

Research Report | November 2020

ITSMA +  ABM  
LEADERSHIP ALLIANCE

# Rethinking ABM for the Next Opportunity: 2020 ABM Benchmark Study

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# Introduction

Amid the tremendous disruptions of 2020, Account-Based Marketing (ABM) continued to gain traction as a core B2B marketing strategy that delivers substantial business results.

*Rethinking ABM for the Next Opportunity*, the fourth annual ABM benchmark study from ITSMA and the ABM Leadership Alliance, highlights ABM's ongoing success during a time of unprecedented challenge and change.

As B2B firms continue to reset marketing strategy and plans for the next normal, this essential study provides critical insight into the current state of ABM and the best-practice approaches required for continued success.

This report, based on both survey data and qualitative interviews with ABM leaders, documents the continued evolution of ABM through the extreme pressures of 2020.

The report provides critical data and commentary on ABM program objectives, maturity, budgets, tools, tactics, challenges, metrics, and business results.

The report also notes the different approaches that companies are taking with the distinct types of ABM that have emerged in recent years—One-to-One ABM, One-to-Few ABM, and One-to-Many ABM—and the degree to which companies are adopting blended strategies with more than one type.

Further, the report documents the changes that companies made in their programs through the disruptions of 2020 and highlights the new opportunities for ABM as B2B buyers accelerate business transformation in the wake of COVID-19.

Most important, the report showcases the distinguishing characteristics of the most effective ABM programs as they point the way toward greater business impact.

Looking toward 2021, the report identifies five strategic guidelines for ABM-ers to accelerate success next year and beyond:

- Accelerate agile
- Deepen account insight
- Strengthen sales collaboration
- Build a blended strategy
- Invest in metrics

Please join the conversation by adding your questions, comments, and experiences to the mix. We look forward to talking soon!

- Rob Leavitt, SVP, Consulting, ITSMA
- Julie Schwartz, SVP, Research and Thought Leadership, ITSMA

 @ITSMA\_B2B @ABMLA1 #RethinkingABM

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# Rethinking ABM for the next opportunity: Five priorities for 2021

The opportunity for ABM to drive strategic business impact has increased dramatically as B2B buyers accelerate digital transformation for their own growth and success. Yet ABM programs must move quickly to respond effectively to the opportunity. To thrive in 2021 and beyond, ABM leaders need to focus on five priorities that the most effective programs have already emphasized in their 2020 pivot: Accelerate agile, deepen account insight, strengthen sales collaboration, build a blended strategy, and invest in metrics.

## *Accelerate agile*

- The most effective ABM programs in 2020 were much more likely to:
  - Change and introduce new tactics
  - Shift account priorities with their coverage models
  - Use ABM to enter new markets and sell to new types of buyers
- With uncertainty being the only certainty for 2021, this type of agility in program focus and approach will become even more important as ABM-ers address fast-changing markets and unexpected developments in business and society

## *Deepen account insight*

- Account insight is a core principle of ABM and most ABM programs invest in data and analytics to support account selection and campaigns
- But the pace of change and the scope of uncertainty puts an even stronger premium on deep insight into how the pandemic is affecting accounts to support more nuanced and successful strategies
- The most effective ABM programs invest more than others in insight of all types, including:
  - Account insight
  - Intent
  - Prospect insight
  - Engagement insight
  - Business intelligence
  - Predictive analytics

## *Strengthen sales collaboration*

- Sales collaboration is a hallmark of any ABM program but it's a constant challenge, as well
- The disruptions of 2020 put tremendous pressure on the marketing-sales relationship as both sides had to pivot quickly to new ways of working and engaging with customers
- The most effective programs are notable for their closer working relationship with sales; they are significantly more likely than others to be:
  - Closely aligned with the sales coverage model
  - Working more closely together since the pandemic
  - Satisfied with the degree of collaboration

## *Build a blended strategy*

- All three types of ABM can be effective in achieving business and marketing goals. One type is not more effective than another
- However, the most effective ABM programs are much more likely to use a blended strategy, with at least two types of ABM to balance breadth and depth of coverage across different groups of priority accounts
- Looking ahead, the most effective programs are also more likely to invest in a blended approach in 2021 compared with all other programs

## *Invest in metrics*

- Metrics has always been a top challenge for ABM and programs will continue to struggle for resources absent more effective approaches to demonstrate business impact
- Top metrics for all ABM programs focus mostly on engagement (relationships) and revenue-related outcomes; some program leaders also emphasize the third R, Reputation
- The most effective programs do not necessarily use different metrics, but they are significantly more likely to measure ROI than others
- Measurement dashboards and regular program-level communication are other hallmarks of best-practice programs

# About the research

*Rethinking ABM in Response to the Pandemic*, the fourth annual benchmark study from ITSMA and the ABM Leadership Alliance, explores the current state and best practices in Account-Based Marketing based on a quantitative and qualitative review with ABM leaders and practitioners worldwide. To support a deeper review, the report includes analysis based on two sets of cross-tab survey data: The most experienced programs vs. all others, and the most effective programs vs. all others.

## Web-based survey

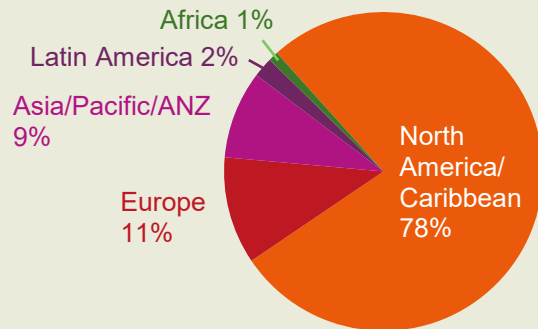


Web-based survey in August–September 2020 with ITSMA member companies and ABM Leadership Alliance contacts

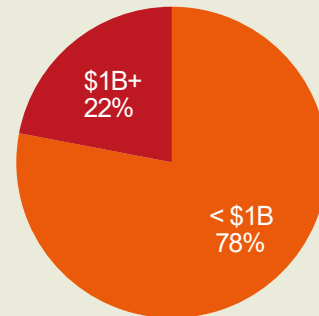


420 Marketers at B2B technology and business services companies

### Location



### Revenue



## Qualitative interviews



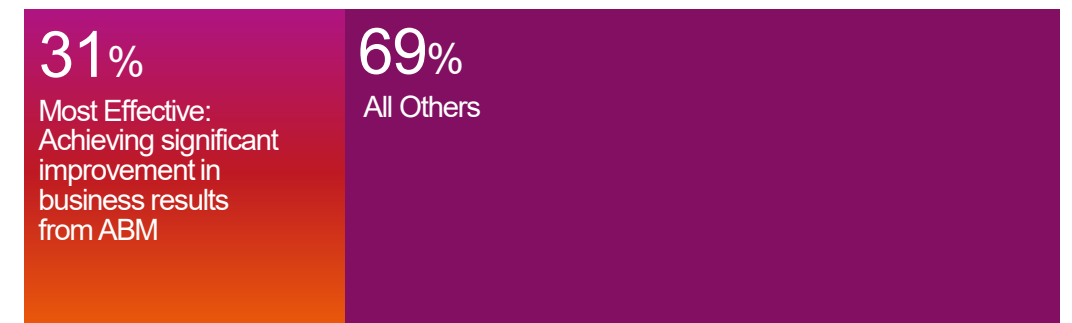
24 In-depth interviews with leading ABM practitioners

## Analysis by

### ABM Maturity\*



### ABM Performance

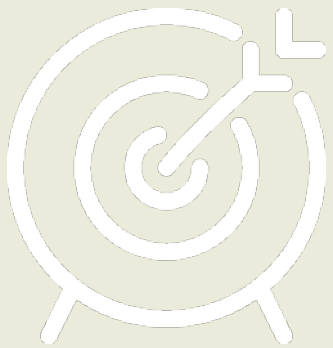


Source: ITSMA and ABM Leadership Alliance, 2020 ABM Benchmark Study, September 2020

\*See the Appendix for the ITSMA ABM Adoption Model

# ABM Definition

Treating individual accounts as markets in their own right



As ABM has taken off in recent years, so too have the number of definitions. Even the sponsors of this research have used different definitions in the past.

For the purpose of this report, and with the hope of helping marketers rally around a common definition, we agree on the following:

Account-Based Marketing (ABM) is a strategic approach to designing and executing highly-targeted and personalized marketing programs to drive business growth and impact with specific, named accounts.

## Core principles for ABM include:

- Strategic focus on improving business reputation, relationships, and revenue  
*(if it's just about lead gen, it's not ABM!)*
- Tight partnership and integration with sales  
*(if there isn't active, ongoing collaboration throughout the lifecycle, it's not ABM!)*
- Tailored and personalized programs and campaigns based on deep customer insight  
*(if customers get the same experience and inside-out messaging, it's not ABM!)*



# ABM Continues to Deliver

# ABM accounts for a significant share of total marketing spend

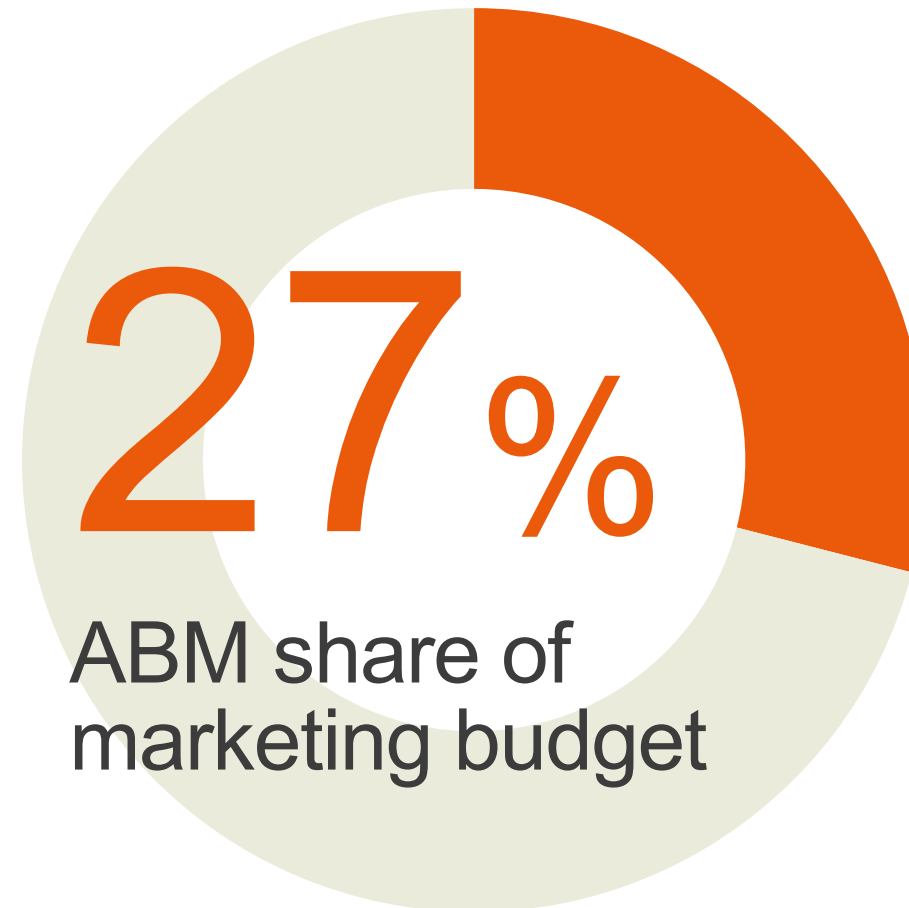
Even as many companies continue to launch new ABM experiments and small pilot programs, average spending on ABM represents a substantial share of the total marketing budget for companies with an active program of any sort. Smaller companies, perhaps not surprisingly, dedicate more of their total marketing budgets to ABM than larger companies—32% for companies under \$100 million in annual revenue compared with 21% for companies with more than \$1 billion annual revenue.

Approximately what percentage of your total COVID-adjusted marketing budget is now earmarked for ABM? (Include all program management, program governance, campaign, agency, and personnel expense)

Mean %  
(N=159)

*“We see a positive correlation between the size of the ABM budget and ABM maturity level. With experience comes higher ROI and therefore, the more mature companies see the value in investing in ABM.”*

Julie Schwartz, Senior VP, ITSMA



Source: ITSMA and ABM Leadership Alliance, 2020 ABM Benchmark Study, September 2020



# ABM continues to deliver substantial results across the three R's of business impact.

ABM programs continue to generate substantial business results across the three R's of marketing impact: Reputation, Relationships, and Revenue. Majorities of companies with ABM programs are seeing measurable business improvement with targeted relationship development and account-based revenue; about one third are also seeing measurable improvement in reputation and brand.

