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Market Guide for Account-Based Marketing Platforms

Published 9 February 2021 - ID G00725858 - 17 min read

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Digital marketing leaders in B2B firms are investigating ABM platforms to grow new business and spur demand from existing customers through improved collaboration with sales teams. Use this research to scope requirements and use cases to select a platform that can drive measurable business value.

Overview

Key Findings

- B2B marketers' interest in account-based marketing (ABM) as a go-to-market approach remains robust, but many ABM programs are still early in development and have yet to achieve scale in terms of targeting 100 or more accounts.
- Successful ABM programs require marketing maturity, sufficient expertise, close collaboration between marketing and sales, and a set of technology solutions that enables delivery of personalized marketing engagement across multiple channels at scale.
- ABM platforms can bolster internal capabilities and fill execution gaps in systems of record such as marketing automation and sales force automation (SFA). As such, they are becoming a critical component of efficient and effective martech ecosystems in B2B organizations.
- ABM platform vendors are focusing on enhancing audience management capabilities; providing proprietary intent data and artificial intelligence (AI)-driven account activation and orchestration; and developing more sophisticated reporting and attribution modeling functionality.

Recommendations

As a B2B digital marketing leader responsible for account-based marketing, you should:

- Identify the technologies you need to run both a small-scale ABM pilot and an ABM program at scale. Work with sales leaders to determine whether a comprehensive platform approach or a more selective best-of-breed approach makes the most sense for the net new accounts and account expansion use cases you expect to encounter.
- Evaluate vendors based on the criteria that will be most important to your program, spanning audience management, account selection, engagement and reporting. Ask vendors how they plan to address gaps in their platforms in 2021 through native development and/or partnerships and integrations.
- Assess how an ABM platform will coexist with and potentially extend the capabilities of your systems of record, including SFA and marketing automation.

Market Definition

This document was revised on 23 February 2021. The document you are viewing is the corrected version. For more information, see the [Corrections](#) page on gartner.com.

ABM is a go-to-market strategy that builds on traditional B2B lead and relationship management practices. In ABM, B2B marketers align with sales counterparts to engage a defined set of high-priority accounts and buying committee members with targeted marketing and sales support. ABM platforms encompass capabilities that enable marketers to run ABM programs at scale, including account selection, planning, engagement and reporting. Features include audience management capabilities to ingest first-party and third-party data from multiple sources; data-driven and AI-driven scoring models to select accounts; and contact and lead-to-account matching to help with planning. Feature sets also comprise cross-channel activation/orchestration to drive engagement. ABM platforms may activate audiences via display advertising and retargeting, email and social marketing content syndication, and web personalization, using a mix of native capabilities and integrations with other systems. Also included are reporting across channels, accounts and programs to measure engagement, and attribution analysis to gauge funnel impact.

Market Description

For most B2B organizations, ABM represents a supplement to traditional demand generation efforts. B2B marketers with early-stage ABM programs tend to manage the often manual processes of account selection and reporting by leveraging existing marketing automation and SFA tools, and potentially leveraging outside data intelligence solutions for sales. For engagement, many early ABM programs limit their efforts to social advertising (typically on LinkedIn) and email marketing. As such, despite robust interest in ABM as a strategy, demand for dedicated ABM technology remains modest relative to incumbent marketing and SFA systems.

Based on inquiries with our clients and discussions with leading vendors, Gartner has found that B2B organizations typically turn to ABM platforms when targeting net new accounts at scale (i.e., hundreds or thousands of accounts). Companies that sell many products and SKUs, such as manufacturing firms, or large companies with a high level of market penetration also use ABM to cross-sell more of their existing products as well as complementary products to current customers.

