider segmenting by company profile type, the type of business issues they are facing and their requirements that your products or services can meet.

Further segmentation can be defined by breaking down prospects into those that can provide the highest reward for minimal effort; those which require high effort but offer above-stellar reward, and high-profile targets that could help raise your company brand, just by being associated with them.

Additional markers can include targets that could most easily adopt your products or service, those where a high level of customization or high-touch support would be involved and other checklist items that may affect the ABM approach, such as messaging and who within the organization you target.

Once those segments are defined, you will need to qualify them through some reality-check testing to ensure targets fit in the right areas. Once the rationale for segmentation has been proven, your targeting strategy is ready to go.

TOP TIP:

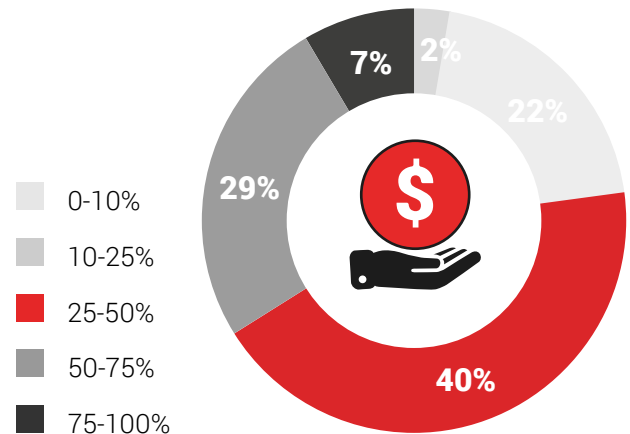
Whatever ABM service or tools you use, regularly check the validity of segmentation results to keep the project on track.

Lookalike marketing is used by 83% of marketers and can be a useful tactic for finding new audiences. Tools such as Facebook's Lookalike audience and Google's Similar audience are invaluable when helping you to find businesses matching your requirements. Media owners and specialists in intent data can also help you build out your lookalike strategy; by tracking digital touchpoints on content topics relevant to your brand, they can provide you with visibility into what your target accounts are engaging with and how to reach other relevant organizations.

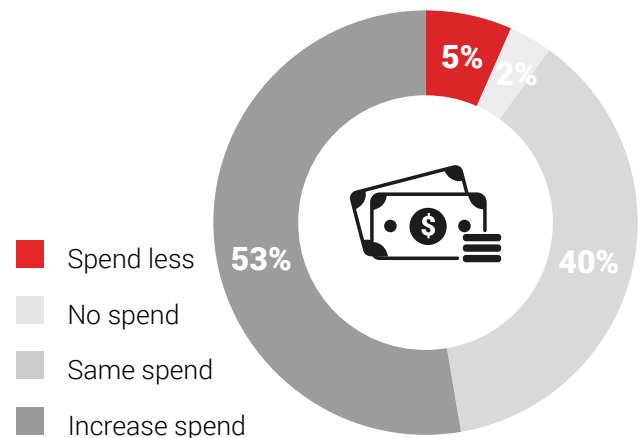


ABM budget

HOW MUCH OF YOUR OVERALL MARKETING BUDGET IS ALLOCATED TO ABM?



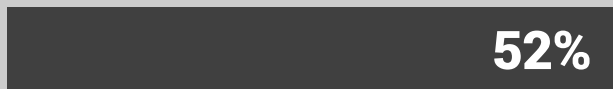
WHAT ARE YOUR ABM SPENDING PLANS FOR NEXT YEAR?



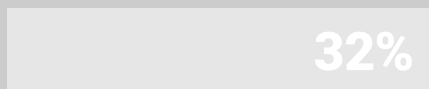
Marketing budgets remain under pressure in many verticals, but the success of ABM makes it an attractive area to spend in. Our research shows 36% of businesses spend more than 50% of their marketing budget on the ABM approach with 53% looking to increase their spend in the coming year.

CHAPTER 3: TACTICS

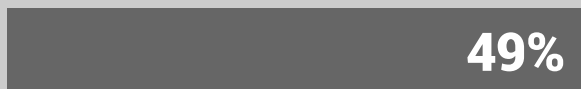
WHAT TACTICS ARE YOU DEPLOYING TO SUPPORT ABM?



