

ABM:

What's moving us forward and what's holding us back?



Introduction

ABM is no longer the new kid on the block. Maturity varies depending on geography and sector, but any B2B marketer working on high value propositions with long sales cycles will have dipped their toes in the inviting waters of all things account-based by now. In Gartner's hype cycle terms, some of us - particularly those running technology-first ABM - may be languishing in the trough of disillusionment. Others, with several years' of strategy-led ABM under their belts, will be moving up the slope of enlightenment to the plateau of productivity.

So how does it feel out there on the front line? What's greasing the wheels – and what's causing them to come off? We asked 50 ABM marketers at (primarily) enterprise technology firms to share unvarnished feedback on their experiences with key elements such as team set up, training and tools.



Background to the survey

This survey was jointly commissioned by The Marketing Practice and FINITE.

About The Marketing Practice

The Marketing Practice (TMP) is the global, integrated B2B agency built to provide a growth platform for technology enterprises. 350 specialist B2B marketers across six offices deliver measurable marketing results from brand to demand. Big name brands and fast-growth companies come to TMP for:

- Brand strategy and activation
- Account based marketing & demand generation (direct and via the channel)
- Media strategy and buying

About FINITE

FINITE is the free member only global community for ambitious B2B marketers in technology, SaaS, and software. Through events, podcasts, peer support and networking opportunities, they help over 2000 B2B tech marketers to connect, share, learn & grow.



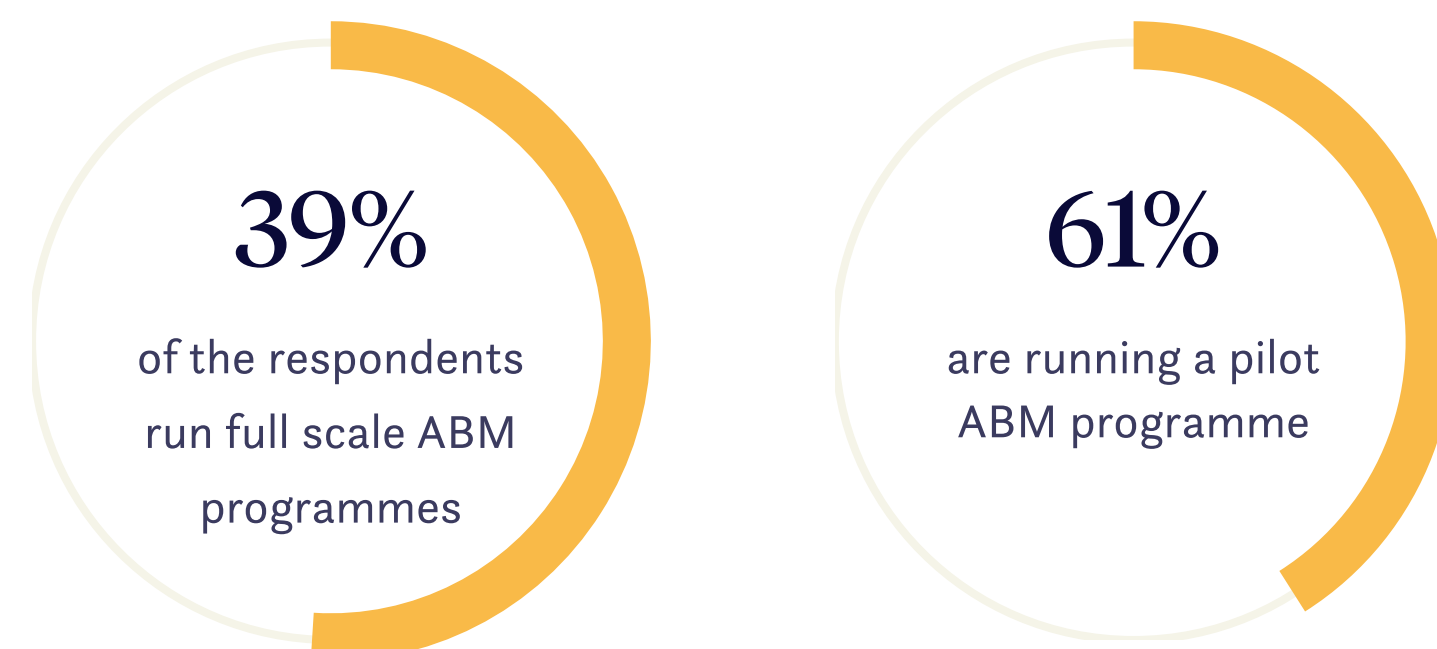
Survey Participants

Of those surveyed...



A range of seniority levels and job titles are represented, including generalist roles such as **marketing leads, marketing managers, VP marketings, a head of enterprise marketing** and a **COO**.

