



200 Marketing & Sales Execs Challenge
the B2B Marketing Status Quo:

Revealing What's Fact and What's Fiction



Marketing in a New Context

If the term “new normal” makes you want to roll your eyes, you’re not alone. But eye roll or not, COVID-19 has colored the way many of us work and live—even how we view the world at large. Here’s just one example.

We recently surveyed 215 marketing and sales professionals in a wide variety of industries and asked them what the biggest buzzword was in the B2B sales and marketing space in 2020. While we were ready to accept that they’d largely gravitate to marketing jargon and hyped trends like “personalization,” “AI” and “ABM,” we were surprised to find that COVID-19 co-opted our every thought. For instance, respondents were **three-times more likely** to reference COVID-19, COVID and Coronavirus than ABM. And when we bucketed all buzzwords categorically based on their reference to the new reality versus standard sales and marketing trends, we found that **38% more people** referenced pandemic-related topics. (See side bar)

2020 Buzzwords: The ‘New Normal’ Takes Over

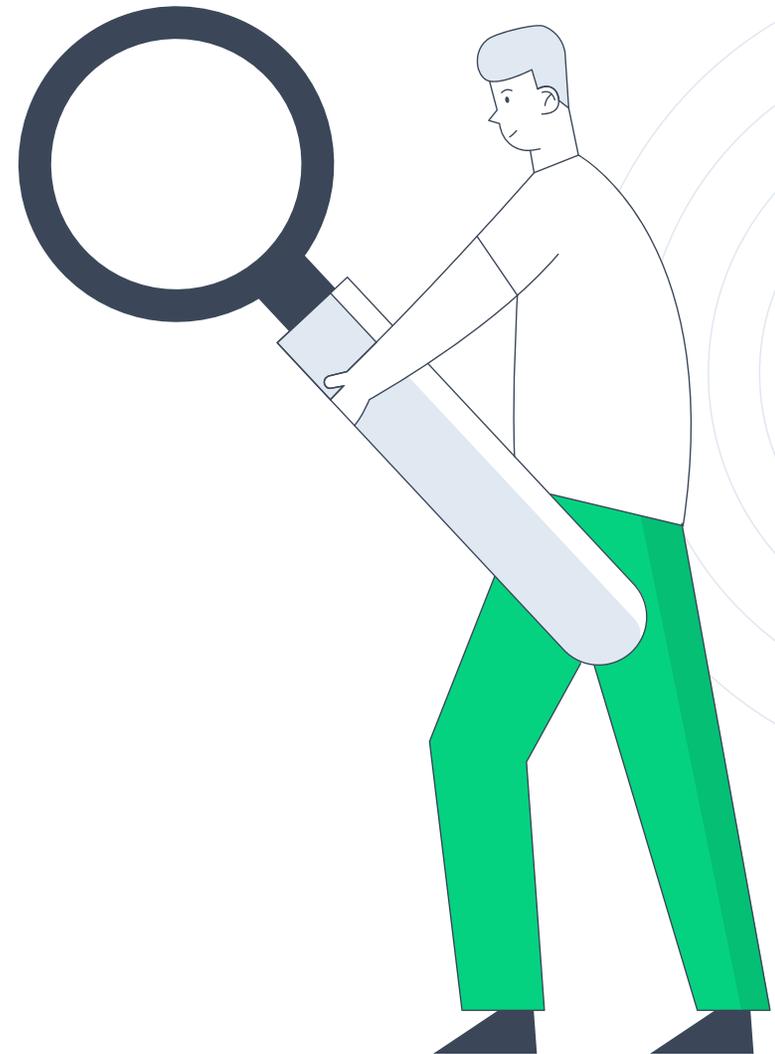
- Agile
- Authentic
- Collaboration
- Commitment
- Competition
- Contactless
- Convenience
- Corona
- COVID
- Covid-19
- Digital-savvy
- Digital
- Digital Transformation
- Empathy
- Furlough
- Healthy
- Human
- Innovative
- IT Software
- Low income
- Nimble
- Online
- Pandemic
- Pivot
- Progress
- Remote work
- Resilience
- Safety
- Social Distancing
- Teams
- The New Normal
- Trust
- Unprecedented
- Video
- Virtual
- Virtual Connection
- Virtual Events
- Virtual Meetings
- Virtual Platforms
- Virtual Programming
- We're in this together
- WFH
- Work from Home
- Zoom

But even amidst the uncertainty and chaos of a global pandemic, we all still have marketing goals to hit, campaigns to execute and content to create. Marketing and sales teams have tried their hardest to keep the machine running, rewriting their messaging, pivoting their plans and overhauling in-person experiences for virtual channels. While some organizations have successfully adapted and evolved, some have hung on to preconceived notions and past experiences to guide the way.

As we barrel toward 2021 and see an ongoing shift in business dynamics and buyer behaviors, we thought it would be the perfect time to survey our community of practitioners.

The goal?

To debunk some commonly accepted myths and half-truths that are permeating the landscape—and that means zeroing in on some of the hottest trends and buzzwords to determine how organizations can best spend their time, budget and bandwidth moving forward.



Fact or Fiction?