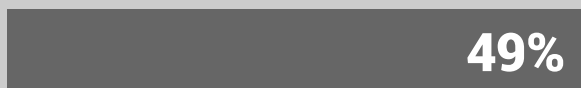
BEHAVIORAL DATA



LEVERAGING A CONSULTING PARTNER



MARKETING AUTOMATION PLATFORM



PERSONALIZATION TECHNOLOGIES



PREDICTIVE ANALYTIC TOOLS



PROGRAMMATIC ADS



TAILORED CONTENT STRATEGIES



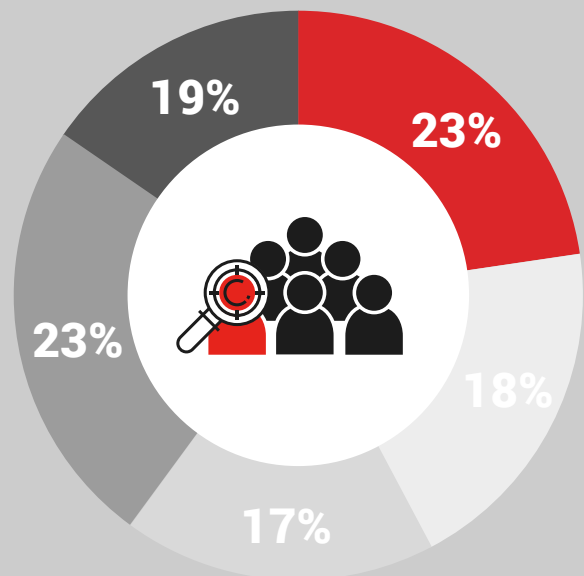
THIRD PARTY AUDIENCE BUILDERS



VIDEO PERSONALIZATION

WHICH AUDIENCE CHARACTERISTICS ARE IMPORTANT FOR PROFILING YOUR TARGET ACCOUNTS?

- Company size
- Location
- Intent
- Industry
- Annual spend

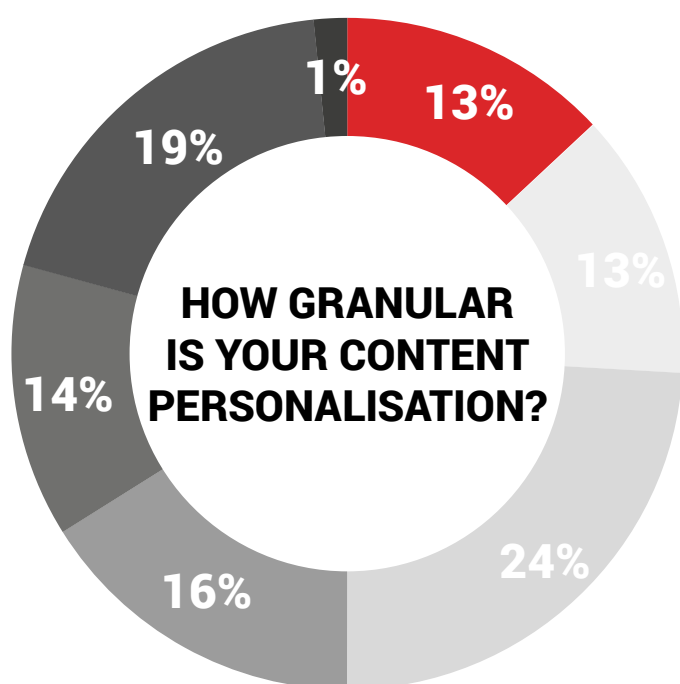


There are a range of tactics, depending on the needs of the marketing organization and the target clients, that can be adopted to build on the targeting approach to drive maximum success and return on investment.

Predictive analytics tools are a firm favorite, with 55% of marketers leveraging this technology while 53% use tailored content strategies. 52% use behavioral data and 49% use marketing automation platforms. All of this demonstrates the importance and need for the right insights to drive the right tools. Without a solid foundation of understanding their customer base, marketers are ill-equipped to launch an ABM strategy. The popularity in implementation has clearly been accelerated thanks to the accessibility of such technologies.