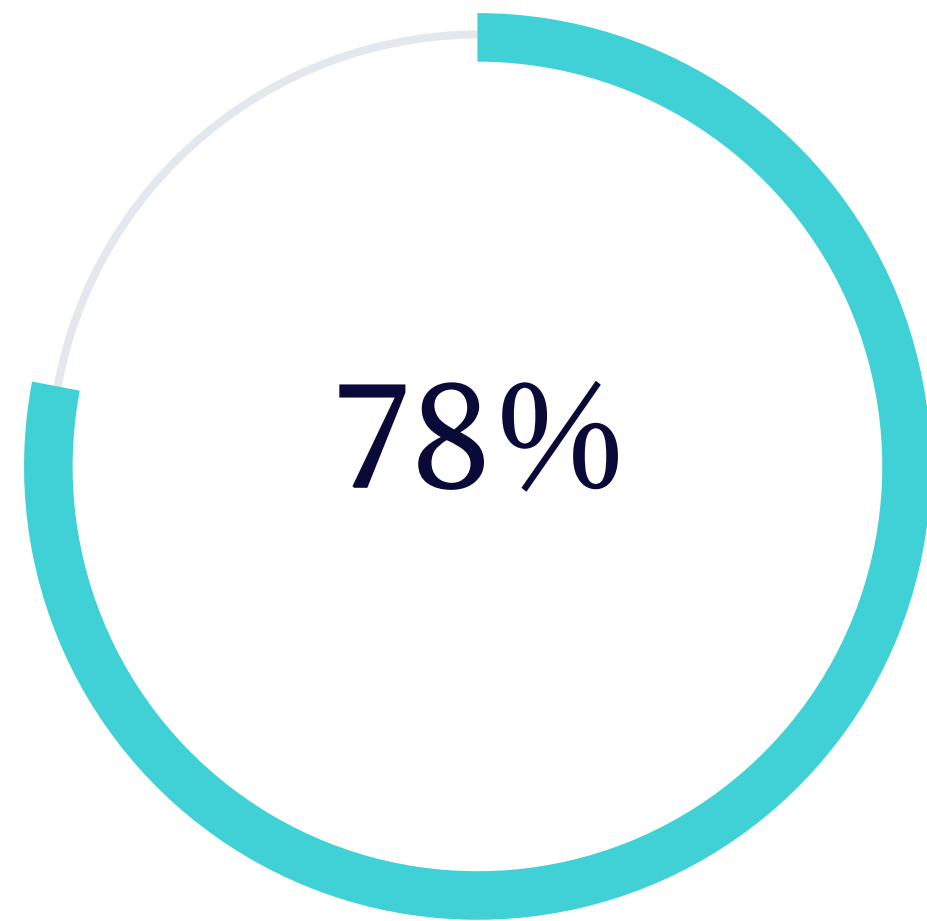
There were also dedicated ABM roles surveyed such as a **senior ABM manager** and an **ABM enterprise digital marketing manager**.



A total of **51** B2B executives were surveyed, of which half represented companies with **£100m** turnover or above.



Why do organisations embark on ABM?



Achieving a particular objective for an account or group of accounts



‘Wanting to achieve a particular objective for an account or group of accounts’ was the top trigger for most respondents, with **78%** of marketers citing it as one of the factors that led to ABM implementation.

This is followed by ‘a sense that this is something we should be doing’ (cited by a third of participants) and ‘an ABM advocate joining the business’ which played a part in a quarter of our respondents’ ABM implementations.

The least popular option was ‘a request from another part of the business (e.g. the board, the sales team)’.



Viewpoint: Chris Burke, Associate Director, ABM Solutions at The Marketing Practice



It's not entirely surprising that most participants mentioned a particular account objective as at least one of the reasons their organisation embarked on an ABM programme. Where previous marketing programmes have failed, or been less successful than anticipated, ABM is often seen as beacon of hope. The key, then, is to set your ABM programme up for success from the start. If expectations are misaligned, upfront planning skimmed on, or your programme is too slow to get to market, ABM risks being consigned to the 'another marketing thing we tried' bin. When it's given the attention and resource it deserves, on the other hand, it can absolutely be the solution to opening up a tricky account, expanding footprint or changing buyers' perceptions. One thing I would hope to see rising up the charts in future surveys of this nature would be the 'request from other parts of the business' trigger for ABM. It's something we're seeing increasingly within clients, where other business functions see success and want the same formula. This is particularly true where ABM is seen as a business, rather than a marketing imperative. Indeed, ABM is in such demand at some organisations we work with that sales teams have had to pitch their accounts, 'Dragons' Den' style, for consideration within the programme.



How easy is it to find practical tools and templates?

25%

Can't find practical tools and templates to help launch and run their ABM programme.



A quarter of respondents weren't able to find the practical resources they needed to launch and run ABM programmes.

