Fractorial

Finding and engaging with in-market sponsors

A BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT GUIDE FOR CONTRACT RESEARCH, CLINICAL RESEARCH, AND CDMO PROVIDERS

The sponsors most worth winning can be identified before they ever issue a request. This guide covers the public signals that reveal an in-market program, and how working a shared account list with marketing gets you into the conversation earlier, with the right people, about the program they're actually running.

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01 Background

A sponsor contacts your organization, whether through a formal RFP, a scoped inquiry, a request for capabilities sent to several providers at once, or a conversation at a conference booth. Whatever the form, the same thing has usually already happened: the need was defined, a timeline was set, a budget was identified, and a working sense of who might be suitable has formed inside the sponsor organization. By the time the request is visible, most of the decisions that shape it have been made, and responding, however well, is a position of limited influence.

The providers in the strongest position are the ones a program team already knows before the evaluation starts, already in conversation and already associated with the specific scientific or operational problem in question. Getting into that position depends on finding the sponsors that are actively heading toward a purchase, the in-market sponsors, before they raise their hand. And they can be found. Sponsors publish the progress of their development programs continuously, and those milestones signal purchasing needs before any request goes out. Tracked well, they yield a list of the accounts most worth pursuing right now.

> A list alone doesn't win the business, though. The second half of the work is how that list gets worked, and this is where marketing comes in.

In many provider organizations, marketing and business development support each other from a distance. Marketing builds the brand, runs the conference calendar, produces content, and passes along the leads that come in. BD works its own target list: the sponsors each account owner knows, is pursuing, or has flagged as worth pursuing. Both efforts are productive, but there is limited synergy as the most important accounts for BD don't get extra marketing attention; they see the same marketing as everyone else.

There's an established approach that better aligns marketing and sales, and leverages marketing to help win key accounts. Account-based marketing (ABM) inverts the usual direction of marketing: rather than marketing broadly and waiting to see which accounts respond, marketing runs targeted campaigns directly at a defined list of accounts, selected for their business potential. In a well-run version, that list is substantially the same one BD is working, built and maintained by both teams together.

For providers in contract research and development services, the conditions make an ABM approach an unusually good fit. A relatively small number of sponsors represent a large share of what any provider can realistically win, deal values are high enough to justify concentrated effort, and sales cycles are long enough that the providers a buying group already knows hold a real advantage when an evaluation starts.

How the two teams divide the work

The collaboration works because each team can do something the other can't.

BD reaches out person to person: targeted, direct, and able to carry a real conversation. What BD can't do is be present at every account continuously, or reach the dozens of people at a sponsor who may influence a decision but will never take a first meeting.

Marketing, however, **can** reach out broadly. Campaigns aimed at a defined account list put relevant messages in front of many people at each sponsor, long before any of them would accept outreach, and often serve as the first point of contact between the provider and a future buying group. Just as importantly, marketing can measure the response. Tracking who at each account is engaging, with what, and how often turns campaign activity into a prioritization tool: the accounts showing real engagement are the accounts worth the sales team's active attention now.

> Marketing establishes presence across the list and reads the signals. BD concentrates its limited outreach capacity where the signals point.

02 The importance of grouping accounts by shared challenge so the message lands

Outreach from a service provider works when it speaks to a challenge the sponsor recognizes as their own. A sponsor preparing a first-in-human study, a sponsor scaling a cell therapy program, and a sponsor heading into a pivotal trial are dealing with different problems, and a message generic enough to cover all three will resonate with none of them.

The practical consequence for list building is to group target accounts around a shared challenge, and build the messaging for each group around that challenge. A segment like "biotechs advancing early-phase oncology assets with biomarker-driven designs" can be addressed with content and messaging specific enough to feel written for each account in the segment. The more precisely the shared challenge is defined, the more the outreach, the ads, and the content resonate, and the less any of it reads as a capabilities brochure.

Sales teams tailor their message instinctively when they reach out to a target account. Marketing can only do the same when the segmentation exists. Building segments around shared challenges, against a shared target list, is the step that lets marketing put messages in front of key accounts with the same specificity sales brings to a call.

03 Key concept: programs are the units that buy

Account targeting is crucial (figuring out which accounts to reach out to), but when selling to biotech, pharma, and diagnostic developers, the account isn't actually the unit that buys. Individual programs buy. So the goal is a target list built on the accounts with programs at the stage that need what you sell - those programs likely to be "in market". A mid-size biotech running four development programs may be actively scoping vendors for one of them and entirely inactive on the other three. The company is in market and out of market at the same time, because the thing that buys is the program: it holds the need, the timeline, and the budget.