Marketers have responded to COVID-19 flawlessly. They've been able to pivot and execute without struggle.

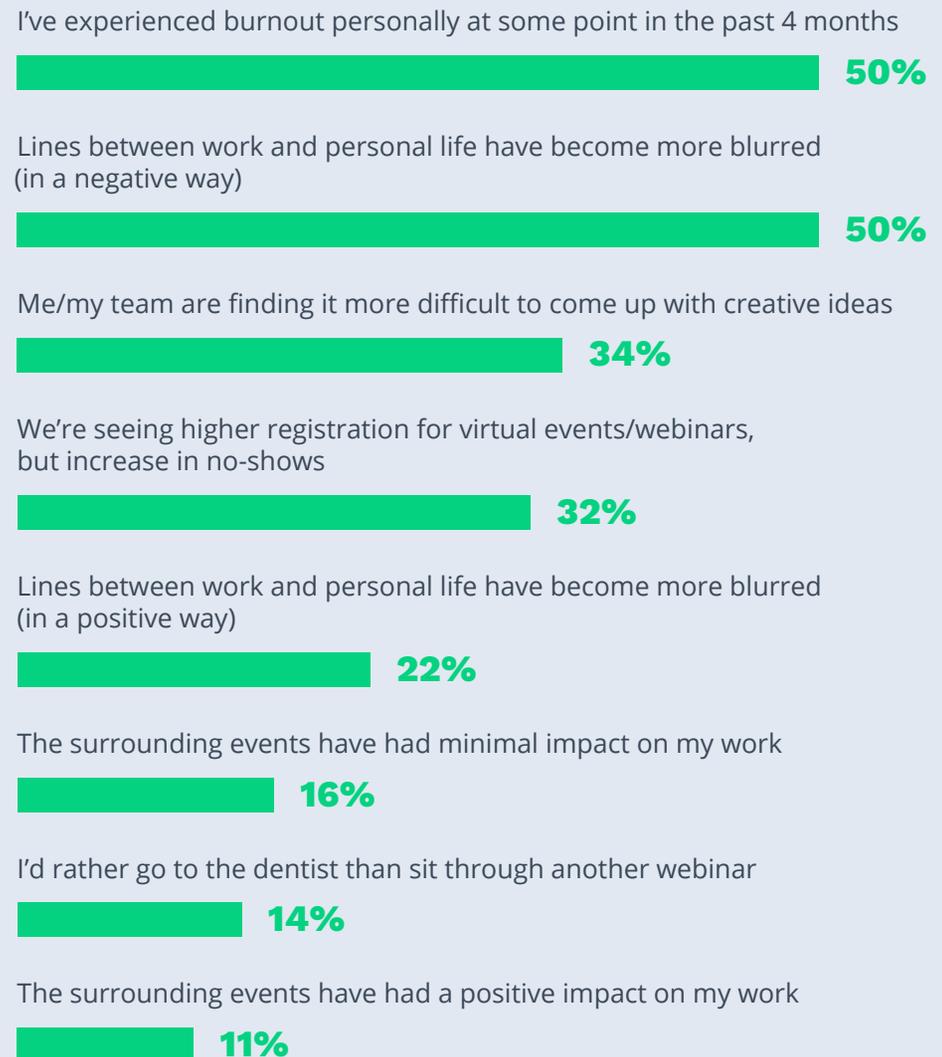
The Answer: **FICTION**

In fact, marketing and sales teams are feeling more strapped than ever and navigating daily life has become a mental and emotional rollercoaster. Half (50%) of respondents said that they've experienced burnout since the start of COVID-19 and just as many reported that the lines between their work and personal lives are becoming more blurred...and not in a good way.

The mental and emotional load of quarantine and work-from-home life is also impacting our work output, with 34% of respondents struggling to come up with creative ideas that keep their audience's attention. This struggle is compounded by the fact that our buyers are more overwhelmed by digital content and virtual events, creating a daunting gap between initial interest and actual engagement. (See Fig. 1)



(Fig. 1) Given the current social and economic climate, largely related to COVID-19, which of the following are true?



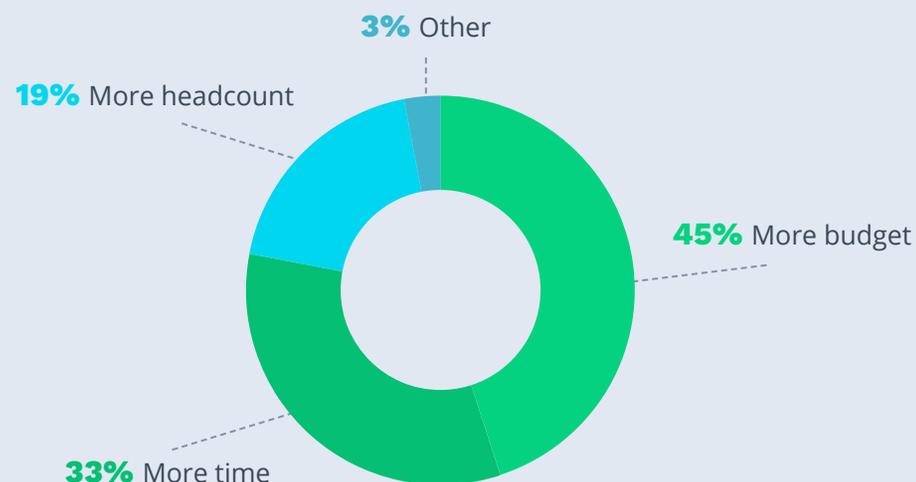


Of course, we can't blame the pandemic for all the challenges that hold marketing and sales professionals back from reaching peak performance, but COVID-19 has highlighted some simmering anxieties. Sure, most of us have long bemoaned the need for more time and resources. The pandemic has elevated those challenges to new heights, especially as our companies rewrite budgets and still task us to hit increasingly critical sales goals. (See Fig. 2)