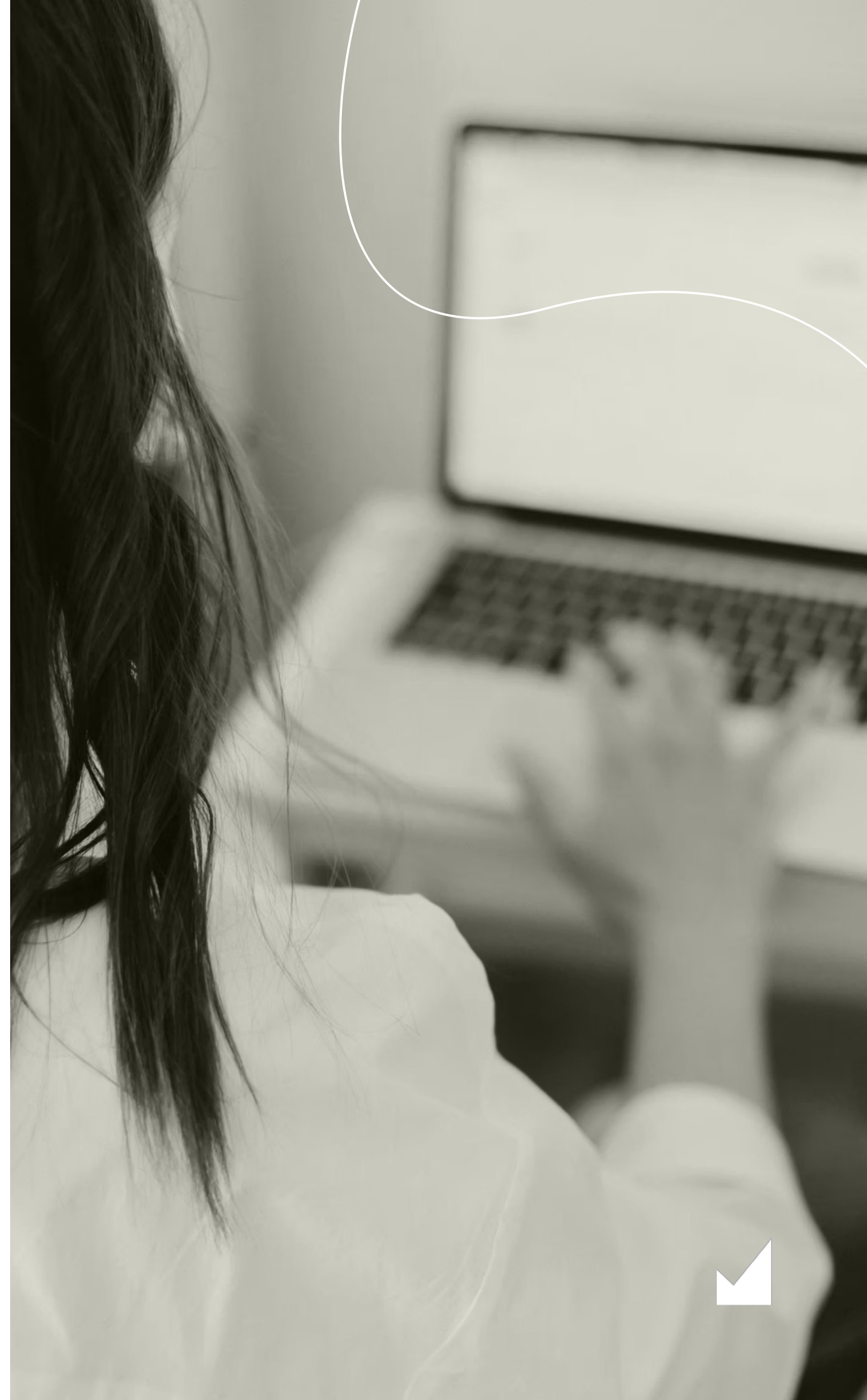
Of those respondents who were able to source the tools required, most of them found them from within their own business, followed by training providers and then their agency.



Viewpoint: Dominique Hall, Marketing Director – Industry Marketing at Servicenow (and ABM Hotline responder)

