



Guiding Prospects from Discovery to Conversion.

A B2B guide to *better* account-based marketing (ABM).



“B2B buyers use up to and sometimes more than ten channels, including online and digital, as part of any given purchase...”

—MCKINSEY & COMPANY

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Navigating the digital buyer’s journey.

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Key takeaways.

1

The buyer's journey has evolved into a primarily self-serve process that occurs online. Adjusting to this new reality requires B2B organizations to deliver personalized content and messaging that meets the needs, preferences, and expectations of today's digital audiences.

2

Mastering ABM principles isn't easy—but it's worth it. According to our survey of the most successful B2B companies, 58% of high growth marketers said their ABM programs improved funnel velocity and/or conversion rates.*

3

Effective ABM enables companies to identify, target and engage high-value accounts with consistent messaging and meaningful, impactful digital experiences that progress them along the buyer's journey, efficiently.

4

Companies who are new to ABM or struggling to get a robust ABM program up and running should start with a small-scale pilot, and focus on setting up technologies and processes to support effective, end-to-end collaboration between Marketing and Sales.

SOURCE: **IRON HORSE 2024 SALES EFFECTIVENESS SURVEY**

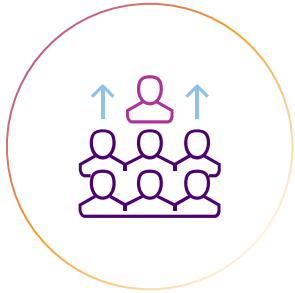
CHAPTER 1

Navigating the digital buyer's journey.

How and why ABM drives growth.

The digital age has ushered in a new era of buyers who independently and anonymously gather information about potential solutions online before making a purchase decision. To remain competitive, B2B organizations must provide these buyers with personalized experiences at every stage of their decision making process.

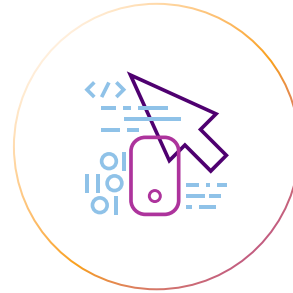
3 factors shaping ABM.



The buying group has expanded, and includes a diverse group of stakeholders with multiple organizational titles, interests, and needs.

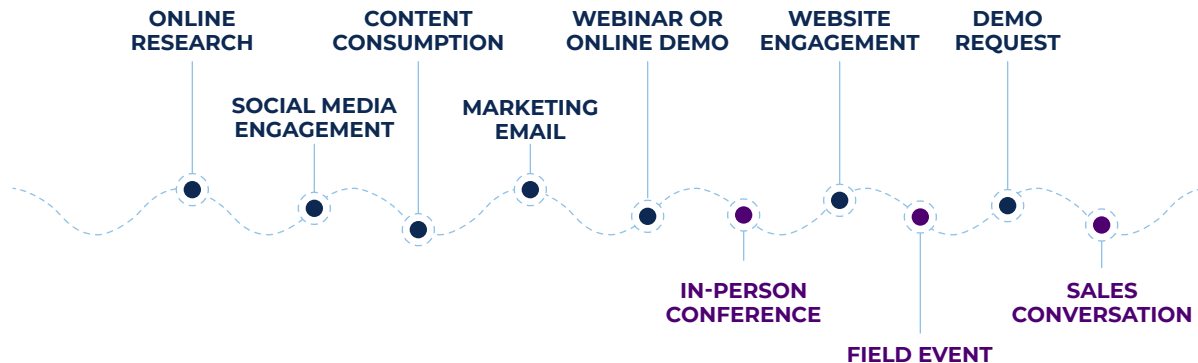


These decision-makers prefer to research and evaluate an organization's services through diverse online channels.



Prospects leave behind valuable clues, or signals, through their online activities and behaviors, which signify their intent and interests.

Today's B2B buyer's journey includes more digital than in-person touchpoints.



6-10

people, on average, are engaged in today's B2B buying committees.

