How to Run a Successful ABM Campaign: Lessons from Online Dating

Rhiannon Blackwell, Accenture UK Client Marketing Lead
How to Run a Successful ABM Campaign: Lessons from Online Dating

Rhiannon Blackwell, Accenture UK Client Marketing Lead

Great ABM campaigns have four key ingredients: they are outcome-driven, insight-led, differentiated, and personalized.

---

**Key Takeaways**

One of the first steps in developing an ABM campaign is to understand what the client wants to achieve. Working closely with the account planning team helps get this right from the outset.

It is essential to map out the key players and stakeholders in the target account. Using different sources and brainstorming workshops can reveal actionable insights as the basis of stakeholder engagement plans.

Standing out from the crowd means creating messaging that grabs the client’s attention.

The ABM toolkit is full of different ways to personalize campaigns to engage clients wherever they are on their buyer journey.
At ITSMA’s 2018 ABM Forum in London, Rhiannon Blackwell, Accenture UK Client Marketing Lead, took an unusual approach when outlining how she defined a successful ABM campaign. To the delight of the audience, she reflected, slightly tongue-in-cheek, on how running an ABM campaign could be compared to her previous life in the world of online dating.

What’s so interesting is how apt the parallels are. In this Viewpoint, Blackwell shares how she uses dating tips to illustrate the four key ingredients that can help you create a great ABM campaign—and maybe find love.

ITSMA: Accenture was one of the first organizations to talk about client-centricity back in 2002. What is the state of play currently?

Rhiannon Blackwell: My challenge at the moment, because of the success of our existing ABM programs, is that we have a lot of accounts knocking on the door who want to do ABM. This is obviously a great position to be in, but I have had to work out how we bottle all that good stuff we are doing, standardize that, and then scale it.

I have given a lot of thought to the ingredients of a successful campaign and I believe there are four: it has to be outcome-driven, insight-led, differentiated, and personalized. So, when I began to put my presentation on the anatomy of an ABM campaign together for the forum, I realized just how much my approach to ABM reflects my approach to a previous life in online dating.

ITSMA: ABM and online dating?

Blackwell: I am going to tell you a little story. A few years ago, when I was single, I had a really clear vision of what I wanted my future to look like—my happily-ever-after. I moved from Germany to London with the sole goal of finding a boyfriend. I wanted a tall, dark, handsome man who lived in London and wanted to be my boyfriend—all before I turned 29. It was a SMART objective: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-boxed.

So, to bring this back to ABM, you have to be really clear on what the client wants, the account team wants, and what you as marketers want to achieve. The first thing we do in any campaign is seek to understand the aspirations of our client. Let me bring this to
life with an Accenture campaign. Our client, a major UK retail bank, wanted to drive through a fundamental transformation, from how they work and the technology they used to their overall culture, so that the bank would be future-ready to deliver market-leading customer experiences.

In terms of business outcomes, the account team wanted to achieve a 10% sales growth within the following 12 months. To enable this, the key sales objective was to get selected for a panel of transformation partners. This would put us first in line for new opportunities, help us build those C-level relationships, and become a trusted, strategic partner.

From there, we were able to distill our marketing goal: increase preference among those key decision makers and buyers and keep us front of mind during the campaign. The objective was to engage over 70% of those target stakeholders through our marketing activity.

**ITSMA:** How do you go about setting measures of success in a campaign like that?

> **So how do you know when you’ve met your soulmate?**

> **Keep these eight soulmate signs in mind, and you’ll know when you’ve found the one.**

> KATHARINE HURST, THE LAW OF ATTRACTION.COM


**Blackwell:** The quote from The Law of Attraction.com shows even dating has KPIs! What we do during the initial goal-setting phase is work with the sales team to decide and define what success looks like. For example, we look at audience growth, client perception and engagement, value of marketing to sales, and revenue growth.
ITSMA: Let’s look at the second ingredient, insight-led.

“Do your homework. Knowing even just a little bit about your date beforehand will give you all the conversation starters you need.”

