

THE BIG BOOK

OF ACCOUNT BASED MARKETING (ABM)

How to get started, how to stand out,
and how to get great results

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A VERY QUICK INTRODUCTION

**No one reads the forewords of these things,
so we'll get right to the point.**

ABM is seriously powerful stuff. Both for targeting shiny new prospects and for nurturing existing customers into spending more or sticking around.

And yes, here at The Creative Consultancy we might be a bit biased, because we're award-winning ABM specialists. But the ROI it can deliver packs a punch that can't be ignored.

If you're an in-house marketer, it can be daunting to start or scale an ABM programme. Or to know how to make sure your ABM has the cut-through to stand out. (Because let's face it, if ABM is such a good idea then your competitors are already doing it.)

This "big book" is here to arm you with arguments, answers and a few bright ideas.

If you like it, we hope it inspires you to give your own ABM programme a go or to broaden your ABM horizons. And we not-so-secretly hope you'll give us a call when you do.

ABM 101:

GETTING STARTED WITH ABM

WHAT ACTUALLY IS IT?

Account Based Marketing (ABM)

is a brilliant tool in any marketer's arsenal: targeting existing customers or prospects based on knowledge of the account, treating each company or vertical as a "market of one". It's different than some other marketing strategies because it requires complete buy-in from sales too. Both teams need to work together to get the best results.



THERE ARE THREE MAIN TYPES OF ABM:

1:1 OR STRATEGIC ABM

- Typically targets up to 10 accounts.
- The most personalised form of ABM and therefore the most time intensive... but offers the highest potential ROI.
- Involves creating custom messaging tailored to each account, and even to each individual within the decision-making unit (DMU).
- Great for building relationships with high value accounts, changing perceptions and cross-selling.

1:FEW OR ABM LITE

- Typically targets between 10-100 accounts.
- A medium level of personalisation and therefore a medium level of time investment.
- Involves creating dedicated campaigns for small groups, such as by vertical or region.
- Great for reaching a broader audience while still providing a personal touch that demonstrates deeper understanding.

1:MANY OR PROGRAMMATIC ABM

- Typically targets 100+ accounts (but could be thousands!).
- The least personalised and time intensive form of ABM that uses technology to target lots of accounts at once.
- Involves creating content that has broad appeal to accounts with similar characteristics.
- Great for mass lead and demand generation and promoting new products or services.

IT'S NOT AS DAUNTING AS IT LOOKS!

GET STARTED IN 5 STEPS...

1

Start with a pilot

Because it can be resource intensive, it can be tough to get stakeholder buy-in for ABM, particularly if it's not a strategy your team have tried before. That's why many marketers choose to begin with a small but scalable pilot. ABM for a small group of accounts, a single vertical, or prospects with a single common pain point. Then when you demonstrate how successful your programme was, it'll be easier to get budget allocated to a larger one next time around.

2

Define your Ideal Customer Profile (ICP)

Your ICP is a description of the company or person that benefits the most from your product or service. It can include factors like industry, company size, geography and pain points. It can also include job titles, which will help you to understand the type of tactics you'll need to implement: a time-poor CEO will need different communications than a team leader, for example. The more defined your ICP, the more impactful your campaigns will be! And it'll help you with the next step too...

3

Align with sales to build a target account list

For ABM to succeed, there must be close collaboration between sales and marketing. Both should understand the accounts, messaging and journey. Consider setting up joint meetings to discuss priorities and responsibilities at each stage, because alignment doesn't just mean planning together: it also involves real-time feedback. When sales share insights from their conversations with targets, marketing can refine the messaging to better resonate. The first stage of this collaboration is to work with sales to build a list of target accounts. You might choose companies that have recently gone through an investment cycle, launched products, or changed leadership – because they may be more open to new solutions. Whatever accounts you decide on, together you'll then need to identify the specific contacts within the DMU.

4

Choose your strategy

Now it's time to choose your strategy – 1:1, 1:few or 1:many. This may be immediately obvious: if you've only identified 4 target accounts... 1:1 it is! Whereas if there are 15, it might be trickier to decide, and you'll need to weigh up how much time and money you have available to invest in the programme. Generally speaking, potential ROI goes up as personalisation increases, but so does the required resource investment. If your heart is set on 1:1 or 1:few but you've got too many accounts to make it feasible for your team, consider outsourcing elements of the project or starting with a small first phase.

5

Develop personalised content

ABM requires personalised content tailored to each target account's pain points and objectives. You may choose to start with bespoke emails or LinkedIn messages, but content like custom case studies, webinars, whitepapers or direct mail will demonstrate a far deeper level of understanding. Every single touchpoint should add value. For 1:1 and 1:few journeys, you'll also want to consider where and how sales will follow up on the content to maximise its impact.

COMMON BARRIERS AND HOW TO OVERCOME THEM

I DON'T HAVE THE BUDGET

Marketing Week's State of B2B Marketing shows that, from late 2023-24, 59% of B2B marketers have been asked to deliver more with fewer resources.ⁱ When times are tough and budgets are tight, it's tempting to cut back on innovation and experimentation. But McKinsey research suggests that "as disruption increases, business as usual becomes riskier than innovation".ⁱⁱ Experimentation is crucial to making breakthroughs and improvements.

"Collective strategies, collaboration, cross-functional partnerships, and teamwork will be the best paths to incremental return on your budget allocation over the next year... B2B marketing leaders should aggressively invest in areas that can have an outsized impact on growth, especially through cross-functional collaboration."ⁱⁱⁱ

– Forrester Budget Planning Guide 2025

ABM makes the relationship between sales and marketing more seamless and can improve efficiencies. By ensuring both teams are working in tandem towards the same goals, you're avoiding duplication of effort and wasted spend. And in an environment where you're pressured to deliver, ROI is more likely found with the leads that are closest to conversion: those your sales team have already identified as having the most intent. Plus, proactive sales support makes the programme more likely to succeed.

So if investment is a concern, consider reallocating part of your existing budget towards a small ABM pilot that, for example, only focuses on the sales team's top 10 hot prospects.

I DON'T HAVE ENOUGH TIME OR PEOPLE

You're busy (we bet you wish you could skip that next meeting!) and your team is under a lot of pressure to deliver. There are two ways to work around resource constraints.

1) Give a small pilot a try. As an example, for one of our global logistics clients, we recommended beginning with just 6 key target accounts in one geography. One successfully converted almost right away and another followed a few months later!