—DEMANDBASE

64%

of buyers are Millennials or Gen Z—who prefer a digital buyer's journey.

—FORRESTER

63%

of buyers prefer not to interact before the Explore phase.

—OUTREACH

A modern buyer's journey demands a comprehensive ABM approach.

In this buying environment, B2B organizations are confronted with a pivotal business imperative: refining their ABM strategies to better resonate with the preferences and behaviors of digitally empowered target audiences.

The good news is that in today's complex B2B landscape, ABM offers two key advantages:

- Enables Marketing to proactively influence and guide prospective clients across dynamic yet interconnected digital touchpoints with highly targeted and personalized content and messaging
- Provides Sales with a strategic framework to effectively engage and qualify buyers at every stage of the journey

In the next three chapters, we detail what an effective ABM approach looks like, and how your B2B organization can implement and scale these strategies effectively.

91% of marketers using ABM see a larger deal size, with 25% seeing their deal sizes grow by more than 50%.

—FORRESTER

Optimizing your ABM program poses unique challenges.

You may be wondering:

How can we better align our marketing and sales teams to maximize ABM effectiveness?

How can we enhance our personalization tactics to stand out in a crowded market?

How can we continuously engage target accounts throughout a longer buying cycle?

Look for tips throughout this ebook for how to address these challenges.

CHAPTER 2

Capturing digital, high-value accounts.

What effective ABM looks like.

ABM involves identifying a select group of high-value companies, creating tailored campaigns to target key members of the buying teams at those accounts, and delivering a consistent message, through various channels, at multiple touchpoints, to maximize engagement across every stage of the buyer's journey.



Marketing and Sales: Two teams, one goal.

Put simply, ABM enables B2B organizations to identify, connect, and communicate with your best-fit customers at the right time, across the right channels. This results in stronger, more meaningful relationships with your ideal customers, which helps shorten the sales cycle as they move more confidently toward making a purchase decision.

For ABM to be effective, however, close collaboration between Marketing and Sales is essential. In a traditional model, there is a distinct handoff point where Marketing passes leads to Sales, and, usually, the information exchange is limited. In ABM, these functions work together throughout the buyer's journey to provide a seamless experience that drives conversion.

For example:

- Marketing can provide relevant insights and data about an account's online interactions at specific touchpoints, allowing Sales to pick up the conversation at any point throughout the customer journey.
- Sales can share firsthand knowledge about the questions, objections, and preferences that arise during interactions with prospects, allowing Marketing to make real-time adjustments to content and messaging to increase their impact.

In 2024, Iron Horse asked over 400 sales and marketing decision-makers at high growth B2B companies about their experience with ABM. Here's what they said:

58%

of marketers cited **improved funnel velocity and/or conversion rates** as a top benefit of ABM

51%

of sellers cited **better alignment with Marketing** as one of the top 3 benefits of ABM

58%

of marketers selected **accurate account and contact data updated regularly in the CRM** among the top 5 things Marketing needs from Sales

SOURCE: **IRON HORSE 2024 SALES EFFECTIVENESS SURVEY**

What campaign-specific ABM strategies look like.

Let's consider an ABM campaign tailored for Veltios Technology Architects, Inc., a hypothetical professional services organization specializing in technology management consulting.

Identification of high-value accounts.

The company's marketing and sales teams collaborated to identify high-potential accounts, focusing on mid-sized financial services companies looking to scale and implement digital transformation initiatives.



Research and account profiling.

Based on their research, Veltios focused their program on two buying team roles and their pain points: decision makers facing increasing pressure to drive efficiency, and influencers experiencing challenges with legacy technology upgrades.



Personalized content and messaging.

Marketing created personalized content and messaging for decision makers focused on the cost savings of technology upgrades. For the influencer audience, they created a series of short videos featuring their expert consultants speaking about new data privacy issues plaguing financial services companies.



Personalizing content and messaging shows you understand the needs of your target audience—a great way to stand out in a crowded marketplace.

59%

of B2B customers expect fully/
mostly personalized content
when researching and exploring a
company's products or services.