That principle changes what to watch. Firmographics (size, funding profile, geography, sector) define the universe of companies worth considering. The signals that show a sponsor is likely in market are program-level events, and sponsors publish them continuously: studies registered, INDs and IDEs filed, financings closed against named assets, regulatory designations granted, programs advancing between stages, assets licensed in. Each is public, time stamped, and carries predictable purchasing consequences. Tracked on a regular cadence, they produce something a static prospect list can't offer, a continuously refreshed view of which companies have programs likely to be in market right now.

The next sections walk through the steps for building the list and the six signal categories in detail; the reference table at the end collects them with their sources.

04 The steps in building a priority target list

1. **Start with firmographics.**

   Define the companies eligible to be targets at all: sponsor type, size range, funding stage, geography, therapeutic focus. This is the boundary of the universe, and should be generous enough not to exclude good accounts on technicalities.

2. **Filter on program-level features.**

   Within that universe, identify the companies whose active programs match what you sell and show the signals above: the right development stage, the right modality or therapeutic area, a recent event indicating movement. Life-science-specific data sources (clinical trial registries, pipeline intelligence platforms, funding databases) are built for exactly this query. This step is what separates a list of plausible companies from a list of sponsors with a live, documentable reason to buy.

3. **Incorporate BD team knowledge to refine the list.**

   Before anything runs against the list, account owners review it. Territory knowledge catches what databases can't: the incumbent relationship nobody will dislodge this year, the program quietly shelved, the account that belongs on the list for reasons no database records. The review improves the list, and produces something equally valuable. BD's agreement that these are the accounts is what makes everything downstream a joint effort rather than a marketing initiative BD tolerates.

Key program-level signals worth tracking

Study registrations and regulatory submissions.

A new ClinicalTrials.gov registration means a program has been designed, approved for execution, and is preparing to enroll. An IND submission means a sponsor is preparing to move an asset into first-in-human studies. Both are declarations that a program has crossed from planning into execution. This is the shortest window of any signal here: a sponsor engaged in the first week after a filing is having a different conversation than one engaged two months later, when a vendor search may already be underway.

Funding events.

Series B, C, and D rounds, IPOs, and substantial non-dilutive funding such as BARDA contracts or large NIH awards all predict program acceleration. Capital is only part of the signal. A raise creates organizational pressure to deploy that capital productively and to show progress against the milestones used to justify the raise. A company that raised $120M to advance two assets into Phase 2 has told you what the money is for, and the months that follow are among the most commercially active in a sponsor's lifecycle.

Regulatory milestones.

Fast Track, Breakthrough Therapy, Orphan Drug, and Priority Review designations indicate that the FDA has recognized an asset's potential significance and is providing mechanisms to accelerate its development. A designation says two things at once: the program is being resourced, and the group around it is likely to make decisions faster than a standard timeline would suggest.

Program advancement.

Positive Phase 1 data, a move from discovery into IND-enabling studies, a decision to take an asset from Phase 2 into a pivotal trial. Each transition changes what the program requires and increases what it costs, and announcement usually follows the internal decision by some interval, so advancement news is better treated as confirmation that scoping has begun than as a starting gun.

Partnerships, licensing, and acquisitions.

A licensing deal brings a new asset into a pipeline, often before any supporting infrastructure for that asset exists, and an acquisition can introduce capabilities the acquiring organization has never supported. These events also reshape organizations, which matters for a second reason: the people who make vendor decisions may change, and existing relationships may be reviewed rather than assumed.

Grant and contract awards.

For academic, government, and publicly funded targets, awards are the equivalent signal. A new award indicates funded work about to begin within a defined scope and period of performance, along with the outsourced research services and supporting purchases the work will require. Award records are unusually informative, typically naming the principal investigator, the institution, the amount, and the research aims.

Signals in device, combination product, and diagnostic programs

The same categories apply; the events have different names. Worth watching:

- IDE submissions and approvals
- Feasibility, pilot, and pivotal clinical study registrations
- Analytical and clinical validation study starts for diagnostics
- Breakthrough Device designations
- De Novo, 510(k), and PMA submissions and decisions
- CE marking, MDR, and IVDR conformity milestones
- Companion diagnostic partnership agreements
- Design freeze and verification and validation milestones disclosed in investor materials

05 What marketing does with the list

1 Develop and deploy segmented messaging built on program needs.

For each segment, marketing develops content and campaigns around the challenge that defines it: the ads, landing pages, technical content, and webinars all speak to the problems those specific programs are navigating. This is the difference the targeting makes possible. Messaging can be this specific only because the list was built around a shared challenge.

2 Measure engagement.

Every campaign interaction is tracked: who visited, what they read, what they downloaded, which webinar they registered for, and engagement is tracked from anyone at a target account, whether or not they hold an expected title. An unexpected role engaging from a priority account is information, and it's often how a buying group member nobody anticipated becomes visible.