Regardless of whether respondents wished for more budget, time or headcount, the key takeaway is that people are struggling, and these struggles are exacerbated by a global pandemic. We're all trying to do our jobs in adverse times and performing well is difficult when you feel strapped for time and are lacking creative ideas.

The internal and external factors impacting teams right now reaffirm the need for efficiency, flexibility and scalability, which makes digital marketing and account-based marketing (ABM) both viable solutions. This survey, in fact, zeroed in on ABM as a key tactic in this new world of B2B marketing—and a key opportunity for growth and differentiation in 2021.

(Fig. 2) In the context of your job, if you could be granted one wish, would you choose:



Fact or Fiction?

The ABM FOMO is real—get involved or risk missing out.

The Answer: **FACT**

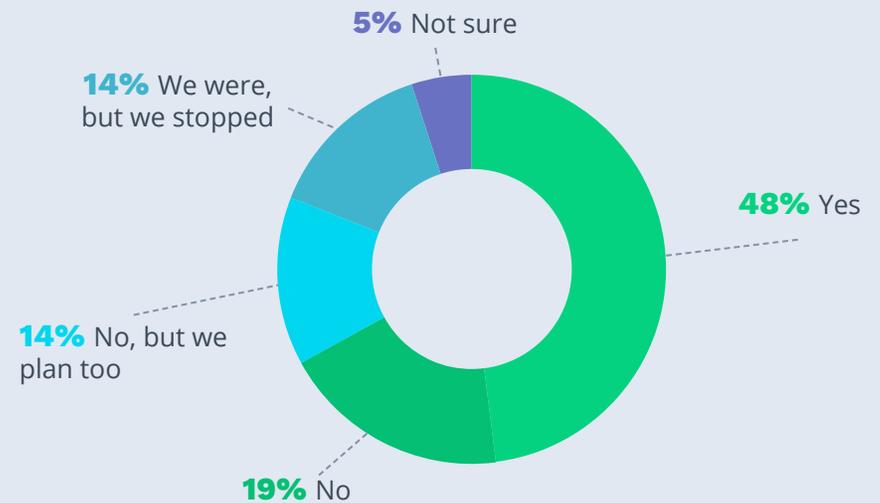
If you think you're missing out or falling behind by not having an ABM strategy, you would be right. We've seen hundreds of customers reap the benefits of ABM, so we couldn't help but wonder how widely it was being adopted in the B2B landscape, and how it was overall perceived by our peers.

Overall, ABM has evolved from a buzzword to a proven strategy that is gaining serious momentum. About half (48%) of respondents said they are currently using ABM and 14% said they plan to in the future. While size does impact, it's only to an extent—and in fact, a growing portion of smaller companies are embracing it as a path to stay competitive. (See Fig. 3)

More B2B organizations are realizing that they don't need big budgets or complex technology stacks to make an impact with ABM: **nearly half (45%) of companies using ABM have fewer than 500 employees, and 32% have fewer than 100 employees.**

The size of your company shouldn't stop you from implementing ABM. Small companies that don't engage in ABM will lose a competitive advantage. While you're placing all your budget on the hope and a prayer that spray-and-pray marketing tactics will work, your competition may be taking a more strategic approach to engagement by embracing ABM.

(Fig. 3) Is your company currently engaged in account-based marketing (ABM)?



Fact or Fiction?

ABM providers have made it easy for B2B companies to understand what they're buying into, and how to develop plans successfully.

The Answer: **FICTION**

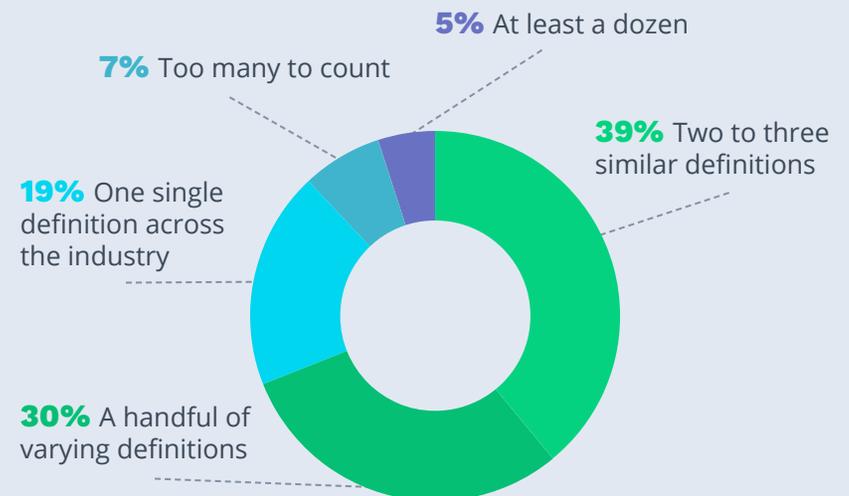
Ask 10 different B2B marketing professionals what ABM is, and you'll likely get 10 different definitions. There's an overall lack of industry understanding of what ABM is—and isn't. **And we'll be honest, here: tech providers aren't doing such a great job of creating this consistency to better serve our fellow practitioners.**