For B2B marketers seeking scale in their ABM programs, ABM platforms help to address the four key components in the Gartner ABM Framework (see Figure 1) by supporting a number of related activities, including:

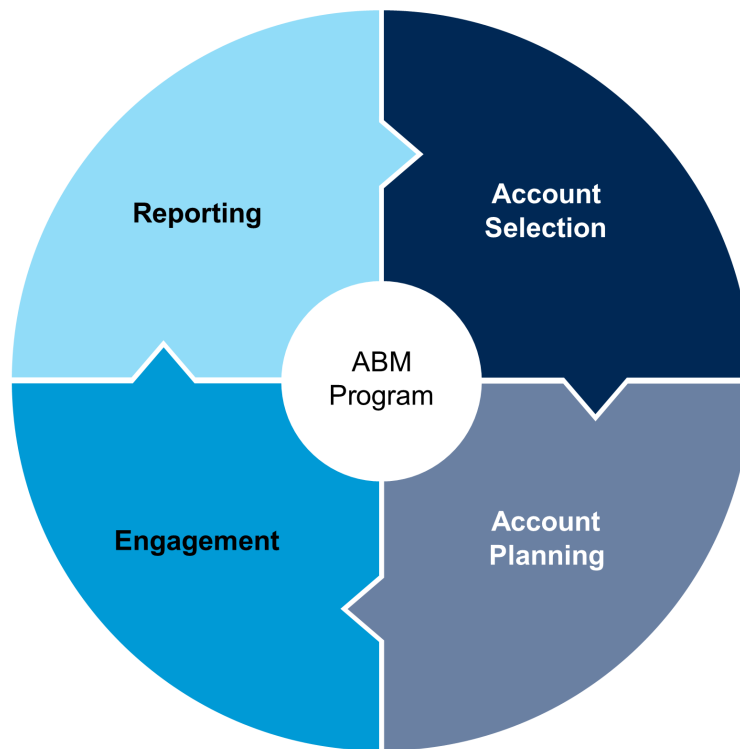
- **Audience management** — First- and third-party data ingestion from multiple sources to facilitate account selection, prioritization and planning, often with dynamic, real-time updates at the account and contact level based on status changes within integrated SFA and marketing automation systems
- **Account scoring** — Account-level engagement scoring, typically derived from a combination of a prospect or customer's website activity and intent, firmographic, product usage and status data from linked SFA and/or marketing automation systems, to facilitate account selection, planning and engagement
- **Account activation and orchestration** — Activation of audiences across multiple engagement channels and/or orchestration of campaigns across those channels using a combination of native and third-party execution endpoints
- **Account- and channel-level reporting** — Insights around sales funnel impact, journey analytics and attribution, with functionality for easily sharing relevant account insights with sales about buyers and what matters to them

ABM platforms' account-centric approach to audience management, engagement and measurement — exemplified by the capabilities noted above and in the Market Analysis section — helps to augment mainstream SFA and marketing automation tools. It can fill gaps that these solutions have been slow to tackle. For the most part, ABM platforms rely on a synergistic relationship with marketing automation solutions when it comes to account engagement. They bring native account data management and advertising and retargeting capabilities but leverage other core channel activation functionality, such as email marketing, from integrated marketing automation tools as part of a hub-and-spoke approach.

Figure 1: Gartner Account-Based Marketing Framework



Gartner Account-Based Marketing Framework



Source: Gartner
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Gartner

Market Direction

As a go-to-market strategy, ABM has continued to see momentum, with Gartner client inquiry volume remaining brisk. Gartner estimates that more than 80% of midsize to large B2B organizations with complex sales processes have adopted or piloted at least one ABM program. Respondents to the 2020 Gartner Technology Marketing Benchmarks Survey observed lifts in key marketing metrics from their ABM efforts, including an increase in web traffic, advertising and email marketing performance improvements, and conversion rate gains throughout the funnel. They also saw reduced sales cycles and higher win rates (see [Plan and Manage a Successful Account-Based Marketing Program](#)).

The scope and the scale of B2B organizations' ABM programs have varied along a broad continuum. At one end of the continuum is an "ABM lite" approach that more closely resembles a focused demand generation, prospecting or key account management program, albeit leveraging an application of limited ABM techniques. At the other end are highly sophisticated, full-scale ABM programs orchestrated across a wide range of use cases and channels and deployed widely across complex, global organizations.

A disparity persists between marketer interest in and use of ABM as a marketing strategy and the status of the supporting technology. ABM technology first appeared on the Gartner Hype Cycle for CRM Sales in 2017 and made a large jump from 2017 to 2018 (when it was renamed “ABM platforms”), and again from 2018 to 2019. The movement was meaningful but more gradual in 2020. Despite these advances, we describe the market as being in the Trough of Disillusionment. Marketers typically experience a lag between the stages of developing a scaled ABM program and investing in supporting technology.

