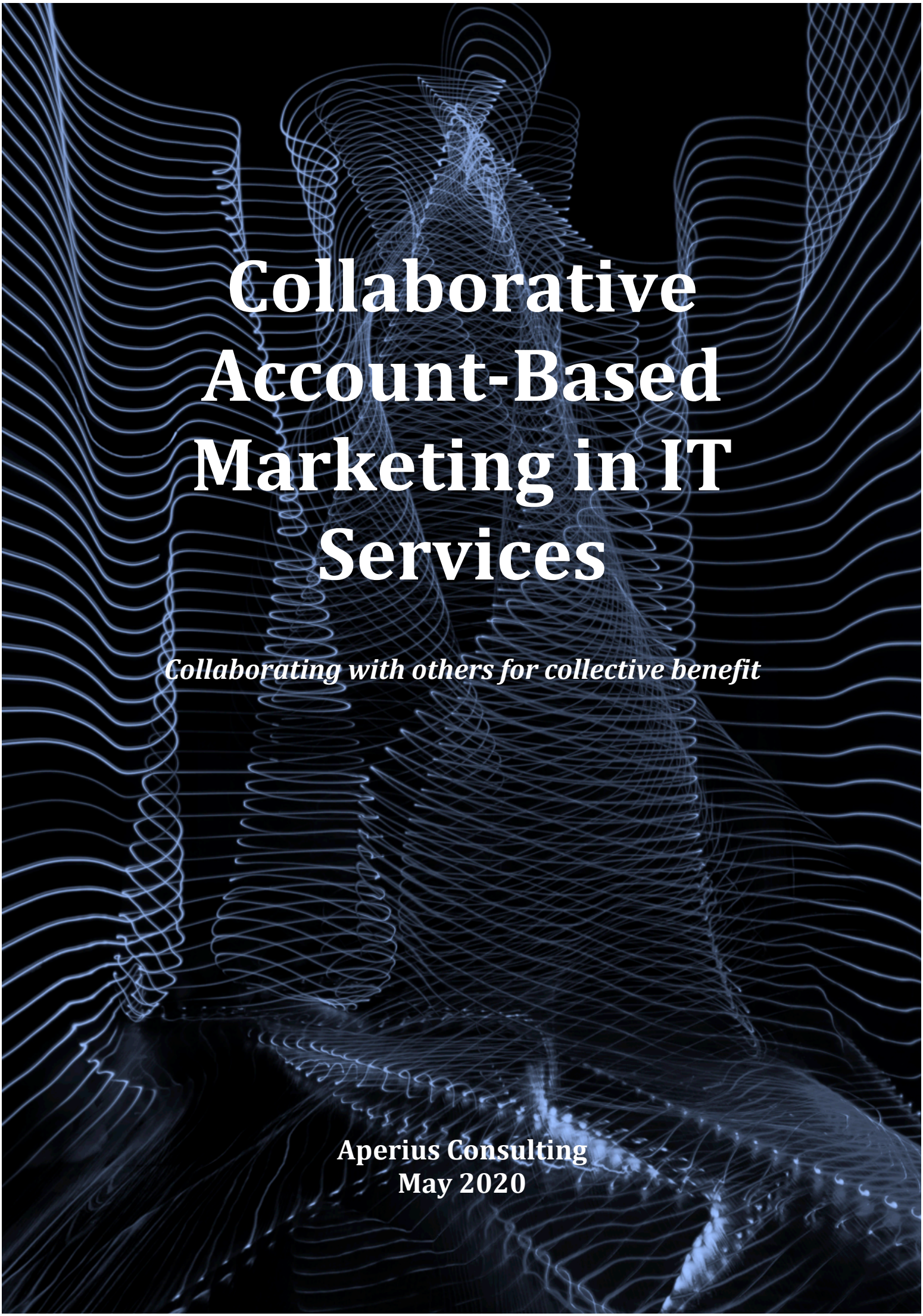

Collaborative Account-Based Marketing in IT Services

Collaborating with others for collective benefit

Aperius Consulting
May 2020

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INTRODUCTION

When Don Peppers and Martha Rogers published *The One to One Future* in 1993 they skilfully brought together all of the latest thinking (including their own) on the emerging topic of one-to-one marketing. At the time, I was working for EDS in the United States where we were redefining how sales and marketing was conducted in the IT services space. We were creating new sales and marketing processes and establishing Strategic Sales Centres co-located with *Agility Alliance* partners. The Peppers and Rogers concepts fit neatly into our new approach and Account-Based Marketing (ABM) rapidly emerged and blossomed.

