WHAT'S WORKING IN PERSONALIZATION?

Marketers Turn To ABM Strategies, AI To Create
Binge-Worthy, Custom Content

DEMAND GEN
REPORT

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INTRODUCTION

The great irony of personalization is that once a tactic becomes widespread, the novelty of the experience — and by extension, its impact on potential buyers — wears off. After all, it wasn't too long ago that first name email personalization was all the rage, but that won't wow buyers today.

Rapid technological advancements have allowed modern consumers to grow accustomed to having dynamic, highly customized content available at their fingertips at all times — think **Spotify Wrapped** and **Instagram Reels**. It's not surprising, then, that buyers expect similar experiences from B2B companies. The marketers that meet and exceed these expectations are best positioned to engage and convert prospective buyers into loyal customers.

According to *Demand Gen Report's* "**2023 Content Preferences Survey Report**," 42% of buyers said they were more likely to engage with a sales rep if the content is personalized or tailored to their specific needs. But the survey findings reveal a sizable gap between buyer preferences and the content experiences that marketing teams are currently delivering. In fact, more than one-third of respondents (39%) found it difficult to find relevant content that caters to their needs.

This report will explore what's working in personalization today, including best practices and expert insights into crafting customized, engaging content for each stage of the buyer's journey. Topics covered include:

- The value of creating binge-able content hubs with dynamic recommendations;

- How account-based marketing (ABM) can not only improve content strategies, but also better equip sales teams for personalized outreach; and

- The role of AI in executing personalization at scale.

BREAKING THROUGH THE NOISE WITH PERSONALIZED CONTENT HUBS, RECOMMENDATIONS

In today's crowded digital landscape, marketers have a narrow window for captivating and engaging prospective buyers. In a **session at the 2023 B2B Sales & Marketing Exchange**, Jeanne Kirby, VP of Marketing for full service marketing and communications agency **Inviso Corporation**, broke down the statistic that human attention spans are only eight seconds — less than that of a goldfish.

"It's not necessarily our attention spans that are so short, it's more likely that our consideration span is," said Kirby. "It's the amount of time we're willing to consider whether or not we're going to keep reading that article or watching that video. For marketers, that means we have eight seconds to hook our customer before they're gone."

Once hooked, people will spend hours binge-watching a TV show or scrolling endlessly through social media. Thereby, marketers should not only focus on producing high-quality, first-touch content to reel in prospective buyers, but also consider continuing to share highly personalized content for future consumption.

According to **Kyall Mai**, an award-winning C-level marketing specialist, online content hubs are a ripe channel for personalized B2B marketing. Campaigns can start small before expanding to more advanced forms. Per Mai, the key is to lean into personalized recommendations that serve up the next best blog, video or interactive content asset based on user data and engagement.

"Personalization should be approached gradually, starting with simple methods and progressively enhancing data quality and content creation capabilities," said Mai. "Testing and learning are crucial at each stage. Building a system based on quality first-party data and well-organized content are the critical and essential building blocks."

Proof Point:

Schneider Electric is putting efficiency and sustainability at the core of its purpose and mission. Since 2018, the company has helped its customers save and avoid 347 million tons of CO_2 emissions by providing digital energy efficiency solutions for buildings, data centers, infrastructure and industries. Using its 10-year partnership with Salesforce, Schneider Electric makes it easier for customers and partners to solve energy efficiency and industrial automation challenges by giving its 40,000 frontline employees a 360-degree view of the customer and technology to work more efficiently. Since the partnership, Schneider Electric:

- Sees a 15%-20% lead-to-order success rate;

- Takes one day to close opportunities; and

- Achieves a 30% projected reduction in time to close.

> "We have eight seconds to hook our customer before they're gone."
> **JEANNE KIRBY, INVISO CORPORATION**

ABM PROGRAMS QUIETLY INSPIRED THE ERA OF 1:1 PERSONALIZATION: NOW IT'S TIME FOR THE NEXT LEAD FORWARD

By Kimen Warner, SVP of Salesforce

For years, the conventional wisdom about B2B digital marketing was that it's just like B2C marketing — except with a 5-year lag. B2C brands have been known for being bolder in adopting new technologies and platforms to reach their target consumers. Just look at Starbucks, which was experimenting with social media crowdsourcing back in 2008, while Budweiser was sharing viral videos as far back as 1999. Tried-and-true tactics are often the safer bet in a business setting, and it can take a few years for B2B marketers to incorporate new ones.

