



A Tactical Guide to **Account-Based Selling**

Deconstructing the practical steps
to win high-ticket deals and secure
attractive logos

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What is account based selling?

Gone are the days where companies cast wide marketing nets into the sea to hook just about any fish.

With Account-Based Selling (ABS), marketing and sales substitute the large net for a harpoon that's tailored to catch the prized fish: high-value accounts and attractive logos.

ABS is a highly personalized customer engagement strategy in which every account is treated like a market of one. Marketing and sales work together in a multi-touch, multi-channel effort to close the key accounts.

The principles of ABS aren't new, but in recent years its interest has become something of a buzzword. The key drivers behind its popularity are:

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- The importance of customer centricity
 - An increasing number of stakeholders in the buying process
 - A non-linear buyer journey with multiple channels
 - Deeper niches and competitive markets
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The sales and marketing floor realized the need for a refined and cohesive approach to gaining new clients - and many of them found it with ABS.

According to Gartner, businesses can:

- Drive more wins
 - Shorten their sales cycles
 - Close larger deals
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through the coordinated and targeted approaches of using highly personalized, multi-touch outreach to specific accounts.

We've created this comprehensive guide to explain what ABS is, who it's for, who it's not, and to share the tactics on how to successfully deploy it.

Five questions to ask before getting started with ABS:

When should you consider making the transition to ABS?

It can dramatically boost your revenue and company growth. However, it's not suitable for everyone - it's a resource-intensive methodology that works best with the right company, market, and product.

1. How well do we know our customers?

Start by asking if you have enough data available to map your customers' firmographics and buying characteristics. Do you know:

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- Which customers are the most profitable
 - The industries and locations they operate in
 - The channels they engage through
 - How they were acquired
 - Where they churn
 - Their product usage
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Without the evidence and insights into your most profitable and engaged customers, the transition to ABS is extremely difficult. For it to be successful in an organization, you need to be laser-precise in your outreach and marketing. You can only make decisions on target accounts if you have enough knowledge about your existing accounts.

2. Are our deal sizes big enough to justify the investment in ABS?

The next step considers your average deal size. ABS is a resource-intensive strategy that demands a lot of time and budget. It's something of a sledgehammer approach for smaller deal sizes. As a rule of thumb, ABS is typically applied to high-ticket enterprise accounts or deals that are greater than \$50,000. It's worth caveating that with the logos that have a low value, but a high market presence and credibility attached to them.

3. What type of product are we selling?

The third factor to consider is the nature of the product that you're selling. ABS lays the groundwork for upselling and cross-selling additional products and complementary services.

For isolated deals it's not always worth the investment, but for subscription-based or multi-serviced outfits, it's often a good direction. Are you dealing with one-time sales or with upsell opportunities and renewals?

4. How many stakeholders are involved in the buying process of our product?

Are you talking with multiple people in the buying process? If you are, ABS can help navigate the specific questions and pain points for several internal stakeholders concurrently. Tailoring messages and collateral that's relevant to the different roles in the buying process can help deconflict the delays and decisions in the buyer journey that need internal consensus. It's important to strengthen the positive outcome of an opportunity by multi-threading your relationship with the relevant stakeholders.

5. Is there enough alignment between marketing and sales?

The final and most important question to execute ABS relies on how well marketing and sales are aligned? A seamless habitat is hard to obtain, but organizations need to dismantle the siloes, secure the handovers, and open the cross-channels of information for ABS to work. Ensure that marketing and sales have the operational alignment and documented processes in place before you roll out this methodology.

Should I move to account based selling?

Intentions to move to ABS should take these five considerations into their stride:

Most organizations that struggle with an account-based approach tend to lack cross-functional alignment across marketing, sales, and customer success. Before moving to an account based approach, be mindful that you'll be working collaboratively with departments across a non-linear journey.