In which of the following areas have you seen measurable business improvement due to ABM?

% of respondents  
(N=218)

*"Our objective is to build a deep partnership with sales to help customers achieve their business outcomes. And then as part of that, ideally, we're trying to drive revenue growth and share a voice."*

Anonymous

## Relationships

(e.g., account engagement, relationship strength, breadth and depth of relationships)

71%

## Revenue

(e.g., revenue per account, pipeline growth, deal size, portfolio penetration)

55%

## Reputation/Brand

(e.g., brand equity, perception, awareness, and knowledge)

34%

Note: Multiple responses allowed.

Source: ITSMA and ABM Leadership Alliance, 2020 ABM Benchmark Study, September 2020

# Most companies see higher ROI with ABM than with other types of marketing

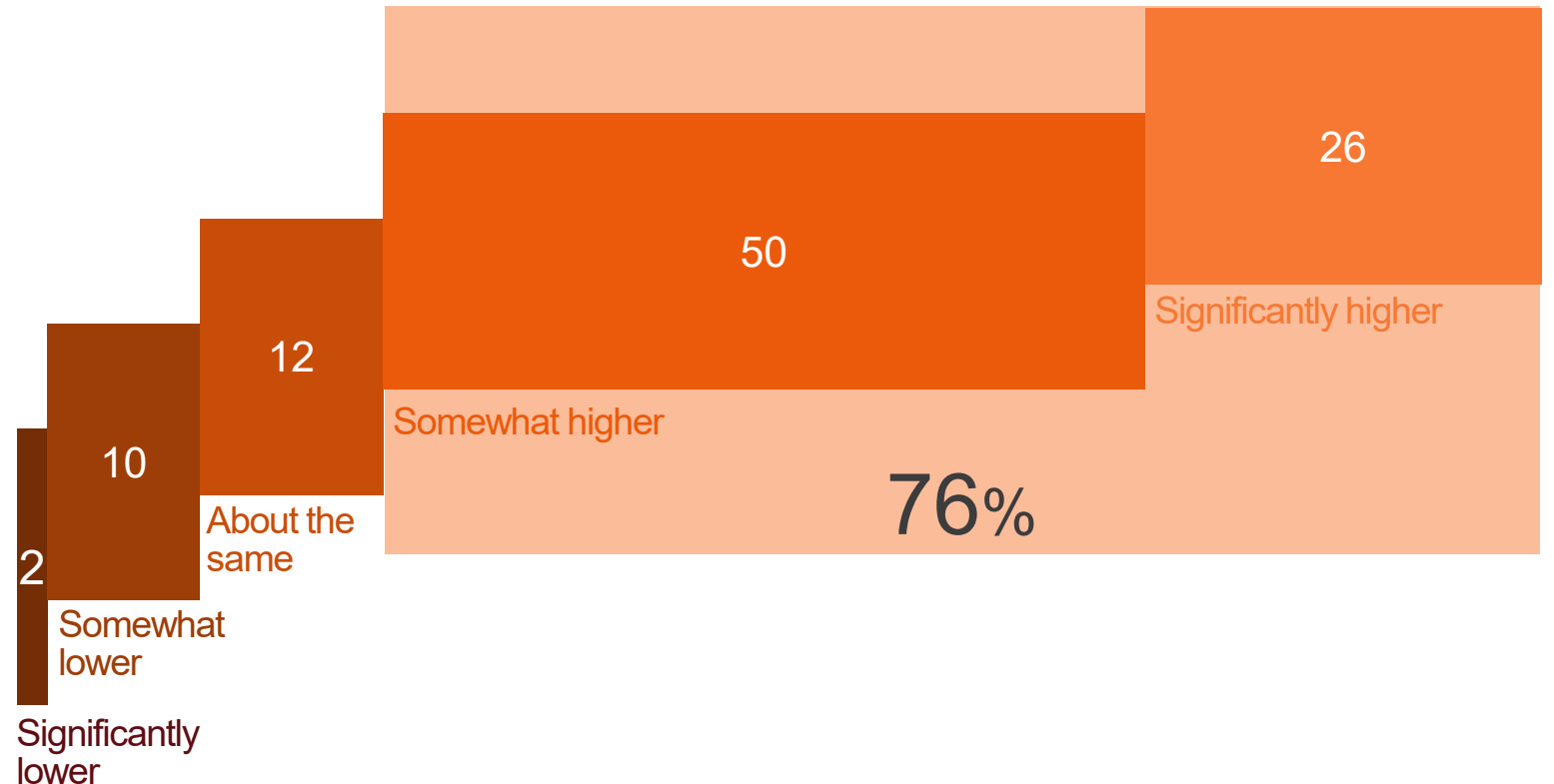
ITSMA and ABM Leadership Alliance have consistently shown that most ABM programs generate greater return on investment than other types of marketing. In 2020, three quarters of programs cite higher ROI, with about one fourth citing significantly higher return. Importantly, this includes companies just starting out with their ABM programs as well as those with more experience.

How does ABM return on investment (ROI) compare to traditional marketing initiatives?

% of respondents  
(N=168)

*“People love to quote this data, and with good reason! ABM works. Done right, ABM leads to significantly higher ROI than any other marketing approach.”*

Bev Burgess, SVP ITSMA Europe & ABM Practice Leader, ITSMA

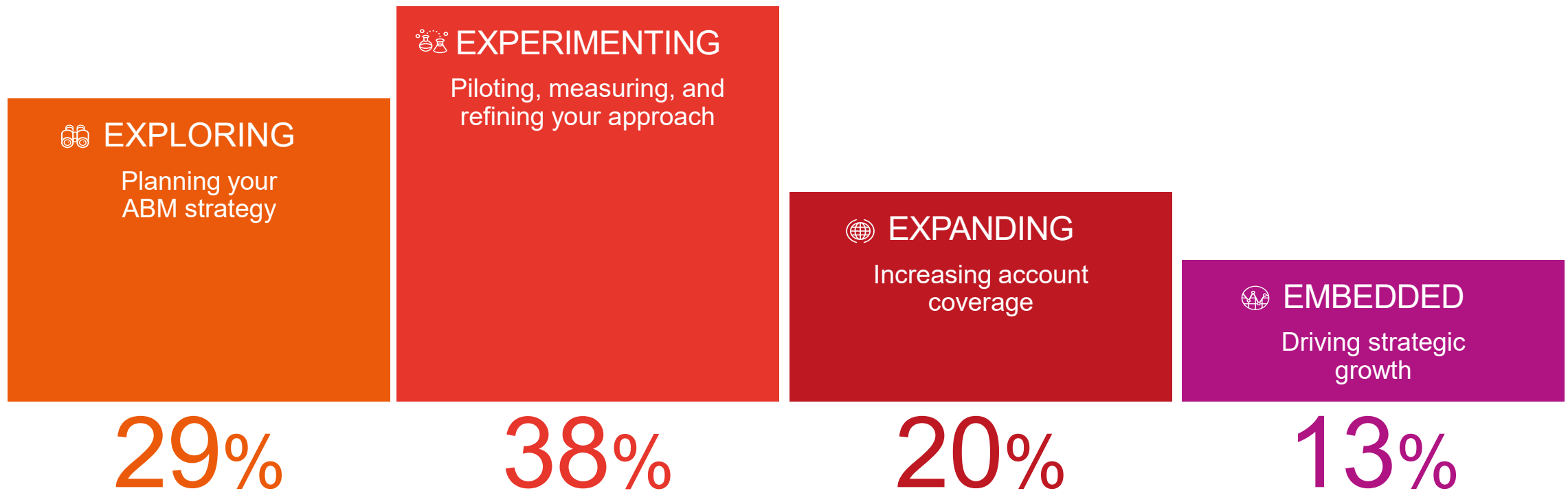


Source: ITSMA and ABM Leadership Alliance, 2020 ABM Benchmark Study, September 2020

# Amid great success, the ABM community continues to expand

With a long history of success, new companies continue to explore and experiment with ABM initiatives. Even though many programs date back to the early 2010s or even earlier, most current practitioners are still just beginning their ABM journeys. Two thirds of ABM programs today are in the earliest phases of development, with just one fifth in expansion mode and only 13% being fully embedded in marketing and corporate strategy.

## ITSMA's ABM Adoption Model: Four Stages of Adoption\*



\*See appendix for more detail on ITSMA's ABM Adoption Model.  
Source: ITSMA and ABM Leadership Alliance, 2020 ABM Benchmark Study, September 2020 | % of Respondents (N=390)

# ABM programs continue to flourish with three distinct approaches

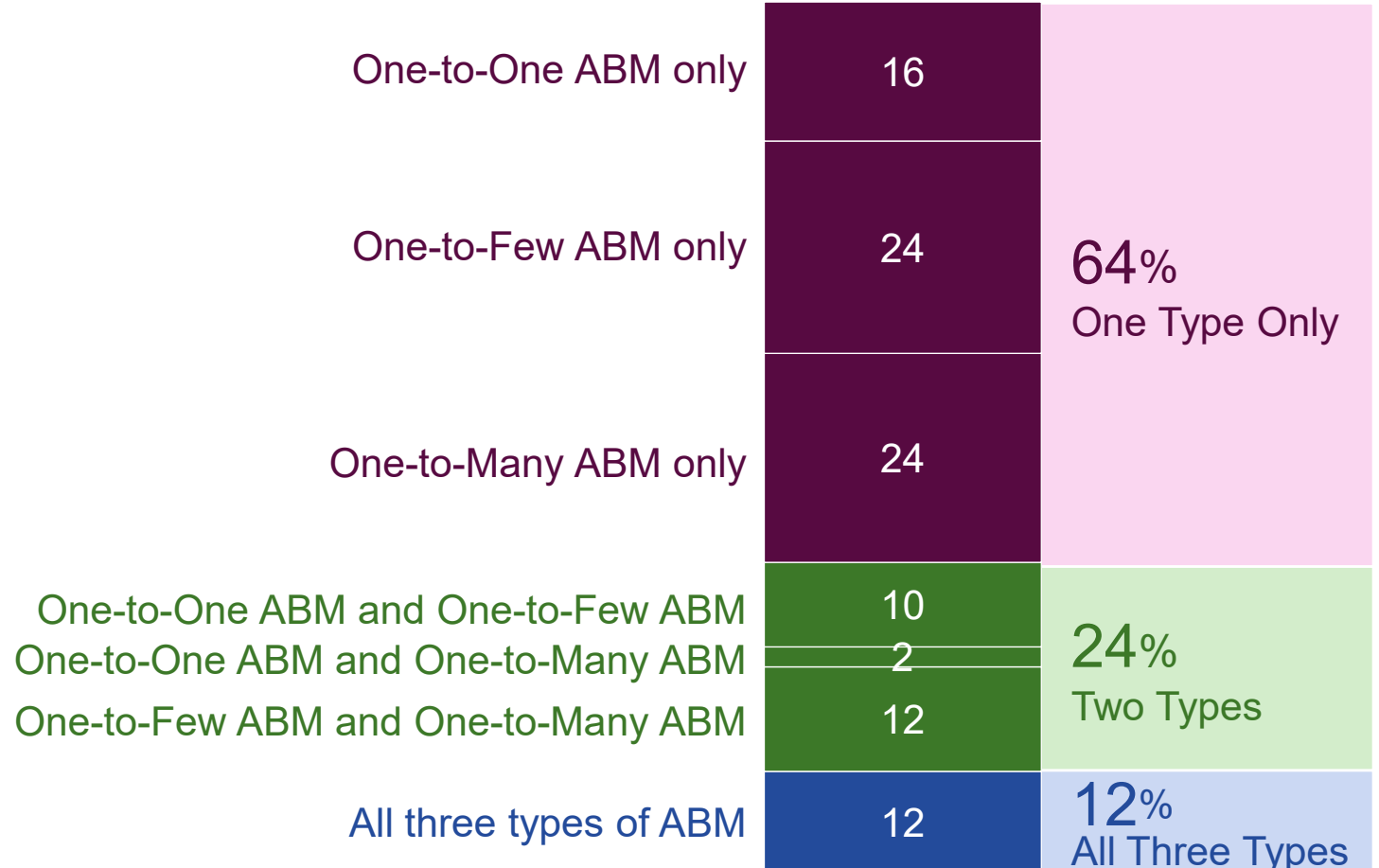
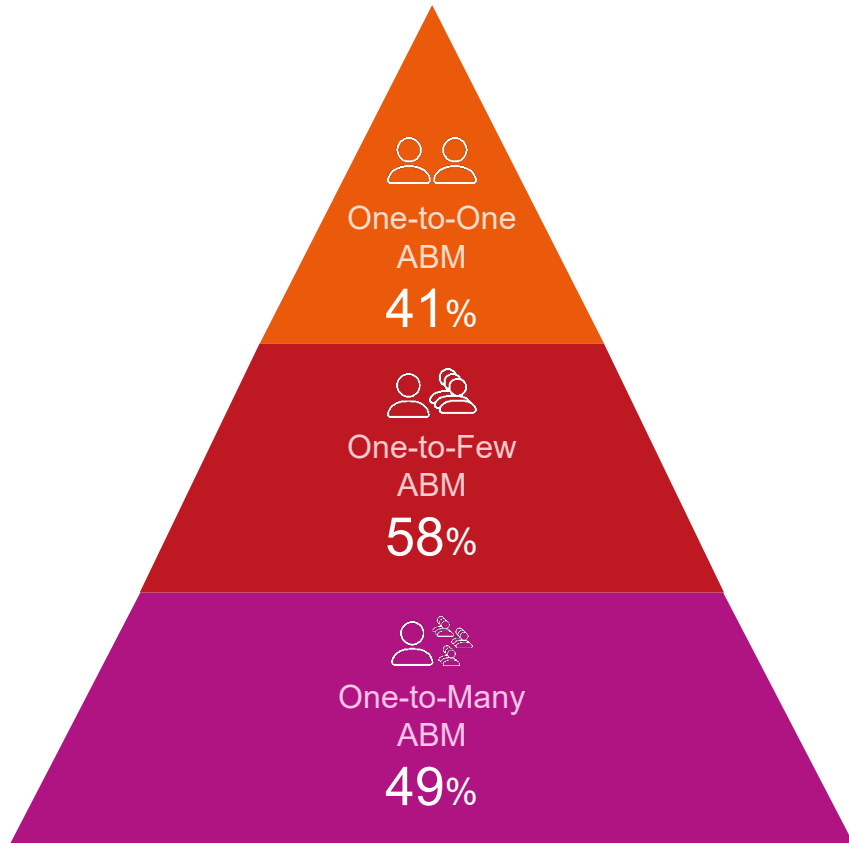
Launched in the early 2000s with a primary focus on One-to-One marketing for existing key accounts, ABM has evolved in recent years to provide breadth and depth of coverage across both new and existing accounts with three distinct approaches: One-to-One, One-to-Few, and One-to-Many ABM. ABM evolution has enabled companies to go broad and deep with different groups of priority prospects and customers.



