



STATE OF ACCOUNT-BASED STRATEGIES

Practitioners Bullish On Customer Acquisition Campaigns; Focused On Improving Internal Alignment



INTRODUCTION

In times of economic uncertainty, account-based strategies are essential. According to several business analysts and practitioners, ABM is a necessity for creating more predictable revenue — and research shows that **nearly three-quarters of marketers (74%)** already have the resources needed to build successful ABM programs. With that in mind, practitioners are leveraging their existing ABM frameworks for two initiatives: Creating tailored experiences to engage potential customers and developing retention campaigns.

“In the past, personalization was trendy and beneficial,” said Daniel Englebretson, Chief Customer Officer at marketing agency **Khronos**. “Now it’s necessary to stay relevant with buyers — a lack of personalization isn’t an option.”

To create highly personalized account-based strategies, modern marketers are focused on harnessing multichannel engagement and blended ABM/demand generation strategies. This report will examine the main investment areas that marketers are prioritizing to enhance their account-based strategies through a focus on:

- How practitioners are executing and accelerating blended ABM strategies that put self-service buying journeys at the forefront;
- The areas in which AI shows the greatest promise;
- The continued convergence of ABM and demand generation, with expert testimony that highlights the best ways to synchronize the two;
- Why marketers are split between focusing on retention-based plays or prioritizing new business generation; and
- How organizations are working to align all departments from the top-down on key performance indicators (KPIs).



INCREASING PERSONALIZATION THROUGH SELF-SERVICE ACCOUNT JOURNEYS

In a constantly evolving landscape, a personalized approach is key to standing out from the competition and driving success. [Research from McKinsey](#) found that personalizing the customer experience is a top priority for modern marketers, but executing that goal requires an investment in data and technology.

Data-driven ABM initiatives require practitioners to access all the datasets that will support their account growth goals. This includes leveraging first- and third-party data to build an ideal customer profile (ICP) and ensuring market fit through segmentation. The right data and technology will also allow marketers to personalize messaging and create tailored experiences for each account.

"In my experience, B2B marketers definitely understand the importance of being buyer-centric, and allowing buyers to direct and dictate the experiences they have is essential," said Meredith Fuller, Managing Director, Demand Strategy for B2B tech-focused demand marketing firm [Quarry](#). "As such, marketers are incorporating opportunities for buyers to engage when, where and how they want."

Fuller continued that these opportunities include:

- Allowing buyers to connect with sales or access support at any time via chatbots;
- Creating preference centers that help buyers identify their preferred communications channels and topics; and
- Enabling buyers to select the content they're most interested in a content aggregation hub.

Taking it a step further, companies are beginning to leverage self-service ABM packages so sales teams can utilize ABM without too much handholding from marketing. For example, digital supply chain company [Blue Yonder](#) provides custom 1:1 and 1:few scaled ABM programs "in a box" for their sellers targeting high-value accounts, explained the company's VP of Global Marketing Sam Nohava. She added that these programs enable customization, targeted messaging for a particular industry and pain point identification.

"The success of self-service ABM requires sellers to have a deep understanding of the customer or prospect and a strategic account plan," continued Nohava. "ABM marketers act as educators; they ask the right questions, learn about customer/prospect's needs, review intent signals and help sellers develop thoughtful and connected strategies. With self-service offerings, sellers have greater control over the strategy's success."

By enabling sales to act independently from marketing in their account-based strategies, practitioners can communicate with their target audience in a way that resonates with the entire buying committee on a deeper level, driving relevant engagement and increasing conversion rates. When executed effectively, this approach can improve brand perception and lead to a higher ROI.



THE ROLE OF AI & INTENT IN ACCOUNT-BASED STRATEGIES

With Calen Holbrooks, ZoomInfo

“Intent” is one of the buzziest words in B2B, and for good reason: Intent is essential to craft strong campaigns and get ahead of buyers’ needs. Amid new artificial intelligence (AI) innovations, such as ChatGPT, practitioners can incorporate new technologies to automate key processes and strengthen key facets of their ABM programs.