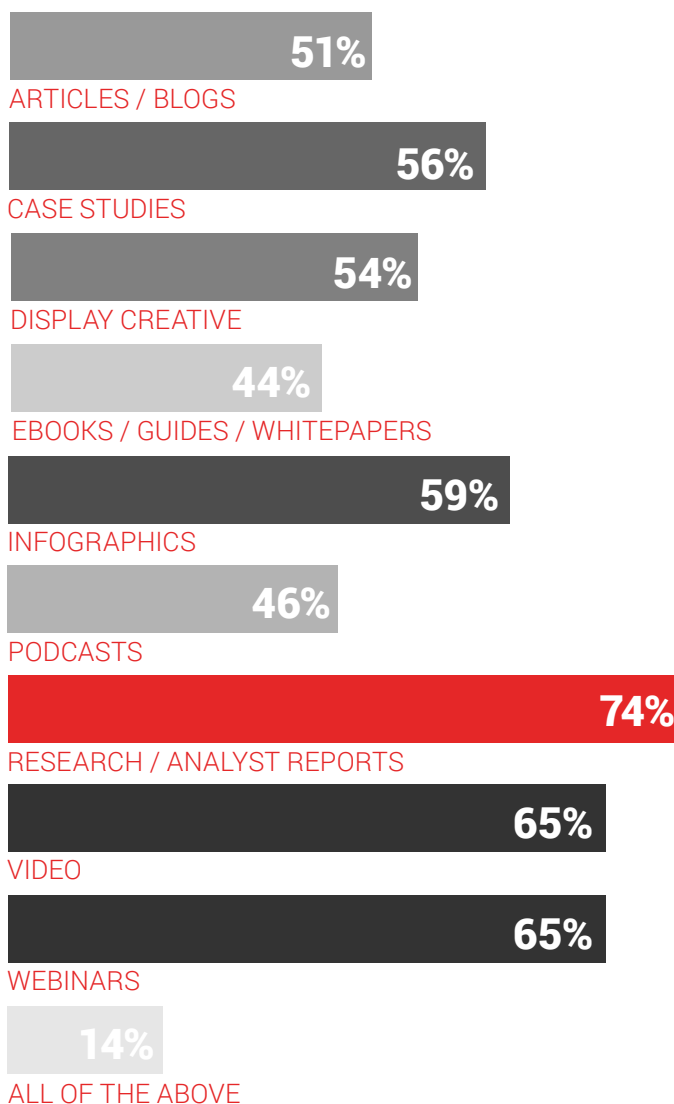
Identifying and profiling the target accounts primarily falls to industry and company size (both accounting for 23% of ABM strategies), but there is a fairly even split within the marketing industry with annual spend (19%), location (19%) and intent (17%) also key profilers, further supporting the idea that a combined strategy targeting different accounts according to different profilers is the most effective way of achieving ABM success.

Content tactics



- Content tailored around action-based intent data
- Content tailored to buying stakeholders
- Content tailored to industry
- Content tailored to job role
- Content tailored to specific account
- Generic content with broad appeal
- One-to-one messaging

WHICH CONTENT FORMATS ARE YOU USING TO SUPPORT ABM?



Within ABM campaigns, content delivery becomes more about delivering the right type of content to the individual. Research and analyst reports still lead the way and are used by almost three-quarters of marketers (74%). However, the rise of video on social has made its way into everyday marketing strategies with video and webinar formats being used by 65% of marketers for the purpose of ABM. As business leaders have less time to read research reports, this method of content delivery becomes increasingly appealing.

Even when video isn't a viable content format, visual formats also perform well, and 59% of marketers are using infographics in their ABM campaigns for this reason. Being able to provide bite-sized content in a format that doesn't require sound/headphones helps to address the issue of time-poor professionals and can also distill complex data into easy-to-digest insights.

Due to the targeted nature of ABM, the nurture cycle can be more closely monitored and as a result, case studies are another popular content format being used by 56% of marketers.