The discipline has moved on a lot since then. At its heart it's the same core concept – focusing the best available marketing resources on discrete target accounts to create enduring client relationships – but it is an increasingly sophisticated area of marketing with highly refined processes, dedicated tools and experienced professionals that push the boundaries every day. Tried and tested approaches are honed while new approaches are piloted and where appropriate, adopted. One emerging area that seems particularly interesting is 'collaborative ABM,' where organisations come together to share ideas, expertise and resources in the pursuit of key clients.

Of course, it hasn't escaped my attention that collaboration has changed in the last few months.

When this study was launched in early 2020, collaboration typically involved people meeting in conference rooms, coffee shops, hotel lobbies and airport lounges. Flip charts, white boards and napkins were key brainstorming materials, augmented and supported by digital collaboration tools. My assumption is that when most people responded to the survey this was the collaboration framework that they were picturing.

The emergence of SARS-CoV-2 changed all that.

While I am confident that people will once again meet face-to-face in the (hopefully not-too-distant) future, digital collaboration tools have become even more relevant. The *majority* of meetings are now held using video conferencing such as Zoom, GoToMeeting and Whereby. Ideas are shared and discussed using tools such as Slack, Chanty and Fleep. Documents and presentations are co-developed using platforms such as Docs, Dropbox and Huddle. If they hadn't before the arrival of C19, business professionals have now integrated these tools into their daily lives and come to appreciate how useful they can be. They're unlikely to suddenly drop them when the world returns to whatever 'new normal' emerges in the coming months.

But, this doesn't change the need for collaboration. If anything, collaboration has become even more essential as market landscapes shift. The need to work together to solve problems and realise opportunities has never been greater. This is as true for marketing as it is for any other part of the organisation. Those ABM functions that were already *collaborating with others for collective benefit* have gained a head start. For the rest, now is the time to start exploring this dimension of ABM and taking full advantage of the benefits that it can provide.

Roger T. Alderson
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London, UK

METHODOLOGY AND KEY FINDINGS

This study was conducted in February and March of 2020 with responses collected digitally using Google Forms. Respondents were predominantly from an IT services background and the majority were experienced account-based marketing professionals with several years' experience.

The fundamental question investigated in the study is:

"is inter-organisational collaboration of value when undertaking account-based marketing activities (marketing that is focused on a single account or a small group of target accounts)?"

Despite a small sample size and a (deliberately) limited set of questions, the survey provides an interesting window into how broadly collaboration is being embraced within ABM functions in the IT services space. Some key findings include:

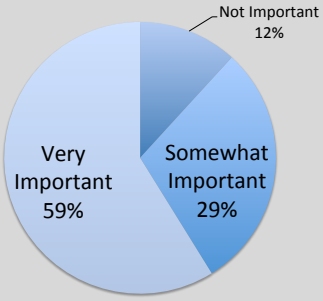
- ABM professionals see collaboration (with external organisations) as important (88%) and growing (59%).
- Enhanced campaign innovation is the most recognised benefit of collaborative ABM (82%), followed by increased quality and broader brand perception.
- 41% of ABM functions collaborate with at least one external party on more than half of all key pursuits.
- Knowledge transfer and security/privacy are the biggest challenges to collaborative ABM, while project management and open communication are the least challenging.
- Less than a quarter of ABM functions (24%) have formal collaboration processes.

SURVEY RESULTS SUMMARY

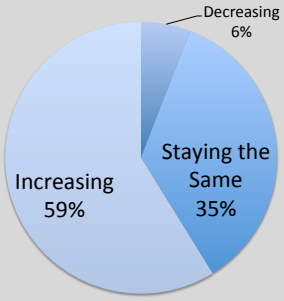
The Importance and Growth of Collaboration

The importance of collaboration in ABM is broadly recognised and tapping into the experience, expertise and resources of others is generally seen as a good thing. The vast majority of respondents (88%) see collaboration as at least '*important*', and close to two thirds (59%) see it as '*very important*'. Unsurprisingly, the perceived importance is slightly higher for those with smaller ABM functions (66% rate as '*very important*'), presumably because they see it as a tangible way of extending their limited marketing reach.

The Importance of Collaboration in ABM



The Growth of Collaboration in ABM



Alongside the perceived importance of collaborative ABM is the perception that it is growing as an activity – 59% of respondents reported that the number of marketing campaigns where they actively collaborate with at least one other external organisation is increasing.

The only real surprise is that there are some that do not see the importance of collaboration. The obvious question to those people is … "*why not?*" A dive into the data reveals one possible explanation - the respondents that do not see collaborative ABM as important also tend to be those that see it decreasing as an activity.

