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A photograph of two men in a meeting. The man in the center is wearing a white shirt and has a pen in his hand, looking towards the man on the left. The man on the left is wearing a blue suit jacket and is looking back at the man in the white shirt. They are sitting at a table with laptops and papers. The background is a blurred office setting.

The Complete ABM Playbook



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INTRODUCTION: YOUR COMPLETE GUIDE TO ABM

If you've downloaded this playbook, chances are you work in B2B marketing! Maybe you've heard of Account-Based Marketing (ABM) but you've never done it. Or maybe you've run some ABM campaigns before, but you want to know how to improve them.

If you fit into either of those categories, you're in luck! Cognism's Complete ABM Playbook will be your guide to launching effective ABM for 2020 and beyond! Over the course of these pages, we'll give you:

- Definitions for what ABM is and how you can get started with it.
- Top tips and advice from an all-star cast of ABM experts!
- Templates and infographics you can take away and use in your business.
- Answers to all the ABM questions you can think of!

So, whether you're an ABM newbie or an old hand, come with us and learn some new skills or refresh some old ones!

Happy reading,



Alice de Courcy
Head of Marketing, Cognism



1 CHAPTER 1: 6 STEPS FOR GETTING STARTED WITH ABM

Many organisations are reaping big rewards from account-based marketing (ABM). Here's how you can join them.

Account-based marketing is gaining in popularity across the B2B sector. Why? Because it works. B2B marketers who use ABM report upticks in almost every KPI.

- A **study by Demandbase** found that 19% of companies using ABM for at least a year reported more than 30% growth in revenue.
- A **SiriusDecisions** survey found that 91% of marketers using ABM see a larger deal size, with 25% seeing their deal sizes grow by more than 50%.
- **ITSMA** found that companies using ABM saw an 84% rise in reputation score and a 74% improvement in customer relationships.

Some companies believe that switching from a conventional sales and marketing strategy over to ABM is difficult. However, it's actually really simple. Here are our six tips for ABM success.

1. Build your ABM team

ABM, focusing your sales and marketing operations on a small number of highly-targeted accounts, requires a change in thinking around the way you sell.

One of these changes involves getting your marketing and sales teams to work much more closely. You need to build an ABM team of people with different roles, but common aims. These could include:



Sales reps



Sales operations



Marketing operations



Content producers (e.g. writers, designers)



Customer success reps



Marketing development reps

2. Define your ABM goals

If you don't know what your goals are, how will you know when you have achieved success? Plus, giving your ABM team clearly defined goals helps focus their efforts. Think about what you want to accomplish from your new ABM strategy. Here are some questions to get you thinking:

- Are you using ABM to launch a new product to the market?
- Do you want to target a new customer segment?
- Are you looking for new business, or more spend from existing customers?

TOP TIP

Once you have defined your goals, make sure you have the right technology in your organisation to help your ABM team achieve them.

For example, will you need new tech to help you identify your targets? Will you need email automation software? Will you need to adapt your CRM to help you find ABM victory?

3. Select your target accounts

The next stage of getting started with ABM is possibly the most important. Who are the companies you are going to target? Think about the goals you have set out at the last stage.

One way to define your target accounts is to consider what kind of companies are already your customers. Then, look at their competitors. If you are providing value to several companies in a specific industry, it's likely you can provide value to all the others too.

There may also be companies you dream of landing as customers, for the MRR, the logo or both. ABM puts you in a great position to hit these ambitious targets.

TOP TIP









Find out everything you can about your target accounts. You need to discover who is on the decision-making committee for your target accounts.

What are the motivating factors for everyone who would have an input into purchasing your product? How can you reach them with the kind of messaging that will make them want to buy?

4. Create personalised messaging

ABM is all about creating content that resonates with every individual who has an input into buying decisions at your target account. The more personal you can get, the better. Ideally, you want to create one-off content, addressing their specific needs - no copy and pasting.

Think about what sort of content will work best with each particular individual:

- | | |
|---|---|
|  Email |  PPC advertising |
|  Social media |  Listicles |
|  Video |  Templates |
|  Articles or whitepapers |  Webinars |

You may even go as far as putting on events for your target accounts.