🔗 Marketing-sales Alignment

Necessary communication and meetings

Cross-departmental KPIs

Friction points in customer handovers

Documented understanding of qualification, ICP, and stages

Automated activity capture and accurate CRM

🌐 Number of Stakeholders

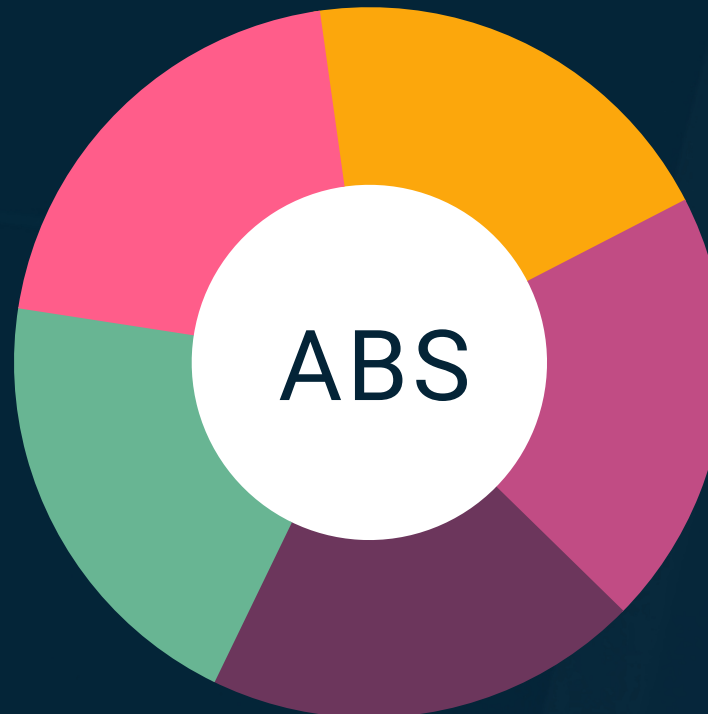
More than one

Level of seniority

Stage involvement

Departments involved

Existing collateral for relevant stakeholders



🔗 Customers

Common characteristics

Technographics

Employee headcount

Culture

Annual revenue

Budget

Investment status

Industries/verticals

Level of organizational/
technological maturity

Locations

🔗 Type of Product

Subscription-based

Enterprise sales

Upsell and cross-sell
potential

Above \$50,000

Average sales cycle is
longer than 3 months

Your market fit has been
established

🔗 Deal Size

How to create an Ideal Customer Profile (ICP) from your data

In order to create an ICP, you need to collect and analyze different data sets to understand the common characteristics of your highest value leads.

1. Internal Data

Finance & Product

- Which customer segments are most engaged, optimize their usage, are light-touch, have the least support tickets, and fastest onboarding?

Marketing

- Which content gets the most traction?
- What are the critical pain points?
- Which channels of acquisition produce the biggest profit?

Customer Success

- Reasons cited for churn
- Which accounts are least likely to churn?
- Which accounts and industries come with the highest number of upsell and cross-sell opportunities?

Sales and Sales Development

- Customer feedback derived from conversations with leads and prospects?
- What are the common buyer objections?
- What is the compelling reason to buy?

Sales Ops

- How long is the average sales cycle?
- What's the average close rate?
- Who are your most profitable accounts?
- Which customer segments have the best CAC to LTV?
- What level of activity and engagement do you need to close-win?
- Which stakeholders are involved at which stage?

2. Firmographic Data

Take a look at your most profitable accounts and historic benchmarks to identify your target accounts.

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- Industry, market, and vertical(s)
 - Number of employees
 - Annual revenue
 - Financial performance
 - Location
 - Historical and predicted growth
 - Predicted deal size
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3. Technographics

What other technologies are your target accounts using?

Identify if their tech stack is compatible with your solution. If they're using a competitor's solution, it's your opportunity to change the narrative to emphasize the unique benefits that your product offers.

4. Behavioral data and trigger events

Sales Navigator, LeadMD, 6Sense, Leadfeeder, and Ebsta's Revenue Intelligence Platform are just some of the tools that can collectively track behaviors and events that influence a sale. It helps you measure buyer intent and engagement to move your accounts forward. Sales Navigator and Ebsta can also help identify the buying committee of your target accounts.

Three groundblocks for ABS

Map your target accounts

You need to ask yourself how you want to organize and track your target accounts. Account mapping allows you to visualize the account information needed and organize your leads. With an account map, you won't lose track of the leads in your target accounts.

For account mapping, consider using a tool that helps you visualize and score the relationships between the key stakeholders in your target accounts. Plot the different figures that play a role in the buying decision and label their roles, stage of involvement, and strength of relationship.