Only 19% of respondents said they've seen one consistent definition of ABM across industry thought leaders, analysts and influencers. And 7% said that they've "seen too many definitions to count." (See Fig. 4)

What is ABM, really?

ABM is an **objective, data-driven** identification of high-value accounts, and engagement of **buying committees** within those accounts through **coordinated** marketing and sales efforts to turn them into customers.

(Fig. 4) How many different definitions of ABM have you heard from industry influencers and vendors?

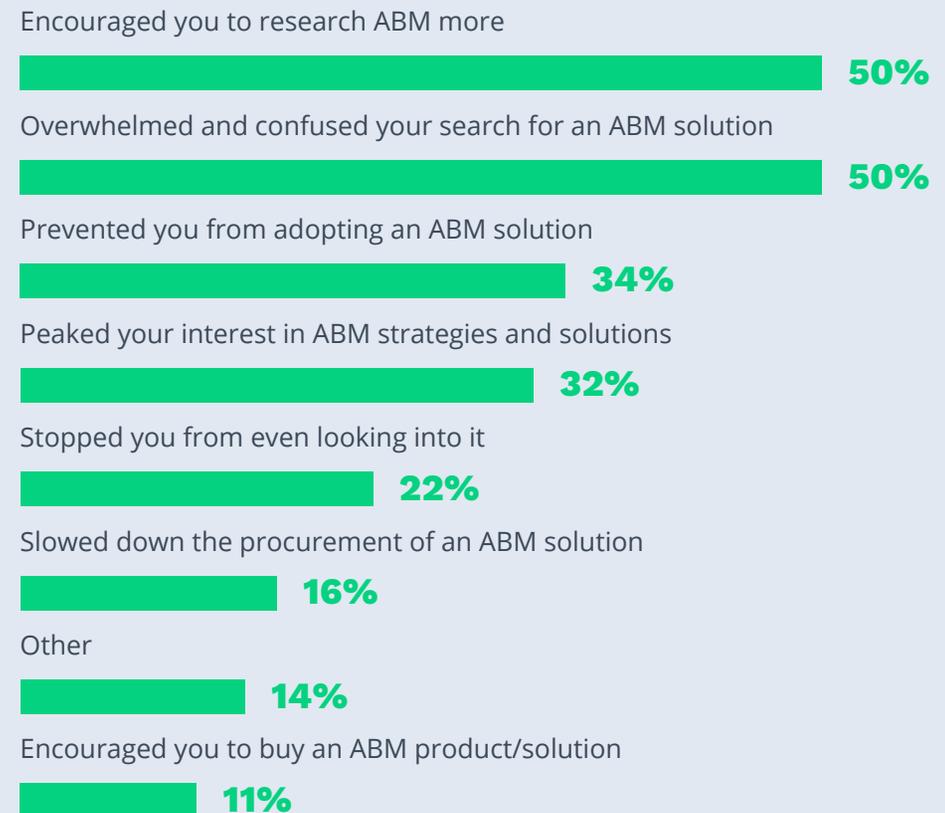


Lack of clarity and consistency ultimately creates confusion, which had an adverse effect on many of our respondents: 90% of sales and marketing professionals said inconsistency in industry definitions hurt their ABM research and consideration process in some way. Some were only impacted in a small way, such as the 16% of respondents who said it merely slowed the procurement of an ABM solution. For others, the effects were more significant.

More than one-fourth of respondents (34%) said inconsistency prevented them from adopting an ABM solution, while 22% said it stopped them from considering ABM for their business altogether. (See Fig. 5)