2) Outsource at least some of the work. Consider partnering with an external agency who can tackle the ABM legwork for you. Yes, as ABM specialists we are bound to say that – but an expert partnership can drive additional ROI and tackle tasks outside of your team's core competencies, such as in-depth desk research or video production.

I DON'T HAVE THE RIGHT TECH & DATA

You might think your tech stack isn't quite up to scratch for ABM. But even if your CRM isn't perfect, and marketing automation still sits on your we'll-get-round-to-it shopping list, that doesn't mean you can't start your journey.

Because of the sheer number of contacts involved, 1:many does require the right tech and at least a degree of automation to be effective. If you're really keen to do 1:many and aren't averse to adding new systems to your stack, there are several ABM-specific softwares like 6sense or Demandbase that you can implement, but these of course require time and cost investment. However, a small 1:few or 1:1 pilot is more easily handled manually without the need for tech (all you really need is a spreadsheet!), particularly if you've engaged your sales team.

If your CRM isn't up to scratch, your first-party data might not be either. Manually researching the right individuals across a variety of sources like LinkedIn is a time-intensive but incredibly useful exercise. Or if you don't fancy doing it by hand, many ABM tools can enrich your lead data automatically. You may want to go a step beyond firmographic data (like job role and location) and into intent data: whether the company is 'sales ready'. Intent data can be gathered, for example, through posing extra questions like "What's your timeline for solving this problem?" when asking a prospect or customer to download a piece of gated content.

OUR SALES AND MARKETING TEAMS **ARE TOO SILOED**

After we've hammered home the importance of the sales and marketing relationship, you may think your teams are just too siloed to make ABM work. But 66% of surveyed professionals say ABM is significantly improving marketing and sales alignment.^{iv}

Maybe that's because good ABM involves engaging the sales team right at the beginning to agree the strategy and ways of working; and also checking in with them throughout the project's duration. Marketing can support sales by letting them know when activity is going out, so sales can strike while the iron's hot.

They'll love the doors it opens! And as the programme rolls out, by combining the quantitative engagement metrics from marketing with the qualitative sentiment that sales hear, both teams are able to test, adjust and improve their approaches.

We recommend choosing a couple of salespeople who are already engaged with marketing to be "champions" for your activity internally. Once your teams demonstrate good ROI together, and your champions can provide testimonials of how essential marketing support was to securing the sale, you'll find it easier to get wider buy-in.

SALES AND MARKETING: THE PERFECT PARTNERS

Bangers and mash. Strawberries and cream. Sales and marketing. When it comes to ABM, one just isn't as good without the other.

Sales and marketing must work together throughout the programme to maximise performance and success. When they aren't aligned, ABM programmes can fail to reach the potential ROI they would otherwise generate.

The relationship is particularly critical across:

- Identifying key accounts: Both sales and marketing have a role to play in establishing the Ideal Customer Profile (ICP) and exploring which existing clients and prospects meet this profile. One side may have valid reasons for putting forward an account or group that the other side hadn't even considered.
- Researching the brands to find out essential information: Research is vital when personalising ABM messaging for specific pain-points. Sales and marketing can help inform each other's research to make both more effective. Can marketing interview the salespeople to find out enlightening details from previous meetings?
- Agreeing on the working relationship and processes: This includes outreach and follow-ups throughout the customer journey, ensuring both sides are communicating with one another to prevent missed opportunities or long gaps between touchpoints.

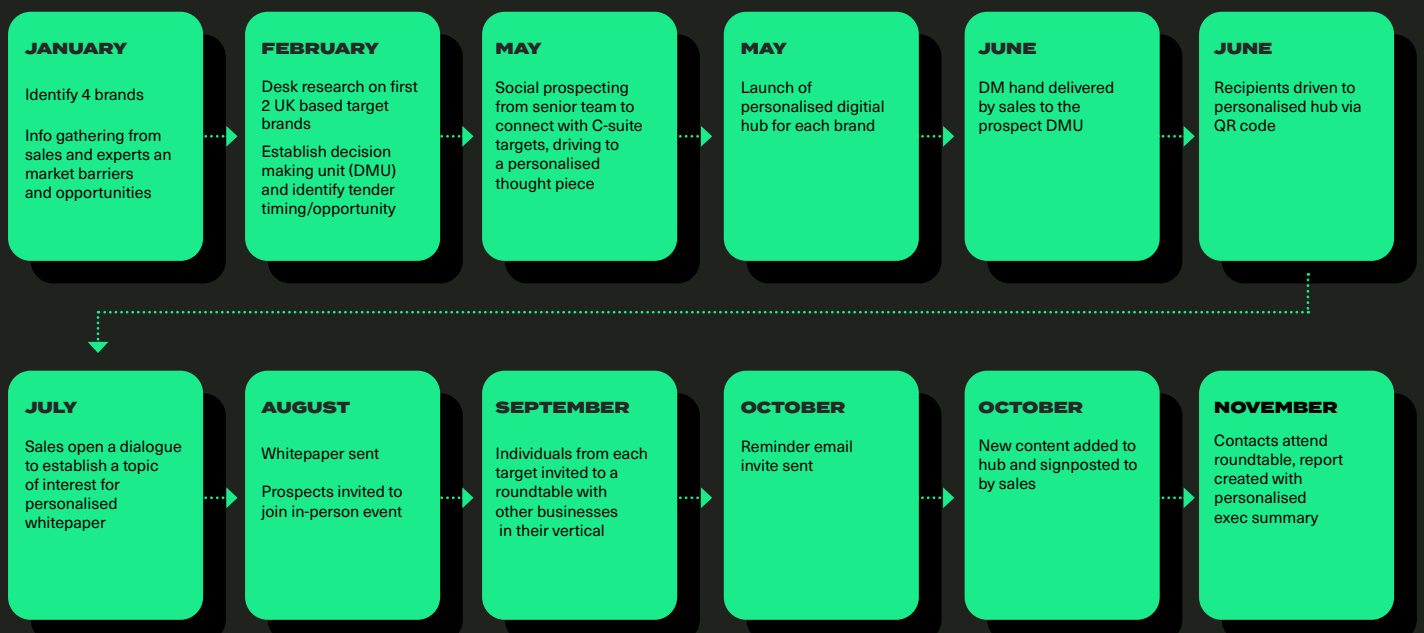
- The collection of customer feedback:
The feedback loop of customer feedback via sales is critical, allowing marketing to continuously refine messaging, channels and tactics as the campaign progresses. It's essentially real-time testing and adjusting.
- Identifying measurements of success:
Both sales and marketing must agree on KPIs, how success will be measured and whose responsibility it is to measure it. This is particularly important for long-tail sales cycles where it might take 18 months to see conversions. Can sales help by passing along anecdotal positive feedback from targets, that marketing can then use to get stakeholder buy-in for further ABM campaigns?
- Attribution of sales and marketing effort:
Everyone wants their share of the ROI! Agreeing on this attribution and how it will be transparently reported on and shared internally helps both sides of the fence to achieve their targets.

