

Account-Based Marketing in The Era of Strategic Intelligence How to Win High-Value Clients, Today

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Abstract

B2B purchase decisions have undergone a structural transformation. Where convincing a single procurement manager once sufficed, today every buying decision involves an average of six to ten stakeholders, each with distinct objectives, concerns, and success metrics (Gartner, 2019– 2024). This complexity has rendered standardised sales strategies obsolete and opened a decisive competitive space for those who know how to orchestrate personalised conversations with complex decision- making ecosystems.

This paper argues that Account-Based Marketing (ABM) — when integrated with a strategic intelligence logic and targeted thought leadership — represents the most effective response to this complexity. ABM is not a lead generation tactic but a paradigm shift: from mass marketing to the surgical conquest of high-value accounts, one account and one stakeholder at a time.

We propose the Applied Strategic Intelligence (ASI) framework, which describes how the collection, interpretation, and activation of contextual data on target accounts — combined with thought leadership content calibrated to their strategic imperatives — generates sustainable competitive advantage in high-complexity B2B environments. The paper includes a case study from the cybersecurity/banking sector and specific implications for Italian industrial SMEs.

Keywords: Account-Based Marketing, Strategic Intelligence, Multiple Stakeholders, Thought Leadership, B2B Demand Generation, Personafication System, Italian Manufacturing, Ethical Marketing

Introduction: The New Anatomy of Business Decisions

In contemporary B2B markets, selling has become a choral act. It is no longer about convincing one person, but about orchestrating the consent of a committee — often

informal, rarely visible from the outside, almost always traversed by internal tensions between functions with divergent priorities.

Digital transformation has paradoxically accelerated this dynamic: it has multiplied the availability of information but has also multiplied the number of people who feel entitled to participate in the decision. The result is a B2B decision-making process that Gartner describes as non-linear, multi-touchpoint, and structurally resistant to traditional sales approaches.

B2B buying journeys are rarely straightforward. Buyers interact with multiple touchpoints, making tracking and optimisation difficult. Decisions typically involve several people, each with different priorities.

— **Gartner, B2B Buying Journey: A Comprehensive Guide for Growth Marketers**

In this scenario, the vendor who continues to operate with standardised presentations and uniform proposals is structurally at a disadvantage — not because their product is inferior, but because their commercial approach does not respect the real architecture of the decision they are trying to influence.

This paper explores how Account-Based Marketing — understood not as a category of tools but as a commercial philosophy — offers a systemic response to this complexity. And how strategic intelligence, combined with precision thought leadership, constitutes its most powerful engine.

The Decision-Making Ecosystem: Anatomy of A Buying Committee

To understand why ABM works, one must first understand what sits on the other side of the table. Consider an archetypal case: a manufacturing multinational that must select a new software platform for supply chain management.

A decade ago, this decision would have been made by the logistics manager in agreement with the IT manager. Today, at least six distinct figures sit around that table, each with their own time horizon, success metric, and set of fears.

The Six Voices of the Buying Committee

The Chief Financial Officer focuses on numbers: reducing operational costs over the next eighteen months and demonstrating to the board that the company is investing intelligently in digitalisation. Their primary fear is hidden costs and implementation delays that could jeopardise quarterly targets.

The Chief Technology Officer pursues long-term innovation: modernising the technological infrastructure while keeping it competitive for the next five years. Their recurring nightmare is choosing a solution that becomes obsolete in two years, forcing them to justify a new migration.

The Chief Operations Officer lives in the present: they need a solution that simplifies daily processes without creating operational disruption. Maintaining production continuity during the transition is their absolute priority.

The Chief Human Resources Officer thinks about people: they must manage change management, staff training, and resistance to change. They know that the project's success depends on end-user acceptance, not on technical specifications.

The Chief Executive Officer watches overall strategy: they want a solution that supports growth in emerging markets and that can integrate with future acquisitions. Their focus is long-term competitive positioning, not immediate operational optimisation.

The Chief Information Security Officer evaluates risk: every new platform represents a potential vulnerability in the cybersecurity system. They must balance functionality and protection in a constantly evolving threat landscape.

Customers unequivocally demand a seamless, personalized omnichannel experience. If these expectations are not met, they will not hesitate to take their business elsewhere.— **McKinsey & Company, The New B2B Growth Equation, 2022**

The Strategic Implication

These six people have entirely valid reasons for their concerns and legitimate — often conflicting — objectives. A vendor with a generic proposal will adequately address the needs of one or two stakeholders while ignoring, or worse, contradicting those of the others.

