

# Mastering ABM

LESSONS LEARNED FROM  
SEVERAL MASTERS OF ABM

**HIGHLIGHTS  
REPORT**

*(full version available to  
Propolis members only)*

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*Want access to the greyed out sections? These sections are exclusive to Propolis members.*

## Want to get even more depth and insight on this topic?

On Propolis – our exclusive community for B2B marketers – you can view a much larger, more detailed version of this report, which also includes:

- › *Robert Norum, our ABM expert and Propolis Hive expert for Growth, provides his must-follow checklist for any aspiring ABMer.*
- › *Peter O’Neill, the lead analyst of this report, offers his recommendations – the next steps you should be taking today to reach ABM nirvana.*
- › *The critical success factors and inhibitors for ABM.*
- › *The top five ABM vendors you need to looking at seriously.*
- › *The complete version of the competency assessment framework, with even more detail and granularity.*

Want to learn more about Propolis? Learn more by clicking [here](#).

## SECTION 1

# ABM is now fundamental



**PETER O'NEILL,**  
lead analyst,  
B2B Marketing

The last two years have seen a series of shifts in B2B marketing: a shift to more digital marketing channels; a shift to more customer-centric or even personalised content marketing; and a definite shift to more marketing programmes based upon the needs of accounts, as opposed to individual contacts. In parallel, because of the growing popularity of ecommerce in B2B buying, some elements of the selling process have undergone a tectonic shift in B2B businesses, away from the sales organisation and towards digital programmes.

During the disruption caused by Covid-19, business buyer profiles were changing within organisations, with new members increasing the size and composition of buyer teams. Marketers were having to target different persona configurations, and adjust to the increasing importance of digital channels. Those companies who did not have an established ABM strategy found that they were not quick enough to pick up changes in the behaviour and preferences of their target customers.

So, there is a clear reaction across many B2B sectors to planning new investments in ABM technologies, such as predictive analytics,

advertising retargeting and account-profiling. The most-early adopters of ABM, and therefore the most experienced practitioners, are to be found in the services and software industries. But now these technologies can also be found in the B2B financial services and healthcare companies and, increasingly, across the manufacturing sectors.

The B2B Marketing *2021 ABM Census* discovered that over 50% of those respondents named 'winning new business' as their primary ABM objective – a strong indicator that ABM has become a fundamental business practice across the B2B marketing discipline.

Most B2B businesses will continue to reform to a post-Covid world driven by societal change, resulting in new working practices and economic and market shifts – all of which have dramatically altered both customer behaviour and their expectations. The overall importance of customer relationships based upon deep insights into the specific needs of each target account has become an overriding critical success factor for marketing and sales. This will continue to accelerate additional ABM investments in new processes, education and technology.

The focus for this Growth Hive report is to complement the *ABM Census* and document a series of best practices and lessons-learned from more experienced ABM practitioners. It will also provide actionable advice on improving ABM programmes, using the B2B Marketing Maturity Assessment for ABM as a basis. This year's Growth Hive report has a clear focus on ABM for the reasons described above.

In order to build this report, we held long interviews with several senior B2B marketers for deep insight into the topic. All are all highly experienced ABM practitioners, so we have taken the liberty of setting the report title accordingly. As you will see, these executives delivered a wealth of advice, so they will take the main stage throughout the report. Both Robert Norum and I have worked (and continue to work) with many clients on their ABM programmes, and so those experiences also feed into this report.

*Robert Norum is a B2B marketer with over 30 years of experience. For the last nine years, he has specialised in ABM, working with several leading agencies and directly for a wide cross-section of global brands. Robert is also the Propolis Hive expert for Growth.*

*“The most highly-measured and results-driven aspect of marketing, demand generation, is the programme that never sleeps. But how do you gain important cut-through when response rates are becoming increasingly hard to predict and your sales teams have a never-ending appetite for new leads? The emergence of ABM has been seen as the saviour for many – a shift from short-term tactical programmes to longer-term engagement and relationships through a close partnership with sales.”*

ROBERT NORUM

# Setting up ABM programmes for success

First, we asked our interviewees about important aspects of setting a strategy. Gathering support from important executives, establishing the financials, finding the right resources, and ensuring the right skills are in place.

