

Top Five Ways Sales and Marketing Teams Must Align for ABM Success



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One of the recurring themes in any conversation about creating a successful ABM strategy is the need for alignment between sales and marketing. The problem: most people have heard this statement so often over the years, it has become a cliché. Companies understand the need to align sales and marketing like a teenager knows he needs to clean his room: he understands he should do it because he keeps hearing about it; it just never manages to get done in the midst of all the other priorities.

But ABM cannot succeed without close cooperation between these two departments, say the women who wrote the book on sales and marketing alignment. Tracy Eiler, Chief Marketing Officer, and Andrea Austin, Vice President of Enterprise Business, InsideView, recently released *Aligned to Achieve: How to Unite Your Sales and Marketing Teams into a Single Force for Growth* (Wiley, 2016). They say alignment is foundational for any organization considering an ABM strategy because today's buyer has changed so dramatically – and, if companies aren't pursuing them in an orchestrated, highly coordinated way, prospects will walk away.

"Customers are coming to my reps more educated than ever. But what are they learning?" asks Austin. "If what my salespeople have to say is different from what marketing is saying in tone or content or timing, the buyer will be confused. And, when there is any disconnect, the buyer will leave." This alignment must continue through the lifetime of that customer, she added.

To avoid that scenario and pave the way for a highly successful ABM initiative, Eiler and Austin say organizations need to align sales and marketing in these five areas.

1. Communication. This is where great sales and marketing alignment starts. Get communication right and you lay the groundwork for success in all areas of ABM; get it wrong and you'll undermine your entire ABM strategy. Eiler, Austin, and their teams talk daily on an informal basis about what is and isn't working. They've also established a bi-weekly "Smarketing" meeting in which their

teams come together to evaluate the past two weeks, what's happening currently, and the upcoming fortnight.

The agenda is operational. If a rep in the Northeast needs pipeline, they'll look at that. If marketing is considering two versions of a billboard, they'll get input from sales on which is best. Whatever is going on, they'll discuss. "This gives sales and marketing time to ask questions," says Eiler. "Then you can understand the decisions and not complain about or judge them," she says.

2. Process. Moving a prospect from initial target to closed sale within an ABM strategy requires a well-defined, highly coordinated process. From defining a target to determining how the target will be reached – and with what content and frequency – sales and marketing teams must be in full agreement on the "how" for converting targets to deals. "Process" addresses the nitty-gritty details of this day-to-day effort. What's the orchestration between marketing touches and sales development touches? What are the handoff points? What happens when the opportunity becomes a customer – or selected a competitor instead? How many touches does it require to make a sale – and what's the procedure if we start going beyond that number?

While it's essential to jointly define the business processes around ABM, it's also important to remember that the process is fluid. "We have an ABM plan we've agreed to, but we are still learning and are always talking to each other about what is and isn't effective, how many touches it is really taking to make a sale, and so on," says Eiler. "We have regular meetings between sales and marketing to go account by account to see what's working and what isn't."

3. Data and Technology.

Eiler and Austin group these together because they are so intertwined. With most purchases today made by committee – not a lone buyer – sales and marketing teams must have a thorough understanding of the buying teams, the roles, the relationships, and the content being consumed by each person at every target customer.

Your technology must support your ABM strategy but it must also be able to connect individual data to an account for a complete picture of a target. This takes not only finding the right ABM technology, but integration of that technology into the existing stack – and clean, accurate data. "Most companies overlook the fact that their data needs just as much attention as their ABM technology," says Eiler.

QUESTIONS EVERY SALES LEADER SHOULD ASK MARKETING

In researching their book on sales and marketing alignment, InsideView's Tracy Eiler and Andrea Austin discovered that, while many sales leaders know they should be talking to their marketing counterparts, they aren't sure what to ask. To initiate productive conversations that can transform the sales-marketing relationship, Eiler and Austin recommend sales leaders sit down with marketers and ask the following questions:

1. How are leads prioritized? What is the lead scoring model? How often do we review it?
2. How do we calibrate our follow-up capacity? Sometimes there are busy seasons (events, for instance) and the sales development team gets overwhelmed. How do we plan for that?
3. What are the rules of engagement once a deal makes it to the opportunity stage (e.g., marketing continues with thought leadership touches, but no specific solution offers)?
4. What is the intent of specific programs we are running? (Branding? Awareness? Campaigning for a purpose such as deal acceleration?)
5. What happens when an opportunity ends in "no decision"? Do we have a "wake the dead" nurture in place?
6. Besides hard program dollars, what is the "people effort cost" for each campaign (Eiler calls this "marketing muscle cost")?
7. Explain how existing customers are included (or not) in marketing campaigns.
8. What kind of visibility will my sales reps have into how an account is responding to our marketing efforts (e.g., interesting moments and other activity made visible by Marketo Sales Insight)?
9. What kind of flexibility does the Marketing team have to add special campaigns or field events? How much notice do you need?
10. Is marketing measured by pipeline targets? If not, are you open to it?

"If you don't have all the right people with the right titles and background and other information, you won't have the reach you want."

