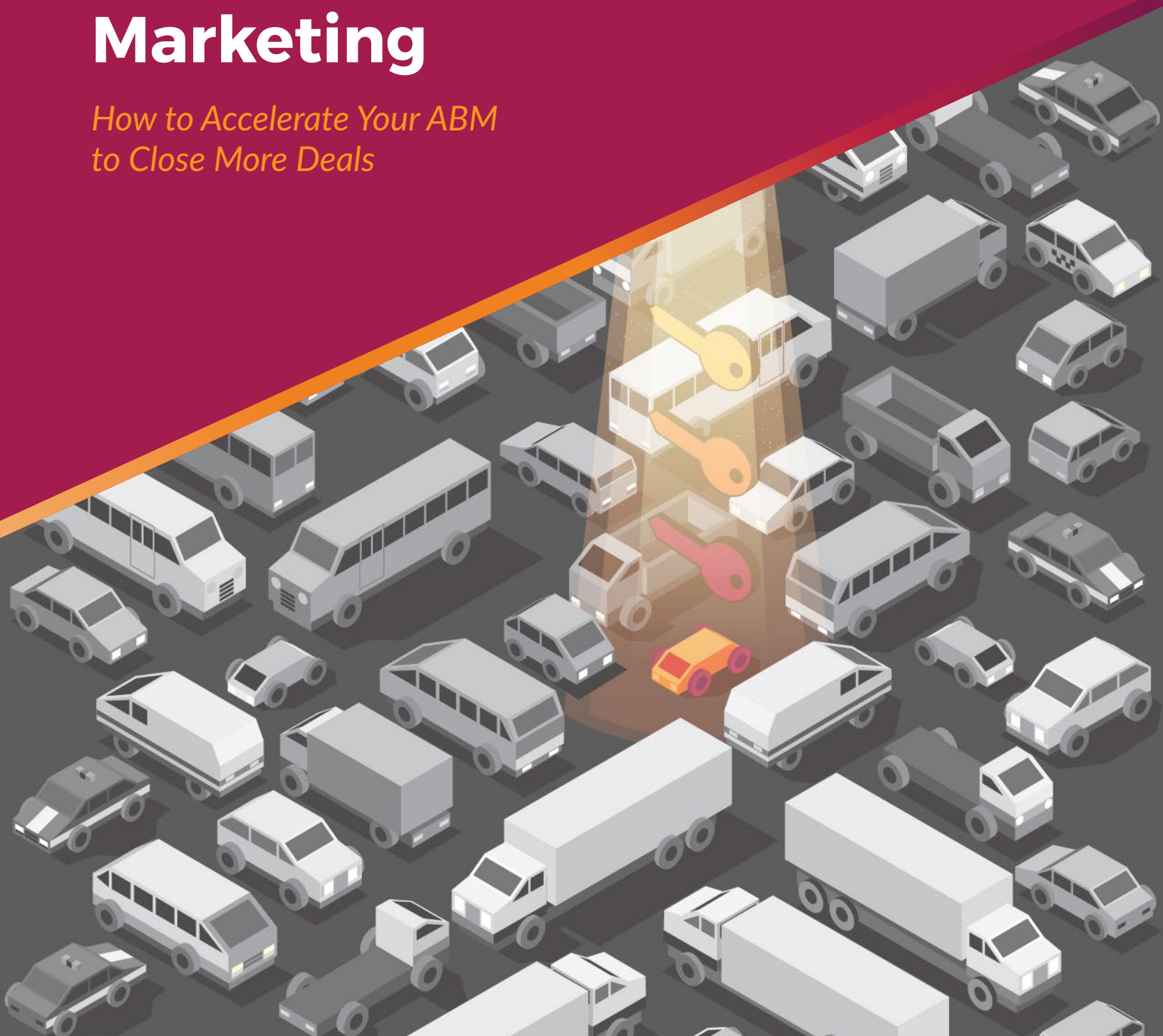# BONFIRE
MARKETING

The Keys to Agile Account-Based Marketing

*How to Accelerate Your ABM
to Close More Deals*

It's Time to Drive Better ABM Results

The hype around account-based marketing is real and, based on its results, well-deserved. Treating your prospects and accounts as markets of one with a little additional care will help you increase closed deals, average deal size, and target account and C-level engagement. Plus, it engages earlier and helps improve the efficiency of your marketing.

The time to start pursuing those results is now. A recent SiriusDecisions' State of ABM Study confirms marketers are making ABM deployment a priority:

34% are allocating up to 50% of their marketing budget to ABM.

18% are allocating over half of their budget.

93% of marketers rate ABM as "important" or "extremely important."

But if you're here, you know the competition is getting more fierce, and you're aware of the benefits ABM delivers. So let's get started on how to select the right accounts, build a strategy for sales and marketing collaboration, model an engagement plan, and measure and modify your results.