## 2.1 Executive support is a prerequisite

The opening question asked our interviewees about whether they felt that ABM had sufficient support from the most senior stakeholders in their company. As ABM is already a relatively mature topic for executives in the IT sector, there was consensus in most interviews that this was the case. The degree of support varied perhaps according to the project roll-out method.

Andrea Clatworthy, global head of ABM, Fujitsu: *“Yes and no, actually on this question. We are a regionally structured organisation and some regions are 100% supportive, while others are still questioning the value. So, I think the takeout from that is that it depends upon the nature of business in that region, as well as the maturity in the marketing organisation.”*

Neil Berry, global head of account and deal-based marketing CoE, Atos. *“Yes, we are very lucky to have our CMO sitting on our group board. So, he is very much a direct route to the top table for ABM, as well as other topics.”*

An important consequence of senior executive level support across the board is that ABM is understood as important down the respective organisations, such as sales.

Christa Norton, head of industry and account-based marketing, Capita: *“We have also had supportive engagement across the board, to the extent that we have had to expand in response to demand from sales teams, who understand the difference in the approach that ABM can take, and are demanding that for more and more customers, because they can see the potential, they can see the value that the ABM approach is going to offer.”*

Christian Weiss, director ABM, EMEA, Autodesk: *“We have corporate goals related to ABM, or, as we call it, ABSM, which is a corporate initiative of account-based sales and marketing – as we are convinced the success of ABM lies in the partnership of both.”*

Mark Larwood, head of strategic customer marketing and ABM, O2: *“The straight answer to that is ‘absolutely, yes.’ ABM is definitely seen as a growth engine and a way of getting closer and building more important, stronger relationships with our business customers.”*

All ABM consultants strongly recommend that you should first obtain full senior executive support for a strategy like ABM, which requires significant technology investment, touches customers directly, and involves several disciplines, not just marketing. The companies interviewed here are successful with their ABM initiatives and all obtained sufficient executive support (more or less).

However, there are still, strangely, quite a few B2B marketing organisations that begin their ABM efforts with the acquisition of analytics or insights technology, thinking they are acquiring some secret source to make their customer data much more valuable.

# Want to learn more about how to set up your ABM programme for success?

Propolis members get access to more great insight, as we discuss how industry marketing leaders are setting up their ABM budget, and the skills and resources actually required to be a great ABMer.

Propolis is the global body giving B2B marketers the clarity to solve real-world challenges – through instant access to unbiased experts, resources, training, and support. Together, we can help you navigate change, master a multidisciplinary environment, and drive business growth.

Propolis is designed for the way you really work, to help you find answers quickly and tackle the day-to-day challenges of B2B marketing life – by the people who know better than anyone what makes B2B unique. It's a global community of real marketers – from many of the biggest names in B2B – supported by a bank of experts with hands-on, practical experience.

As one B2B marketer put it: *"It's the membership you'll actually use."*

“

*In order to drive our business and global marketing team forward, we knew we would benefit from an international professional membership, which is exactly what Propolis with B2B Marketing gives us.*

*Now more than ever, the need to come together as a community of B2B marketers isn't just relevant, but necessary*

CAT DUTTON  
global deputy CMO, Atos

”

Contact [propolis@b2bmarketing.net](mailto:propolis@b2bmarketing.net) for further information on how you can be a part of the evolution of B2B marketing.

## SECTION 3

# Running ABM operations well

In the interviews, we also tried to extract some best practice tips about running ABM on an operational basis. This often depends on the type of ABM being adopted and is then also influenced by how much work is created for the ABM teams (i.e. how many accounts get into the ABM target list).