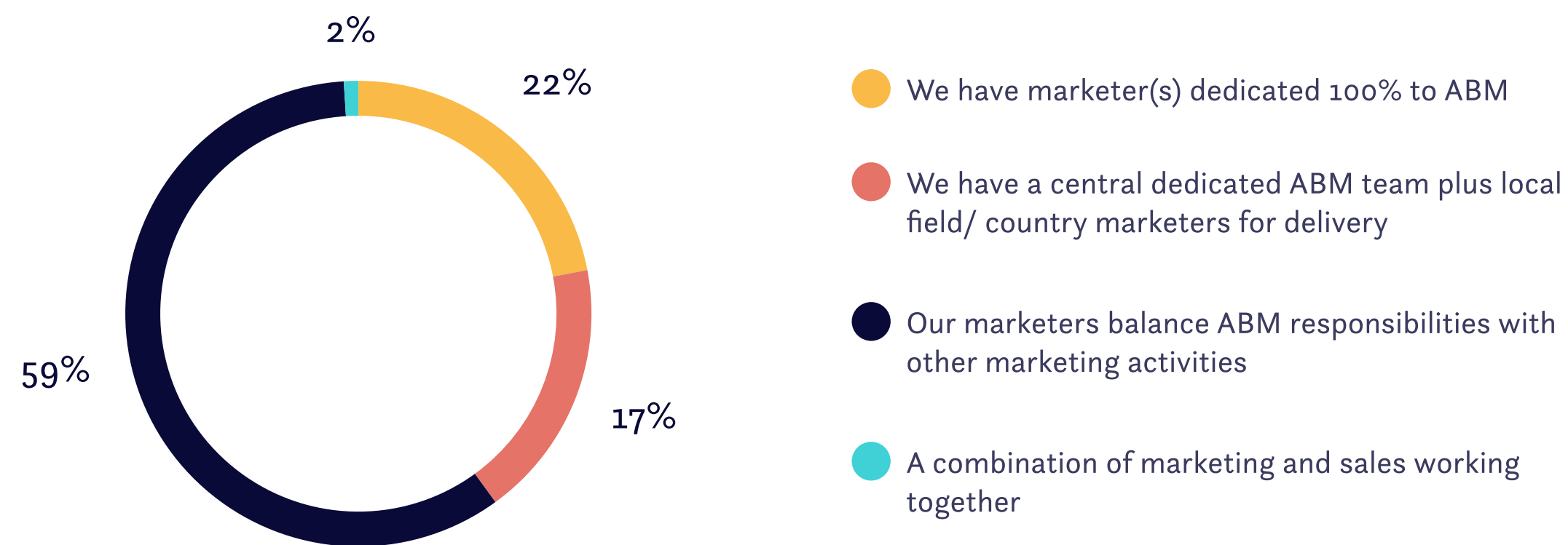


The finding that a quarter of respondents are trying to run ABM programmes without easy access to relevant documents and tools is worrying. Although the ABM market is reaching maturity in many regions, the number of practitioners out there with years of experience running long-term, successful programmes is still relatively small, and they won't necessarily be people you can reach out to for advice. Training organisations and conferences are great places to learn ABM theory and get inspired, but once you're in the thick of it, it's really important to be able to follow tried and tested approaches. At ServiceNow, we set up our ABM Centre of Excellence in order to make sure that all our marketers globally have playbooks, communication plans, asset templates and more at their fingertips. It means that anyone new coming onto the programme can hit the ground running with an ABM approach that we know works for ServiceNow.

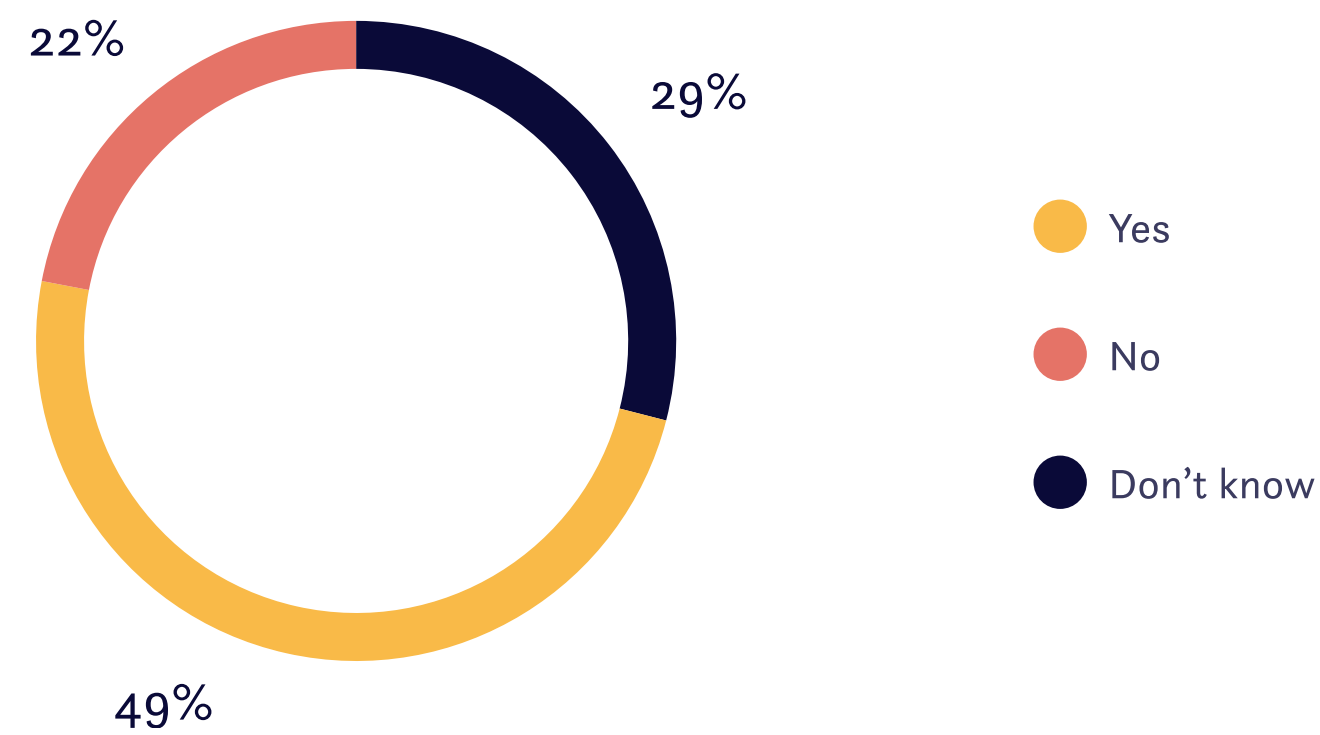


What does a typical ABM team look like? (...and is it effective?)