Who's in the Driver's Seat? Selecting the Right Accounts for ABM

Understand the attributes of your best customers to define your ideal customer profile.

How many times have you heard sales complain about not getting any good leads from marketing?

Five times? Fifteen? Fifty? It's a refrain that's repeated over and over in nearly every organization.

> "The pitch would have landed if only the lead was better."

> "It's marketing's fault, not sales."

A big reason for butting departments is that most of the leads brought in by marketing's inbound (and many outbound) campaigns just aren't a good fit for the products or services your sales force is trying to sell. In other words, they aren't speaking to sales' ideal customer profile.

Finding the right fit

A quick glance at a list of leads makes the problem painfully obvious. And that's exactly what sales reps do when they get a new lead. They scan and assess a fit, disqualifying the majority of leads without any further action.

Good sales reps don't waste time with people or companies who won't (or can't) buy.

Account-based marketing eliminates this issue. By design, ABM only aims at a specific list of pre-selected target accounts. Nothing else matters—not to your sales force and not to you. You're on the right track when you change the conversation to have sales saying:

"If you help us get into these specific accounts, you've succeeded."

Target accounts with accuracy, not on a whim

Proceed with caution when it comes to targeting your accounts. Don't fall into the trap of blindly targeting a list of accounts just because sales asked you to. The list could be solid, but more likely, it's populated by accounts with which sales has tried and failed to make any progress.

And that's why caution is needed. You may be their Hail Mary, and you could be setting yourself up for failure by pursuing a cold lead (or those accounts that aren't the best fit or where the timing just isn't right).

That's why you put your focus on your best-fit accounts that have a lot in common with your current best customers. Begin by understanding the similarities (both good and bad) of your best customers, and then build your ABM around a defined ideal customer profile (ICP).

Choosing target accounts with a higher propensity to engage is the single most important element of any ABM effort.

This ensures select accounts are worth the time and effort of higher investment. Successful account selection and the corresponding tiering of those accounts requires a methodical selection and prioritization that leans heavily on quantitative data. Your data removes your dependence on intuition and reduces inherent biases to enable smarter choices.

Start by reviewing marketing and sales data and group your active accounts into 3 tiers of how they best fit with your company. Then supplement and expand account knowledge with additional research and account profiling. You can purchase external sales intelligence data, as well, to further expand the data you're pooling.

Ask these questions during the account selection stage:

- Who are our "best" customers?
  - *What makes them better than others?*
- What attributes or traits do our best customers share?
  - *Do they fall into natural segment groupings or verticals?*
- What should we be looking for in our accounts?
  - *And how do we find it?*
- How can we use available data to identify our top 10–50 accounts?

Make sure to review this data with sales and collect feedback to compile as much intelligence as possible. The anecdotal details sales reps relay can validate, correct, or expand upon account information and inform prioritization decisions.

The collaboration process begins here. Working with sales to select best-fit targeted accounts for your company's solution starts your ABM off on the right foot. And don't forget to keep the list small initially—50 accounts or less.
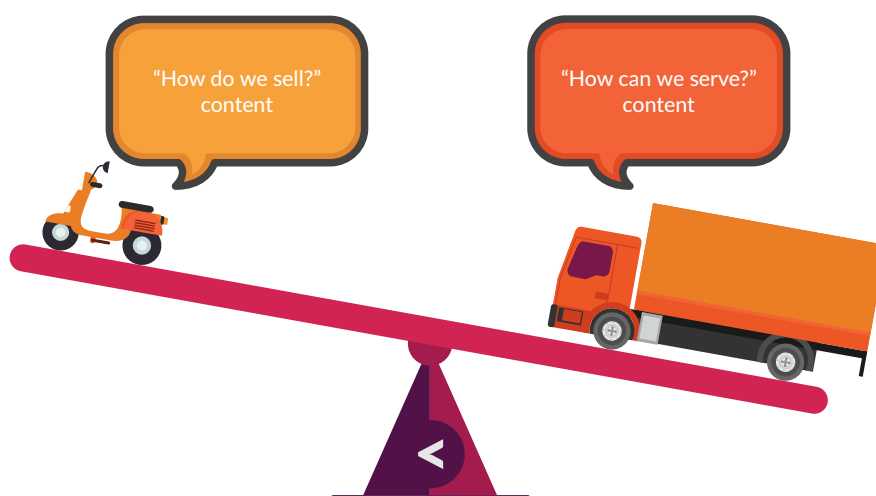
Your step-by-step ABM account selection plan

1. **Data collection and consolidation**
   a. *Gather existing data about your customers and prospects.*
2. **Data enhancement and overlays**
   a. *Acquire firmographic attributes.*
   b. *Append additional contact data for each target persona.*
   c. *Append intent signals.*
   d. *Overlay engagement history.*
3. **Data analysis and visualization**
   a. *Make sense of it all.*
   b. *Identify the biggest areas of opportunity.*
   c. *Define your ICP (ideal customer profile).*
4. **Data review and account selection**
   a. *Collaborate and decide.*
5. **Tier prioritization and additional segmentation**
   a. *Identify accounts by tier (A, B, C).*
   b. *Determine additional segmentation by vertical markets or other criteria.*

Navigating the Marketing vs. Sales ABM Road Map

Align marketing and sales messaging to fuel the perfect content strategy.