Some marketers never evolve their programs enough to require a dedicated ABM platform. Instead, they make do with a combination of marketing automation solutions, supplemental data (including intent data) and LinkedIn advertising, while forgoing ABM platform-specific capabilities such as sales alerts and account-level engagement scoring. Gartner regularly sees such an approach among B2B companies outside of high-tech and related markets. A lack of marketing maturity and investment in related skills, programs and tools contributes to this dynamic.

For 2020, Gartner estimates that total ABM platform spending was \$570 million — a 28.6% year over year (YoY) increase over an estimated \$450 million in spending in 2019. Software accounted for \$350 million (a YoY increase of 19%), while professional services represented \$60 million (a YoY increase of 20%) and media spend \$160 million (a YoY increase of 33%). Neither the 2019 nor 2020 estimate includes ABM-related revenue from B2B marketing automation vendors that offer some ABM-related functionality, nor any ABM-related revenue from data intelligence solutions for sales vendors (except for Dun & Bradstreet).

During the initial months of the global pandemic, B2B organizations reallocated unspent funds (often from tradeshows and events) to digital media. This caused a temporary spike in media spending that benefited vendors, including ABM platforms, offering advertising and content syndication. We also saw an initial spike in spending on ABM platform modules geared toward sales (to account for a lack of in-person selling). These sales modules offer engagement and intent insights and alerts as engagement and intent levels increase. Gartner believes that software and services spending on ABM platforms slowed during the summer of 2020, but then recovered in the latter half of the year, which kept the overall growth rate close to 2019 levels.

Other key market developments include:

- **Ongoing merger and acquisition activity in the ABM platform market** — Salesforce acquired Evergage in February 2020 and subsequently incorporated the solution to power the Interaction Studio module within Salesforce Marketing Cloud. The Evergage acquisition was driven by that vendor’s broader personalization and real-time interaction management capabilities, leaving open questions about how Interaction Studio and Salesforce Pardot, the company’s B2B marketing automation solution, may work together to serve ABM use cases. IDG acquired Triblio, adding an ABM platform to complement its proprietary intent data and content syndication platform. Since the publication of the last Market Guide, Terminus has made several acquisitions, including Sigstr

(email signature advertising), RambleChat (a website chatbot) and GrowFlare (AI-driven account intelligence to aid with account selection and audience management). The most significant move was Demandbase's acquisition of Engagio, which added enhanced audience management, engagement scoring, sales alerting and attribution capabilities to Demandbase's already broad functional set.

- **Increasing ABM platform adoption beyond high-tech and related industries** — In 2020, ABM platform vendors continued to make inroads in financial services and manufacturing, both for net new and cross-sell use cases. The pandemic, meanwhile, has had mixed effects on ABM platform adoption. On the one hand, it has provoked vendors to retrench and focus on verticals that were further along in their ABM journey and required less education and evangelization. On the other, the pandemic has compelled B2B marketers across many industries to pay closer attention to their existing customer base, which in turn has helped elevate the importance of using an ABM platform to address renewal, cross-sell and upsell use cases. According to Gartner's 2020 CMO Strategic Priorities Survey, 78% of B2B CMOs say their primary strategy to fuel growth in 2021 is by boosting sales of existing products and selling new products to existing customers.
- **Challenges for ABM platform expansion among companies headquartered outside of North America** — Selling to companies located outside of North America, particularly those in non-English-speaking countries, has long been a challenge for ABM platform vendors. B2B buyers expect in-country sales and support and localized content, especially in larger markets in Europe and Asia/Pacific. The pandemic has hindered geographic expansion, leading several ABM platform vendors to shelve plans to open offices in other markets in 2020. Regional and local privacy regulations such as the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the California Consumer Privacy Act (CCPA) also may affect vendors' ability to make services available in specific markets, particularly with respect to IP and cookie matching.
- **Status quo for competition with marketing automation platforms** — The collision between marketing automation solutions and ABM platforms noted in previous iterations of this Market Guide has not yet materialized, but the prospect of it happening in the medium term remains likely. Some of the larger ABM vendors, especially Demandbase (post-Engagio acquisition), have been increasingly vocal about articulating a product vision to accommodate ABM and traditional lead-based demand generation. Still, most vendors (including Demandbase) have yet to add native email marketing and associated landing page capabilities (although some offer web personalization). We expect that ABM platform vendors will add this functionality over the next two years if they remain intent on positioning their solutions to serve both ABM and traditional demand generation/prospecting use cases. The timing of this convergence may hinge in part on ABM platform vendors' ability to raise more money (through venture funding, initial or secondary public offerings, or private equity buyouts) and rapid market growth. Only one vendor — 6sense — had a significant (\$40 million) financing event in 2020, but the pandemic may have contributed to a lack of capital markets activity. At the same time, CRM megavendors are likely to continue

