



What High-Performing Account-Based Marketing Teams Do Differently

Analyzing what high-performing account teams do differently provides valuable insights for optimizing account-based marketing

High performers – those who achieve the highest ROI – have specific approaches for setting up and executing programs, and measuring results

The likelihood of success often can be determined early in the program by the presence of appropriate investment, sponsorship and leadership

Richard Branson, founder of the Virgin Group, has become one of the world's most successful and admired business leaders, despite suffering from dyslexia and dropping out of school at age 16. He and other successful business leaders such as Sheryl Sandberg, Jack Welch and Lee Iacocca have documented some of their lessons on achieving success in autobiographies. Common themes include overcoming adversity, solving problems creatively, empowering employees and taking risks.

SiriusDecisions conducts a great deal of research and analysis on what makes high performers stand out at the company level, the functional level (sales, marketing, product) and the discipline level (in this case, account-based marketing [ABM]). We combine anecdotal evidence drawn from client inquiries with quantitative market analysis to draw out lessons others can apply. In this brief, we look at what sets high-performing ABM teams apart, including how they are resourced, how they allocate budget, what tactics they execute, how they measure performance and what results they achieve.

The Methodology of High Performance

SiriusDecisions' study of ABM high performance draws heavily on data from our 2019 State of Account-Based Marketing Study, which analyzed responses from more than 120 ABM leaders from a range of industries across the Americas, Europe and Asia-Pacific (see the brief "The Pulse: The State of Account-Based Marketing in 2019").

The first step was to define high-performing ABM practitioners. The top quartile of respondents who reported higher ROI for their ABM accounts (compared to a control group of accounts) was isolated from the rest of the group and assessed against other variables for robustness. We then compared their answers to additional questions about resourcing, activities and outcomes to the remainder of the group to determine what set them apart. Key distinguishing factors are summarized in the following five findings.

High Performers Show Greater Organizational Commitment to ABM

High-performing ABM teams show greater stakeholder buy-in with higher investment. Respondents' budgets were 70% higher on average than low-performing ABM teams (about \$470,000 compared to \$270,000). Although this may be explained in part by cause and effect – higher budgets awarded in response to strong results – more than half of the high-performing programs



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were less than a year old, suggesting that some of their success may be attributed to being set up to succeed from the outset.

Two other critical success factors provided further evidence: the presence of an executive sponsor and a dedicated ABM leader. High performers were 30% less likely than low-performing peers to indicate lack of sponsorship as a challenge and half as likely to cite lack of a leader as a challenge.

Organizations that seek to emulate these high performers must ensure sufficient budget is in place by accounting for key spend areas relating to people, tools and technology, and service providers (see the brief “Budget Considerations for Account-Based Marketing”), and nail down clear and active sponsorship of ABM from sales and marketing leaders.

High Performers Have a Technological Advantage

Respondents were asked about their adoption of technology categories to support the delivery of ABM and which categories they planned to increase spend on. High performers were about 30% more likely to have plans to increase spend in emerging categories like intent monitoring, account-targeted display and web personalization, while lower performers were more likely to be playing catch-up by increasing spend in core systems like marketing automation platforms and sales force automation systems.

ABM leaders should not simply copy the technology stacks of high performers but should capture the business requirements of their own organization once the ABM strategy is in place. Audit the existing stack against those requirements before speaking to vendors (see the brief “Introducing the SiriusDecisions Account-Based Marketing Infrastructure Framework”).

High Performers Adopt More Customized Approaches for Their Accounts

The study found that high performers were about 30% more likely than low performers to customize content for the accounts they were targeting. Customization (not only of content, but also measurement and other variables) is one of the differentiating features of an ABM approach (see the Core Strategy Report “A Deep Dive Into the SiriusDecisions Demand Spectrum”), and it is naturally higher in companies employing a large-account marketing deployment model focused on a small number of key strategic accounts. However, even a

Use of Key Account-Based Marketing Impact Metrics: High Performers vs. Low Performers

Key Metric	Percentage of High Performers Using Metric	Percentage of Low Performers Using Metric
Average deal size*	64%	35%
Win rate*	64%	30%
Engagement rate*	73%	56%

*for ABM accounts vs. non-ABM accounts

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named-account marketing deployment model targeted at larger numbers of accounts should use some customization.

ABM leaders should audit content according to the organization’s goals for its ABM accounts. Use account insights to customize existing content whenever possible, and create new content only where specific gaps exist and resources permit.

High Performers Measure More

High performers are more likely than low performers to report on some of the key impact metrics associated with ABM. Many use a control group to compare the performance of ABM accounts in average deal size, win rate and engagement rate with similar accounts that did not receive ABM support.

ABM leaders should use a control group of similar accounts to provide objective data on ABM performance. Communicate these KPIs, along with other readiness, activity and output metrics, in clear dashboards to help sales and marketing leaders understand the value ABM is bringing (see the brief “Tailoring Account-Based Marketing Measurement”).

High Performers Are Three Times More Likely to Achieve Higher Average Deal Size

One reason the high performers achieved higher ROI than low performers was that their accounts saw a higher average deal



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size. Higher average deal size is a common goal of ABM programs, because it is often consistent with a better revenue outcome as well as a proportionately lower cost of sale. Many organizations refer to this as “solution selling” – identifying the business needs associated with a particular buying group and bundling different offerings into a solution to meet that need, rather than pushing individual products.

To build appropriate solutions, ABM leaders should create a demand map as an organizing principle to uncover the various buying groups and their needs (see the Core Strategy Report “Account-Centric Planning: How to Create Demand Maps”).

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High performers come from organizations of all sizes, and the study data shows that not all are massive enterprises with deep pockets. What sets them apart is the care and attention they display – from how they set up their ABM effort to their understanding of their customers and how they buy to the tools they use and their tactical choices. Additionally, because high performers measure everything, they know how to continually optimize and improve. The best way to emulate these high performers is to study them – by reading case studies, hearing them speak at events and networking with them in communities.