The vendor who has invested in target account intelligence — who knows the specific pressures of each stakeholder, the internal conflicts, the individual career objectives beyond organisational ones — can construct a proposal that helps each one win their own game. This vendor is not selling: they are orchestrating consent.

Strategic Intelligence as Competitive Advantage

Strategic intelligence applied to ABM is not simple market research or demographic profiling. It is an anthropological understanding of the decision-making ecosystems of target companies — knowledge so deep about prospects that it anticipates their needs, understands their internal dynamics, and designs solutions that solve problems they often do not yet know they have.

The Four Dimensions of Account Intelligence

Companies that excel at ABM have developed structured corporate intelligence competencies, organised around four primary dimensions.

The first is temporal intelligence: studying the strategic planning cycles of target accounts, identifying when opportunity windows open — typically during annual budget preparation, after a leadership change, following a disappointing performance — and synchronising commercial action with these windows.

The second is relational intelligence: mapping the power relationships within the account, identifying who decides formally and who decides informally, understanding where coalitions form and where implicit vetoes reside.

The third is contextual intelligence: monitoring organisational and technological changes at the account — new hires in key positions, acquisitions, restructurings, product portfolio changes — that may signal the emergence of new needs.

The fourth is competitive and regulatory intelligence: analysing external pressures that influence the account's decisions — new regulations, competitor moves, sector dynamics — that create strategic imperatives the vendor can help address.

Technology and Humanity: The Winning Combination

Technological evolution has made increasingly sophisticated analytical tools available. Artificial intelligence can process enormous quantities of public data to identify behavioural patterns and trigger events signalling when a company is ready for a specific solution. Social listening can reveal decision-makers' concerns through their interactions on professional networks. Intent data platforms signal when prospects are actively researching solutions similar to yours.

But technology alone is not enough. Truly effective intelligence requires a human approach: authentic conversations, trust-based relationships, emotional understanding of the pressures each stakeholder faces in their role. Data tells you what is happening. Only human intelligence understands why it is happening and what it means.

The secret is not having more data than your competitors. It is interpreting the right data with greater depth.— **Alberto Regis, Personafication System™ Framework, 2025**

The Account-Based Marketing Revolution

Account-Based Marketing completely inverts the traditional logic of B2B marketing. Instead of trying to attract the largest possible number of generic leads, ABM identifies with surgical precision the companies representing maximum value potential and constructs completely personalised strategies to win them, account by account.

But the true revolution of ABM lies in recognising that every account is a complex ecosystem of relationships, interests, and power dynamics. It is not about selling to a company but about orchestrating a consensus-building process that involves multiple people with different — often conflicting — objectives.

Companies with ABM programs dedicated more than a quarter of their total marketing budgets to ABM. 72% of companies reported greater ROI from ABM than from other types of marketing.— **ITSMA/ Momentum ABM Benchmark Study, 2021**

ABM as Diplomatic Operation

Next-generation ABM campaigns resemble diplomatic operations more than traditional marketing activities. They require the same attention to detail, the same understanding of interpersonal dynamics, and the same capacity for mediation that characterise the most complex international negotiations.

Every piece of content produced within an ABM campaign is not a communication asset but a strategic move: it tells the target who you are, how you think, what you understand about

their world. And it does so before you have requested a meeting. This is the connection between ABM and thought leadership that we explore in the next section.

Case Study: Cybersecurity in Banking

An illuminating example comes from the cybersecurity sector, where a European startup managed to penetrate the American large banking corporation market through a precision ABM approach.

Instead of bombarding Chief Information Security Officers with technical demos and generic pitches, they began by studying the specific regulatory pressures each target bank was facing. They analysed public risk reports, CEO statements, and recent hires in security teams.

They discovered that in many target banks: the CISO was under pressure to demonstrate compliance with new European regulations; the CFO was seeking solutions that would reduce external audit costs; the CTO wanted technologies integrable without massive restructuring; the Chief Risk Officer needed precise metrics for board reports.

For each stakeholder they developed specific content and proposals: detailed compliance frameworks for the CISO; ROI models with audit cost savings for the CFO; architecture guides and integration plans for the CTO; customised risk metrics dashboards for the CRO.

The result was extraordinary: contracts averaging 2.3 million dollars in value with sales cycles 40% shorter than the industry average, and margins 25% higher — because they were not competing on price but on the specific value delivered to each stakeholder.

Thought Leadership and Abm: The Conversation Before the Conversation

The connection between thought leadership and ABM is structural, not tactical. In the context of an ABM programme, thought leadership content does not serve to be found: it serves to be chosen before being sought.