MATCH.COM

Blackwell: To carry on with my dating story, it wasn’t long before arriving in London that I decided to download the infamous dating app, Tinder. After a lot of swiping I found someone, Tom, who caught my eye (and met my criteria!). Within two minutes I had looked him up on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and the electoral roll, and I knew where he worked, who he lived with and, most critically, what his ex-girlfriend looked like! And, as this quote from Match.com confirms, this isn’t creepy—it’s important research!

So, the first thing we did with our account team was to start mapping out who the key players were, to really get the lay of the land. This stakeholder mapping enabled us to identify the decision makers, the approvers, the influencers, and the recommenders. We also worked out who from Accenture owned each relationship. We then took that list and started to apply our online detective skills.

ITSMA: What were your main sources?

Blackwell: We used a lot of different ones, including all those I used for my date-stalking! But we also looked at things like speaker engagements, media, and our own CRM systems. How have they responded to events and hospitality? To email? How do they use social media?

This started to inform our strategy for particular individuals as we got a better understanding of what they were passionate about, their interests, and the best way to reach them. We then had an audience workshop with our account team. This was the exciting part because we began to get anecdotal insights from those people who knew our targets really well so we could build up enriched profiles.

We also talked about what a successful relationship would look like. Where we have a small target audience, we might create engagement plans at an individual level. For this campaign, we grouped our audience into segments based on areas of interest and motivations.
ITSMA: How did you keep on top of the process?

If you want to keep the momentum going before, after, and between dates, then your phone can be the greatest tool at your disposal.

eHARMONY UK

Blackwell: As the tip from eHarmony says, the phone can be your greatest tool. We kept in constant touch with the sales team with weekly calls about the stakeholder engagement plan. We would go through each individual or client segment and discuss how sales or marketing had engaged them, what we had learned, and what was—or should be—our next step.

ITSMA: Your next ingredient is about being differentiated. How did that work?

There are two steps that make a great first message: finding a common ground with a girl, then starting a conversation around it.

EMILY FROM MENASKEM

Blackwell: Well, it’s one thing finding someone on Tinder but writing your first message so that it stands out among the many others he might be getting is the hard part. As I flicked through Tom’s photos, I saw one of him at Machu Picchu and I thought, great: I love South America, he loves South America, we have common ground and that was going to be my way in.

I think Emily from MenAskEm has a point when it comes to creating a value proposition. We had a collaborative workshop with the account team and really challenged them to put themselves in their clients’ shoes to get that clear insight on what would help them and how Accenture—above anyone else—could make this happen.

This is where it can be very effective to get people from other areas into the room. We might have our vertical marketing leads, for instance, who can ensure that what we are
coming up with is in line with the broader go-to-market messaging. Or we will get people who have previously worked for the client into the room because they have a really good understanding of the culture and the language used on the ground. From that we distill a set of core messages, possibly with a copywriter to come up with something punchy.

With this particular campaign we went one step further and created a messaging playbook. This articulated the value proposition, core messages tailored to segments, and provided stories our people could tell on the ground at the client. We had maybe 200 people working at that client who were not all involved in this opportunity but who, through their personal relationships with the client, could act as brand ambassadors. They had to be able to tell the story we had created.

Finally, we engaged a designer who articulated and translated the messaging into a unique visual identity for all of our marketing and sales assets.

**ITSMA: How did you approach personalization?**

> What you want is targeted attention. You don’t want everybody, you want the people whom you’re hoping to date...

> So you have to know how they think, what they’re looking for and, critically, how to grab them by the eyeballs.”

**Blackwell:** I know I said that writing the message is the hard part, but actually trying to be entertaining on dates is on a whole different level, especially if you are dating more than one person at a time. They can start blurring into one another if you aren’t careful. How can you have a meaningful conversation if you don’t know (or can’t remember) what they like! Our tip from Dr. Nerd Love says it all!