Pushing general content to your highest priority accounts is a death sentence in account-based marketing. It's not about your desire to peddle your company's solutions, features, and benefits. It's about you providing the unique solutions your prospects and customers need.

"How do we sell?" content
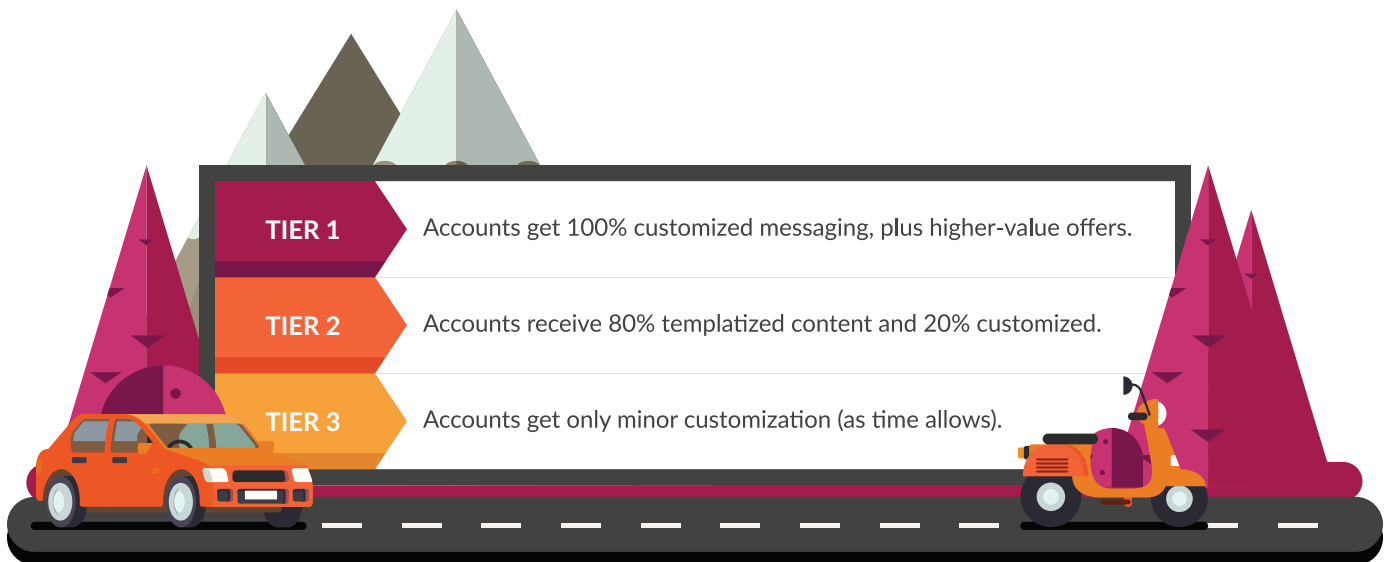
"How can we serve?" content

97% of B2B marketers say ABM has a higher ROI than other marketing initiatives.

If you want huge engagement rate improvements, begin by focusing on the needs of potential buyers and personalizing content for specific accounts and/or leads.
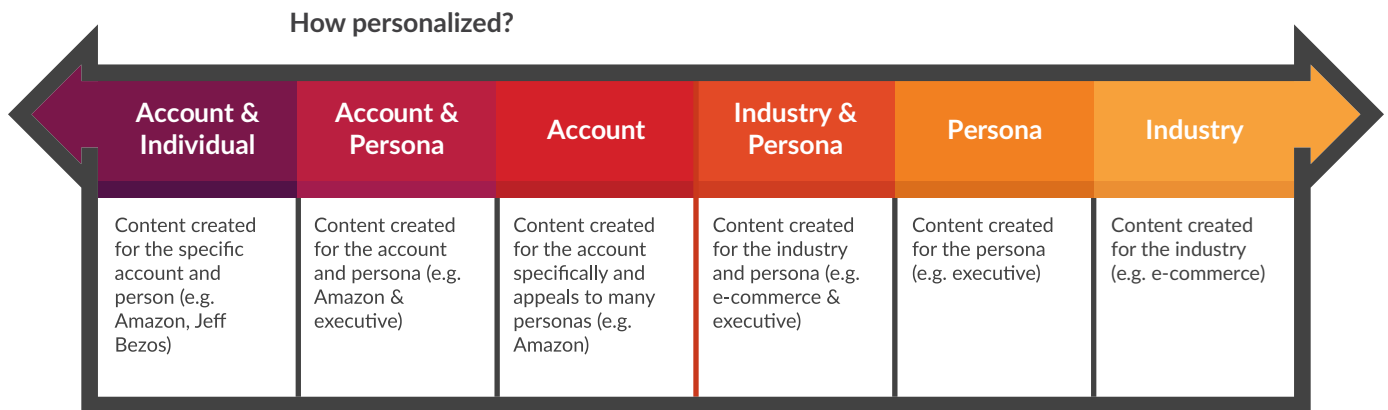
Achieving personalization perfection