Podcasts are an emerging trend and an increasingly popular way of building an audience among your prospects and targets to deliver insights and information, and 46% of marketers are feeding the demand for audio-only content ideal for work commutes.

In order to deliver the greatest success and highest ROI, most ABMs use a mix of content. In fact 14% of marketers claim to use all these mentioned content formats and more to support their ABM efforts, allowing them to focus their efforts on delivering the type of content that's best suited to get the key information across to the right audience, at the right time.

When asked about how granular their content personalization was, 40% of marketers

indicated their content strategies were mostly tailored to the specific industry, whilst 32% stated they created generic content with broad appeal. Beyond these, less than a quarter (24%) created content for a specific account, 26% focused on the job role and about a fifth (22%) concentrated on stakeholders across the decision making unit.

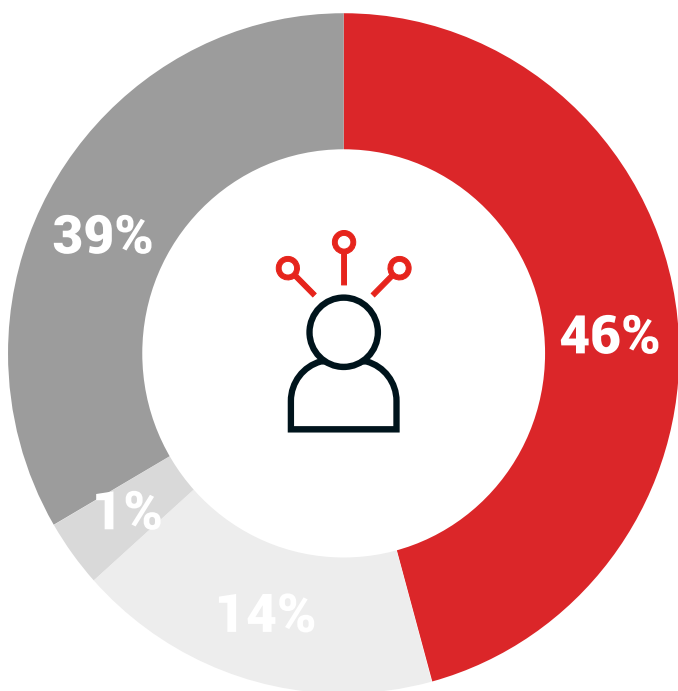
One-to-one messaging, whilst has the potential to be the most effective, only scored 2%, a considerably limited effort in ABM, but will grow in popularity and value as marketers get a better idea of the key audience members they need to address, especially within smaller target organizations.

At the end of the day, content is here to stay. And it's only through content personalization and consistent improvement will ABM campaigns improve. Marketing teams will primarily focus on prospect-specific offerings, tailored to the key leaders within the target business. Documents or material sent to the sales manager will highlight the value proposition of the product or service, while technical information can be focused on the IT manager or product leads. Strategic highlights can be the focus of marketing collateral for business leaders while broader-based efforts can target visionaries, buyers and other roles within the organization.

