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Achieving hyper- personalization in B2B through **account-based marketing**



Table of Content

| | |
|----------------------------------------------------------|---|
| The shift in the B2B experience | 3 |
| Need for hyper-personalization in B2B marketing strategy | 4 |
| What is account-based marketing or ABM? | 5 |
| Personalization is the key | 5 |
| How ABM can help | 6 |
| Adopting account based marketing | 7 |
| Benefits | 8 |
| In conclusion | 9 |



The shift in the B2B experience



Digital transformation has drastically changed the nature of business-customer relationships. With each digital-led disruption, customer expectations have only increased in the business-to-business (B2B) world. Today, they parallel those expected in the B2C sector. This is a sharp contrast from earlier, when B2B transactions were traditionally held to be very complex, that happen over a long time and require continual handholding by sales teams throughout lead lifecycle. Whereas, B2C transactions were expected to be more direct, in-the-moment transactions with higher marketing influence. Today, customer interactions in the B2B domain have become fast, easy, self-service driven, where customers expect sales teams to work hand-in-hand with marketing and provide experiences on par with what they get while interacting with B2C brands.

This shift of B2B to B2C has greatly accelerated post-pandemic. B2B marketers have another persona – the buyers who are accustomed to exceptional customer experiences in their day-to-day lives. As a result, B2B buyers increasingly think and act more like B2C customers. Their expectations for personalization and product information now extends into every interaction, causing new challenges for manufacturers and distributors. Companies that fail to provide contextual and seamless B2B customers' experiences are liable to fall behind their competitors.

Therefore, the B2B organizations are going to have to rethink their customer experience strategies to meet the new customer demands. Organizations have to think holistically and adopt improved platforms, experiences, and processes to meet the needs of the B2B customers throughout the buying journey.



Need for hyper-personalization in B2B marketing strategy

There is a lot of interest in the increasing demand and expectations from organizations in the B2B space to create and drive individualized customer experiences. Responding to the calls from the market, B2B organizations are now exploring these capabilities and personalizing customer interactions accordingly. To personalize, organizations must leverage customer data, customer insights, and machine learning to target customers at each stage of the individual buyer's journey. This approach is proving to be of great value to the B2B industry, as sales and marketing teams come together to drive enhanced customer journeys across verticals and geographies.



B2B marketers now need to make the leap from standard personalization to hyper-personalization. The first one usually involves collecting data such as the client's name, industry, and products, while the second allows insights into customer behaviors and interactions and personalizing the entire buying journey. Hyper-personalization is changing how organizations market themselves to their customers. Hyper-personalization needs the application of artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning to real-time data in order to derive the required customer insights for contextualizing customer messaging, and changing the way organizations engage with their customers. Consequently, focusing on personalization of customer experience will further increase customer engagement and create a loyal customer base.



The building blocks for hyper-personalization are to create personas, personalize content and customer touchpoints for marketing activation. Organizations need to respond to buyer requirements in real-time to provide a contextualized, continuously optimized experience by adapting and orchestrating campaigns based on new customer insights revealed with each interaction. Creating buyer personas is critical for hyper-personalization. In B2B, it's best to develop personas based on business-related attributes as it pertains to account-based marketing.

What is account-based marketing or ABM?

As a marketer, you're always looking for ways to engage and create deeper relationships with customers. Traditionally, inbound marketing approaches in B2B, sales, and marketing generally operate independently of each other. This includes broad marketing campaigns to drive awareness and engage a large audience to gather potential leads and share them with sales. The problem is that these campaigns are often done without a focus on customer experience or account strategy and yield poor results. Over time, it has been understood that not all leads are equal. This has created the need for processes and technologies that are more customer experience-focused. ABM seeks



to align sales and marketing and is the foundation for all B2B sales and marketing efforts. The focus is to reach out to accounts that can benefit from your solution instead of having them find you. Identifying accounts, influencers, and decision-makers, and engaging with those who demonstrate active buyer signals, and personalizing marketing communications for those accounts and individual profiles.

The goal of account-based marketing is not to move completely away from lead-based efforts, but to work and create a strategy that also takes needs and requirements into consideration in all marketing efforts.

The right mix of the two strategies, lead and account-based often fits best and maximizes the results.

ABM recognizes the complex buyer journey and aims to understand and respond to the numerous viewpoints, concerns, and incentives within each client's account. It is a customer-centric approach that is aimed at improving customer experience rather than improving a single customer touchpoint. The focus is on increased engagement and stronger, long-term relationships to expand the identified key accounts and improve lifetime value.

Personalization is the key



Personalization lies at the heart of account-based marketing. ABM allows for granular targeting when combined with multi-platform analytics, AI, machine learning, and behavioral triggers. Leveraging account insights, market trends, customer data and behaviors, ABM efforts can generate a contextual, individualized experience for their clients, creating experiences based on individual customer profiles.

One example of hyper-personalized account-based marketing is assessing all interactions of key account personnel with the organization channels and identifying key areas of interest to display a contextual message to that person across various channels.

How ABM can help

For B2B organizations, ABM is extremely important to their overall marketing efforts.