5. Just do it!

Preparation over. It's time to get ABMing! Use your chosen tech to start distributing the content you have created to the people you have chosen.

You also need to deploy your sales reps to start making inroads into your target accounts. Make calls, set up meetings and demos. If your content is good and well-dispersed, your buyers will already know who you are. You know the interest they have in your product. You see the solution you provide for them. It's time to move them through your customer journey.

6. Evaluate and iterate

Starting with ABM can be a trial and error process. Your reporting should be able to tell you after a short while what kinds of messages are resonating and what are not. Your sales reps will hear from their prospects what lines of attack work better than others.

TOP TIP

If something is working well, double down on it. If something else is failing, switch it out. Use A/B testing to hone your ABM strategy to perfection.

2 CHAPTER 2: 6 VITAL ABM QUESTIONS - ANSWERED!

3 ABM experts, 6 vital questions. Cut through the confusion and get all the answers you need to kickstart ABM in your business today.

ABM (account-based marketing) is an often misunderstood concept, with even seasoned marketers feeling confused about what it is and how to get started with it. On Wednesday 9th October 2019, Cognism hosted a live broadcast: **ABM Beyond the Hype: How to get started today.**

The purpose of the webinar was to cut through all the jargon and misinformation and provide clear, practical advice on how you can add ABM to your marketing efforts, right away.

For this reason, we assembled an awesome line-up of speakers who are working every day on the frontline of ABM. They were:



Alice de Courcy
Head of Marketing at
Cognism [Moderator]

Cognism 



Nick Mason
CEO & Founder at **Turtl**

Turtl



Owen Steer
Account Strategist at **Punch!**

PUNCH!



Joe Birkedale
CEO at **Project36**

Project **36**

We asked our panel 6 vital ABM questions. Their answers will help any marketer launch their own ABM campaigns, fully optimised to produce the best results.

1. What does a good ABM campaign look like?

The answer here is - it depends! It depends on the company and their objectives, the market they're working in and the territory in which they're based. But within that, there are things you can do to make sure your ABM campaign is as primed as it possibly can be for success.



Joe Birkedale:

"When we go about implementing ABM, it's during the discovery phase that we get together with our sales team, senior and junior, and we drill into their existing sales cycle. We understand the steps and phases that exist, the blockers and objections, the timescales they're working with, what's the buying journey like, how long it takes to convert a typical sale from initial inquiry through to conversion. We need to know those things to set KPIs and goals for the campaign."

Building a profile of your perfect customer is an important factor that can make or break an ABM campaign.



Nick Mason:

"You need to be absolutely clear who your Ideal Customer Profile is. This is something every business should do. It's an incredibly useful exercise even outside of ABM. Who are we not selling to at the moment that we could be selling to? That's a good question to ask."

2. How do you decide which tactics to use?

There are many different tactics you can deploy when running an ABM campaign, from live events to online advertising, blog posts to direct mails! Which ones you use will depend on the decision-maker you're targeting and where they spend their time.

How can you pick the right channels? The panel agreed that personalisation is the key.



Nick Mason:

“Personalisation is the difference between ABM working or not working. But the personalisation has to be meaningful. It really comes down to who you’re going after, in terms of the type of business sector they’re in, the type of person you’re looking for, and that will help you determine which tactics to use.”

3. What tech is out there to help? And is there a no-tech route?

Everyone working in B2B and SaaS will be aware that there has been an explosion in sales and marketing tech. People can be overwhelmed by the avalanche of choice available to them. How can you make the right tech choices for ABM – and can ABM be done without buying tech?



Owen Steer:

“You can absolutely do ABM without technology. Don’t rush into making decisions for a tech stack when you’re trying to learn and implement ABM. Instead, have regular meetings between sales, marketing and CS to agree on a plan for each account and see how you can leverage the knowledge you already have in your team.”

4. How about the metrics? What should you track?

When you launch an ABM campaign, you need to prove to management and the wider business that it’s worthwhile. While the ABM metrics you track will vary from campaign to campaign and company to company, we asked our panel for the top metrics you need to focus on.



