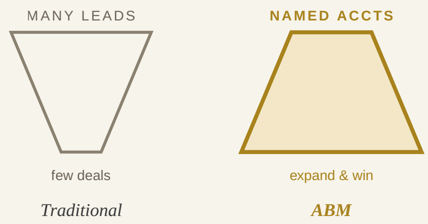
HOW TO RUN ACCOUNT-BASED MARKETING — IN PLAIN ENGLISH

Stop generating leads and hoping. *Pick the accounts you want, then go win them.*

Account-based marketing inverts the funnel. Instead of casting wide for leads and filtering down, you name the accounts worth winning first, then concentrate marketing and sales on them as a single team. ITSMA, the firm that coined the term, finds that **87% of marketers say ABM delivers higher ROI than any other marketing approach**. For B2B software companies selling five- and six-figure deals to a finite set of high-fit buyers, that's where pipeline comes from. Crucible installs the operating model.

Traditional demand gen fills the top of a funnel. ABM *starts at the bottom*, with the accounts you've already decided are worth winning.



The old model chases volume: thousands of leads, a few turn into deals. ABM flips it. **You define the finite set of accounts that fit, then create demand inside them.** Fewer names, bigger deals.

Timing decides the winner. 6sense's buyer research finds that **buyers are roughly 70% through their journey before they ever contact a seller, and the first vendor they call wins 84% of the time**. Wait for the hand-raise and you're competing for leftovers. ABM gets you into the account while the decision is still forming.

THE THREE FLAVORS OF ABM: MATCH EFFORT TO ACCOUNT VALUE, THEN RUN THE TIER

ONE-TO-ONE

Strategic

A handful of your highest-value targets, each treated as its own campaign. **Deep research, custom content, bespoke plays.** Highest cost per account, reserved for the deals that move the number.

Runs: custom account plans, exec-to-exec outreach, bespoke content and events, dedicated sales pairing. Weeks of effort per account.

ONE-TO-FEW

Clustered

Small groups of accounts sharing an industry, use case, or trigger. **One tailored program serves the cluster**, personalized to the segment, not each logo. The scalable middle.

Runs: segment-tailored campaigns, industry landing pages, clustered webinars, coordinated outbound by pod. One program, many accounts.

ONE-TO-MANY

Programmatic

Hundreds of fit accounts reached through intent data and targeted advertising. **Technology personalizes at scale**. Light touch, wide net, feeds the tiers above.

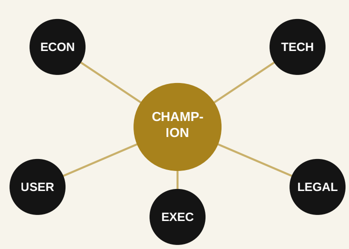
Runs: intent-triggered ads, personalized web experiences, automated nurture keyed to firmographic and behavioral signals.

YOU'RE NOT SELLING TO A LEAD. YOU'RE SELLING TO A COMMITTEE.

The single biggest reason lead-based marketing stalls in enterprise software: nobody buys alone. **Gartner puts the buying group for a complex B2B solution at six to ten decision-makers**, and Forrester's 2025 buyer research counts an average of **thirteen internal stakeholders** influencing a purchase, with external advisors on top. A "qualified lead" is one person in a room where economic buyers, champions, technical evaluators, and blockers all have a vote.

ABM markets to the whole buying group at once, mapping the roles, addressing each one's concern, and giving your **champion the material to sell you internally** when you're not there.

ONE TARGET ACCOUNT



The motion: five moves from target list to pipeline

1 Define — 2 Score — 3 Orchestrate — 4 Engage — 5 Measure

Marketing and sales run this together, against the same account list, or it doesn't work.

1 Define the ICP and name the accounts

Build the ideal-customer profile from your best existing wins: firmographics, tech stack, trigger events. Then **name the finite target list**. If everyone's a target, no one is. Sales and marketing must agree on this list before anything else.

2 Score and tier by fit + intent

Rank accounts by **fit** (how well they match the ICP) and **intent** (are they researching your category now). Intent data surfaces accounts already in-market, the ones deep in that anonymous 70% of the journey. Assign each to a tier (one-to-one, one-to-few, one-to-many) so effort matches value.

3 Orchestrate the plays across channels

Map the buying group in each account, then sequence coordinated touches (targeted ads, tailored content, outbound, events, sales outreach) so the account sees **one coherent story across every channel**, not disconnected campaigns.

4 Engage the whole buying group

Give each role a reason to care and give your champion the ammunition to sell internally. **Measure progress by how much of the account is engaged**, not by a single lead raising a hand.

5 Measure accounts, not leads

Track account engagement, pipeline created, deal velocity, and win rate within the target list. **MQLs are the wrong yardstick here.** The question is whether target accounts are moving toward a deal.

THE METRICS THAT MATTER

COVERAGE	DEPTH	OUTCOME
Account engagement	**Buying-group reach**	**Pipeline & win rate**
% of target accounts actively engaged	roles engaged per account	within the named target list

IS ABM THE RIGHT STRATEGY FOR YOU? AN HONEST TEST

Run ABM when…

- ✓ Deal economics clear the bar. **Gartner frames ABM for large, complex purchases; Forrester tiers by account lifetime value**, one-to-one reserved for accounts that move annual revenue
- ✓ Your market is **finite and nameable**. You can list the accounts that matter
- ✓ A **committee buys**. Multiple stakeholders must be won over, not one
- ✓ Expansion revenue matters. You land, then grow inside named accounts
- ✓ Sales will **work the same list**. Alignment is the precondition

Skip it (or wait) when…

- ✕ ACV is low, sales are **transactional or self-serve**. Personalization costs more than it returns; demand gen or PLG wins
- ✕ Your TAM is **broad and undifferentiated**. If almost anyone can buy, volume is your advantage
- ✕ **One person decides** quickly. Inbound plus outbound is cheaper and faster
- ✕ Sales and marketing **can't share a list**. Fix alignment first, or ABM will fail on contact
- ✕ You need pipeline **this quarter**. ABM compounds over quarters; it's not a rescue play

DO

- ✓ Get sales and marketing to agree on the target list first. Shared list or nothing
- ✓ Match investment to tier. Don't spend one-to-one effort on one-to-many accounts
- ✓ Market to the buying group, and arm your champion to sell internally
- ✓ Report on account progression, not lead volume

DON'T

- ✕ Rebrand your lead-gen as ABM by bolting "account" onto the same funnel
- ✕ Make the list so big it's just a segment. Focus is the point
- ✕ Run marketing plays sales knows nothing about. Unaligned touches confuse the account
- ✕ Judge it on MQLs. The wrong metric kills good ABM before it compounds

ABM is marketing and sales *pointed at the same named accounts, run as one motion.*

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nav@cruciblegtm.com · cruciblegtm.com