"My sales team spends most of its time in CRM while marketing spends most of its time in Marketo," adds Austin. By creating a solution that combines the data from these systems, the teams have joint visibility into contacts, companies, and campaigns. "It's really important to have continuity of data and integration of systems," says Austin. "Without it, you might get people and targets wrong." That data needs to be continuously refreshed, adds Eiler. "We all experience key contacts coming in and out of accounts; you need to stay on top of those changes to be effective."

4. Targeting. Choosing the right accounts to target is a crucial part of the ABM process. Get it wrong and you'll waste a lot of time and effort on deals that either won't close or won't bring in the right kind of revenue – undermining the entire ABM effort. Getting it right requires a scientific, data-driven approach. At InsideView, for instance, Eiler and Austin mapped all their customers on two revenue dimensions that were most important to the company – renewal rate and up-sell propensity. The characteristics of those companies in the top right quadrant – those with high renewal rates and a high up-sell propensity – became the defining characteristics of their ABM targets. "My team will sometimes say, 'But I have a great contact at this startup company!' It doesn't matter because, based on our data, I know that company isn't a good customer for us long term," says Austin. "And, if they aren't a good fit long term, we don't go after them."



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It doesn't take a lot of technology to do this analysis. InsideView used its CRM system, Marketo, and spreadsheets. Most companies have these; all they need is for sellers and marketers to sit down together and use them to create a target list.

5. Measurement. Sales and marketing must agree on the measures that will be used within the ABM program. While these will be different for every company, "the overwhelming measure that sales and marketing need to align around for ABM is pipeline goals," says Eiler. "Marketing should have some portion of variable compensation tied to pipeline goals." This is a new idea for most marketers, who prefer to be tied to lead levels or other measures over which they have control.

Working with Marketo, InsideView also created a measure called Engagement. "We know that, on average, 34 people are engaging with us to close one piece of business. They are across at least three departments and at least half are at director level and above,"

explains Eiler. "When an account is close to reaching those numbers, it is considered Engaged." Armed with that information, marketing can show an account exec which of the accounts for which he is responsible are Engaged – enabling him to direct his energies most profitably.

"Marketing can now show sales information that's relevant to the way they sell," says Eiler. "In the past, we could have shown them individuals and their activity but not the whole picture. Our sales teams are more effective now and they are getting to proposal and close faster."

Faster sales cycles are just one benefit of the company's ABM strategy. Renewal rates are also up and InsideView is seeing bigger up-sell opportunities, faster. These results are all rooted in the tight alignment between sales and marketing across the five areas above. "An ABM strategy is already risky because you are no longer going after volume; you're going after individual accounts," Eiler concludes. "If sales and marketing aren't aligned, it's even riskier." ■

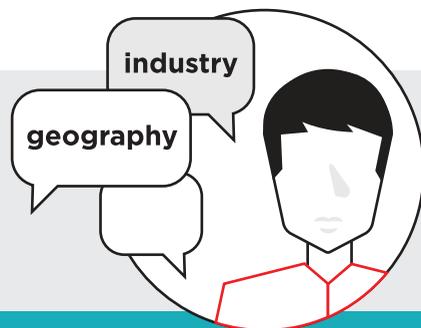
BUILD A STELLAR ABM PROGRAM

IN 4 SIMPLE STEPS

71% of marketers have started testing or using ABM and 84% are seeing higher ROI than other marketing programs.¹ But don't jump the gun! Successful ABM starts with proper selection of account and contact targets.

1. Determine Your Ideal Customer Profile

Look at your best customers and identify what characteristics they have in common. Use that to define and document your ICP.



2. Find Targets in Your Database

Use your ICP to analyze your existing database. Do you have any gaps? Outdated or duplicate records?



3. Clean and Complete Your Data

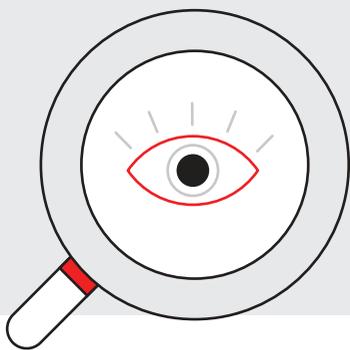
Make sure you aren't wasting your efforts by eliminating old, dirty data. Make sure you aren't wasting your efforts — eliminate old, dirty data.

UP TO **25%**

of your customer and prospect records contain errors.²

4. Identify Your TAM and Target New White Space Leads

Most companies do not have complete coverage of their TAM in their database. Identify how much white space you have, then fill the gaps by importing new prospects.



Set yourself up for ABM success! Analyzing your data first will help you be more targeted and achieve faster growth. Visit insideview.com/resources to download more resources, including our full eBook, *Do You Know Your Total Addressable Market?: 3 Steps to Modernize Your Go-To-Market Approach*.

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Work, informed.

¹ ITSMA, *Account-Based Marketing and ROI: Building the Case for Investment*
² SiriusDecisions, *The Impact of Bad Data on Demand Creation*