Sources: ITSMA, 2020; ITSMA and ABM Leadership Alliance, 2020 ABM Benchmark Study, September 2020

# Most companies run one type of ABM, but 36% have a blended strategy

As the ABM discipline continues to mature, we see a growing diversity of approaches building on the standard three types. Hybrid approaches allow ABM-ers to cover more accounts with a lighter touch while continuing to go deep with subsets and near-term opportunities. Variations of each type include different approaches to account selection, staff coverage, deliverables, and collaboration.



Note: Multiple responses allowed. % of respondents (N=300)  
Source: ITSMA and ABM Leadership Alliance, 2020 ABM Benchmark Study, September 2020

# Companies are still early in leveraging technology and data

Amid the continued growth in ABM, most companies are still early in leveraging specialized tools to support their programs. Many rely largely on core tools and systems including email, web, CRM, and social media; only a relative few have already developed a mature tech stack. Looking ahead, top planned investments for next year include ABM platforms, attribution and reporting, intent, and direct mail.

Which types of technologies do you currently use to support your ABM programs?

% of respondents (N=300)



Top planned investments for 2021

- ABM platform
- Attribution and reporting
- Intent
- Direct mail
- Content syndication
- Third party data
- Events

Note: Multiple responses allowed.  
Source: ITSMA and ABM Leadership Alliance, 2020 ABM Benchmark Study, September 2020

# Maturity matters! The most experienced programs drive significantly higher results

The most experienced ABM programs are much more likely to drive significant improvement in key measures of ABM success, including customer perception (reputation), account relationships, and pipeline and revenue growth.

## What changes have you seen in these metrics that can be attributed to ABM?

% of respondents reporting significant improvements



\* Indicates a statistically significant difference.

Source: ITSMA and ABM Leadership Alliance, 2020 ABM Benchmark Study, September 2020

# With success comes growing demand for ABM

*"We are in our sixth full year of our ABM program and I'm just thrilled to report that, through our marketing programs, we're driving significant revenue growth in our targeted accounts when an account is in our program for at least 3 years. The revenue growth is 3x what our normal revenue growth rate is. It's really working!"*

Nancy Harlan, Head of Global Strategic Account Marketing, QLIK

*"We recently revised our ABM dashboards and after sharing them with our CMO, his response was, '\$XXM in closed business!! Way to go ABM.' Our stakeholders on a regular basis share 'We don't know what we'd do without you,' in regard to the support the ABM team provides."*

Tammie Larson, Head of Account Based Marketing, Diebold Nixdorf

*"We have a blended program with strategic One-to-One ABM, but also a huge One-to-Many ABM focus aligned by five key verticals. This aided us in switching our content and message development from a horizontal to industry focus."*

Shikha Saxena, Head of ABM and Financial Services Marketing, UK, Thought Works

*"We've received such incredible feedback from our sales teams and customers about our ABM program. Sales say things like, 'This is like nothing I've ever experienced before; it's really making a difference in how we engage.' A customer told me, 'I feel like you really care about me. You're not selling to me, but you really understand me and you're really trying to help me.'"*

Stephanie McCredie, A/NZ Marketing Director, Strategic Accounts and Customer Marketing, Salesforce

*"I've been evangelizing One-to-One ABM since about 2014, initially in the UK. As the business better understood ABM and realized the value, we adopted the ABM approach more fully, and we now have ABM leadership and teams in the Americas, Oceania, Central, Northern and Western Europe, and the UK. Japan and Asia are next!"*

Anonymous

*"We are good at One-to-One ABM, but is our program going to be able to scale to handle the number of accounts requested? We are exploring a hybrid model where we can use technology to drive a One-to-Few program enabling us to scale and adapt the program to meet our business objectives."*

Noushir Jagmag, Global Head Marketing for Communications, Media and Technology and Account Based Marketing Leader, Infosys



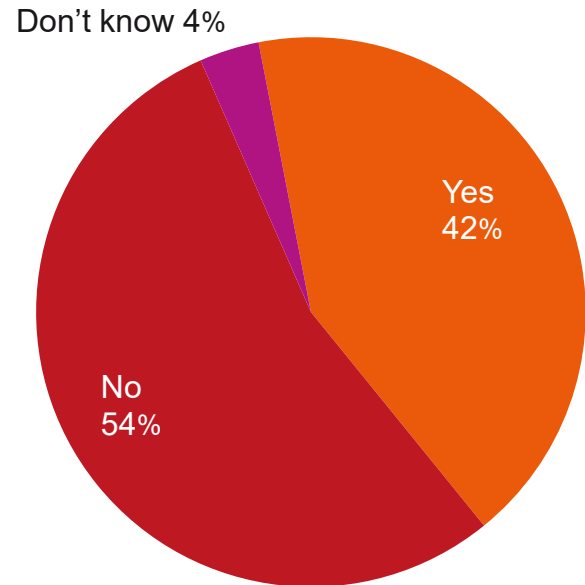


# The Disruption of 2020

# ABM programs were not immune from the 2020 disruption

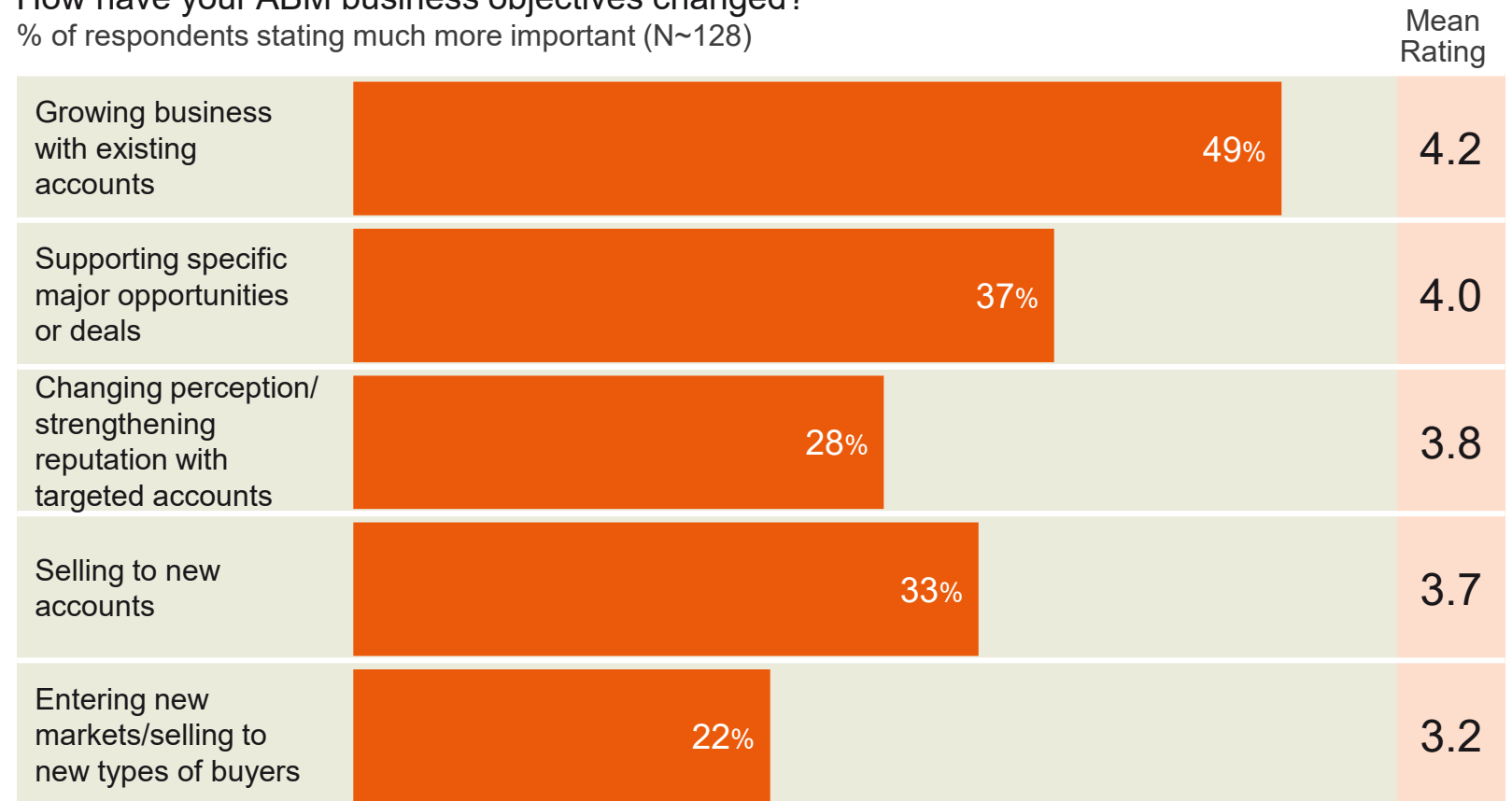
In response to COVID-19, many companies modified their ABM business objectives. The most important shift was to focus more on growing existing accounts and supporting specific major opportunities. Few companies scaled back on existing ABM objectives, with the modest exception of some companies moving away from using ABM to enter new markets or sell to new types of buyers. Even this group, however, was smaller than those putting more focus on those same objectives.

In response to the Pandemic, have your business objectives for ABM changed?  
% of respondents (N=306)



Source: ITSMA and ABM Leadership Alliance, 2020 ABM Benchmark Study, September 2020

How have your ABM business objectives changed?  
% of respondents stating much more important (N~128)



Note: Mean rating based on a 5-point scale where 1=Much less important and 5=Much more important.