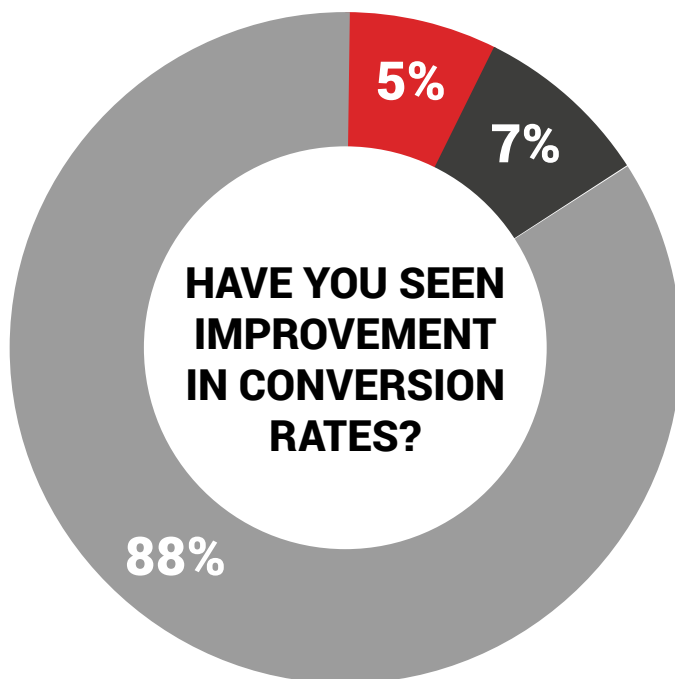


The use of intent data

HOW CONFIDENT ARE YOU AT IDENTIFYING OR PREDICTING ACCOUNTS THAT ARE IN-MARKET?

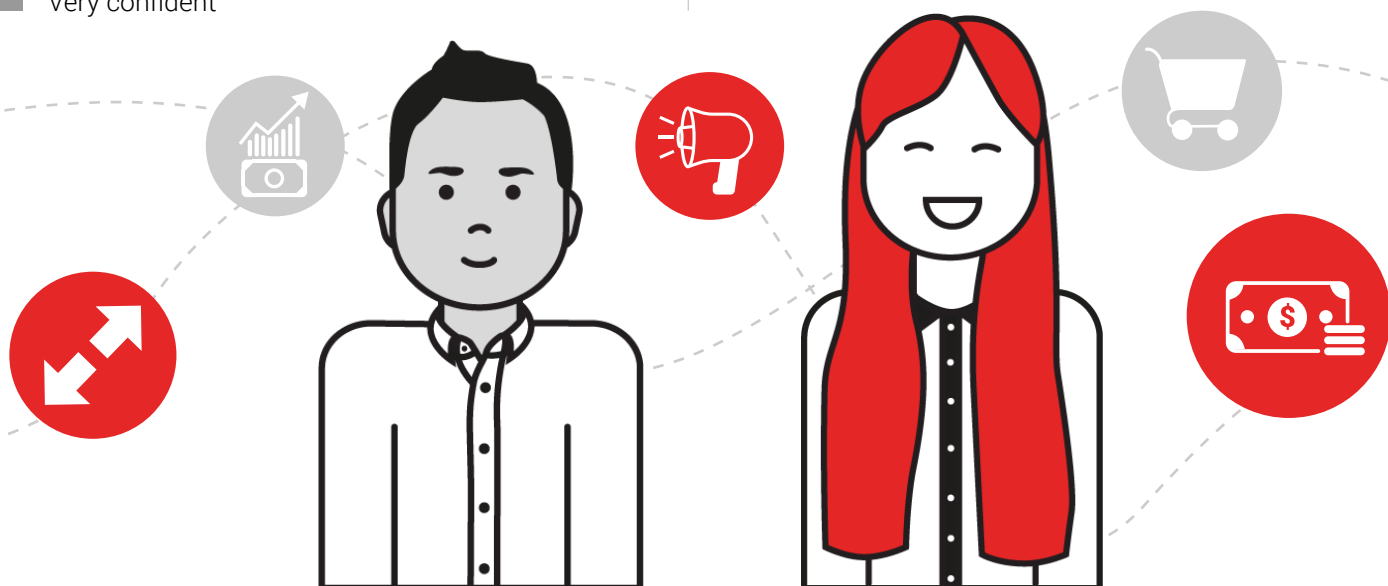


- Confident
- Could do better
- Not confident
- Very confident



- No
- Too early to tell
- Yes

The majority of marketers are confident or very confident (totaling 85%) at identifying/predicting accounts that are in-market, with 88% seeing an improvement in conversion rates. Of those struggling with confidence (15%) or ROI (5%), iterating the ABM project and refining their effort could improve confidence and deliver results.



CHAPTER 4: BENEFITS AND ROI

The primary benefit of ABM is that it reduces wasted effort. With ABM, there is no need to launch a massive number of emails or produce generic white papers in the hope of generating any leads you can. Instead, your marketing team can craft specific messages designed to attract the key decision makers in the target businesses, resulting in greater engagement across both online and offline channels.