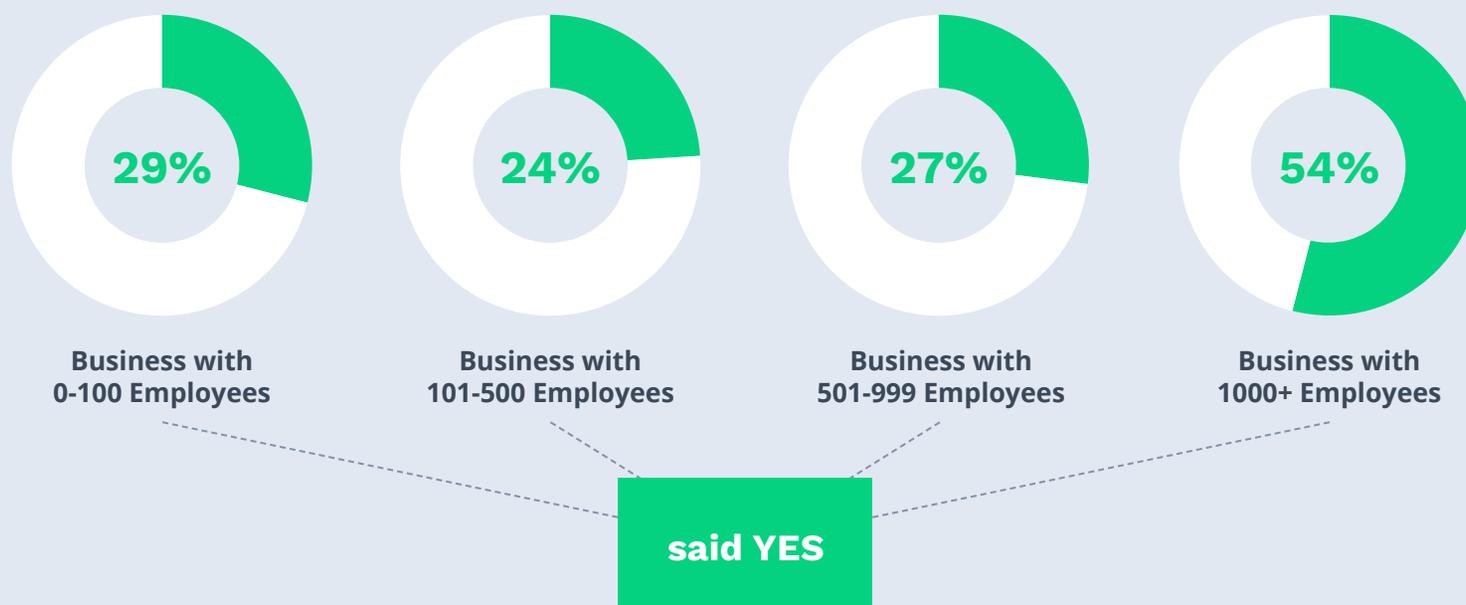
Ultimately, this calls for a more honest conversation about what ABM can DO, not what the perfect Webster definition is. Going into 2021, marketers can expect the industry to spend more time showing how ABM is just the best tool in your kit to stay ahead of the curve in 2021.

(Fig. 5) Has inconsistency in industry definitions of ABM led to any of the following? (Select all that apply)



As with many of the findings, there was a gap in responses based on company size and headcount. Respondents from larger companies—those with 1,000 employees or more—**were nearly twice as likely** as their small-business counterparts (29%) to feel encouraged to research ABM more. (See Fig. 6) Since smaller firms are less likely to do their own ABM research, these firms should consider leaning on vendor partners for support. Vendors that work with smaller firms may also offer more flexible pricing options and packages that can best reflect budgetary requirements and overall goals.

(Fig. 6) Has inconsistency in industry definitions of ABM encouraged you to research ABM more?



Fact or Fiction?

Limiting your reach to only a few high-value accounts can derail your marketing success.

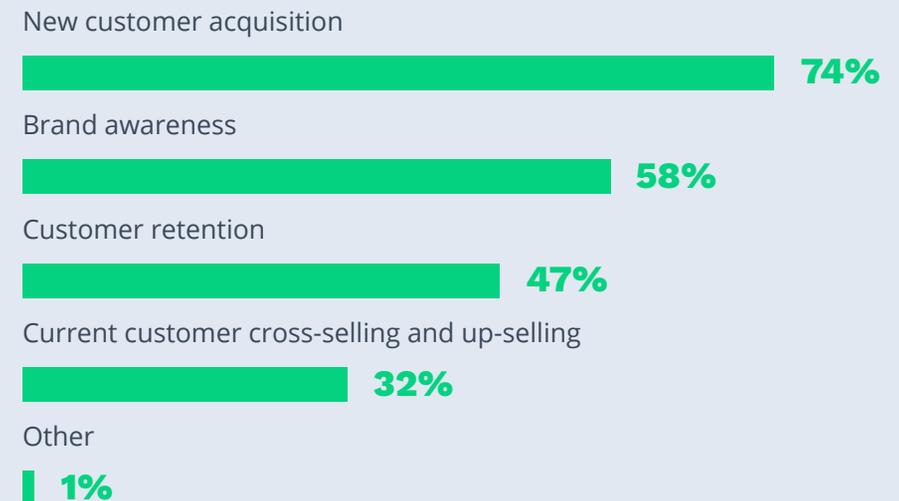
The Answer: **FACT**

We've moved well beyond the early days in which organizations curated small, targeted lists of accounts to create highly personalized experiences for. That approach is not just expensive, but time intensive, making it difficult to scale.

Our survey results show that more organizations are applying ABM across their entire business to achieve goals and priorities. The most common goals of ABM are new customer acquisition (74%) and brand awareness (58%). (See Fig. 7)



(Fig. 7) What are the primary goals of your ABM strategies?