The Benefits of Collaboration

"I not only use all the brains I have, but all I can borrow" (*Woodrow Wilson, 1856-1924*), eloquently encapsulates the view that the more people focused on a problem or opportunity, the better the solution will be. Two heads are invariably better than one.

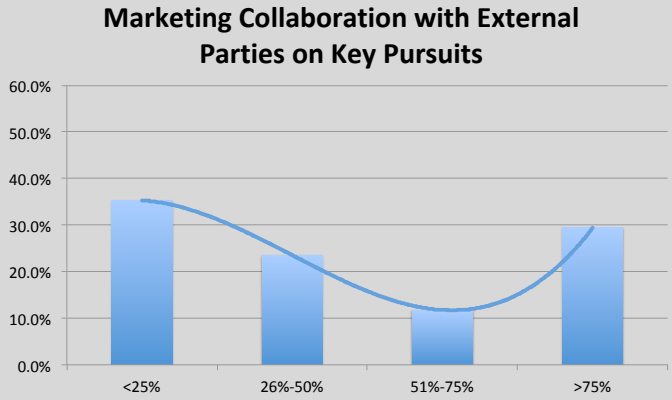
Key Benefits of Collaboration
Innovation
Quality
Brand Perception
Client Engagement
Responsiveness
Costs

From a collaborative ABM perspective, this was a perception shared by the majority of respondents and 'innovation' was at the top of the list for most people. The dominant opinion was that more people working on a marketing campaign results in more creative ideas, and 82% of respondents said that innovation was increased on collaborative ABM campaigns.

The next three benefits of collaboration were also strongly endorsed. 71% reported that campaign quality was improved and 65% said the same for brand perception and client engagement.

However, campaign responsiveness and costs and were less strongly supported with only 29% and 24% respectively claiming that they were improved. Indeed, in the case of costs, 35% of respondents felt that they were increased on collaborative ABM campaigns. Nonetheless, it's worth noting that 100% of those that felt that costs increased also responded that innovation increased. Perhaps the increased costs are justified in light of the corresponding increase in innovation?

Marketing Collaboration on Key Pursuits



In line with the finding that collaborative ABM is increasing, it was no surprise to find that most ABM functions are now actively collaborating on key pursuits. Almost a third (29%) said that they collaborated with external organisations on greater than 75% of key pursuits, and close to half (41%) said that they collaborated on greater than 50%.[1] However, there is room for expansion in this area and more than a third (35%) reported collaboration on less than 25% of key pursuits.

Unfortunately, a deeper review of the data didn't highlight any particular characteristics of those that were more actively collaborating versus those that were not. Both groups comprised organisations of all sizes, types and locations making it impossible to draw any defensible conclusions.

The Challenges of Collaboration

As already mentioned, there is a cost associated with collaborative ABM (that 35% of respondents recognise), and there are other challenges too. In this study, skills and knowledge transfer was the challenge that consistently bubbled to the top of the list, with 82% of respondents citing this as '*challenging*' to some degree, and 24% referring to it as '*very challenging*.' Security and privacy was also perceived as '*very challenging*' by 24% of respondents, but additional challenges were not generally perceived as major roadblocks. Only 12% saw cultural alignment as a major challenge and by the time the bottom of the list is reached just 6% felt that open communication was particularly challenging.

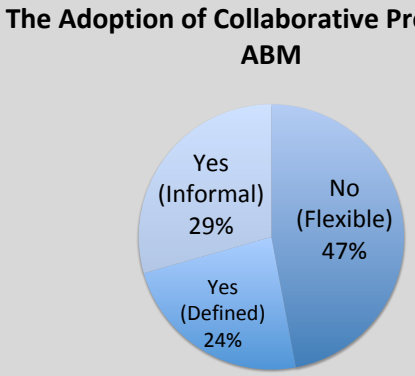
Key Challenges of Collaboration
Skills and Knowledge Transfer
Security/Privacy
Cultural Alignment
Goals Alignment
Rewards Allocation
Leadership Buy In
Project Management
Open Communication

[1] *Respondents were (also) asked their perception of the levels of external collaboration in sales and delivery/operations organisations. In almost all instances, marketing was perceived as the more collaborative function with delivery/operations typically at the bottom of the pile.*

There are some subtle but notable differences in the perception of challenges between the smaller and larger organisations, with two in particular standing out. Larger organisations see security and privacy as a bigger challenge than smaller organisations, and smaller organisations see the fair allocation of rewards as a more difficult task than the larger organisations.