To learn more about the innovations in AI and its influence on intent and ABM, *Demand Gen Report* sat down with Calen Holbrooks, VP of Integrated and Partner Marketing for [ZoomInfo](#), a sales intelligence software that provides a database of business and professional contact information.

Demand Gen Report: In your opinion, what’s the current state of account-based strategies?

Calen Holbrooks: ABM is everywhere – everyone is doing it, or at least trying to. The good news is we’ve come a long way, and many of the early struggles, such as sales and marketing alignment and coordinating efforts, are definitely solvable today. With increased investments in intent data, targeting capabilities and buying committee concepts, creating a solid ABM strategy is more accessible than ever before.

The advancement of ABM-specific technologies can also help foster greater sales and marketing alignment. When you invest in a quality data platform that can host aligned account lists, launching unified campaigns becomes much easier across the entire funnel.



DGR: What are the key areas you think marketers need to invest in to strengthen and refine their ABM strategies?

Holbrooks: Intent and buying signal data are key to ABM for B2B companies. The whole point of an account-based funnel is measuring how an account is moving and progressing on their journey. That starts with going after the right accounts in your ICP; look beyond the firmographic data of who is ideal for your company and lean into the tell-tale intent signals like new funding round alerts and executive changes.

Having access to both data points will ultimately make your ABM strategy more efficient. You want to be the first vendor in the door once accounts start showing interest in solving problems that you can help address. When you have access to intent signals and buying data, you can create a coordinated ABM effort to target the accounts that align with your ICP and have the highest propensity to buy in that moment.

DGR: Let's talk more about data — how does intent help fuel and expand ABM strategies? Is it essential to ABM?

Holbrooks: Intent data is gold. You cannot waste precious ad dollars on accounts that aren't going to respond or convert anytime soon. This is especially true during uncertain economic times — it's a waste to try and create demand that isn't there. Everyone is trying to create demand and capture customers in the moment they're ready to buy. Intent helps surface those accounts, so your teams have a much more targeted list to prioritize.

Other strategies, like pure outbound or going to events, can be a way to do both effectively.

DGR: You've recently integrated GPT technology into your platform — how will that help practitioners strengthen their account-based strategies?

Holbrooks: The AI craze is about increasing automation and efficiency. If you can let GPT or AI tools take those intent signals and turn them into a thoughtful action for you and expand your account executives' capabilities, it's going to make a big difference.

Additionally, GPT is great for drafting emails to specific accounts because you can prompt the tool to write in a way designed for those accounts or groups of accounts. Leaning into AI can help kickstart a lot of processes that may have been more manual in the past.



DGR: What steps do you recommend organizations take to scale their ABM strategies?

Holbrooks: One of the best ways to scale your ABM strategy is starting with target account alignment between sales and marketing, and within marketing across channels. This sets your strategy up for success and scalability because the parameters for your lists, channels and messaging are all aligned from the start.

Make sure there's consistency in that target list long enough to show impact and be the most effective. Changing your ICP or changing your strategy too often can limit your success in ABM.

DGR: How can organizations go beyond ABM to develop scalable GTM plays to maximize impact while increasing efficiency?

Holbrooks: GTM plays need to be a central component in your ABM strategy. Sales and marketing need to be running plays together or in concert to really drive efficiency – it's inbound talking to outbound. This not only increases efficiencies, but also maximizes the impact of your campaigns when both teams are working in a coordinated effort.

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CALEN HOLBROOKS, ZOOMINFO





BLENDING ABM & DEMAND GENERATION TO ALIGN SALES & MARKETING

Industry thought leaders state that marketing strategies are often divided into two recognizable approaches: ABM and demand generation. But recent research found that practitioners are slowly unifying these two approaches to align sales and marketing teams on key initiatives. The primary benefit of blended ABM and demand gen is that it enables practitioners to create more personalized customer journeys by optimizing targeted messaging and enhancing campaign quality.

“When ABM first became mainstream, it was largely viewed as a separate, standalone initiative from other demand marketing practices,” Fuller said. “In part, that was because ABM often necessitated new ways of thinking, new processes, new collaborations with sales, new marketing technology and so on. Now, marketers are seeing ABM more as a point on the continuum of buyer-centric marketing.”