Nick Mason:

“Moving further up in the funnel than revenue and pipeline, which are the ultimate metrics that we’re looking for, the thing that we’re really interested in is genuine engagement. You need to understand engagement far more deeply than who clicked what and who downloaded what. The thing that we really look for is who’s spending time on what particular parts of what particular document.”



Owen Steer:

“As campaigns are going, part of the alignment process needs to be making sure that any insights and information regarding genuine engagement are filtered down to sales. Make sure that those real-time metrics are being transparently shared across the company so that you’re making the most of what you’re learning.”

5. What is the secret to aligning successfully with sales and the business?

Our panellists agreed that this is the most important part of any ABM campaign.



Owen Steer:

“Getting buy-in from internal stakeholders, first and foremost, is absolutely essential. Set realistic expectations – you need to secure a budget from the company for your ABM campaign. Be aware that it’s a long-term campaign. ABM is not a short-term revenue grab. Avoid the pitfall of failing from the get-go by setting realistic expectations.”



Joe Birkedale:

“However long your stages of delivery for ABM are, the final step should be: measure, learn, optimise and repeat. It’s not a set and forget program. ABM is a living, breathing thing, so it will change. It takes time. If you want revenue tomorrow, ABM is not the program for you.”

6. What are your top tips for success?

We asked our ABM experts for their number one tip for ABM success.



Joe Birkedale:

"If sales don't understand why ABM is happening and the process and steps that a lead has gone through to be classified as a marketing-qualified or sales-qualified lead... then there's no importance placed on it. If sales understand what is happening and why, they're much more likely to jump on those leads and close them. It should be seen as a joint effort to close that lead."



Nick Mason:

"Start small and get an understanding of what you want to achieve."



Owen Steer:

"ABM is not just multi-channel marketing, it's best practice marketing. But there's more to it than just using multiple channels. It's about treating the accounts you're going after as markets in their own right. There's no better resource for a marketer to learn more about accounts than their own internal sales team and customer success team."



3 CHAPTER 3: A QUICK GUIDE TO IDEAL CUSTOMER PROFILES

The key to ABM success lies in identifying a small number of high-profile accounts and targeting them with personalised campaigns. To do this, you'll have to build your Ideal Customer Profile.

Unlike traditional forms of marketing, where the net is cast wide in the hopes of catching large volumes of customers, ABM is all about getting hyper-focused and granular.

To get your ABM campaigns started with a bang, you need to define who your ideal customers are. The best way of doing this is to build your Ideal Customer Profile (ICP).

What is ICP?

Your ICP is a comprehensive description of your perfect client. It's the kind of customer that finds massive benefits from your product or service, while also being able to give you enough value in return to make your business profitable.

How do you create an ICP?

These are the steps that we use at Cognism to build our ICP:

1. Identify your super-users

It's likely that your ICP is already a customer of yours. Start by looking at the prospects that convert quickly and your longest-serving customers. Narrow down your customer base until you have a list of 10 super-users - the people who don't just use your product, but the people who love it and get more value out of it than the average user.

2. Interview your super-users

Set up phone calls, Zoom or face-to-face meetings with your 10 super-users. Ask them about their experiences with your product, specifically:

- Their buying processes.
- How they found out about you.
- Why they purchased.
- How they're benefitting from your product.

3. Analyse the data

Once you've conducted your interviews and collected the answers, it's time to study the data. Put all the answers together and see what links them. Look for common attributes. Are there any recurring patterns or shared characteristics? The insights you'll gain here are critical for the next step in developing your ICP.

4. Create your ICP template

This final step is where you put it all together. Take all the insights you've gained and build a template of your ideal customer.

COGNISM IDEAL CUSTOMER PROFILE



Industry
B2B Sales, SaaS



Geography
USA



Company Size
50 employees



Budget
\$10,000/month



Buying Process
Reliance on referrals for buying decisions



Decision Makers
CEO, CRO



- Pain Points**
- Generating high-quality C-suite leads
 - Automating outbound email campaigns
 - Increasing sales team productivity



Business Goals

Short term: grow their client base by 20% over the next 3 months

Long term: raise their next funding round and expand their sales team



Technologies

Salesforce CRM
SalesLoft
Chili Piper



Attributes

Primary social media channel = LinkedIn

Gaining a reputation as SaaS industry thought leaders

Uses ABM strategies

Here's an example which we use at Cognism. This has helped us to launch our own ABM campaigns!