Collaboration Processes

The final area investigated in this study was how many organisations have defined processes for collaborative ABM. Almost half of respondents (47%) reported that they have no process for collaboration, and of those that do, only a quarter (24%) stated that the process is clearly defined. A significant number adopt an informal process that is (presumably) flexed based on different circumstances.



This low adoption of formal processes is revealing and highlights that collaborative ABM is probably still in a relatively low maturity phase. Collaboration is complex and requires alignment in key areas such as finance, HR, legal and IT. The fact that so few organisations have defined processes for collaborative ABM indicates that this is not a well-developed part of the account-based marketing discipline.

CONCLUSIONS

It's important to note that the respondent profile means that this study is not indicative of collaborative marketing generally. Rather, it provides insight into collaborative account-based marketing specifically in the IT services space. Furthermore because respondents were predominantly experienced ABM professionals, it is undoubtedly skewed towards more mature functions.

With that understanding, the headline conclusions are that collaborative ABM is:

- a widespread concept within the ABM professional community,
- generally viewed as important and valuable, and
- increasing in adoption.

For most ABM functions this is still a relatively new activity with collaboration confined to a small number of trusted partners and allies. However, there is a growing population that is exploring collaborative ABM to a much greater extent and expanding interactions beyond traditional networks. This latter group is experimenting with new ways of creating and implementing marketing campaigns that have a broader cross-section of marketing elements within them.

This doesn't come as a huge surprise. ABM functions are typically dynamic environments with high demand rates. Anything that provides access to a broader and deeper pool of skills, experiences, ideas, relationships and (most important of all) resources, is almost certainly going to be welcome. ABM is also a highly competitive 'tactical' marketing discipline that evolves rapidly. New approaches that provide even small competitive advantages tend to be adopted quickly, and collaborative ABM is an excellent way to get exposure to new ideas and test them in pilot campaigns.

Unfortunately, collaboration comes at a price. In some instances it means a shared workload and shared costs, but there are always indirect costs and challenges. As a minimum it requires administrative and organisational effort that pulls time away from other activities. For some ABM functions this is just too much. They are already over-burdened, running from one campaign to the next, and don't have the time to manage engagement with third parties. The leaders of these functions may see the potential benefits of collaborative ABM, but in their judgement the benefits do not outweigh the costs.

Even when collaborative ABM is fully embraced it is still (often) a relatively undeveloped activity. Less than a quarter of organisations have defined processes for collaboration and each ABM campaign is in many ways a new event. Past experiences (along with proven tools and templates) are certainly leveraged where available, but they are not codified into standard practices that can be adjusted and refined over time. The intersections with other parts of the organisation that allow for alignment around aspects such as people, contracts, finances, systems and brand are rarely developed into structured methodologies.

The bottom line is that collaborative ABM is something that is recognised as having great potential but is not yet a mainstream activity.

RESULTS TABLES

Importance of Collaboration to ABM	%'age
Not Important	12%
Somewhat Important	29%
Very Important	59%

Growth of Collaborative Marketing Campaigns	%'age
Decreasing	6%
Staying the Same	35%
Increasing	59%

Marketing Collaboration on Key Pursuits	%'age
<25%	35.3%
26%-50%	23.5%
51%-75%	11.8%
>75%	29.4%

Collaboration Impact on Innovation	%'age
Decreased	0%
Stays the Same	18%
Increased	82%

Collaboration Impact on Quality	%'age
Decreased	0%
Stays the Same	29%
Increased	71%

Collaboration Impact on Brand Perception	%'age
Decreased	0%
Stays the Same	35%
Increased	65%

Collaboration Impact on Client Engagement	%'age
Decreased	6%
Stays the Same	29%
Increased	65%

Collaboration Impact on Responsiveness	%'age
Decreased	29%
Stays the Same	41%
Increased	29%

Collaboration Impact on Costs	%'age
Decreased	24%
Stays the Same	41%
Increased	35%

NOTE: Data may not always sum to 100% due to rounding

Challenge of Collaborative Knowledge Transfer	%'age
Minimal	18%
Somewhat	59%
Very	24%

Challenge of Collaborative Security/Privacy	%'age
Minimal	35%
Somewhat	41%
Very	24%

Challenge of Collaborative Cultural Alignment	%'age
Minimal	24%
Somewhat	65%
Very	12%

Challenge of Collaborative Goals Alignment	%'age
Minimal	35%
Somewhat	47%
Very	18%

Challenge of Collaborative Rewards Allocation	%'age
Minimal	29%
Somewhat	59%
Very	12%