How is your ABM team set up?



Do you think your team set-up supports ABM success?



Over half of respondents said that their ABM programmes were run by marketers who were having to balance the programme with other marketing responsibilities.

Only **22%** of survey participants said their organisation had marketers dedicated **100%** to ABM. **17%** have a dedicated central ABM team working with local field or country managers to deliver the programme in-region.

Of those who balance ABM with other activities, only **36%** feel this set-up supports their team's success; compared to **73%** of those who have marketers dedicated **100%** to ABM. (Note these are small sample sizes, however.)



Viewpoint: Robert Norum, ABM Consultant & Trainer, B2B Marketing

B2B marketers are nothing if not pragmatic. We often work in small teams and have to turn our hand to many jobs, so it makes sense that this approach would apply to ABM as well. The survey shows that marketers are picking it up as one of their responsibilities alongside, say, demand generation, events or social media. It's understandable therefore for most organisations to trial ABM alongside their current activities rather than hiring in dedicated marketers at the initial pilot stage.

A note of caution, however. Strategic ABM into individual accounts (1:1) or clusters (1:few) is resource-intensive. It takes an individual or a team who can liaise and work with multiple stakeholders across the business including sales, service delivery, customer success and the board - not to mention managing external agencies. They will need to define strategy, align propositions to customer objectives, design communications plans, deliver campaigns, work in tandem with sales on opportunities and report back against a series of shared KPIs and objectives.

In the short term, launching an ABM pilot alongside your 'day' job might be possible, but in my experience if you're going to do ABM properly, you'll need to line up the right dedicated resources - both internal and external - to enable your organisation to truly deliver on the promise of ABM.

Below: responses from those who feel a dedicated team has positively impacted their success.

The set up allows for collaboration across roles, lines of business and geographies.

Our ABM marketers work with account management and sales teams to define objectives and achieve results.

There is a dedicated focus on ABM with the help of field marketers. Alongside the central team this gives a strong push to the ABM efforts.

Below: responses from those who expressed a concern that a lack of dedicated ABM marketers was holding their programme back.

We lack collaboration between a unified marketing team and supporting CoE teams.

We need additional resource and a greater degree of buy in from sales.

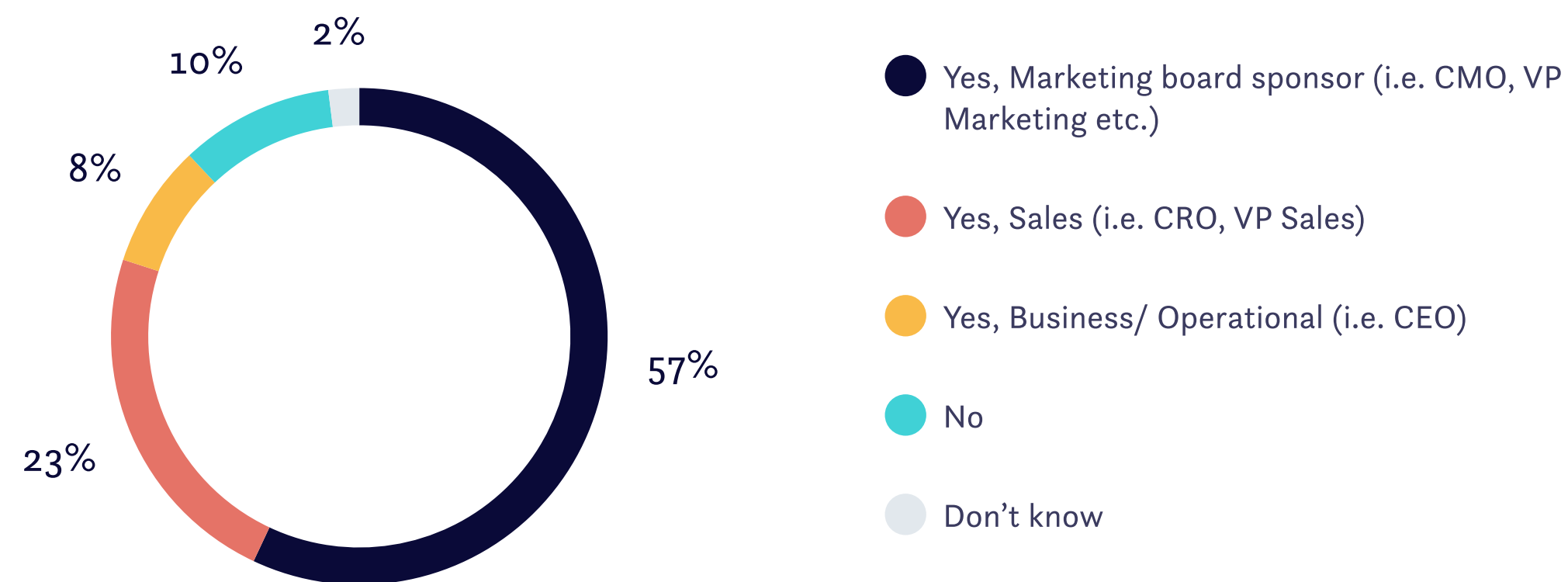
As it is right now, the team is too small to provide ABM the dedication it'd need to succeed. It's not awful, but it could be much better.