The mechanism works as follows. The target account — say, the operations director of a mechanical SME in northern Italy — is not looking for a vendor. But they are reading. They are following discussions in their sector, seeking interpretations of trends that concern them, comparing viewpoints on problems they recognise as their own.

If in this journey they encounter content that names their problem with precision — not the generic problem of "digitalisation" or "Industry 4.0 transition", but the specific problem of maintaining competitiveness in German markets when production costs rise and response times shorten then something significant happens: they form an opinion about the producer of that content. Before ever meeting them.

The ASI Framework: Applied Strategic Intelligence

We propose the Applied Strategic Intelligence (ASI) framework as an integrated model that unites ABM intelligence and thought leadership in a coherent three-phase process.

Phase 1 — Deep understanding: before producing any content, the company invests in understanding the target's decision-making ecosystem. Who are the key stakeholders? What are their strategic imperatives at this specific moment? What problems keep them awake at night? This phase is intelligence, not market research.

Phase 2 — Precision content: the content produced does not speak about the vendor but about the target's problem. It is calibrated to the account's specific strategic imperative, written in the register and language of the sector, distributed on the channels where target stakeholders are present. It is not generic content with a touch of personalisation: it is content that would be relevant only for that type of account, at that moment.

Phase 3 — Orchestrated activation: when the content has created familiarity and credibility, the commercial outreach occurs in a radically different context than a cold call. The prospect already knows who you are. They have already formed a positive opinion. The first meeting is not the beginning of the conversation but its continuation.

The Strategic Imperative as the Cornerstone

The concept of "strategic imperative" is central to the ASI framework. It is not the generic pain that every vendor claims to solve. It is the specific, urgent, high-stakes problem currently defining the agenda of the CEO or operations director of your target account.

A mechanical company that has just lost 15% of its German revenue due to a lead time problem has a different imperative from one preparing for a generational succession. A firm seeking ESG certification to retain a large retail client has a different imperative from one that must digitalise production processes to compete with Eastern European suppliers.

ABM-native thought leadership speaks of imperatives, not generic pain points. And this specificity is the most powerful signal you can send to a prospect: you demonstrate that you have already done the work of understanding their world.

Scalable Personalisation: Automation and Humanity

One of the most frequent objections to the ABM approach is its perceived non-scalability. In reality, modern technologies allow much of the personalisation process to be automated while maintaining the authenticity of the human-centric approach.

The secret lies in finding the right balance between automation and human touch. Technologies handle data collection and analysis, trigger event identification, stakeholder segmentation, and touchpoint activation. Human beings focus on strategy, content creativity, relationship building, and managing complex conversations.

This hybrid approach allows ABM principles to be applied even across portfolios of dozens of large target accounts, maintaining a level of personalisation that would be impossible to manage manually but that remains authentic and relevant for recipients.

The ABM Continuum: From 1-to-1 to 1-to-Many

Not all accounts require the same level of personalisation. A mature ABM framework

operates across three simultaneous levels: top accounts (typically 3–5 companies) receive fully personalised programmes, with content, events, and interactions built account by account; strategic accounts (10–20 companies) receive cluster programmes, with personalisation by vertical or shared challenge; extended target accounts (50–200 companies) receive 1-to-many campaigns with messages calibrated to the segment profile.

The key is that even at the 1-to-many level, the message is not generic: it is built around a specific segment imperative, not around product features. This is the difference between low-intensity ABM and mass marketing with a degree of segmentation.

New Models for Measuring Success

Marketers report improvement in the three Rs of strategic marketing: Revenue (73%), Reputation (65%), Relationships (40%) — reporting improvement from ABM.— **ITSMA ABM Benchmark Study, 2021**

ABM requires completely different metrics from traditional marketing. It is no longer about measuring lead volume generated or cost per generic contact acquisition, but about evaluating the depth of engagement, the quality of relationships built, and the advancement of target accounts through complex decision-making journeys.

The Four Fundamental Metrics

The Account Engagement Score measures how deeply each target company is engaging with content and touchpoints — not how many people clicked a link, but how many key stakeholders are consuming content relevant to their role.

Stakeholder Coverage indicates how many of the key decision-makers identified in the account's decision-making ecosystem are actually receiving and consuming content. An account where only procurement is engaged is an account at risk.

Progression Velocity tracks how quickly accounts move through the phases of the decision-making process. This indicator, correlated with the type of content consumed, allows real-time optimisation of the nurturing strategy.