# ABM budgets have been disrupted by the pandemic but in different directions

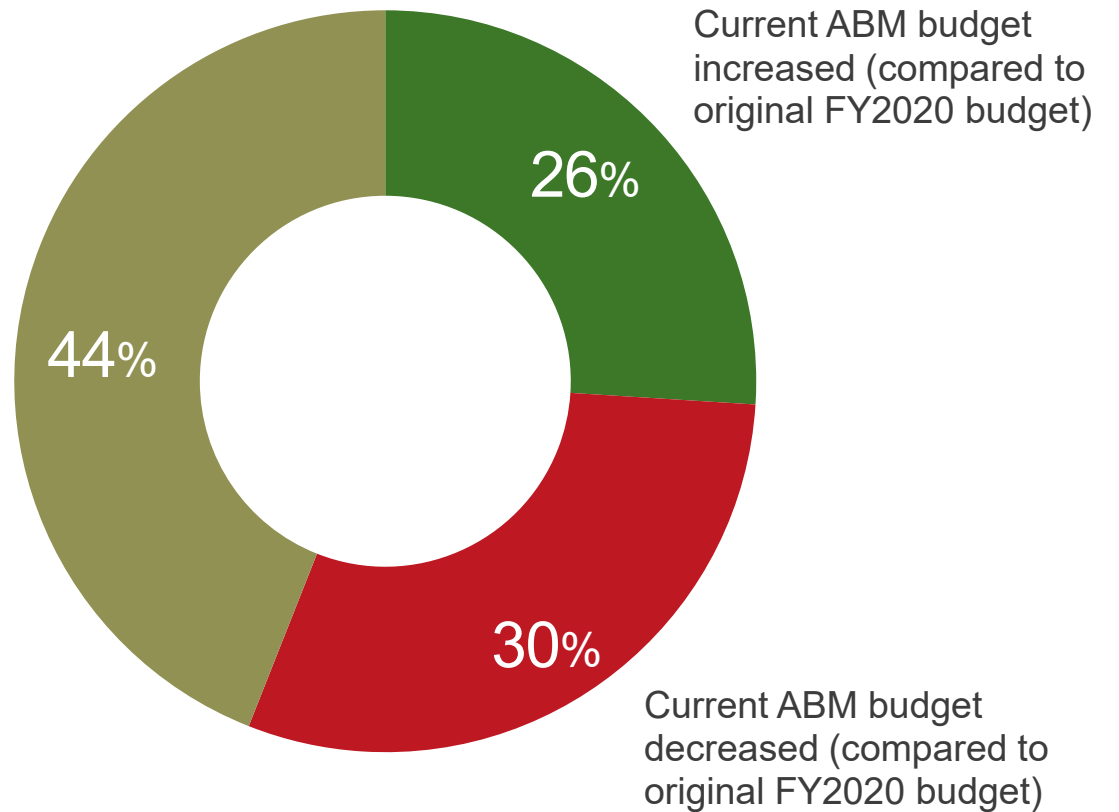
Overall, ABM budgets have held steady or grown amid the pandemic even as average spending has fallen slightly. About one quarter of ABM programs (26%) have increased spending this year compared to initial budgets, while 30% have had to cut back. A bit less than half have had no change in budgets due to the pandemic.

What impact did the COVID-19 pandemic have on your originally planned 2020 ABM budget?

% of respondents  
(N=286)

Average ABM Budget Growth  
(compared to original  
FY2020 budget)  
**-3.9%**

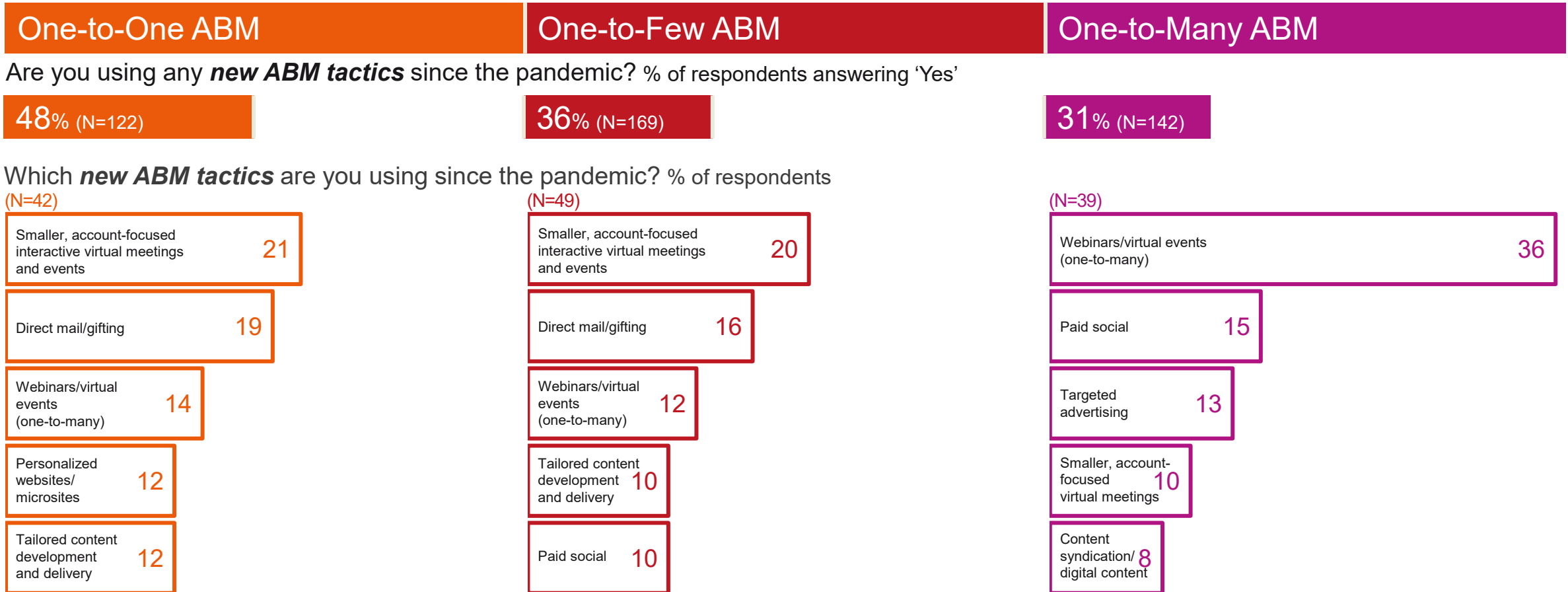
No change in budget due to the pandemic (current and original ABM budget are the same)



Source: ITSMA and ABM Leadership Alliance, 2020 ABM Benchmark Study, September 2020

# Changes in tactics this year were common as companies responded to the disruption

As the world went virtual overnight, many companies developed new tactics to engage contacts at ABM target accounts. Top new tactics across the three types of ABM have included small virtual meetings and events, direct mail and gifting, tailored content development and delivery, and paid social media. All emphasize engaging executives with more tailored and interactive content and thought leadership.



Note: Multiple responses allowed. | Source: ITSMA and ABM Leadership Alliance, 2020 ABM Benchmark Study, September 2020

# ABM and the new normal: disruption and uncertainty

*“This pandemic really challenged us because we were always very high touch. With the pandemic, there was no touch. We had to rethink our entire program to add the same amount of value and not be out of sight, out of mind. Through heavily personalized digital campaigns, we took a step closer to these accounts much more than we would have done earlier.”*

Noushir Jagmag, Global Head Marketing for Communications, Media and Technology and Account Based Marketing Leader, Infosys

*“The pandemic has given us an opportunity to develop more integrated campaigns with a connected customer journey. We are getting smarter with our digital initiatives. It’s not just about that 60 minutes when we host the webinar; it’s also about the on-going conversations before and after the webinar. We are striving to take our customers on a well-connected end-to-end journey and help them solve their critical business problems.”*

Shikha Saxena, Head of ABM and Financial Services Marketing, UK, Thought Works

*“One of the biggest surprises for me was that we were able to shift quickly to virtual and sustain engagement with the accounts that matter most. However, virtual engagement without the appropriate messaging around the pandemic would have fallen flat. Our ability to do both in a relatively short amount of time allowed us to be relevant. Now our customers are experiencing webinar fatigue and therefore we have to continue to evolve and innovate.”*

Heidi Eisenstein, VP, Global Field Marketing and Event Strategy for CX, Oracle (former Head of Enterprise Field Marketing for the Americas, Adobe)

*“Storytelling becomes so much more important. With everybody being online and virtual, you have to tell great stories to engage people.”*

Keith Pranghofer, Director of Account Based Marketing, Strategic Accounts, Microsoft

*“We built a new ABM model for 2020, selected our accounts, and got to the point where our first campaign was ready to go. On the week of our first email, COVID-19 shut down travel around the world. We literally were two days away from hitting the send button. We took a step back, reevaluated, and completely changed our program objectives in order to better serve our partners as they navigated the new normal we were facing.”*

Tim Heare, Senior Marketing Manager, ABM

*“We’ve learned that we should treat different industries very differently. In the beginning of the pandemic, it was about empathy, but what does empathy really mean? Empathy in marketing is quite a hard thing to quantify and take action on. The best approach is to show that we understand our customers; subdivide and approach them differently. It influences the engagement and the response rates, because people say, ‘You’re really talking to me. You’ve stepped into my shoes.’”*

Alex Olley, Co-Founder, Reachdesk

# Top challenges today include metrics, customization, and sales education

Amid the ongoing uncertainty, ABM leaders point to a number of critical challenges as they look toward 2021. Tracking and measuring ABM results tops the list, but other common challenges including customization, justifying program cost, educating sales, personalization, and, perhaps ironically, keeping up with sales team demand.

What are the top challenges your organization faces today in your ABM program(s)?

% of respondents (N=286)

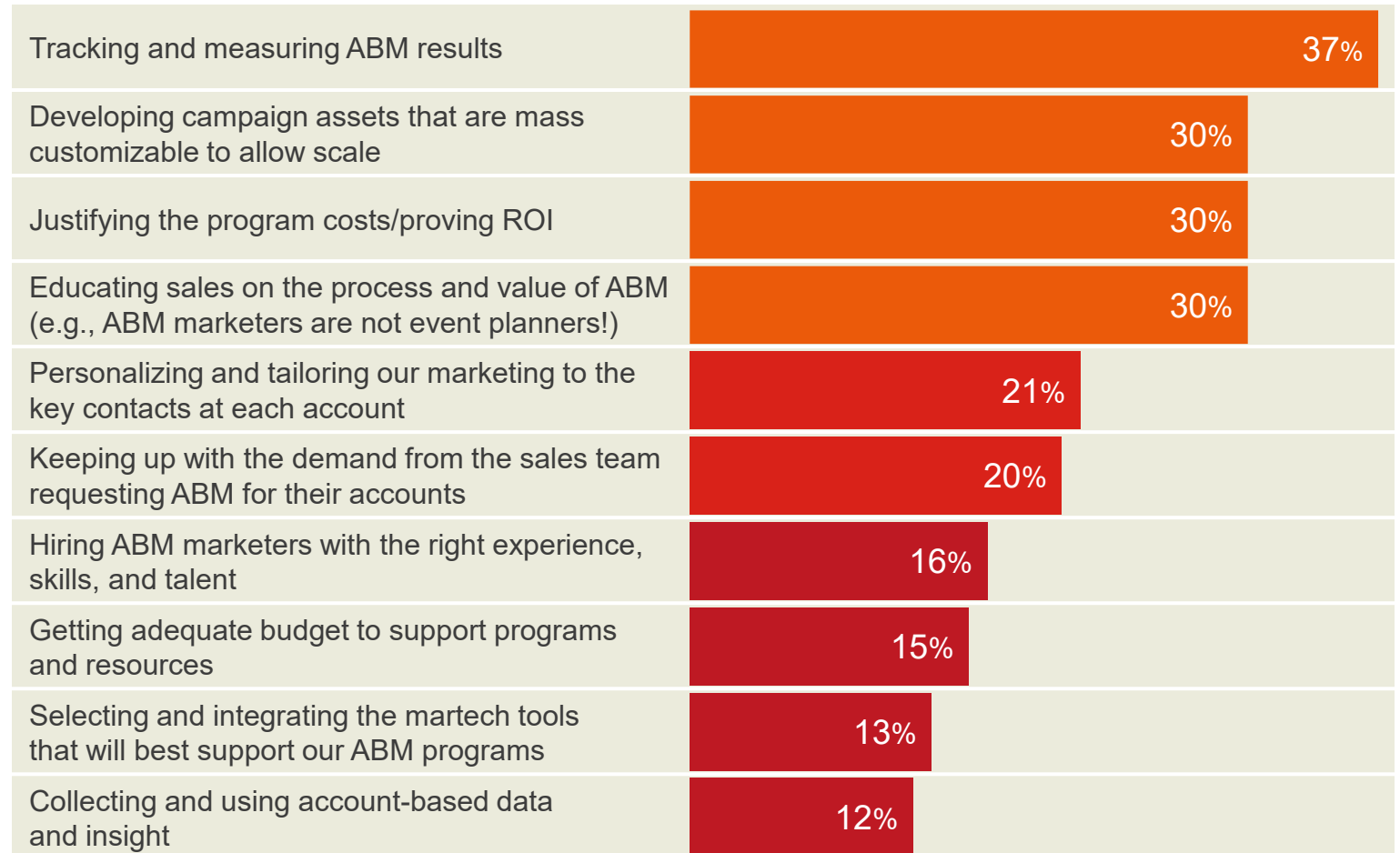
*“ABM requires a change of mindset. Education and communication are key to making it work and sustaining the investment.”*

Bev Burgess, SVP ITSMA Europe & ABM Practice Leader, ITSMA

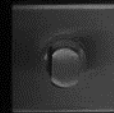
Note: Up to three responses allowed.