The more focused approach provides a greater sense of purpose for metrics and building influence that can drive outcomes, whilst leveraging awareness and reputation from the start. This approach improves accuracy and produces a return on investment over the journey of the account, aligning to a better sales prospect and creating stronger relationships.

The vast majority of marketers report that ABM is well worth their investment, with 80% claiming somewhat higher returns and 64% claiming significantly higher results compared to other marketing activities. As a result, 80% of marketers say they have seen higher deal sizes compared to previous efforts.

Measuring response and results is essential to validate current and refine future ABM efforts, with key metrics including number of qualified accounts, top tier accounts and average deal size.

Beyond the core ROI benefits, ABM allows marketing teams to work in a more focused and directed manner than with other strategies, enabling teams to make more effective use of their resources.

ABM also brings harmony to sales and marketing teams, with the larger deal sizes providing mutual benefits and discouraging the “sales at any price” tactics sometimes used when target deadlines are looming. The types of information used within these campaigns also helps marketers focus on the product side of the company, encouraging wider collaboration.

With more information available, marketing can be more personalized with their strategy. This creates critical content that addresses key pain points of your identified audience or buyer personas. Ultimately, content personalization creates a series of assets dedicated to individual accounts, making the connection with prospects that work in those key businesses, and impressing them by dedicating more effort to your approach.

Targets who feel as though your company understands them will establish relationships that are mutually beneficial with value-added engagements, customer service and other bonuses.



CONCLUSION

Essentially, ABM can help generate more revenue and reduce wasted, generic marketing efforts that bring little value to the bottom line. The ABM approach also helps everyone concerned better understand the company's customer base, mapping how different accounts work and understanding how decisions and information flow. In certain TALs, knowing how power structures, personalities, and previous battles impact buying or leadership decisions can be half the challenge, something an advanced ABM process can deliver great insight into.

To succeed with ABM you need:

- Good data
- Good content
- And a marketing team willing to buy into the ABM concept

Early wins will reinforce that confidence, but even a slow start can be quickly accelerated thanks to the customizable nature of this approach. ABM is proven to work and can deliver valuable ROI and enhanced business results that can turn a successful company into a market-leader.

ABOUT

This research report was created by Inbox Insight in partnership with Insights for Professionals.

About **Inbox Insight**

Inbox Insight promote the best B2B content marketing practices enhanced by a data-driven approach. We believe putting audience insights at the heart of every digital campaign, drives superior experiences for both our business communities and clients.

It's about continuously leveraging audience intelligence to understand what they want to hear, and translating this into thoughtful demand generation campaigns that resonate with decision makers across the full buyer journey.

About **Insights for Professionals**

IFP gives you access to the latest business knowledge that's customized for you. We provide high quality, credible and relevant resources for senior professionals in one place. An easy to access and personalized library to help you when you are researching specific topics, seeking practical advice, or simply want to stay ahead of what's happening in your industry. To do this we gather the best content from suppliers, brands and industry experts, as well as doing our own research.



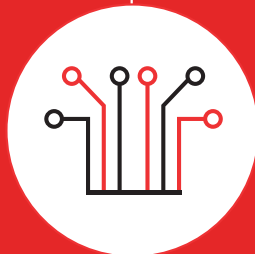
“ We can support your B2B marketing with a series of optimized demand generation products based on your objectives ”

Ready to build your own success story?



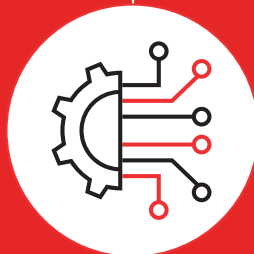
Inbox**ENGAGE**

Identify your audience, activate their interest and generate qualified engagements through our optimized multi-channel campaigns.



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A blend of targeted email marketing and the latest programmatic advertising technology to achieve superior audience reach, relevancy and scale.



Inbox**INTEGRATE**

A powerful end-to-end content amplification solution built around creating seamless digital experiences and optimized reader journeys.



Inbox**INBOUND**

We curate your best content, and optimize it using insight, then drive a relevant audience to the hub with multiple digital touchpoints.



Inbox**CREATE**

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