We are in the early stages and the leadership team is being slow to help give us any momentum.



What role does the board or leadership team play?

Does your ABM programme have a board sponsor/ a representative on the senior leadership team?



More than three quarters of respondents' ABM programmes are represented at board or senior leadership level. Of those, **57%** have a marketing sponsor, **23%** are represented by sales and **8%** by another member of the C-suite.

The **10%** of respondents who don't yet have a seat at the top table felt this held them back for reasons including: "Greater understanding of ABM as a function would aid buy-in/success", "ABM and lead gen is seen as solely marketing responsibility" and "Need that seat at the table to push ABM across the organisation".



Viewpoint from our respondents

It was clear from the survey that having top-level representation in the company was crucial.

79% of those whose programme has a marketing sponsor felt it impacted the organisation's ability to run ABM, because:

“Top level sponsorship is crucial to success. Otherwise everyone is too busy with their 'day jobs'.”

“While there isn't a lot of budget or resources, at least there are some that are dedicated to ABM. Having a senior sponsor was key in achieving this. Hopefully more will follow once results have been validated.”

“Impacts budget, prioritization, etc.”

“We are able to drive visibility and traction for the program with the help of the sponsor.”

“It helps to have someone be the voice for our ABM efforts.”

“Voicing our ABM successes is a key driver for continued support.”

“Leadership has an ear to the ground realities.”

64% of those with a sales sponsor felt it had an impact, because:

“There is focus on a specific set of customers.”

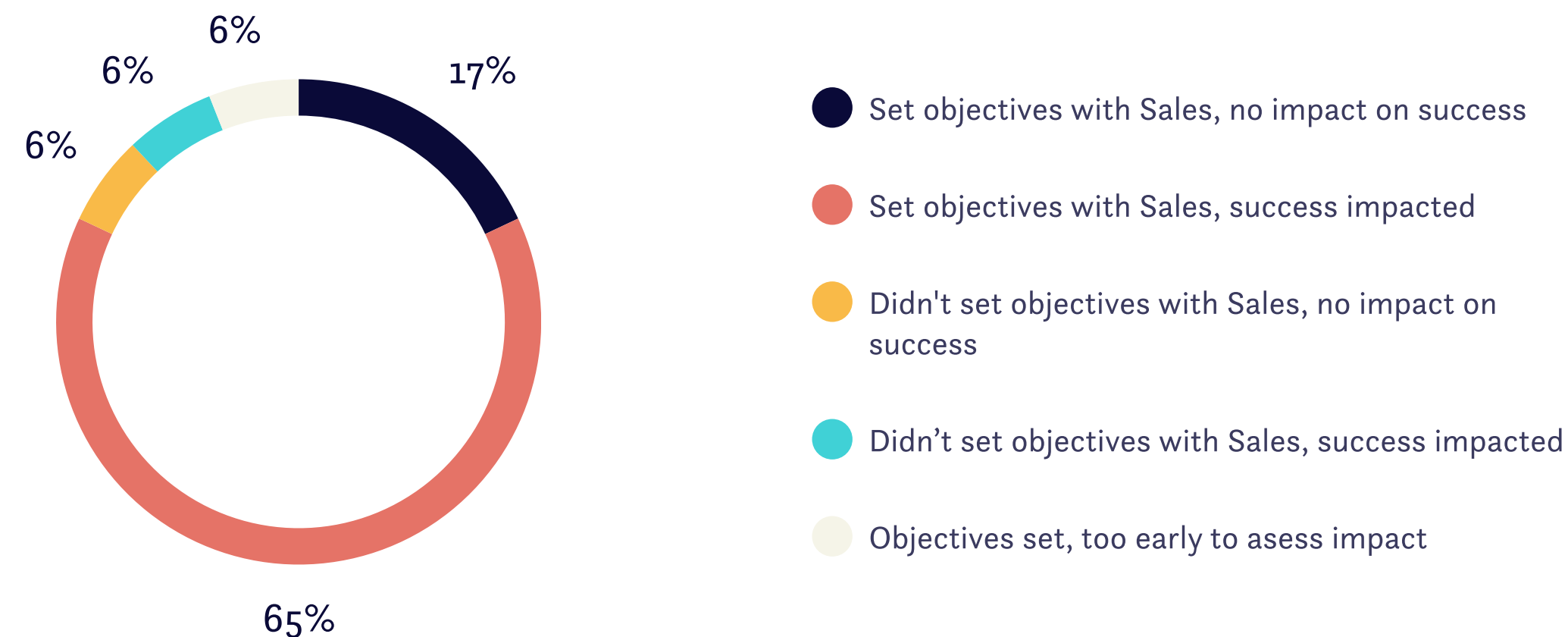
“Representation and advocacy to support time, resource, budget investment.”