Other challenges include: Standardizing the approach to ABM across the company, Agreeing on the selection of accounts for the program, Adjusting ABM tactics during the pandemic, Getting buy-in from sales account teams, Differentiating from the competition at the account level, Managing an increasingly complex ABM ecosystem, Retaining ABM marketers in the ABM program

Source: ITSMA and ABM Leadership Alliance, 2020 ABM Benchmark Study, September 2020



# The Next Opportunity



# B2B buyers' COVID-adjusted IT spending continues to grow

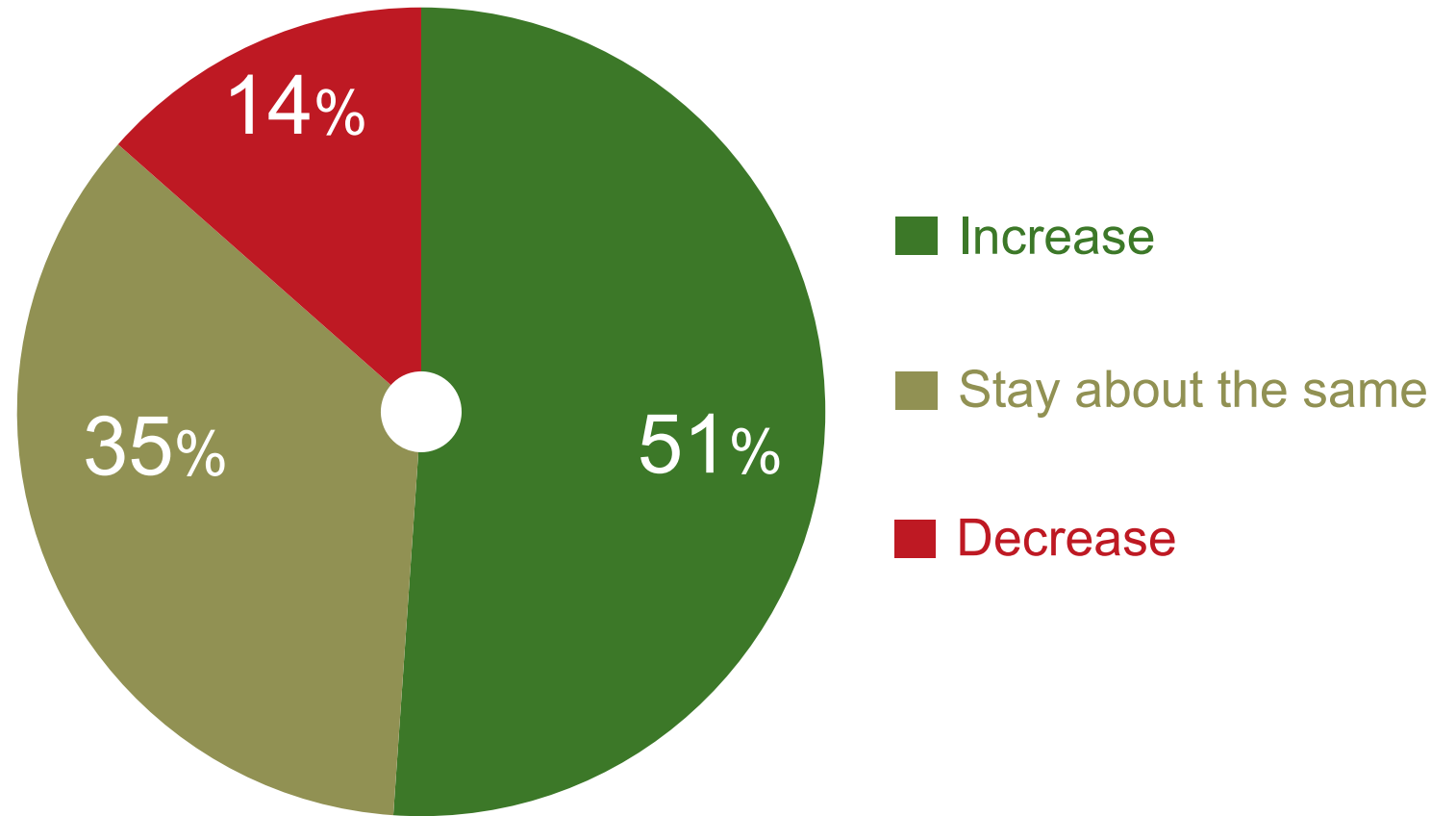
Most B2B buyers have held steady or increased their IT spending this year, even with all the economic disruption. For companies selling into IT, this is great news. The big question, of course, is what specific types of solutions are our customers and prospects prioritizing? ABM is all about targeted and customized solutions; we need to know that our potential buyers continue to invest in the types of solutions that we can provide.

ITSMA 2020 How Executives Engage Survey

How will your COVID-adjusted 2020 IT budget (including hardware, software, and services) compare to your 2019 budget?

% of respondents  
(N=503)

Average Budget Growth Rate: **5.4%**



Source: ITSMA, How Executives Engage Survey, Part 2, September 2020

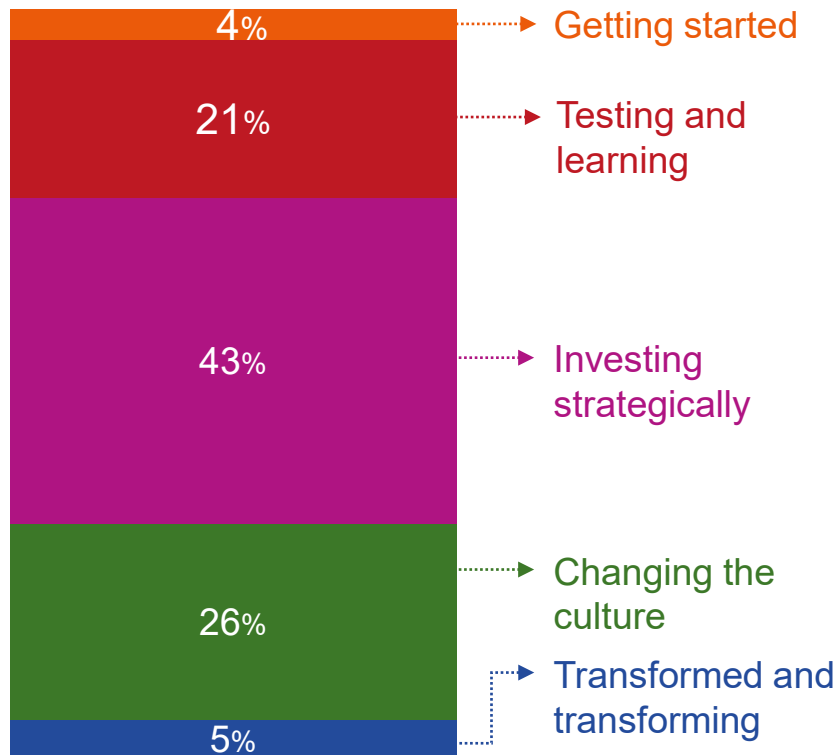


# For buyers 2020 has become the year of digital acceleration, opening a huge ABM opportunity

B2B buyers have made a dramatic pivot through the course of 2020 from the required reaction to the COVID-19 disruptions to a new focus on innovation and growth. Digital acceleration is the primary focus. Research with B2B buyers suggests that not only are businesses already far along with their digital transformation but their current priorities are to go even faster. ABM-ers that can support digital acceleration have substantial new opportunities to collaborate with customers for mutual advantage.

ITSMA 2020 How Executives Engage Survey

## Current state of digital business transformation



% of respondents (N = 463)

Source: ITSMA, How Executives Engage Survey, Part 2, September 2020



## Top business priorities

- Transform to enable digital business
- Grow revenue
- Invest in innovation; new products, services offerings, business models
- Upgrade infrastructure to enable remote work and collaboration
- Improve profitability
- Cut costs



## Top technology investments

- Cloud
- Security
- Artificial Intelligence (AI)
- Collaboration/remote work
- IoT
- Digital transformation

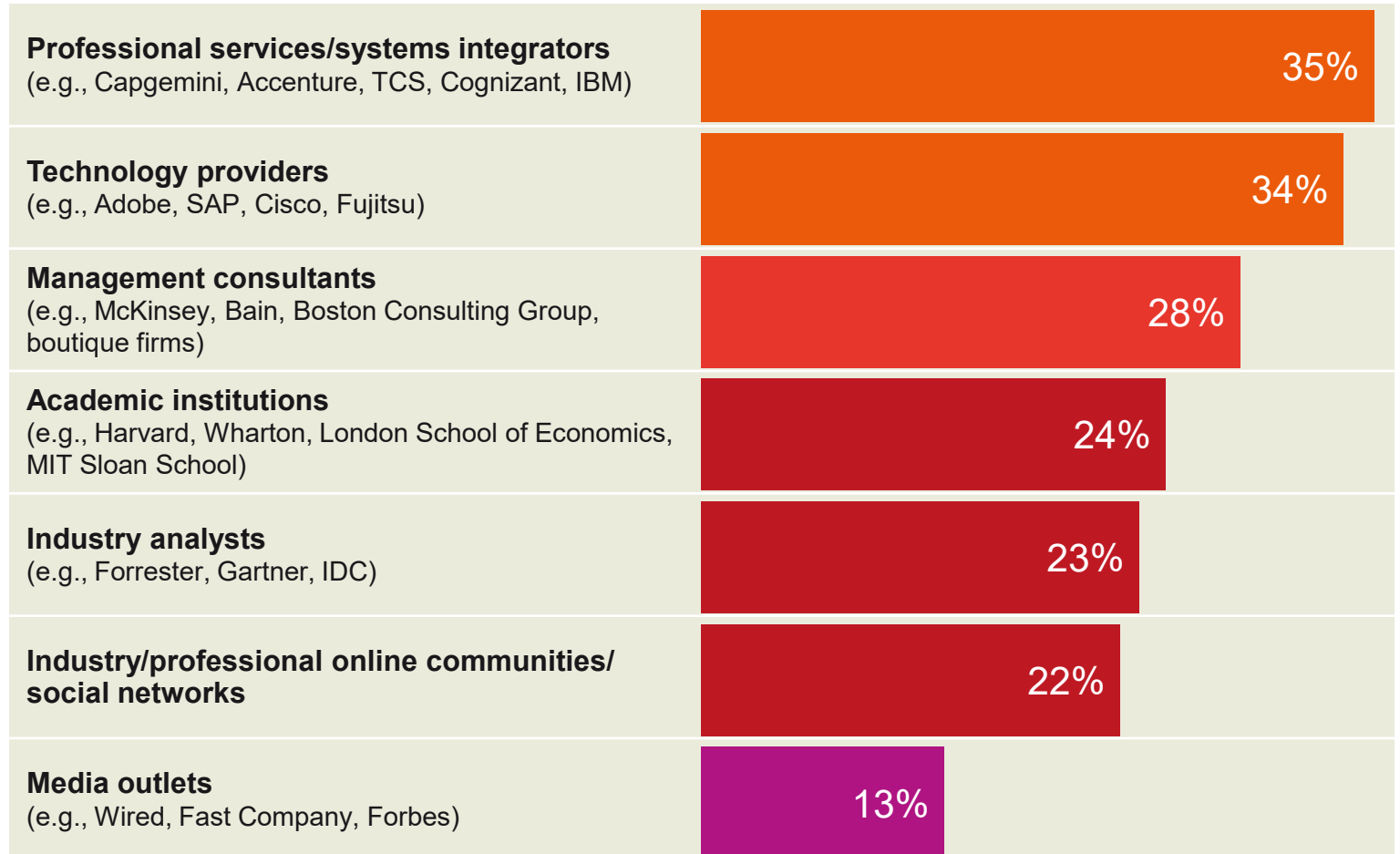
# Amid the disruption, solution providers have gained trust with B2B buyers

The urgent focus on digital acceleration has put solution providers front and center. Historically, B2B buyers have looked first to analysts, consultants, and peers as their most trusted sources for information and ideas. Solution providers have typically faced a credibility gap with their sales-first approach. Today, though, buyers are focused much more on practical guidance for digital acceleration, and solution providers have moved to the top of the list of trusted sources of information.

ITSMA 2020 How Executives Engage Survey

Since the pandemic, which sources of information do you trust the most?

% of respondents  
(N=503)



Note: Up to two responses allowed.