Follow our quick guide - and use our ICP template - and you too will soon have a complete picture of the customers you'll need to target with ABM.

4 CHAPTER 4: ESSENTIAL ABM METRICS

For success in ABM, you need to let the data drive your decision-making. Here are the most important metrics to track.

ABM isn't a "quick win" activity. It can take a lot of time before it starts producing results. When you start running an ABM campaign, you'll need to prove to management and the wider business that it's worth the time and expense. The only way you can do this is to monitor your ABM metrics.

While the metrics you track may vary from campaign to campaign, at Cognism we've found that there are some core metrics that you need to keep your eyes on - especially if you're just starting out with ABM.

These are the essential metrics to help you get started with ABM.

TOP TIP

- **Agree on the metrics to track** before starting your ABM campaign.
- **Align sales and marketing** and ensure both teams are fully aware of the metrics they need to monitor.
- **Be transparent in sharing** the results of your ABM activity as the campaign progresses, so both teams learn together.

Tracking ABM engagement







The guiding principle of ABM is to build and maintain deep and meaningful relationships with your target accounts. To measure success in growing those relationships, you'll have to track engagement.

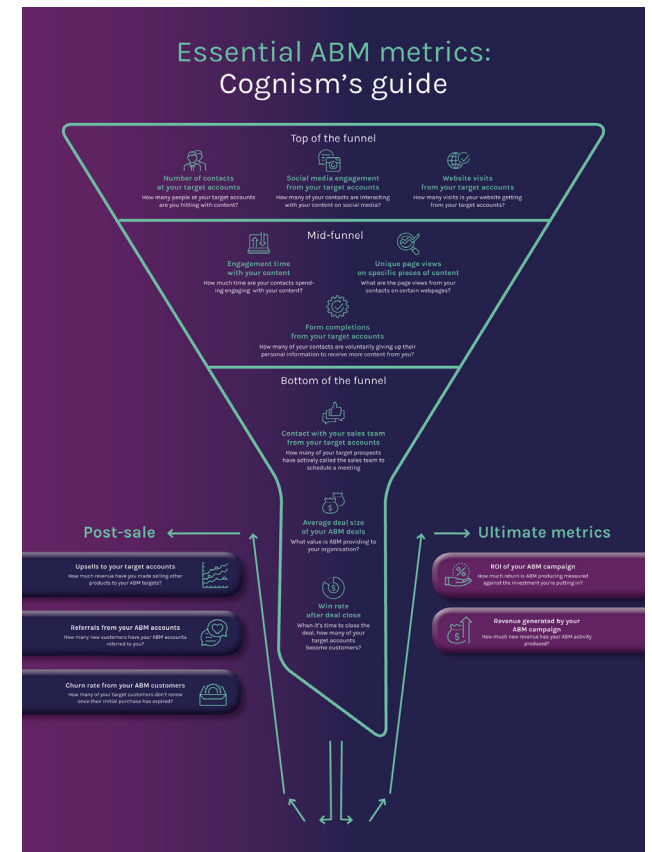
What is ABM engagement?

ABM engagement is any interaction a prospect has with your ABM activity. There are two types of engagement:

DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT

This includes any online interactions from your prospects. For example:






-  Opening an email
-  Visiting your website
-  Downloading a piece of content
-  Reading a piece of content
-  Filling out a survey or form
-  Signing up to a newsletter or mailing list



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PHYSICAL ENGAGEMENT

This includes all real-world interactions from your prospects. For example:

-  Onsite visits or event attendance
-  Phone calls
-  Direct mail
-  SMS
-  Demo attendance

How to track ABM engagement

At Cognism, we regularly help our customers to run targeted ABM campaigns. We encourage them to track the engagement they have with their prospects by using the template to the right.

TOP TIP #1

Our advice is to keep your eye on the engagement score. Before you start your ABM campaign, define your goals and set engagement scores against each goal.

For example, a prospect answering an email could be a score of 5, while booking a demo could be a score of 8. Add up all the engagement scores to see how well each campaign is doing in relation to others.