“Full support from sales means we work in tandem.”



How important is sales alignment when it comes to objective-setting?

How was your ABM programme's success influenced by your ability to set your ABM objectives in partnership with the sales team?



82% of respondents set their ABM objectives in collaboration with the sales team.

Of those, 65% felt it had an impact on success, with an overwhelmingly positive response, including comments such as:

Opened up accounts and discussions.

Building mind share amongst the ABM accounts has helped us build brand recall and increase revenue.

Sales have the key account knowledge and therefore are able to better identify target accounts.

Campaigns were in line with customers' needs.

Much easier to align on an account by account basis.

Input from sales made the programme realistic.



Viewpoint: Nick Anastasiou, Strategic Key Account Manager – Public Sector, O2 Business

I'm pleased to see that 82% of respondents set their ABM objectives in partnership with the sales team; in fact I'd question why it's not 100%. In strategic ABM programmes, the involvement of the sales team is key, particularly when the objective relates to existing customer accounts, such as retention, expansion into new business units or shifting brand perception to unlock opportunities. Sales or account teams own the relationship with these top accounts, and they usually hold vast amounts of intelligence about the stakeholders, history and business strategy. To try to bypass sales or work in isolation is, I'd suggest, a sure-fire way to fail.

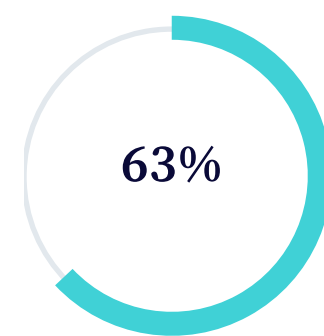
As a sales leader, my view on ABM is that it's best done 'with' sales, not 'to' them. I've seen exceptional results when marketing and sales collaborate from the off: setting objectives, sharing information in workshops and working together on strategy and approaches. We have the same aim after all, which is to deliver growth for our organisation. When our complementary skills are combined in pursuit of high value opportunities, great things can happen. To get to that point takes excellent communication on the part of the marketing team, to bring to life the value ABM can deliver; as well as an openness to new ideas and a willingness to share information on the part of the sales team.

Setting objectives together is just the starting point: where I've seen ABM fly is where sales feel just as much ownership for the programme as marketing. That's where it truly becomes a business initiative, rather than a marketing project.

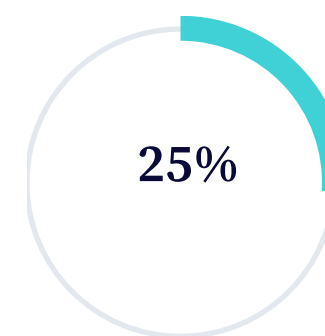


How integrated is inside sales follow-up?

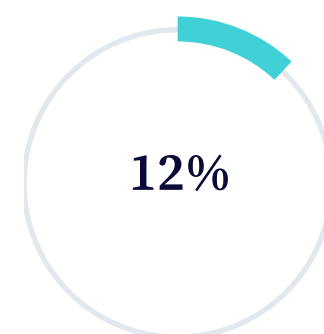
Do you have inside sales specialists dedicated to following up your ABM activities? Or do you use a separate telemarketing team?



We use specific inside sales specialist(s) who are integrated into our ABM programme