Personalized content can be a lot of work, but you can moderate your efforts and focus on efficient ABM with different levels of personalization. Begin by selecting the right level of personalization based on your predetermined target accounts.

At a high level, here's how to think about content personalization tiering:

TIER 1	Accounts get 100% customized messaging, plus higher-value offers.
TIER 2	Accounts receive 80% templatized content and 20% customized.
TIER 3	Accounts get only minor customization (as time allows).

It's all about prioritizing your efforts to maximize your time and optimize your impact with your most important accounts. Tier A is worthy of higher investment and more resources to customize content, messaging, and offers because these are the companies that have the highest likelihood of becoming big lifetime value (LTV) customers. On the flip side, you don't want to focus on deep personalization for Tier C accounts that have a lower potential value.

Another approach is to personalize content across a spectrum with highly personalized content approaches on the left and more limited personalization on the right.

How personalized?

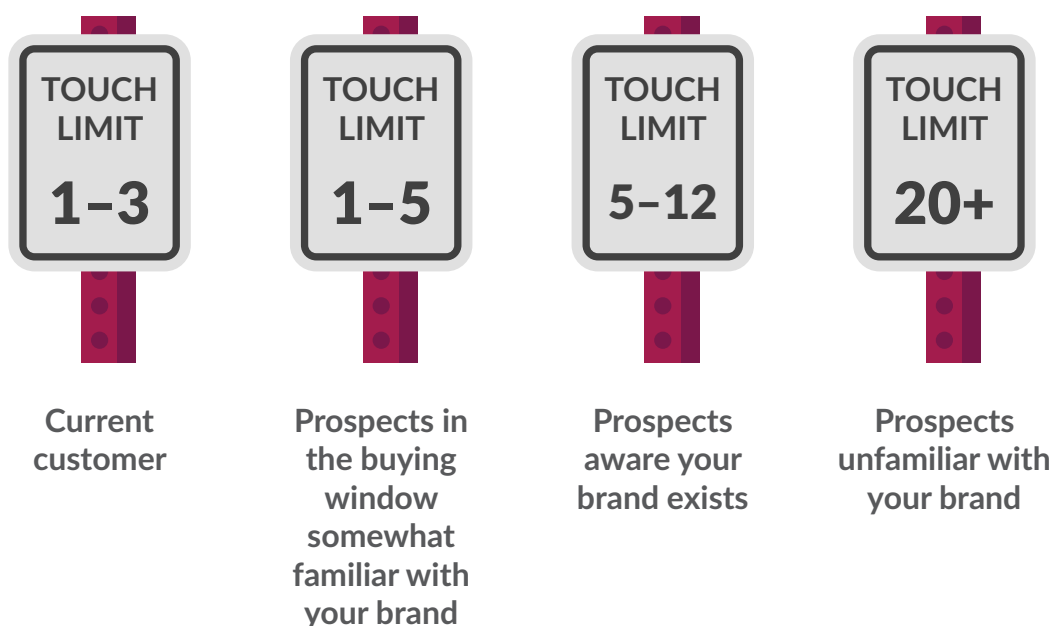| Account & Individual	Account & Persona	Account	Industry & Persona	Persona	Industry
Content created for the specific account and person (e.g. Amazon, Jeff Bezos)	Content created for the account and persona (e.g. Amazon & executive)	Content created for the account specifically and appeals to many personas (e.g. Amazon)	Content created for the industry and persona (e.g. e-commerce & executive)	Content created for the persona (e.g. executive)	Content created for the industry (e.g. e-commerce)

Larger high-value accounts are worth higher levels of investment. This means making hyper-personalized content (requiring considerable resources and in-depth research) becomes a time-consuming and expensive effort—but ultimately a valuable one. Apply the opposite mentality to lower-value accounts. You can't afford to over-invest in smaller accounts where scalability is more important.

If you focus on the value potential of your account tiers when determining the best content for specific industries, accounts, persona types, or in the most personalized sense, for specific individuals, you'll be able to balance the right amount of personalization needed to land targeted accounts.

Rubber Meets the Road: Putting Your Engagement Plan Into Action

Create and execute—or optimize—an engagement plan that delivers the best ABM results.