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Tracking ABM engagement: what you need to know

ABM template for tracking engagement

ACTIVITY DATE	PROSPECT NAME	PROSPECT TITLE	ACCOUNT NAME	ENGAGEMENT TYPE	ENGAGEMENT SCORE

KEY

-  **ACTIVITY DATE** - The date on which each engagement happened
-  **PROSPECT NAME** - The prospect's full name
-  **PROSPECT TITLE** - The prospect's job title (e.g., Director, Manager, CEO)
-  **ACCOUNT NAME** - The prospect's company
-  **ENGAGEMENT TYPE** - The type of engagement (e.g., prospecting call, scheduled demo, event attendance)
-  **ENGAGEMENT SCORE** - Give each engagement a mark out of ten, based on the value generated from the engagement

[Click to view full size](#)


We've found this template to be a useful way of tracking ABM engagement over time. Not only does it list each engagement on a day-by-day basis, but it also shows how each interaction feeds into the success of the entire campaign.

TOP TIP #2

Another quick trick is to track your engagement scores in Excel or Google Sheets. There's no need to shell out on expensive reporting solutions when you're just starting with ABM.

What can you do with this data?

The insights you'll gain from measuring engagement can be invaluable to the continued success of your ABM efforts. Here are some questions to get you thinking:

 **Are certain days of the week more popular for engagement than others?**

Do you find that you get a higher number of engagements on certain days than others? Are certain engagement types more popular on specific days? The answers to these questions will tell you when are the best times for launching your ABM activities. They'll inform your ABM campaign schedule and help you to maximise engagement from your prospects.

 **How do individual prospects engage with your company?**

As we've said, ABM works when it's highly-personalised and relevant to each prospect. Look out for patterns in their behaviour. Do they engage with certain channels but not others? Do they usually respond at certain times of the day? Are there particular messages or engagement types that they respond best to?

A woman with dark hair tied back, wearing a red blazer over a white collared shirt, is sitting at a desk and looking at a laptop. There are two glasses of water on the desk in front of her. The background is slightly blurred, showing what appears to be a whiteboard or a wall with some papers.

TOP TIP #3

Use the information to get even more personalised. Double down on what works and build a campaign that's laser-focused on the prospect and his or her needs.



How well are each engagement types performing?

ABM is a multi-channel undertaking. You have to interact regularly with your potential buyers across a number of different channels and media. It's the only way to keep that meaningful relationship going.

TOP TIP #4

Find out which engagement types work best for each prospect. Then you'll know which engagement types you need to concentrate on. Use the template we've provided to keep track of this.

The secret of ABM engagement

ABM engagement is about time. It's the same with any purchasing decision you make in any walk of life - the more time you spend in a shop, for instance, the more likely you are to buy something. So it is with B2B buyers. The more time they spend interacting with your company, the more interest they're showing in buying from you.

Tracking engagement is the vital first step in measuring the success of ABM. It's simple to understand, easy to track, and can give you some useful insights early on. Simplify the process even further by making use of our tracking template. Be sure to share your successes with us!

5 CHAPTER 5: HOW TO BUILD ABM TARGET LISTS

How do you build lists that will bring Account-Based Marketing success? Owen Steer, ABM Specialist at Punch, shows us how.



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Account-Based Marketing (ABM) can be an extremely effective way to win bigger deals from more clients in the B2B space. However, it takes a considerable amount of investment, of time and money, for it to work.

For this reason, you need to have a robust plan before you start your ABM operation. You can't run ABM campaigns on an ad hoc basis. Part of your preparation for ABM is building a list of targets. You need to define who you are going to approach before you start.

We sat down with **Owen Steer**, ABM Specialist at Punch, to gain more insights on ABM and target lists. As an ABM expert who deals with this topic every day, there are few people better qualified to show us the right way to do things. Here is Owen's how-to guide for list building success.

How to build your lists

Owen recommends three core things you can do when you build your ABM target lists.

Step 1: Create your Ideal Customer Profile

ABM requires you to get your sales and marketing teams aligned and working together. Once you've done this, you can run this exercise - creating a profile of your ideal customer, the type of account you will target with ABM.