expanding their native ABM capabilities and bolstering their partner relationships. As the market demand for ABM technology grows, it creates a strong possibility that a CRM or marketing automation vendor may simply acquire one of the larger ABM platforms. This would require B2B marketers to maintain a framework for determining how an ABM platform could coexist with their marketing and sales technology stacks, in both the present and the near future.

Market Analysis

B2B organizations run ABM programs for a variety of use cases in pursuit of net new logos and/or growth from existing customers. The most common are:

- **Development of net new accounts** — This use case includes top-of-funnel awareness building, midfunnel engagement such as event/webinar follow-up and ongoing pursuit after the creation of an opportunity or a sales-accepted lead.
- **Expansion within existing accounts** — This use case comprises selling more of the same product or solution, renewals of key or high-risk customers, and upsell and cross-sell scenarios.

A common set of functionality supports these different scenarios, enabling marketers to leverage an ABM platform to pursue multiple use cases with the same technology. Key capabilities for ABM platforms include:

- **Proprietary and/or licensed intent data** — Most ABM platforms offer proprietary intent data and/or integrate licensed third-party intent data (typically from Bombora). With intent data becoming more applicable to a broader set of industries beyond high tech, it is emerging as an adoption driver for ABM platforms. Intent data, combined with licensed firmographic and technographic data, feeds into models for selecting, scoring and prioritizing accounts. Understanding the extent of support for keywords and topics relative to your industry and the markets in which you operate is crucial.

- **Lead-to-account matching** — This capability supports account planning by linking anonymous and known individuals' engagement to specific companies in your existing account hierarchies with associated firmographic data.

- **AI-powered predictive recommendations** — These aid marketers in account selection, scoring and contact management, using intent, fit and behavioral signals. Predictive models also identify next best actions that enable marketers and their sales partners to deepen engagement with accounts at relevant moments in the buying cycle.

- **Multichannel campaign activation and orchestration** — Most ABM platforms can activate audiences across a range of touchpoints, even if they lack a native ability to execute campaigns on those channels. ABM platforms typically focus on display advertising and retargeting, email and

social marketing, content syndication, and web personalization, leveraging integrations with marketing automation tools for much of the last-mile execution outside of display advertising and web personalization. Increasingly, ABM platforms add value to campaign management by enabling marketers to orchestrate complex, multistep, cross-channel campaigns that may incorporate one or more connected execution systems.

- **Embedded sales alerts** — These notify sales teams about key account activity, providing prescriptive insights to further engagement. Sales alerts may be delivered via email and integrations with tools such as Slack and SFA systems.
- **Integrations with complementary marketing and sales technology** — These include core SFA and marketing automation systems as well as data intelligence solutions for sales, sales acceleration systems and conversational marketing tools. Integrations with customer data platforms (CDPs) are an emerging area of focus as this technology becomes a more prominent component within the B2B marketer's toolkit.
- **Account analytics** — ABM platforms can report on website and channel-specific engagement activity, providing marketers with insight about campaign performance for target accounts. They also enable account-level engagement scoring across a range of marketing and sales touchpoints, comprising known and anonymous visits, which supports ABM activities from account selection through reporting and optimization. Coupled with native advertising and retargeting capabilities, ABM platforms offer account journey analytics and attribution modeling that match or exceed comparable functionality in marketing automation systems.