Challenge of Collaborative Leadership Buy In	%'age
Minimal	35%
Somewhat	53%
Very	12%

Challenge of Collaborative Programme Management	%'age
Minimal	47%
Somewhat	41%
Very	12%

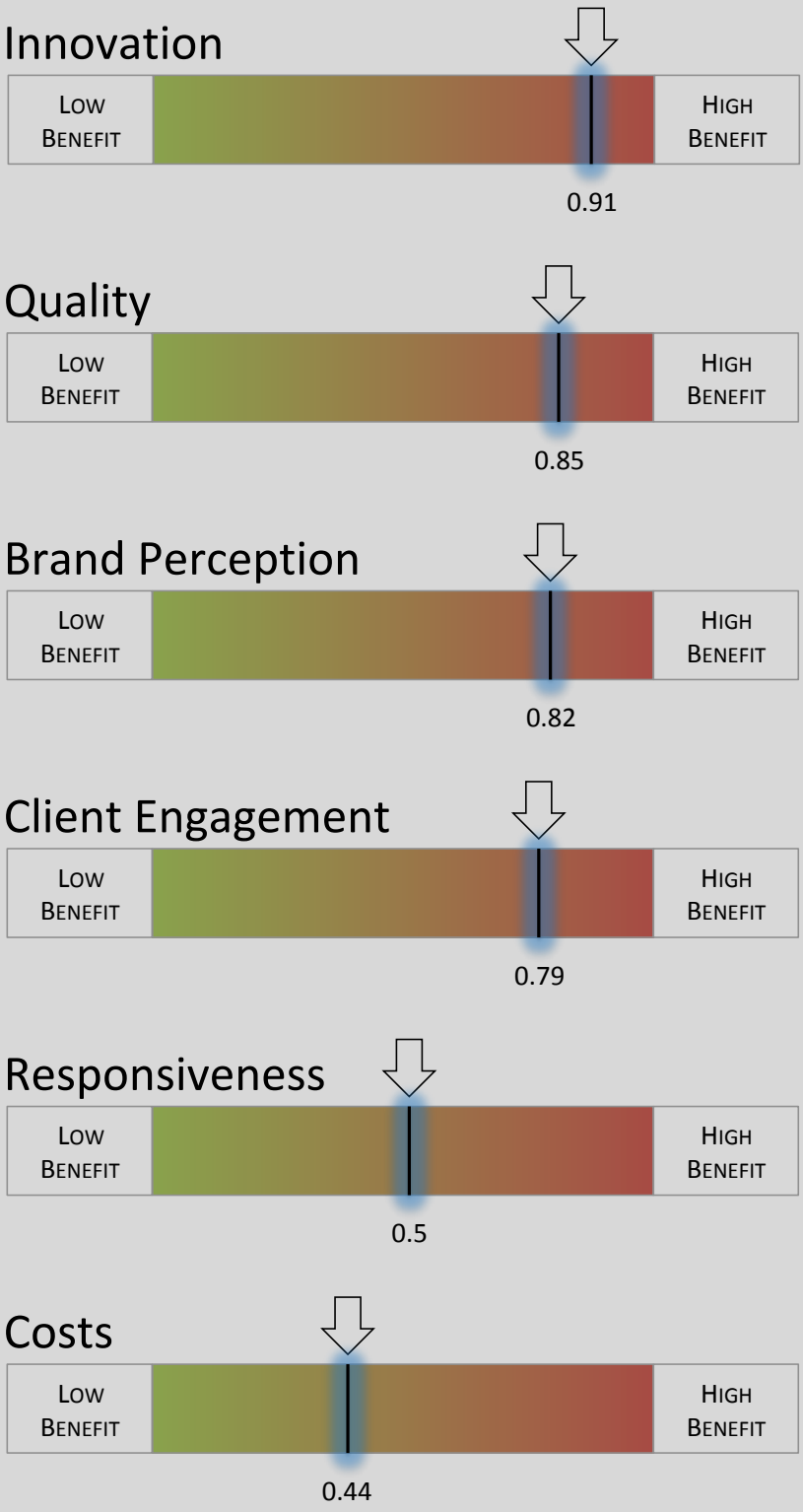
Challenge of Collaborative Open Communication	%'age
Minimal	47%
Somewhat	47%
Very	6%

Adoption of ABM Collaboration Processes	%'age
No (Flexible)	47.1%
Yes (Defined)	23.5%
Yes (Informal)	29.4%

NOTE: Data may not always sum to 100% due to rounding

KEY BENEFITS ANALYSIS

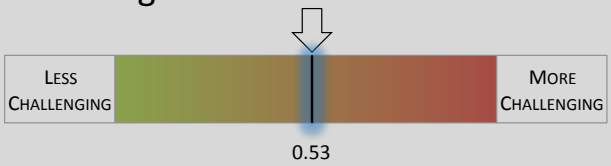
Benefit 'scores' are calculated based on a weighted assessment of the numbers of respondents that assessed each factor as having a positive, negative or neutral impact on ABM performance.