Source: ITSMA, How Executives Engage Survey, Part 2, September 2020

# Rethinking ABM for the next opportunity: Five priorities for 2021

- The opportunity for ABM to drive strategic growth for the business has grown dramatically as B2B buyers look to accelerate digital transformation for their own growth and success.
- Yet ABM programs have to move quickly to respond effectively to the opportunity. Markets have changed dramatically, buyer needs have shifted substantially, and earlier approaches may not be effective.
- To thrive in 2021 and beyond, ABM leaders need to emphasize five priorities that the most effective programs have already emphasized in their 2020 pivot.

- Accelerate agile
- Deepen account insight
- Strengthen sales collaboration
- Build a blended strategy
- Invest in metrics

# Rethinking ABM for the next opportunity

- Accelerate agile
- Deepen account insight
- Strengthen sales collaboration
- Build a blended strategy
- Invest in metrics



# The most effective ABM programs in 2020 moved faster than the rest

The most effective ABM programs in 2020 were much more likely to change and introduce new tactics, shift account priorities with their coverage models, and use ABM to enter new markets and sell to new types of buyers. With uncertainty being the only certainty for 2021, this type of agility in program focus and approach will become even more important to address fast-changing markets and unexpected developments in business and society.

Are you using any new ABM *tactics* since the pandemic?

	One-to-One ABM		One-to-Few ABM		One-to-Many ABM	
	Most Effective	All Others	Most Effective	All Others	Most Effective	All Others
% of respondents answering 'Yes'	68* N=41	38* N=81	35 N=57	36 N=112	45* N=47	24* N=95
Adding more accounts	48	33	49	38	54	41
Adding coverage of new industries or account clusters	28	17	47*	29*	43	29
Reducing coverage of certain industries or account clusters	28* N=29	12* N=52	19 N=43	19 N=79	22 N=37	21 N=68

\* Differences are statistically significant.

Most popular new tactics introduced:

- Webinars/virtual events (one to many)
- Smaller, account-focused interactive virtual meetings and events
- Direct mail/gifting
- Paid social
- Personalized content/microsites

Note: Multiple responses allowed. | Source: ITSMA and ABM Leadership Alliance, 2020 ABM Benchmark Study, September 2020

# The pandemic accelerated the adoption of agile marketing practices

*“In the world of COVID, everything changes quickly. We know what the right messages are to take to the account, but without the right processes and tools, it takes time to implement the changes. Companies need to develop processes and invest in the tools to be more agile.”*

Anonymous

*“I think one of our biggest accomplishments of this year is taking the principles of agile marketing and applying it to our ABM program. So as we expand our current ABM program, we’re using agile sprints and different methodologies that help us get it stood up faster in a much more comprehensive way.”*

Karen Webb, Director, Americas Field Marketing, Content Strategy & Sales Enablement, Dell Technologies Services

*“Lesson number one would be the importance of agility and being nimble to adapt to change at any given point in time. I think pre-COVID, we didn’t have any insight into what 2020 would bring. We had locked all our fiscal year plans down for the year. We had aligned on all the key themes with product marketing. COVID hits. Everything is shut down. The workplace changes. Everyone’s operating virtually. It typically takes a large global company a long time to make changes, but change has to happen more quickly to adapt to the needs of the customer base.”*

Anonymous

*“With our ABM programs, we need to do two things. One is keeping the lights on for those programs that work and scaling them into the relevant verticals and geos. Second is piloting new ideas and failing quickly. If something isn’t showing any traction at all within a quarter, then scrap it. If it works, scale it and look at where else you can innovate.”*

Anna Abrell, Senior Enterprise Marketing Manager, Braze

*“We have to be agile and get content out there, but this is a challenge in a global ABM program. Translations take time and we must make sure things are messaged the right way in each country. You can’t just pick up something from the UK and throw it into Japan. Agile, yes, but within the bounds of cultural sensitivities.”*

Natalie Mendes, Head of ABM & Demand Generation, Yellowfin BI

# Rethinking ABM for the next opportunity

- Accelerate agile
- Deepen account insight
- Strengthen sales collaboration
- Build a blended strategy
- Invest in metrics



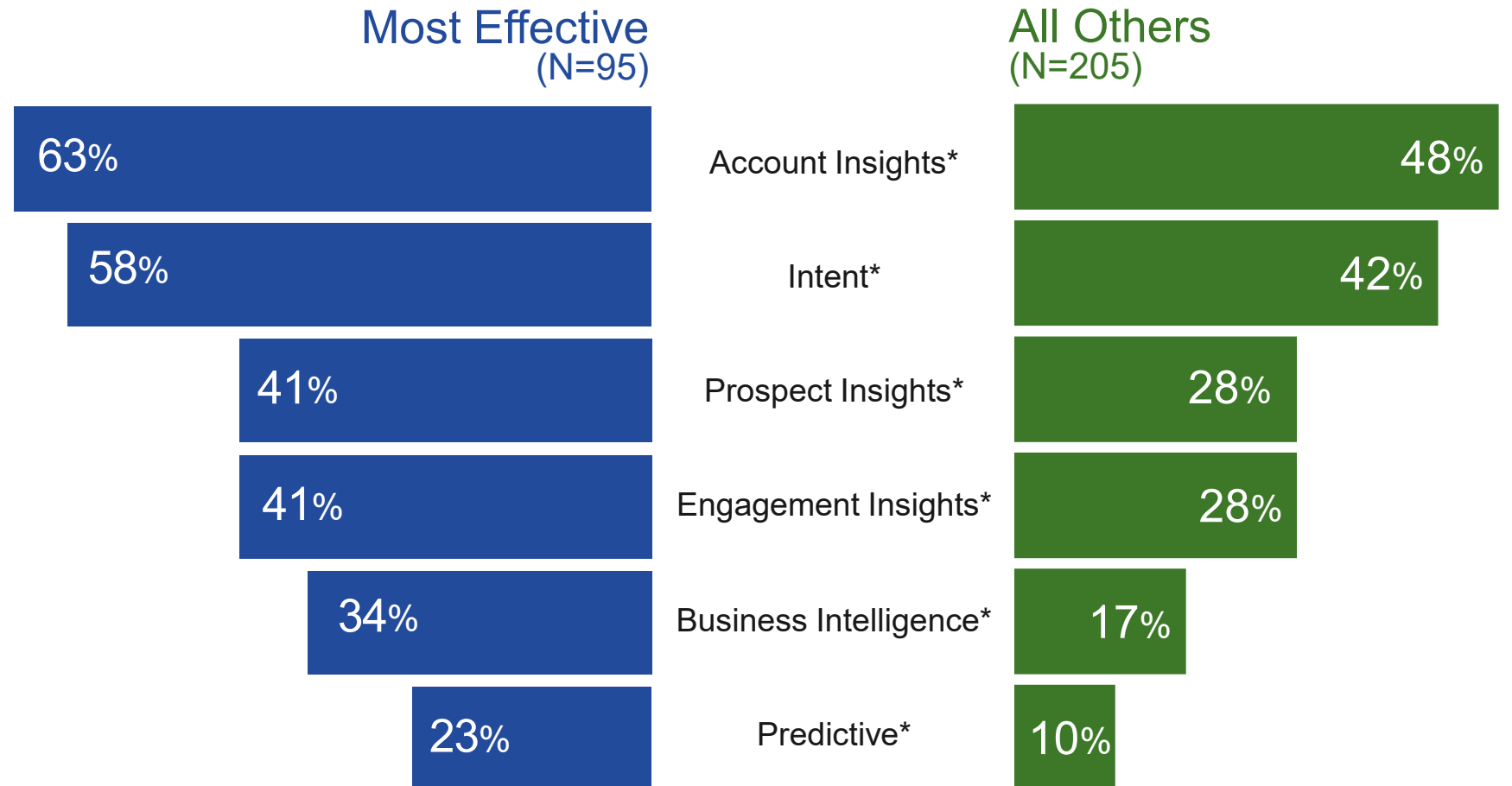
# The most effective programs invest more in data, insight, and analytics

Account insight is a core principle of ABM and most ABM programs invest in data and analytics to support account selection and campaigns. But the pace of change and the scope of uncertainty puts an even stronger premium on deep insight into how the pandemic is affecting accounts to support more agile and effective strategies. The most effective ABM programs invest more than others in insight of all types, including direct account insight, intent, engagement, predictive, and data management.

## Technologies in use

Which types of technologies do you currently use to support your ABM programs?

% of respondents currently use



\*Indicates a statistically significant difference.  
Source: ITSMA and ABM Leadership Alliance, 2020 ABM Benchmark Study, September 2020



# Account intelligence is what makes it “account-based”

*“Customer insight is vital for our content-led campaigns to determine clients’ interests. We draw those inferences and conclusions with the help of intent data. We’re also looking at intent data from a single account perspective to see which topics are most relevant to our clients’ current challenges. We use that insight to design account-specific workshops and anchor our content accordingly. C-suite intelligence is another key area helping us strengthen our executive relationships.”*

Shikha Saxena, Head of ABM and Financial Services Marketing, UK, Thought Works

*“My team works with various other Center of Excellence teams to select accounts and locate customers that show some promising buying signals where we can offer more value. With this research, data, and segmentation that we do for our account-based plays, we’re able to make more personalized, meaningful communications. By being more focused in this way, we’ve been able to move the needle more on our programs.”*

Anonymous

*“How can ABM add value from the start? Personalization based on insights is critical. We spent about three months doing discovery on 38 organizations, including collecting external and intent insights and 50 hours of discussion with account teams including account planning and messaging workshops. We discovered about 24 recurring topics that we grouped into five themes, reflecting the pain points and challenges that the different organizations are going through. As a result, we have the 38 organizations as part of a One-to-Few program with five clusters based on the sales exec’s judgement of which theme would resonate most. Every ABM program we design and rollout to these accounts are all reflecting messaging and content linking back to the five themes that matter most to these organizations.”*

Stephanie McCredie, A/NZ Marketing Director, Strategic Accounts and Customer Marketing, Salesforce

*“With the move to virtual and online we’ve benefited and seen improvement in our marketing and sales connection. Sales is coming to us and saying, ‘Bring us insights and a point of view on how I create proximity with my clients even when I’m not going on site now,’ It’s been a highlight for our team to have this increased sales engagement.”*

Keith Pranghofer, Director of Account Based Marketing, Strategic Accounts, Microsoft

*“The key to success is active listening and becoming a ‘trusted advisor.’ But you have to do your research make sure you have a clear understanding of the account. What are the business initiatives? Who on the executive team is responsible for those business initiatives? What added value can you bring to help them advance those business initiatives? If you don’t do this, you’re going to come off as disingenuous and you won’t bring any value to table.”*

Marlowe Fenn, Head of Account-based Marketing, FireEye

# Rethinking ABM for the next opportunity

- Accelerate agile
- Deepen account insight
- **Strengthen sales collaboration**
- Build a blended strategy
- Invest in metrics

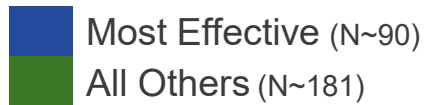


# The most effective programs work significantly more closely with sales

Sales collaboration is a hallmark of any ABM program but it's a constant challenge, as well. The disruptions of 2020 put tremendous pressure on the marketing-sales relationship as both sides had to pivot quickly to new ways of working and engaging with customers. But the most effective programs are notable for their closer working relationship with sales. Even the most effective programs have work to do, though, and responding to the challenge is key to success in 2021.