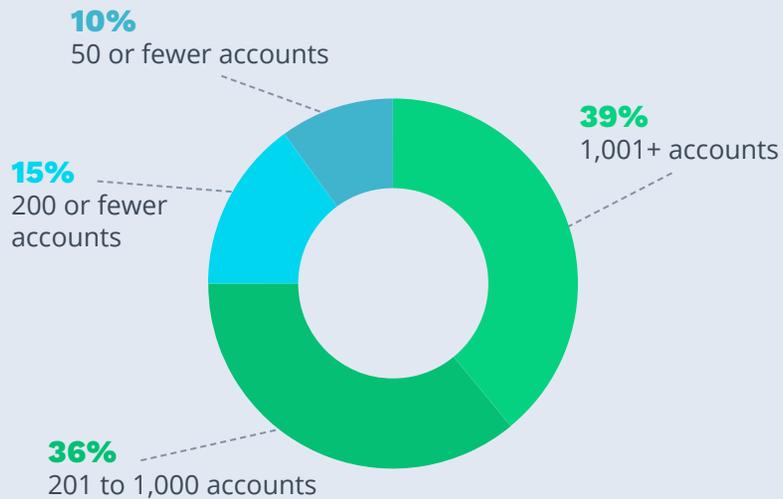


Companies that are investing in ABM also are taking a comprehensive, multi-touch approach. Approximately three-quarters (74%) of survey respondents said that ABM plays a crucial role in their approach to demand gen. Some in this group have even replaced all other demand generation with ABM. (See Fig. 8)

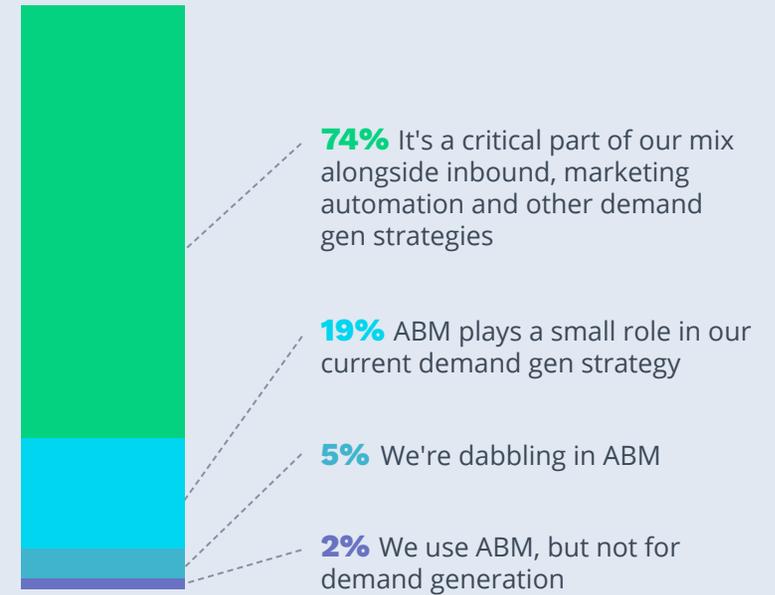
These findings, coupled with the fact that many of our respondents have larger target account lists, support our theory that marketing teams are looking to scale their ABM activities. Almost four in 10 (39%) survey respondents manage target account lists of more than 1,000 accounts. (See Fig. 9)

We have clearly evolved from the early days of ABM, when we emphasized small account lists. In this new world, where buyers are relying more on digital content and virtual experiences, marketers are focused on maximizing reach and impact.

(Fig. 9) What's the size of your target account list?



(Fig. 8) To what degree is ABM a part of your overall demand generation?



Fact or Fiction?

The best ABM strategies focus on one or two strong channels.