—FORRESTER

Some results companies have seen using ABM:

31%

YoY increase in pipeline from business development teams.

60%

of target accounts engaged over a 6-month period.

278%

higher click through rates on personalized ads.

49%

higher page views with personalized experiences.

SOURCE: **DEMANDBASE**

Omnichannel engagement.

Marketing engaged these buyers through targeted ads and content syndication, including an ebook and on-demand webinar used to capture leads.



Nurturing and relationship building.

As the campaign progressed, Marketing nurtured relationships with target accounts by providing additional content in an email nurture, including an industry report addressing relevant trends and best practices, plus a case study focused on financial services.



Sales engagement and conversion.

As prospects from target accounts expressed interest and engaged with Veltios's content and offerings off- and on-domain, Marketing (utilizing an ABM platform and tools), provided information about qualified leads to Sales, who reached out with personalized email sequences designed to drive a sales conversation.



Post-sale relationship management.

After successfully converting target accounts into clients, Marketing and Sales provided ongoing support, delivered value-added services, and sought opportunities for upselling additional consulting services to expand the scope of engagement.



Campaign optimization.

Throughout the campaign, Marketing and Sales closely monitored key performance indicators (KPIs) such as engagement rates, conversion rates, and client satisfaction scores to measure the effectiveness of their combined efforts, and make data-driven adjustments as needed to optimize results.

CHAPTER 3

Essential tools, technology, and tactics.

Setting up your ABM blueprint.

Many of the technology platforms and digital channels you already use can be leveraged to implement ABM. However, success lies not just in the tools themselves, but in integrating them effectively to deliver coordinated, personalized buyer experiences.

This chapter covers the key tools and tactics used in successful ABM programs.



Top technology stack components for an effective ABM program.

CRM System.

The central location for prospect and customer data, the CRM system facilitates tasks such as lead management, sales pipeline tracking, and reporting, enabling Marketing and Sales to track and analyze customer interactions.

Marketing automation (MA) platform.

Software tools that streamline and automate lead generation and lead nurturing, allowing marketers to effectively segment and nurture leads from target accounts for better engagement tracking and personalization.

Account-based marketing (ABM) platform.

Feature-rich platforms that allow marketers to identify and target specific audience segments and accounts through personalized ads, while also capturing intent signals based on how accounts engage with content.

Aligning leads with specific accounts and ensuring consistency between CRM and marketing automation fields are essential for effective ABM.

How companies can effectively utilize an ABM platform.

Expand their target account list with look-alikes

Identify accounts with buyer intent

Advertise to accounts across the buyer's journey

Leverage analytics to understand account engagement

Deliver personalized ads and content to target accounts

Sales enablement platform.

A centralized tool that streamlines outreach activities, while also tracking and enabling reporting on phone calls, email sequences and other interactions.

Personalization tools.

Allow Marketing and Sales to deliver different messaging, content, and experiences on your organization's website based on visitor information, such as engagement history, on- and off-domain intent signals, journey stages, and more.

Analytics tools.

Serve as a shared platform for both Marketing and Sales to track KPIs, ensuring both functions are working from the same data to support joint decision-making

DO MORE WITH:

Webinar platform.

Webinars can be valuable for engaging buyers because they provide an interactive and informative way for you to showcase products, services, or industry expertise.

Gifting platform.

Digital gifting can be an effective incentive for buyers to engage with Sales, especially if the gift is personalized.



Make sure the right tech and processes are in place before you start.

Clearly define roles and responsibilities, establish communication channels, and implement robust systems for data management and collaboration prior to launching an ABM program or campaign.

Drive a unified conversation across touchpoints.

The goal of ABM is to deliver consistent content and messaging across the channels your prospects use, both digital and physical.

Here are some of the most common channels and tactics used in an ABM program:

Website.

A central hub for showcasing personalized content, such as case studies, whitepapers, and services information.

Performance media.

Targeted advertising across digital channels tailored to specific accounts or decision-makers to increase visibility and generate leads.