TACTICS

(OR IDEAS YOU CAN STEAL)

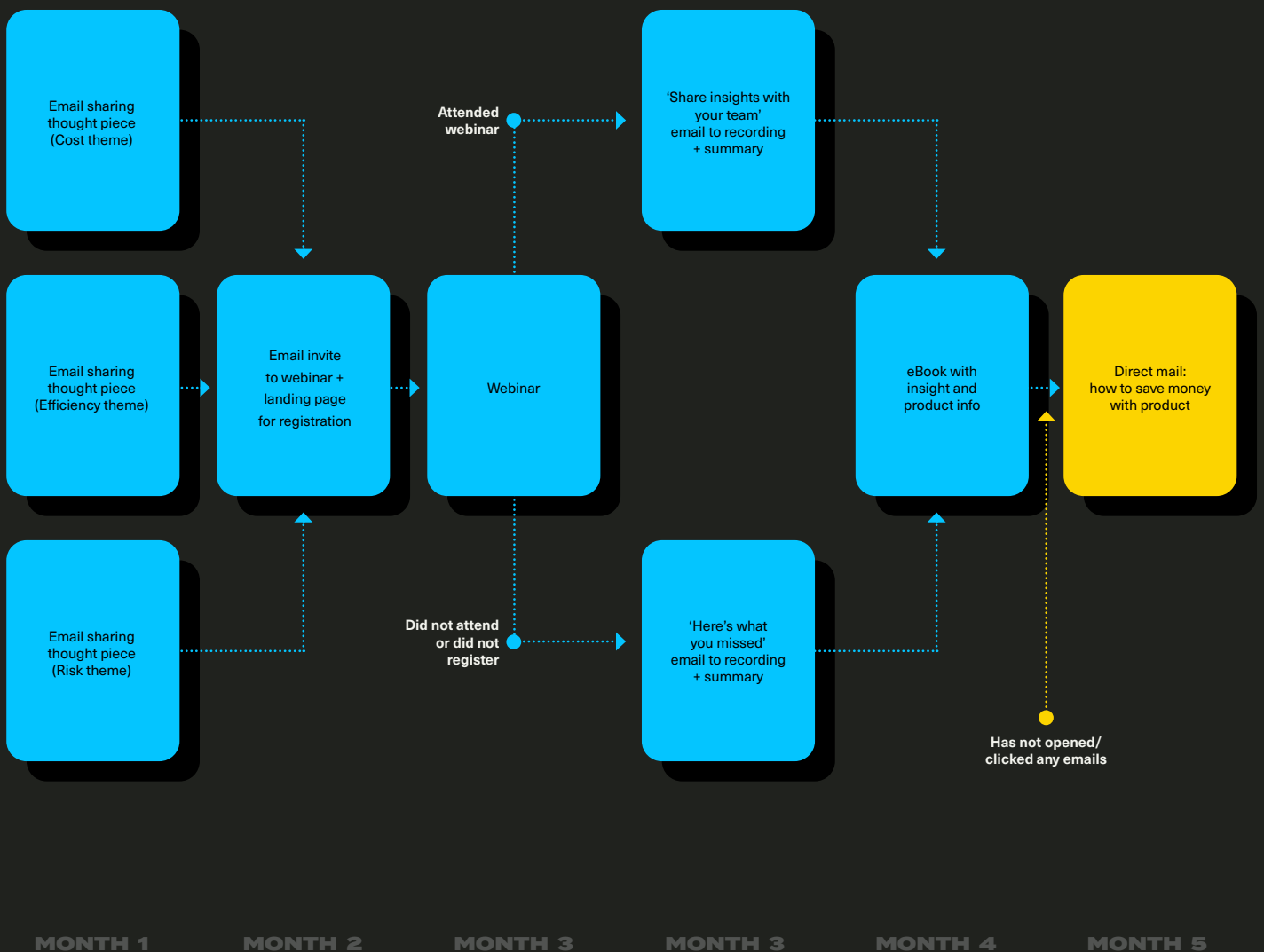
We all need a swipe-and-deploy file of great ideas to inform our own campaigns.

You might get some 1:1 ABM inspiration from this year-long strategy we created for one of our customers, targeting 4 new prospect brands in 2 geographies. It's a "phygital" journey (a blend of physical touchpoints like direct mail and digital ones) because that's how we see the greatest cut-through. And it involves hyper-personalised and thoroughly researched pieces that explore the synergies between our client and their targets.