However, that's not the whole story. Over the past 15 years, B2B marketers have quietly used a digital marketing tactic that's also become a critical part of modern B2C marketing: Omnichannel marketing personalization. The not-so-obvious obvious connection? Account-based marketing (ABM).

The foundational premise of ABM is that the most effective marketing treats every account (or buying group, or opportunity group) individually because mass marketing feels impersonal. The key is to make each group feel like you really know and understand them.

B2C marketers bought into that philosophy and are now using personalization strategies and solutions designed to bring every engagement closer to a 1:1 experience. And, because each individual transaction is lower value and therefore lower risk, they've been faster to adopt automated tools to support their programs.

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Now let's go back to the B2B side. Executing ABM has been challenging: Typically, a lot of people and expertise are needed to plan, create and deliver bespoke messaging and campaigns if automation is not used. Plus, today's B2B marketer faces the added complexity of managing data at the account level or the buying group at the opportunity level.

As with many B2B efforts, you're probably having multiple conversations with multiple people at your target accounts. Organizing your customer data so you know who someone is and what they care about is crucial. With each potential customer worth so much, it's been safer to artfully — and manually — craft each experience targeted to a group. However, that has limited the impact of ABM programs.

The good news is we've seen a big jump in the quality of AI offerings over the past year. This improvement presents an opportunity for B2B marketers to leap forward with ABM. The goal is the same: Using what you already understand about your target customer to provide content and offers that are always relevant. But now the content creation and campaign selection can be done automatically and more broadly than doing it manually. This updated version of personalization is characterized by three key capabilities:

- Real-time interaction;

- AI-decisioning; and

- Cross-channel 1:1 experiences.

Imagine four people from one of your top accounts visiting your site. Now imagine giving each person a real-time experience that's relevant to A) the account, B) the opportunity, C) their role and D) their journey stage. Now think about how this experience extends to every channel from email campaigns to sales calls to service interactions. It's clear you can't do this with rules and spreadsheets, and the ROI and improved customer experience are worth the leap to AI.

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For example, let's say a customer visits the website of your heavy machinery supply company for the first time in several months. While you will not know their exact reason for this visit, a dynamic real-time profile and AI-driven decisioning can instantly create an experience that's hyper-relevant to where they left off. Your dynamic profile instantly identifies that this person is from a critical multi-national buyer in Latin America, where this account has very specific product and service needs. You can now serve them an experience showcasing the factory equipment they would be most interested in learning about and manage a cross-channel journey that includes an email next week and sales call a few days later.

This vision of ABM nirvana may seem daunting, but rest assured there are crawl/walk/run approaches that can help onboard personalization tactics regardless of an organization's level of maturity. First, you can start with automatically selecting the best homepage content for an account from a set of approved assets, eliminating the need for custom landing pages. Then, you can extend to unifying email and web content based on their brand interactions over time.

The AI train is about to leave the station, and now is a good time to hop on. This is B2B marketers' moment to adopt the recent advances in B2C marketing. But don't forget: This was actually B2B innovation all along.

> "Organizing your customer data so you know who someone is and what they care about is crucial."
>
> **KIMEN WARNER, SALESFORCE**

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TAPPING INTO ABM TO FUEL CUSTOMIZED CONTENT THROUGHOUT THE BUYER'S JOURNEY

The B2B buyer's journey has grown longer and more complex in recent years. In fact, 19% of buyers said they spend more time researching potential solutions and 27% are involving more people compared to one year ago, according to the "2023 B2B Buyer's Survey."

Today's buyers enjoy navigating the purchasing process on their own terms and timelines, typically engaging sales representatives much later down the line. In response, ABM has emerged as a winning strategy for staying top-of-mind amongst key accounts.