Email nurture.

Personalized emails delivered over a certain period of time to nurture leads, build relationships, and keep target accounts engaged.

Sales sequences.

A series of personalized touchpoints (e.g., emails, calls, LinkedIn messages) used in conjunction with marketing activities once buyers have demonstrated intent.

Webinars.

On demand or live virtual events used to educate, engage, and build relationships with buyers from target accounts.

Content.

Gated and ungated assets such as blogs, eBooks, infographics, videos, and reports that help buyers learn about and evaluate your solutions.

Gifting.

Personalized gifts sent to key decision-makers to establish a personal connection, encourage brand recognition, and add a human touch to the campaign.

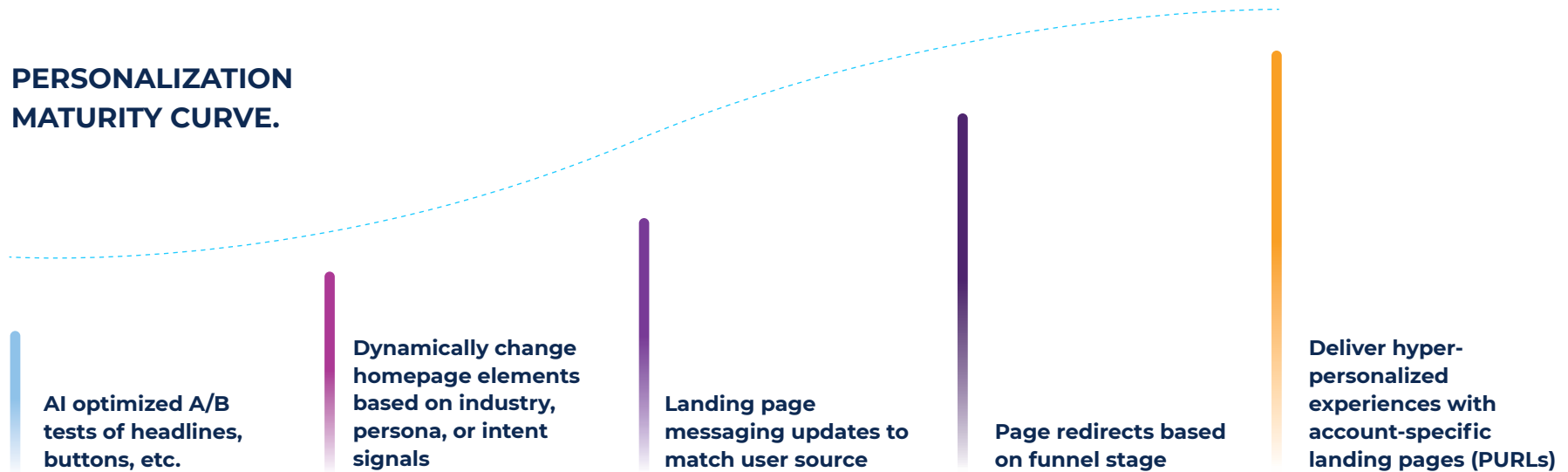
Live events.

Conferences, trade shows, workshops, and networking events that provide opportunities to connect with buyers from target accounts in person.

Blogs and webinars about timely issues facing potential customers are a great way to showcase your expertise.

A crawl-walk-run approach to personalization.

Personalization is a key component of ABM—but you don't have to do it all at once. Here's how to gradually increase personalization as you grow your program.



“Frontline B2B marketers must not only understand the dynamics of buyer and customer groups at any point in time but also connect their digital and non-digital interactions to deliver relevant—and above all, accurate—personalization.”

—FORRESTER

CHAPTER 4

Guiding prospects from point A to you.

Pulling it all together to turn buyers into customers.

At its core, ABM is about creating a conversation where you genuinely connect with buyers because you understand and can speak to their unique needs, challenges, and goals while catering to their preference for convenience and autonomy in their digital interactions.



Start small, test and evaluate.

Launching a small-scale pilot program will allow you to implement ABM with minimal risk and investment.