Think about what makes a good customer for your company. Get your sales, marketing and customer success teams around the table to get a full picture. Map out technographic and firmographic data for all your clients. What connects them?

TOP TIP

Use these insights to create your Ideal Customer Profile (ICP). Then, you can use tools (such as **Cognism Prospector**) to build out your Total Addressable Market (TAM) - a list of accounts ripe for targeting.

Step 2: Measure first-party intent

First-party intent (also called engagement) is information from end-user engagement with your brand. This could take the form of:

- Event attendees.
- Users who have viewed or downloaded content.
- People who have filled out online forms.

At this stage of your list-building, you need to gather all this information together. You're looking for anyone who has directly engaged with your brand.

TOP TIP

Once you have all the data, study it. Are any of them in a buying window right now? Have they signalled any intent to buy?

You can add any users with intent to buy to your ABM list.

Step 3: Measure third-party intent

If first-party intent is all about people who have directly engaged with your brand, third-party intent is about people who could be interested in your company, but may not know about it yet.

You are looking for people who have engaged and shown interest in your industry or sector. These could be:

- People viewing competitor websites.
- Users searching for specific terms on search engines.

How can you find these people? First, define a set of keywords that are relevant to your industry. Be careful with these keywords - they must be relevant. Owen recommends a list of around 250 keywords. Always double-check your list to make sure the terms you're using aren't bringing in irrelevant search results.

TOP TIP

Use tools that will find people who are searching for these keywords online. You can add those people to your ABM lists.

Owen recommends this as a good option for smaller companies with low inbound volume.

How to order your lists

Now you have a list of people, it's time to put them in the order in which you're going to target them. You can use all three of the methods we've talked about - but be scientific. Don't just go after the biggest or most famous companies - look for targets that are the best fit for your offering.

You should also prioritise the accounts that have a strong intent to buy.

The 3 types of ABM

OK, now you have your target lists, it's time to get started! But how?

There are 3 types of ABM:

- **One-to-one:** picking up a handful of high-value accounts and putting all your budget into targeting them. This works with 1-5 accounts max.
- **One-to-few:** Sector-specific - selecting a larger pool of accounts in the same industry (10-30 accounts max).
- **One-to-many:** More like traditional digital marketing, but with more customer-centric messaging.

Choosing the right type of ABM

You need to choose the right ABM method for your business, based around the nature of your company and the type of accounts you want to target. Important factors to consider when selecting the right type of ABM are deal size and lifetime value.

- Lower-value accounts are best suited to one-to-many ABM. This allows you to spread your budget over a larger number of accounts, maximising ROI.
- Higher-value accounts should be targeted with a one-to-few approach.
- The highest-value accounts should be treated as a market in their own right and targeted with one-to-one.

TOP TIP

Owen's advice is to run a pilot programme. Probe the market with the one-to-many method. If you get good results, you can ramp up the pilot into one-to-few or one-to-one. You need to know the science behind your ABM operation to help you make informed decisions.

6 CHAPTER 6: HOW TO PLAN CONTENT FOR ABM

We interviewed Joe Birkedale, the founder and CEO of Project36. Read on for some top insights into planning ABM content.



Joe Birkedale is the founder and CEO of **Project36** - a strategic ABM agency that delivers marketing projects for clients all over the world. Project36 has an impressive portfolio of services, including inbound marketing, content and strategy, video marketing, campaign planning and execution, and creative design and illustration.

We sat down with Joe and asked him for his thoughts on how to plan content for ABM. As an experienced marketing professional with a strong record of connecting and engaging with target accounts on his clients' behalf, Joe had many tips on this topic.

Here's Joe's advice for planning content for ABM.



1. Identify your target audience

First and foremost, before you embark on an ABM strategy, you need to define your target audience. Content in an ABM context only works if it resonates with the people who engage with it. So, you need to know who you're going to engage before you start creating your content.

Start off by developing your Ideal Customer Profile (ICP). Get your sales and marketing departments to work together on this. Your ICP should be a comprehensive description of your perfect customer, including:

- Who they are.
- Where they work.
- Their challenges and goals.
- Where they spend their time online (or not!).