Now that you've established your Tier A accounts and the level of personalization they require, you can move on to your engagement plan. Personalization is essential, but how often is personalized content being put in front of your high-level accounts? It begins with a cadence for a segmented audience. Here's an example:

TOUCH LIMIT	TOUCH LIMIT	TOUCH LIMIT	TOUCH LIMIT
1–3	**1–5**	**5–12**	**20+**
Current customer	**Prospects in the buying window somewhat familiar with your brand**	**Prospects aware your brand exists**	**Prospects unfamiliar with your brand**

Now that you have ...

Your target list	Your content strategy	Your key offer defined

... it's time to drive engagement with your ideal accounts.

Begin engagement by determining investment

Start your ABM engagement plan by determining how much you're going to invest in each account. Not all accounts are worth the same to your organization, nor do they deserve the same time and effort. It sounds simple enough, but acknowledging this is often an overlooked step.

TOPO, the sales and marketing research and advisory firm, recommends that your account-based investment strategy be divided into a minimum of three tiers. Expanding on the personalization tiering of the last chapter, let's determine which accounts fall into the bottom tier for engagement. Once completed, the investment of your time and resources should be three to five times more in each tier from the bottom to the top.

For example, if you've determined the lowest investment is $100 in Tier C, then Tier B investment would be $300–$500 and Tier A accounts would be $1,500–$2,500. Setting a budget is crucial, and this framework is an excellent starting point to govern the amount of investment you'll make in each tier.

By following this guide, you'll help your ABM achieve better ROI, avoiding the pitfall of too much time and money spent on far too little return.

Building an engagement strategy for ideal accounts

With your investment defined for each account tier, you can now determine your engagement strategy—the relationship advancement you'd like to make with your target accounts. This is where your research with target accounts pays off.

What do you know about your accounts and what do they know about you?

Are you an unknown entity to certain accounts but know they're currently using a complementary technology or service? If so, your engagement strategy should center on using familiarity to establish a common conversation.
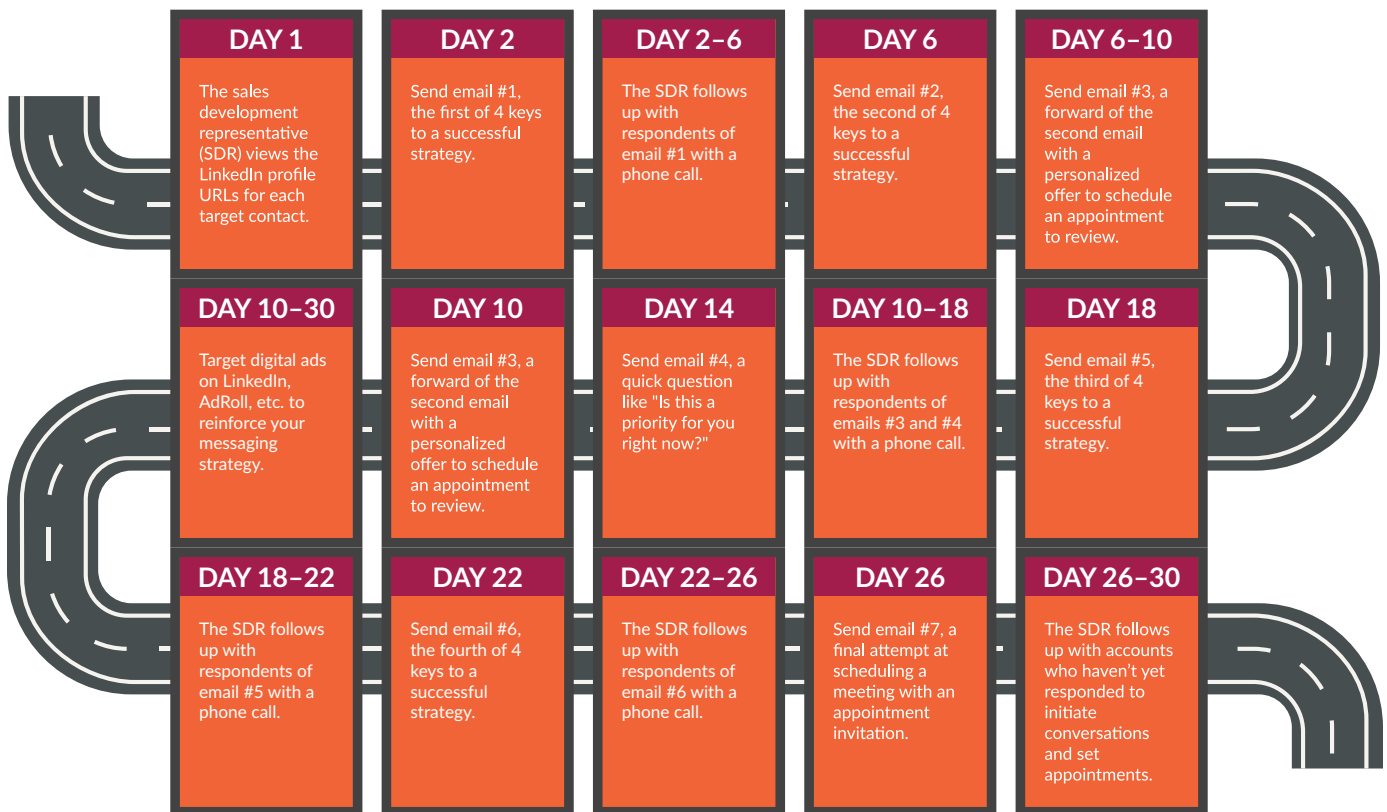
Once the strategy is defined, start building an allocation of tactics in a sequential process for each of the account tiers, aka your engagement playbook.