Consider following these steps to create an effective pilot.

- 1 Build your team.**

Consider forming a compact team comprising one marketer and one seller who can collaboratively delve into potential challenges, become fully aligned, and refine your ABM strategies before diving into full-scale implementation.
- 2 Define objectives.**

Clearly define the objectives of your pilot campaign, such as increasing pipeline velocity, improving win rates, or expanding into new markets.
- 3 Select target accounts.**

Agree upon a list of high-value target accounts that fit your ideal customer profile (ICP) and your business goals.
- 4 Develop account profiles.**

Jointly create a consolidated profile that captures common characteristics of the account segment, including key decision-makers, pain points, and buying motivations.
- 5 Create program messaging and content.**

Develop content (i.e. email nurtures, advertisements, blogs, guides, personalized website landing pages) that is tuned to the needs of the account segment. To start, limit the content to one of your services, and to one or two buyer roles.
- 6 Implement multichannel outreach.**

Create a plan to deliver your program content and messages across at least three of the channels your buyers regularly use (e.g. programmatic, email, social, etc.) Your ABM team should collaborate to execute a multichannel strategy that ensures buyers are not met with content they have already engaged with, but instead are provided with new content.
- 7 Track and measure engagement.**

Using agreed-upon tools and KPIs, your ABM team should regularly meet to review engagement metrics such as website visits and intent signals, as well as Sales follow-up activities such as emails, phone calls, and LinkedIn connections. Both should have a unified view of data.
- 8 Iterate and optimize.**

After a predefined period (often, quarterly), adjust campaign targeting, messaging, content, ad strategy, and other factors based on performance observations.

3 primary types of ABM approaches.

Adopt an approach that both aligns with your organization's capabilities and accommodates the diverse needs of your target accounts.

One-to-one.

Creating individual campaigns for up to 5 very high-value accounts.

Content, messaging, and communication are highly personalized.

One-to-few.

Accounts that share similar characteristics are grouped together (6-20).

Personalization is less extensive since it is applied to a group of similar accounts rather than one individual account.

One-to-many.

Targets a large group of high-value accounts (21+)

Personalization is applied to the entire account segment, making it more generalized, which optimizes efficiency and resource allocation.

“Once you determine your account list, make sure you actually have the bandwidth to accelerate opportunities. If you're only piloting with one marketer and one seller, you can't service the same volume that you would for regular demand-generation programs.”

—STEPHANIE S. MCARTHUR, PRINCIPAL, ABX EXPERT, DEMANDBASE

A one-to-one approach is not recommended for a pilot program due to its resource-intensive nature. Instead, start with a one-to-few or one-to-many approach to allow for broader outreach and experimentation before scaling up.

How you measure makes a difference.

While tactic-level metrics are still important for understanding how well individual campaign elements are performing, ABM KPIs aim to evaluate how the joint efforts of Marketing and Sales contribute to revenue and growth. Typical KPIs include:



Account engagement.

Measures the level of engagement from target accounts with your marketing and sales activities, including account-level intent, website visits, email opens and clicks, social media interactions, and content downloads.



Pipeline contribution.

Assesses the impact of your campaign on the sales pipeline with metrics such as the number of qualified leads generated, opportunities created, pipeline velocity, and progression of target accounts through the sales funnel.



Account reach.

Evaluates the extent to which marketing and sales efforts are reaching your target accounts. Monitor metrics such as the number of target accounts reached, the percentage of accounts engaged, and the depth of engagement within each account.



Revenue influence.

Determines the revenue impact of your marketing and sales efforts. Track metrics such as closed-won deals, average deal size, and revenue generated from target accounts.



Customer acquisition cost (CAC).

Calculates the cost-effectiveness of acquiring new customers through ABM and sales activities by dividing the total cost of the campaign by the number of new customers acquired.



Customer lifetime value (CLV).

Evaluates the long-term value of customers acquired through your ABM and sales efforts by calculating their expected lifetime value based on revenue generated, retention rates, and upsell opportunities.