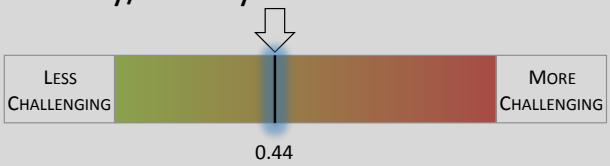
KEY CHALLENGES ANALYSIS

Challenges 'scores' are calculated based on an assessment of the numbers of respondents that assessed each factor as being very, somewhat or minimally challenging.

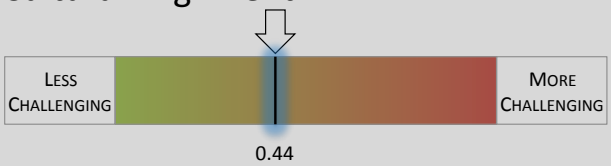
Knowledge Transfer



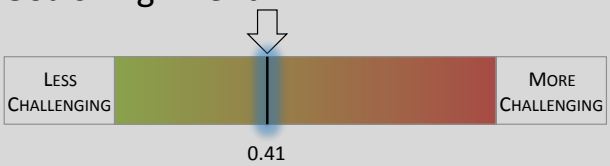
Security/Privacy



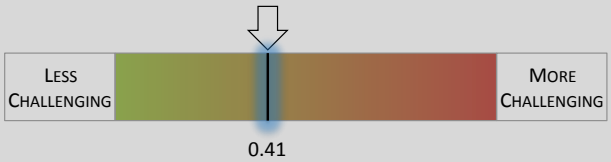
Cultural Alignment



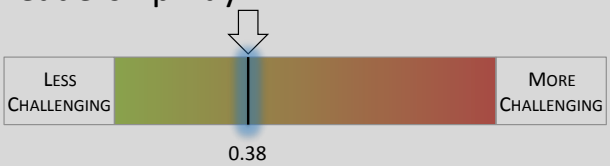
Goals Alignment



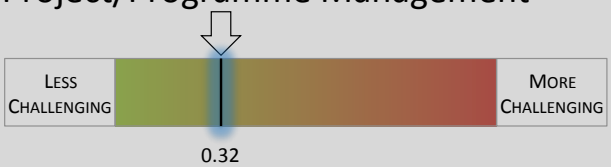
Rewards Allocation



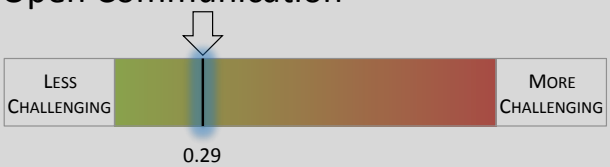
Leadership Buy-In



Project/Programme Management

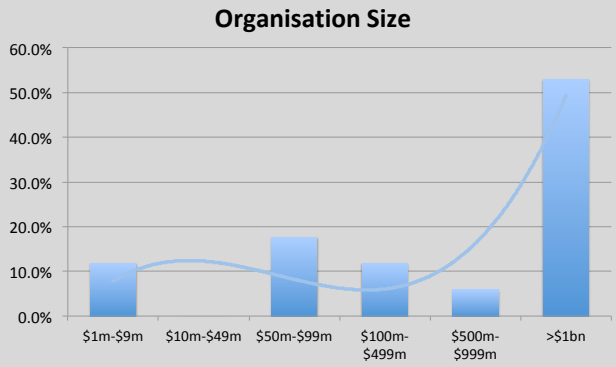


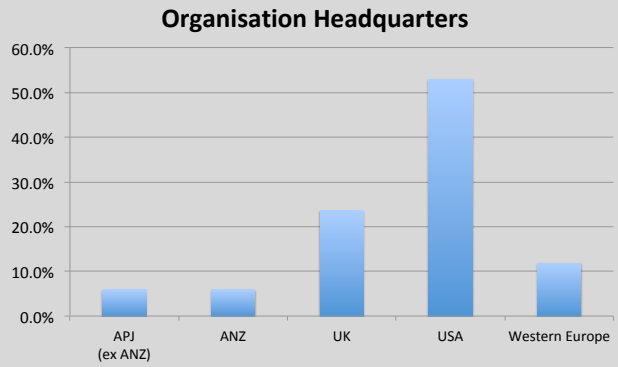
Open Communication

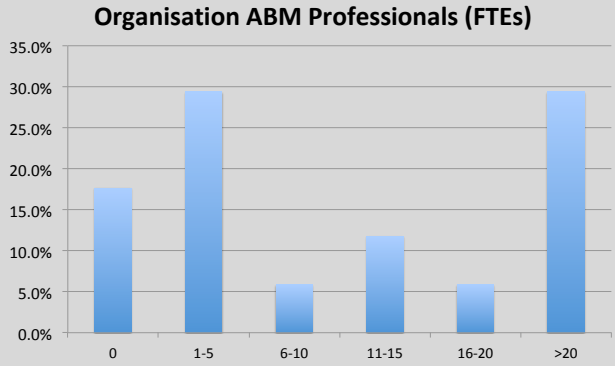


RESPONDENT PROFILE

In total, 117 individuals were invited to participate and 39 agreed. Partial responses were received from 22 people while 17 completed all questions. Respondents were predominantly from an IT services background and the majority were experienced account-based marketing professionals with several years' experience.







Business Category	%'age
Business Process Services	5.9%
Engineering and R&D	5.9%
IT Services	64.7%
Manufacturing	5.9%
Professional Services	17.6%

Respondent Level	%'age
Senior Executive (EVP, SVP, CxO)	26.3%
Executive (VP)	10.5%
Senior Manager	36.8%
Manager	5.3%
Team Leader	0.0%
Professional	5.3%
Senior Director	0.0%
C-suite consultant	5.3%

Sector	%'age
Public, Private and Voluntary	17.6%
Public and Private	35.3%
Public	5.9%
Private	41.2%

NOTE: Data may not always sum to 100% due to rounding
10.5% of respondents fell into an 'other' category for 'respondent level'.

SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Your responses will help provide insight into the importance of 'collaboration' in Account-Based Marketing.

The fundamental question being investigated is:

"is inter-organisational collaboration of value when undertaking account-based marketing activities (marketing that is focused on a single account or a small group of target accounts)?"

SECTION ONE of the survey captures basic positioning data and should take one to two minutes to complete.