At Blue Yonder, the ABM and demand gen teams sit side-by-side, with both managers taking notes from the other’s playbook to optimize personalization at scale. The two teams collaborate on events and intent data to better target buyers and build a deeper connection across the buying journey.

“We found our best ABM managers know demand gen, and vice versa,” Nohava said. “There are incredible learning opportunities from both functional sides of the equation there. ABM tends to lean on seller engagement, while the demand gen side typically relies on the finesse of scale and targeting. I regularly see each side taking notes from the other’s playbook now more than ever to find that optimal mix of personalization at scale. I think that’s what we’re all trying to accomplish to be more effective and efficient.”



LEVERAGING ACQUISITION-BASED PLAYS FOR MORE PREDICTABLE RESULTS

When it comes to acquisition versus retention plays, it appears that priorities are shifting as ABM strategies become more sophisticated. According to the experts, early ABM adopters typically begin with acquisition-focused tactics, which features marketing teams seeking to attract new leads through targeted prospecting and personalized outreach. On the other hand, seasoned practitioners largely focus on brand awareness, content marketing and inbound marketing strategies to attract a wider audience and promote cross-sell/upsell opportunities.

“The practitioners who’ve been leveraging account-based strategies for a long time have a heightened focus on current customers and tail-end lifecycle marketing,” said Khronos’s Englebretson. “People who are newer to ABM are still overwhelmingly on the acquisition side.”

However, as the cost of acquisition continues to rise, retention plays are becoming even more vital to achieving ROI. By retaining customers, brands can build long-term customer value and reduce churn rates.

“**OC Tanner** has a well-developed ABM journey for new prospects, with the right technology and alignment between sales and marketing,” said Heather Martin, Head Of Global Field Marketing for the employee recognition software provider. “We’re experimenting with a new platform to make cross-sell expansion more compelling while also incubating land and expanding plans within the existing customer base.”



MAXIMIZING ACCOUNT-BASED STRATEGIES BY COMMUNICATION VALUE TO THE C-SUITE

The experts suggested that B2B organizations can create an aligned understanding between their marketing and leadership teams by identifying common goals and objectives. [Research from](#) ITSMA shows that while marketing teams must be able to tie their efforts back to the company's overall strategy, most organizations are struggling to articulate the connection.

"There still is a gap at the C-suite of what ABM can and shouldn't do," Englebretson explained. "You still have some executives asking for things that don't really fit with marketing best practices, such as how a campaign is executed."

Attribution is one tactic that can help bridge the divide between ABM visionaries and practitioners, because it provides data-driven insights into the channels that drive the most conversions and engagement. Quarry's Fuller suggested developing revenue teams with colleagues from each key business function – sales, marketing, leadership, etc. – to clear any disconnect.

"The creation of revenue teams will help alleviate the pain of disjointed expectation," said Fuller. "A shared budget evaluated by dollars spent versus business won should be the priority KPI, and attribution should be less important than ongoing performance optimization overall."

Companies should set clear expectations and success metrics to measure campaign performance, which they can review regularly. Practical advice for this issue includes conducting regular meetings and setting constant communication loops between the teams responsible for executing these campaigns.



CONCLUSION

Account-based and demand gen strategies have become increasingly intertwined, with organizations needing to balance acquisition and retention efforts to maximize their ROI. The key is ensuring that all stakeholders understand the real cost of an account-based approach while preparing for longer sales cycles. By utilizing attribution tools and setting clear objectives, companies can increase the effectiveness of both ABM initiatives and traditional demand gen campaigns — even in turbulent times.

“The pandemic had changed our strategies, and we are now looking at how best to engage employees during the recession,” Martin concluded. “These lenses help inform our account-based strategy on engaging with existing accounts and net-new prospects.”



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Demand Gen Report is a targeted online publication that uncovers the strategies and solutions that help companies better align their sales and marketing organizations, and ultimately, drive growth. A key component of the publication's editorial coverage focuses on the sales and marketing automation tools that enable companies to better measure and manage their multichannel demand generation efforts.

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