Return on investment (ROI).

Measures the overall return on investment of your campaign by comparing the revenue generated or cost savings achieved against the total cost of the campaign.



Marketing and sales alignment.

Determines the level of collaboration between sales and marketing teams. Evaluate team metrics such as whether they are targeting the same segments/accounts, using the same data sources, have the same/complementary goals, and are focused on the same SLAs.

“One of the first indicators of successful sales and marketing strategy is the alignment of critical metrics that matter to the business. When I was an analyst at TOPO and Gartner, we observed this single factor. Documented and shared measures of success often separate top performers from everyone else.”

—CHRIS MOODY, VP, BRAND MARKETING, DEMANDBASE

CHAPTER 5

Case study.

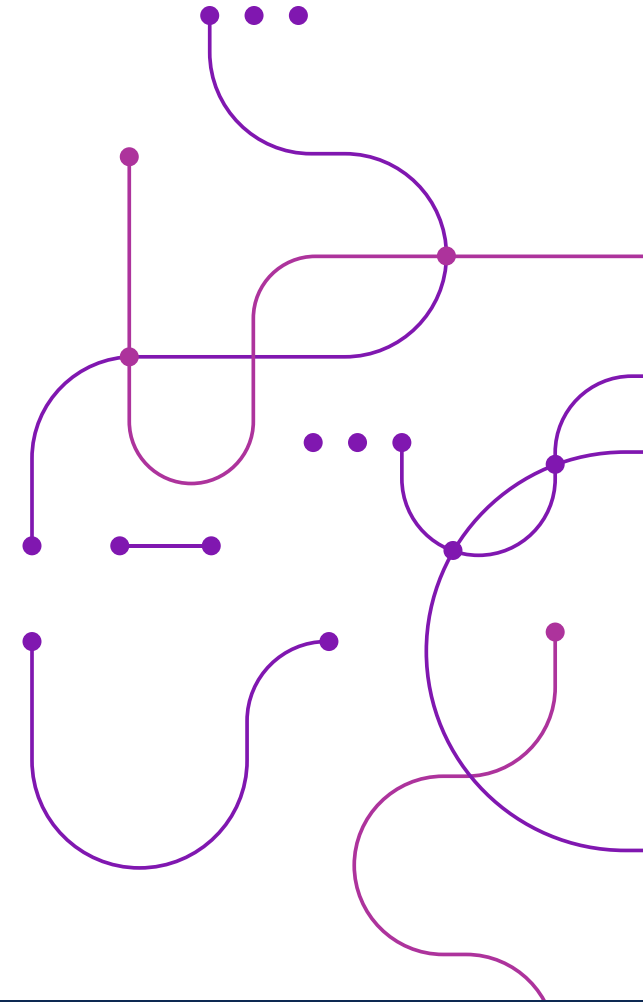
A national tax & advisory firm shifts to ABM.

Customer story: A B2B organization's marketing evolution.

A leading financial services company aimed for faster expansion into a new market, so they turned to Iron Horse for help.

Iron Horse implemented a scalable ABM program to target prospects from high-value accounts with highly relevant marketing content. We started by working with our client to optimize marketing operations and technology and select relevant content for key roles in the buying group. We then developed an omnichannel program consisting of content syndication, targeted ads, and coordinated marketing email nurtures and sales outreach to attract and guide the right buyers through the marketing funnel.

Equipped with insights from these engagements, Sales was then able to initiate meaningful conversations, accelerating accounts down the path to purchase.



Key results.

1,657

target accounts reached

580%

increase in solution
page views

30%

average email open rate,
nearly 40% above standard
for their industry



Iron Horse is a growth marketing agency focused on enterprise and emerging growth companies. We combine audience research, strategic consulting, and martech strategy to help you design and execute scalable integrated marketing programs that deliver the outcomes you want.

We'll help you develop winning ABM programs that enable your marketing and sales teams to more effectively and efficiently find, engage and close target accounts.

For more information about Iron Horse, visit www.ironhorse.io.