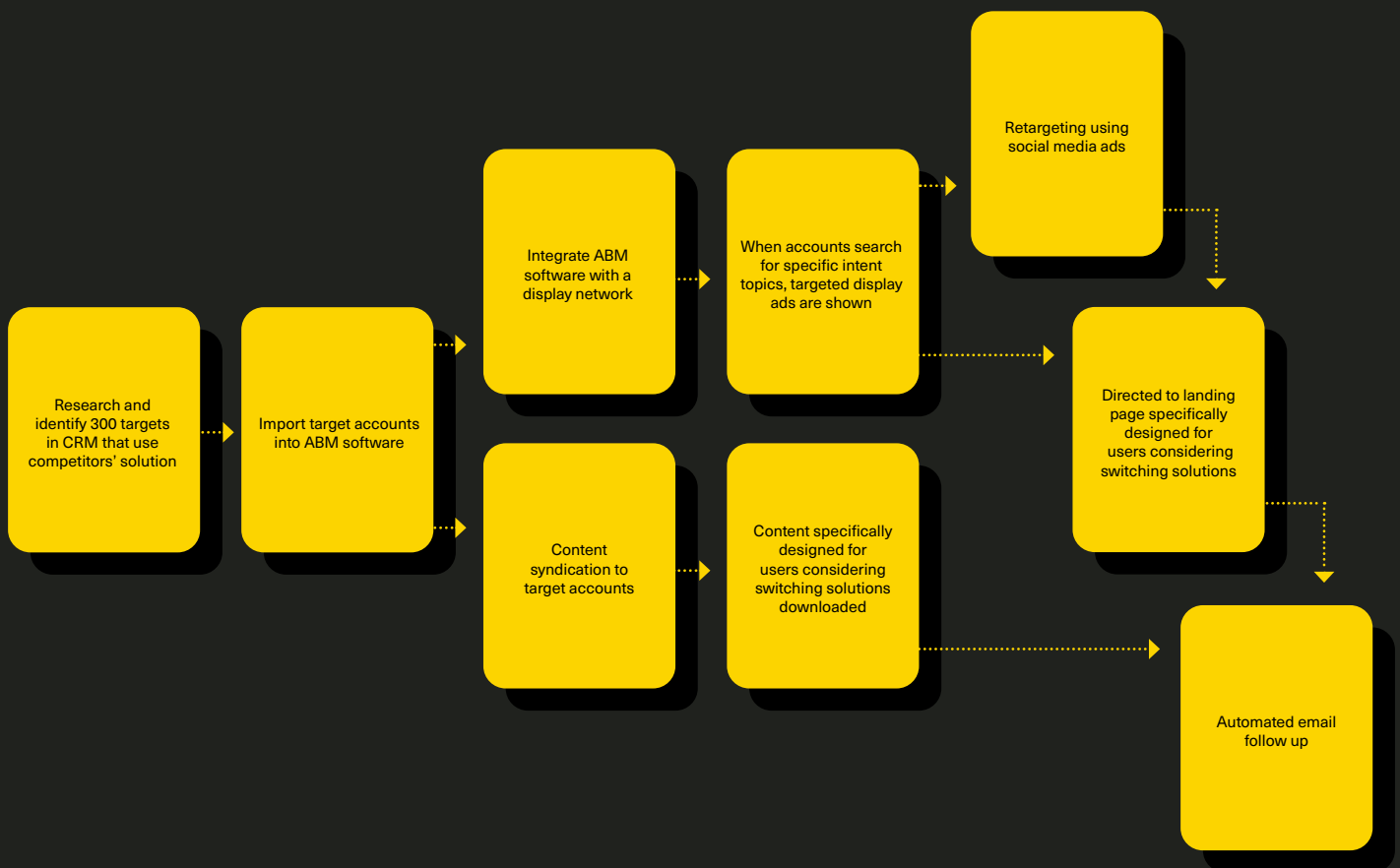
Here's another of our real strategies for 1:few ABM to launch a new product to existing customers – in this case 75 organisations of a similar size within a single geography. Individual contacts in the DMU were split into three groups based on the pain-points of their role: cost, efficiency or risk.

The webinar was a common theme that featured elements addressing all three pain-points. This was a primarily digital journey with a physical piece at the end for those who didn't respond to online communications. Critically, the sales team were on standby to interact with those customers who indicated interest.

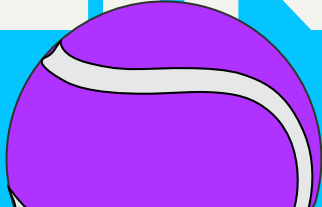



And here's an example 1:many strategy, using a popular ABM tool to integrate and automate a cross-channel campaign for 300 targets that currently use a competitor's solution. Action was triggered by the targets' searches, and depending on which intent topic they searched for, a specific set of targeted ads were shown. The webpage featured customer testimonials and compelling reasons to switch, with a form to enquire and/or download content.

Additionally, an ebook – specifically created for users considering switching solutions – was syndicated to these target accounts – was syndicated to these target accounts. The landing page for downloading the ebook featured BANT questions (Budget, Authority, Need, Timeline) for automatic lead scoring, which helped sales to understand which accounts were the hottest prospects.



SCALING UP

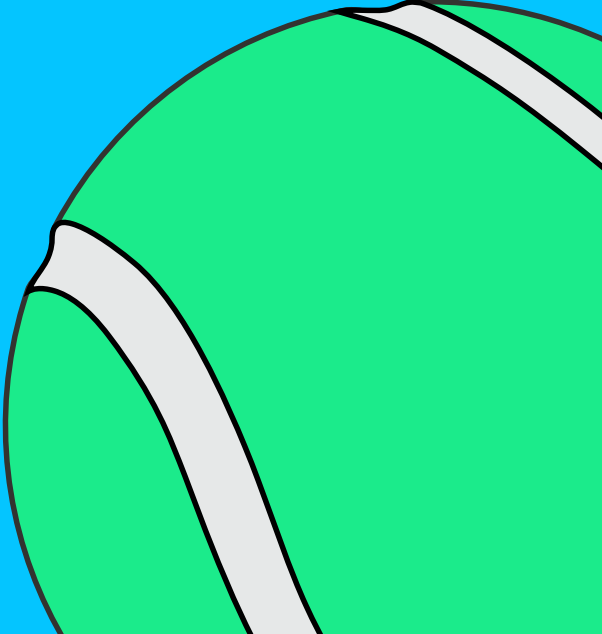


HOW TO GROW AND SCALE

YOUR EXISTING PROGRAMME

For many organisations, ABM is no longer 'new news'. It's likely that you may be facing overcoming a legacy rather than setting up a shiny pilot. When establishing ABM from the ground up, you can build the foundations yourself. But scaling and evolving is tricky: there will be elements that you can't move, or resistant stakeholders who say "we don't do it that way, because we've always done it this way."

If you're looking to take your programme to the next level, we've assembled top tips from other 'ABM-ers' who've faced the same challenges.



BUILD ON THE SALES AND MARKETING

RELATIONSHIP

The sales and marketing relationship only becomes more important the more you want to grow your programme – and it cuts both ways. Just as sales shouldn't be operating disconnected pockets of ABM without marketing's say-so, it's also not good enough for marketing to say to sales "here are 100 MQLs, get on with it". Bringing in hundreds of barely qualified leads turns sales into seagulls, picking through a rubbish heap trying to find the good stuff.

It's important to shift from net fishing to spear fishing: focusing on bringing in a smaller group of the best possible leads. Deepen your ICP by understanding what type of customers buy more and do so more frequently. To do this, sales must have significant involvement in both defining the ICP and selecting targets (in some organisations, they even own it!).