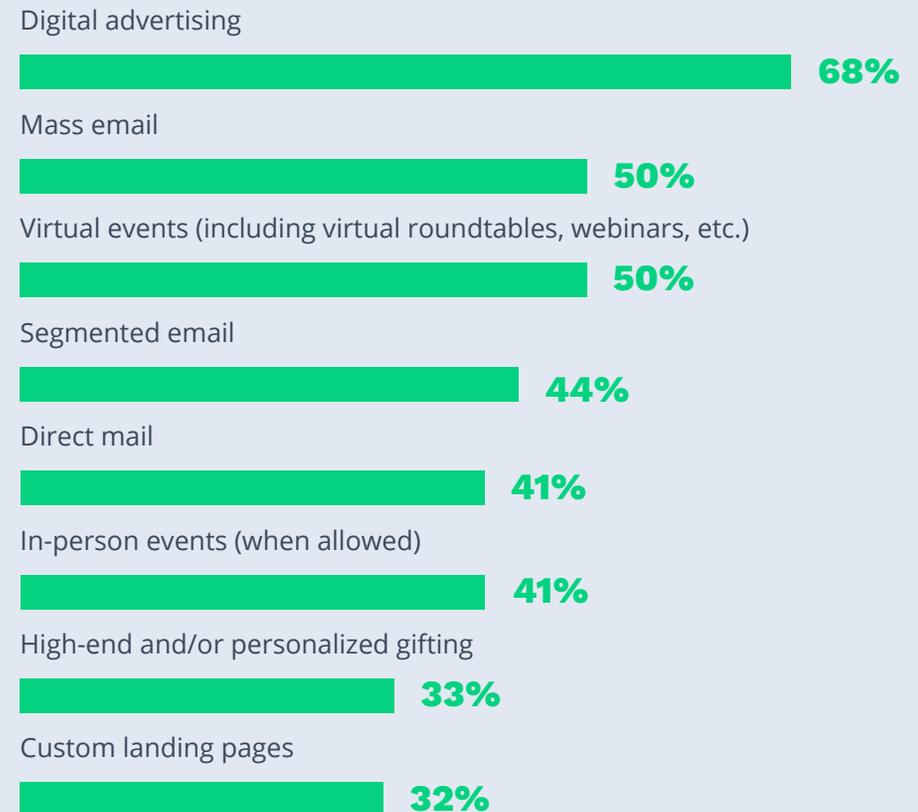
The Answer: **FICTION**

The most successful ABM tactics embrace a wide range of channels: from widespread (yet targeted) brand advertising to sales-development rep (SDR) outreach to personalized gifting.

Using a variety of channels is a best practice, and with many in-person events cancelled through at least mid-2021, it's also imperative. With the pandemic eliminating in-person networking events, roundtables and those box seats at the ballgame—all core components of an effective ABM approach—it's not surprising that many respondents are leveraging a mix of digital channels to meet their goals. (See Fig. 10) Most respondents (60%), in fact, are using at least four channels in their ABM campaigns.

It's not surprising that digital advertising is the clear winner, with 68% of marketers relying on the channel. Broadly speaking, we believe that digital is the backbone of any successful ABM strategy. It's scalable, allows you to target key accounts effectively and you can easily adjust plans based on budgetary restrictions.

(Fig. 10) What channels are part of your ABM programs?



Since the pandemic has forced buyers to spend more time online rather than attending in-person events, marketers will need to find new ways for their campaigns and programs to stand out. After all, half (50%) of respondents said they have seen an uptick in virtual event registration but have struggled with low attendance rates. Digital fatigue is real. Buyers don't just want the same messaging delivered through different channels. They want something creative, unique and tailored to their needs.

ABM can help you move beyond batch-and-blast messaging and experiences. You want to maximize time and resources yet still create highly effective messaging based on the needs and pain points of top priority accounts. You can achieve this level of scale by prioritizing your account lists and establishing different personalization tactics based on their level of importance. This is a key reason why digital advertising is such a widely adopted, and effective, channel for ABM: it allows you to develop core ad messaging for a campaign and seamlessly tailor creative, such as images and headlines, at the job role, industry or account level. When buyers engage with your campaign, you can run more targeted ads that guide them through the decision-making process.

Digital Takeover

If you want to keep pace with your peers, and get your message in front of the right buyers at the right time, consider a mix of some of the most-used channels and tactics:

1. Digital advertising
2. Virtual events
3. Mass email
4. Segmented email
5. Direct mail



Well, Now What?

2021 Planning Considerations

Doing more with less has long been a mantra for marketing and sales professionals—but the pandemic has made efficiency and cost-effectiveness more important than before. ABM allows you to achieve your goals, whether they be acquiring new customers or upselling current ones. But too few professionals are taking advantage of ABM's benefits because they worry that their organization is too small or that implementing ABM is beyond their abilities. Others don't understand what ABM really is and what it can achieve.



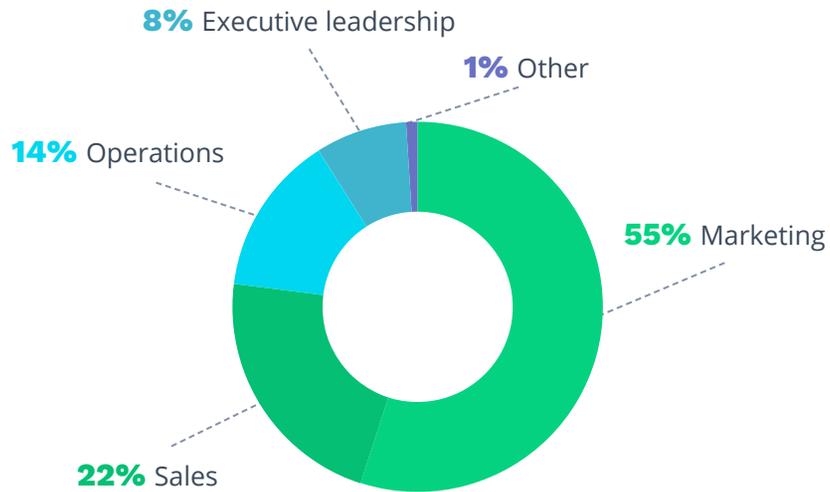
There's no reason to hold back.