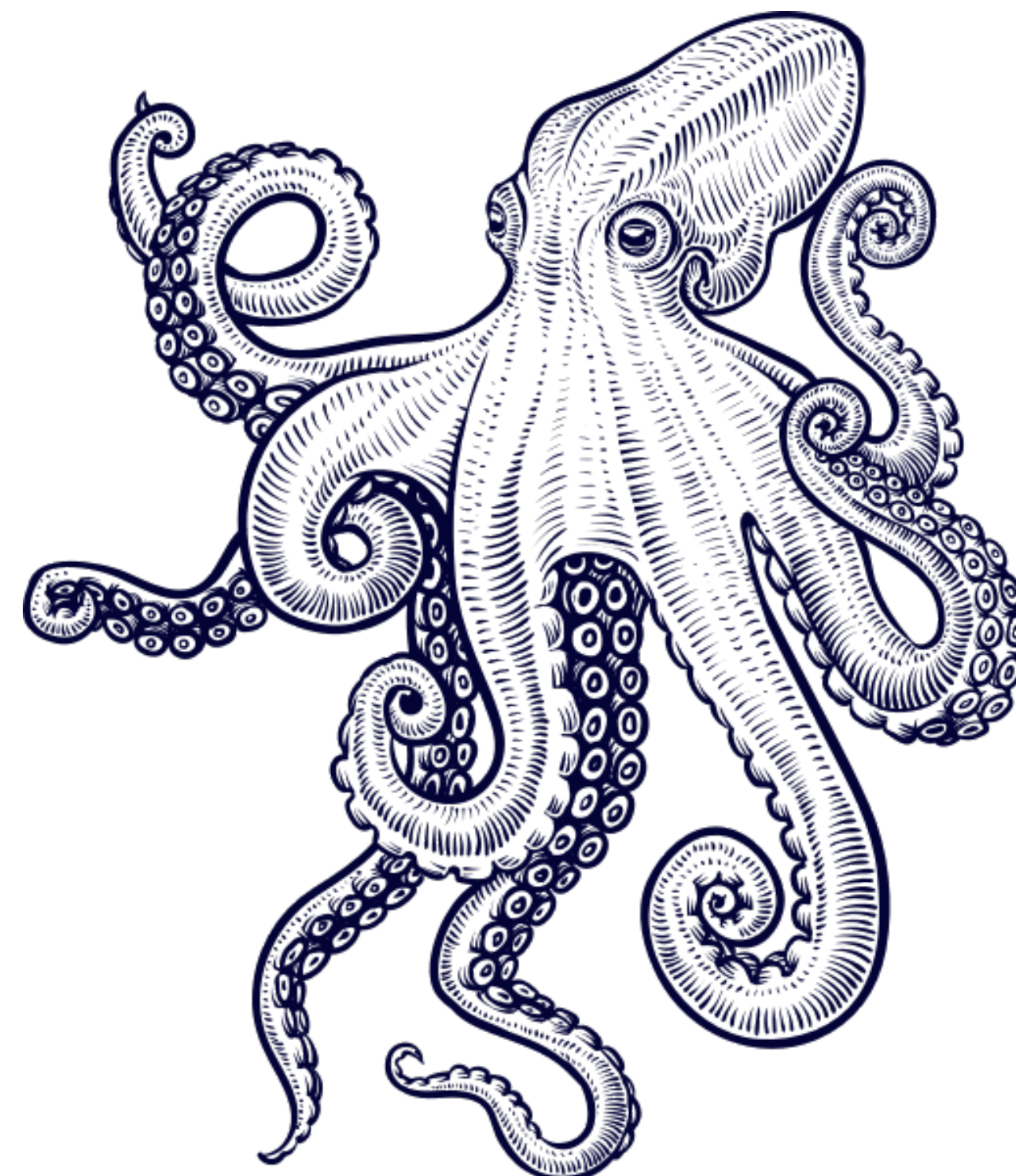


We don't use any inside sales/telemarketing in our ABM



We use a separate telemarketing team to follow up on ABM activities

63% of respondents use specific inside sales specialists who are integrated into their ABM programme, as opposed to **25%** who don't use inside sales or telemarketing as part of their ABM programme, and **12%** who use a separate telemarketing team.



Viewpoint: Erica Neal, Head of Outbound at The Marketing Practice

Just as many organisations launch ABM with part time marketing resource, the temptation can be to use existing BDR/SDR teams or telemarketing services to follow up on their ABM campaigns when starting out with a new programme.

Tempting as this might be, experience shows it isn't effective, as the compensation models mean these teams often aren't incentivised to deliver ABM results and they may not have the requisite skillsets. It also means they won't have the dedicated focus needed to drive real results. By using dedicated inside sales resource who have been trained up on the ABM programme and involved from the start, this issue can be avoided. ABM inside sales representatives can cover the ground the account team doesn't have time to, closing the gap between great plans and great results.

It's heartening to see this survey demonstrating that 61% of marketers are integrating inside sales into their ABM programme and maximising their chance of success.



A final thought

From Chris Burke, Associate Director, ABM Solutions at The Marketing Practice

One thing that jumped out to me from this survey were the reasons people gave for kicking off their ABM programme. The number of respondents who indicated they embarked on an ABM journey because it's something they thought they should be doing is worth a cautionary note.

For anyone considering ABM as a strategy, my advice is to make sure you're going through the right thinking process; that means having clarity on the sales and marketing challenges you are trying to solve.

Start with the challenge you're trying to address (does it relate to pipeline, brand, retention, net new growth?) rather than jumping to solutions (should it be 1:1, 1: few or 1: many ABM?). That way you can be confident that you've aligned the best strategy to your objectives and not just picked ABM because everyone is doing it.

All the best with your own ABM journey and enjoy the ride!



Ready to take the next step on your
ABM journey?

Get in touch

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