### 3.1 Configuring the ABM type that fits best

Ever since the original ABM discussions initiated by the IT Services Marketing Association a full decade ago, there has been an understanding that there are three types of ABM: one-to-one, one-to-few and one-to-many. Each approach entails slightly different things in terms of resourcing, content creation, channels used and working with sales. Usually, companies select one method as their primary ABM method when first starting their ABM strategy, but it is assumed that most mature ABM programmes end up deploying a blend of all three methods.

Or do they? Five of the six executives interviewed were clear that they do not have a three-part hybrid approach. In fact, none of them have a one-to-many approach that they label ABM – if they are doing a one-to-many, they prefer to recognise it as ‘personalisation’, not ABM.

Mark Larwood, O2: *“That [one-to-many ABM] sits in a different part of our organisation, predominantly. It’s not something that I do, and I don’t tend to see that as ABM. For me, ABM is when you are really understanding small audiences – audiences of one, five or 10 – not when the question is: ‘I’ve got 800 customers in a segment out there. What can I do?’ That’s*

*just personalised approaches. I think it’s just the wrong classification.”*

Most of the executives are now mixing one-to-one and one-to-few, depending on their target markets. These vary by geography, industry sector and company size.

Neil Berry, Atos: *“We’re trying to drive towards a consistent model to help embed an ABM mindset. So, every industry would have a one-to-one and a one-to-few approach. I am not really going to entertain the one-to-many piece too much, as that’s just good industry marketing, and the industries absolutely know how to deliver that. We have to remember that each industry, as well as each account, will have different behaviours, so having the right ABM approach based on the industry/account is important.”*

Christian Weiss, Autodesk: *“Our plan was immediately to start on a wider scale. That means we need a good mix of all ABM types. If we had not done this, we would only serve a handful of accounts, but we have the responsibility to support the same number of accounts as our respective sales teams do. We are very selective in choosing one-to-one enterprise accounts – never without defined outcomes and timing. In the mid-market, we prioritise one-to-few campaigns as a scaled version of one-to-one, but we are also running one-to-many campaigns to a wider set of accounts to make sure we are engaging with the entire audience. So, although we deploy all three methods, the emphasis is on one-to-few.”*

So, although Autodesk claims to do ABM marketing across a wide set of accounts, perhaps the argument that this is more like personalised content marketing is valid for them also.



## SECTION 5


# Achieving a balance between ABM technologies and ABM strategy

I remember publishing Forrester's first research reports on ABM back in 2016. *The ABM Vendor Landscape* report was controversial at the time because: 1.) we listed many marketing technology vendors that had never claimed to support ABM until then; and 2.) we pointed out that you do not need to buy technology to do ABM. It is a strategy – a method of marketing operations.

## 5.1 You do not need to buy technology for ABM


Nothing has really changed since then. In a straw poll, we asked the six executives about the technology that they are using in their ABM programmes. As in the *ABM Census* and previous ABM reports, we listed out a total of eight categories of martech, and asked our interviewees if they are using it for ABM. We also asked if they had bought that martech tool specifically for ABM. Here is the result of that straw poll among six experienced ABM practitioners.

**CRM** (e.g. Salesforce, Hubspot, etc)

 Five out of six said they are using this for ABM


**Marketing automation platform**

(e.g. Adobe-Marketo, Oracle-Eloqua)


 Four out of six said they are using this for ABM

**Data and contact resources**


(e.g. LeadGenius, DiscoverOrg)

 Three out of six said they are using this for ABM


**Sales insights** (e.g. Dun & Bradstreet, SAP)

 Six out of six said they are using this for ABM


**Predictive analytics** (e.g. Leadspace, DiscoverOrg)

 Three out of six said they are using this for ABM


**ROMI dashboard** (e.g. Adroll, Demandbase)

 Three out of six said they are using this for ABM

**Intent platforms** (e.g. Bombora, The Big Willow)


 Four out of six said they are using this for ABM

**Orchestration tools** (e.g. Engagio, Terminus)

 One out of six said they are using this for ABM

**Advanced measurement and attribution**

(e.g. Bizible, Full Circle)

 Two out of six said they are using this for ABM

One respondent said they were investigating buying a predictive analytics solution for next year, and another is considering working with Demandbase (though that may not be purely as a ROMI dashboard as they have since merged with Engagio).