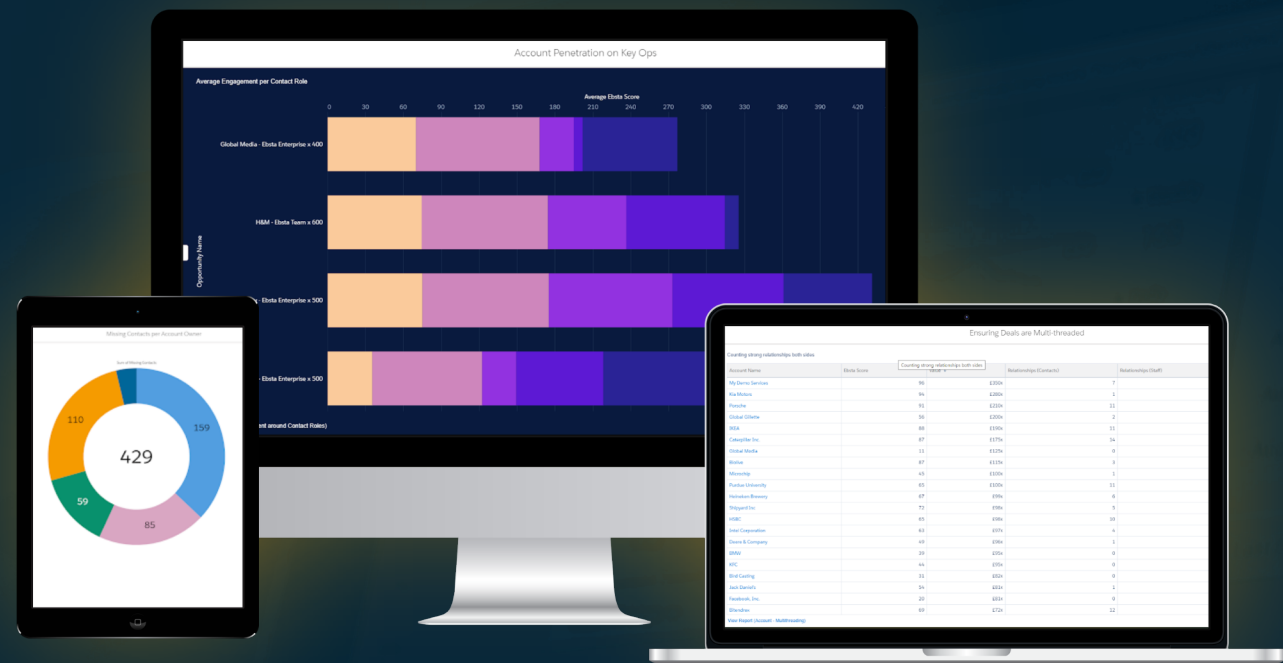
Ebsta's relationship mapping tool automates this process by populating all the hidden relationships that exist in your mailboxes outside of the CRM and building an internal network of who knows who. Combining that with the help of engagement scoring brings visibility to who has the best relationship, who you can leverage for introductions, who's losing engagement, and which key stakeholders are still missing.

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- Create an account map
 - Visualize information from your CRM
 - Attach or automate data-capture of the relevant information
 - Build out the org chart
 - Label contacts in key roles
 - Identify key relationships to find the best path to sale
 - Build out the org chart and identify decision makers
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A look into Ebsta's relationship mapping tool

Automated tracking of every engagement and notification of when individual stakeholders leave the company.

Bring all the peripheral relationships outside the CRM into Salesforce to gain complete visibility of who knows who in an account and who has the best relationship to leverage. Collaborate with your team to save time on introductions and work through the customer lifecycle together.



Marketing, sales, and customer success join their knowledge of the customer and use data as a compass to define the buyer personas and target account list.

Create Buyer Personas

Use the data available to create buyer personas that identify the common stakeholders, their pain points, and outcomes of your target accounts that align to your Ideal Customer Profile (ICP).

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- Key characteristics
 - An operational “day in the life”
 - Key challenges
 - Their role in the decision process
 - The compelling reason to buy
 - Other buying motivations
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Which accounts to target

Use your ICP and buyer persona breakdowns to create your target account list. This list gives sales development direction for their outreach.

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- The named accounts that the company will engage
 - The contacts within those accounts who match the buyer persona criteria
 - Tiered in terms of value
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How to segment & tier the logos you go after

It's recommended that you segment your target account list into smaller and larger tiers. Smaller tiers receive the most attention and resources. The first tier typically consists of 20 to 50 accounts. These accounts are similar to your highest value customers. Each of these accounts receive in-depth research and personalized one-on-one communication.

