

What's Working IN ABM?

**An Inside Look At How B2B
Practitioners Have Successfully
Engaged Audiences With
Creative Digital Offers That
Focus On Relevancy & Value**

DEMAND GEN[®]
REPORT

SPECIAL REPORT

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Introduction

When most of the world went into lockdown back in March 2020, sales and marketing teams scrambled for new ways to stay close to customers and key prospects when face-to-face meetings were no longer an option.


While many of the pivots to virtual events, direct mail programs and other creative content offers were made out of short-term necessity, the successful response and positive results they have generated are expected to have long-term impact on B2B strategies.

In addition, the renewed focus on getting closer to customers and providing more relevance and interactions in all touch points has resulted in many companies upping their ante on ABM strategies overall.

“We certainly believe it’s a time to double down on ABM,” Rob Leavitt, SVP of Consulting at **ITSMA**, recently told *Demand Gen Report*. “It’s about putting a lot more emphasis on more individualized connections and engagement with key accounts; a lot more emphasis on research and insight. Just running a lot of those broad-based demand gen-type programs is going to be much less effective going forward for quite a while.”

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ROB LEAVITT, ITSMA



With ABM becoming a bigger part of the overall strategy for a lot of brands, there has also been more integration between the approaches to traditional lead acquisition programs and more targeted account-based plays.

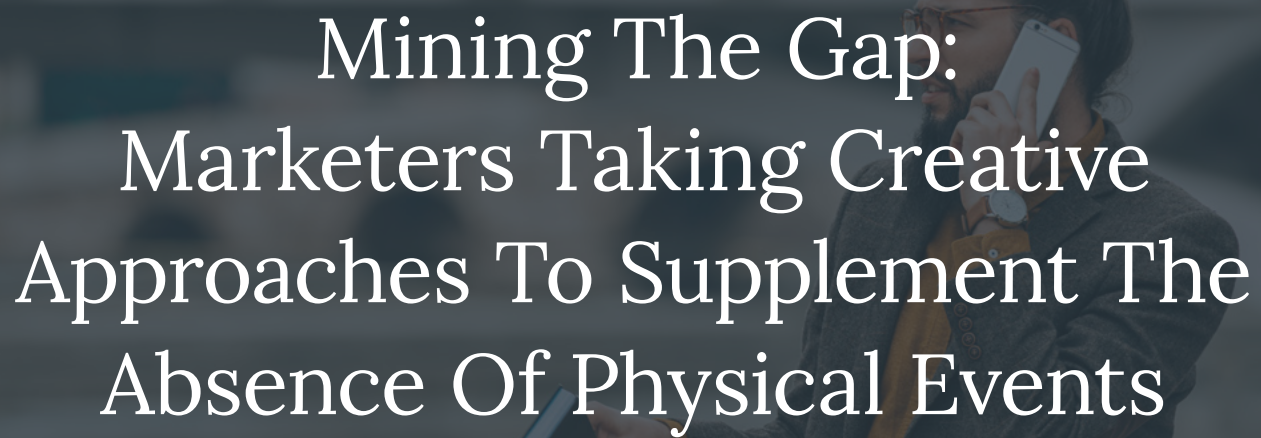
Industry analysts point out that what often began as a mix of random acts of marketing, has resulted in a more meaningful shift to well-coordinated and creative high-touch campaigns delivered across multiple channels.

In the following report, we'll examine some of the specific strategies and tactics that have proven successful for B2B brands during this transformational and disruptive period, including:

- How companies have successfully supplemented the gap of physical events with creative content and virtual offerings;
- How integrated multichannel campaigns have become a more standard approach;
- How direct mail programs have remained successful and relevant through preferred mailing addresses;
- How intent data and other data have become more critical in building Ideal Customer Profiles (ICP) and engaging target audiences; and
- How sales and marketing collaboration has gotten stronger during this period and how that will likely become a staple of ABM success in the future.

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Mining The Gap: Marketers Taking Creative Approaches To Supplement The Absence Of Physical Events

Since in-person meetings have traditionally been one of the most popular tactics for ABM and traditional demand gen programs, marketers have understandably been hyper-focused on finding platforms to replace the leads and the engagement lost as face-to-face events have temporarily been off the table—bringing about a flood of virtual event offerings in Q2.