The *2021 ABM Census* states that CRM and marketing automation platforms are still the most commonly used for ABM, with 80% and 45% using them, respectively, while a considerable 20% use sales insights tech and 7% are using predictive analytics tools like Leadspace and DiscoverOrg. However, the two insurgent technologies for ABM are data and contact resources and intent platforms. When we put this question to marketers last year, only 17% were using data and contact resources. Now, over a quarter (26%) are using it to fuel their strategies. Last year, just 10% were using intent platforms. Now, that's more than doubled to 22%.

*Want to know what the ABM technology vendor landscape looks like currently, and the who the top five vendors are? This section is exclusively for Propolis members. To learn more about Propolis, [click here](#).*

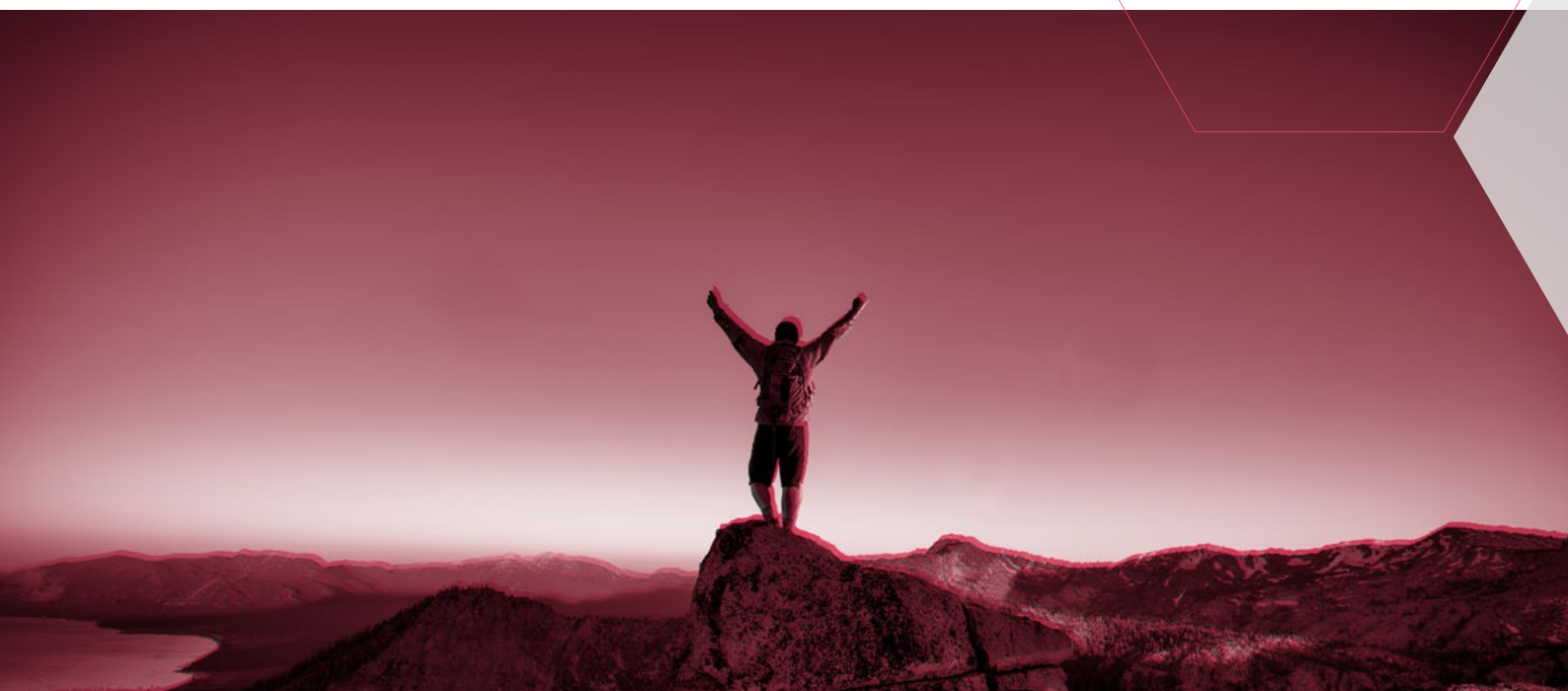
## SECTION 7

# Competency assessment framework

The following framework seeks to define the different stages of maturity when it comes to Growth, and map them against different criteria required for success. A framework such as this is being created for all eight Propolis Hives and competency areas.

This framework is a flat or static version of the interactive Competency Assessment Programme, which is part of your Propolis membership. This assessment is designed to help you determine your specific level of competency against these criteria, compare them against other Propolis members and highlight areas to focus on for improvement.

If you've not taken your Competency Assessment yet, please contact your account manager or Propolis customer success manager.



# GROWTH COMPETENCY ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK 1.0

	1. BUSINESS CONTRIBUTION	2. BUILDING	3. DEVELOPING	4. IMPROVING	5. EXCELLING
Go-to-market strategy	Is there a clearly defined GTM strategy to bring new products or services to market?	Defining target markets, target customer groups and their buying units has commenced.	Brand positioning and value proposition in the context of the market and competition has commenced.	An aligned sales and marketing strategy and process for the GTM objective exists.	A seamless, end-to-end GTM strategy with all parts of the business contributing to shared objectives is now embedded.
Demand generation for new customer acquisition programme	How does your organisation target new customers, and how do you approach campaigns?	Prospect database creation has begun, and CRM is in place. Product-driven content used to target them, albeit generically.	Sales-ready site exists, funnel is defined, MA is configured, and personas have been identified. Propositions/campaigns tailored to specific vertical markets.	Sales funnel optimised to create more targeted content and improve lead conversion. A/B testing develops effective propositions and content by vertical, persona and solution area.	Value attribution is measured and optimised to improve engagement/conversion. Highly targeted content/propositions tailored to personas, verticals and need.