Typical Tactics Used for ABM

1. **Personalized emails from an individual.**

2. **Banner ads on social platforms and publisher sites directed at the account.**

3. **Cost-per-lead programs to drive initial engagement with influencers at the account.**

4. **Direct mail and dimensional mail programs to generate top-of-mind awareness.**

5. **Outbound calls to key individuals within a target account.**

6. **Website personalization for when someone from an account lands on your home page.**

7. **Social networking and connecting through references.**

Where and when you use each of these tactics will depend on the investment level you have for each tier.

But one tactic isn't enough. A one-tactic strategy executed in repetition won't yield the necessary engagement to prove the effectiveness of an account-based strategy. At a minimum, pick at least three tactics to execute in parallel. Check out this example of an engagement playbook used for one of our top-tier accounts.

DAY 1	DAY 2	DAY 2–6	DAY 6	DAY 6–10
The sales development representative (SDR) views the LinkedIn profile URLs for each target contact.	Send email #1, the first of 4 keys to a successful strategy.	The SDR follows up with respondents of email #1 with a phone call.	Send email #2, the second of 4 keys to a successful strategy.	Send email #3, a forward of the second email with a personalized offer to schedule an appointment to review.

DAY 10–30	DAY 10	DAY 14	DAY 10–18	DAY 18
Target digital ads on LinkedIn, AdRoll, etc. to reinforce your messaging strategy.	Send email #3, a forward of the second email with a personalized offer to schedule an appointment to review.	Send email #4, a quick question like "Is this a priority for you right now?"	The SDR follows up with respondents of emails #3 and #4 with a phone call.	Send email #5, the third of 4 keys to a successful strategy.

DAY 18–22	DAY 22	DAY 22–26	DAY 26	DAY 26–30
The SDR follows up with respondents of email #5 with a phone call.	Send email #6, the fourth of 4 keys to a successful strategy.	The SDR follows up with respondents of email #6 with a phone call.	Send email #7, a final attempt at scheduling a meeting with an appointment invitation.	The SDR follows up with accounts who haven't yet responded to initiate conversations and set appointments.

With the right engagement plan, you'll drive the best ROI from your accounts and spend your time as efficiently as possible along the way. This checklist will help guide your way to engagement success.

Account Engagement Checklist

1. **Determine your investment for each tier.**

2. **Determine your engagement strategy and goal.**

3. **Determine your tactics for each tier.**

4. **Build your engagement playbook.**

5. **Create a playbook with content and scripts.**

6. **Execute.**

7. **Measure and refine your strategy. (More on this in the next chapter!)**

Finding a Better Route:
Measure, Modify, and Make It Work

Perfect your engagement plan by gathering data and adapting your approach.

Target account strategies require new metrics to understand how well deals are progressing. You can harvest this data with a targeted pipeline and balanced scorecard approach, including leading and lagging indicators to help define campaign effectiveness.

> *"When we practice ABM, we do all those normal marketing behaviors ... but we combine that with real targeted outbound and sales development practices."*
>
> *– Craig Rosenberg, TOPO*

The ABM data measuring process

A targeted account pipeline (TAP) can be used to determine campaign ROI in focused terms of deal size and velocity (how quickly the deal progresses). Isolating the TAP allows for the comparison of targeted deal size versus average annual contract value (ACV), differential of deal flow between stages, and percentage of overall revenue.