A recent survey conducted by *Demand Gen Report* found B2B buyers have responded positively to targeted online gatherings, with 61% saying they want to network digitally via topic-oriented gatherings.

Specifically, respondents noted that they were interested into online get-togethers where discussions were based on:

- **Topics and challenges (77%);**
- **Role (64%); and**
- **Industry (50%).**

The research also showed that 48% of respondents wanted conversation-based networking opportunities, while 44% said they wanted a mix of business and fun.

“We see lots of companies trying to replace the networking elements that we are missing from face-to-face events with things like online yoga classes and wine tastings,” said ITSMA’s Leavitt. “We are also seeing a lot of executive education programs where instead of traveling out to a university for a few days, now companies are inviting top accounts to things like innovation workshops where it’s still high touch, high value but they don’t have to travel. Overall, we’ve just seen a burst of creativity, including really relevant content and other new approaches.”



In one example of a creative approach to content, RollWorks responded to the cancellation of the Adobe Summit back in March by pivoting and creating a highly relevant asset for their target audience.

Once that pivotal event for the marketing industry was canceled, **RollWorks**' SVP of Marketing Randi Barshack and her team quickly adjusted to the new reality.

“We thought, ‘I bet there’s lots of companies that are going to be dealing with the same thing: What do we do when our events get cancelled?’ Barshack explained. So, we put out a guide within a week on what do with canceled events and how to make up the demand gap. And we had it ready on March 10.”

The response to the guide was immediate and impressive: Within a few days, two thousand copies of the guide were downloaded. To build on the immediate interest in the guide, Barshack noted that RollWorks took a multichannel approach to promote the timely asset.

“As they were announcing cancellations like SXSW, we would create ad campaigns,” she said. “And we would run ad campaigns that very explicitly referenced the canceled event that they were sponsoring. And then on the back end, we actually had a special promo for companies that could demonstrate that they had had an event canceled. We gave them free three-month access to our platform and a certain number of advertising credits.”

The approach RollWorks took to creating timely and relevant content matched up with what ITSMA research found executives were looking for during these disruptive times, with 54% of executives polled selecting a 5 on a 1-to-5 scale that indicated they wanted practical, unbiased information that demonstrates applications and results.

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RANDI BARSHACK, ROLLWORKS

ABM In The Fall Of 2020: From Getting The Message Right To Making The Message Real

RANDI BARSHACK, SVP OF MARKETING, **ROLLWORKS**



In the spring of this year, I penned a similar byline for the 1H2020 version of this report. Filled with contemplative thoughts in the wake of several weeks on lockdown, the essay began:

"I write this from a makeshift desk in my living room. My son is at 'school' 10 feet away in his bedroom and my husband is puttering away in the kitchen; five feet to my right."

Seven months later and I'm still in the same damn chair, my son has matriculated into his sophomore year from the same desk in his bedroom and (seriously) my husband is, once again, in the kitchen as I write....blending himself a smoothie as I attempt to concentrate on writing.

Back in March, I mused over my struggle to put an article on ABM into perspective. Today, as well, finding perspective feels like a tall order. This time, however, I've had the benefit of watching our industry in action amidst what is arguably the most challenging business circumstances we'll ever face. And some of the rare silver linings are chock full of account-based strategies.

Despite its name, ABM is really less about marketing to an "account," and more of an understanding that B2B decisions are made by buying committees of individuals who work together at specific companies. These individuals work at the same company, so their collective actions constitute an indicator of interest, intent and engagement. Further, the characteristics of the organization or *firmographics* are the best possible indicator of which accounts are likely a fit in the first place. It's what we call at RollWorks a "Fit-First" approach.

A significant part of the promise of ABM is the ability to personalize messages, content and programs to fit prospects by firmographic information, stage in a sales cycle or role of any given individual. In buzzword speak we say, “the right message at the right time.” While this relatively will always be of value, 2020 has opened doors for us to take the relativity of personalization to a new level. It’s all about embracing the imperfect marketer and leading with empathy.

