

CHANGEMAKERS | ABM LEADERS ROUNDTABLE

Key insights

Getting ABM launched: developing a true proof of concept

Anonymised insights from a Changemakers roundtable. Names and organisations have been removed so the learnings can be shared openly.

KEY INSIGHTS

From pilot pressure to a proof of concept that lands

ABM leaders face mounting pressure to demonstrate value quickly while working in organisations still structured around lead-based thinking. The challenge is not just proving ABM works. It is securing cross-functional buy-in, turning intelligence into sales action, and defining success metrics that satisfy stakeholders without demanding impossible attribution.

Most programmes have to prove themselves before they are fully resourced. Pilots that succeed tend to start with sales buy-in, the right people, success measures tied to business objectives and clean data, rather than waiting for perfect technology.

This report covers four themes: building adoption with sales, getting the right team in place, setting proof of concept success criteria, and putting strategy before platforms.

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THEME 1

Build adoption through early sales buy-in

Successful pilot launches depend less on perfect planning and more on relationship-building, scope management and clear communication about what ABM actually means for the organisation.

Involve sales from the beginning

Getting sales on board early is the foundation for ABM success, turning what could be a marketing initiative into a collaborative approach. The key shift is moving from presenting ABM as a completed plan to involving sales from the start. Joint planning sessions, shared objectives and drawing on sales' account insight create a genuine partnership, rather than marketing pushing initiatives onto reluctant sales teams.

> "ABM is a strategic shift for a business. As marketers, we were really on board and excited about it, we could see the potential. Our sales colleagues were more sceptical."
>
> **ABM leader, financial services company**

Select the right sales partners

Not every salesperson is ready or willing to try new methods, and ABM is less effective with resistant teams. Choosing invested sales partners for the pilot gives it the best chance of proving its value.

> "Once you have the buy-in it's about selecting who from the sales team you are going to partner with, because they have to be invested as well."
>
> **ABM director, enterprise software company**

Use joint workshops to shift the mindset from leads to accounts

Joint workshops give sales a voice and a share of responsibility in shaping the ABM approach, building buy-in through participation rather than prescription. One example is bringing in an external partner to lead those conversations.

> "That shift in mindset is tricky, but we've found that joint workshops where we include sales and marketing and an external partner to lead those conversations helps solve the mindset shift."
>
> **ABM leader, enterprise software company**

Use plain language to keep sales with you

Avoiding jargon and explaining concepts simply is critical for keeping sales engaged. Clear communication makes ABM accessible and stops sales teams feeling lost in marketing acronyms and terminology.

> "Try and have a conversation about account-based marketing without using any abbreviations, so when you say things like 'Total Addressable Market' explain what you mean. Then people really get it."
>
> **ABM director, enterprise technology company**

Show success from other teams to drive adoption

Demonstrating peer success creates competitive motivation, and it accelerates adoption more effectively than top-down mandates.

> "I learned that envy is a good motivation for sales, so when you tell them, hey, this team is getting 5 times more opportunities with ABM than you do, then you have them."
>
> **ABM leader, enterprise software company**



THEME 2

Build the right ABM team

ABM success depends less on perfect strategy or technology and more on having team members with the right mindset, curiosity and ability to bridge intelligence and action.

Hire for curiosity

When ABM programmes struggle, the issue is not always strategy or technology. Often it is whether the team has the analytical mindset, experience and curiosity that ABM demands.

> "The number one ABM skill is curiosity, which can't always be taught. Curiosity to find out about the accounts, to find out about the vertical and then being able to share and hypothesise about the learnings is key."
>
> **ABM director, enterprise software company**

Build for a specific skill mix, not a new job title

Renaming a role does not change how someone works, particularly once sales starts asking for leads again. Building an ABM team means hiring or developing for a specific profile rather than retraining whoever is available.

> "You can't baptise someone on ABM and expect them to think differently or act differently. This works until the first person in sales asks them for more leads. You need a very interesting mix of experience, an analytical mind, being open to technology, and being inherently curious. It's a special personality you need."
>
> **ABM leader, enterprise software company**



Accept manual reporting in the early stages

Without perfect technology in place, manual tracking and reporting is a practical way to show early ABM value. At this stage the focus is on leading indicators that show the programme is working, with revenue a longer-term measure.

> "Demonstrating ABM value is currently a manual process. We're trying to show the value of a growing account footprint, and the types of personas we have available, and then drawing the connections between them, and then the types of conversations our SDRs are having. It's about showing that the marketing programmes are working, because we have the right personas, and we are having the right conversations. The monetary value is a longer-term consideration."
>
> **ABM leader, enterprise software company**

Rethink the marketing and sales handover

As buyers arrive better informed before engaging sales, ABM offers an opportunity to rethink where marketing ends and sales begins. Marketing can take on activity traditionally owned by sales earlier in the journey.