3 Identify the specific individuals on in-market programs.

Knowing an account is engaging is useful. Knowing which individuals are engaging is what makes the data commercially actionable, for a reason specific to this market: a title alone can't tell you who is attached to the in-market program. A biotech with three active programs may have three clinical program directors. A large sponsor has dozens of people with biomarker or translational medicine in their titles. Only some of them are connected to the program that's buying. Engagement behavior can provide data on the people who are your true targets. Those who engage seriously with content built around a specific program challenge are disproportionately the people working on that kind of program. Read at the individual level, engagement data filters a list of plausible contacts down to the probable members of the buying group, which gives sales and BD outreach a focus that a title list alone can't provide.

06 What sales and marketing should expect from each other

Making this operational takes more than broad alignment. It takes specific agreements between sales and marketing, running in both directions.

BD should expect from marketing:	Engagement handed over as named people with context (who engaged, in what role, with what content, and when) rather than a note that an account is "showing activity"; the program-level signal attached, so the first conversation can reference the study, the financing, or the designation; an agreed threshold for when an account moves to BD, with a defined route to a specific person; and speed, because program timelines set the window and a signal delivered in a monthly report has usually lost most of its value.
Marketing should expect from BD:	Genuine participation in list building and refresh, since territory knowledge is an input nobody else holds; prompt follow-up when an account crosses the agreed threshold, because signals decay and unworked handoffs discredit the system; and feedback from the conversations that result, because knowing which messages landed and which accounts converted improves the next round of segmentation, content development, and scoring.

07 The benefits of shared ownership

When commercial operations run this way, with sales and marketing aligned around account-based, targeted marketing, the character of BD outreach changes. First conversations start from something the sponsor is already working on, with people already familiar with the provider's name and thinking. Building this system requires marketing and BD to hold the account list, the signal definitions, and the response process jointly. That shared ownership is what turns targeted marketing into what BD actually needs from it: better conversations, earlier, at the accounts worth winning, and the pipeline and won business that follow.

Reference signals

PROGRAM-LEVEL EVENTS THAT INDICATE A SPONSOR MAY BE IN MARKET

SIGNAL	WHAT IT INDICATES	WHERE TO FIND IT
Study registration or regulatory submission (IND, IDE, pivotal or validation study start)	A program has crossed from planning into execution, with an enrollment timeline beginning. The shortest window of any signal here: first-week engagement precedes most vendor searches	ClinicalTrials.gov; EU CTIS and other national registries; company announcements; pipeline intelligence platforms
Funding event (Series B/C/D, IPO, BARDA, large NIH)	Capital allocated against named programs, with pressure to deploy it and show milestone progress. The months following a raise are among the most commercially active in a sponsor's lifecycle	Company press releases; SEC filings; funding databases; agency award announcements
Regulatory milestone (Fast Track, Breakthrough Therapy, Orphan, Priority Review; Breakthrough Device; De Novo, 510(k), PMA; MDR and IVDR conformity)	A resourced, accelerated program working to a compressed timeline, likely to decide faster than standard	FDA announcements; EU regulatory publications; company press releases
Program advancement (Phase 1 data, preclinical to IND-enabling, Phase 2 to pivotal, feasibility to pivotal, analytical to clinical validation)	A stage transition with different service requirements and a larger investment than the prior stage	Company announcements; registry updates; investor presentations; pipeline intelligence platforms
Partnership, licensing, or acquisition (including companion diagnostic agreements)	New assets or capabilities entering an organization, often with no supporting vendor relationships in place	Company press releases; SEC filings; deal databases; trade press
Grant or contract award (academic, government, and publicly funded targets)	Funded work with a defined scope and period of performance about to begin, with outsourced services to follow	NIH Reporter; BARDA contract awards; DOD funding announcements

ENGAGEMENT SIGNALS THAT INDICATE AN ACCOUNT IS READY FOR OUTREACH

SIGNAL	WHAT IT INDICATES
Multiple individuals engaging from one account	Internal discussion rather than individual browsing
Engagement across different roles	A pattern resembling the shape of a buying group
Depth and repetition	Working interest rather than a passing click
Engagement topic matching a known program	Campaign data and public signal pointing at the same program
Direct-response activity (contact form, consultation, meeting request)	An account moving itself from consideration into contact

Event categories hold across therapeutic, medical device, combination product, and diagnostic developers; the event names differ by sponsor type. A signal indicates a program is active; who decides on any given scope of work depends on the work being sold and the size and structure of the sponsor.

GET IN TOUCH

Fractorial designs and runs account-based marketing programs for B2B life science organizations.

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