Customer growth programme	How do you upsell, cross-sell and retain?	There is no formal upsell, cross-sell or retention strategy. Campaigns are ad-hoc and often reactive.	A growth marketing strategy is being developed, and includes upselling, cross-selling and retention.	The customer-centric approach to marketing is embedded and delivering growth through cross-selling, upselling and retention.	The inter-relationship between upselling, cross-selling and retention is fully mapped, measured and used to accurately forecast demand.
Innovation	What is the role of marketing in product and service innovation, and how innovative are your campaigns?	Marketing aspires to be innovative, but has no actual input into product or service innovation. No wider business support exists.	Marketing is starting to be asked by the business to innovate, but it's limited to trying new channels, creative or messaging.	Innovation is actively encouraged from marketing. Full campaign testing implemented and starting to power growth.	Marketing is a trusted body for driving product/service innovation, and the voice of the customer. Peers regard our marketing as industry-leading in innovation that delivers growth.
Sales and marketing alignment	How do marketing and sales work together, and what role does marketing play in increasing sales effectiveness?	Marketing and sales work separately, with the former providing some generic content for the latter.	Marketing and sales are working on setting some common objectives, with marketing delivering some effective sales enablement tools.	Marketing and sales collaborate on shared objectives, with marketing delivering tailored sales enablement content based on customer needs.	Sales and marketing are total equals. Insight-driven content supports the entire sales process, tailored to specific customer needs.
Performance measurement and ROI	How do you measure your performance and ROI?	There is some manual reporting based on siloed information, but there's little process involved.	Metrics are being recorded, and there's a roadmap to understanding attribution. Still, processes are fairly manual and unsophisticated.	Performance and ROI are regularly reviewed, and relative value for each campaign can be assumed. Processes are in place.	Full attribution for all campaigns is understood, showing ROI across all activity. KPIs and metrics fully developed and in use. Predictive lead scoring in place. Growth can be forecast.