ABM enables marketing teams to deploy customized content at each stage of the buyer's journey. As an added benefit, it also helps align marketing and sales departments, so sales representatives are armed with in-depth account insights that allow for more personalized conversations when they finally connect with buyers.
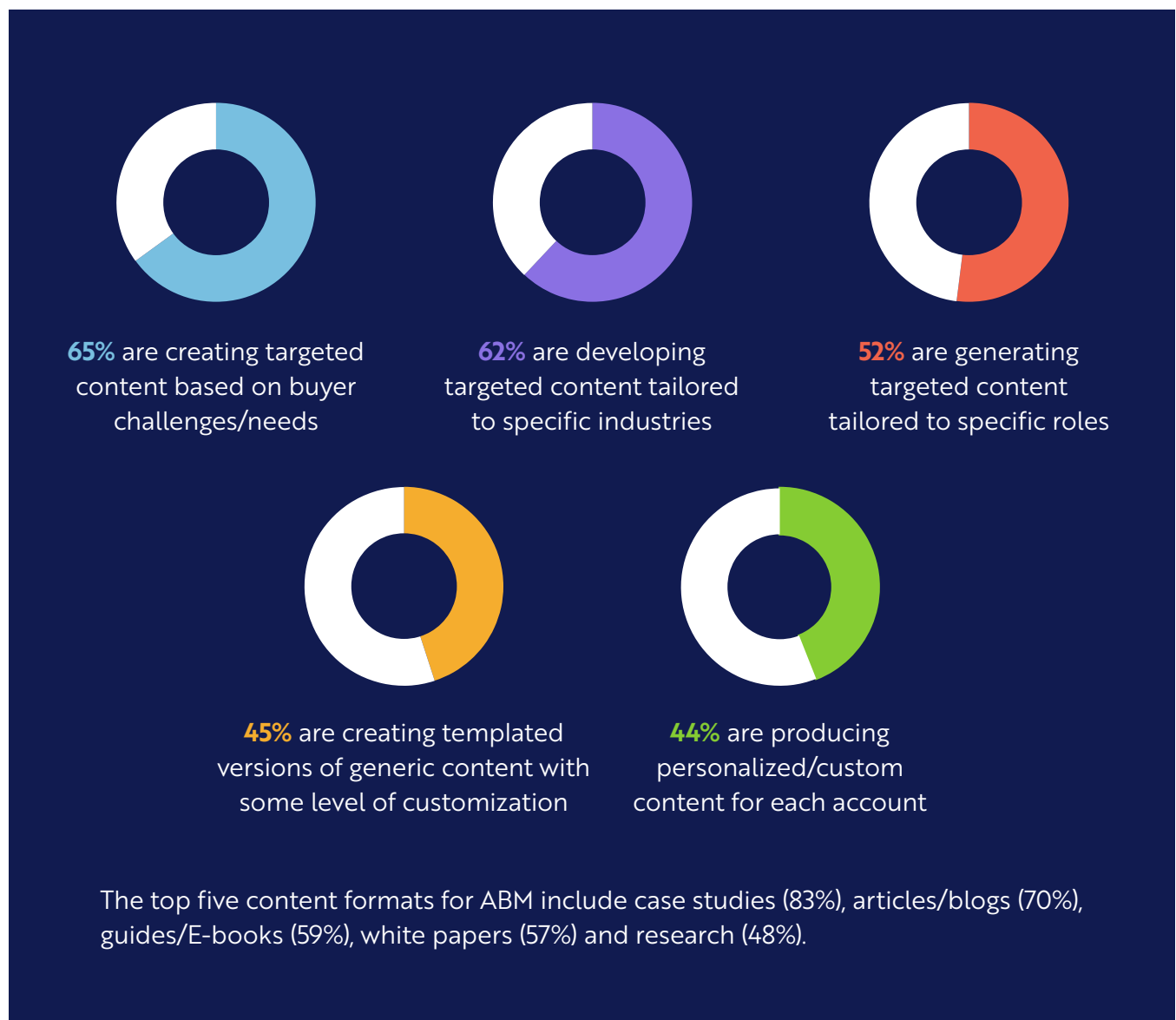
When asked what made buyers ultimately accept outreach from a sales rep, 57% cited highly customized outreach. Meanwhile, 16% said sequenced messaging was key to securing their business and 11% said personalized video won them over.

According to C-level marketing specialist Mai, using ABM and intent data to fuel personalization campaigns is a "slam dunk" for marketers.

He noted that these tactics enable hyper personalization via real-time insights into buyer interests, which can include everything from their interests in certain products, topics or education materials — all of which provide "critical clues on the buyer journey progression.