The Stakeholder Success Rate is the most important metric of all: the percentage of stakeholders who, after engaging with the proposal, believe it will help them achieve their specific objectives. This metric predicts not only deal closure probability but also relationship quality over the long term and the account's expansion potential.

Abm In the Context of Italian Manufacturing

The Italian manufacturing landscape — with its density of family-owned SMEs, deep vertical specialisation, export dependence, and ongoing transitions toward Industry 4.0, ESG compliance, and generational succession — represents a particularly fertile context for the application of the ASI framework.

The firms of the Italian "fourth capitalism" are sophisticated buyers but are chronically underserved by mainstream B2B communication, which is almost entirely produced for anglophone, enterprise-scale audiences. A vendor that produces thought leadership content

in Italian, in the register of the mechanical or mechatronic sector, calibrated to the specific strategic imperatives of a family-owned company with 50–200 employees exporting to Germany and navigating digital transformation without losing the production flexibility that distinguishes it — that vendor occupies a category of one.

The ASI framework applied to Italian manufacturing suggests organising account intelligence around five systemic imperatives characterising the segment at this historical moment: margin pressure from Eastern European competition; ESG compliance demands from major clients; the risk of tacit knowledge loss in generational succession processes; the need to shorten lead times without increasing inventory; and the difficulty of attracting talent in traditional production environments.

The vendor who builds their thought leadership around these imperatives — not generically but with data, concrete cases, and clear positions — is not producing content. They are building credibility with the hardest audience to win and the most loyal once won.

The Ethical Imperative of Strategic Intelligence

With the growing availability of data on prospects and the capacity to influence complex decisions comes a proportional responsibility. Strategic intelligence must be used to create authentic value for all stakeholders involved — not to manipulate decisions for the vendor's exclusive benefit.

Companies that excel at ABM in the long term have developed rigorous ethical codes guiding the collection and use of information: they commit to proposing solutions only when these bring real and measurable benefits to clients; they invest in training their teams on ethical consultative selling principles; they measure success not only in terms of revenue generated but also in terms of value created for clients.

True strategic intelligence does not consist in knowing what your clients want. It consists in understanding exactly what they need to realise their most ambitious objectives. And in building the bridges that help them get there.— **Alberto Regis, IperLeads**

This principle — summarised at IperLeads as "those who know how to help others win, always win" — is not a motivational motto. It is an accurate description of the mechanics of competitive advantage in high- complexity B2B: vendors who create asymmetric value for their clients build exit barriers that no competitor can replicate through pricing.

Conclusions

Account-Based Marketing in the era of strategic intelligence is not an evolution of marketing and sales techniques. It is a cultural transformation that recognises a fundamental truth: in modern high- complexity business, individual success is inseparably linked to collective success.

The ASI framework proposed in this paper — founded on deep understanding of decision-making ecosystems, production of thought leadership calibrated to the strategic imperatives of target accounts, and orchestration of a multi-stakeholder consensus-building process — offers a structured response to the growing complexity of the B2B buying journey.

The principal implications for B2B marketing and sales professionals are three. First: investment in account intelligence is not a sales support cost but a strategic competitive differentiator, one that accumulates over time and generates increasing returns. Second: ABM-native thought leadership, built around target accounts' specific imperatives rather than product features, is the most effective tool for creating familiarity and credibility before the first commercial contact. Third: ABM success measurement must evolve from volume metrics — leads, clicks, MQLs — toward metrics of relational quality and depth of multi-stakeholder engagement.

In the context of Italian manufacturing, where competitiveness increasingly depends on the ability to build partnership relationships with strategic clients rather than competing on cost and volume, intelligent ABM represents not an option but an imperative [1-19].

About the Author

Alberto Regis is an ABM Advisor with over thirty years of international experience in marketing and general management, accumulated across contexts spanning FMCG (Danone, Quaker Oats, Scholl, Havaianas) to B2G sales in Pakistan and the Middle East, through entrepreneurship and specialised ABM consultancy for the Italian industrial market.

He is founder of IperLeads, a boutique that designs and manages 1-to-1 ABM programmes on high-value accounts for Italian manufacturing SMEs and mid-market companies. His approach — synthesised in the Personafication System™ and the WOW Framework (Watch, Orchestrate, Win) — is founded on human personalisation, slow marketing, and ethical ABM oriented toward long-term relationships.

He teaches Industrial Marketing at the Fondazione ITS Meccatronica e Avionica in Turin. He operates from the Biella area, in the heart of the Piedmontese manufacturing district.

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