Sales pipeline is often a better measure of ABM success than number of leads – and it's a more convincing metric for the board and for sales themselves too. By making their lives easier, sales are more likely to offer buy-in and act as champions. Pick a couple of salespeople to really bring on-side and act as your advocates internally, presenting your programme to their wider team.

In an ideal world, you'll be looking to move towards a RevOps (revenue operations: the strategic integration of sales, marketing and customer service) model, because a great ABM programme isn't sustainable with distinctly separate sales and marketing functions.

RE-EXAMINE YOUR

TECH STACK

Sadly, it's time for an activity that utterly thrills all marketers: a lovely audit. Audit your tools to find the ones that are making the most impact and those that create limitations – both in terms of functionality and usability.

Firstly, is there truly a lack of functionality, or are the tools not being fully utilised? Build out your best practice: a practical step by step guide of what the tools are there to do and how they do it. Provide guidance to your team on the expectations of what they should be able to achieve using these systems, but listen if they push back on what's actually possible.

Also focus on future needs: where will you be in 3 years, and will your current solutions have the capability to support those needs? If you need to replace existing systems, it can be a laborious process and it'll take time to get the board bought in – so build this into your plan with as much notice as possible.

Finally, think about what functionality would really elevate the efficacy of your programme. For example, the average DMU now includes 11 people – and there might be up to 25 within a big enterprise account. A tool to map the 'influence web' (or the relationship coverage with all these stakeholders, including who you do and don't know and who is already on-side) would help you to understand the complex way business decisions are made and how best to sway them. If this isn't possible with your current stack, think about adding it to your roadmap.

SCALING

PRACTICALLY

If you want to scale your programme you'll need more time, which means it's important to focus on actual business value... and empowering your team to say no to ABM work if there's no value. (That means not agreeing to design up endless sales decks without assessing what they're achieving!) By aligning with sales and leadership to assess their goals, you can more accurately prioritise projects that matter.

Another way to free up time involves degrees of personalisation. You can create suites of readily available content – like case studies and propositions – for sales to use in a toolkit by repurposing the pieces you're creating for 1:1. Projects can then be given a 'flavour' of personalisation using the 80/20 rule (80% stays the same, 20% is custom) for those accounts that don't justify the full 1:1 treatment. Though there's an initial time investment in creating these assets and toolkits, they were being created for 1:1 anyway!

If you're looking to scale then you'll also probably need to secure extra budget. To do this, it's important to find the golden nuggets of quick wins within the next few months (ahead of your organisation's next budget-setting cycle), and promote these across the organisation – perhaps via an executive sponsor – so that your senior stakeholders have visibility over what you're doing. The more visible your success stories are, the more likely you are to get additional budget.

Of course, you could end up a victim of your own success and create too much demand with sales. If this happens, you could consider creating a sales questionnaire to understand how appropriate each account truly is for 1:1 (and score it against your own ICP criteria as a marketing team for extra ratification), again empowering your team to prioritise the right projects.

HISTORY

REPEATS ITSELF

And finally, whether you're new to the organisation or you ran the previous phases yourself, don't forget that there's history in your ABM programme which you're doomed to repeat if you never look back at it. Listen to what's been done before to find out what failed, so that your next phase can be bolder and brighter.

THE **IMPORTANCE** OF CREATIVITY IN ABM

Of the two Bs in B2B, neither one of them stands for Boring. And yet so much of B2B marketing is muted and forgettable. Maybe that's why System1 research shows that 75% of B2B ads are ineffective!'

'Inspiring' brands are five times more likely to be a B2B buyer's first choice, and more than twice as likely to be remembered when buyers are in market.^{vi} And as 95% of B2B buyers are not ready to buy today,^{vii} it's essential that your marketing is memorable and impactful.

Nowhere is this more important than in ABM. When you're targeting only a handful of prospects, it's essential that your marketing is creative enough to cut through.

PERSONALISATION VS CUSTOMISATION

Some marketers may think that creativity = personalisation. But there is a difference between personalisation and creative customisation.

Customisation is shaping a piece of ABM to be truly relevant to the recipient. To reflect their needs, their strategy and their role. It doesn't ominously say "I know who you are" and unsettle them. It says: "I know what you value".

Instead of just a logo-on-a-pdf, why not send a standardised report that appears totally customised through the use of a custom exec summary. Ask the lead salesperson or account manager for relevant insights that they know the target will appreciate, which can be included within the summary.

Or if you work in supply chain management for example, instead of a panel discussion, why not invite key contacts to a sustainable wine tasting evening? Each sustainably sourced wine could come from the same location as their products are sourced from, opening a conversation about the environmental benefits of near-sourcing.

CREATIVITY IN CHANNELS

Creativity can be found in choice of channel as well as execution. It's almost impossible for an email to cut through the noise of a busy inbox. So instead of sending yet another email to a target, why not try what we've done at The Creative Consultancy. We turned our proposition into an illustrated fairytale, customised with characters from each target brands, and sent them a physical copy. Our first wave of this activity had a 100% response rate!

BUT HOW DO I MEASURE CREATIVITY?

B2B sales can be a slow burn. So if you don't yet have concrete results, you can use qualitative feedback like stakeholder comments to quantify your creativity... and get further buy-in for other ABM programmes. On an ABM project for Royal Mail, we gathered comments from the targets when they received a hand-delivered direct mail piece:

"I think the whole team is impressed at the creativity and impact of the messaging! Certainly one of the more creative proposals I have ever received."

"The team were very impressed and appreciative of all the efforts you've gone through. We definitely will be looking into how we can hopefully use your services in the near future."

WHY INCLUDE DIRECT MAIL IN **ABM?**

Think direct mail is a dinosaur, banished to the relics of the past? Think again! Direct mail is going through a resurgence in the UK (spend is on the rise and the market is in growth) which Statista attributes to its “personalised approach fostering connections with consumers in a digital age”.^{viii}

Why is this, and why should you consider adding it to your ABM programme?

WE'RE ALL FATIGUED BY DIGITAL

There's a lot of noise in this digital world, driven in part by spam emails and a constant bombardment of online ads. 37% of global web users have already adopted ad blockers!^{ix} Direct mail provides much-needed respite from screens and a physical, tactile way of interacting with marketing that can be very memorable.