Leading indicators, such as outbound email replies, high-value content engagement, and discussions with decision-makers provide valuable insights, as well. Leading indicators like these track potential revenue, while lagging indicators track targeted revenue. Through this entire measurement process, you begin understanding your audience and scoring your prospects. And that balanced scorecard can be a subset of your overall demand gen metrics.
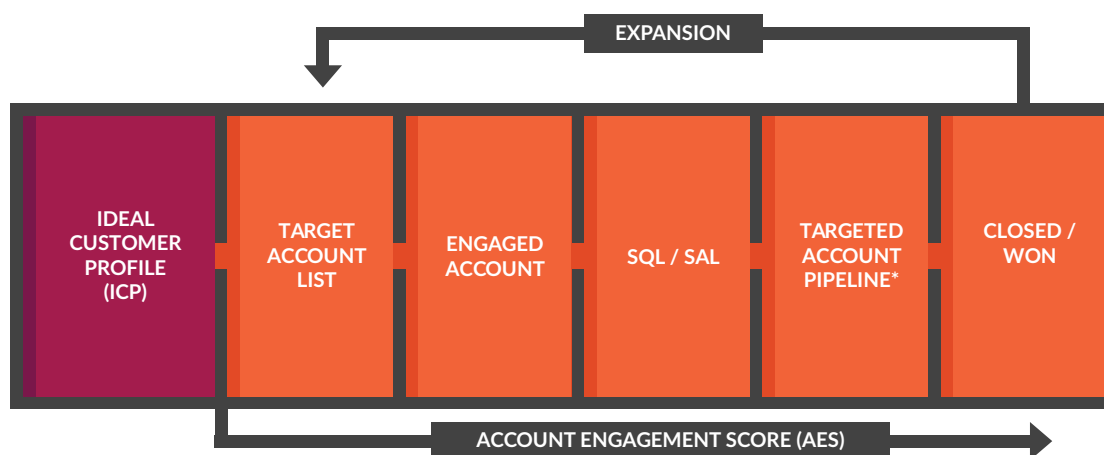
> *"An ABM program should create more high-quality pipeline that will ultimately lead to more revenue, higher ACV and LTV, and shorter time to close."*
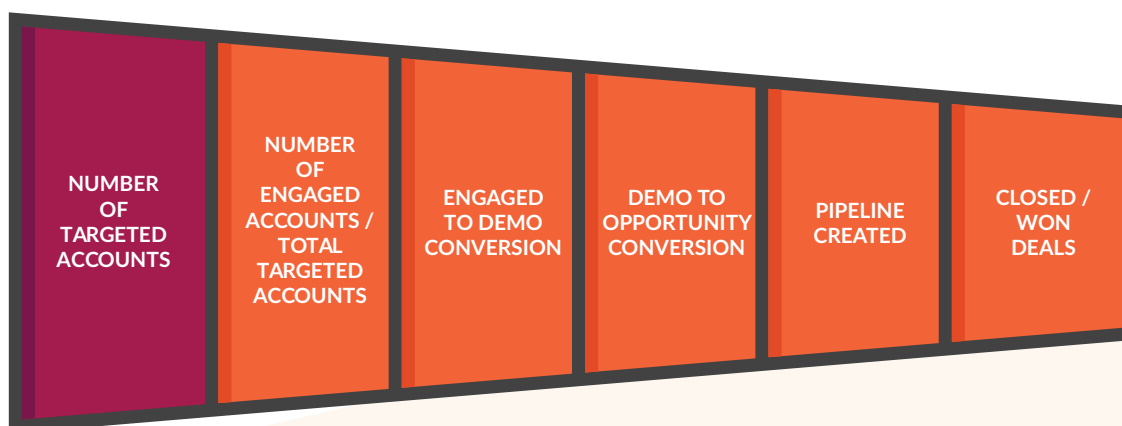>
> *– Thomas Shields, Terminus*

By adopting these metrics, you can build an account engagement score to help determine the lifetime value of accounts.

TOPO Targeted Account Based Funnel

Those metrics will inform your targeted account pipeline, allowing you to balance your scorecard. Here's an example:

***Targeted Account Pipeline (TAP)**

What does a balanced scorecard look like?

A balanced scorecard is essential for measuring campaign effectiveness, especially during the early phases of campaigns where you're still testing account- and title-specific messaging. An uptick in positive leading indicators suggests progress more than slow-moving or lagging indicators.

Balanced Scorecard: Sample Leading Indicators

- **5:2 Outbound Rule**
  Within target accounts, initiate email engagement with 5 title targets and sustain engagement with at least 2 stakeholders with purchasing authority.

- **Content Analytics**
  Measure engagement with at least 3 high-value content elements within the account. This could be a video, webinar, e-book, case study, buyer's guide, or acknowledgement of direct mail content.

- **Discovery**
  Develop a custom discovery matrix for 2 stakeholders to help understand the context for their purchase flow. This could be a buyer's guide, heuristic, or some other buyer's matrix to help prospects understand the value you provide and the requirements for moving forward with your product or service.

Balanced Scorecard: Sample Lagging Indicators

- **Identify the TAP**
  Develop a separate funnel to track revenue potential and deals closed or won associated with target accounts. Note that deal stage parameters are probably different for the TAP compared to other deals in your pipeline.

- **Measure the TAP Volume**
  Compare percentage of total forecasted revenue with revenue attributed to the TAP. Note how deal size compares with similar non-targeted accounts.