If you're ready to get the most out of ABM, here are some planning considerations:

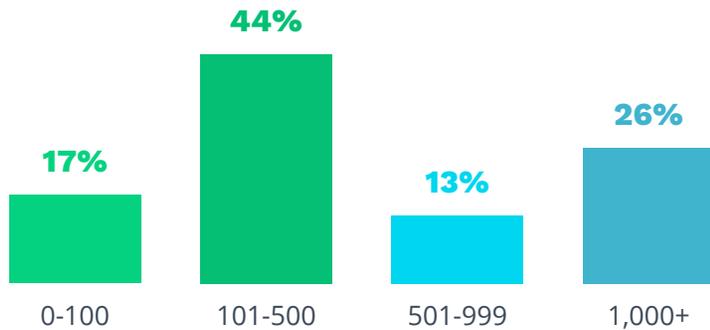
- As you develop your budget and strategies for 2021, take the opportunity to dive into what ABM can do for you, not just what vendors define it as. This will set a new standard that ABM is not a lofty academic concept, but a tried-and-true key to reliable pipeline.
- Digital ABM is critical for the foreseeable future because it enables you to deliver, at scale, personalized messages based on sales status and persona. You can boost efficiencies without losing sight of the human touch. Prioritize top-tier accounts and use digital ABM to add surprise and delight to contacts' days. Use a diverse mix to maximize the reach and impact of your messaging.
- You're likely not as far behind your peers as you fear—and there's time to catch-up. While it's true that larger companies are more likely than smaller firms to use AI-enabled ABM, smaller companies have the most to gain. Automation and AI gives firms of all sizes breathing room.
- To scale ABM, bolster ABM results and understand the impact of different tactics, tier your target account lists. You'll not only maximize reach but also better allocate budget for engaging top-priority accounts using high-touch gifts, direct mail and more personalized digital experiences.

About the Survey

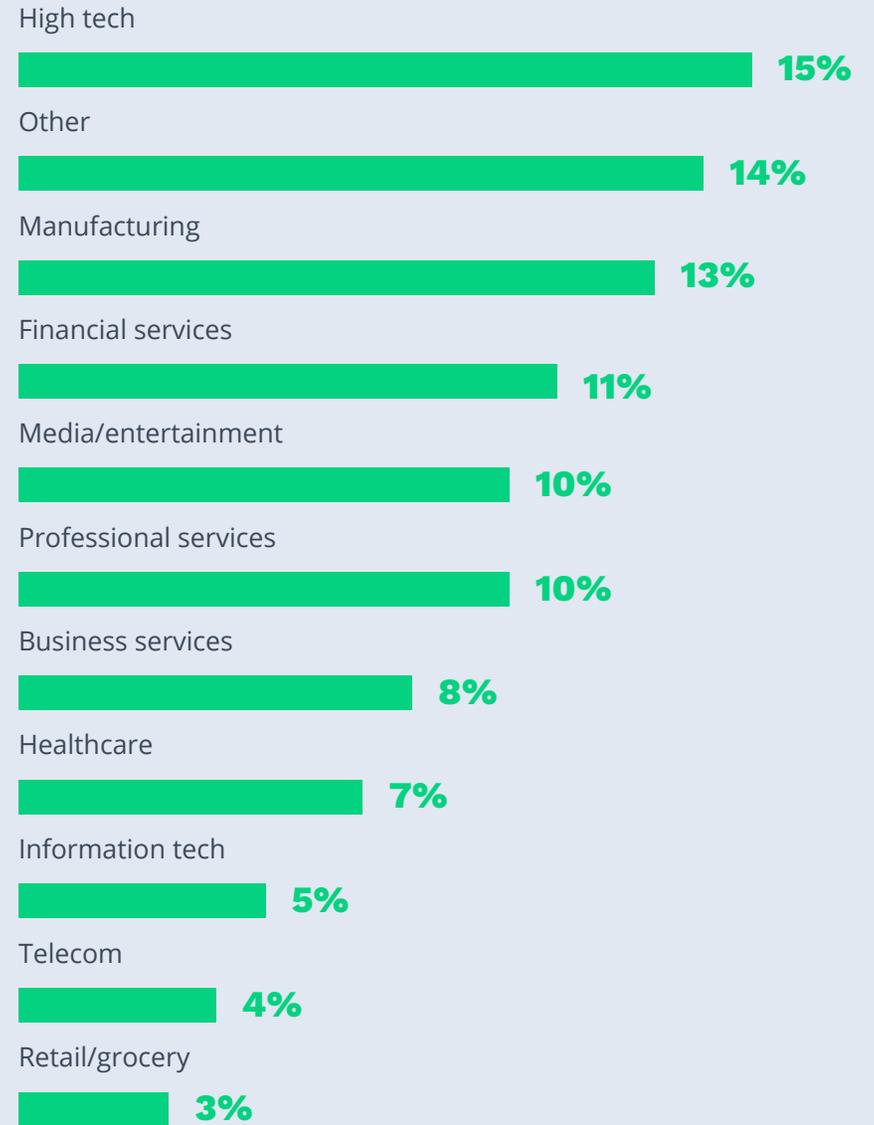
What role are you in?



How many employees does your company have?



What industry are you in?





RollWorks, a division of NextRoll, offers ambitious B2B companies an account-based platform to align their marketing and sales teams and confidently grow revenue. Powered by proprietary data and machine learning, RollWorks' solutions address the needs of organizations large and small—from those with best-in-class ABM programs to those just beginning their exploration.

While we at RollWorks are focused on the success of B2B marketers, NextRoll (formerly AdRoll Group) is a marketing and data technology company with a mission to accelerate growth for companies, big and small. NextRoll empowers growth for over 37,000 customers through three business units: AdRoll, RollWorks, and NextRoll Platform Services.

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