As we settled into our makeshift home offices; as we furiously pounded out our fear and frustrations via the kneading motions of sourdough loaves, communed over binge-watching *The Tiger King* and traded in our *business* casual wardrobes for *extremely* casual...something transformational happened. We were finally allowed to admit our humanity. No makeup, kids interrupting, dog barking and dirty dishes in view behind us, a freedom to embrace our imperfections within the professional realms. It’s not that we all suddenly become more human, but 2020 has given us permission to admit it.

As a marketing team at RollWorks, we embraced this new normal. Our call to arms was a determination to market to our prospects and customers as people. Our mantra became “empathy first” and as a result, we experienced record-breaking quarters. In a demand gen world, “people” may feel like the antithesis of “accounts” (you know, the whole “Leads vs. ABM” rhetoric), but in our case, an account-based strategy and people-led programs proved to be the best of bedfellows.

At the heart of our account-based strategy is a core list of target accounts. Thousands of companies are smack, dab in the middle of our ICP sweet spot. Each account is scored, giving us a tiered list of accounts.

This account-based backbone gave us the infrastructure upon which to drive these people-led micro-programs. The payoff extended well beyond ROI and into great personal satisfaction. Turns out the “real message at the right time” is even better than the “right” one. Rather than sweeping broad campaigns, we attacked super real pain points (that went well beyond our own solution) speaking to the whole person of our audience.

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Three guides we published spoke to the “real” challenges faced by our B2B marketing brethren. One addressed a challenge around filling the demand gap of cancelled events. One assisted in turn-on-a-dime rewrites of our 2020 marketing plans. And when a strawman poll we conducted revealed that 15% of marketers would rather have a root canal than attend another webinar, we put out a guide addressing webinar fatigue called “Not Another Webinar.”

While the content was gobbled up by many, we used our account-based strategy to drive incremental investments. We negotiated with pay-per-lead syndication vendors to deliver only leads from relevant roles at priority accounts. Highly targeted ad campaigns touting the guides were served up to this same, high-value audience.

More substantial budget was reserved for accounts with the highest fit scores or those most likely to deliver the highest lifetime value. Most notable, a no-strings-attached dinner delivery gift card touched a nerve with once engaged prospects who had gone silent. Our offer, no doubt, spoke to the exasperation many are feeling as they juggle stay-at-home work with stay-at-home life.

A more recent campaign speaks to an even more primal pain point of our audience. After multiple meetings where our own team had trouble remembering the day of the week, we decided to run PSA ads simply reminding our target account audiences of the day of the week. Targeted, efficient investment of our dollars, 30% of our targeted accounts reached 10 hours into the campaign (as I write) and (hopefully) goodwill to that will last long beyond the days by which I’m tethered to this chair.

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Connecting Across Multiple Channels Is Even More Critical To Engage Targeted Audiences

Just as RollWorks used targeted ads, social and direct mail to engage targeted accounts, industry experts have pointed out that the most successful, post-pandemic ABM programs used a mix of channels to stay in front of buying committees.

Meredith Fuller, Managing Director of Demand Strategy for **Quarry**, a leading B2B marketing agency, suggested that tracking engagement across multiple channels has allowed brands to see which accounts are truly engaged. “Most of the robust account-based programs we develop are multichannel and multi-touch,” said Fuller. “So, they have email components, direct mail components, sales outreach components, maybe paid ads — and traditionally events are part of them as well.”

In addition to using multiple channels for outreach, she added that closely measuring and tracking engagement across those channels is equally important.

“Are those accounts engaging with either the inbound or outbound content you have out there? Are they visiting your website? Are they clicking through on your ads? Are they engaging with your social channels?” Fuller said. “If you are able to overlap that potential engagement analysis to really see which accounts are scoring highly on each of those areas, you can double down on those accounts... that’s the ideal scenario.”

While experts stressed a multichannel approach to marketing, there has been a clear up in digital advertising within the B2B sector post-pandemic. According to a recent eMarketer forecast, B2B spending on digital ads in the U.S. will increase this by 22.6%. “We estimate that growth in B2B digital ad spending peaked in 2018 at 27.5%, falling almost six percentage points last year,” said analyst Jillian Ryan. “But due to the pandemic and the unique conditions for B2B marketers who are rapidly shifting spending from in-person events, growth will reaccelerate this year by 22.6%.”