- **Measure the TAP Velocity**
  When ABM's done right, deals will move through the TAP more quickly. Focusing on larger deals—as you should—may slow velocity, but personalized and customized content should help to overcome that. Comparing actual deal size to budget may help you prioritize accounts, as well. Note where TAP deals may go dark.

Zero to Sixty: Put Your ABM Pedal to the Metal

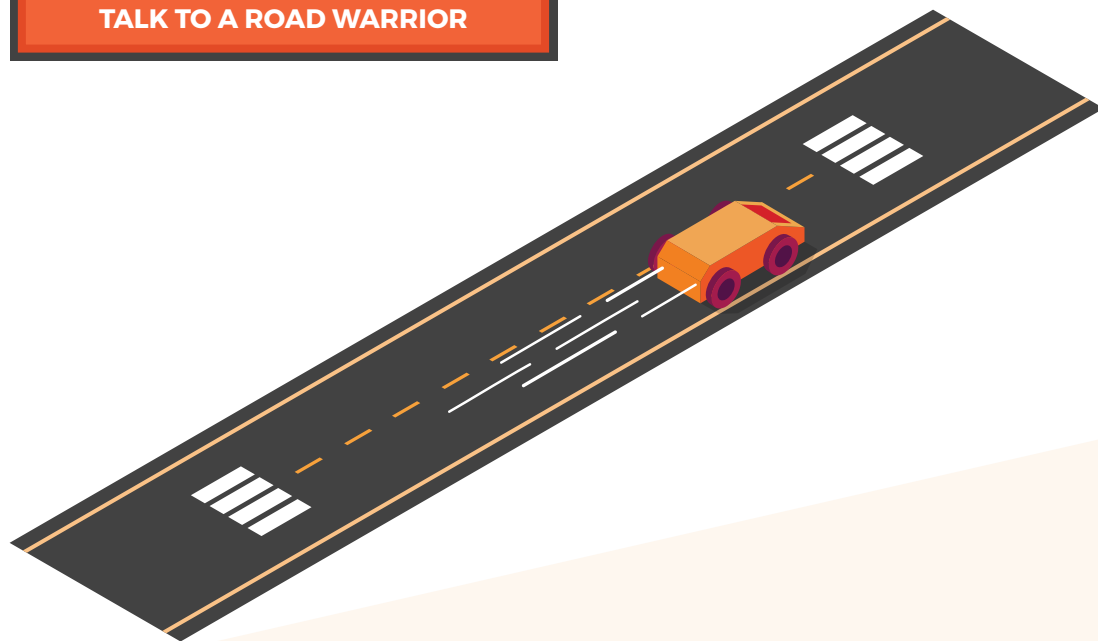*You're up to speed, now it's time to supercharge your results.*

Not all accounts are created equal, and by mastering an account-based marketing approach, you ensure you're putting the right time and effort into the right accounts at the right moments.

Like most endeavors, the amount of work and organization upfront can seem daunting. But by taking this process one step at a time, you'll make progress toward more efficient, effective work that increases closed deals and average deal size while improving targeting for better account and C-level engagement.

Equipped with this knowledge, you're ready to begin your ABM journey.

Get a guide to join you on this adventure or dive into more helpful information on ABM.

TALK TO A ROAD WARRIOR

REFERENCES

1. The Art and Science of ABM Account Selection

2. Getting Serious About ABM Metrics to Measure

3. 5 New Account-Based Metrics

4. **Terminus:** I <3 ABM / #OneTeam
   a. *Alignment*
   b. *Measure the Right KPIs*
   c. *Focus on Account Tiering and Segmentation*
   d. *Orchestrate Account Engagement*

5. **TOPO:** A Recipe for Successful ABM Featuring Craig Rosenberg
   a. BullDog Marketing's critique

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

GREG HESSONG

is an account director in Portland, Oregon who's been helping B2B-focused sales and marketing teams develop and execute account-based campaigns for over two decades. He has a wide range of experience in developing account-based engagement strategies to jumpstart relationships that result in new sales opportunities and higher ROI for marketing.
Connect with Greg.

- ABM Speaker
- ABM Blogger

TROY O'BRYAN

is an unapologetic metrics-driven marketer. With more than 15 years in account-based sales and marketing, he's helped 22 Fortune 500 companies and over 110 small- and medium-sized businesses drive revenue and higher ROI from their marketing.
Connect with Troy.

- ABMie Award Finalist
- ABM Consortium Editor
- ABM Speaker

CHRIS ORTOLANO

is co-president of the Portland chapter of AA-ISP and founder of Outbound Edge, a sales engagement consulting group that aligns sales and customer success teams to increase revenue using customer stories and analytics. Chris gathers, curates, and transfers knowledge through workshops, webinars, and a virtual community of emerging SaaS leaders and practitioners.
Join the SalesStack online community.

- SalesStack Founder
- Sales Coach Instructor
- DiscoverOrg Blogger