SECTION TWO forms the core of the survey and contains 10 questions (3 of which are optional) and should take no more than five minutes to complete.

SECTION THREE is the final section and only for those that would like to receive a summary of the results.

Note! For the purposes of this study, 'Account-Based Marketing' is defined as:

"a marketing approach that focuses resources on discrete individual target accounts, or a handful of related target accounts, with the goal of building enduring client relationships".

And 'marketing collaboration' is defined as:

"working with one or more 'partner' entities to develop integrated marketing campaigns that draw from the experience, expertise and resources of all participants".

Positioning Questions

Positioning-1: How large is the organisation that you work for (annual revenue/budget)? Note, if you work for the subsidiary/division of a larger organisation this is the size of your subsidiary/division.

- Greater than $1bn
- $500m-$999m
- $100m-$499m
- $50m-$99m
- $10m-$49m
- $1m-$9m
- Less than $1m

Positioning-2: Where is your organisation located? Note, if you work for the subsidiary/division of a larger organisation this is the MAIN location of your subsidiary/division.

- United States
- Canada
- South or Central America
- United Kingdom
- Western Europe (excl. UK)
- Central or Eastern Europe
- Middle-East
- Africa
- Australia or New Zealand
- China
- Japan
- Asia/Pacific (excl. ANZ, China and Japan)

Positioning-3: What organisational level are you?

- Board (C-Level, Owner)
- Senior Executive (EVP, SVP)
- Executive (VP)
- Senior Manager
- Manager
- Team Leader
- Professional
- Other:

Positioning-4: What sector(s) do you predominantly target? Note, if you work for the subsidiary/division of a larger organisation this is the sector(s) that your subsidiary/division targets.

- Public (Government)
- Private Sector
- Voluntary/Charity

Positioning-5: What best describes the primary category of product/service that your organisation provides? Note, if you work for the subsidiary/division of a larger organisation, this is the category of the product/service that your subsidiary/division provides.