> "Now we need to start thinking about how we use account-based marketing and selling to do more of the kind of selection work that salespeople do, but with marketing, because our buyers are coming to us much later in their purchase journey."
>
> **ABM director, enterprise technology company**

Build an internal and external ABM community

Forums where ABM practitioners share experiences, both successes and failures, accelerate learning and provide valuable peer support.

> "We try to meet as ABMers and share and connect. I just reached out to others, and others reached out to me, and we connected regularly, and we exchanged our achievements and our frustrations. When I go to an ABM-related conference, you see that they all have the same challenges."
>
> **ABM leader, enterprise software company**



THEME 3

Set soft and hard metrics for the proof of concept

Traditional measurement rarely captures ABM's impact during a pilot, particularly with long enterprise sales cycles. That calls for practical ways to demonstrate value early.

Pilot in one vertical and compare leading indicators

A useful approach to pilot measurement focuses on controlled comparison rather than perfect attribution.

> "We approached measurement in the pilot through looking at a specific vertical and micro-verticals within that. Comparing the leading indicators e.g. reach to the ICP, and the opportunities created from that ICP."
>
> **ABM director, enterprise technology company**

Track buying committee coverage with a traffic light system

One example is a traffic light rating for how many members of each account's buying committee are in the database. It makes early progress in building account footprints easy to track, and shows value in terms sales teams understand: coverage of the people who actually make buying decisions.

> "We know we need to approach at least 8-12 buying people within that committee. We review the database and if we only have 2 buying people for that particular account they'd be listed as red. 5, they'll be listed as amber, and 5+ they'll be listed as green. We're trying to move everybody up into that green area."
>
> **ABM leader, enterprise technology company**



Start with business objectives and work back to metrics

Metrics built from business objectives resonate with the stakeholders who control budgets and programme continuation, which makes pilot success easier to communicate and defend.

> "Our metrics are based on business objectives, identifying the main goals for each market, where we need to invest to grow and where we are hitting targets. Our messaging and approach for each region then links back to the business objectives, ensuring we get the right people on board from a business angle right from the offset, because we're all focusing on developing the business in the same areas."
>
> **ABM leader, enterprise technology company**

THEME 4

Put strategy before platforms

Platforms add value, but they should not be a barrier to starting. The data foundation needs fixing before investing in more sophisticated tools.

Start without waiting for the technology

For one-to-one ABM in particular, sophisticated platforms are not needed to begin demonstrating value and learning what works.

> "Technology shouldn't be a barrier to running ABM, but technology or platforms that can provide insight, firmographics or technographics can aid your ABM programmes."
>
> **ABM director, enterprise software company**

Fix your data first

Without data integrity, even the most sophisticated ABM platforms deliver unreliable results, making it impossible to demonstrate real value. Working without clean data is like "fishing with a spear in the dark": a precision tool with no visibility of who you are targeting.

> "Before you talk about intent data or AI or any fancy tech, you need clean account data. If your CRM has duplicates, if firmographics are wrong, if you can't reliably identify which contacts belong to which accounts, nothing else works. That data cleanup isn't sexy, but it's essential."
>
> **ABM leader, enterprise software company**

Build AI into processes from the start

Embedding AI from the beginning, rather than retrofitting it later, lets teams scale personalisation without a matching increase in manual effort.

> "We're looking at Agentic AI solutions to create more tailored communications at speed. It's a way of doing personalisation in a quicker, more tailored way."
>
> **ABM leader, financial services company**

SUMMARY

Key takeaways

01 **Bring sales in early.** Involve invested sales partners from the start, talk in plain language and use peer success to build momentum.

02 **Hire for curiosity.** ABM depends on people with an analytical mindset, experience, openness to technology and genuine curiosity, not on renaming existing roles.

03 **Measure what a pilot can prove.** Use leading indicators such as ICP reach, buying committee coverage and opportunities created, tied back to business objectives.

04 **Fix the data before the platform.** Clean account data comes first. Technology can follow, and should never be the reason a programme does not start.

Successful ABM pilots put relationships ahead of perfect processes, show value through measurement adapted to their context, and are built around people with the right mindset rather than traditional marketers moved into ABM roles.

Perfect technology and processes can come later. What matters first is not letting infrastructure gaps delay proof of the fundamental value of account-focused engagement.

About Changemakers

Peer-led roundtables for marketing leaders navigating change. Honest conversations, practical ideas and anonymised insights you can act on.

About Modern

The B2B marketing consultancy for marketing leaders in complex businesses going through change.

We bring focus to what matters next, and the evidence to defend your decisions.

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Let’s connect

W: modernb2b.co
T: +44 (0)117 332 6700

Nicola Ray
nicola.ray@modernb2b.co
Connect on LinkedIn