Creative Ways To Keep Physical Connections Working While Working From Home


At the same time digital ad spending was ramping up, many ABM practitioners were struggling with ways to maintain the highly personal, high-touch impact that integrated direct mail programs have provided.

Many marketers assumed that direct mail was off the table as an option once most of their prospects started working from home and were no longer reachable at their office addresses. However, PFL, a leading provider of orchestrating direct mail solutions with digital marketing and sales programs, learned first-hand after the pandemic that new approaches to physical programs could still be successful.

Nick Runyon, PFL's CMO, explained that in the two-week period after many offices were closed back in March, the company noticed the meetings booked by marketing had plummeted because they stopped including physical mailings out to prospects.

“We invest in marketing technology pretty heavily, so the ability to integrate the intelligence gathered to not only know they received a mailing, but also if they then visited our website – whether they clicked on an ad, what content they engaged with and how long they spend with content. Then we can give them an engagement score.”

NICK RUNYON, PFL



“What we started to do was email our contact and say, ‘This is what I think your preferred address is. I’m only going to use it one time, but I have something to send to you,’ said Runyon. “And what we saw was our meeting book rate jumped to 9.5% once we started to send to our contacts preferred mailing address.

“When the package gets delivered, we still make the phone call to the person because we usually have personal phone numbers,” he continued. “We had a 10X improvement in meeting books immediately. But then when people respond and said ‘Yes, that is my preferred address,’ our connection rate rose over 22%.”

By asking for and getting the preferred mailing addresses and contact information, PFL was able to achieve and maintain the critical physical touch element of its ABM program.

Runyon added that an integrated and coordinated approach with the rest of PFL’s martech stack was critical to the pivot. “We invest in marketing technology pretty heavily, so the ability to integrate the intelligence gathered to not only know they received a mailing, but also if they then visited our website — whether they clicked on an ad, what content they engaged with and how long they spend with content. Then we can give them an engagement score. That is what we have categorized as tactile marketing automation.”

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Conclusion: Marrying Fit, Intent & Engagement Remains Critical For ABM Success

Although B2B brands have had to be creative and adapt their approaches amid this unique business environment, industry experts point out the fundamental steps of using data to build out your ICP and actively track your engagement within target accounts.

“Ideally, ABM success is looking at fit, intent and engagement,” said Quarry’s Fuller. “From a fit standpoint, really having a strong understanding around what your organization’s ideal accounts are. A lot of that can be determined by looking at your current customer base, and then identifying companies who have similar attributes. In terms of intent, there’s a lot of technologies out there that can give you a sense of how aware accounts are in terms of their buying journey.”

As an example, PFL’s Runyon said one of the first initiatives he prioritized when he took over as CMO last year was further analysis into their ICP. “We looked at where our current revenue was coming from and we saw that 64% of our revenue was coming from companies of a certain size. That led us to redefine our ICP and move more up-market.”

Mark Ogne, Founder and CEO of the [ABM Consortium](#), added that many of the most successful ABM practitioners are leveraging predictive, intent data and other intelligence to help define their ICP and successfully engage those accounts with the right fit.

“It’s actually the intersection of many things, including both intent and predictive, not either or,” Ogne said. “With the combination of the two, when you want to find people that have high interest in a topic and then score high on their ability to make a purchase, your organization has intelligence to engage the right audience with the right messaging.”

Additional Resources



RollWorks offers ambitious B2B companies an account-based platform to align marketing and sales teams and confidently grow revenue. Powered by proprietary data and machine learning, we can help do it all — from identifying your targets to engaging them across channels and measuring revenue impact.

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Demand Gen Report is a targeted online publication that uncovers the strategies and solutions that help companies better align their sales and marketing organizations, and ultimately, drive growth. A key component of the publication's editorial coverage focuses on the sales and marketing automation tools that enable companies to better measure and manage their multi-channel demand generation efforts.

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