## SECTION 8

# Putting the buyer at the heart of your marketing



**CHRIS WICKSON**,  
general manager, EMEA,  
Integrate

The last two years have been a time of massive change for B2B marketers. Marketers are under pressure to accelerate innovation and digital adoption, while continuing to convert leads and accounts more quickly to revenue and demonstrate marketing's return on investment.

While much of this stress is due to environmental changes, the old ways of approaching B2B marketing are contributing to these issues. To be a marketer today is to be on a never-ending treadmill. New platforms and new approaches put marketers in a constant state of flux, and many struggle to have a fundamental understanding of what is expected and how our work aligns with business goals.

In a recent study conducted by Heinz Marketing on 'The Future of Marketing Work,' nearly 60% of B2B marketers are not entirely confident that their marketing strategy, technology and team structure effectively support their marketing goals. And a further breakdown of that data finds that number jump to 87% for ABM teams and 74% for revenue marketing teams.

It's apparent that ABM can mean many things to many people. As the report indicates, we're seeing increased investment in ABM strategy and technologies as we move into a post-Covid world. We believe ABM represents a return to the fundamentals of B2B marketing – where we go beyond the account and put the buyer at the centre of our marketing strategies.

As Peter suggests in the opening to this report, the last two years have dramatically altered buyer behaviour and expectations. They are no longer satisfied with outdated tactics and now require brands to meet them where they are in their buying process and connect with them in the channels where they are doing their research.

But marketers cannot change if their dated strategies, tech stacks and organisational structures don't change. It requires a rewriting of the rules of engagement with our buyers.

**As we see in the report, if you're considering a shift in your marketing strategy, it's critical to:**

1. Establish shared goals and buy-in at the executive level and across your teams. Executive support is a prerequisite to successful change management.
2. Ensure your teams are aligned with a specific ABM strategy before you begin to operationalise for scale. Whether you're targeting a small number of accounts or a large, less focused number, aligning teams with a shared understanding of the strategy is the key to scale.
3. Assess your existing tech and ensure alignment with your approach before investing in additional technology. It's key to have your strategy clearly laid out and start with the channels and technology you have today as you scale.

By centring our ABM strategies around our buyers, marketers can connect channels, break down silos within their organisations and meet the buyers where they are on their journey. After all, it's a buyer world, and we must adapt to their needs if we are to succeed in the next era of B2B marketing.

## ABOUT

# B2B Marketing and Propolis

Powered by the community, for the community.

Established in 2004, B2B Marketing is now the number one go-to resource for B2B marketers across the globe.

Right from the start, we had a clear mission that remains as strong and clear today: to provide marketers at business brands with the tools, insight and inspiration they need to grow and succeed – as both individuals and businesses.

To do this, we need to continually evolve to make sure we are delivering what you need.

This is why Propolis was born – our community for B2B marketers.

We're proud to serve as the focal point for the B2B marketing sector, and to be a force for greater connectivity, enabling marketers and leaders to share experiences and learn from one another.

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## ABOUT

# Integrate

Integrate is the leader in Precision Demand Marketing, an emerging category to help B2B marketers develop and deliver an omnichannel demand strategy, convert customer and prospect data records to revenue, and drive marketing ROI. Integrate works with high-growth and enterprise organizations like Salesforce, Microsoft, Akamai, and Pluralsight to power their Precision Demand Marketing strategies. Over the past decade, Integrate has evolved from solving the complex challenges across each demand generation channel to powering account-based, buyer-driven omnichannel experiences.

Today, Integrate's Demand Acceleration Platform helps marketers orchestrate connected buying experiences that drive qualified conversations at scale, simplify ABM management, and accelerate revenue generation. For more information, please visit [www.integrate.com](http://www.integrate.com) or follow us on LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter.

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