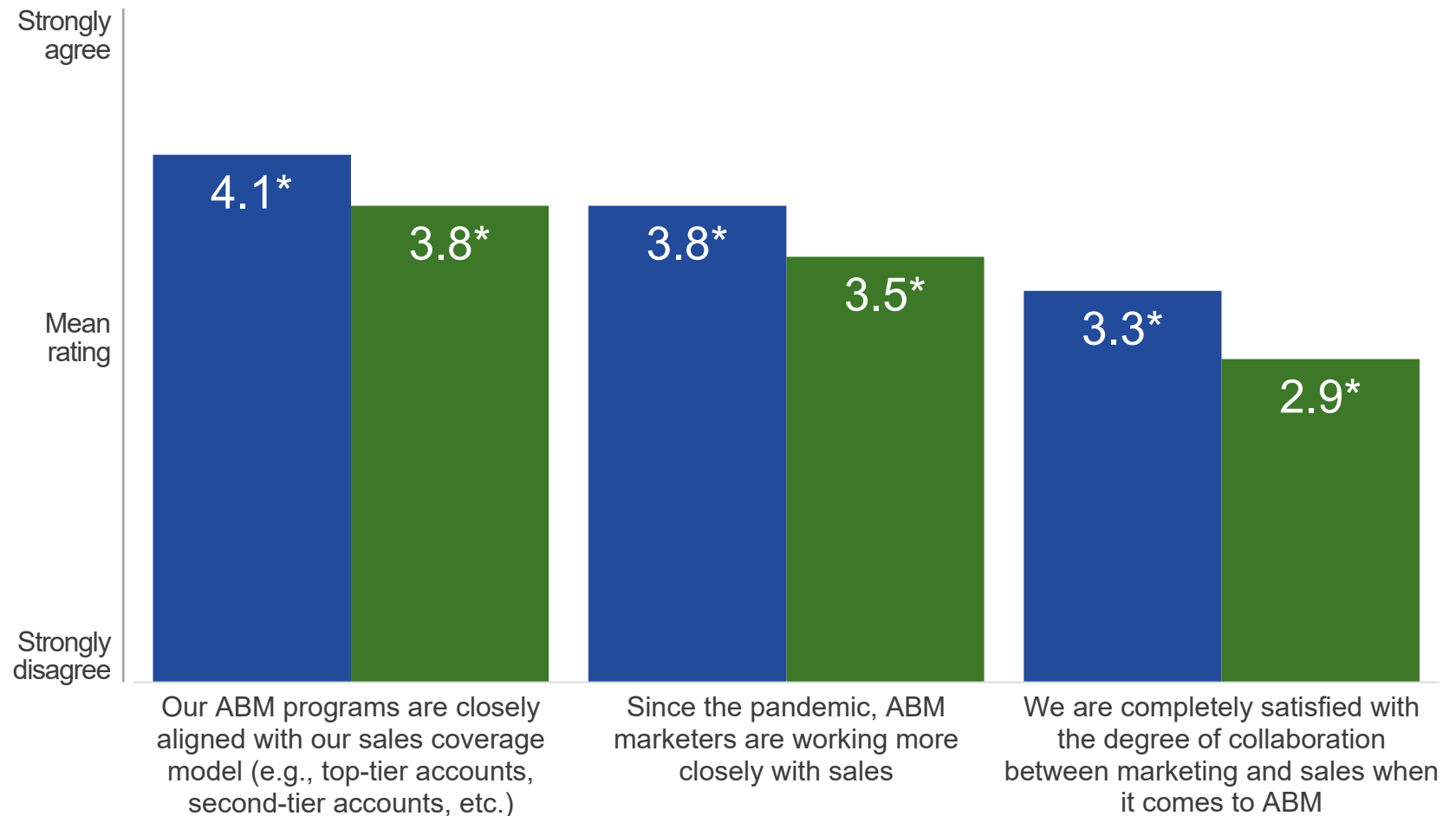
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Mean rating



*“Working with sales is a foundation for ABM. It’s not ABM if we’re doing it by ourselves as marketers.”*

Rob Leavitt, Vice President, Consulting, ITSMA



Note: Mean rating based on a 5-point scale where 1=Strongly disagree and 5=Strongly agree.

\*Indicates a statistically significant difference.

Source: ITSMA and ABM Leadership Alliance, 2020 ABM Benchmark Study, September 2020

# ABM will only achieve its potential when sales and marketing work hand in hand

*"I've been pleased with the engagement from and alignment with sales. The account executive on one of my accounts said yesterday that he views ABM and his relationship with me as the glue that provides the consistency amongst all his opportunities and projects with the account."*

Anonymous

*"Getting buy-in from sales is extremely important. Both sales and marketing leadership need to understand and agree to the program goals and outcomes. Sales and marketing needs to see the value of working together versus marketing doing their thing and sales doing their thing, and then fighting with one another due to misalignment. Viewing sales as your ally to help them advance their programs and objectives makes you more of a partner and will get you a lot further."*

Alex Hague, Demand Generation Manager,  
Georgia Pacific

*"The key to our success is the relationships we have with the sales reps, gaining their trust as not only a good marketer but as a strategic advisor to them and to the account. They trust us enough to put us in front of the customer to talk about the programs we can run to help the customer build awareness of Qlik and drive adoption."*

Meghan Dingler, Head of Account Based Marketing,  
US Team, Qlik

*"At the end of the day, the ABM-er's job is to help sales be more successful; it's not to tell them what to do. I always remind them [Sales] that it is their account with their commission on the line. Whenever I meet with sales teams, I say: 'Let's look at my quantitative data, but you have the qualitative data. You know things about the account I can't measure.' Only together, with the whole picture, can we figure out the best approach for the account."*

Anonymous

*"I don't think anything will torpedo ABM quicker than not having a strong relationship between sales and marketing."*

Anonymous

*"Sales and marketing have the same revenue goal. Marketing doesn't have a goal on MQLs or leads. In fact, the word MQL is banned in this organization. At the end of the day, we care about the revenue goal. It's not just net-new, it's an expansion revenue goal as well."*

Alex Olley, Co-founder, Head of Revenue and Marketing,  
Reachdesk

# Rethinking ABM for the next opportunity

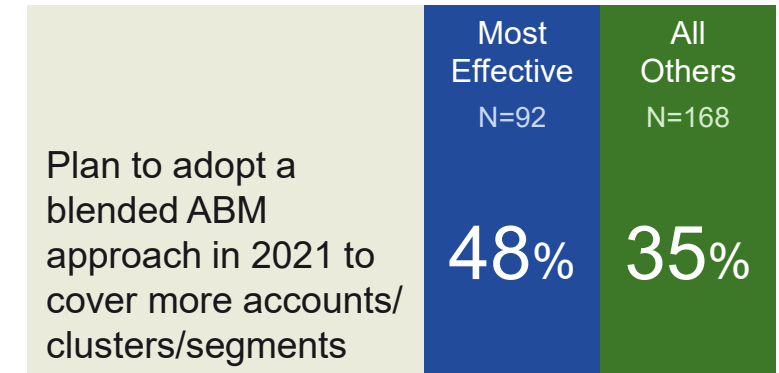
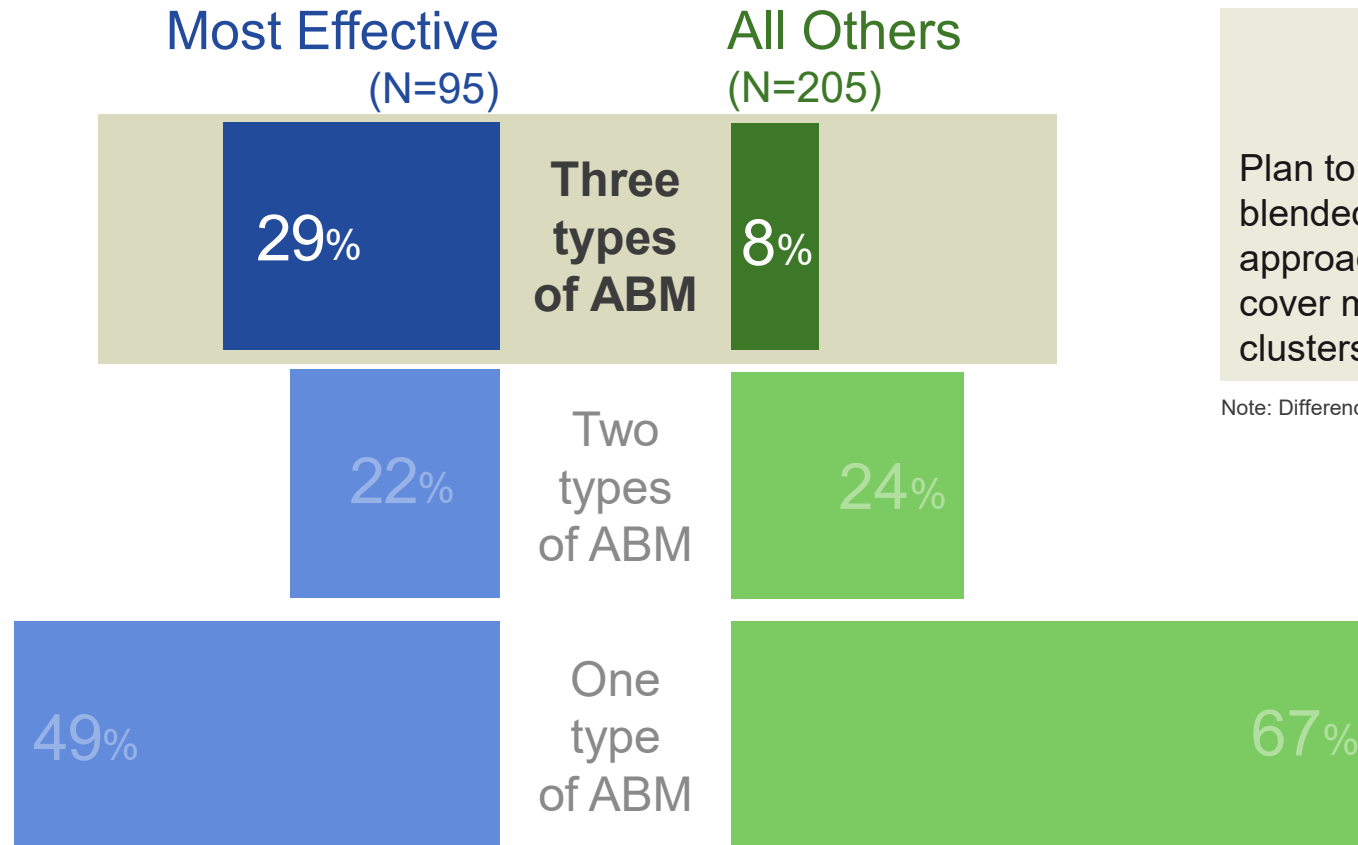
- Accelerate agile
- Deepen account insight
- Strengthen sales collaboration
- **Build a blended strategy**
- Invest in metrics



# The most effective programs are much more likely to use a blended strategy

All three types of ABM can be effective in achieving business and marketing goals. One type is not more effective than another. However, the most effective ABM programs are much more likely to use a blended strategy, with at least two types of ABM to balance breadth and depth of coverage across different groups of priority accounts. Looking ahead, the most effective programs are also more likely to strengthen a blended approach compared with all other programs.

ABM program types  
% of respondents



Note: Differences are statistically significant.

Note: Differences are statistically significant.  
Source: ITSMA and ABM Leadership Alliance, 2020 ABM Benchmark Study, September 2020

# A blended approach supports going deeper with the most important customers and prospects

*“Although we have 38 organizations in our One-to-Few ABM program, if there is a moment that matters, whether it’s an important customer milestone or an opportunity our account teams are working on, a C-Suite engagement, or an innovation center briefing, we will double down on that account and provide them with something very specific and timely. Based on the investment we made in building insights for the 38 accounts, we can quickly create messaging or assets that can be used one-on-one.”*

Stephanie McCredie, A/NZ Marketing Director, Strategic Accounts and Customer Marketing, Salesforce

*“Leadership and sales want us to cover as many accounts as we can, so we have developed a framework with different levels of ABM that enables us to stretch our limited resources. Our Always On program provides customized messaging for our strategic accounts by either a group of people, line of business, or industry. The next level up is the One-to-One ABM programs. We work with the sales rep and the extended team to create a more strategic plan to customize the messaging and ensure consistent activity in a single account. Then there is the [Qlik] Infusion Program which is One-to-One ABM on steroids. We identify a customer champion who wants to drive adoption of our platform at their company and work with the champion to create and execute a series of marketing campaigns and events that support customer goals.”*

Meghan Dingler, Head of Account Based Marketing, US Team, Qlik

*“More companies will try multiple types of ABM in a blended strategy to keep up with demand from their sales and account teams if they started with One-to-One ABM, or to increase their focus on their most important accounts if they started with One-to-Few ABM or One-to-Many ABM.”*

Bev Burgess, SVP ITSMA Europe & ABM Practice Leader, ITSMA

*“We take an ABM approach to engage enterprise accounts across the US, Canada, and Latin America through different types of programs. We do custom, One-to-One ABM for our very top accounts, some cluster ABM targeting enterprises at an industry level or around a shared pain point, and also ABM at scale.”*

Heidi Eisenstein, VP, Global Field Marketing and Event Strategy for CX, Oracle (former Head of Enterprise Field Marketing for the Americas, Adobe)

# Rethinking ABM for the next opportunity

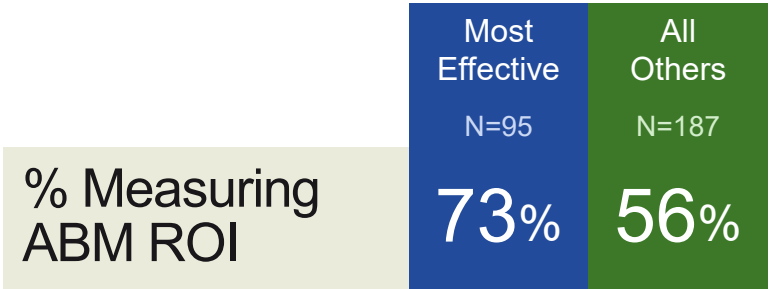
- Accelerate agile
- Deepen account insight
- Strengthen sales collaboration
- Build a blended strategy
- Invest in metrics