"Using intent data, sales teams equipped with scripted follow-ups and relevant content can achieve scalable personalization," said Mai. "This alignment of sales and marketing ensures delivery of personalized, useful content to move prospects further down the B2B sales cycle."

Research from the "2023 ABM Benchmark Survey" found that marketers are largely adjusting their content as follows:

65% are creating targeted content based on buyer challenges/needs

62% are developing targeted content tailored to specific industries

52% are generating targeted content tailored to specific roles

45% are creating templated versions of generic content with some level of customization

44% are producing personalized/custom content for each account

The top five content formats for ABM include case studies (83%), articles/blogs (70%), guides/E-books (59%), white papers (57%) and research (48%).

Proof Point:

Global open mobility company astara recognized that the market was crowded with various companies offering different services to customers, but none that catered to what they really wanted. However, with so many companies in the industry, it was difficult and costly to compete as a business centered on car distribution, vehicle subscriptions and connected vehicle software. Using Salesforce Customer 360, astara can bring together data that includes dealership interactions and website visits to create a single view of its customer. Now, astara can predict if a driver is going to be more interested in taking out a subscription for a sports car or buying a family 4x4. And that means it can stay one step ahead of its customers – and its competitors.

The transformation helped astara achieve:

- 300% increase in turnover in six years;

- 20% uplift in lead conversion rates; and

- 30% boost in customer loyalty.

"Using intent data, sales teams equipped with scripted follow-ups and relevant content can achieve scalable personalization."

KYALL MAI, C-LEVEL MARKETING SPECIALIST

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HARNESSING AI TO DELIVER
PERSONALIZATION AT SCALE

The harsh reality of modern marketing is that teams are increasingly asked to do more with less. This is especially true during today's uncertain economic times when budgets are tightened and staffing levels are trimmed.

The silver lining is that artificial intelligence (AI) tools have made it easier than ever for marketers to create high-quality custom content at scale. But while the barriers to entry are lower, the stakes are higher given the exceptional personalization experiences consumers have in their daily B2C lives and now expect from B2B companies as well.

"AI will — and already has — entirely reshaped personalization," said Daniel Englebretson, Principal Consultant at marketing agency Shift. "Now, as you live your life, if you are engaged in a particular channel, and it isn't tailored for you, then it is a bad experience."

But Englebretson noted that when done well, generative AI enables marketers to reshape the prospective buyer's journey in real time by adjusting marketing messages and content according to buyer insights and intent data. In this way, AI gives marketers some power back over the path to purchase, while still letting buyers feel that they are the ones in the driver's seat.

"Companies that nail this will be intrinsically able to build trust with their audience," he said. "Those that do this well will be in the right place, at the right time, with the right message, every time — and much faster than those who haven't mastered the fundamentals of the approach."

AI can help with everything from identifying and segmenting top in-market accounts to creating customized content with automatic deployment triggers based on specific intent signals. But the key to success, according to Inviso's Kirby, is to make sure the human element remains and AI is used as a tool to help marketing teams, rather than a replacement.

"We see ourselves as creative conductors and use AI as instruments in a symphony," she said. "From creative design to content development to video, we're using it every day to build out our ideas. We use the tools to create the magic and the masterpiece, but we're still the conductor."

Proof Point:

Spotify is known for matching people to the content they love, whether music, podcasts or even ads. Behind the scenes, manual sales tasks and a disjointed view of advertisers made it difficult to sell efficiently and grow revenue. The company turned to Salesforce to serve as the single source of truth for its ad inventory by providing reps with full visibility of the sales pipeline through dashboards and AI-powered insights. Since the Salesforce implementation, Spotify has seen:

- A 40% increase in sales productivity;
- 95% faster client data query for campaigns; and
- 19% year-over-year advertising growth.

> "AI will — and already has — entirely reshaped personalization."
>
> **DANIEL ENGLEBRETSON, SHIFT**

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CONCLUSION

Modern marketers would do well to heed the adage, "innovate or die." This guiding principle rings especially true when it comes to personalization, where consumer expectations are ever-changing and seem to grow loftier each year.

B2B teams looking to outrank their competitors can lean into custom content strategies that mimic current B2C tactics. An expert mix of binge worthy content, ABM insights and AI tools is a winning recipe for best-in-class personalization that drives a strong sales pipeline.

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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 multichannel demand generation efforts.

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