THIRD-PARTY COOKIE

PHASE-OUT

Third-party cookies come from web domains outside of the one a user is visiting, and marketers use them to understand purchasing habits. Google announced they would phase out these cookies on Chrome by 2025. Though the total depreciation has been paused, Google remain in talks with regulators and it's unlikely the notion has disappeared.

The loss of third-party cookies means marketers will need to rely on first-party data. This is fine for existing users that you have data for, but what about those who've opted out or prospects who haven't visited your website yet? Banner ads and emails will become less personalised as marketers have to catch as broad a range of people in their net as possible. All of this will contribute to the transient nature of email marketing... but this is where direct mail can still excel.

GAIN**CUT-THROUGH
WITH DECISION-MAKERS**

At The Creative Consultancy, we incorporate direct mail into our ABM strategies when the individuals within the DMU are very time-poor, such as C-Suite. These people typically have “gatekeepers” such as an executive assistant who will prevent your emails from reaching their intended recipient. An intriguing direct mail piece, particularly if hand-addressed or hand-delivered, is much more likely to reach the individual. Its unusual nature is likely to stand out and generate cut-through, provided you keep the messaging short and sweet enough to hold their attention.

IT'S**MEMORABLE**

Generally speaking, we're more likely to commit something to long-term memory if it's sensory and experiential, and positive emotional triggers can enhance memory coding too. Mail by its very definition is tangible and sensory, providing a physical experience that can't be replicated online.

IT'S INCREDIBLY**EFFECTIVE**

Don't just take our word for direct mail's efficacy! Because you can hyper-personalise and hyper-target direct mail, and because of its novelty and tangibility, it can be very engaging. 32% delivers a commercial action such as purchasing or visiting a website.^x To use the US market as an example, in 2023 direct mail outperformed all other channels in terms of ROI, with an average of 161%. (Email and paid search followed with ROIs of 44% and 38%).^{xi} All in all, campaigns with direct mail in the mix are 52% more likely to report ROI effects and 43% more likely to report revenue uplifts.^{xii}

Rory Sutherland, Vice Chairman at Ogilvy UK, summarises it best:

“Messages that are costly to convey, we perceive in a different way... That's because we react to things completely differently depending on which medium they appear. No one has ever thrown away a Fedex envelope unopened. There are certain messages you cannot convey in digital media... Print, the great seducer.”

CAN DIRECT MAIL **EVER** BE GREEN?

In today's (quite rightly!) more sustainably focused world, you'd be forgiven for thinking that anything involving print is out of the question. But emails – often cited as the eco-friendly alternative – aren't exempt from environmental impact either. Because they require electricity and infrastructure to distribute, sending a single text-based email emits 4g of CO₂e (carbon dioxide equivalent). This can increase to 50g for emails with attachments.^{xiii} So if sustainability is on your agenda, it's important to consider a balance of formats in your marketing mix.

And though a single printed piece does have a higher carbon footprint than a single email, when you look at the CO₂ cost per sale, the tables turn:

"Since email is seen as a cheap and effective channel, the volumes of emails being sent are rising significantly – whereas companies tend to be more cautious about direct mail... As there are so many emails being sent out... the CO₂ per sale through email is greater than the CO₂ through direct mail." – The DMA^{xiv}

So it's the quantity of emails pinging across the ether every day that creates the real challenge. If every Brit sent one less email a day, we'd save 16,433 tonnes of carbon a year. That's the same as over 80,000 flights from London to Madrid!^{xv} Storing emails has an impact too: if everyone deleted just 50 emails, it would be the equivalent of turning off 2.7 billion light bulbs for one hour.^{xvi}

If mass-emailing contacts isn't a truly sustainable option, can you reduce the volume sent and bring direct mail into your ABM campaigns to help balance things out?

HERE'S HOW TO ADD DM TO YOUR MIX

1

Start with data

Just like with email, sending mail to vast swathes of contacts isn't a great eco-move. Start by cleaning up your data to make sure it's up-to-date, improving deliverability. Then segregate your data to ensure only the most relevant companies and individuals are receiving it. This is what makes mail particularly great for 1:1 or 1:few ABM: less pieces being produced means less wastage, but still the potential for huge ROI.

2

Choose materials carefully

Particularly for 1:many campaigns cut back on the amount of paper used by aiming for smaller, lighter mail with less pages and avoid envelopes with plastic address windows. Try self-mailers or postcards instead. Recycled paper uses less water and energy, and if the stock is approved by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) you can use their logo on your mailer. Vegetable-based inks use far less petroleum than other inks, while soy-based ink offers brighter colours – meaning you need less

3

Get creative

You don't have to stick with standard paper! You can craft mail out of elephant poo paper or seeded paper, which can be embedded with the seeds of flowers, herbs or vegetables. All your customer needs to do is plant them, water them and watch them grow.

4

Measure your success

By tracking who's converting, you can test and adjust your direct mail for the next round of campaigning. Try using a QR code to track website visits back to a specific campaign or even to an individual customer, with highly targeted one to one or one to few approaches.

5

Choose a sustainable partner

Ultimately you want to choose a partner who will create your direct mail with your business' sustainability and reputation in mind, coming up with ideas for the strategy, design and distribution based around environmental impact. This extends to your printer too: some offer carbon offsetting schemes with certificates to prove your dedication.

ABM CASE STUDY

420X ROI AND 2X GRAND PRIX AWARDS

THE

CHALLENGE

Royal Mail is the UK's greenest delivery partner for letters and parcels, with on-foot delivery helping them achieve around half the carbon per parcel of their competitors. They were looking to use this unique selling message to open the door with 10 large retailers.

To establish our target list we extensively researched the UK's most sustainable multi-channel retailers, including their initiatives, ESG reports, green awards and credentials. We overlaid these brands against Royal Mail's priority list, generating 10 targets.

The piece needed to be engaging enough to achieve instant cut-through with senior decision-makers, while still sharing the breadth of the green message, including Royal Mail's net zero by 2040 strategy.

THE CREATIVE

This was the perfect opportunity for a 1:1 ABM programme. We developed a selection of super personalised 'boxes within boxes' – the larger box the equivalent volume of CO2 produced in a typical delivery, and the smaller box half the size to showcase the approx. 50% less CO2 produced by a Royal Mail delivery.

The boxes were highly sustainable, using eco-friendly inks and materials. The boxes and accompanying landing pages – accessible via QR codes – were designed using the brands' own colours and written with their own tone of voice.