The second tier are typically accounts that are a strong fit with the ICP, but have a lower lifetime value. This list can consist of around 200 accounts. For these companies, marketing and SDRs work together in a multi-touch, multi-channel approach to reach out to them. The outreach gets personalized according to industry and buyer persona.



How to create a channel strategy

Successful execution needs visibility of the customer journey within your target accounts. ABS has a better ability to acknowledge that the buyer's journey is non-linear and will move back and forth across channels, stages, and stakeholders.

In order to keep track of all the stakeholder interactions, sales and marketing need to collaborate, or have a platform like Ebsta that automates and contextualises these journeys in the CRM.

It's important that your marketing team understands the individual wants and needs of the buying committee for the messages to be relevant and valuable.

Marketing (ABM)

- Lead nurturing: in-depth research and personalization
- ICP: understand their wants, needs, and stakes for relevance in your outreach
- Buyer enablement content: Deconflicts the decision to buy as they move through the sales funnel
- CRM: list segmentation to keep the content organized

Sales (ABS)

- Organize your leads on the account-level instead of the lead-level
 - Track the engagement of individual leads in an account
 - Understand what roles the stakeholders play in the purchase decision and tailor your outreach efforts to them
 - Inform marketing of collateral gaps in the buying decision
 - Predict the potential deal size of the account
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First steps to gain a foothold

ABS is not an overnight success and it's important to make the transition in stages with a bullet to boulders mentality. You might dedicate 25% as a vanguard to establish the processes, map the market, create the materials, and to signpost the key metrics. Once you start seeing initial success with your program, you can invest more time and budget – until eventually you spend 60% or more on this strategy.

As a rule of thumb, it usually takes organizations between 12 and 24 months for a full transition². Alignment across your revenue operation will certainly accelerate this.

First Steps

- 1) Map your total addressable market
- 2) Define your ICP
- 3) Define your buyer personas
- 4) Create a key messaging matrix
- 5) Attach a content strategy to this
- 6) Leverage your data to create a target account list
- 7) Segment the target accounts into tiers
- 8) Allocate one-third of your revenue operation to pursuing target accounts
- 9) Track the metrics
- 10) Shift a further 20% of your team to ABS

Second Steps

- 1) Analyze your content strategy to revise messaging and channels
- 2) Shift the next 25% of your team to ABS
- 3) Revise the key metrics, leakage points, and areas of friction
- 4) Shift the remaining % of teams to ABS.

Tactics for ABS

As a final step, your commercial teams need to decide on their GTM channels. We've compiled some tactics that marketing and sales can use.

Marketing

Creation of content: that supports sales in building a relationship with the target accounts: you can use case studies, blog posts, webinars, podcasts, etc. that help your leads gather information during their purchasing process.

Develop prospect-specific offers: Create offers that are built specifically for your target account. You can create offers that are tailored to address their specific industry and pain points. Here, you can show how their competitors are using your product or show them that you understand the nature of their business.

Events: If your company plans to attend or even organize events, make sure to send out personal invitations to leads from your target accounts. Give them incentives – e.g., free tickets or invitations to exclusive after show events.

Sales and sales development

Research of target accounts and tracking of industry news: This helps sales decide which logos to go after.

Cold calls: Research before you start to dial. Then reach out with custom pitches that are tailored to the specific business needs and that show that you've done your homework.

Custom emails: Customize and personalize your email outreach to the leads of your target accounts. Address the specific pain points and attributes.

Social selling: Engage with leads from your target accounts, answer their questions and share relevant content with them.

Track the engagement: Ebsta scores how engaged individuals and opportunities are and what activity is resonating the most with them. This information can be used to mitigate engagement risks in your pipeline and capitalise on buying signals.

Conclusion

Account-Based Selling has enormous potential to move the needle in your customer acquisition strategy. If executed correctly, ABS can increase the number of deals closed, your average deal size and accelerate the sales cycle. Before you get started with ABS, ask yourself if your organization is suited for this methodology. It's best suited to enterprise deals with products that you can upsell and cross-sell. For a successful transition to ABS, there needs to be a tight alignment across your revenue operation.

Revenue intelligence to make sales decisions simpler, faster, and hyper-efficient

Automate contact capture and build a relationship matrix in Salesforce, identify missing stakeholders, and score engagement with key accounts to drive ABS.

Trusted globally by the world's leading & fastest growing companies



See it in action