Once you've developed your ICP, you can use it to inform the next stage - creating lists of the ideal customers you want to target. Then, when you've built your target lists, go even deeper. Identify the decision-making units (DMU) inside each target company. ABM is a highly-personalised play - you'll need granular intelligence on every member of the DMU.



2. Define their pain points

Work out individual pain points for everyone in the DMU. For example - are they looking to reduce costs? Save time? Grow their sales? Streamline their existing processes?

Interview the salespeople who are interacting with the DMU. Sales reps work at the coalface of business every day and the information they pick up during their qualification and discovery calls can be invaluable to the account-based marketer. Use their insights to define the prospects' pain points - and then use the pain points to inspire and influence the content you'll create.



3. Choose the right medium

Joe shared a stat with us - on average, there are 7 to 8 influencers involved in every business decision.

Each influencer is different, so it stands to reason that they will all respond to content in different ways. Some people respond better to different types of content than others.

And in today's modern marketing world, there is a wide range of content types to choose from. Popular formats include:

- Blogs
- Videos
- Case studies
- Whitepapers
- Webinars
- Podcasts
- Letters and direct mail

With so many options available, how can you be certain you're choosing the right one?

Again, ask your sales team. They'll know from experience what resonates most with different types of buyers. Aligning marketing with sales is the surest route to achieving success with ABM.

4. Select the right channels

Just as important as knowing what types of content to produce is knowing where to promote them. Go back to your ICP - where are your targets spending their time online? What social media channels do they most often engage with?

Do your research. Check your own social media channels and email campaigns. Where are you seeing engagement from your target accounts and others like them? Study your data and make decisions based on it.

When activating your content, tailor and customise your messaging for each prospect. Personalisation is the key to ABM engagement.



5. Timing is everything

Successful ABM campaigns contain multiple steps, involving numerous channels and content types. Joe had some great advice to share.

The more senior the decision-maker, the shorter your content must be in the first step. Senior decision-makers will have no time in their day to consume long-form content. It's only later, at the decision stage of the buyer's journey, that they'll have time for long content. Build up to that point by delivering smaller pieces of content at regular intervals.

Joe told us that the trick is to keep the engagement going. You'll need to provide the prospect with valuable content at every stage of their journey with your brand.



7 CHAPTER 7: 10 QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR ABM VENDOR

Choosing the right ABM vendor can be a tricky proposition. Owen Steer and Joe Birkedale select their top 10 questions to help you through the process.



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ABM has the highest **return on investment** of any B2B marketing tactic. It's no surprise then that the ABM industry is booming. There are a wealth of agencies and tools out there that promise to take your ABM campaigns to the next level. But, with so much choice available, how do you pick the right one for your business?

We asked **Joe Birkedale**, founder and CEO of **Project36**, and **Owen Steer**, ABM Specialist at **Punch**, for their advice. As seasoned marketers with a record of delivering complex ABM strategies for their clients, they are uniquely placed to offer their insights into the top 10 questions you need to ask your ABM vendor. Their tips will help you when it comes to defining your ABM goals and making a sensible buying decision.

Over to Joe and Owen!

The questions

1. What does success or failure look like?



Joe said:

"Asking this question first of all is a very good option! Before you start with ABM, you need to determine what you're looking to get out of it. What's your perfect end result? What are you hoping to achieve?"

Bear in mind that ABM is not a silver bullet. It normally takes a lot of time and effort before you see success. A good ABM vendor will seek to outline the end goal first, then describe the steps you need to take to get there."

2. What metrics will you be tracking?



Owen said:

"You definitely need to set the correct KPIs before you launch an ABM campaign. All stakeholders need to be fully aligned on these metrics. Think about the following: what does success look like? Who is responsible for achieving these metrics? Who and how will you be measuring results?"

This conversation should involve marketing, sales, customer success, and of course, your ABM vendor.

Remember that ABM is a long-term initiative, so you may have to agree on short-term metrics that showcase early signs of success, while you wait for the long-term benefits to kick in."

3. How many accounts can you realistically target?



Joe said:

“You need to be realistic with what ABM can achieve, what you can handle and how far your budgets can reach. Start small, always. Prove the model and then scale. If you scale up too soon, you’ll drown in data and the campaign will stumble.