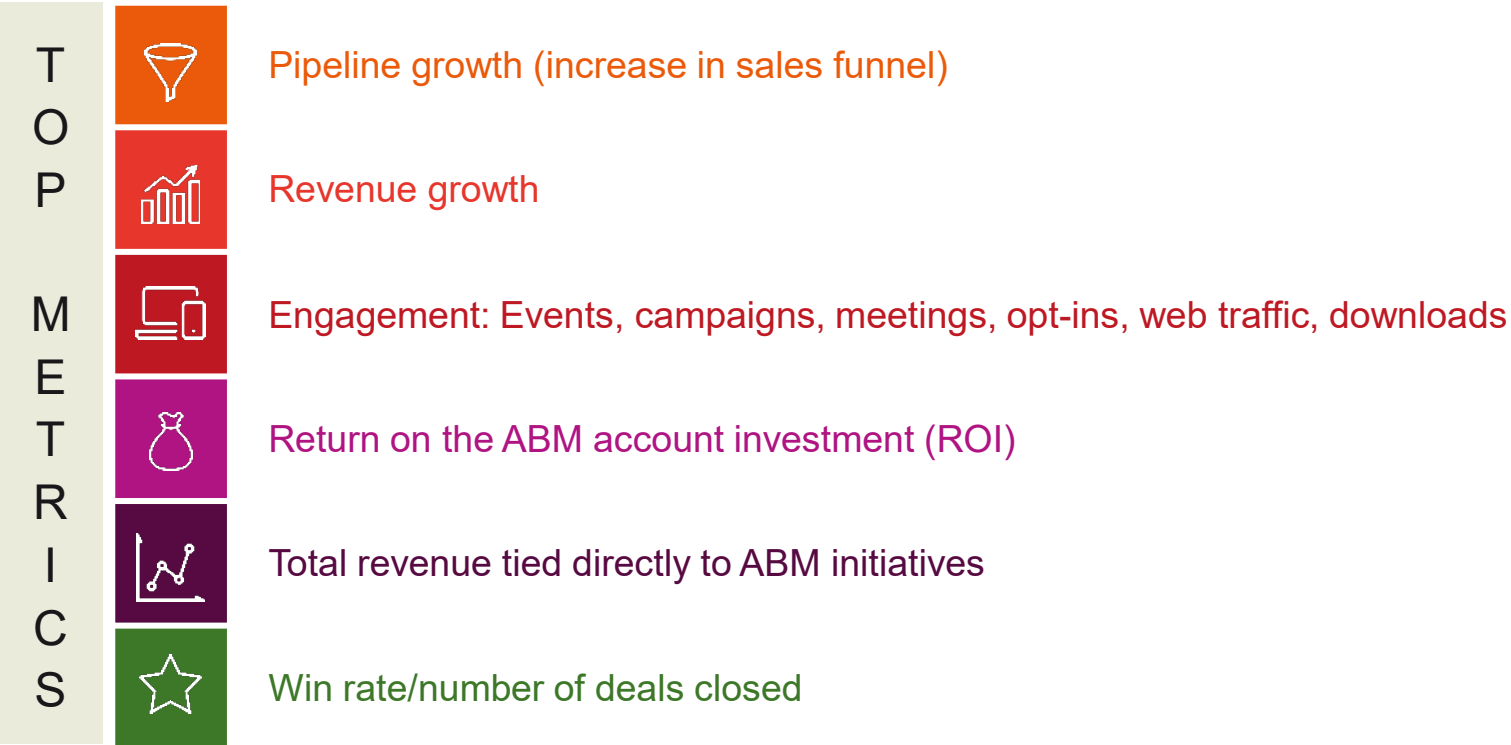
# The most effective ABM programs are better able to measure results and demonstrate ROI

Metrics has always been a top challenge for ABM and programs will continue to struggle for resources absent more effective approaches to demonstrate business impact. The most effective programs are significantly more likely to measure ROI than other programs. Beyond that, there are no important differences in the metrics used by leading and other programs. Top metrics generally focus on Revenue and Relationships (engagement); leaders should also consider the third R, Reputation.



Note: Differences are statistically significant.

## Which metrics are most important to measure the success of your ABM initiative?



Note: Up to five responses allowed. Other response choices included: Sales rep feedback, customer brand perception, return on ABM investment, length of sales cycle, cross sell/upsell, relationship coverage, relationship strength, customer loyalty/satisfaction, and others

Source: ITSMA and ABM Leadership Alliance, 2020 ABM Benchmark Study, September 2020

# ABM-ers measure business outcomes using the three R's

*“There is no ambiguity in the value our ABM program delivers. We measure revenue, relationship, and reputation. For revenue we measure win ratios, number of buying centers, and quality of revenue, meaning the revenue is for more strategic work. We measure the depth and breadth of relationships in terms of how well we are connected in an account and the quality of engagement. And for reputation we do customer satisfaction and brand studies. We also survey our account teams. We put all this data into an Account Health Assessment and come out with a fact-based score.”*

Noushir Jagmag, Global Head Marketing for Communications, Media and Technology and Account Based Marketing Leader, Infosys

*“The jewel in our ABM crown is our ABM dashboard. It enables us to understand where the program's working well, replicate those best practices, and show leadership, what great ABM looks like to encourage even more sales and marketing alignment and adoption globally. It also helps encourage our sales teams to take responsibility for their own success within the program and make sure that everything that we're doing creates great experiences, builds deeper decision-maker relationships, accelerates pipeline, and fosters customer advocacy. With the dashboard, it is all being tracked and showcased across our business.”*

Anonymous

*“Sales leaders want impact immediately, but it takes time to build and expand the ABM program before you see a return. What's helped us is creating an interactive dashboard where sales leaders can see the impact of what we're doing. We include pipeline, revenue, and engagement. We also started looking at the impact on net promoter score (NPS). With a dashboard, you're able to look at many different metrics and you're communicating constantly with the sales leadership and they start to understand that Rome wasn't built in a day.”*

Karen Webb, Director, Americas Field Marketing, Content Strategy & Sales Enablement, Dell Technologies Services

*“Similar to most marketers, we measure pipeline and opportunities generated. However, with ABM programs we also subscribe to the ITSMA 3R framework. So we are also helping deepen relationships, maturing, growing and progressing pipeline revenue, for a higher chance of winning, to close pipe faster, and ultimately speeding up time to value for our customers. So we also measure marketing engagement across the different stages of the customer journey.”*

Stephanie McCredie, A/NZ Marketing Director, Strategic Accounts and Customer Marketing, Salesforce

*“Measuring ABM requires a different mindset to measuring demand generation campaigns. The latter are traditionally measured by the volume of qualified leads they generate, whereas ABM-ers typically measure the business outcomes delivered for the accounts in their program. ABM is more about quality than quantity.”*

Bev Burgess, SVP ITSMA Europe & ABM Practice Leader, ITSMA

# Rethinking ABM for the next opportunity: Five priorities for 2021

The opportunity for ABM to drive strategic business impact has increased dramatically as B2B buyers accelerate digital transformation for their own growth and success. Yet ABM programs must move quickly to respond effectively to the opportunity. To thrive in 2021 and beyond, ABM leaders need to focus on five priorities that the most effective programs have already emphasized in their 2020 pivot: Accelerate agile, deepen account insight, strengthen sales collaboration, build a blended strategy, and invest in metrics.

## *Accelerate agile*

- The most effective ABM programs in 2020 were much more likely to:
  - Change and introduce new tactics
  - Shift account priorities with their coverage models
  - Use ABM to enter new markets and sell to new types of buyers
- With uncertainty being the only certainty for 2021, this type of agility in program focus and approach will become even more important as ABM-ers address fast-changing markets and unexpected developments in business and society

## *Deepen account insight*

- Account insight is a core principle of ABM and most ABM programs invest in data and analytics to support account selection and campaigns
- But the pace of change and the scope of uncertainty puts an even stronger premium on deep insight into how the pandemic is affecting accounts to support more nuanced and successful strategies
- The most effective ABM programs invest more than others in insight of all types, including:
  - Account insight
  - Intent
  - Prospect insight
  - Engagement insight
  - Business intelligence
  - Predictive analytics

## *Strengthen sales collaboration*

- Sales collaboration is a hallmark of any ABM program but it's a constant challenge, as well
- The disruptions of 2020 put tremendous pressure on the marketing-sales relationship as both sides had to pivot quickly to new ways of working and engaging with customers
- The most effective programs are notable for their closer working relationship with sales; they are significantly more likely than others to be:
  - Closely aligned with the sales coverage model
  - Working more closely together since the pandemic
  - Satisfied with the degree of collaboration

## *Build a blended strategy*

- All three types of ABM can be effective in achieving business and marketing goals. One type is not more effective than another
- However, the most effective ABM programs are much more likely to use a blended strategy, with at least two types of ABM to balance breadth and depth of coverage across different groups of priority accounts
- Looking ahead, the most effective programs are also more likely to invest in a blended approach in 2021 compared with all other programs

## *Invest in metrics*

- Metrics has always been a top challenge for ABM and programs will continue to struggle for resources absent more effective approaches to demonstrate business impact
- Top metrics for all ABM programs focus mostly on engagement (relationships) and revenue-related outcomes; some program leaders also emphasize the third R, Reputation
- The most effective programs do not necessarily use different metrics, but they are significantly more likely to measure ROI than others
- Measurement dashboards and regular program-level communication are other hallmarks of best-practice programs

# Tweetable Takeaways

@ITSMA\_B2B

@ABMLA1

#RethinkingABM



## Rethinking ABM for the next opportunity: Five priorities for 2021 success

- **Accelerate #agile:** Speed, collaboration, and adapting to constant disruption is essential for #ABM success
- **Deepen account #insight:** Constant market change puts a premium on ongoing insight into priority #ABM accounts
- **Strengthen #salescollaboration:** #ABM works best with end-to-end collaboration with sales; even the best programs can still get better!
- **Build a #blendedstrategy:** Most #ABM programs rely just on One-to-One, One-to-Few, or One-to-Many; the most effective use two or three types
- **Invest in #metrics:** We all “know” #ABM works but the most effective programs prove it with documented ROI and outcomes for Reputation, Relationships, and Revenue

# Methodology and Respondent Demographics

# About the research: Qualitative and quantitative study with ABM leaders and practitioners

## Web-based survey



Web-based survey in August–September 2020 with ITSMA member companies and ABM Leadership Alliance contacts

420

Marketers at B2B technology and business services companies

## Qualitative interviews



Adobe

AIRBUS

braze

Cockroach LABS

DELL Technologies

DN  
Diebold Nixdorf

DXC.technology

e  
expedia group

FIRE EYE™

FUJITSU

GP Georgia-Pacific

hp

Infosys®

Microsoft

QASOURCE

Qlik Q

Reachdesk

Red Hat

salesforce

servicenow

ThoughtWorks®

workday

zix

# ITSMA and ABM Leadership Alliance survey participants\*



\*Partial list  
Source: ITSMA and ABM Leadership Alliance, 2020 ABM Benchmark Study, September 2020

# Appendix



# Moving to Maturity: ITSMA's ABM Adoption Model

ITSMA's ABM Adoption Model highlights four stages of development across seven dimensions. As companies develop their programs, they typically move from Exploring and Experimenting, often with one type of ABM, into a broader and more strategic program as they learn, improve, and refine their initiatives. Achieving a fully Embedded program as a core component of the firm's growth strategy often requires three or more years of increasingly sophisticated development.

## ITSMA's ABM Adoption Model



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# About ITSMA and the ABM Leadership Alliance

**ITSMA** For more than 25 years, ITSMA has led the way in defining, building, and inspiring B2B services marketing excellence. With a dedicated focus on services and solutions for the connected economy, we provide our corporate member community with insight, advice, and hands-on help to strengthen reputation, increase revenue, and deepen customer relationships.

ITSMA pioneered the concept of account-based marketing in 2003 to help marketers stop generic sales pitches and instead zero in on the essential needs of their most important clients and prospects.



The ABM Leadership Alliance unites industry-leading technology partners to educate B2B marketers about how developing and deploying an ABM strategy can help them improve their reputation, strengthen relationships, close bigger deals with target accounts, and increase pipeline velocity.

Members include Bizzabo, Demandbase, Engagio, LeanData, NetLine Corporation, ON24, Opensense, PathFactory, PFL, SalesLoft, and Vidyard.

## More info

- [ITSMA.com](https://www.itsma.com)
- [abmleadershipalliance.com](https://abmleadershipalliance.com)

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