Messaging focused on the parallels between the brands' ESG strategies – researched through combing through their reports, PR and investor info – and Royal Mail's net zero strategy, demonstrating how Royal Mail could help deliver their green objectives. Some landing pages featured vox pop interviews with real shoppers, sharing how important they felt green deliveries would be for the brand.

The boxes were hand delivered by a dancing postie, echoing the TV ad and wider green campaign running at the time which featured 'light on their feet' posties.

To keep the ABM highly sustainable, we focused on targeting the two key decision makers in each brand: the Director of ESG and COO. The ESG position was essential to influencing the carrier decision, whilst the COO was likely the ultimate decision-maker. We researched these individuals to find out who they were, where they were based and when they would be in the office, to ensure the piece would not get stuck at reception – maximising chances of success. And we worked closely with sales to ensure prompt follow-up.

THE RESULTS

60% of the brands scanned the QR codes and Royal Mail had meaningful contact with 100% of the brands. Meetings were booked with several and 3 brands invited Royal Mail to tender. As a direct result of the campaign, one brand even began a paid trial with Royal Mail worth millions. In total, the estimated sales pipeline offers an ROI of around 420 times the cost of the activity.

The Creative Consultancy won the Grand Prix at the DMA Awards and the B2B Marketing Awards for this campaign too!

MEASUREMENT AND

RESULTS

Monitoring and analysing the performance of your ABM efforts is crucial for long-term success and getting buy-in and budget for further phases.

DEFINING YOUR KPIs

Decide on your Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) up front so that you can establish a benchmark. These can include a number of different metrics:

- **Intent tracking:** Behaviours from your audience that signal what they're likely to do next. By assigning behaviours different score values (i.e. an email click is 5 points, 2 email clicks in a week is 20 points), you can build up a picture of intent and pass along leads to sales when they hit a predefined threshold.
- **BANT (Budget, Authority, Need, Timeline):** By asking questions like "Who makes the decisions for X in your company?" or "Are you looking to implement Y solution in the next 3 months?" you can enrich the quality of the leads you pass along to sales, improving the likelihood of conversion down the line.
- **ROI:** This could include pipeline value for longer-tail sales cycles, or acquired business. The important thing is to make sure ROI can be attributed to your ABM activity. This could be measured anecdotally for 1:1 or 1:few (sales sharing that they believe the activity was essential for opening doors, for example) or with attribution tags (applied automatically or manually by sales) in your CRM.
- **Engagement and response:** Though these are 'vanity metrics' and less likely to resonate with your internal stakeholders, measuring engagement like clicks can help to show trending improvements in your programme, provided you don't rely on them too heavily. Response rates like form fills are better as these demonstrate real lead generation.
- **Pipeline velocity:** This means measuring how quickly your targets move through your sales pipeline. Measuring this can not only show improvement, but also helps to identify bottlenecks and where people are getting stuck.
- **Customer Lifetime Value (CLV):** Nurturing and retaining your existing customers is just as important as securing new ones (and makes the most financial sense!). Growing CLV by improving either the average deal value or the average lifespan (or preferably both) via ABM is a powerful metric.

- **Account coverage:** The average B2B DMU is 11 people... but how many of them have you successfully engaged with? Tracking and improving the number of contacts you have in each account – and your relationship with them – helps to demonstrate the efficacy of your programme.
- **Net Promoter Score (NPS):** Your overall NPS score is unlikely to be directly attributed to ABM, but you can check in with specific accounts before and after your programme to see how their NPS rating improved.
- **Sales and customer feedback:**
The power of qualitative feedback shouldn't be underestimated! In addition to the anecdotal sales attribution mentioned above, it's important to collate any other feedback from sales and customers. Compiled together, quotes like "The whole team is impressed at the impact of the messaging! Certainly one of the more creative proposals I have ever received. It would be great to see some pricing as well (and if you can be as creative with this!)" (a real quote from one of our customers' targets!) can provide powerful rationale to the board for more budget.

TESTING

- Use ABM analytics tools to monitor engagement, campaign performance, and conversions as you go. In your planning stage, build in regular time for analysis and data evaluation to see which strategies work, and the time to make adjustments as needed.
- We recommend running meaningful A/B split tests at various stages. Not just "does X subject line or social ad perform better than Y", but seeing if an email nurture sequence that utilises more dynamic content performs better than another, or whether introducing direct mail at the beginning of a programme (to get attention) or at the end of a programme (to convince those who haven't interacted digitally) performs better.
- Regularly check for trends and patterns in your data to understand what content is resonating most with your accounts. ABM is best done iteratively, meaning you have the agility to pivot your strategy towards new content or formats that are working better, rather than being locked in to predetermined tactics.
- Market dynamics are also continuously changing, so it's also important to refine your strategy after any major industry-relevant market events. For example, many businesses were impacted by geopolitical disruptions in the Red Sea, which affected their ability to serve their customers. Were contacts more or less likely to engage in this time? Which types of content were they most likely to engage with? Were they looking to be reassured or for content that helped face the issues head on?

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE:

AI IN ABM

Artificial intelligence – particularly generative AI (genAI) that can create its own text, images and data – offers a whole world of opportunity across ABM.

But adoption is hard work. Forrester survey data tracks the share of marketing organisations using genAI: between Q1 and Q2 2023, the share tripled from 19% to 56%, only to fall back to 26% in Q4.^{xvii} This suggests that the AI honeymoon period was over, and the very real challenge of adoption had begun.

BARRIERS TO

AI ADOPTION

Business cases: Many CMOs look to AI as a way to economise, but not necessarily at how it can be used for growth and opportunity. While doing things faster is the first benefit, efficiency focuses on reducing labour costs and gets in the way of more sophisticated use cases. Improving marketing performance is just as important! When programmes see significant cost savings by implementing AI, these costs should be redeployed back into the programme to allow for scaling.

AI literacy: Not only are different organisations at different stages of AI literacy, but individual departments within companies are too! Consider the purpose of what your team is actually trying to achieve, and have a vision of what you'd like AI to look like in your programme, before you jump straight to the specific tools. Understand what capabilities your team currently have and where you may need to upskill.