Most clients aim for 1-to-Few ABM, which is typically 20 accounts with approximately 5 decision-makers in each.”

4. Of those accounts, which ones would be best to target?



Owen said:

“Committing to ABM means focusing your resources on accounts that have a higher propensity of converting into business. Best-practice account selection is absolutely vital to ensure you’re mitigating the inherent risk of targeting fewer accounts.

At Punch, we start by drilling down into a client’s data and building an Ideal Customer Profile (ICP). We use this ICP to develop a list of accounts that are a good fit for your proposition. This is called your Total Addressable Market (TAM).

Once you have your TAM, it’s time to use intent data to identify which accounts are showing the best signals for having a need or entering a buying window. The accounts that are showing the highest intent to buy are the accounts that you need to prioritise with ABM!”

5. How much will it cost?



Joe said:

“It’s vital to stress that ABM is a long-term strategy. It’s best placed to work with complex services or solutions that have a high degree of customisation, high cost and typically long implementation timescales.

ABM is not usually suitable for high-volume, low-value products or services. Expect the costs to reflect the volume of research, data, insight, strategy and the playbook the campaign requires.”

6. How quickly can I expect to see ROI?



Owen said:

“Similar to question 5, this question is all about managing expectations. ABM isn’t a short-term cash grab. It’s good to get everyone thinking long-term. You have to set yourself realistic expectations around achieving ROI.

For example, if your current sales cycle is 12 months then you shouldn’t come into ABM expecting to win business within the first 6 months. That doesn’t mean you won’t, though!”

7. How long will the campaign take?



Joe said:

“The answer is – it will vary dramatically based on the product, service or solution being offered. Look at your existing sales cycle. If, for example, it normally takes 12 months from enquiry to order, then expect something broadly similar.

ABM should have numerous KPIs for tracking success. Time to first order can be one of those metrics and ABM can shorten the sales cycle, but it will need time to run before it can be evolved and tweaked.”



8. How will you manage communications with our sales team?



Owen said:

“Although the conversation to develop an ABM programme tends to start with marketing, the first topic of conversation is always the most effective way to align with sales.

Here at Punch, we invite sales, customer success and marketing to attend a series of strategic workshops during the setup process. This ensures that all stakeholders are aligned.

Fast-forward to campaign execution and we'll put in the diary weekly catch-ups about how well the campaign is going, and monthly reviews where we can share insights and ideas for improvement.”

9. What systems/tech will you use?



Joe said:

“ABM doesn't need a sophisticated tech stack. A spreadsheet and good data are really all you need at the start. My advice to my clients is: don't go mad on the tech! As an ABM agency, we often spend a lot of time unpicking our customers' tech stacks. They can become overly complex and convoluted, and can actually slow you down in the early stages. Get your ABM campaigning right from an operational level first, then add in tech later.”

10. How long will the setup take?
















































Owen said:

“I always say that ABM is 80% setup, 20% execution. There are no strict guidelines for how long it takes to work through the strategic setup of your ABM programme...but you will notice that due diligence in getting the setup right in the beginning will be reflected in your success.”

8 CHAPTER 8: EXAMPLE ABM TECH STACK

What tech can you use to enhance your ABM efforts?
Here's an example tech stack for ABM.

INTELLIGENCE	MANAGEMENT	EXECUTION	REPORTING
      	      	      	      

INTELLIGENCE	MANAGEMENT	EXECUTION	REPORTING
     	     	     	    

CONCLUSION

You've reached the end of Cognism's Complete ABM Playbook! We hope you found it useful. We'd like to thank all our wonderful contributors for sharing their knowledge.

What did you think about our Playbook? We'd love to hear your feedback. Follow us on our social media channels, where we'll be sharing more ABM-related content in the very near future!



Did you know?

Cognism is the perfect choice for the account-based B2B marketer. Using our platform, you can:

- Develop personas of your ideal customers and quickly build target lists of B2B leads.
- Drill down into your target accounts and discover an accurate list of decision-makers and their contact details.
- Deploy highly-focused, multi-step and automated outbound campaigns to engage and follow-up with them.

Want to know more?



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