- IT Services (incl. outsourcing, systems integration, network services, cyber security and data centre management)
- Financial Services (incl. retail, commercial and investment banking and insurance)
- IT Hardware (including computers, peripherals and data storage)
- IT Software (incl. mobile applications and SaaS)
- Business Process Services (incl. finance, HR, security and environmental services)
- Professional Services (incl. business consulting, agencies, associations, accounting and law)
- Energy & Utilities (incl. water, electricity, oil/gas production transmission and distribution)
- Travel & Transportation (incl. freight, cargo, airports, airlines, railways and other mass transit)
- Manufacturing (incl. automotive, aerospace, pharmaceuticals, packaging and consumer products)
- Hospitality & Leisure (incl. hotels, parks, cinema, catering and travel services)
- Education (incl. schools, universities and professional training)
- Property Development (incl. commercial and residential construction and real estate)
- Machinery & Equipment Rental (incl. business and consumer rental)
- Media & Entertainment (incl. publishing and broadcasting)
- Communications (incl. satellite, 'wired' and mobile communication systems)
- Retail (incl. online and physical, consumer and wholesale)
- Government (incl. central and local government administration)
- Healthcare (incl. hospitals and medical centres)
- Other:

Core Survey Questions

(1) How many people (FTEs) are dedicated to account-based marketing in your organisation?

- 0 (we don't have a dedicated account-based marketing function)
- 1-5
- 6-10
- 11-15
- 16-20
- More than 20

(2) How important is it to actively collaborate with other (external) organisations on key account pursuits?

- NOT IMPORTANT - our offerings are largely 'stand alone' products and/or services.
- SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT - we see some benefit from collaborating with other organisations to create stronger client offerings.
- VERY IMPORTANT - it is essential to collaborate with other organisations to create integrated client solutions.

(3) In general, how much do you CURRENTLY collaborate with at least one other (external) organization from a sales, marketing and delivery perspective?

	<25%	26%-50%	51%-75%	>75%
SALES				
MARKETING				
DELIVERY/OPERATIONS				

(4) Is the number of marketing campaigns where you actively collaborate with at least one other (external) organisation: increasing, decreasing or staying the same?

- INCREASING
- DECREASING
- STAYING THE SAME

(5) Do you have a process for collaborating with other organisations on account-based marketing campaigns?

- NO - there isn't a significant need for collaboration.
- NO - collaboration is orchestrated on a flexible 'as needed' basis.
- YES - we have an informal process for collaboration.
- YES - we have a clearly defined process for collaboration that we are constantly evolving.

(6) How do you think the following factors are impacted when collaborating with other organisations on account-based marketing campaigns?

	Is/are Increased	Is/are Decreased	Is/are the Same
COSTS			
INNOVATION			
CAMPAIGN SPEED/RESPONSIVENESS			
CAMPAIGN QUALITY			
CLIENT ENGAGEMENT			
BRAND PERCEPTION			

(7) How challenging do you see each of the following factors when collaborating with other organisations on account-based marketing campaigns?

	Very challenging	Somewhat challenging	Minimally challenging
ESTABLISHING COMMON GOALS			
GAINING LEADERSHIP BUY IN AND SUPPORT			
PROJECT/PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT			
MAINTAINING OPEN COMMUNICATION CHANNELS			
ENSURING PRIVACY, SECURITY AND CONFIDENTIALITY			
ALIGNING AND/OR OVERCOMING CULTURAL DIFFERENCES			
MANAGING SKILLS/KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER			
'FAIR' ALLOCATION OF REWARDS BETWEEN COLLABORATORS			

(8) (OPTIONAL) What other challenges do you perceive (or anticipate) when collaborating with other organisations on account-based marketing campaigns?

(9) (OPTIONAL) Are there any organisations that you would identify as being especially good at collaborating on account-based marketing campaigns?

(10) (OPTIONAL) Do you have any additional insight or opinions regarding the importance of collaborating with other organisations to develop and/or deliver account-based marketing campaigns?

OPTIONAL: Contact Details
If you would like to receive a summary of the results please provide your contact details below. Alternatively, you can request a copy by sending an email directly to roger@aperius.com.

If you would be willing to participate in any future surveys, please indicate at the bottom of the page so that your contact details can be retained EXCLUSIVELY for that purpose.

- First Name(s)
- Last Name
- Title
- Company
- Telephone Number
- Address
- Email

I authorise the retention of my contact details for the purpose of sending me a summary of the results from this survey.

- Yes
- No

I am willing to participate in future surveys and authorise my contact details be retained for this purpose only.

- Yes
- No

If you have any comments, questions, ideas or suggestions, we'd love to hear from you. For more information about this study, or to discuss collaborative ABM generally, please contact Roger Alderson at roger@aperius.com. You can learn more about Aperius Consulting at www.aperius.com.