Rogue use of tools: The 'rogue' or independent and unregulated use of genAI tools by employees can make it difficult to adopt a consistent approach and can leave companies open to risk. It's born both out of curiosity, but also staff fears about their future

and job security. *The machines are coming for our jobs!*, the media cries – and your employees listen. As a marketing leader, you can help to set the pace and the vision for augmentation and enhancement to alleviate these fears: it's not destructive tech, it's your helpful assistant.

WHAT GROUP

ARE YOU IN?

Forrester's research has identified four groups of marketing leaders based on their level of genAI adoption.

Integrators: This group have already integrated genAI into their go-to-market strategies and workflows. They've been looking at it for years, assessing data, tech and processes even before the launch of ChatGPT. They developed in-house experts and committed budget to help make it happen. In ABM, this group are pioneering new methods of data segmentation, personalisation and content generation.

Explorers: This group are experimenting with genAI use cases, piloting AI-infused ABM projects to help establish their capabilities, and understanding how this influences the channels they use and what they can produce. These leaders can advance by adding more use cases, like analysing code for media reporting, data summarisation, and the localisation and translation of content.

Considerers: Interested in genAI but yet to experiment with it, this group are starting to look at how they could get ready to start bringing AI into their sphere. They want to watch how other businesses approach things and crowdsource ideas from others. They probably don't have the tech in place just yet, but they're starting to become aware of the tools.

Rejectors: A group who have no intention of using genAI, thank you very much. This is a relatively small group of marketers who are either not interested in engaging or can't, possibly because they're in highly risk averse industries who don't want the liability. This group can however take advantage of AI in ABM via hiring partners who use it on their behalf.

HOW CAN AI BE USED IN ABM?

Lead management: AI can analyse data from both sales and marketing, identifying gaps and areas of overlap. It can highlight priority leads based on their engagement with content and readiness to purchase, allowing for more informed outreach.

Targeting and personalisation: AI can identify patterns and predict what should come next. For targeting, this can help review which existing customers buy more and when, helping you to build on your ICP. You can personalise content in quantities that would be far too labour-intensive to do manually. And you can quickly aggregate data from LinkedIn, websites and industry news to discover trends to create content around.

Predictive analysis: AI could assess your data to find that, for example, prospects from the fashion sector typically reassess their warehousing at the end of the financial year. And that these prospects also attend conferences in the months before making this decision. Armed with this insight, your organisation can be present at the right conferences and follow up with perfectly timed content.

Improved customer engagement: AI can analyse customer interactions, content preferences and activity levels, allowing you to optimise the delivery of content. If a particular topic or product is getting more attention, subsequent communications can offer webinars, whitepapers or demos in this area.

Dynamic content: This ensures the right account is shown the right content based on their unique profiles. For example, if a target retailer only sells to the UK and only in-store, they receive one track of communications, versus a retailer selling globally online. But it can go one step further: if the UK customer engages with content about sustainability, the AI recognises this and pushes a case study or in-depth guide around green issues.

Gain insight: There are lots of ways AI can be used to gather insight. Ask Perplexity (an AI search engine) what you really need to know about a particular account and it'll crawl the internet for an answer. Train ChatGPT on your brand's proposition and then ask it to tell you more about it, gaining valuable insight about the way your proposition could be interpreted. Or build synthetic personas with ChatGPT – "As a CTO, what do you think of this messaging?" – to gain hypothetical but useful insight.

OKAY...BUT WHAT ARE

THE DOWNSIDES?

AI learns by crawling and aggregating opinions. And because the internet is a bit of a hellscape, AI can be trained on everything from cognitive biases to downright offensive opinions. (For example, when genAI Midjourney was used to create Barbies from around the world to promote the 2023 movie, the doll from South Sudan featured weaponry...) Meaning the output it produces should always be double checked by a human, or your brand could end up in hot water.

There's also a concern that widespread use of AI in creative industries like marketing could lead to a devaluation of human labour. The recent SAG-AFTRA strike in the US, where screenwriters asked for protection against AI-generated content, is one example of this manifesting in today's business world.

It's still too soon to know how these situations will unfold and how society will adapt to AI. But your organisation should consider how it can responsibly augment AI with human expertise. Alleviating the administrative ABM tasks like data summarisation that take up time unnecessarily, while ensuring creative decision-making is still done by people to prevent bias and risk.

ABOUT THE CREATIVE CONSULTANCY

We're an award-winning B2B creative agency, specialising in ABM that delivers serious ROI. 1:1 and 1:few are our sweet spots, but we build high-performing 1:many campaigns too.

OUR

APPROACH

B2B marketing shouldn't be boring.

Because businesspeople are, first and foremost, people. They eat fast food. They love their Miniature Schnauzer more than most humans. They find things funny. We believe talking to people at work is no different to talking to them at home. Except at work, they have even less time for jargon!

Your message has to be brave and compelling and human to cut through the noise. We'll paint a picture that's brighter and bolder than the competition. One person will remember long after the campaign is over. And in every strategy and stand-out creative we build for you, we'll always inject the human touch that has won us two Grand Prix awards.

WHAT WE DO

We work on campaigns of all shapes and sizes, but cross-channel ABM is our one true love. So we can handle all the stuff you'd expect including:

Sales enablement: We'll help deepen the sales-and-marketing relationship and arm your sales team with tools to help both parties see bigger and better results.

Demand generation: We'll create strategies and assets that drive good, qualified leads and make your marketing budget work harder.

Proposition: We'll help you develop your proposition and messaging to highlight what's different about your brand, products and services.

Insight: Discover what drives and motivates your customers. We'll do the heavy lifting to turn the data into insights you can make real decisions with.

Brand: Fallen out of love with your brand? We'll craft a visual and tonal identity that help you stand out in your industry and connect with customers.

Content: From social and webinars through to blogs, e-books and whitepapers, we've got the words and content strategies to move accounts through your funnel.

Direct mail: The pièce de résistance of any campaign, we'll create DM that stands-out, cuts-through and gets you noticed by senior stakeholders.

Digital: We'll create digital customer journeys, including paid social, digital display ads, landing pages and more, that drive results.

Video & photography: If you need a brand video with a witty script or a bold new photoshoot to support your campaign, we've got it covered in-house.

Illustration: When photography can't possibly capture all your brand has to offer, our creatives can craft (or animate) unique rights free illustrations.

READY TO TAKE THE NEXT STEP IN YOUR ABM JOURNEY?

Want to make your marketing budget work harder? Or just bounce ideas around with a friendly sounding-board ?

LET'S HAVE A CHAT

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