Customer targeting

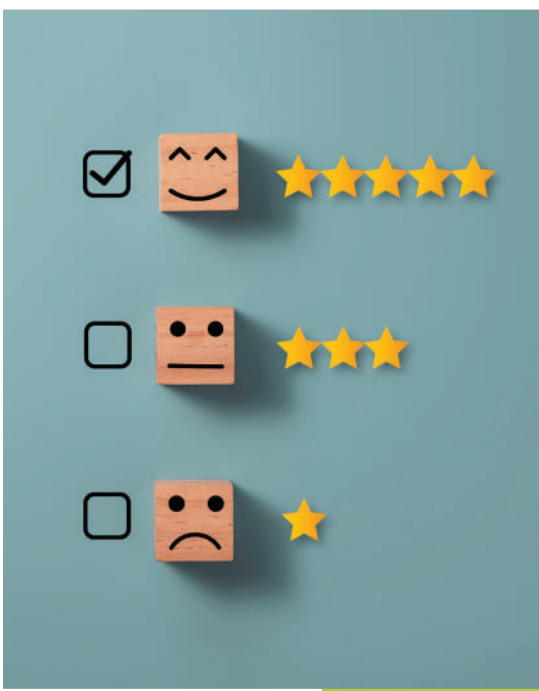
By deciding on which accounts to target, you can profoundly impact the way you think about sales and marketing, the types of programs you execute, how and when to pass leads, and what information to share.

Instead of running broad campaigns, it is best to narrow the audience to target the key individuals in specific organizations. By strategically targeting individuals, the messaging can be made more contextual and effort greatly reduced.

Personalization

ABM redirects your sales and marketing efforts to a targeted audience with laser precision, and it also entails coordinating and personalizing your messaging and communications to specific personas and buying groups within each target account.

Customers are more likely to engage with content that is personalized to their needs, relevant to their business and the stage of their buying journey. The key to ABM is personalization based on accounts, hence any campaigns created as part of ABM efforts must already be optimized for the right audience.



Customer attribution

ABM takes an account-centric view of measurement. It is possible to measure the impact each activity across channels has on driving the sale. ABM increases sales, marketing, and organizational alignment, and marketers must also work closely with sales to identify target accounts and pursue them throughout the sales process. Within ABM, each team has a specific task to achieve the business goals. This allows for both marketing and sales teams to work collaboratively and create synergies among themselves.

By adding elements of ABM to customer experience solutions to automate the delivery of relevant, personalized messages across all channels, the buyer experience is improved compared to using point solutions for one-off campaigns. Each persona receives content that matters to them at their respective stages, which builds trust and loyalty over time.

Adopting account based marketing

To adopt ABM, your marketing strategy should incorporate the following:

1

Identify targets

Use current customer analytics to validate the target accounts and refine them on a continuous basis. Look for anonymous and known buyer engagement signals in those accounts (or other accounts) to add/modify that list. This is done across all your marketing channels and includes in-bound, out-bound, social, as well as third-party content and community channels.

2

Personalization

Develop personalized content for account-based profiles instead of or in addition to individual personas. For example, depending on your average sales price, it may even be as targeted as generating content specific to one large account. Develop your marketing database (more contacts with the right persona in those accounts) specifically targeted towards ABM. Match the inbound traffic to target accounts to create account-centric lead generation. Modify your lead scoring to recognize aggregate account behavior in terms of reach, penetration, and engagement. Target your broader marketing efforts to those specific account profiles. Work closely with sales and analyze the business impact to refine and modify your execution plans. Better sales and marketing alignment is key to ABM. Recognize that, with ABM, marketing's role doesn't end after delivering the lead to sales. It continues through the complete sales cycle and beyond.

3

Measure

Measure and track marketing success metrics that are closed-loop to the revenue cycle, and not just top-of-the-funnel statistics. Top-of-the-funnel statistics are good to understand short-term benefits, but closed-loop revenue-driven metrics will determine your real success.



Benefits

Account-based marketing efforts offer vast benefits to organizations, some of them are listed below:

Shortened buying cycle

Use current customer analytics to validate the target accounts and refine them on a continuous basis. Look for anonymous and known buyer engagement signals in those accounts (or other accounts) to add/modify that list. This is done across all your marketing channels and includes in-bound, out-bound, social, as well as third-party content and community channels.



Improved sales efficiency

Account-based marketing works closely with sales teams to improve outcomes by providing sales teams with the data they need at each step to carefully target high-value prospects. Qualifying leads early in the marketing stage saves time and effort for sales. Working on only a subset of leads allows sales to spend more time nurturing qualified leads and leading to faster conversion.

Increased lead quality

Without ABM, all leads whether from marketing channels or unqualified events, move to the sales pipeline. It is then up to the sales team to qualify and filter the leads that are of any value. ABM allows only highly qualified leads to move to a sales pipeline that will provide higher value to the organization and convert faster. Lead scoring allows B2B marketers to use all accounts and industry information about demographics, affinity, value, and website behavior to understand customer propensity even before any sales interaction.



In conclusion

Marketing nowadays is much more than just about brand awareness, product information, and customer impressions. B2B marketers in the digital age must understand customer personas and use appropriate content to improve engagement. Content tailored to the buyer's needs should be the focus.

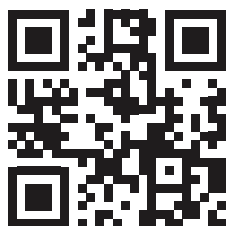
Account-based marketing strategies and technologies improve customer experience and help organizations become consistent in their marketing efforts. Personalization helps B2B marketers to engage with key target decision-makers inside the desired accounts. For B2B companies, hyper-personalization will not just increase sales, but also improve customer engagement, drive customer relationships, and build a base of loyal customers. B2B marketers should understand the experience expectations of their customers and develop strategies to meet needs across touchpoints throughout the buying journey accordingly.



About the Author

Shilpa Sood is a Practice Lead for customer experience platforms at HCL Technologies. In this role, she works with large organizations across the world conceptualizing digital blueprints, architecting digital foundations for data driven experience and enabling digital execution at scale. Her areas of focus are Customer data platform, marketing automation, customer analytics helping organizations in their journey deliver exceptional customer experiences.





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