Representative Vendors

Market Introduction

Table 1 provides a quick reference guide to ABM platform solutions that are often mentioned in Gartner client inquiries and industry research. They serve organizations of differing sizes, across a range of budgets, industry verticals and complexity in ABM program management needs. Many vendors offer tiered licenses in their products — limiting or expanding the number of capabilities in the license, depending on the tier. Other providers that aren't on the list might be right for you. Use this list as a starting point in your exploration of ABM platforms.

Table 1: Representative Vendors in the B2B Marketing Automation Platform Market

Vendor	Product, Service or Solution Name
6sense	6sense Account Engagement Platform

Anaplan	Predictive Insights
Demandbase	Demandbase One
Dun & Bradstreet	D&B Account Based Marketing, D&B Lattice
Integrate	Integrate Demand Cloud
Jabmo	Jabmo B2B Marketing Platform
Kwanzoo	Kwanzoo Adaptive ABM
Leadspace	Leadspace Customer Data Platform
Madison Logic	ML Platform
Metadata.io	Metadata Autonomous Demand Generation Platform, MetaMatch
MRP	MRP Prelytix
RollWorks	RollWorks Account-Based Platform
TechTarget	TechTarget Priority Engine
Terminus	Terminus Engagement Hub
Triblio	Triblio Account-Based Marketing Platform

Source: Gartner (February 2021)

The vendors listed in this Market Guide do not imply an exhaustive list. This section is intended to provide more understanding of the market and its offerings.

Market Recommendations

- Define the marketing and sales use cases for your current or planned ABM program, and the scope of your efforts. Companies that are primarily targeting net new accounts and doing so at scale may prioritize different capabilities than those looking to retain key accounts or fill in white space within large, existing accounts.
- Gauge ABM platform vendors' ability to provide mission-critical capabilities that support running ABM programs at scale. Focus on where vendors differentiate around those capabilities highlighted in the Market Analysis section.
- Develop a plan for how to leverage any ABM technology you select in conjunction with your existing marketing technology ecosystem, particularly key components such as marketing automation and CRM. Perform an audit of your current solutions to ensure there are no capability gaps and that your systems are carefully aligned to business goals (see [Identifying the Most Critical Components for Your Martech Stack](#)).
- Assess the extent of vendors' service offerings, including implementation, onboarding, consulting, and ongoing support and education. Use these resources to raise your team's skill levels and ability to maximize platform performance.
- Confirm vendors' 2021 roadmap plans before making an investment. Seek flexibility in contract duration, particularly if you are starting out and unsure of which use cases will emerge as the focus of your program and the timeline for achieving scale.

Evidence

Gartner's CMO Strategic Priorities Survey, 2020-2021: This study was conducted to understand how marketing leaders are navigating the post-COVID-19 environment. This survey focuses on how they are reflecting on their position within the company, their role in strategic decision making, and how they are navigating through difficult times to best position their 2021 marketing strategy and budgets.

The research was conducted online during September 2020 and October 2020 among 381 respondents from the United States (47%), Canada (5%), U.K. (26%), France (11%) and Germany (11%). Respondents were required to have involvement in decisions pertaining to setting or influencing marketing strategy and planning, as well as have involvement in aligning marketing budget/resources. Eighty-five percent of the respondents came from organizations with \$1 billion or more in annual revenue. The respondents came from a variety of industries: financial services (42 respondents), high tech (42 respondents), manufacturing (42 respondents), consumer products (39 respondents), media (44 respondents), retail (42 respondents), healthcare providers (41 respondents), IT and business services (47 respondents), and travel and hospitality (43 respondents).

The survey was developed collaboratively by a team of Gartner analysts who follow marketing and was reviewed, tested and administered by Gartner's Research Data and Analytics team.

Disclaimer: Results of this study do not represent global findings or the market as a whole but reflect sentiment of the respondents and companies surveyed.

Note 1

Representative Vendor Selection

The vendors named in this guide were selected to represent the ABM platform category as outlined in the Market Definition section and do not imply an exhaustive list. Client interest and market presence factored into the selection of the vendors featured in this guide.

Document Revision History

[Market Guide for Account-Based Marketing Platforms - 5 December 2019](#)

[Market Guide for Account-Based Marketing Platforms - 5 December 2018](#)

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