Personalization was key to our marketing strategy. We had a two-pronged approach. One was aimed at equipping the sales team to attract, connect, and engage those target clients while the other was launching the channel strategy that would engage clients through content and events relevant to each stage of the buyer journey.

Underpinning all that were the tactics—and there are so many tactics in the ABM toolkit. It’s interesting to note that two thirds of the tactics we developed were for our sales people, such as training and materials.
When it came to the client, we didn’t just want to bombard them with everything we had. We based it on where each particular segment was on their buyer journey, from awareness to interest to confidence, and then mapped out the relevant content for the relevant stages. We also customized some of our existing thought leadership to bring it in line with our story.

Throughout this we had a number of targeted channels in play the whole time, such as nurture emails, social media, personalized web pages, and events.

ITSMA: Any other thoughts on what made this so successful?

Blackwell: I’m not a big reader of Men’s Fitness, but Nick Savoy makes a very good point. Collaboration has been critical in making this ABM program a success.

At the first stage it was about the marriage between the account and ABM teams. But pretty soon we were drawing on other groups such as the competitor intelligence team, industry marketing, research, a colleague who used to work at the client, copywriters, designers, and so on. And then we were reaching out to the web team, social media, the media agency, CRM, sponsorship, our eco-system partners and, of course, the client.

Don’t ever forget the client. ABM doesn’t have to happen to a client. It can also happen with a client. You can be quite transparent about what you’re trying to achieve in some cases. Why not work with your advocates and discuss what’s going to add the most value?

Collaboration is about having a single story, shared goals, and creating symbiotic relationships. For example, while you are equipping the account team or sales people to look their best, they should be feeding back their insights to you as regularly as possible so that you can adapt what you are doing.

On that note, you should build in agility to adapt from the start. There is no point creating a campaign plan that’s set in stone. You have to be responsive to how quickly the client is moving along the buyer journey.
You also have to help others help you. By having a succinct playbook that articulates what your story is at a client, others can take that and tailor what they are doing and add another tactic to your campaign. Finally, think from the outside in. You should not just be collaborating internally but with external groups to find innovative ways to engage with the client.

**ITSMA: Did it work?**

**Blackwell:** With this campaign, we have actually engaged with 80% of decision-makers and influencers so far, while winning 100% of the work packages related to this opportunity to date. We have also seen a 25% uplift in sales with the account and, importantly, have a very happy account lead who has put in writing that they are a believer in client marketing.

---

**Exhibit 1. Outcomes**

![Image](image.png)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>80%</td>
<td>Of decision makers and influencers engaged through marketing to date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100%</td>
<td>Of work packages relating to this opportunity won to date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25%</td>
<td>Uplift in sales achieved this year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Happy Client Account Lead</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Accenture, 2018

---

**ITSMA: And could you tell us if your online dating campaign worked as well?**

**Blackwell:** Yes, I finally got my outcome, my happily-ever-after, and married the man I met on Tinder!

---

**About Rhiannon Blackwell**

Rhiannon leads Client Marketing for Accenture in the UK, designing and delivering account based marketing programmes for Accenture’s top tier clients with a focus on Financial Services, Comms & Media and Products. Prior to joining Accenture in 2016, she spent 8 years working client-side for Zurich Insurance specialising in brand strategy, media planning, and digital experience design. Since joining Accenture, she has doubled the demand for account based marketing from Accenture sales teams and is passionate about collaborating across the business and partners to bring the best of Accenture to clients in new ways.
For More Information

Browse all ITSMA publications at www.itsma.com/online-library/.

About ITSMA

For more than 20 years, ITSMA has led the way in defining, building, and inspiring excellence in B2B marketing. With a dedicated focus on services and solutions for the connected economy, we provide our member community with insight, advice, and hands-on help to strengthen reputation, increase revenue, and deepen customer relationships. Learn more at www.itsma.com.

*ITSMA Viewpoints* are available at no charge to anyone from an ITSMA member company and for sale to others. Learn more about the benefits of membership at www.itsma.com/membership/.